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## Governance of Both Poles

AT THE END OF THIS MONTH, THE ANTARCTIC TREATY SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON, DC, WILL CELEBRATE the 50th anniversary of an international agreement that has been centered around science, promoting cooperation to manage nearly 10% of Earth for peaceful purposes since 1 December 1959 (see [www.atsummit50.aq](http://www.atsummit50.aq)). As the world moves toward negotiating effective policies related to climate change, lessons from the Antarctic Treaty experience can be drawn upon, particularly in regard to the future governance of international spaces that are considered to have an amplified response to climate change. Among the most critical are the Arctic regions.

As the most recent country to sign the Antarctic Treaty, the Principality of Monaco, with the 46 other signatory countries, recognizes that multiple nations can indeed maintain sound oversight of a major international region by cooperating on common interests, such as environmental protection and conservation, to avoid issues that would otherwise divide them (such as the exploitation of natural resources). Science has been key to this diplomacy. The treaty emerged at the height of the Cold War. It was designed “with the interests of science and the progress of all mankind,” and for five decades has paved the way for other institutions, including the 1980 Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, with its novel ecosystem approach, and the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection, with its unified strategies for conservation, pollution prevention, area protection, and moratorium on mineral resource activities.

International spaces (beyond national jurisdictions) exist across nearly 75% of Earth, and the climate interactions with these regions are fundamental on a planetary scale. The Arctic regions are warming twice as rapidly as elsewhere on the planet, so much so that the ice caps may soon disappear, thereby depriving the planet of an essential heat regulator and further accelerating climate change. Despite this awareness, there is still much difficulty in bringing states together, often because

there are complex strategic issues, linked in particular to underground treasures. The Arctic is estimated to hold one-fifth of the planet’s energy resources, which arouses overt ambitions. In this situation, it is the duty of political officials to catalyze discussions aimed at implementing long-term solutions for responsible oversight of the Arctic, taking into account not only the interests of the coastal countries (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States), and their populations, but also the international community as a whole, because the future of the Arctic is crucial for all humankind.

This raises the issue of the framework of such action. Whereas a half-century of enforcement of the Antarctic Treaty has clearly led to establishing its effectiveness, there is no international treaty protecting the Arctic. Thus, it is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 that applies. It is on that basis that the five coastal countries of the Arctic Council recently agreed to “take steps . . . to ensure the protection and preservation of the fragile marine environment of the Arctic Ocean.” But this declaration is unlikely to hold up as interests in the Arctic expand, and a binding agreement may be difficult to achieve in the near future.

Thus, more than ever, scientists must become sentinels and stewards to lead countries in taking concrete action for governing the Arctic. The consequences of climate change are destabilizing to environments, cultures, and economies. Governments should mitigate this instability before they have to react to it. Now is the time to forge policies for the Arctic that are driven by the notion of common interests and based on sound science. Alongside such negotiations, measures for good governance are needed, including the creation of sanctuaries and special zones for the conservation of biodiversity. This has already been done, for example, by France, Italy, and Monaco in the Mediterranean with the Pelagos Sanctuary.

Science has become the conscience of our time. And as the Antarctic Treaty has demonstrated, peaceful solutions can be reached that serve the progress of science and knowledge. Let the success of the Antarctic Treaty inspire political leaders to provide sound guardianship of both poles.

– Albert Grimaldi

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