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Antarctic Treaty at 50, a beacon for joint management of Earth

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Fifty years ago representatives from twelve nations meeting in Washington signed the [Antarctic Treaty](#) "in the interest of all mankind that Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes."



Now, on that anniversary, on December 1, an [Antarctic Treaty Summit](#) is being convened in Washington.

Representatives of governments, nongovernmental organizations, commercial entities, academic institutions, and indigenous people's organizations will review the treaty as a remarkable accomplishment of international cooperation.



And they will ponder how the Antarctic Treaty shows the way to international management of not only other international spaces, such as the deep seas and outer space, but also shared responsibilities for the atmosphere, fisheries, and similar transboundary resources.

The Antarctic Treaty Summit: Science-Policy Interactions in International Governance will be convened in Washington, D.C. from November 30-December 3, 2009. The organizers invite broad participation in the Summit, "which is being convened with the spirit of balanced international, interdisciplinary and inclusive engagement." Registration and other information can be found on the [Antarctic Treaty Summit Web site](#).

Forever Declaration

"We will use the Antarctic Treaty Summit to proclaim a 'Forever Declaration,' which everyone in the world can sign, elaborating on the concept of 'forever' from the preamble to the Antarctic Treaty," says Paul Berkman, chair of the International Board for the Antarctic Treaty Summit.

"The Antarctic Treaty is as an example of how different nations can cooperate for peaceful purposes in ways that are equitable, balanced, continuous, and offer hope to the world."

The Forever Declaration will be introduced on December 1, the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty, and will be open for signature by anyone via the Internet.



Image of Antarctica courtesy NASA

"It is something which the entire world can make a shared statement about cooperation, using regions for peaceful purposes only, based on the notion of common interests," Berkman says. "That is the hope and aspiration of the Forever Declaration."

Berkman has a remarkable story to tell about the Antarctic Treaty, from its origins in the Cold War and the superpower race to acquire nuclear weaponry and dominate outer space, to the way the treaty was able to harness science as a framework for diplomacy.

In this three-part series, Berkman tells the story:

By Paul Berkman,
Special Contributor to NatGeo News Watch

Cold War origins of the Antarctic Treaty

The institutions that have emerged to manage regions beyond sovereign jurisdictions have emerged largely since World War II. The first region that was formally defined by an institution beyond sovereign jurisdictions was the High Seas.

The High Seas came about with the 1958 [Convention on the High Seas](#). In 1959 was the Antarctic Treaty. In 1968 was the the Treaty on Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies

(the [Outer Space Treaty](#)), and in 1982 was the Law of the Sea Treaty. These four regions have each been defined as beyond sovereign jurisdictions.

The system governing the four regions--the High Seas, Antarctica, Outer Space, and the Deep Sea--emerged after World War II. If you go back to that time, the generation that was actively involved during that period are the senior people in our world today. Most of us don't have the memory of World War II, so we have to imagine going back to that time.

If we think about it, a decade after World War II, the major stresses in the world were Cold War stresses. There was the Korean War, there was the potential of nuclear weapons being delivered by ballistic missiles.

In the 1950s, missiles were still something that governments were thinking about, it hadn't happened yet. Today we recognize this as something that's a matter of fact. But in the 1950s the United States and the Soviet Union were thinking about the time when they would have ballistic missiles.



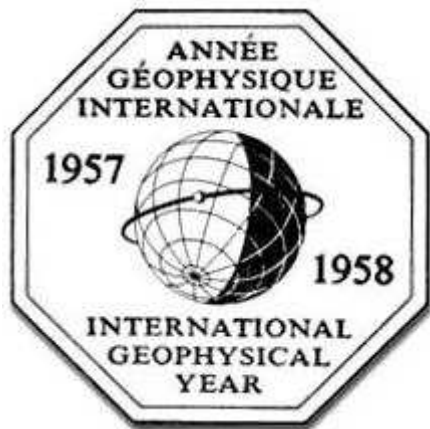
Photo of Eisenhower inauguration courtesy of U.S. Senate

One of the visionaries of this period was President Eisenhower. He had been one of the supreme Allied commanders during World War II and he had seen first-hand the horrors of war. He had to make terrible decisions that cost people their lives.

During his inauguration as President, in 1953, in the photo above, Eisenhower spoke about the Great Question. The question was, how do we develop peace on this planet? At the same time, as a former Supreme Allied Commander, he knew that you also have to work from strength. So there were discussions of peace, but there were also these developments of ballistic missiles.

So one path to the Antarctic Treaty had to do with ballistic missiles.

International Geophysical Year



Another path was the concept of the Third [International Polar Year](#), which was originally proposed by scientists who were interested in looking at the Earth as a system.

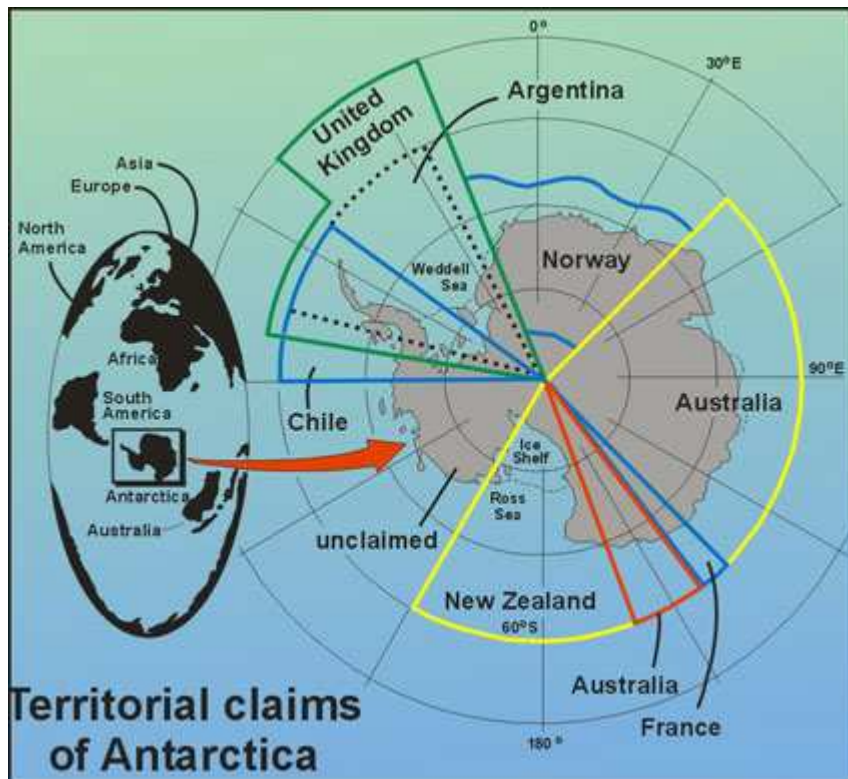
One of the people involved in the concept of the Third International Polar year was Lloyd Berkner, a rocket scientist. Soon after the discussions started about the Third International Polar year it was decided to rename it the [International Geophysical Year](#), the concept being to consider the planet as a whole, through the science of earth systems.

Growing interest in Antarctica

A third path to the treaty was Antarctica itself.

The United States was interested in the region. Byrd had gone down to fly over the Antarctic, for example, under specific instructions from Roosevelt to look for minerals.

There was a longstanding interest in Antarctica by the U.S., and countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Norway, Argentina, and Chile had actually made claims to the continent itself. So there was a combination of national and international interests in the region.



Regions of Antarctica have been claimed by seven nations: Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom. The only overlapping claims are between Argentina, Chile and the United Kingdom in the Antarctic Peninsula region. Other nations reserved the rights to make territorial claims, including the United States, which had expressed sovereign interests in the only unclaimed area of Antarctica in Marie Byrd Land. The polar projection shows the geographic location of Antarctica relative to the other continents. Adapted from: Berkman, P.A. 2002. *Science into Policy: Global Lessons from Antarctica*. Academic Press, San Diego.

Scientific Rockets

In 1954, at a meeting in Rome, the [International Council for Science](#) proposed that a component of the International Geophysical Year would be satellites. At that stage satellites were only envisioned. There weren't any in orbit yet.

In 1955 President Eisenhower went to Geneva and proposed Open Skies, a strategy which would allow the U.S. and the Soviet Union to look at one another's ballistic missile technologies, so that each would have a sense of what's going on. The Premier of the Soviet Union, Bulganin, indicated that this was a passive attempt at spying and refused to participate in an Open Skies agreement.

The following week, in July 1955, the U.S. publicly released its very first Space policy, which was that in 1956, during the International Geophysical Year, the U.S. would launch a satellite with a scientific rocket system.

Three military agencies could potentially launch a scientific rocket. One was the Army, where Wernher von Braun, who was with the German V-2 missile program in the war, was in charge of the U.S. Army's ballistic missile agency. The other agencies were the Navy and the Air Force.

It was decided that the Navy, being the least militaristic of the three agencies, would be the one to have the opportunity to launch the scientific ballistic rocket during the International Geophysical Year.



President Eisenhower, seen here with Wernher von Braun at the Marshall Space Flight Center in 1960.

Photo courtesy of NASA

In 1956 in Alabama, at the Army ballistic missile agency, Von Braun had developed what was called the Jupiter-C rocket. It had four stages and Von Braun had made a lot of progress with it. But during this period Von Braun had specific instructions from the White House not to launch a rocket into orbit under any circumstances.

In September 1956, a year before Sputnik, Von Braun launched a Jupiter-C rocket which had four stages, but he intentionally deactivated the fourth stage. The first three stages fired perfectly. If that fourth stage would have been activated the Jupiter-C rocket likely would have gone into orbit a year before Sputnik.

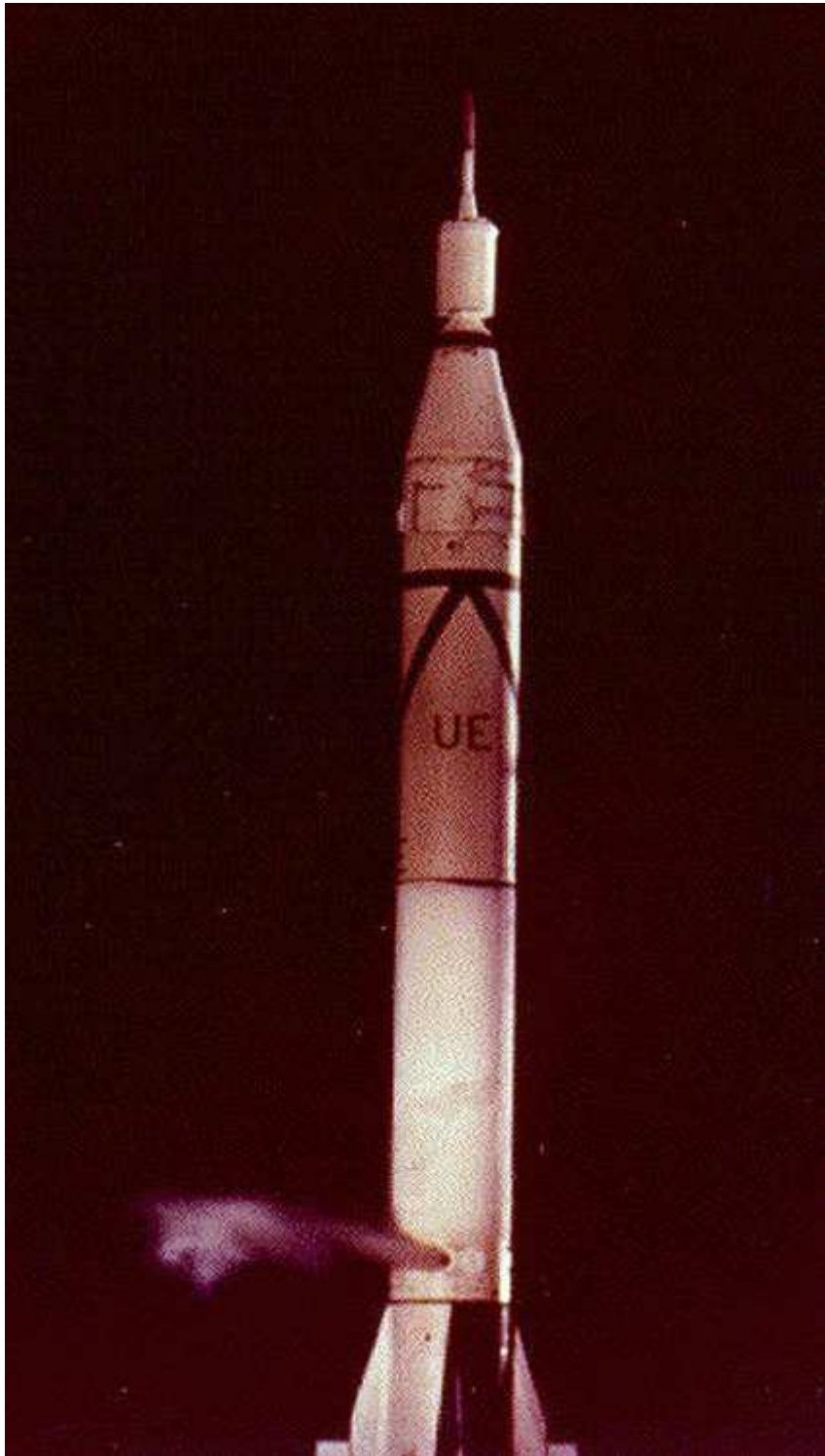


Photo of Jupiter-C rocket courtesy of NASA

This raises the question why the U.S. chose not to be the first in Space.

The answer is that the United States wanted Space to be open. It wanted the concept of freedom of Space. Space was not national space but international space and, like the high seas, the nations should have freedom to use Space.

If the U.S. had launched the Jupiter-C into orbit it would have sent a signal to the Soviets that this was a system being developed for ballistic missiles, which would have exacerbated the Cold War and defeated the concept of free and open Space.

It's interesting going through the National Security Council minutes where they were discussing what would happen to the first nation to be in Space and these issues.

The following year, 1957, was when the International Geophysical Year began, and Sputnik was launched in October 1957. Sputnik was a product of the International Geophysical Year.

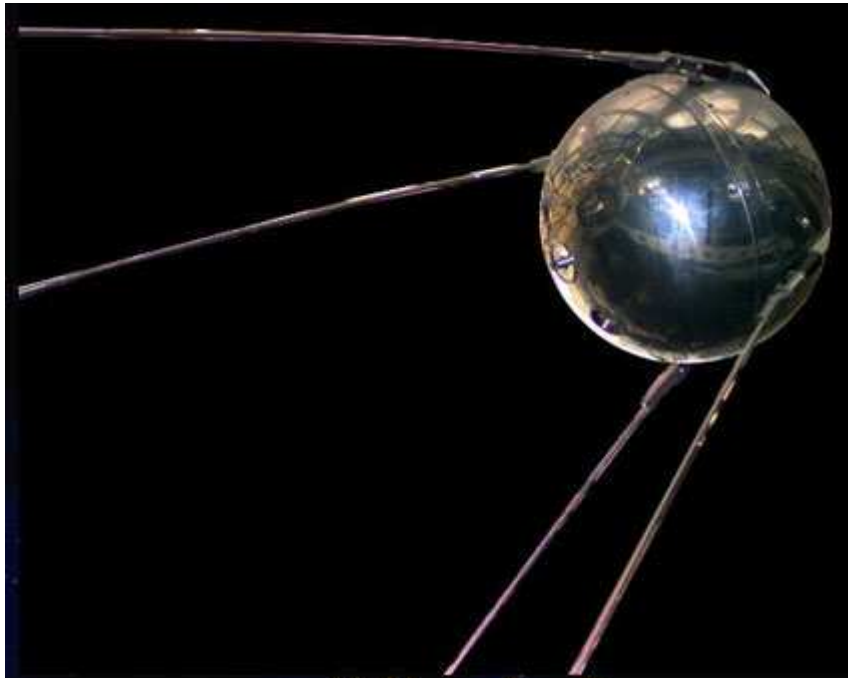


Photo of model of Sputnik courtesy of NASA

While Sputnik was considered in Russian-U.S. terms, the whole concept was to launch a scientific rocket during International Geophysical Year to highlight the relevance of science in international cooperation.

The following months the U.S. tried to launch their Navy satellites, but they all failed. Von Braun then stepped in three months later with a modified Jupiter-C, which became the first U.S. rocket into orbit.

So while it is well known that Sputnik was the first rocket into orbit, it is less well known that the U.S. had the capacity to launch a rocket into orbit a year beforehand, and chose not to.

Professor [Paul Berkman](#) is the head of the Arctic Ocean Geopolitics Programme at the [Scott Polar Research Institute](#), University of Cambridge, UK.

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How Antarctica facilitated science as a tool of diplomacy

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By choosing to allow the Soviet Union to be the first nation to launch a satellite into orbit, Sputnik, in October 1957, the United States found a way to engage its Cold War nemesis where there was no dialog before, says Paul Berkman, chair of the International Board for the [Antarctic Treaty Summit](#).



The Antarctic Treaty Summit convenes in Washington, D.C., on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the agreement "in the interest of all mankind that Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes."

"President Eisenhower's decision to stand back for the Soviet Union in putting a rocket into space opened the possibility for the U.S. to engage the Soviet Union," Berkman said. "Eisenhower recognized that science could be used as a tool of diplomacy to create a vehicle of cooperation where there was none beforehand."

In this second part of a three-part series on the 50th anniversary of the [Antarctic Treaty](#), Berkman explains how the frozen southern continent presented the opportunity for the leading Cold War protagonists to come together on the basis of "common interests" and, in the name of science, co-manage a vast portion of the Earth for peaceful purposes only.



Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty on its signature-day in the city where it was signed "with the interests of science and the progress of all mankind," the Antarctic Treaty Summit: Science-Policy Interactions in International Governance will be convened in Washington, D.C. from 30 November 30-December 1, 2009. Its goal is to assess lessons about managing nearly 10 percent of the Earth "for peaceful purposes only." Visit the [Antarctic Treaty Summit](#) Web site for registration and other information.

**By Paul Berkman,
Special Contributor to NatGeo News Watch**

In May 1958, using the example of cooperation during the International Geophysical Year (read the [first part](#) of this series), President Eisenhower suggested that all nations engaged in research in Antarctica come to the U.S. and begin the process of negotiating an agreement to manage the Antarctic collectively.

Eisenhower did this over the objections of his Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the 1950s the U.S. was going through McCarthyism and the whole concept of pinkos and reds and people's lives were damaged because of any word of Russian in their background.

During this period, between May 1958 and October 1959, there were 60 secret meetings between the 12 nations who were involved in studying Antarctica during International Geophysical Year.

In October 1959 the formal Conference on Antarctica began in Washington, D.C. It lasted from October 15 to December, 1, on which day the Antarctic Treaty was signed in the interests of all mankind, that Antarctica shall forever be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and prevent international discord.

So if we combine this history, there are several interesting features. There was a period when the U.S. and the Soviet Union were clearly racing toward ballistic missiles. It was a period of expanding the horizons of humankind to study the Earth on a planetary scale, with rockets that could circle the Earth, and it was a period when the Soviet Union and the U.S. were agreeing to cooperate and work together to manage a vast portion of the Earth for peaceful purposes only.

First nuclear arms treaty

It's fairly well known that the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to cooperate in the management of the Antarctic. What's less well appreciated is that the Antarctic Treaty also became the world's first nuclear arms agreement, and that the inspection strategy that Eisenhower originally envisaged for Outer Space became part of the Antarctic Treaty.

So in a sense, although Eisenhower wasn't successful in Open Skies in Outer Space, he was able to establish the Antarctic as a region to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and he established this as the first non-nuclear region on the planet.

The Antarctic Treaty became what is known as a non-armament treaty. On the high seas there had been ships with weapons in the past, but the idea that Antarctica had never been and would never be armed would subsequently define it as a non-armament region.

That idea of non-armament and peaceful use was similarly extended to Outer Space in the 1968 agreement, and to the Deep Sea in the 1982 agreement. So three of the four international spaces beyond sovereign jurisdictions are specifically defined as non-armament regions.

Now the lessons of the Antarctic Treaty at the time were that the United States and the Soviet Union weren't able to identify agreement explicitly directed at nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles in Outer Space.

However, they were able to look at issues in a sideways manner with science as the vehicle of cooperation.

So science provided a tool for cooperation that didn't exist with other diplomatic means. It allowed the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the two principal protagonists of the Cold War, to set aside their difference and identify what were called common interests.

The notion of "common interests"

Among the lessons of the Antarctic Treaty is this notion of common interests, which is in contrast to the notion of national interests, which are defined by nations in relation to their boundaries, which is the way the world has worked for millennia. This is what nations contest. They defend their boundaries.

What happened from World War II onward is that, while there remains a component of national jurisdictions, confined to national boundaries, we now realize that 75 percent of the Earth is beyond sovereign jurisdictions. The challenge for the future is to how we manage these regions that are beyond sovereign jurisdictions.

One of the components to doing that is to recognize that international spaces have this concept of common interests. These are interests that are shared not only by nations, but by corporations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and indigenous peoples organizations.

In effect, these are regions that are shared with all humanity into the distant future.

It's an interesting time that we're at in terms of beginning to germinate these ideas, because in a very practical way we are beginning to think as a civilization, not years or decades into the future, but centuries into the future.

Like the Magna Carta

When the Antarctic Treaty was up for ratification in 1960 in the U.S. Senate, Laurence Gould, one of the principal scientists who had been instrumental in using science diplomacy and helping the U.S. cooperate with the Soviet Union, said that in ways the Antarctic Treaty was like the Magna Carta.

Whereas the Magna Carta served as a tool of inspiration for nations and the development of constitutional law, Gould suggested that the Antarctic Treaty would serve similar import at an international scale for the development of international institutions.

It's a fairly presumptuous statement in that in the Magna Carta we have experience from 1215 to the present to think about its role in the development of constitutional law and the development of democracies. To suggest that the Antarctic Treaty would have similar import means that we'd have to have 800 years of perspective.

What Gould suggested was that we have an experiment for the ages, that through time we'd have the opportunity to assess the treaty in terms of the development of international organizations.

So in a very practical way, the Antarctic showed nations how to build on common interests the concept that a region shall be used only for peaceful purposes. Questions of jurisdiction were a common interest, scientific cooperation was a common interest, freedom of scientific investigation was a common interest, conservation and preservation of living resources was a common interest.

In the case of Antarctica these common interests provided the framework for establishing the treaty. But more importantly they established the basis for a process for engagement among the nations to continuously interact and solve problems from 1955 to 1959 and into the future.

Think about, for example, the discussions that are ongoing today with regard to climate change and the upcoming meeting in Copenhagen, and the notion of specific carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. In effect the wrong message is being sent to the world because the idea is that if you achieve a magic carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere somehow we've solved the problem.

That's not the case. The climate is a dynamic system operating over decades and centuries, as opposed to weather, which is days to weeks to years. The solution to a climate issue can't be fixed by a specific level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This is something that has to be ongoing and iterative and responsive to changing circumstances.

There is no magic bullet. The solution is the process. The Antarctic Treaty demonstrates that the process of consultation to engage the various parties continuously and effectively over time has to be built around common interests.

Common interests correctly phrased provide a beacon for nations to orient and consider and formulate measures and principles for whatever institution that is involved.

The history that built up to the Antarctic Treaty allowed the U.S. and the Soviet Union to identify their common interests, and those common interests became not only the framework for the treaty but also the basis for the process of ongoing consultations.

That allows the parties to continuously adjust to circumstances like living resources and even mineral resources, which weren't envisaged or considered as part of the treaty.

Professor [Paul Berkman](#) is the head of the Arctic Ocean Geopolitics Programme at the [Scott Polar Research Institute](#), University of Cambridge, UK.

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<http://blogs.nationalgeographic.com/blogs/news/chiefeditor/2009/10/antarctic-treaty-forever-declaration.html>

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The lesson of fifty years of the [Antarctic Treaty](#) System is that the nations of the world can set aside their political and territorial aspirations to share in the management of a vast region of the planet, says Paul Berkman, chair of the International Board for the [Antarctic Treaty Summit](#).



In this final part of a series on the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty, Berkman describes the hopes for building on an international agreement that has been a road map for nations to collaborate on the basis of "common interests" to manage the 75 percent of the planet that does not fall under national jurisdictions.

The Antarctic Treaty Summit: Science-Policy Interactions in International Governance will be convened in Washington, D.C. from November 30-December 3, 2009. The organizers invite broad participation in the Summit, "which is being convened with the sprit of balanced international, interdisciplinary and inclusive engagement." Registration and other information can be found on the [Antarctic Treaty Summit](#) Web site.

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Special Contributor to NatGeo News Watch

Recognition by the U.S. Congress

The [United States House of Representatives](#) adopted House Concurrent Resolution 51 (Recognizing the 50th Anniversary of the Signing of the Antarctic Treaty) on September 30, 2009. (See full text below.)

The resolution was sponsored by Congressman Pat Tiberi from Ohio along with 33 co-sponsors, including the Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Congressman Howard Berman from California) and Chair of the House Committee on Science and Technology (Congressman Bart Gordon from Tennessee).

The Resolution was an interesting process from several different angles.

As a citizen of the United States, one individual among 300 million people, to be able to go and interact with the elected officials at the national level and to be able to suggest them a type of legislation and assist with the process of seeing this legislation emerge and finally get approved by one of the branches of the U.S. Congress, was in itself a humbling experience.

An individual in a great nation can contribute to the development and growth of that nation. There's a message of hope in that. Anyone, whoever they are, with the right motivation, insight and sincerity can create positive development and change in the world we live in.

"The idea is to look across the 50 years of international cooperation and identify those lessons that will have meaning and value to international governance into the future."

The full name of the Antarctic Treaty summit is The Antarctic Treaty: Science, Policy, Interactions, and International Governance. So it's not just a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty. The idea is to look across the 50 years of international cooperation and identify those lessons that will have meaning and value to international governance into the future.

Certainly science and policy are two of the ingredients that allowed the Antarctic Treaty system to emerge. The notions of science, policy, interactions are the focus of the Antarctic Treaty Summit.

In developing this Concurrent Resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives, the original resolution was sponsored by Congressman Tiberi, and it was done in a nonpartisan way. Eventually there were 33 co-sponsors of the resolution, which was assigned to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The very last sponsor was Congressman Berman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Two of the co-sponsors are the chair of the House Science and Technology Committee and the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It's a mirror of the science policy theme. This makes it a special piece of legislation.

The Resolution is now in the U.S. Senate, where it has been assigned to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

The Antarctic Treaty Summit "Forever Declaration"

The intention of the summit is not just to have a meeting, where people get together, discuss things, and leave, and it was relevant only to the people in the room.

The idea is to begin a snowball, a level of momentum in a dialogue where various parties, governments, nongovernmental organizations, commercial entities, academic institutions, indigenous peoples organizations, are all talking together in neutral venues about strategies to manage regions that are beyond sovereign jurisdictions, as well as resources that are transboundary.

Fisheries migrate across boundaries, the atmosphere and oceans move across boundaries, so the issues that are relevant to international spaces are also relevant to things that move across boundaries.

The type of dialogue that is anticipated for the Antarctic Treaty Summit is a demonstration that it is possible to catalyze high-profile international, interdisciplinary and inclusive discussion.

The big difference between the Antarctic Treaty Summit and the [Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting](#), which is an annual event, is that the consultative meeting is convened by governments, for governments, with government people, whereas the Antarctic Treaty Summit is open to anyone anywhere in the world.

The intention is to reach across all sectors of society internationally in an engaged and inclusive way, welcoming the insights and participation, the enthusiasm, even the questions from anyone, anywhere in the world. So the event itself is open and not restricted in any way.

The tangible outcome of the event, aside from books and things like that, will be discussions that carry over into future meetings.

But what's likely to be of most interest to the average person anywhere in the world is the "Forever Declaration."

The Forever Declaration embraces an interesting concept:

If you think of the eight centuries of perspective of the value of the Magna Carta, and imagine eight centuries into the future, for all intents and purposes that's forever. We know from the Magna Carta that we can see how a legal document can have meaning across centuries.

The idea of elaborating "Forever" from the Antarctic Treaty is not only for the relevance of the Antarctic but for the relevance of international spaces, for transboundary issues, for the elaboration of common interests, as an example of how different nations can cooperate for peaceful purposes in ways that are equitable, balanced, continuous, and offer hope to the world.

This declaration will be introduced on the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty, which is on December 1. The declaration will be open for signature by anyone anywhere in the world. And it will be available for signature via the Internet.

It is something in which the entire world can make a shared statement about cooperation, using regions for peaceful purposes only, about the notion of common interests. That is the hope and aspiration of the Forever Declaration.

Professor [Paul Berkman](#) is the head of the Arctic Ocean Geopolitics Programme at the [Scott Polar Research Institute](#), University of Cambridge, UK.

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U.S. House of Representatives Concurrent Resolution (H. Con. Res. 51)
recognizing the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty
agreed to on September 30, 2009

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty was signed by 12 nations in Washington, D.C., on December 1, 1959, ``with the interests of science and the progress of all mankind";

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty was established to continue and develop international ``cooperation on the basis of freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica as applied during the International Geophysical Year";

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty came into force on June 23, 1961, after its unanimous ratification by the seven countries (Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom) with territorial claims in the region and five other countries (Belgium, Japan, South Africa, the Soviet Union, and the United States), which had collaborated in Antarctic research activities during the International Geophysical Year from July 1, 1957, through December 31, 1958;

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty now has 47 nations as signatories that together represent nearly 90 percent of humanity;

Whereas Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty states that ``no acts or activities taking place while the present Treaty is in force shall constitute a basis for asserting, supporting or denying a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica";

Whereas the 14 articles of the Antarctic Treaty have provided a lasting foundation for maintaining the region south of 60 degrees south latitude, nearly 10 percent of the Earth's surface, ``for peaceful purposes only";

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty prohibits ``any measure of a military nature";

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty has promoted international nuclear cooperation by prohibiting ``any nuclear explosions in Antarctica and the disposal there of radioactive waste material";

Whereas the Antarctic Treaty provides a framework for the signatories to continue to meet ``for the purpose of exchanging information, consulting together on matters of common interest pertaining to Antarctica, and formulating and considering, and recommending to their Governments, measures in furtherance of the principles and objectives of the Treaty";

Whereas common interests among the Antarctic Treaty nations facilitated the development and ratification of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources;

Whereas the international cooperation represented by the Antarctic Treaty offers humankind a precedent for the peaceful governance of international spaces;

Whereas in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year, the Antarctic Treaty Parties in their Edinburgh Declaration recognized the current International Polar Year for its contributions to science worldwide and to international cooperation; and

Whereas the International Polar Year program has endorsed the Antarctic Treaty Summit that will convene in Washington, DC, at the Smithsonian Institution on the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress--

(1) recognizes that the Antarctic Treaty has greatly contributed to science and science cooperation worldwide and successfully ensured the "use of Antarctica for peaceful purposes only and the continuance of international harmony" for the past half century; and

(2) encourages international and interdisciplinary collaboration in the Antarctic Treaty Summit to identify lessons from 50 years of international cooperation under the Antarctic Treaty that have legacy value for humankind.
