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NO COUNTRY AN ISLAND:
ICELAND'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATO SINCE 1949

by

John R. Morgan III

September 2018

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The United States and its Allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) shifted their collective focus away from the North Atlantic in the early 1990s because Russia was no longer a dominant threat to Western security as it had been during the Cold War. After two decades of fighting in the Middle East (since the 1990–1991 Gulf War), in 2011, the United States announced a "pivot to the Asia-Pacific region." Since 2014, however, a resurgent Russia has caused the Alliance to once again turn its attention to the North Atlantic. This thesis assesses Iceland's role in NATO during the Cold War and beyond. It relies on historical information to develop analyses on alliance management and the power of small states. The thesis then turns to contemporary events and sources to explain NATO's heightened state of alarm in the face of an increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Kremlin. Western air and naval forces have witnessed a marked increase in confrontational incidents with Russian military forces, and East-West tension has increased. In this context of NATO's "pivot back to the North Atlantic," Iceland's geostrategic value to the Alliance has again come to the fore.

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NO COUNTRY AN ISLAND: ICELAND'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATO SINCE 1949

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ABSTRACT

The United States and its Allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) shifted their collective focus away from the North Atlantic in the early 1990s because Russia was no longer a dominant threat to Western security as it had been during the Cold War. After two decades of fighting in the Middle East (since the 1990–1991 Gulf War), in 2011, the United States announced a "pivot to the Asia-Pacific region." Since 2014, however, a resurgent Russia has caused the Alliance to once again turn its attention to the North Atlantic. This thesis assesses Iceland's role in NATO during the Cold War and beyond. It relies on historical information to develop analyses on alliance management and the power of small states. The thesis then turns to contemporary events and sources to explain NATO's heightened state of alarm in the face of an increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Kremlin. Western air and naval forces have witnessed a marked increase in confrontational incidents with Russian military forces, and East-West tension has increased. In this context of NATO's "pivot back to the North Atlantic," Iceland's geostrategic value to the Alliance has again come to the fore.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASW	anti-submarine warfare
EU	European Union
FY	fiscal year
GIUK Gap	Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap
IDF	Iceland Defense Force
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
NAS	naval air station
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SEI	Icelandic Socialist Party
SOSUS	sound surveillance system
SURTASS	surveillance towed-array sensor system
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WW2	World War II

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Although Iceland has never had a national military establishment, it was a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. Due to its geographic location, it has been an extraordinarily important Ally despite its small economy and lack of military forces. However, Iceland's membership in the Alliance was called into question several times from the 1950s through the 1970s due to various factors. Why was Iceland's place in the Alliance somewhat precarious during that time, and might these factors affect Iceland's future role in NATO? How have Iceland's domestic politics affected its actions in the Alliance? What parallels can be drawn between Iceland and other countries with regard to small states in international politics and alliance relations?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In the years immediately following World War II, many of the belligerents in the war pioneered novel military alliances with each other. Some of these new alliances reflected an "East versus West" confrontation of communism versus free-market democracy that lasted for more than 40 years. The strongest of these alliances, NATO, was formed in 1949. There were 12 founding members in NATO: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

One of these countries might seem incongruous in a military alliance because it has never had a national military establishment: the Republic of Iceland.[1] A small country with a comparatively moderate population size, Iceland is separated from mainland Europe by hundreds of miles of sea. In modern times, Iceland has been a nation of peaceful citizens who do not regularly involve themselves in the affairs of other nations. Iceland turned its back on 400 years of preferring non-engagement in military affairs when it helped to found

[1] Iceland has never had a military force comprised of its own citizens, but the Iceland Defense Force was stationed in Iceland from 1951 until 2006. The Iceland Defense Force, composed of American military personnel stationed in Iceland for its defense, is discussed in Chapter II of this thesis.

NATO, a military alliance, in 1949.[2] Why did Iceland join NATO as a founding member, and how important are its contributions to the Alliance?

Despite its lack of a standing military, Iceland's role in NATO has always been crucial due to its strategic geographic location. Its geostrategic role was at its height during the Cold War because of its capacity to support improved submarine tracking. The importance of the role that Iceland plays in the Alliance was diminished after the Cold War ended, but NATO has recently turned its focus back to Iceland and the surrounding sea in the face of an increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Kremlin.

In the FY 2017 budget, the U.S. Department of Defense allocated $21.4 million for the renovation of facilities at Naval Air Station Keflavík (NAS Keflavík) to make it suitable to host Navy P-8 Poseidon aircraft, the U.S. Navy's newest generation of submarine-hunting and maritime patrol aircraft.[3] The Pentagon requested a further $14.4 million in the FY 2018 budget proposal to continue refurbishing facilities at NAS Keflavík and enable it to host more P-8 aircraft, and the Pentagon has confirmed that the United States and Iceland have agreed to increase rotations of American surveillance planes to Iceland in 2018.[4]

This thesis examines the role that Iceland played in NATO from its inception in 1949 through the end of political turmoil in the 1970s, analyzes the reasons for Icelandic actions taken during that time, and discusses the implications for the future of Iceland's role in NATO. The thesis also considers how Iceland compares to other small states with regard to its foreign policy, its security policy, and its experience with the politics of alliances. This thesis concludes with an assessment of the future of Iceland's role in the Alliance as NATO-Russia relations continue to grow increasingly strained in the current international context.

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[2] Benedikt Gröndal, *Iceland: From Neutrality to NATO Membership* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).

[3] Gregory Winger and Gustav Peturrson, "Return to Keflavík Station," *Foreign Affairs*, February 24, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-02-24/return-Keflavík-station.

[4] Paul McLeary, "In Return to Cold War Posture, U.S. Sending Sub Hunting Planes to Iceland," *Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2017. http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/04/in-return-to-cold-war-posture-u-s-sending-sub-hunting-planes-to-iceland/

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to survey what has been written about U.S.-Icelandic defense relations, NATO-Icelandic defense relations, small state politics, and alliance politics. It analyzes the varied opinions about Iceland's role in NATO from its founding to the present, with a focus on the Cold War era. Many authors have written about Iceland and its special role in NATO over the years; this thesis discusses the differing opinions about Iceland's history in NATO as well as why Iceland remains a key member of the Alliance and how its political actions can be compared with those of other countries. The literature review's two sections discuss (a) Iceland's domestic politics and its effects on the NATO alliance and (b) the roles of small states within alliances and on the world stage.

1. Domestic Politics

Three books are especially useful for this thesis, as they provide different perspectives and furnish a great breadth of information and insight. These three books were written by Donald Nuechterlein, Benedikt Gröndal, and Michael Corgan.

Nuechterlein wrote *Iceland, Reluctant Ally* in 1961.[5] Nuechterlein was then a press officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Reykjavik. Nuechterlein focuses on the period from 1949 to 1956, a time when both NATO and the Republic of Iceland (as an independent state) were relatively new. This book recounts Iceland's unwilling participation in World War II,[6] its rejection of peacetime military bases in the years immediately following World War II, its entry into NATO in 1949, and the lack of enthusiasm expressed by Icelanders as members of the new Alliance.[7] Nuechterlein criticizes Iceland for repeatedly threatening to break off participation in the Alliance.

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[5] Donald Nuechterlein, *Iceland, Reluctant Ally* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1961).

[6] Iceland was occupied by the United Kingdom and the United States beginning in 1940. When London asked in 1939 if the United Kingdom could occupy and use Iceland as part of the war effort, Iceland refused. British forces invaded in 1940 and met no resistance.

[7] There was actually an anti-NATO riot in Iceland's capital of Reykjavik in 1949 after its parliament voted to join NATO. The resistance to NATO membership and the U.S. military force presence in Iceland lasted for decades.

Benedikt Gröndal wrote *Iceland from Neutrality to NATO Membership* in 1971.[8] Gröndal was a member of the Icelandic parliament and later became the country's prime minister. Gröndal seems to have written the book in order to rebut some of the points that Nuechterlein made in his 1961 book, whose criticisms were not well-received by many Icelanders. Gröndal recounts the same history of Iceland's experience during World War II and Iceland's entry into NATO, but he focuses on some more measureable impacts of Iceland's membership in the Alliance. He has the benefit of authoring this book ten years after Nuechterlein published *Iceland, Reluctant Ally*, and he discusses the many developments that came after 1961. He discusses the overall Icelandic unease over military involvement and examines how Iceland became a more willing and contributing member of NATO over the years. One important subject that Gröndal's book considers (and that this thesis addresses) is the first of what would be three Cod Wars between Iceland and the United Kingdom.

Michael Corgan published *Iceland and Its Alliances: Security for a Small State* in 2002.[9] Corgan, an associate professor of international relations at Boston University, spent many years in Iceland while working for the U.S. Navy and then later teaching at the University of Iceland. This is the first significant book written about Icelandic defense relations since Gröndal's study in 1971. Corgan covers a much longer range of years in discussing Iceland's defense policy, and he is able to analyze and synthesize data over a broader scale because he wrote the book after almost 60 years of Icelandic independence. He begins with the post-1945 years and discusses Iceland's contributions to NATO. He focuses on the politics in the 1970s and 1980s and the effect they had on Iceland's defense relations. This is an excellent source, which could be used as a guidebook for other small states that are developing their own security policies and defense relations.

In addition to these books, a number of scholarly articles inform this thesis. Two major scholarly articles—"To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations

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[8] Benedikt Gröndal, *Iceland from Neutrality to NATO Membership* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).

[9] Michael Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances: Security for a Small State* (Lewiston, New York: E. Mellen Press, 2002).

during and after the Cold War" by Gudni Jóhannesson and "Iceland—Troubled Ally" by Neil O'Connor—are especially noteworthy.

"To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War" was written in 2004 by Gudni Jóhannesson,[10] who was then a lecturer at the University of Iceland and who is now the president of Iceland.[11] It is an extraordinarily useful source that discusses the history of the relations between the United States and Iceland from various perspectives: military; political and diplomatic; and economic. It assesses Iceland's part in global events during the Cold War and then the transformation of its role after the end of the Cold War. It points to the interdependent relationship that the United States has with Iceland. The United States and NATO need to retain cooperation with Iceland because of its location, and Iceland's economy relies heavily on that of the United States.

"Iceland—Troubled Ally" was written in 1975 by Neil O'Connor, a U.S. Navy officer who was assigned to the Iceland Defense Force.[12] He highlights some of the unique features of Iceland and investigates why the relations between Iceland and its NATO Allies have not always been among the most amicable. His study also reveals an American military perspective on what it was like to be part of the Iceland Defense Force and stationed in Iceland, exposed to the Icelandic people and their sentiments over the years – not all of which were friendly to U.S. forces.

2. International Perspective

Iceland merits comparison to other small states in terms of how they function within an alliance and in bilateral or multilateral diplomatic relations. A number of factors

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[10] The Icelandic alphabet contains ten characters not used in the English language; two of these characters do not look like any English character. For the purpose of this thesis, *Þ/þ* ("thorn") will be replaced with the English letters *Th/th* and *Ð/ð* ("eth") will be replaced with the English letter *D/d*. All other Icelandic characters will be used as appropriate.

[11] Gudni Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War," *Naval War College Review* 57, no. 3 (September 2004), http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol57/iss3/10/.

[12] Neil O'Connor, "Iceland: A Troubled Ally," *The Naval War College Advanced Research Project*, May 1974, https://archive.org/details/DTIC_ADB000808.

influenced Iceland's diplomatic relations with other countries and especially its relations with fellow NATO Allies in the early days of the Cold War, and an analysis of these factors is the primary focus of Chapter III of this thesis. A number of studies have been written about small states and the trends in interactions that can be predicted between small states and big powers. Additionally, much has been written about alliance politics, and this part of the literature review addresses three books and a *Foreign Policy* article on these topics.

Glenn Snyder's *Alliance Politics* analyzes different alliances and the politics behind them, including the Franco-Russian Alliance and the Austro-German Alliance leading up to World War I. Snyder does not discuss NATO except for a short mention of its restraint of Germany, but his book has an important chapter on alliance management. He points out how allies seek to shape the alliance to maximize their own benefits from the pact while minimizing the cost of their involvement. Snyder addresses divergent interests, which are an important aspect of this thesis. He argues that pursuing both common and competitive interests in an alliance can be tricky, and that "what gives rise to both these management tasks is the likelihood that allies will have at least some divergent interests or even conflicting interests. Although their common interests will have been sufficient to induce them to ally in the first place, their divergent and conflicting interests will constantly threaten to pull them apart."[13] Snyder proceeds to discuss "alliance bargaining" in its many forms, and this is addressed in this thesis as well.

Annette Baker Fox's 1959 book *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II* provides the reader with five case studies about countries that were non-participants in World War II.[14] She details how Turkey, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Spain managed to mostly avoid playing a role in the war in spite of their proximity to the continental war. Her ultimate chapter in this book includes an analysis of how small states have been able to influence major powers, despite the clear imbalance of general power between them. This book is an important addition to the analysis of small state politics in Chapter IV of this thesis.

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[13] Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 165.

[14] Annette Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

Martin Wight's *Power Politics* provides a thorough exploration of the differences between dominant powers, great powers, world powers, and minor powers.[15] He wrote about many other aspects of power politics in this book, but the four chapters mentioned are particularly useful for analysis and application in this thesis. Wight defines each level of power and asserts that small powers have extremely limited foreign policy interests — so limited that self-preservation is often the only interest of small states.[16] This assertion is further analyzed in Chapter IV of this thesis.

Robert Keohane wrote an article for *Foreign Policy* in 1971 called "The Big Influence of Small Allies." He does not discuss Iceland in particular, but his analysis of how "the badgers, mice, and pigeons—if not doves—of international politics…have been able to lead the elephant"[17] is useful for a side-by-side comparison of Iceland and other small allies. According to Keohane, one of the ways in which small allies can influence the United States is by "developing close working relationships with sub-units of the U.S. government, appealing to the Army, Navy, or Air Force, the CIA or AID."[18] This is particularly useful in countries where the United States has military installations, "for in such situations American agencies become dependent on the small ally's consent to their continued presence within its boundaries."[19] Keohane's analysis relates directly to how the United States and NATO were influenced by Iceland during the Cold War.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Iceland has always been a significant Ally, and this thesis addresses its importance in a fact-based manner. The most compelling factor remains its location. Now-declassified programs and capabilities concerning the submarine aspect of the NATO-Soviet arms race

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15 Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, edited by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1978).

16 Ibid., 65.

17 Robert Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," *Foreign Policy* no. 2 (Spring 1971): 161.

18 Ibid., 165.

19 Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," 165.

during the Cold War were critical to the strength of the Alliance.[20] Much of the competition was focused around the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. Gap.[21]

The enduring importance of Iceland in the Alliance is largely due to its aforementioned geographical significance, but it was also of critical value as a player in the "free market democracy v. communism" aspect of the Cold War. Iceland's communist political parties were influential during the Cold War, but the country's membership in NATO had enough support in Iceland that the communists were unable to establish a stronghold. It appears that Iceland's politicians and diplomats used its membership in the Alliance as an "upper hand" to strengthen its position in international affairs from the 1950s through the 1970s.

This thesis primarily explores the history of Iceland's diplomatic moves within NATO during this 1950s–1970s time period as well as from 2006 to the present with a goal of identifying a pattern within Icelandic politics. Iceland's domestic politics have a tumultuous history, and its internal politics affect its external politics to a great extent. This thesis explores how past and present internal politics have affected Iceland's role in NATO and may continue to do so in the future.

Iceland's cooperation with its NATO Allies is critical because the Alliance has begun to focus once again on the North Atlantic region. The Russian Federation's aggressive buildup of its military has included a new class of submarines with improved stealth technology. This is one of the reasons why the United States has developed the Poseidon P-8A jet, a highly advanced surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft capable of tracking submarines. Iceland will play a pivotal role when it hosts P-8A aircraft in Keflavík, just as it once hosted NATO aircraft on a permanent basis during the Cold War. It is probable that the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea will see an increase in naval

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[20] Assets such as underwater hydrophones and other acoustic tracking technology were critical during the Cold War. These assets are further addressed in Chapter II.

[21] The Greenland-Iceland-U.K. Gap refers to the open sea between the islands of Greenland, Iceland, and the U.K. It was of immense importance during the Cold War due to technology that allowed for the tracking of Soviet submarines as they passed through "the Gap." Further information is furnished in Chapter II.

activity, especially if the relations between Russia and NATO continue to deteriorate to Cold War levels.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis utilizes both primary and secondary sources for its analysis of Iceland's participation in the Alliance in the early years of the Cold War and unclassified and declassified primary sources from Iceland and other NATO countries during the early years of the Cold War to explore the changing dynamic of Iceland-NATO relations from the 1950s through the 1970s. It uses contemporary sources—largely journal articles, newspaper articles, and books written about Icelandic politics—to analyze the current state of affairs within Iceland and formulate an informed judgment about the future of relations between Iceland and its NATO Allies. This thesis utilizes sources from various NATO countries both at the time of various conflicts within NATO and as historical accounts. By analyzing both sources that were written about current events and historical studies of the relationship between Iceland and the rest of NATO, this thesis provides an assessment of how the relationship has developed over time. This topic calls for a qualitative investigation of the issues.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter II reviews the history of Iceland since its independence in 1944[22] and its occupation during World War II (1940–1945). The chapter then discusses the factors that led to the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 and considers why Iceland was a founding member of the Alliance. The chapter also discusses the political unrest in Iceland from the 1950s through the 1970s concerning its membership in the Alliance.

Chapter III examines Iceland's contributions to the Alliance during the Cold War. This includes its geostrategic importance in relation to Greenland and the U.K., and the

[22] Iceland was part of the Kingdom of Denmark from 1814 until 1918, at which time it entered into the Danish-Icelandic Union Act. It was granted sovereignty but was still part of the Kingdom of Denmark. A provision of the Act allowed Iceland to declare its own independence after 25 years if either party deemed it appropriate. Iceland declared independence in 1944.

international political factors that influenced its role in NATO during this time. These factors included Iceland's trade with the USSR, the Communist influence within Icelandic domestic politics, the Cod Wars "fought" with Great Britain over fishing rights, and the significance of the American base in Iceland.

Chapter IV explores the relations between Iceland and the "world powers" from the 1950s through the 1970s in the context of analyzing Alliance politics and the distinct roles of small states in international affairs. The thesis draws upon other examples for comparison, and examines events such as the Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 to show how other crises during the Cold War were handled.

Chapter V of the thesis is the most analytical and the most relevant to current policy, as it is not simply an historical narrative. As the Alliance has shifted its focus back to the North Atlantic region in the face of heightened Russian aggression, the Allies have recognized the importance of Iceland as an ally and have increased their investments in Iceland. This chapter discusses the current state of politics in Iceland and explores how it may affect the country's roles in NATO. This chapter also considers the "Northern Triangle" of Iceland, Norway, and the U.K., and the mounting NATO emphasis on Maritime Patrol and Antisubmarine Warfare aircraft. Chapter VI offers conclusions about the enduring importance of Iceland to the Alliance.

II. BACKGROUND

This chapter presents background on Iceland's experiences in World War II, its membership in NATO since 1949, and its close relationship with the United States during the Cold War. It then details Iceland's role in the Alliance since the end of the Cold War, focusing especially on the last decade since the Russian Federation began a buildup of its armed forces.

To begin to understand why Iceland joined NATO as a founding member, one must first look back to its history since it was granted independence by the Kingdom of Denmark in 1918. At that time, Denmark "agreed to declare that Iceland had become a sovereign, independent, and eternally neutral state."[23] Although Iceland was granted independence, it also joined in the Danish-Icelandic Union Act and was thus still tied to Denmark. The King of Denmark was still the King of Iceland, and Iceland was still dependent upon Denmark.[24] It was not until 1944 that Iceland became fully independent as the Republic of Iceland.[25]

A. WORLD WAR II

In the early years of World War II, the United Kingdom asked Iceland for permission to station troops and stage war supplies in the country. Iceland's status as an "eternally neutral state" and the interest of its people in maintaining this position led to a denial of the request. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom invaded soon afterwards out of necessity, and Iceland did not challenge the Royal Navy. The United States took over the occupation of Iceland from the United Kingdom in 1941 and retained forces there through the end of the war.[26]

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23 Benedikt Gröndal, *Iceland: From Neutrality to NATO Membership* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 18.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 18–20.

26 Donald Nuechterlein, *Iceland—Reluctant Ally* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961).

Most Icelanders believed that at the conclusion of the war and the end of American occupation, Iceland would return to its preferred foreign policy of neutrality.[27] However, as Donald Nuechterlein pointed out in his 1961 book about Iceland's foreign relations,

> the eminent lawyer and later the Foreign Minister, Bjarni Benediktsson… wrote in 1943 that the Defense Agreement of 1941 with the United States marked the end of Iceland's neutrality and ushered in a new era wherein Iceland would be forced to choose between competing blocs of world powers.[28]

B. JOINING NATO

Not long after World War II ended, the Cold War took center stage in the international realm. The reconstruction of Europe and the partitioning of Germany eventually led to an ideological war of free market capitalism v. communism, with the Truman Doctrine setting out a U.S. policy of stopping Soviet expansion. This division of East and West was a major factor in the founding of the Alliance. NATO's emergence in 1949 solidified the "Western Bloc" alliance that remained through the end of the Cold War. The geographic separation that Iceland once enjoyed from the rest of the world aided in its neutrality. However, the war technology of the 1940s diminished this geographic separation as long-range aircraft and maritime assets were developed and utilized. Recognizing that Iceland could be easily invaded during time of war, its *Alþingi* (Iceland's parliament, hereafter referred to as the Althing) accepted an invitation to join the Alliance.

This decision was not well-received by many Icelanders. Iceland's own socialist party (the SEI) was against it and, more importantly, the Icelandic people preferred the pre-war status quo of full neutrality. In 1949, protestors came out in the center of Reykjavik when the government of Iceland agreed to join NATO despite domestic opposition.[29] Riots broke out, but the protests did not change the fact that the Republic of Iceland had joined a military alliance merely five years after its own independence – a somewhat unusual step for such a young state, but one justified on grounds of political-military necessity.

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27 Nuechterlein, *Iceland—Reluctant Ally*, 37.

28 Ibid.

29 Valur Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally: Iceland, The United States, and the Politics of Empire 1945–2006* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Republic of Letters Publishing, 2011), 35.

C. ICELAND-UNITED STATES RELATIONSHIP

Another noteworthy aspect in understanding Iceland's importance in the Alliance was the conclusion of a bilateral defense agreement between the United States and Iceland in 1951. As a result of this defense agreement, the Iceland Defense Force (IDF) was established, composed of thousands of U.S. troops stationed at Naval Air Station Keflavík (NAS Keflavík).[30] The preamble to the agreement effectively conveys the *Zeitgeist* in post-war Europe:

> Having regard to the fact that the people of Iceland cannot themselves adequately secure their own defenses, and whereas experience has shown that a country's lack of defenses greatly endangers its security and that of its peaceful neighbors, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has requested, because of the unsettled state of world affairs, that the United States and Iceland in view of the collective efforts of the parties to the North Atlantic Treaty to preserve peace and security in the North Atlantic Treaty area, make arrangements for the use of facilities in Iceland in defense of Iceland and thus also the North Atlantic Treaty area.[31]

Keflavík functioned as the main airport during the World War II occupation, but the official construction of NAS Keflavík did not begin until 1951. The establishment of NAS Keflavík as a result of the agreement proved to be of critical importance during the Cold War and beyond, and hosting this facility has been Iceland's most significant contribution to NATO.[32]

In March 1956, the Althing adopted a resolution demanding the expulsion of U.S. troops,[33] further demonstrating the unpopularity of the U.S. military presence in Iceland. However, after further diplomatic discussions, the United States agreed to keep its troops stationed in Iceland, resume its $12 million construction of NAS Keflavík, and pull its troops out of Iceland with six months' notice at the request of Iceland.[34]

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30 O'Connor, "Iceland—Troubled Ally."

31 The Avalon Project, "Defense of Iceland: Agreement between the United States and the Republic of Iceland, May 5, 1951," Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/ice001.asp.

32 O'Connor, "Iceland—Troubled Ally."

33 Felix Belair, "Iceland Gives U.S. Terms on Air Base that Bypass NATO," *New York Times*, November 26, 1956.

34 Ibid.

Domestic politics in Iceland continued to cause an ebb and flow of support for the American presence in Iceland. After the 1956 crisis, which unfolded concurrently with the Hungarian and Suez Crises,[35] the next major crisis was in the early 1970s after another left-wing coalition was elected in Reykjavik.[36] This crisis coincided with both the negotiations for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the British-Icelandic Cod Wars "fought" over fishing rights in the 1970s.[37] This crisis was once again resolved through diplomatic actions taken by the United States and other NATO countries. The end of the final Cod War in 1976 concluded the diplomatic crisis between Iceland and its NATO Allies. It ended with a concession by the United Kingdom that allowed Iceland to claim fishing rights out to 200 nautical miles from its territory, a decision highly unfavorable to the U.K.,[38] but agreed upon after Iceland threatened to withdraw from NATO – a move that might have aligned Iceland with the Soviet Union.[39]

The frosty relations between NATO countries and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) quickly led to a well-documented arms race between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc. A major aspect of this arms race – developing better submarine and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technology – made Iceland a valuable member of the Alliance in the subsequent years. Iceland's strategic location, situated between Greenland and the United Kingdom, was and remains invaluable to its NATO allies.

The open sea between Greenland, Iceland, and the U.K. is commonly referred to as the GIUK Gap.[40] This gap first got its name during World War II, when the short-range capability of aircraft made it impossible to police the whole area by air, thus leading to a "gap" in air coverage. It is composed of the Denmark Strait to the north of Iceland and the

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35 These events are discussed further in Chapter IV.

36 Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.–Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War."

37 These events are discussed further in Chapter III.

38 Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.–Icelandic Defense Relations During and after the Cold War."

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

waters between the North Atlantic Ocean and the Norwegian Sea to the south. The figure below helps to visualize the GIUK Gap.

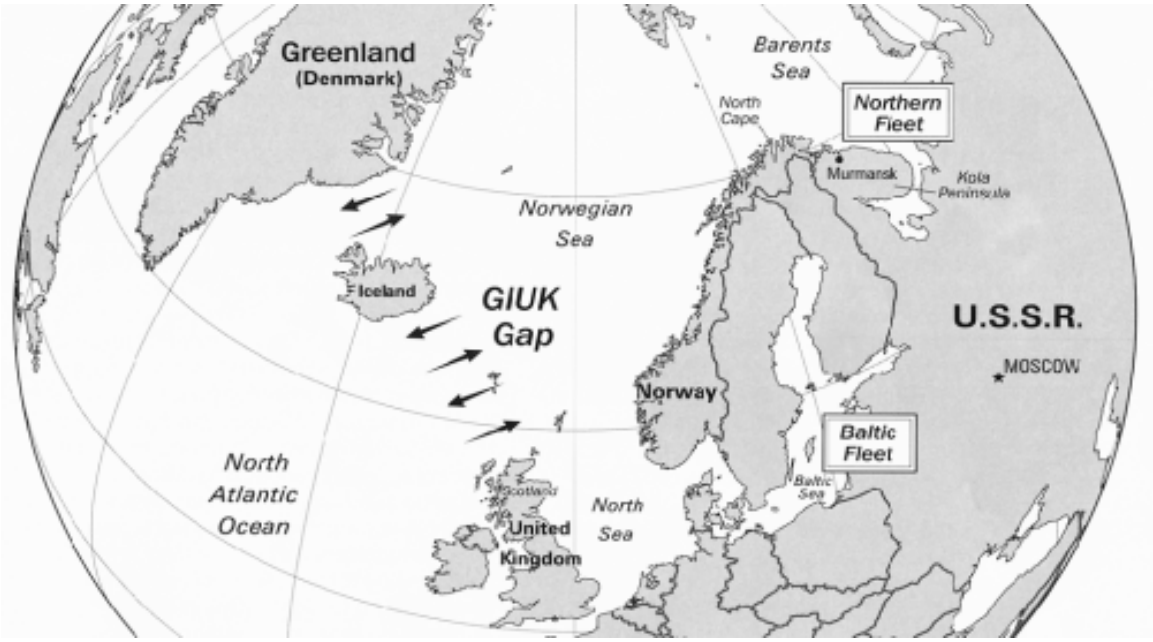

Figure 1. A geographic representation of the GIUK Gap.[41]

In December 1960, a military reporter for the *New York Times*, Hanson Baldwin, wrote the following:

> The Navy has maintained at various times, particularly during maneuvers, a so-called anti-submarine barrier in the Iceland-Faroes gap. During the last maneuver conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in September [1960], this barrier was composed of planes, based principally on Iceland, and submarines. The increase in numbers of the Soviet missile-firing submarine fleet… has emphasized the importance of this early warning submarine barrier across the Icelandic gateways to the open ocean.[42]

The geostrategic importance of Iceland makes it a valuable ally, and this was the major explanation of the repeated capitulations of Allied countries to its political and

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41 CDRSalamander, "Once More Unto the Gap," *U.S. Naval Institute Blog* (blog), April 20, 2016, https://blog.usni.org/2016/04/20/once-more-unto-the-gap/rs-giuk-gap.

42 Hanson Baldwin, "Navy to Tighten Arctic Air Alert," *New York Times*, December 18, 1960.

economic demands as it struggled to strengthen its relatively new economy. NATO countries' relations with Iceland were heavily influenced by its importance in the overall Cold War.

As mentioned in the previous *New York Times* excerpt, an "early warning submarine barrier across the Icelandic gateways" was in use. Part of this barrier was known as the Sound Surveillance System, or SOSUS. It consisted of a series of thousands of underwater hydrophones that were placed on the sea bottom along the GIUK Gap, and were so sensitive that they could track Soviet (and Allied) submarines effectively as they transited through the chokepoints in the GIUK Gap.[43] This early antisubmarine warfare (ASW) technology was later combined with a 1970s shipboard ASW technology called the Surveillance Towed-Array Sensor System (SURTASS) to increase the effectiveness of ASW efforts in the northern Atlantic. It was also combined with sonobuoy technology employed by U.S. fixed-wing and rotary aircraft operating out of Iceland and other strategic NATO bases in order to effectively curb the threat of a nuclear missile launch by a Soviet submarine.[44] Intensified ASW efforts were emblematic of the Cold War.

D. COLD WAR ENDS

The Cold War came to an unexpected end in 1989–1991, and the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union were dissolved. East-West relations improved as Russia attempted to stabilize its economy and find its way into Western markets. In this context, the United States and NATO recognized that NAS Keflavík did not hold quite the same level of strategic importance as it once had. As a result, the United States and Iceland decided on a U.S. troop drawdown in Iceland in 1994.[45] Both the United States and Iceland reaffirmed their commitment to the 1951 defense agreement at this time.[46]

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43 David Colley, "Stealth beneath the Sea: The 'Wet Cold War,'" *Veterans of Foreign Wars Magazine*, August 1997.

44 John Howard, "Fixed Sonar Systems: The History and Future of the Underwater Silent Sentinel," *The Submarine Review*, April 2001.

45 Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.–Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War."

46 Ibid.

The United States attempted to cut costs several times over the next ten years by pulling its fighter jets out of NAS Keflavík, but this was always met with Icelandic opposition.[47] In the view of Icelanders, a credible and present U.S. air defense force was paramount for the defense of Iceland. In 2001, Iceland's prime minister, David Oddsson, declared, "there should be no military base here if it only serves as an observation and advance warning post for the United States and it does not serve what we define as the defense of Iceland. If the Americans reach the conclusion that they are unwilling to run a base which serves the interests of both parties, then it will simply be shut down."[48]

The United States once more announced its intention to pull its fighter jets out of Iceland in late 2003.[49] The Icelandic government's response was the same as it had been in 2001, but the United States had become focused on wars in the Middle East and was eager to cut costs at other overseas locations. While the United States decided to keep four F-15 fighter jets at NAS Keflavík later that year,[50] the continuing trend was evidence of a shift in focus for the United States and a precursor to the next major event in U.S.-Icelandic defense relations: the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops and materiel from Iceland.

In 2006, the United States completely withdrew its forces from NAS Keflavík, thereby disestablishing the IDF and closing down NAS Keflavík. The new bilateral agreement between the two countries announced that:

> The United States will withdraw its forces from and return to Iceland certain agreed areas and facilities in Iceland following the notification by the United States to Iceland of March 15, 2006 that, given the current strategic environment and the intense demand for United States conventional military resources in other parts of the world, permanent United States military presence in Iceland would cease by the end of September 2006.[51]

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47 Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.–Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War."

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 "Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Iceland Regarding the Withdrawal of U.S. Forces from and the Return to Iceland of Certain Agreed Areas and Faciliities in Iceland," ed. Department of State (2006), https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/81302.pdf, accessed May 14, 2017.

The facilities at NAS Keflavík were returned to the government of Iceland, and it became responsible for the upkeep of the facilities as part of its contribution to NATO.[52] NAS Keflavík is now the Keflavík International Airport, and its facilities are still used by Allied nations' military aircraft as necessary.

Starting in 2008, the Alliance began to maintain a "periodic presence" of NATO fighter aircraft in Keflavík.[53] NATO members have been sharing air defense responsibilities on a rotational basis since that time, policing the skies over the North Atlantic with fighter aircraft, airborne early-warning aircraft, and maritime patrol aircraft. This is certainly a scaled-back effort when compared to the continuous presence of U.S. assets that were permanently stationed in Iceland for more than 55 years, but it was agreed upon due to the perceived decrease in threats to the North Atlantic region and the focus of NATO nations, particularly the United States, on other parts of the world.

More recently, NATO has realigned its priorities again due to changing circumstances in the international realm. In September 2015, the United States opened a dialogue with Iceland, seeking to reopen some of its former facilities in Keflavík.[54] After over 10 years of NATO focusing on the Middle East and North Africa, this dialogue with Iceland over the status of Alliance forces in the North Atlantic signaled a possible shift in focus back to Russia. During the 10-year period of U.S. absence (with regard to military personnel permanently stationed in Iceland), Russia was focused on a military buildup and inserted itself more forcefully into the affairs of other countries (e.g., its involvement in eastern Ukraine and the Syrian civil war). As NATO has continued to expand its capabilities on its eastern flank, Russia has sought to undermine the strength of the Alliance and cause problems between NATO countries.

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52 "Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Iceland Regarding the Withdrawal of U.S. Forces from and the Return to Iceland of Certain Agreed Areas and Faciliities in Iceland."

53 David Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2014), 170.

54 Paul Fontaine, "U.S. Military Possibly Returning to Iceland," *The Reykjavik Grapevine*, September 10, 2015, https://grapevine.is/news/2015/09/10/us-military-possibly-returning-to-iceland/.

Due to these Russian goals to undermine NATO and to accelerate Moscow's military buildup, bilateral cooperation between Iceland and the United States once more took center stage. Icelandic Prime Minister Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson said in 2016 that "I first heard about this on the news that the U.S. military plans to put some money into renovating an old hangar, and there is nothing but good things to say about that… They will probably want to fly some more over here and that is in accordance with current agreements with the U.S."[55]

Flying more over the North Atlantic is exactly what the United States and the rest of the NATO Allies intend to do. In its fiscal year 2017 military budget, the U.S. Congress allotted $21.4 million for the refurbishing of facilities (primarily aircraft hangars) at Keflavík, with the intention of making the facilities capable of hosting P-8A Poseidon aircraft.[56] The P-8A, the U.S. Navy's newest generation of submarine-hunting aircraft, brings a heavy arsenal of capabilities to the ASW battle. NATO is currently exploring its options for P-8 aircraft in Scotland and Norway, as well. Magnus Nordenman, the director of the Atlantic Council's Transatlantic Security Initiative, said that "during the Cold War there was this [anti-submarine warfare] triangle between the U.S. flying missions out of Keflavík, the Brits flying out of Scotland and the Norwegians flying P-3s out of Andoya. That triangle that existed in the Cold War is coming back."[57]

The shift in focus that NATO is currently undertaking is overwhelmingly reminiscent of Cold War relations between the USSR and the West. As Russia has made moves in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, and elsewhere, NATO has focused more of its resources on its eastern flank and on the far north. In the face of an increasingly opportunistic Kremlin, NATO cannot afford to disregard Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe and the

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55 Andrei Akulov, "U.S. Military Returns to Iceland: Cold War Base to Reopen," *Strategic Culture*, February 23, 2016, https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/02/23/us-military-return-iceland-cold-war-base-reopen.html.

56 Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2017, "European Reassurance Initiative," http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_ERI_J-Book.pdf.

57 Magnus Nordenman quoted in Aaron Mehta, "Northern Triangle: U.S., U.K., and Norway's Expanding Alliance," *Defense News*, January 8, 2017, https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/surface-navy-association/2017/01/08/northern-triangle-us-uk-and-norway-s-expanding-alliance/.

Baltic region. Iceland is once again indispensable to NATO's security and its capacity to fight for Western ideals.

III. ICELAND AND NATO SECURITY ISSUES

Iceland has played a pivotal role in the security of the North Atlantic area since it joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a founding member in 1949. In 1951, Iceland entered into a bilateral defense agreement with the United States, thereby establishing the Iceland Defense Force, a group of U.S. military personnel stationed in Iceland for its defense from 1951 through its disestablishment in 2006.

During these 55 years, Iceland's domestic politics heaved back and forth with the changing tides of its elections. During the frigid Cold War—a largely ideological war whose two opposing sides were free-market democracy and communism—Iceland had a strong presence of communist proponents who wished to see the country withdraw its membership as a part of "the West." This chapter discusses the so-called "Cod Wars" between Iceland and the United Kingdom (which were not really wars, except for journalistic hyperbole) from 1952 through 1976. This chapter also traces the domestic politics of Iceland from the 1950s through the 1970s and analyzes the effects that Icelandic politics had on the country's interactions with other countries during that time. Interactions with fellow NATO members are touched upon, as well as the influence of the USSR.

A. THE COD WARS

Iceland has relied heavily upon its fisheries and related industries as a primary source of wealth. This was true in the immediate postwar years when it joined NATO, and it remains true today.[58] A series of disputes between 1952 and 1976 highlighted this fact on the international stage and caused a significant diplomatic rift between Iceland and the United Kingdom, the two main parties involved in the disputes. In 1952, Iceland declared its territorial waters to be four nautical miles from land; this declaration was opposed by several other states, and the U.K. responded by imposing a ban on Icelandic trawlers in British ports.[59] As a result of the newest dispute between the two countries, the U.K.

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58 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 89.

59 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 89.

imposed a ban on Icelandic fish imports, and Iceland began to export its fish to the Soviet Union, which presented a unique issue due to the ongoing Cold War. The United States and other NATO Allies purchased more Icelandic fish in an effort to limit Soviet influence in Icelandic affairs.[60] The newly formed Council of Europe settled the dispute, and Iceland achieved *de facto* recognition of its claimed four-mile limit.[61]

In 1958, the United Nations held a Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone. One of the main purposes of this convention was to define territorial and contiguous waters. In a nation's territorial waters, it retains all rights to all natural resources, law enforcement, and sovereignty. In contiguous waters, "the state may exercise the control necessary to: (a) prevent infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary regulations within its territory or territorial sea, and (b) punish infringement of the above regulations committed within its territory or territorial sea."[62] This treaty set the contiguous zone limit at 12 nautical miles, but did not set a limit to the territorial waters of a country.[63] This omission would prove to be problematic shortly thereafter.

Icelandic politicians and fishermen were not satisfied with the ambiguity of the 1958 U.N. treaty and the lack of agreement on the limits of territorial waters. In a move to further protect its fishing rights, Iceland announced on September 1, 1958, that it was extending its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles, which would disallow any non-Icelandic fishing within those boundaries.[64] This was the beginning of a second dispute between Iceland and the U.K. over fishing rights, and the first such dispute that was called a "Cod War."

British trawlers remained in the disputed area after this announcement, and the British government sent Royal Navy escorts to accompany its fishing fleet. "As many as

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60 Hannes Jónsson, *Friends in Conflict: The Anglo-Icelandic Cod Wars and the Law of the Sea* (London: C. Hurst Publishers, 1982), 62.

61 Ibid.

62 *Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone*, Geneva, 29 April 1958, *United Nations Treaty Series* vol. 516, No. 7477, p. 220, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20516/volume-516-I-7477-English.pdf.

63 Ibid.

64 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 90.

thirty-seven Royal Navy ships and 7,000 men were involved in 'protecting' their trawlers against the six Icelandic coast guard vessels and slightly over 100 men between 1958 and 1961."[65] The "war" ended in 1961 when an agreement was reached between Iceland and the U.K. agreeing to the 12-mile range limit, but stipulating that any further disputes would be referred to the International Court of Justice at The Hague.[66]

After more than a decade without major disputes between the two countries, a second Cod War began. On September 1, 1972, Iceland extended its claim of fishing rights from 12 nautical miles to 50 nautical miles,[67] again in contravention to international law. Great Britain protested this, which contributed to the start of the second Cod War between the two countries. This extension to 50 nautical miles was due in part to the shifting tide of Iceland's elections, a factor that is discussed further in the next portion of this chapter.

This second Cod War was much more serious than the first, and Icelandic Coast Guard vessels began cutting the trawling lines of British and other nations' fishing vessels when they were found to be fishing within 50 nautical miles of Iceland.[68] The Icelandic Coast Guard cut nine trawling lines in 1972 and 60 lines in 1973, and the British government sent more Royal Navy vessels to protect its fishermen. Royal Navy vessels and Icelandic Coast Guard vessels began to ram one another as well.[69] David Whittaker and Gísli Thorsteinsson documented that "a furious Britain (with still a hint of imperialism?) despatched British warships to escort trawlers on illegal forays in the banned zone."[70]

This conflict, too, was solved diplomatically after twelve months of negotiations. It was concluded only after Iceland brought the dispute to the North Atlantic Council, and

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65 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 91.

66 Ibid.

67 Bruce Mitchell, "Politics, Fish, and International Resource Management: The British-Icelandic Cod War," *Geographical Review* 66, no. 2 (April 1976): 130, JSTOR.

68 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 92.

69 Ibid.

70 David Whittaker and Gísli Thorsteinsson, *The Iceland Watch: A Land That Thinks Outwards and Forwards* (Cirencester, England: Memoirs Publishing, 2015), 96–97.

the prime ministers of the two nations eventually reached an agreement that set limits on British fishermen utilizing certain sectors of the seas near Iceland.[71] This was the beginning of NATO actions involving the two member countries, as it was noted that the fighting between them could have serious ramifications for the Alliance if it continued to escalate. Regarding the negotiations and settlement of the affair, Whittaker and Thorsteinsson wrote that London and Reykjavik "did so with bad grace after rival ships had occasional collisions, diplomatic relations between Iceland and Britain had been ruptured and neither party in the upset felt that their case had been perceived, perhaps, in a spirit of satisfactory agreement."[72] This was a continuation of "bad blood" between the two Allies whose countrymen never felt that the agreements reached by their governments favored their own country.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a third Cod War began in 1975. Once again, this conflict began after the U.N. initiated deliberations on a third Convention on the Law of the Sea[73] seeking, among other things, to set limits on territorial waters, contiguous waters, and fishing rights. The negotiations on the Convention began in 1973, while there were still great variations between nations on the waters that they claimed to be their own. While most countries accepted and claimed 12 nautical miles as the outer limits of territorial waters, several countries claimed territorial waters out to 200 nautical miles. Iceland was among those countries, and began enforcing its territorial waters extension to 200 nautical miles in 1975, while negotiations were still ongoing at the U.N.[74]

British warships were again sent to the disputed area surrounding Iceland, and the ensuing increase in aggression was alarming. The U.K. reactivated and repurposed two of its World War II frigates, reinforcing the hulls to be utilized as ramming ships. There were 55 ramming incidents in 1975–1976.[75] Several British ships sustained a great deal of

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71 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 92.

72 Whittaker and Thorsteinsson, *The Iceland Watch*, 96–97.

73 The U.N. held a second Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1960, but no agreements were reached at this time.

74 Corgan, *Iceland and Its Alliances*, 93.

75 Ibid., 93–95.

damage, and an Icelandic Coast Guard ship was nearly capsized in a ramming incident. According to Whittaker and Thorsteinsson, "it was on 11 December 1975 that things turned nasty when three British ships and an Icelandic supervisory vessel had a series of ramming encounters and an exchange of blank and live gun rounds. Damage physically was minimal, but both sides felt grievously outraged."[76]

The issue came to a head when Iceland threatened to close the U.S. naval base at Keflavík. If Iceland closed the base at Keflavík, the NATO anti-submarine mission in the North Atlantic would have been severely impeded, a risk that alarmed the Alliance as a whole. On June 1, 1976, the foreign ministers of the two nations met at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting and came to an agreement whereby the U.K. would keep its warships out of the 200-mile area and Iceland would allow 24 British trawlers to remain inside that zone and harvest a yearly maximum of 30,000 tons of fish.[77] This accord brought a close to the Cod Wars, but these wars told a story about the delicate foreign relations between Iceland and the rest of the NATO Allies throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

The heart of this story revolved around the issue of Icelandic membership in NATO and its hosting of American troops at Naval Air Station Keflavík. Many Icelandic citizens opposed both NATO membership and the presence of American troops, and these issues were central themes in Icelandic politics during this time. Icelandic scholar Hannes Jónsson later wrote of the Cod Wars, "what was the value of NATO for Iceland, if NATO would not stop British aggression in Icelandic waters?"[78] This question and others are explored in the next section of this chapter.

B. LEFT VERSUS RIGHT VERSUS NATO

The immediate post-1945 years in Iceland were a time of great change for the newly -independent republic. Icelanders had assumed that after their country's occupation by the United Kingdom and the United States in World War II, Iceland would revert to its policy

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76 Whittaker and Thorsteinsson, *The Iceland Watch*, 97.

77 Ibid.

78 Jónsson, *Friends in Conflict*, 173.

of "eternal neutrality" declared in 1918. That, however, was not what happened. In November 1946, Iceland was admitted as a member of the United Nations, and it later became a founding member of NATO in 1949. Joining these two organizations (especially NATO) was the opposite of eternal neutrality, and the decisions to join these organizations caused a lot of discord within Iceland. The Independence Party, a right-wing party, had a majority of seats in Iceland's parliament at that time, but in the decades to follow, an increase in popularity of left-wing parties in Iceland contributed to some of the diplomatic crises that revolved around the Cod Wars.

The left-wing parties in Iceland enjoyed a greater share of parliament seats in Iceland than they did in other NATO countries. The Soviet influence in Iceland was strong and grew as Iceland became entangled in conflicts with other Western countries. Through much of the 1950s and 1960s, left-wing political parties occupied up to one-third of the parliament seats, and over 20% of the parliament seats belonged to the pro-Soviet Socialist Party. Iceland's students who identified more strongly with left-wing politics often studied at universities in the Eastern Bloc,[79] and formed a strong union among themselves during and after their university education. This led to rumors (and evidence) of a planned communist takeover in Iceland in the 1960s.[80]

In 1971, election results left Ólafur Jóhannesson, leader of the right-wing Progressive Party, in the office of prime minister. A left-wing coalition government was formed for the first time in Iceland due to the increasing popularity of the leftist parties. The three-party government consisted of the Progressive Party, the Organization of Liberals and Leftists, and the Socialist Party.[81] This caused a sharp turn in foreign relations with the other NATO countries. University of Iceland professor Valur Ingimundarson summed up the goals of the new government in his book *The Rebellious Ally: Iceland, The United States, and the Politics of Empire 1945–2006*:

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79 Birgir Gudmundsson and Markus Meckl, "'Karlson' – A Stasi 'Konakt Person.' An Episode of Iceland's Cold War Legacy," *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, Vol 7(1), March 2012.

80 Ibid.

81 Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally*, 101.

> When the left-wing government was formed, it was clear that it would be far less sympathetic to the West than its predecessor. It wanted to make a sharp break with the past in two areas: to expand Iceland's fishery limit unilaterally from 12 to 50 miles [which was the catalyst for the second Cod War] and to revise, or if necessary, abrogate the Defense Agreement with the United States, with the aim of ending the 20-year U.S. military presence in Iceland.[82]

The three-party government was not united on the issue of Iceland's foreign policy, though; the Progressive Party remained in favor of the Defense Agreement, but the other two parties were against it.[83] Ingimundarson pointed out that "what united these three parties and made government cooperation possible was their common stance on the fishery issue."[84] All stood opposed to the agreement reached between Iceland and the U.K. that ended the 1958–1961 "First Cod War" between the two countries.[85] This common ground enabled the coalition government to take the vigorous diplomatic action that allowed the second Cod War to come to a close at the behest of the NATO Secretary General.

The Cod War in 1975–1976 occurred during the tenure in office of Geir Hallgímsson, a right-wing prime minister from the Independence Party. Iceland's foreign minister at the time, Einar Ágústsson, tried to keep the Cod War and the U.S. base at Keflavík as separate issues for the purposes of foreign affairs, but the Icelandic public saw the issues as one and the same. This contributed to the dramatic threat from Iceland to close down the U.S. base and withdraw from NATO in 1976. Hallgímsson knew that Iceland was too important to the Alliance to allow a quarrel over fishing rights to end Icelandic cooperation with NATO, and he used this to the advantage of Iceland.

This quarrel also had a social aspect: many Icelanders opposed having Americans stationed in their homeland due to a sort of xenophobia. During and after the American occupation of Iceland during World War II, many Icelandic women were courted by American soldiers. When the war and the occupation of Iceland were brought to a close,

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82 Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally,* 101.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

many Icelandic women followed the Americans across the Atlantic, thereby angering Icelandic men. To this day, it is referred to as *ástandið* ("the condition" or "the situation") and children born out of these conditions are called *ástandsbörn* — "children of the condition/situation." This situation was part of the reason for Icelandic insistence that American servicemembers be quarantined to NAS Keflavík when they returned in 1951. Icelanders formed the "National Defense Society" whose members "were determined to do whatever was necessary to prevent a recurrence of the wartime fraternization between Icelandic women and American soldiers."[86] They stood with the socialist party members opposed to the presence of American military personnel at Keflavík.

In addition to the sensitivity towards American men vis-à-vis Icelandic women, Icelanders also refused to host African American soldiers at NAS Keflavík. Iceland has always been a very homogenous society, and nationalistic sentiments were high following WW2. In order to appeal to these sentiments shared by many Icelanders, the United States agreed to a secret ban on the stationing of black soldiers in Iceland as part of the 1951 Defense Agreement.[87] Valur Ingimundarson noted that "the need to preserve the homogeneity of the Icelandic nation lay at the heart of Iceland's policy to prevent black soldiers from serving at Keflavík in the 1950s and 1960s."[88] Even though it was officially a secret ban, white troops in the IDF were informed about it, "with the explanation that this was the only way to keep this strategically important base in U.S. hands."[89]

While the quarantining of American men so they could not interact with Icelandic women and the forbiddance of black troops were agreed to by the United States for security reasons, these positions strengthened the anti-NATO political actions of the 1950s–1970s. Owing to the great importance of the base in Iceland, the United States "condoned the

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86 Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing against the American Other: Racism, Nationalism, and Gender in U.S.-Icelandic Military Relations during the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6 no. 4 (2004): 72, Project Muse.

87 Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally*, 45.

88 Ibid., 54.

89 Ibid., 56.

openly espoused exclusionary policies of the Icelandic government toward off-base movements of U.S. soldiers."[90]

C. CONCLUSION

For decades, back-and-forth fluctuations in Iceland's domestic politics caused stress within the NATO Alliance, adding a unique dynamic to the Cold War as other NATO Allies (largely the United States and the United Kingdom) strained to keep Iceland as a valuable geostrategic and ideological ally. That a newly established and tiny country such as Iceland could use its influence as a NATO member with such weight and effectiveness is a unique example of the power of a small state in certain circumstances. It is worth further exploration of the details to help explain the changing tides of alliance politics.

[90] Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally*, 45.

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IV. THE BIG POWER OF SMALL STATES

With a population of just fewer than 340,000, the Republic of Iceland is one of the least populous European nations and the most sparsely populated nation in Europe.[91] It declared independence in 1944 from the Kingdom of Denmark, thereby also marking it as one of Europe's youngest independent nations. In spite of its small population and low population density, it has one of the strongest economies in Europe, earning a per capita GDP of $52,100 in 2017.[92] Its economy relies heavily upon its fishing industry – so much so, that a series of diplomatic spats referred to as the Cod Wars occurred between Iceland and the United Kingdom regarding fishing rights in the waters near Iceland from the 1950s through the 1970s. These disputes are discussed in Chapter III.

The Icelandic people are historically pacifistic (at least in modern times), standing in opposition to armed conflict. Iceland even went so far as to declare "eternal neutrality" in 1918, while still partly under the rule of the Kingdom of Denmark. It has never had a military establishment. It nonetheless joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) when it was founded in 1949. It remains the least populous member of the Alliance (smaller than Luxembourg and Montenegro) and contributes the least in terms of monetary support and personnel. In spite of all this, Iceland wields considerable bargaining power within the Alliance due to the importance of its geographical location for the Alliance. The Icelandic people have recognized this, and have used their significance for the Alliance as a way to give further weight to their desires in the diplomatic realm.

Owing to the aforementioned statistics and facts, Iceland provides a unique case study for the ins and outs of "alliance politics" as well as small-state politics. This chapter explores this topic, comparing the political moves that Iceland has made within NATO to the political moves made within other alliances, such as the Little Entente. It also explores how small states tend to interact with large states in modern history.

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91 The Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* (Washington, DC: The Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ic.html.

92 Ibid.

A. ALLIANCE POLITICS

In its exploration of alliance politics, this chapter showcases how Iceland has acted as a member of NATO throughout the Alliance's existence, with special attention given to the decades of the 1950s through the 1970s. As NATO grew and transformed due to international events and its opposition to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the actions of Iceland were unique and call for a further exploration of the dynamics of the relationships within NATO. Iceland's considerable bargaining power was used as a heavy chip by Icelandic politicians and diplomats, and this added to the complexity of the Cold War. Martin Wight highlighted the effects of bargaining power in the British-Icelandic Cod Wars:

> The balance of *bargaining* power…is different from the balance of *general* power. It involves the possibility of give and take, mutual concession, and the even distribution of bargaining assets. There may be no even distribution of power in general between a United States and a Cuba, or a Britain and an Iceland, but there can be an even distribution of bargaining assets. A third-rate power can even take action which is strictly aggressive against a great power, and obtain a strong bargaining position by doing so.[93]

In another study, Wight made an apt comparison between the Little Entente alliance after World War I and NATO: "There are some similarities between the Little Entente, or rather we should say the French system of alliances in Eastern Europe, and NATO after the Second World War. In each case a group of smaller powers formed security arrangements for preserving the *status quo*, which became associated with and stiffened by a great power."[94] Wight proceeds to compare the Little Entente to NATO, pointing out how France supported each smaller power in the Little Entente by forming alliances with each of them. In the Brussels Treaty of 1948, West European powers (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) formed an alliance that then led to the North Atlantic Treaty the next year once they were supported by the United States, the great power of NATO. Alliance management is a challenge to be continuously

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[93] Martin Wight, *International Theory: the Three Traditions*, edited by Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter (London: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 181; italics in the original.

[94] Wight, *Power Politics*, 133.

accomplished, and the mid-1950s present a good example of how NATO had to react to three different situations: a British-Icelandic dispute over fishing rights, the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, and the Suez Crisis.

The first of four British-Icelandic fisheries disputes began in May 1952 and lasted through November 1956. According to Hannes Jónsson's 1982 book on the fisheries disputes, "Clearly, a small state like Iceland does not get its way in a dispute with a much larger state like Britain on the basis of might; it cannot throw its weight around according to the principle that 'might is right.'"[95] The fisheries dispute was nevertheless resolved with a capitulation by the United Kingdom when it officially recognized the 4-nautical-mile territorial waters claim that Iceland made in 1952. While it is possible that the timing of the dispute resolution in November 1956 was coincidental, there were two much larger conflicts that had begun just a few weeks earlier that commanded the attention of the great powers of the North Atlantic Alliance: the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the Suez Crisis.

On October 23, 1956, an uprising began in Hungary against the government's Soviet-imposed policies. The Soviet Union intervened in this conflict, and it quickly took a violent course. The whole attempted revolution was over in less than three weeks, with the full force of the Soviet Union brought down upon the revolution. In spite of the Cold War rhetoric between the Soviet Union and the West, very little was done to assist the anti-Soviet revolutionaries in Hungary because of the broader context of the overall Cold War. A speech given by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on October 27, 1956, was "widely interpreted as having given a de facto green light to the Soviet intervention," leaving the Hungarians with a feeling of abandonment by the United States.[96] It was later argued by an historian that the reason for the Eisenhower administration's cautious response was to avoid a military clash with the Soviet Union, "whose consequences would

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95 Jónsson, *Friends in Conflict*, 65.

96 Borhi Laszlo, "Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?: U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 3 (1999): 68, Project Muse.

likely have represented a far greater disaster than the snuffing out of a nascent Hungarian democracy."[97]

Almost simultaneously, NATO Allies France and the United Kingdom, in collaboration with Israel, invaded Egypt in an attempt to take over the Suez Canal in what is now referred to as the Suez Crisis. This happened on October 29, 1956, just a few days after the Hungarian Uprising began. This became another crisis-management challenge for the United States, in its de facto position as NATO's leading power, to handle. To the surprise of the West, the United States was critical of its allies and their actions in Egypt. U.S. President Eisenhower threatened economic retaliation against the United Kingdom if it did not withdraw its forces from Egypt, and British Prime Minister Anthony Eden then resigned from office.[98] This string of events is widely seen as the de facto end of the United Kingdom's status as a great power, and it caused a rift within NATO which had to be managed. Richard Nixon, then the U.S. vice president, later explained of the dual conflicts, "We couldn't on one hand, complain about the Soviets intervening in Hungary and, on the other hand, approve of the British and the French picking that particular time to intervene against Nasser."[99]

These three world events that all involved NATO in one way or another paint a picture of how complex alliance politics can be at times. The first British-Icelandic conflict over fishing rights was fought for years before its resolution in November 1956, right when the U.K. focused its attention on Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the British-French-Israeli invasion of the Sinai Peninsula. The United States could have counter-intervened in Hungary after the Soviet intervention during the Hungarian Uprising at the same time, but chose not to do so, both to avoid a military conflict with the Soviet Union and to avoid the appearance of hypocrisy while its Allies, France and the United Kingdom,

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97 Ronald Landa, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A Fresh Look at the U.S. Response," National Security Archives (2012): 86. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3711005-The-1956-Hungarian-Revolution-A-Fresh-Look-at (accessed March 21, 2018).

98 G.C. Peden, "Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 4 (December 2012): 1073, JSTOR.

99 Richard Nixon quoted in Borhi Laszlo, "Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction?: U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s," 105.

were using force in Egypt to seize the Suez Canal. It is a complex web that is weaved when alliances are formed, and it may get more complex over time, especially if additional countries are allowed to join the alliance.

B. SMALL STATE POLITICS

Iceland also allows for an excellent case study of the dynamics of small-state politics in international relations. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, Iceland is one of the least populous nations in Europe and the least populous in the North Atlantic Alliance. The case of Iceland will be explored both in the early days of NATO and again how it relates to small state politics today.

There is a special relationship between Iceland and the Kingdom of Denmark, owing to its status of having been part of that kingdom for more than five hundred years before the Danish-Icelandic Union Act of 1918 established the Kingdom of Iceland as a separate kingdom under the Crown of Denmark. In 1944, Iceland declared its full independence from Denmark and established itself as a republic. This was a unique time in history, nearing the end of World War II, which made it a complicated time for the nascent republic to officially establish diplomatic relations with other nations.

In its infancy, a significant portion of Iceland's foreign policy was centered on its NATO membership and the operation of Naval Air Station Keflavík by American military forces. The U.S.-led operation was very controversial. On one hand, it provided many jobs to Icelanders, which helped to pull Iceland out of a postwar depression in its economy; on the other hand, many Icelanders were opposed to both the fact that military personnel were operating this base in Iceland and to the fact that they were foreign. As Gunnar Karlsson observed, "Many people feared that such a large foreign population would spoil the national culture, language and traditions. Also, rather than protecting Iceland in a nuclear war, the base was thought likely to attract an attack, which would probably kill somewhere between 2.5% and 50% of the population, depending on the weather at the time."[100]

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[100] Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), 339.

In addition to the controversy over the "eternally neutral" Iceland hosting American G.I.s, there was also a strong communist party in Iceland with members in the Althing (Icelandic parliament). The communist angle caused a lot of worry for the other NATO powers, and Icelandic politicians and diplomats played a game of "East v. West" to ensure that Iceland received a lot of foreign aid as well as concessions by the Americans on the status of their forces and armaments in Iceland. Iceland received the highest per capita aid from the U.S. Marshall Plan in 1948–1953 (having been granted a one-year extension after the official end of the Marshall Plan in 1952 due to Iceland's military importance).[101] In the mid-1950s, about 35% of Iceland's foreign trade was with the Soviet bloc,[102] and the British-Icelandic Cod Wars served to fuel a trade war of sorts between Western powers and the Soviet Union.

There are many different criteria that scholars use in the determination of what does and does not constitute a small state. Robert Rothstein asserted that "a small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by the use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of others."[103] In the same time period, Robert Keohane argued that "a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system."[104] Iceland is unequivocally a small state; at times, though, it does not quite fit the mold of a small state vis-à-vis its behavior in international politics.

Iceland's political and diplomatic behavior is worth examination to determine whether it falls in line with the assertions of other authors regarding the behavior of small states. In *Power Politics*, Martin Wight wrote about the differences between major powers, middle powers, and minor powers. "Minor powers (middle powers included) have the means of defending only limited interests, and of most of them it is true that they possess only limited interests… [For example,] their livelihood depends on fisheries, such as

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101 Ingimundarson, *The Rebellious Ally*, 25–27.

102 Ibid., 74.

103 Robert Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 29.

104 Robert Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, no. 6 (Spring 1969): 296, JSTOR.

Iceland."[105] Other "limited interests" that small states may have include territorial disputes or the sale of their exports.

Wight's argument that Iceland is concerned with fishing rights is not untrue, but it does not take into account the many other priorities that Iceland has in international politics. He further wrote that "of some small powers, however, it may be said that the range of their foreign policy is so contracted that they have no interest except the preservation of their independence."[106] Wight's description of the foreign policy conducted by small states does not hold true in the case of Iceland. While the preservation of one's own independence may be said to be among the top priorities of any state, the Republic of Iceland has more interests than simply self-preservation.

While it is indeed a participant in organizations that ensure its continued survival, Iceland has also embraced Western values that champion issues such as human rights and economic cooperation. Iceland joined the UN in November 1946, a year after it was chartered in San Francisco in 1945. It has always been an active participant in various UN organizations, promoting peace, health, and development abroad. These issues have little to do with self-preservation; rather, they are addressed through international cooperation for the betterment of humanity.

Another aspect of small state politics worth exploring is that of influence on major powers. Typically, a minor power such as Iceland does not have the luxury of wielding influence against a major power such as the United States. Annette Baker Fox aptly summarized the "typical" difference between great power politics and small power politics, especially with regard to foreign relations:

> Great-power leaders had to broaden their gaze to sweep the whole international arena, and thus their focus upon a particular small power tended to be fleeting and not especially directed to the particular interests of that state. The leaders in the latter, on the contrary, were primarily concerned with their own fate, regardless of the larger constellations of power over which they could have no control. The diplomatic task of the

105 Wight, *Power Politics*, 65.

106 Ibid.

> small-power leaders was thus much easier than that of the great powers in one respect.[107]

The power that Iceland holds in NATO and its use of this power showcase the complexity of the alliance politics and small state politics during the Cold War. Fox's *The Power of Small States* offers a more persuasive explanation of how Iceland was able to manipulate the great powers of the North Atlantic Alliance in the Cold War: "In the large decisions marking out the configuration of power in world politics, the small state has little influence in the sense that it does not participate directly. Yet its own leaders may modify decisions of the great powers indirectly by affecting the expectations of great power governments in the competition which involves the small."[108] This was showcased throughout the Cod Wars, as Iceland influenced the decision-making of major powers within NATO. Fox contended that small states will sometimes pit major powers against one another in an effort to balance the pressure that a single major power can exert on a small state.[109] This is affirmed in the case of Iceland by its economic ties to the Soviet Union and the communist influence within its own domestic politics throughout the course of the Cold War.[110]

C. CONCLUSION

As noted throughout this chapter, the Republic of Iceland is a unique member of the world's most powerful military alliance today and provides a good reference point when investigating or analyzing either alliance politics or the politics of small states. Its continuing membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, and, most importantly, its relationship with the United States, will continue to be an example of how the diplomacy of great powers can be affected by alliances over time. In the face of a resurgent Russia,

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107 Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II*, 181.

108 Ibid., 187.

109 Ibid., 183.

110 These ties are discussed further in Chapter III.

NATO is focusing on the North Atlantic once more and Icelanders will likely see a resurgence of military activity on their small island—if their politicians and diplomats allow this.

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V. PIVOT TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC

In November 2011, then-President Barack Obama announced a "rebalance to Asia" with new U.S. military deployments to Australia in an effort to generate confidence in America's leadership in the region.[111] Since then, the United States has taken some of the focus off its policies in the Middle East and turned its attention to eastern Asia. It negotiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership, built a strategic partnership with India, and strengthened relationships with Asian allies through multinational military exercises.[112]

This U.S. "pivot to the Asia Pacific region," as President Obama famously called it,[113] may be changing some seven years down the road. The current administration in the United States has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement,[114] leading Asian partners to question just how genuine the "pivot" will remain after the change in leadership in the United States. Concurrently, the political stability of Europe has been called into question by the rise of far-right and far-left political parties in the West. In addition to political uncertainty within Europe, another factor has caused a lot of distress: Russian interference with the West. This has included information operations in elections, military interventions in Ukraine and Syria, and incidents involving confrontation with Western military forces. Specific instances of these three categories of Russian interference are cited in this chapter, and this chapter uses these activities as the basis of an analytical suggestion that the United States and its NATO Allies are shifting their focus back to the North Atlantic region in the face of Russia's heightened aggression, especially with the use of its military.

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111 Kenneth Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Foreign Policy*, December 21, 2011, http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/21/the-american-pivot-to-asia/.

112 Michael Green, "The Legacy of Obama's 'Pivot' to Asia." *Foreign Policy*, September 3, 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/03/the-legacy-of-obamas-pivot-to-asia/.

113 Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President and Governor Romney in the Third Presidential Debate," October 23, 2012. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/23/remarks-president-and-governor-romney-third-presidential-debate.

114 "The United States Officially Withdraws from the Trans-Pacific Partnership," *Office of the United States Trade Representative*, January 2017, https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2017/january/US-Withdraws-From-TPP.

A. HEIGHTENED RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

Russia is a slowly declining power that is taking a "rogue actor" approach to generate broad instability in the West. Russia has sown seeds of instability within many NATO countries in an attempt to undermine the Alliance and weaken it from within. One significant method that Moscow has used to achieve its goals is information operations in elections. The West prides itself on free and fair democratic elections. It is, moreover, a cornerstone of American diplomacy. Because of the emphasis that Western nations place on free and fair democratic elections, these elections have become a "soft underbelly" for Russia to interfere with, notably by using technological advances in the cyber domain.

In January 2018, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations released a report that detailed known Russian attempts at hacking and interfering with elections in 19 European countries.[115] This report was put together largely as a result of the well-known case of Russian interference in the 2016 United States presidential election, which resulted in a victory for now-President Donald Trump. The topic of intervening in elections by Russia has been controversial in the United States, and the Trump administration was reluctant to punish Russia. After a long delay, and in concert with denouncing a nerve gas attack on a former Russian spy in the United Kingdom, the United States imposed sanctions on Russian organizations and individual citizens on March 15, 2018, for interference in the 2016 election and for other "malicious cyberattacks."[116]

These sanctions were applied concurrently with sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation through the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017.[117] The law enacted sanctions for activities such as cyber attacks, corruption, human rights abuses, and arms transfers to Syria.[118]

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115 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security*, 115th Cong., 2d sess., January 2018, S. Rep. 115–21 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2018), https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FinalRR.pdf.

116 Peter Baker, "White House Penalizes Russians Over Election Meddling and Cyberattacks," *New York Times*, March 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/15/us/politics/trump-russia-sanctions.html.

117 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, Pub. L. No. 115–44 § 201 (2017). https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ44/PLAW-115publ44.pdf.

118 Ibid.

Russia has also raised concern in the West through its military interventions. The two most notable recent cases are the interventions in Ukraine and Syria. In 2014, Russian military operatives were sent to the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine under the guise of protecting "ethnic Russians" in Ukraine. Ukrainians coined the term "little green men" to refer to Russian soldiers who were sent into Crimea in green military uniforms without any country or other insignia.[119] Russia then held a referendum in Crimea on whether Crimea should become part of the Russian Federation or be restored to Ukraine as per the 1992 Constitution.[120] Russia's "little green men" ensured that mostly pro-Russian Ukrainians voted in the referendum. Following the referendum, Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation. Russian military involvement was denied by the Kremlin and denounced by Western governments and institutions, most notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Additionally, the G-8 group, which exists primarily as a means of dialogue between leading Western countries and Russia, suspended Russia from the group in retaliation for its illegal annexation of Crimea. The G-7 (the new group that excludes Russia) issued a statement which read, in part:

> We, the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, join in expressing our grave concern about Russia's continued actions to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. We once again condemn Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and actions to de-stabilise eastern Ukraine. Those actions are unacceptable and violate international law.[121]

The conflict remains unresolved today. Although Crimea was annexed and Ukraine withdrew its troops from the peninsula, it is still a controversial move by Russia, which has seen new international sanctions imposed as a result. The conflict continues to be a focal

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119 Steven Pifer, "Watch Out for Little Green Men," *Brookings Institution*, July 7, 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/watch-out-for-little-green-men/.

120 Noah Sneider, "2 Choices in Crimea Referendum, but Neither is 'No,'" *New York Times*, March 14, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/15/world/europe/crimea-vote-does-not-offer-choice-of-status-quo.html.

121 G-7 Leaders Statement on Ukraine, July 30, 2014, https://www.g7germany.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/G7_G20/2014-07-30-g7-ukraine-eng.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3.

point of Western relations with Russia, owing in part to Russia's ongoing military engagement in eastern Ukraine.

Russia has also used its military forces to intervene in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Civil War has been ongoing since 2011, and swaths of Syria were taken over by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The United States got involved in Syria in 2014 under Operation Inherent Resolve, and it leads an international coalition in the fight against ISIL. In addition to campaigning to drive ISIL out of its seized territories, the United States has also called for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. This has complicated the conflict further, as Assad is backed by Putin's Russia. Putin has used the conflict in Syria to showcase his country's advances in weaponry and to demonstrate Russia's military might and its status as a great power (as opposed to a regional power).[122] Western, Russian, Syrian, Syrian "rebels," and Islamic State fighters (among others) all remain embroiled in this conflict today, and Russia continues to back Assad in a determined attempt to oppose Western interests. Russia is engaged in Syria not just for the sake of flexing its muscles, but because the Kremlin wants to retain naval and military bases in this country to support its broader long-term ambitions.

The last category of heightened Russian aggression to address is that of its close military encounters and incidents with Western military powers. Using another tactic to undermine the cohesion of NATO and its partners, Russia has been increasingly aggressive on the sea and in the air in its encounters with NATO countries. The first significant event in recent history that was reminiscent of Cold War encounters between the Soviet Union and NATO was that of Russian fighter jets conducting close and fast overflights of the *USS Donald Cook* in the Black Sea in April 2014.[123] A similar incident occurred in April 2016, when two Russian fighter jets flew over the *USS Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea, again in

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122 "Russian Missiles 'Hit IS in Syria from the Caspian Sea.'" *BBC*, October 7, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34465425.

123 "Russian Jet's Passes near U.S. Ship in Black Sea 'Provocative': Pentagon," *Reuters*, April 14, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-blacksea/russian-jets-passes-near-u-s-ship-in-black-sea-provocative-pentagon-idUSBREA3D15Q20140414.

international waters.[124] In June 2016, a Russian warship and a U.S. warship in the eastern Mediterranean Sea had a "close encounter," sailing dangerously close to one another, and both the Russian Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense blamed each other for the unsafe maneuver. The news agency *Reuters* pointed out in June 2016 that "recent months have seen a number of similar Cold War-style incidents at sea and in the air, with each country's military accusing the other of dangerous approaches in international waters and airspace."[125] In a continuing escalation towards the use of force, a Russian fighter jet flew within five feet of a U.S. Navy surveillance plane in international airspace over the Black Sea in January 2018.[126]

There is a pattern of tense interactions between Russian Federation armed forces and those of NATO and Western-oriented non-NATO countries, including Japan and Sweden. While this could be partially attributed to the proximity of NATO assets to Russian territory, these incidents have all occurred in international waters or international airspace and often far enough from Russian territory to be considered "non-escalatory" by observers supportive of the West. The continued prodding by the Russian military probably represents more than simply an attempt to flex its muscles after a period of buildup and resurgence in the military. Putin will continue to flex these muscles as he tries to steer the country back to "great power" status and pursues his attempts to undermine NATO and the European Union (EU) and weaken them from within. In a study of increased Russia-West incidents, the London-based think-tank European Leadership Network has issued de-escalatory recommendations. A noteworthy recommendation is that "there should be zero tolerance for reckless behavior of individual military commanders, pilots and other personnel, especially by the Russian leadership. Use of dangerous military brinksmanship

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124 U.S. European Command, "US Navy Ship Encounters Aggressive Russian Aircraft in the Baltic Sea." United States Navy, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=94170.

125 Dmitry Solovyov and Idrees Ali, "Russia, United States Blame Each Other for Maritime Incident." *Reuters*, June 28, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-navy/russia-united-states-blame-each-other-for-maritime-incident-idUSKCN0ZE1Q8.

126 Ryan Browne and Zachary Cohen, "Russian Jet Flied Within Five Feet of U.S. Navy Plane, Pentagon Says." *CNN*, January 29, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/29/politics/russia-jet-us-navy-black-sea/index.html.

tactics for political signaling is a high-risk strategy, which may backfire in case of an incident."[127]

B. ROLE OF ICELAND AND NAS KEFLAVÍK

In spite of its name, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had been shifting its focus away from the North Atlantic since shortly after the end of the Cold War in 1989–1991. Iceland saw a troop drawdown of around one-third of U.S. troops stationed at Naval Air Station Keflavík between 1993 and 1996 (around 1,000 personnel),[128] and the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force reduced the number of surveillance planes and fighter jets on the island.[129] The two countries kept amicable ties, but the U.S. attempts at further cutbacks were met with opposition. Icelandic politicians in 2001 warned that if the U.S. withdrew its fighter jets (the primary means of defense behind the Iceland Defense Force), the base would be shut down because it would no longer serve the interests of Iceland.[130]

Before President Barack Obama's "pivot to the Asia Pacific Region," the United States had shifted its focus to the Middle East and the so-called "War on Terror" after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. As part of this shift, the United States had to look at its resource allocation. The U.S. government decided in March 2006 to withdraw from NAS Keflavík the troops and planes which had been permanently based there since 1951.[131] Before closing NAS Keflavík and thereby disestablishing the Iceland Defense Force, the United States reaffirmed its 1951 commitment to defend Iceland, even though American troops and defense aircraft were no longer to be stationed in Iceland. A press release in September 2006 (at the time of the final American military departure from

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127 Thomas Frear, "Russia-West Incidents on the Rise," *European Leadership Network*, June 26, 2017, https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/russia-west-incidents-on-the-rise/.

128 The United States and Iceland established a bilateral defense agreement in 1951 which allowed the United States to permanently station troops and planes at Naval Air Station Keflavík. The U.S. troops stationed there were the Iceland Defense Force, since Iceland did not (and does not) have a military of its own.

129 Jóhannesson, "To The Edge of Nowhere? U.S.–Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War," 128–129.

130 Ibid., 129.

131 Jim Garamone, "Last U.S. Service Members to Leave Iceland Sept. 30." United States Navy, September 29, 2006, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=25809.

Iceland) stated that "during World War II and the Cold War, Iceland was critical to keeping the sea lines of communication open. The United States maintained aircraft on Iceland to defend Iceland and the North Atlantic sea lanes against conventional military threats: submarines, ships and aircraft. But those threats no longer exist."[132]

Not long after the United States military left NAS Keflavík, the Russian military began pushing the envelope near Iceland, sending out more patrols of long-range bombers, which twice closed within 35 nautical miles of Iceland and twice circumnavigated the island.[133] Iceland requested that rotational NATO air patrols be conducted from Keflavík, and the Alliance has been conducting these patrols since 2008 under the mission title "Airborne Surveillance and Interception Capabilities to Meet Iceland's Peacetime Preparedness Needs."[134] Then-U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed the increase of Russian activities in the High North in a May 2008 visit to Iceland:

> And again, as we talk to allies, I think we have to be concerned not just about the resources but about the resurgence of some activity that the Russians have been engaged in. We're quite aware of it and we speak to the Russians about the—not only the—that this is not necessary, it's not helpful.[135]

The increase in Russian aggression since the 2008 intervention in Georgia has continued to build, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Although the United States "pivoted" rhetorically to the Asia Pacific region in 2011, there is ample evidence of a need to pivot back to the North Atlantic, at least to some extent. The United States Department of Defense has started to do so by investing heavily in military capabilities in Iceland, Norway, Poland, and the Baltic States. In 2017 and 2018, the Pentagon's budget requests included over $35 million for renovations at NAS Keflavík so that it can host U.S. Navy

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132 Garamone, "Last U.S. Service Members to Leave Iceland Sept. 30."

133 Daniel Bases, "Iceland Sees More Russian Flights in N. Atlantic." *Reuters*, March 14, 2008, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iceland-monitor-flights/iceland-sees-more-russian-flights-in-n-atlantic-idUSN1461960020080314.

134 "Iceland's 'Peacetime Preparedness Needs.'" North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 2, 2013, https://shape.nato.int/icelands-peacetime-preparedness-needs.

135 Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks with Icelandic Minister of Foreign Affairs Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir," May 30, 2008. https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/05/105447.htm.

P-8A Poseidon aircraft,[136] which are "submarine hunting" aircraft. This is a direct result of an increase in Russian submarine activities in the region, which were a major part of the Cold War. NATO's Submarine Forces Commander, Rear Admiral Andrew Lennon, stated in an interview in 2017 that "Russian submarine activity is higher now in the last three years than it has been since the Cold War."[137] Russia's military buildup includes six new Kilo class submarines, which are active in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.[138] This increase in capabilities and activity is a cause of concern for the North Atlantic Alliance.

As relations between the West and Russia continue to grow strained, the NATO Allies will probably increase their military activity in the North Atlantic. The frequency of NATO air patrols over the GIUK Gap will continue to increase in order to counter the actions of an increasingly opportunistic Kremlin. Although the prospect of an increased U.S. military presence in Iceland has been denied,[139] such an increase could follow if Moscow-Washington relations continue to return to Cold War levels.

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136 Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2017, "European Reassurance Initiative," http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_ERI_J-Book.pdf. See also: Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2018, "European Reassurance Initiative," http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_ERI_J-Book.pdf.

137 Andrew Lennon, as quoted in "NATO Sounds Alarm on Russian Submarine Activity," by Michael Peel and David Bond, *Financial Times*, December 22, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/40236a0a-e711-11e7-97e2-916d4fbac0da.

138 Ibid.

139 Nancy Montgomery, "No Permanent Basing for Navy Sub Hunters in Iceland Despite Construction Projects." *Stars and Stripes*, January 9, 2018, https://www.stripes.com/news/no-permanent-basing-for-navy-sub-hunters-in-iceland-despite-construction-projects-1.505835.

VI. CONCLUSION

In an era of great power competition, with the United States facing rivals like Russia and China, the importance of the North Atlantic cannot be overstated. The 27 years that have passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union have seen tumult in other regions of the world, which has led the United States and its NATO Allies to shift their focus away from the North Atlantic. Russia's military buildup and the opportunism that its military forces have exercised in the Baltic, Mediterranean, and Black Seas constitute a cause for concern to the Alliance and merit a shift in focus back to the North Atlantic region.

This thesis has highlighted Iceland's contributions to NATO throughout the existence of the Alliance; it has also explored the reasons for these contributions and the politics of managing alliance relationships. Chapter II reviewed Iceland's history and why it joined NATO as a founding member in 1949. This chapter also stressed the importance of Iceland to the Alliance. The reasons discussed – above all, the country's geostrategic location – are a major factor when analyzing why certain events played out as they did when Iceland was involved.

Without the Cod Wars of the 1950s through the 1970s, it would be more difficult to predict or understand the actions that a small nation like Iceland is willing to take when a crisis develops between two Allies like Iceland and the United Kingdom. Chapter III examined the events surrounding these conflicts, and this set the stage for Chapter IV's exploration of alliance politics and small state politics.

Alliance management is a tricky feat to be continuously accomplished, owing to many different factors. The challenges presented to the Alliance by Iceland's actions during the Cod Wars allowed for some creativity in alliance management, but the Iceland of today will probably be much more cooperative with its NATO Allies in the face of Russia's political-military resurgence. Iceland's small state politics are also less complicated today than during the Cold War, as the country has become a more mature democracy.

Most importantly, this thesis has analyzed the events that have taken place since the United States pulled its troops and materiel out of Iceland in 2006. The reasons for

these actions were clear because of world affairs at that time, but numerous confrontational incidents between NATO forces and forces of the Russian Federation have caused the signatories of the Washington Treaty to refocus and face the fact that a Russia emboldened by Vladimir Putin and a resurgent military establishment presents a credible threat to the security of the Alliance. It is well-documented that Russia has been trying to undermine the West from within; the United States and its NATO Allies need to strengthen their resolve against aggression and attacks by the Russian Federation. As the United States and NATO as a whole pivot back to the North Atlantic, including the GIUK Gap, it is as important as ever to show unity in action and rhetoric, refusing to allow Russia to divide the Alliance.

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