

# Geopolitics and Science

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**INTERVIEW WITH ARCTIC COUNCIL  
OBSERVER: SWITZERLAND**

JULY 6, 2020  
[Agreements and cooperation  
Switzerland](#)

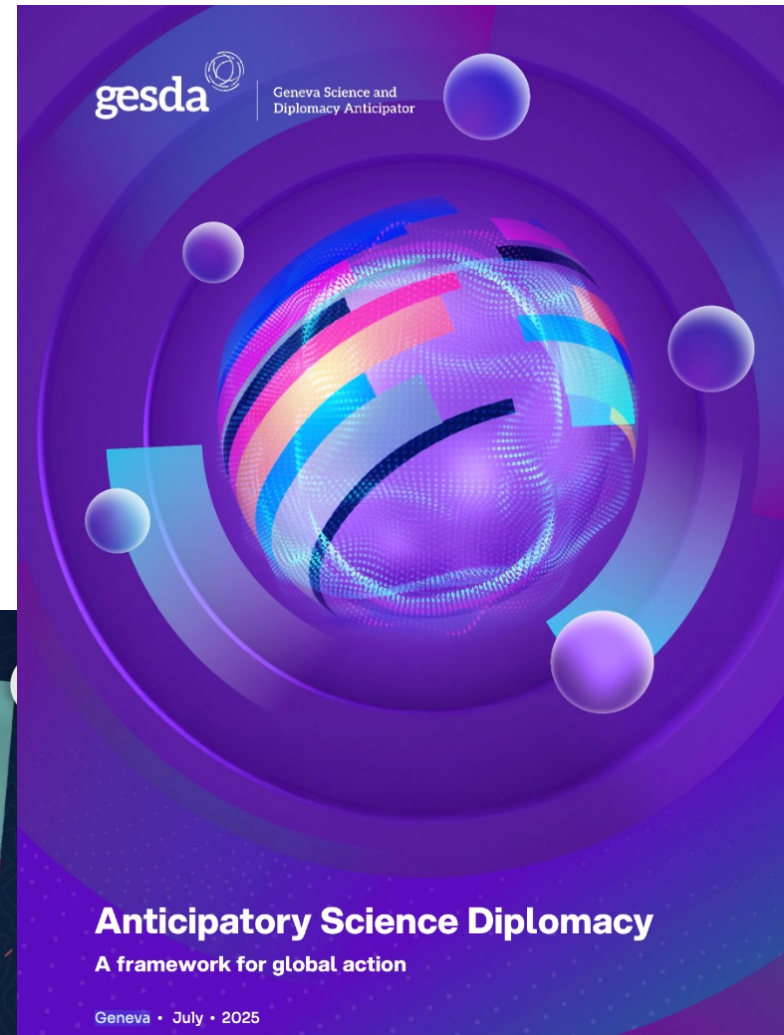
# Science Diplomacy – a new instrument of multilateralism

## Science diplomacy

Switzerland's pole position in international rankings in the area of education, research and innovation provides a good basis for high-profile science diplomacy. Swiss science diplomacy helps to strengthen the international profile and competitiveness of Swiss actors in the area of education, research and innovation, and to support cooperation projects throughout the world. In turn, science can contribute to diplomatic efforts in the context of good offices, peace promotion and global governance as well as underpinning evidence-based foreign policy actions.



Swiss Polar Day 2025





# Science Diplomacy in 2010 ...

## New frontiers in science diplomacy

Navigating the changing balance of power

January 2010



CELEBRATE  
350 YEARS  


THE ROYAL SOCIETY

 AAAS

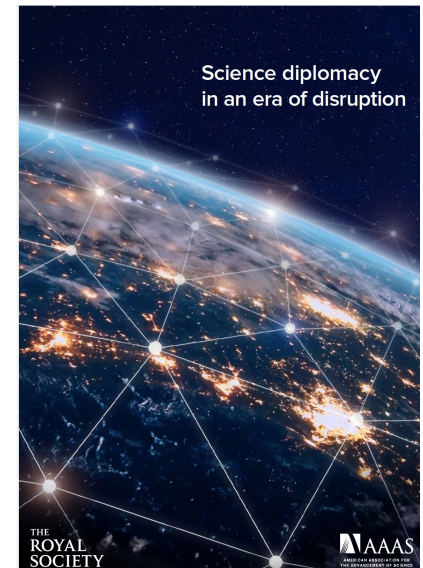
## Governance of international spaces: Celebrating the Antarctic treaty :

- “The governance of Antarctica sets a precedent for how the soft power of science can help to strike a balance between national and common interests, and could offer lessons for the peaceful governance of other international spaces and transnational resources.” (p. 23)
- “The latest International Polar Year (IPY) ran from 2007–2009, and the hope is that this could have a similar legacy in the Arctic as IGY had in the Antarctic.” (p. 24)

## ... and in 2024:

“science as a politically neutral endeavour no longer applies to the Arctic region – if it ever did.”

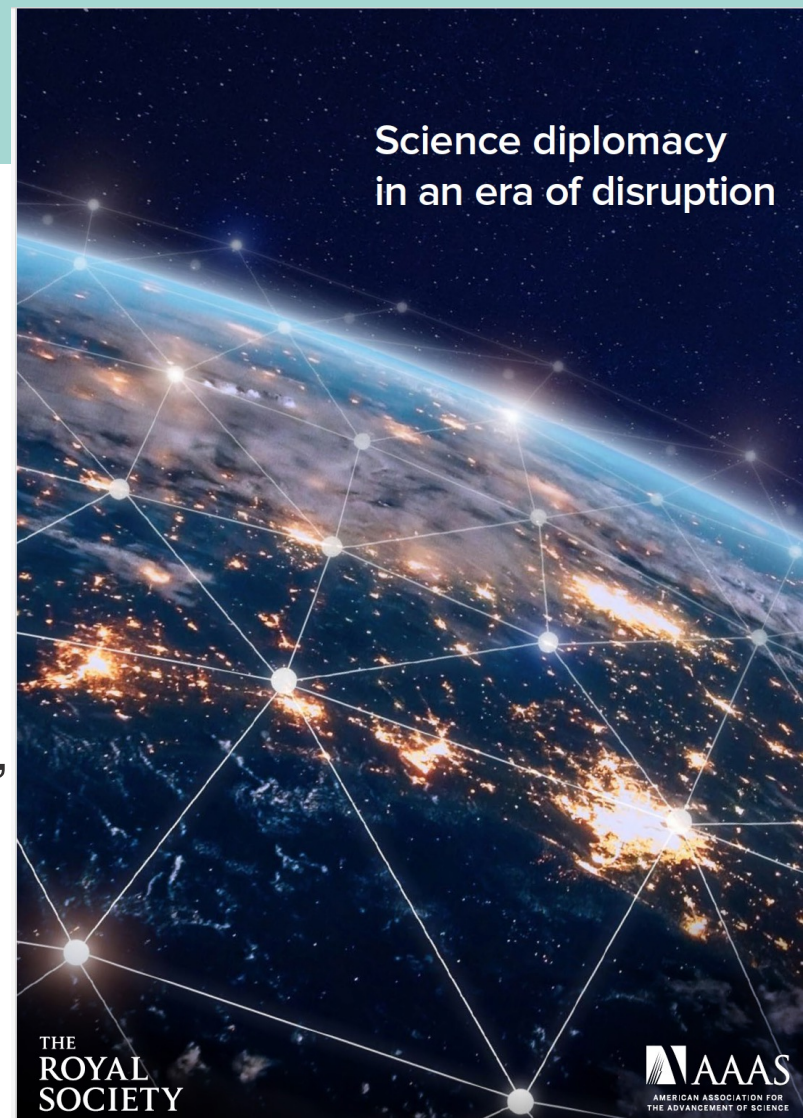
“Treaties (...) which sought to promote international scientific collaboration, are no longer sufficient to manage the changing significance of the Arctic region. The region now presents commercial opportunities in the form of deep sea-mining, mineral deposits, and the Northwest Passage, which is opening up as a result of climate change.”  
(p. 32)



# The role of science in 2024

“The blurring of the roles at any given time is not constructive and can even be counterproductive.”

“It is important for scientists working to bridge gaps in policy-making to understand their role and not blur the line between scientists and diplomats.”  
(p.22)



# Limits of Science Diplomacy

- Fields of common actions: Global goods/global commons
- Fields of disputed collaborations: supranational companies

STRATEGY THE TECHPLOMACY APPROACH IMPACT TEAM



<https://www.aaas.org/programs/center-science-diplomacy>  
<https://techamb.um.dk>



# Swiss scientific multilateralism and the International Polar Years



1882/1883: 1st  
International Polar Year

1932/1933: IPY-2

1957/1958: International  
Geophysical Year

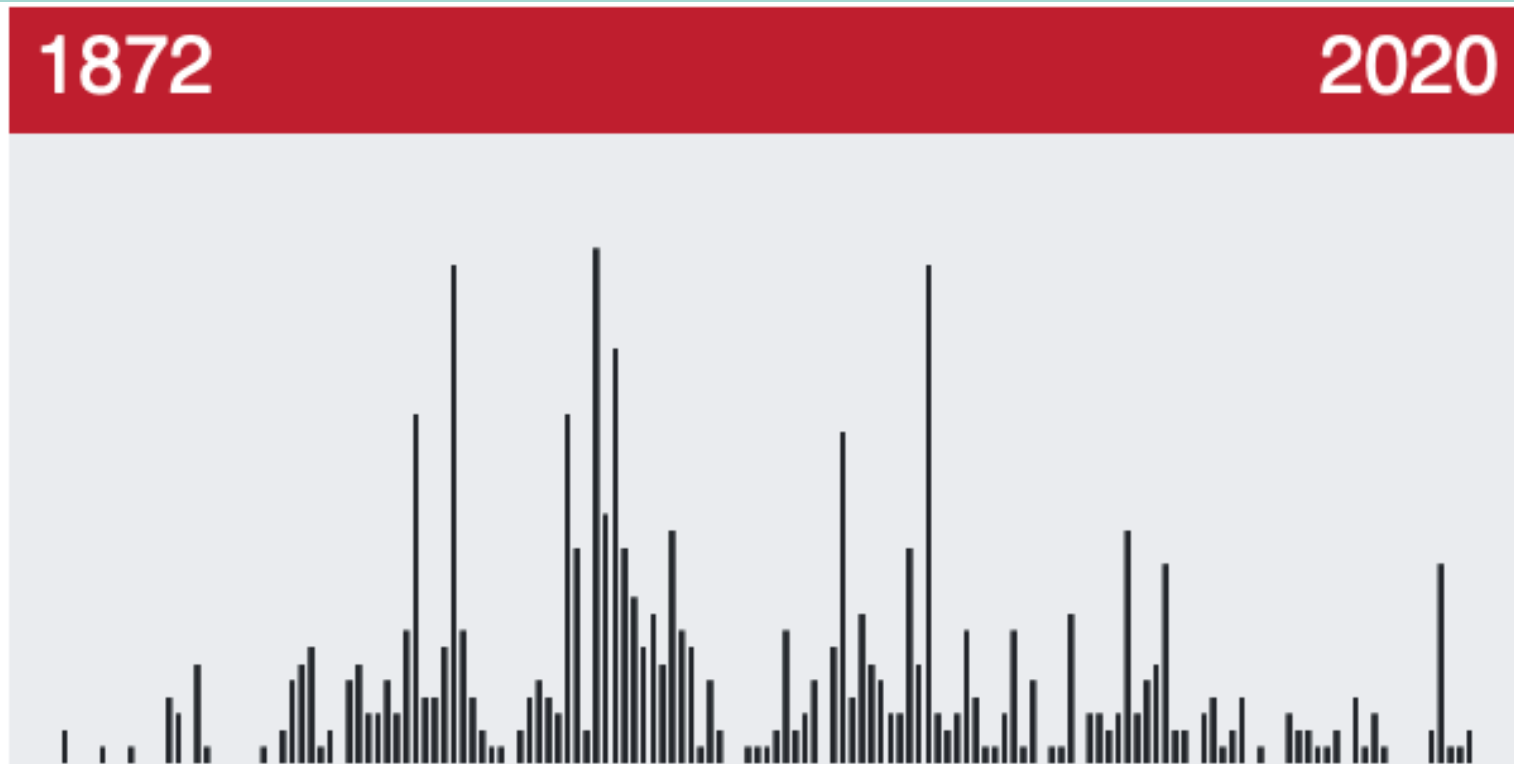
2007/2008: IPY-4

2032/2033: IPY-5

Heinrich von Wild 1833-1902

R.von Wild, [https://uzb.swisscovery.ch/discovery/delivery/41SLSP\\_UZB:UZB/12464114160005508](https://uzb.swisscovery.ch/discovery/delivery/41SLSP_UZB:UZB/12464114160005508)

# Polar research and media: decreasing interest



Search term “Polarforschung” in E-Newspaperarchives.ch:

<https://www.e-newspaperarchives.ch/?a=q&hs=1&r=1&results=1&txf=txIN&txq=Polarforschung&e=-----de-20--1--img-txIN-----0----->



# An increase in international actors: The IPY-5 planning group

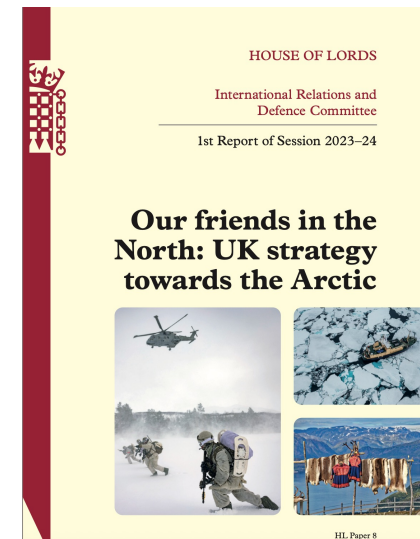


<https://ipy5.info/organisation/ipy-planning-group/>

# Arctic: „one of the world’s fastest changing regions“

## Debates in the UK

- Suggestion to expand co-operation with the other observer states
- Impact of the war: reduction in circumpolar cooperation, uncertain future of the Arctic Council, security dynamics changed with Finland and Sweden joining NATO
- Interest in re-engaging Russia for resuming scientific cooperation and data exchange
- “The UK is a world leader in polar science and this provides a strong platform for legitimising our involvement and exerting soft power in the region.”



<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5804/ldselect/ldintrel/8/8.pdf>  
p.10

# Antarctic Treaty System: tensions require new coalitions

- Increasing influence of additional state actors and dual use related technologies (eg. China operating 5 polar stations)
- Consensus-building challenged by geopolitical tensions (difficulty in obtaining consultative status, see Canada, frictions between Russia and UK in Antarctic forums)
- US: More budget cuts could “jeopardise the operation of US Antarctic research stations and halt scientific projects altogether” (p.20)



<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48242/documents/252483/default/>

- Seismic surveys by Russia may be used for commercial mining
- Suggestion to build new coalitions (strengthening relationship to China, “pan-European coalition centred on scientific research and information sharing”, p.23 )



## Antarctica InSync: Professor Dame Jane Francis

“The idea is that we will have about 10, 15 icebreakers all around Antarctica with projects attached to look at the ocean, to look at atmosphere, to look at the land, to look at many aspects of the Antarctic environment, taking measurements at the same time, even working in the winter, which is a new thing to be able to go to Antarctica and work through the winter months, which is very hostile, and build up a completely new picture of what we know about the Antarctic environment.”

House of Commons, Environmental Committee, Oral evidence: The UK and the Antarctic Environment, 18.3.2024

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14528/html/>

# Conclusions

Fundamental change of framework conditions for polar research requires:

- Science and diplomacy: exchange on the question whether existing institutional frameworks can adapt to geopolitical tensions
- Various options: new coalitions within Polar regimes or new bilateral cooperations
- Priorities: participation in IPY-5 will be crucial and depends on improving access to research infrastructure
- Vision: Shifting the focus from data collection to ensuring data access could be beneficial for both science and diplomacy.