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Security in an ice-free Arctic: interdisciplinary perspectives on Arctic geopolitics

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The Arctic first emerged as a hotbed of military activity during the Cold War. Technological advances opened up the possibility of overflight by strategic bombers and under-ice passage by nuclear submarines. Defence planners learned to work around the permanent presence of ice.

In recent decades though, it has become clear that the future of the Arctic is one that will be increasingly ice-free. As the international community comes to terms with the region's physical transformation, tensions are starting to build. A struggle is emerging over what constitutes legitimate interest and activity in the Arctic. Much of it centres on concerns about purportedly innocent scientific, commercial and military activity serving as a front for different kinds of strategic infiltration in different parts of the Arctic. As a result, the region is increasingly caught up with the global competition being played out by the West, Russia and China.

This roundtable brings together perspectives from International Relations and Political Geography to consider what security means to different actors - local, regional and global - in an increasingly ice-free Arctic, and what that might portend for international relations as profound environmental change is encountered in others parts of the world in the coming decades.

Track Classification: War Studies Working Group