

Developments in Icelandic Security Policy

Alyson J.K. Bailes, Adjunct Professor

Kristmundur Þór Ólafsson, MA International Relations.

Abstract

Iceland has been slow in developing a national security concept, for reasons that include a long period of reliance on US protection post-World War Two, and divided internal views over this defence solution. Since the withdrawal of all US stationed forces in 2006, Iceland's security partnerships have diversified and attempts have been made to frame security in more multi-functional terms. The Risk Assessment Report of 2009 made important progress in itemizing non-military threats and risks. On this basis, a cross-party parliamentary committee was invited to start work in 2012 on guidelines for a security strategy. Its report, published in March 2014, establishes a large area of consensus on 'softer' security issues and on remaining in NATO, with a few dissenting voices on the latter. Its main omission is a proper treatment of economic and financial security, still tied to the divisive issue of EU membership. Meanwhile, Iceland's recent security experience in 2014 has helped to highlight the reality of both harder and softer security challenges. The government can now proceed to draft a full official security strategy, to be laid before parliament possibly in 2015.

Keywords: Iceland, security policy, parliament, Arctic, NATO, societal security

1. Introduction

This article is designed as a work of reportage. It seeks to draw attention to interesting and potentially productive developments in the framing of Icelandic defence and security policies, which have not yet been much noticed abroad or debated at home. At the centre of this analysis is a report on National Security Policy for Iceland, written by an ad hoc cross-Party committee in the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi), which was transmitted to the Icelandic Foreign Ministry on 20 February 2014¹ and published by the Ministry on 7 March.² This document has opened the way for drafting Iceland's first-ever



official security strategy, which would be re-submitted to Parliament (possibly in 2015) for final approval.

To help in assessing the significance of these steps, our text starts with a brief account of the historical background and related key events from 2006-13. There follows a summary and critical analysis of the Alþingi document itself. Finally, the current situation and state of debate on defence and security issues in Iceland is reviewed, to give an idea of the environment in which the drafting of a formal strategy and other security-related work must go forward.

2. Historical Background

Iceland is one of the few states in the world that, since it first gained sovereign control of its affairs in 1918, has never had armed forces. Its traditions inclined it towards neutrality, but in the first years after World War Two, growing fear of Communist power combined with the examples of Denmark and Norway drove Iceland to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO – as a founder member in 1949.³ This action was internally divisive, as was the signing in 1951 of a long-term Defence Agreement⁴ with the United States, which had already placed occupying troops in Iceland during the war. With the creation of a major US air and naval base at Keflavik in South-west Iceland, the nation's practical, territorial defence was essentially delegated into American hands. Since this solution was deplored by a sizeable segment of Icelandic opinion, mainly on the left side of politics, it left national opinion polarized along lines that became quite rigidly entrenched in the following decades. Among opponents of NATO and of the US presence, even the word 'security' (öryggi in Icelandic) became tainted. Among supporters of the military solution, awareness that 'security' could mean more than just military threats and military methods was relatively slow to dawn, compared with the general trend of twentieth-century thought.⁵ Reliance on the US in matters of defence meant, further, that the academic and professional study of security was stunted and the Icelandic authorities never developed their own threat assessment as a basis for autonomous policy making - despite strong encouragement from the US to do so.⁶ For all these reasons and more, the country failed to produce anything that could be called a formal, institutionally approved security 'strategy'.⁷

An opportunity to re-address such fixed ideas and divisions came in March 2006, when the US informed Iceland it had unilaterally decided to withdraw its entire force presence. Iceland had a scant six months to prepare the most essential adjustments, such as taking over the running of the air defence radars at Keflavik that remained dedicated to NATO.⁸ After the withdrawal in September, Icelandic leaders developed a broader new approach to territorial security that included bilateral Memorandums of Understanding with Denmark, Norway, the UK and Canada; the strengthening of relevant civilian assets including a new Coastguard vessel; arrangements for periodic deployments of other NATO nations' aircraft to Keflavik for air policing exercises; and greater involvement in NATO's multilateral activities generally. In parallel, the systems for handling non-military security emergencies were reinforced and further integrated

through a new Civil Protection Act⁹ that placed the National Commissioner of Police in a pivotal position under the then Ministry of Justice (now, Ministry of the Interior).

All these dispositions remain in place today and have become largely uncontroversial.¹⁰ The same cannot be said of an initiative taken by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2008 to establish a new Icelandic Defence Agency (IDA, Varnarmálastofnun), designed to manage the Keflavik radars and other practical contacts with NATO. The relations between the IDA and agencies under the Ministry of Justice were always strained, and when a change of government brought the largely anti-NATO Left Green Party into power as coalition partners in early 2009, a majority was found in Parliament for abolishing the IDA and moving the radars – at least, provisionally – under the practical management of the Coastguard. Under the amended Defence Act,¹¹ the Ministry for Foreign Affairs remains responsible in broad terms for (external) security policy and for political dealings with NATO.

3. Steps towards a Security Strategy

Particularly important for our present topic is the parallel development of security policy thinking in 2006-9. In October 2007 the then Foreign Minister, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, gained government agreement to appointing an independent commission to make a national ‘Risk Assessment’ (Áhættumat) for Iceland. For the first time in Icelandic post-war history, this review was mandated to cover the full range of both military and non-military, external and internal, or – as the commission itself divided them – ‘military, societal, and global’ risks and threats. Gísladóttir envisaged the commission’s report being used to frame an inter-Party debate at political level, after which (and depending on the degree of consensus achieved) officials could draft Iceland’s first comprehensive security strategy. She and her advisers judged the time might be ripe, not only for a integration of the ‘harder’ and ‘softer’ ends of the national security spectrum, but for some bridge-building between the security attitudes at least of more moderate thinkers on the right and left.

Indeed, history was to confront Iceland with a brutal reminder of the importance of non-military security through the economic crash of autumn 2008, which affected almost every single other aspect of national safety and wellbeing. The shock and disruption that it caused affected, among many other things, the publication of the Risk Assessment commission’s report, which had to be delayed to incorporate new comments on the financial/economic dimension. The result were finally presented to the Foreign Minister – a post then held by Össur Skarphéðinsson – and published in March 2009.¹²

The commission’s report was itself a very important step forward, offering as it did the first-ever definition of a multi-dimensional, comprehensive, and reasonably well balanced security agenda for Iceland. It discussed sixteen topics in detail, in the following sequence: financial security; military threats; health safety and pandemics; environmental threats; natural disasters and climate change; international terrorism; weapons of mass destruction; organized crime; cyber threats; human trafficking; migration and integration of immigrants; maritime safety; civil flight security; road security; food security; and

the safety of the electrical and communications system.¹³ The order of topics was stated not to imply priority, but in practice, most of the larger and more controversial issues for Iceland were placed first. On the top two issues, indeed, political sensitivity and divided opinions made it hard for the report to include full and clear recommendations. The financial/economic section said more about what had gone wrong than about how to put it right – which would have required addressing the supremely divisive issue of the EU as an economic ‘shelter’¹⁴ – while the discussion of military and territorial security recorded different views on how to react to a *prima facie* low-threat environment. This section was, however, prescient in urging Iceland to focus seriously on the consequences of growing international interest and engagement in the Arctic.

The Risk Assessment was perhaps at its most ground-breaking in its treatment of the ‘softest’ and most ‘societal’ issues like health, food safety or infrastructure. Its factual, expert analyses of these underlined that modern security for Iceland was not only a multi-functional challenge, but a matter for the whole of government or even the whole of society¹⁵ – thus opening the way to reviewing and modernizing not only the substance of Icelandic policy, but the governance system for executing it. However, in the conditions of early 2009 it was unrealistic to expect political leaders to attempt either of these tasks immediately. The coalition that launched the risk assessment project had fallen, Gísladóttir herself had been forced to retire for health reasons, and (as already mentioned) a new Left-leaning coalition of Social Democrats and Left Greens came to power in May. With a government no longer solid in support of NATO and with an ongoing economic and financial emergency to manage, it was probably wise in retrospect to lay any wider discourse on security aside.

Where useful progress did occur was on the Arctic issue, starting with a background report by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2009.¹⁶ Foreign Minister Skarphéðinsson invited the Alþingi to debate a set of guiding principles for Icelandic Arctic policy, and on 28 March 2011 it adopted a policy document that showed both support for the Ministry’s proposals and a large degree of cross-Party consensus.¹⁷ This successful experiment, going well beyond the role most European states would let their parliaments play in strategy making, provided encouragement for reverting to the wider security policy issue. Before the end of 2011, Skarphéðinsson suggested to the Alþingi that an ad hoc group be formed with MPs from all parties represented in parliament, to consider the principles for a comprehensive national security policy; the machinery of government for policy making; and the possible need for new research support in this field (such as a national foreign affairs think-tank, which the Alþingi had advocated in a resolution of 2009). After consulting various stakeholders, the Alþingi decided to accept Skarphéðinsson’s proposal and the ad hoc committee was established in January 2012.

4. The Alþingi’s National Security Policy Report of March 2014

4.1 The Process

The committee was chaired by Valgerður Bjarnadóttir, a senior MP from the Social Democratic Alliance, and had ten members representing five Parties in all.¹⁸ Its man-

date specified that its work should be based on the 2009 Risk Assessment; the applicable international conventions such as the U.N. Charter and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; and earlier measures approved by the Alþingi such as the status of Iceland's territory as a zone free of nuclear weapons and nuclear powered vehicles. Within this framework, the committee held 16 formal meetings including interviews with some 20 national and foreign experts. It carried out research notably into the national security strategies of Estonia, Austria, Britain, Finland and Norway, and the security and defence arrangements of other small states including specifically those without armed forces. Visits were paid to the NATO-related installations in Keflavík and the civil protection authority's HQ in Reykjavík, and also to Norway where the committee met with parliamentarians and officials and visited similar sites.

A first draft of the committee's findings was ready by August 2012, and at that stage it was hoped to get the report approved by the full Alþingi and published in November the same year. However, other urgent tasks intervened for Bjarnadóttir and others, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs agreed to extend the deadline. By the time discussion within the committee was completed in March 2013, elections were imminent and the work once again had to be placed on ice. In due course the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, made clear that his government (now an Independence Party/Progressive Party coalition) would like to proceed with the strategy making process; and the committee met one last time in January 2014 to finalize its report and comments for submission to the Alþingi in plenary.¹⁹ The Alþingi then approved the materials and transmitted them to the Ministry as described above.

4.2 The Report, and Party Reservations

The main text of the Alþingi report (see below on Party reservations) covers just 11 pages and it is presented in a discursive rather than clearly structured way.²⁰ It starts by recalling the history of Icelandic defence and noting the major changes to which policy now needs to be adapted: notably the increasing global attention paid to the Arctic, the rise of 'new' threats like cyber-attack, environmental pollution and terrorism, the change in defence relations with the US, changes in NATO's focus and activities, and the growing role of the EU in non-military fields of security. Pages 3-6 of the report enlarge on how these points apply to Iceland's global and regional environment. They offer a factual summary of Iceland's increasingly close and many-sided security-related cooperation with traditional partners like the US and NATO, with Nordic and other European states, and with other institutions including the EU (through Schengen membership and contributions to CSDP missions).

At conceptual level, the report notes (p.2) that the whole range of military, global and societal challenges are normally seen nowadays as a single 'security' spectrum. Similarly, a strict line can no longer be drawn between the roles of civilian and military systems and assets either at home or abroad. Even if the two remain separate in governance terms, Iceland may well need for instance to use (foreign) military help for search and rescue purposes. This important – and in Icelandic terms, historic - recognition²¹ is

followed by a section later in the report that stresses how globalization has also changed the equation. Being unarmed, remote and peaceful can no longer be relied on to protect a state from the impact of cyber-attacks, international crime, climate change or economic and financial crises. Against this background, the committee list (on p.9) what they see as the main security risks and threats for Iceland:

Group One: *Major accidents in the Arctic; Cyber-threats and sabotage; Natural disasters*

Group Two: *Organized crime; Financial/economic security; Food security; Public health and epidemics*

Group Three: *Military threats; Terrorism*

As for Iceland's policy response, the committee provides (on p.3) a short but well-considered formulation first of basic national values, and then of policy goals:

Values: *Democracy, rule of law, respect for international law, humanity and respect for human rights, equality, sustainable development, peaceful resolution of disputes and disarmament.*

Goals: *To guarantee Iceland's independence and sovereignty, its territorial integrity and its citizens' security, and to protect the government system and basic functions of society.*

On this basis, in pages 6-8, the report lays out suggested detailed guidelines for Iceland's policy in three security-relevant fields: foreign policy, defence policy, and civil protection. The third category is handled more briefly in view of work taking place separately (see next section) on a national civil protection strategy. The points made under foreign policy are generalized and imply no policy change, but include endorsement of Iceland's efforts to 'export' security e.g. through work for development, human rights, humanitarian goals, and disarmament. The section on defence states forthrightly that the US alliance, Iceland's NATO membership and Icelandic involvement in NATO's work should continue, together with the Allied air policing exercises based at Keflavik. Iceland needs to be active in Arctic security cooperation and ready to play its part, with civilian resources, in civil-military efforts notably for search and rescue. The civil protection section briefly notes the main requirements of infrastructure security as well as health security and security of supply for Iceland, mentions the importance of the Coastguard, and again stresses the high priority to be given to natural disasters, longer-term impacts of climate change, and cyber-threats.

The report's last pages offer a collection of process-related comments that may seem somewhat random but are, in fact, very pertinent to Icelandic conditions. To ensure close coordination between the three policy areas just mentioned, there should be a central national security council either replacing or combined with the existing civil protection and security council.²² Emergency stocks of vital commodities should be increased

and the police better equipped for dealing with the aftermath of major incidents including possible nuclear, biological and chemical attacks. More serious attention should be paid to cyber-security. While the subordination of the NATO radar operations to the Coastguard seems to have worked well, it should be clearly enshrined in law. The establishment of a foreign affairs and defence research institute is not (yet) feasible for financial reasons, but meanwhile policy can draw on existing academic circles and experts for advice. Public debate should be encouraged. The nuclear-weapon-free status of Iceland should be enshrined in law, with due regard to the international legal framework and national obligations.

The representatives of three Parties felt it necessary to add written reservations (Icelandic: *Bókun*) to the committee's report,²³ but none of these too seriously undermined the impression of consensus. The Left Green Movement re-stated their position that NATO membership and the air patrolling exercises at Keflavik were unnecessary and inappropriate. At the same time they stressed their satisfaction with the new broad-spectrum approach taken in the analysis. The Independence Party members also endorsed the report's main findings, but put down a marker that any clarification of Iceland's non-nuclear status must be in line with NATO and other international obligations - which they saw as precluding a complete nuclear ban in all sea and air space. They also underlined the need for clarifying the legal division of responsibilities and line of command in Iceland on security matters. Birgitta Jónsdóttir, representing the Citizen's Movement (*Hreyfingin*) at the time, urged Iceland to do more to protect its citizens' cyber-privacy against foreign incursions.

Overall, the report's analysis and recommendations display a quality that outsiders might call sheer common sense, but which in the Icelandic setting reflects a very real attempt to build consensus across previously unbridgeable rifts. It cannily does so by appealing to the force of external changes rather than proclaiming the 'victory' of one ideological line over another: and in fact, all parties concerned might claim to have contributed something to the resulting policy mix. Less obvious at first reading are the things that the report does not do, because the political obstacles were still too great in 2012-14. The main such omission is any detailed discussion of economic and financial security desiderata, or of how EU membership might relate to them – a topic perhaps easier to side-step because the report provides no detailed guidelines for security-related work in ministries other than Foreign Affairs (covering foreign and defence policy) and the Interior (civil protection). At conceptual level, while the report shows keen awareness of Iceland's vulnerabilities as a 'small state' and makes a strong case for international cooperation, there is no explicit discussion of what Iceland might have to 'pay' in both material and non-material terms to secure the external help it needs.²⁴ Addressing this point could have meant challenging the extreme Icelandic preoccupation with sovereignty and freedom of play, and it is a topic that the 2009 Risk Assessment also evaded. Given that the report develops Icelandic thinking along lines likely to be welcome to all main external partners, however, this intellectual omission should not be considered too serious.

4.3 Next Steps

Alongside the parliamentary committee's work, two other important studies for Iceland's future security policy have been under way in 2013-4. A government strategy for civil protection and societal security has been prepared by the Ministry of the Interior under the authority of the civil protection and security council established by the 2008 Civil Protection Act: the draft is reportedly in its final stages. The other related document is a new Icelandic cyber security strategy,²⁵ also drafted by the Ministry of Interior. As anticipated in the Alþingi's own report, it seems natural for the authorities to wait until this whole package of documents is available before deciding on how and when to prepare the country's over-arching security strategy. It remains to be seen whether the latter would focus more narrowly on the Foreign Affairs and Interior competences highlighted in the Alþingi report, or whether it might attempt a more balanced 'whole-of-government' approach - in which case it would need to pick up extra material notably from the new civil protection strategy. In any event, the resulting document would be sent for study and approval to the Alþingi, where a clear majority might be expected for its adoption even if the Left Greens felt obliged to vote against or abstain on the NATO issue.

Meanwhile, the authorities have felt free to take up certain practical recommendations of the Alþingi report for separate and early action. One such point concerns the committee's call for a stronger legal base for Iceland's cyber-defence operations and for improved reaction capabilities in case of cyber-attack. The need for this was highlighted when a serious security breach at one of Iceland's major internet service providers in 2013 led to the online publication of passwords and personal data of tens of thousands of Icelanders.²⁶ The government reacted by moving the CERT-IS team (Iceland's centre for cyber-defence) from the postal administration to the Interior Ministry's Civil Protection Department,²⁷ where it can be closely coordinated with police, civil emergency response, anti-crime and anti-terrorism activities. Similarly, the Alþingi report's focus on the inconveniences of the still 'provisional' and informal placement of the remaining defence activities at Keflavik under the Coastguard – legal confusion, problems with resource allocation and lack of long-term planning – spurred the Ministries for Foreign Affairs and the Interior to sign a proper legal agreement on the matter in July 2014.²⁸ The transfer to the Interior Ministry's purview was thereby confirmed within the framework of the original 2008 Defence Act.²⁹

5. The Setting for Next Steps: Iceland's Current Security Environment and Discourse

The Alþingi's security policy report passed largely unnoticed by the general public in March 2014, reflecting the Icelandic mood at the time. The one hot issue concerning external relations in the first half of 2014 was whether or not to formally withdraw the previous government's application (of July 2009) to join the European Union.³⁰ Security and defence issues in general came low down on a national agenda still dominated by economic and social problems and public spending cuts. Such ideas as were publicly debated to improve Iceland's longer-term strategic position were focused, as in recent

years, largely on Arctic opportunities. The government sought close coordination of Iceland's, Greenland's and the Faroe Islands' policies in the 'West Nordic' space,³¹ and highlighted the value of working with 'rising powers' such as China and India. These were pertinent proposals in the Arctic connection, but could not be seen as serious alternatives for meeting the country's more general external and internal security needs.

The persistent link between these needs, at least at the 'harder' end of the spectrum, and the strategic destiny of Europe as a whole sprang back into focus with the Ukraine crisis of Spring 2014. Iceland's centre-Right government, despite having curiously omitted reference to NATO in its original platform,³² made clear that it stood within the Right's longer-term Atlanticist tradition by joining in the condemnation of Russian aggression. At the time of NATO's Cardiff Summit meeting in September, Foreign Minister Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson committed Iceland to make even greater – though still non-military – contributions to NATO through budget payments, personnel, inputs to missions, and the use of its territory for exercises and other activities (such as Arctic search and rescue).³³ Very unusually, Iceland received visits in the late summer months both by the outgoing NATO Secretary-General and the Alliance's military leader, SAC-EUR. The only peculiar note was struck by the fact that Russia did not name Iceland among the countries blocked from exporting certain goods to Russia in retaliation for Western sanctions, but the government declined to make much of this, insisting that its solidarity with Western positions was clear.³⁴

Domestic reactions to these developments were subdued, with only the promise of increased contributions to NATO (at home and abroad) attracting close attention – perhaps not unnaturally given the widespread resentment against new public spending cuts in the government's latest budget, which included reduced support for Iceland's own Coastguard. When former Minister and prominent Left Green politician Ögmundur Jónasson called for a national referendum on leaving the Alliance, the lack of any wider response confirmed the impression that a 'silent majority' of Icelanders still valued the US's and NATO's strategic protection. The issue has however since been placed on the Alþingi's agenda with a formal motion by the Left Green Movement, who currently have 7 MPs out of 63.

Notwithstanding the flurry over Ukraine, Iceland in 2014 has had several reminders of non-military risks that make a default back to the narrow defence-oriented visions of former years unlikely. A volcanic eruption near the country's largest ice-cap, Vatnajökull, began in relatively non-damaging form in August but risked escalating at any time to a sub-glacial eruption bringing floods (which would also damage energy infrastructure), air traffic interruption, and perhaps major air pollution in its wake. It has given opportunity both to practise and to publicize the roles of internal security agencies and the cooperation between them. On 26 August all telephone and computer connections to Iceland's Westfjords district broke down, crippling commercial transactions, turning off traffic lights for several hours, and generating a strong cross-Party demand in the Alþingi that the security of communications be reviewed.³⁵ Though drawing less general public attention, the familiar debate over where to find the balance between energy security and

environmental protection was kept alive by increasingly serious governmental and commercial proposals to build an ‘interconnector’ power line from Iceland to the Northern British Isles. According to one’s viewpoint, this was either a wise move to give Iceland the first-ever chance of directly importing energy in a crisis, or a fatal step to ‘infect’ the largely renewable-based, low-price Icelandic energy system by linking it with carbon-based producers. With such a changing mix of non-traditional security challenges constantly in the public eye, Icelandic society today seems ripe for the acceptance of a national security concept combining and balancing ‘harder’ and ‘softer’ risks - albeit still underplaying economic security, for the reasons explained above.

If the number of Icelanders able to mentally encompass all these issues within a single, multi-dimensional spectrum of security has been growing, so has the strength of Iceland’s links abroad in the fields of security research and related policy formation. It is not only with the Faroes and Greenland that Icelandic leaders are ready to develop common concepts for more effective national protection. The tempo of cooperation among the five sovereign Nordic states has also intensified since 2009, as reflected on the ‘hard’ defence side through the cooperation/coordination programme NORDEF-CO³⁶ – where Iceland is a full participant – and on the civil side through the high-level ‘Haga’ process seeking more integrated approaches to civil emergency management.³⁷ The significance of changing Icelandic approaches to security since 2006 lies not least in the way they have fostered a common language and common approaches between the country and its Nordic neighbours, who remain the most congenial available partners in political and cultural terms, and who –following a declaration in April 2011 – are now committed to offer mutual aid in all non-military emergencies.³⁸ As a concrete example, when Finnish and Swedish war-planes took part in the monitoring tasks of a NATO air deployment to Iceland in February 2014, some Finns expressed concern about the implications for their nations’ neutrality, but Icelandic comment was overwhelmingly positive and couched in terms of Nordic solidarity.³⁹ At conceptual level, growing acceptance of the word ‘societal’ (*samfélagslegur*, *samfélags-*) to define a set of non-military, mainly non-divisive security challenges for Iceland – as seen in the 2009 Risk Assessment report, the civil protection planning process, and now in the Alþingi’s report – eases both practical and intellectual cooperation with other Nordic states where this term or a close equivalent has represented official doctrine for some time.⁴⁰

Even though the idea of an Icelandic security research centre remains on ice, developments in pan-Nordic research cooperation have recently led to the strengthening of the Icelandic research environment in the field of societal security. Within a new Nordic research cooperation programme on that subject, a substantial grant was awarded by NordForsk to an academic consortium led by the University of Iceland to establish a Nordic Centre of Excellence on Resilience and Societal Security (NORDRESS).⁴¹ The NordForsk programme provides an equivalent in the academic world to the NORDEF-CO and ‘Haga’ cooperation systems bringing together Nordic governmental experts; it holds out hope also of closer ties between academic experts and operators.

6. In Conclusion

What Iceland has badly needed in recent times has been a normalization of its domestic security debate, in at least three senses of the word ‘normal’. First, the debate needed to become less adversarial, more practical and better attuned to changing times. We have seen that the Alþingi report clearly reflects such a move, even while still dodging the toughest EU-related issues. Secondly, Iceland needed to assess more realistically its multi-faceted exposure as the smallest of Europe’s ‘small states’, with problems that reflect remoteness as much as limited capacities. The priorities suggested by the Alþingi meet this need better than before and should be further refined by the expected civil protection report. Thirdly, the Icelandic élite needed to move closer to the mainstream of thought in the Nordic and other capitals where they have, concurrently, been looking for their main security partners. Other European states’ national security concepts have been incorporating multi-functional, multi-institutional approaches and ideas of civil-military cooperation for up to two decades already.⁴² We have already noted how a common security ‘language’ will help Iceland in Nordic cooperation, and the same should be true for its dialogue with larger Western states

It would be premature, as of autumn 2014, to suggest that any of these three changes has yet been completed or become irreversible. Party positions on individual security-related issues can be as divided and sharp-edged as ever. Individual relations within the security governance apparatus can be far from harmonious, as shown by a damagingly open tussle in autumn 2014 between the Interior Minister, the public prosecutor and the police force.⁴³ Even if all the current strategy development processes – on cyber-security, civil/societal security and general principles – bear healthy fruit, the political élite’s more urgent preoccupations and desperately over-stretched resources shed doubt on how fast or fully the new diagnoses can be translated into actual changes of structure, resource allocation and activity.

All that said, Iceland has arguably made a much longer journey in its security policy formation in the last eight years than in the previous five or six decades. The movement has been in the right direction on all the three criteria suggested above, and it has been conducted in an unusually inclusive, democratic way thanks to the strong roles accorded to parliamentarians and non-state experts. These results deserve more notice and recognition than they have yet received abroad, especially when compared with the lack of decisive progress, or even of clear and consensual analysis, on many of the other existential challenges facing Iceland today.

Notes

- 1 See the covering letter, text at <http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/oryggismal/Skilabref.pdf>.
- 2 Text and other materials at <http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/frettir/nr/7985>. An unofficial translation in English has been published at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/iceland/documents/press_corner/20140324_en.pdf.
- 3 Salmond, Patrick and Anthony G. Insall (eds.), ‘The Nordic Countries: From War to Cold War, 1945-51’, London: *FCO Documents on British Policy Overseas*, 2012.

- 4 Available in English at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/ice001.asp and in Icelandic at http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/Varnarmal/Varnarsamningur_isl.pdf
- 5 Bailes, Alyson J.K. and Þröstur F. Gylfason, ‘Societal Security’ and Iceland’, *Stjórnmál og Stjórnsýsla* Vol. 4/1 (2008), at <http://www.irpa.is/article/view/980>; Ómarsdóttir, Silja B., ‘Öryggið úr lausu lofti gripið’ in *Rannsóknir í Félagsmálum IX*, available at http://skemman.is/stream/get/1946/7639/20251/1/F%C3%A9lagsmálum%C3%ADsindab%C3%B3k_2008.pdf.
- 6 Ingimundarson, Valur, ‘Frá óvissu til upplausnar: Öryggissamfélag Íslands og Bandaríkjanna, 1991-2006’ in Ingimundarson, Valur (ed.), *Uppbrot hugmyndakerfis: Endurmótun íslenskrar utanríkisstefnu 1991-2007*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2008, pp 1-66.
- 7 For more on this term and a comparison of Iceland’s case with the four other Nordic states, see Bailes, Alyson J.K., ‘Does a Small State Need a Strategy?’, Reykjavík: Institute of International Affairs, 2009, available at http://stofnanir.hi.is/sites/files/ams/Bailes_Final_1.pdf.
- 8 Bjarnason, Gunnar Þ., *Óvanti djall eða fyrirsjáanleg tímamót?*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2008. For the text of the agreement on hand-over modalities signed between the US and Iceland in September 2006, see http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/Varnarmal/002_Skilasamningur_29.09.2006_Islands_og_USA.pdf.
- 9 Available at <http://www.althingi.is/altext/135/s/pdf/1285.pdf>
- 10 The basic need for them is still questioned by adherents of the Left Green Movement who do not accept that sufficient military threat exists, or at least, that it is Iceland’s job to respond to it.
- 11 Available at <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2008034.html>. Note that the new line of management for the NATO installations was meant as an interim solution and not confirmed in law – more on this later in the article.
- 12 See http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/Skyrslur/Skyrsla_um_ahattumat_fyrir_Island_a.pdf; English summary at http://www.mfa.is/media/Skyrslur/A_Risk_Assessment_for_Iceland_-_English_Summary.pdf
- 13 The list is taken from pages 127-8 of the document at note 13 (English summary). The authors noted that some valid topics had been left out, such as intelligence threats, riots, and the protection of Icelandic citizens abroad.
- 14 For a summary of this complex issue see Bailes, Alyson J.K. and Baldur Thorhallsson, *Iceland and Europe: Drifting Further Apart?*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs Briefing Paper no 139 (2013), available at http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/360/iceland_and_europe/.
- 15 For more on these terms see Lindberg, Helena and Bengt Sundelius; ‘Whole-of-society Disaster Resilience: The Swedish Way’ in Kamien, David (ed.), *The McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook*, 2012, pp. 1295-1320.
- 16 Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Iceland and the High North*, available at http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/Skyrslur/Skyrslan_Island_a_nordurslodumm.pdf,
- 17 Althingi, Þingsályktun um stefnu Íslands í málefnum Norðurslóða (Parliamentary proposal on Iceland’s policy on Arctic issues), Document no. 1148 of the 139th session 2010-2011, available at <http://www.althingi.is/altext/139/s/1148.html>
- 18 Aside from the Social Democratic Alliance, these were the Independence Party, Left Green Movement, Progressive Party, and the Citizens’ Movement (Hreyfingin) which had entered parliament at the preceding election.
- 19 See <http://www.althingi.is/altext/139/s/1247.html>.
- 20 The report’s structure is not, in fact, entirely logical and our analysis lists its main points in a different sequence for clarity’s sake.
- 21 It was supported by the Left Green MPs on the understanding that combining all military and civil security issues would show up more clearly the limited relevance of the military category for Iceland, and that civil-military cooperation for societal ends would be under clear civilian control.

- 22 The latter was created by the 2008 Civil Protection Act (note 1o above) and has thus far limited itself to policy-framing functions, as distinct from active crisis management.
- 23 For texts, see the reference in note 2 above.
- 24 On the concept of ‘small states’ and their security see Archer, Clive, Bailes, Alyson J.K. and Anders Wivel (eds.), *Small States and International Security; Europe and beyond*, London: Routledge, 2014.
- 25 Ministry of the Interior, *Stefnumótun um net- og upplýsingaöryggi*, at http://www.innanrikisraduneyti.is/media/frettir-2014/umraeduskjal_stefnumotunar_um_net_og_upplýsingaoryggi.pdf
- 26 See http://www.mbl.is/frettir/taekni/2013/11/30/hakkari_birtir_personuupplýsingar/.
- 27 The Ministry of Interior reported this step on 23 March 2014, see <http://www.innanrikisraduneyti.is/frettir/nr/28886>
- 28 See <http://www.visir.is/samningur-undirritadur-um-verkefni-i-oryggis--og-varnarmalum/article/2014140739945>.
- 29 See note 12 above.
- 30 The Foreign Minister tabled a parliamentary resolution to do so, but its progress was stalled by a combination of filibustering and extra-parliamentary protest. Opinion polls showed that a majority of Icelanders would prefer to decide the issue themselves in a referendum. This issue remains unresolved at the time of writing.
- 31 These three nations have long consulted through a parliamentary ‘West Nordic Council’ (see <http://www.vestnordisk.is/english/>), and the present government inaugurated a matching three-way official dialogue. In 2015 the WNC will seek to formulate common principles for the three partners in handling Arctic affairs.
- 32 The reference is to the foreign affairs section of the policy declaration by the Independence Party/Progressive Party coalition government, 22 May 2013, available at <http://www.stjornarrad.is/Stefnuyfirlýsing/#utanrikis>.
- 33 New Europe News Service, *Iceland’s FM urges NATO to concern on changes in Arctic region*, 11 September 2014, available at <http://www.neurope.eu/article/icelands-fm-urges-nato-concern-changes-arctic-region>.
- 34 IceNews, *Iceland not on EU sanction list confirms Russia*, 11 August 2014, available at <http://www.icenews.is/2014/08/11/iceland-not-on-eu-sanction-list-confirms-russia/>, and RUV, *Adgerðir Rússa breyta ekki afstöðu Íslands* (Russia’s measures don’t change Iceland’s position), 7 August 2014, available at <http://www.ruv.is/frett/adgerdir-russa-breyta-ekki-afstodu-islands>.
- 35 For a strong critique by a Left Green MP see <http://www.althingi.is/altext/raeda/144/rad20140915T161255.html>.
- 36 See <http://www.nordefco.org/>.
- 37 *Nordic Cooperation on Civil Emergencies*, Reykjavik: Centre for Small State Studies Background Brief, June 2014, available at <http://ams.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/WhitePaper2.pdf>.
- 38 ‘Nordic solidarity declaration’, see text at <http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/nordurlandaskrifstofa/Norraen-samstoduyfirlýsing-ENG.pdf>
- 39 For a typical reaction by the Foreign Minister, see <http://www.visir.is/norraent-samstarf-i-oryggis-malum/article/2014702129971>
- 40 Bailes, Alyson J.K., ‘Societal Security and Small States’ in Archer, Clive, Bailes, Alyson J.K. and Anders Wivel (eds.), *Small States and International Security; Europe and beyond*, as note 24 above.
- 41 http://english.hi.is/frettir/substantial_grant_for_research_natural_hazards_and_societal_resilience
- 42 Bailes, *Does a Small State Need a Strategy?*, as note 7 above.
- 43 These strained relations have drawn extensive media coverage, see e.g. http://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2014/08/26/svo_kom_gusa_af_gagnryni/.

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