

NO COLD WAR CAN STOP THIS

The Cold War, a historical period of strained relations and animosity that isolated the United States and Russia. What many do not know is that while this was going on, the two countries were cooperating in Antarctica, based on what is known as the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. This will later become known as the 1st International Geophysical Year (IGY). With this as a starting point, Paul Arthur Berkman introduces us to the field of Science Diplomacy and how it has evolved over a 60 year period. The focus is paint a picture of evolution of science diplomacy and its relevance for our globally interconnected civilisation. Paul does a great job of highlighting key milestones throughout this journey with a mixture of personal stories and examples, so that the reader may appreciate the immense potential science diplomacy has to bring the world together.

Science diplomacy is the use of scientific collaborations among nations to address the common problems. It is grounded in informed decision making to balance national interests vs global common interests for the benefit of all. This is what formed the basis of cooperation between the United States and Russia in the Antarctic, an understanding that “It is in the interest of all mankind that Antarctic shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord”.

A significant milestone was 50 years after the first International Geophysical year, when the Antarctic Treaty Summit was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty. This summit which was co-convened by Paul at the Smithsonian Institution generated important papers and also the first book on Science Diplomacy. Over forty sponsoring organisations supported this event and participants were pulled from thirty nations. In the same year, conceptual framing of science policy begun to emerge, influenced greatly by a meeting held at Wilton Park (UK) on the theme: “New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy”. A year prior to this, the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences had set up a Center for Science Diplomacy and four years later, the fields first Journal; “Science and Diplomacy”.

The 60th anniversary of the IGY saw the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) - Advanced Research Workshop build up on work and lessons over the previous decade. By now, there were over 25 mentions of the term “Science Diplomacy” in articles published by both Nature and Science. Contrasting this to about 3 mentions the decade before, gives a fair idea of how much the field has grown.

Based on all the knowledge generated, two basic questions emerge around Science Diplomacy. (1) How does science enable allies and adversaries to build common interests and (2) How can science promote cooperation and prevent conflict. The approach to answering these questions requires one to address a country's national interests, cross border interests and global needs. This makes the role of science diplomacy a vast one, cutting across the creation of early warning systems, communication channels and public policy agenda.

Paul does a great job of highlighting the co-production of knowledge for the benefit of all on earth across generations as the essence of science diplomacy. The impact of mega cities and the economic power they wield is not ignored as he discusses the future of science diplomacy. A sentiment that is common throughout the article is the idea that there are no national boundaries when it comes to climate, space and the big questions that impact everyone who calls earth home.