

SUGGESTED READINGS

Iceland and the High North

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At a time when many of us find ourselves working from home in social isolation, NAADSN has invited various academic subject matter experts to suggest core readings on topics related to North American and Arctic Defence and Security.

The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists are intended to help direct policy makers, practitioners, and academics to credible, open-access sources, available online free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (i.e. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

Hansson, Pia, and Guðbjörg Ríkey Th. Hauksdóttir. “[Iceland and Arctic Security: US Dependency and the Search for an Arctic Identity](#),” in *On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security*, eds. Duncan Depledge, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Peterborough, Ontario: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2021): 162-171.

This chapter explores the changed security environment in the Arctic in the face of renewed large power interest in Iceland, the emergence of Iceland’s Arctic identity following the departure of the US from Iceland in 2006, as well as the recent US pressure on Iceland not to cooperate with China and Russia in the Arctic. Finally, the authors propose policy recommendations to the Icelandic government regarding security issues in the Arctic.

Cela, Margrét, and Pia Hansson. “[Finding a Niche for Iceland in the Post-Cold War Era](#),” *Northern Connections* (November 2020): 8-10.

Iceland has expanded its diplomatic and economic relationship with China in recent years on matters ranging from geothermal energy to free trade to scientific cooperation. Although Iceland joined in the U.S. and EU sanctions on Russia in 2014, it maintains a historically good relationship with Moscow. These dynamics, combined with the general friction in the region, has prompted the United States to take a renewed interest in Iceland, sending both Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on official visits in 2019. However, as the authors argue, while Iceland considers its relationship with the United States to be the core of its national defense strategy, it is nonetheless determined to chart its own course on foreign and security policy.

Pórhallsson, Baldur. [“A Small State in World Politics: Iceland's Search for Shelter,”](#) *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration* 14, no. 1 (2018): 61- 82.

The aim of this paper is to determine Iceland’s foreign policy options in relation to shelter theory. Iceland has been seeking political and economic shelter ever since the United States deserted it in 2006, by closing its military base, and in 2008, by refusing to provide it with assistance following its economic collapse. Iceland has made several new security and defence arrangements with its neighbouring states, applied for membership of the European Union and was the first European country to make a free-trade agreement with China. Moreover, the president of Iceland pressed for closer political and economic ties with Russia. Prominent Icelandic politicians frequently claim that Brexit will create a number of opportunities for Iceland and lead to closer cooperation with Britain. However, Iceland has not yet secured shelter of an extent comparable to what it had enjoyed from the United States. In this paper, we will answer questions such as: What does shelter theory tell us about Iceland’s overseas relations with the US, NATO, the EU, Britain, Russia, China, and the Nordic states? Will Iceland receive more reliable shelter provided by multilateral organizations than by a single shelter provider?

Ómarsdóttir, Silja Bára. [“Icelanders' Perspectives on Security and Foreign Affairs,”](#) *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration* 14, no. 2 (2018): 1-18.

Icelanders’ views on security and foreign affairs since the end of the Cold War are an understudied issue. This article presents the findings of a large scale survey on the position and ideas about foreign affairs and security. The survey was conducted by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland in November and December 2016. The results of the survey are placed in the context of developments in security studies, with an emphasis on security sectors, ontological security, and securitization. The main findings are that the Icelandic public believes that its security is most threatened by economic and financial instability, as well as natural hazards, but thinks there is a very limited chance of military conflict or terrorist attacks directly affecting the country. These findings are incongruent with the main emphases of Icelandic authorities, as they appear in security policy and political discourse. It is therefore important that the authorities understand how to engage with the public about the criteria upon which risk assessments and security policies are based.

Bailes, Alyson J. K., and Kristmundur Þór Ólafsson. [“Developments in Icelandic Security Policy.”](#) *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration* 10, no. 2 (2014): 1-15.

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.

Additional Readings

Ingimundarson, Valur. “[Iceland as an Arctic State](#),” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, eds. Ken S. Coates, and Carin Holroyd (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 251-265.

The chapter focuses on the evolution of Iceland’s Arctic policy since the 1990s by looking at three factors: historical and cultural attitudes toward the Arctic; economic and political interests in the region, and the country’s role in Arctic security and geopolitics. It shows how the Arctic has been used by political elites to promote a backward-looking narrative on an exalted past; how it has served the purpose of redrawing attention to Iceland’s geostrategic position after the end of the Cold War; how it has been used to offer forward-looking economic visions in response to the recent financial crisis, and how it has been adopted both to reinforce traditional Iceland’s Western orientation and to explore non-Western possibilities. It is argued that there are underlying Icelandic insecurities regarding Arctic governance and the fear of being excluded from decision-making in areas considered important for Iceland’s economic security and political interests. This attitude has affected Iceland’s policies with respect to the five Arctic littoral states and ocean management in general. Yet, even if there is less domestic pressure for viewing the Arctic as a prospective dividend in connection with the opening of new sea routes, the region is still projected in terms of material promise.

Wilson, Page, and Auður H. Ingólfssdóttir. “[Small State, Big Impact? Iceland’s First National Security Policy](#),” in *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, eds. Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, and Horatio Sam-Aggrey (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2020): 188-197.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of Iceland’s first National Security Policy (NSP). The chapter argues that the NSP reveals a long-standing tension between two competing security identities in Iceland – a “small state” identity on the one hand, and a “big impact” identity on the other. Through the analysis, these identities – and what they reveal about how security policy is made in Iceland – are unpacked.

Ingimundarson, Valur. “[Framing the National Interest: The Political Uses of the Arctic in Iceland’s Foreign and Domestic Policies.](#)” *The Polar Journal* 5, no. 1 (2015): 82-100.

In the article, I discuss how Iceland’s Arctic policies have been framed, developed, and enacted from the early 2000s to the present. The purpose is to show how the geopolitical importance of the Arctic has – after a post-Cold War hiatus – made the region a core component of Iceland’s foreign policy. By stressing the multifunctionality of the Arctic as a concept and spatial entity, I highlight which Arctic issues have been singled out and integrated into Icelandic official narratives. I examine how a cultural–historical interpretation of an Icelandic past has been used to underpin a discourse on a future Arctic economic dividend; how the Arctic has been projected as a symbol of Iceland’s renewed geostrategic promise following the end of the Cold War and the US military withdrawal; how Arctic narratives have functioned as a domestic political “displacement factor” in response to the financial crisis; and how the region has been “seized upon” both to reinforce Iceland’s Western foreign policy identity and to explore non-Western possibilities, such as increased ties with China. I argue that what has made the Arctic attractive as a political instrument in Icelandic foreign and domestic policies is its discursive “flexibility,” “expedience,” and “incompleteness.” By juggling diverse political, economic, and cultural factors, Icelandic elites have articulated the topicality of the Arctic by constructing ideological narratives of the region’s “future return” unencumbered by the immediacy of political accountability or scrutiny.

Cela, Margrét. “[Iceland: A Small Arctic State Facing Big Arctic Changes.](#)” *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online* 5, no. 1 (2013): 75-92.

Iceland is one of eight member states of the Arctic Council and claims to be the only sovereign state that is entirely located in the Arctic. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the region has gained a priority status in Iceland’s foreign policy. The developments in the Arctic will inevitably affect the country in one way or the other. This paper is divided into three sections; the first one discusses recent internal and external developments. The second section is about three different aspects of security, traditional, human and environmental, and furthermore, discusses those types of security in Icelandic context. The last section is on Iceland’s priorities in the Arctic, which are then measured against Lassi Heininen’s policy fields or indicators, and Arctic solutions presented by Alyson Bailes. Main conclusions are that even though Iceland has been going through challenging times in the recent years, the Arctic still remains somewhat a priority area, policy wise, and the Icelandic priorities, for the most part, fit within the frameworks of Arctic solutions and the policy fields they are measured against.

Official Documents

Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland: [Greenland and Iceland in the New Arctic: Recommendations of the Greenland Committee Appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Co-operation](#) (2020)

Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland: [Together towards a Sustainable Arctic: Iceland's Arctic Council Chairmanship 2019-2021](#) (2019)

Governments of the Republic of Iceland & Kingdom of Norway: [Joint Declaration Between Iceland and Norway on Defence Cooperation](#) (2017)

Alþingi: [Parliamentary Resolution on a National Security Policy for Iceland](#) (2016)

Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland: [Gender Equality in the Arctic](#) (2014)

Alþingi: [Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy](#) (2011)

Governments of the United States of America & Republic of Iceland: [Defense of Iceland: Agreement Between the United States and the Republic of Iceland](#) (1951)