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State security or human security and the security debate in international relations

An Icelandic perspective

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HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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The intent of this paper is to analyse the concept of security and to show how the international security debate influenced Icelandic security policy in the late twentieth century. Traditional definitions of security – which focus on state actions and concentrate on power politics, emphasising state power and military might – dominated the security debate from the late 1940s. In 1980s and after the Cold War in the 1990s it became more popular to focus on human/individual security: emphasizing economic security, societal security, environmental security, political security, poverty, human rights and cultural security. This has been termed as a broadening of the security concept.

The article focuses on how Icelandic security priorities changed as the Cold War cooled down and finally ended. The security literature in international relations will be analysed and an overview presented on why and how a broader security definition was introduced in the 1980s. This overview will be used to show how a broader meaning of security influenced the security policy of Iceland. This will be done by analysing speeches in the Icelandic parliament by the country's foreign and prime ministers from 1971 to 1995 in order to trace how and when the broader definitions of security were introduced into the security policy of Iceland.

The evolution of the security debate

After the end of the Second World War and during most of the Cold War period state security had a priority for states. Security was seen in military terms and linked to states and alliances. These challenges were not simply external military threats, they also included ideological, economic and social dangers. Nonetheless, the 'contest' between the two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, early on took for granted the notion that the sovereign state was the principal actor on the world stage where it had to protect its interests to ensure its survival. Or more bluntly put: it became widely acknowledged that "international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power" (Morgenthau, 1973, p. 27). Hence, the definition of security soon after the start of the Cold War "narrowed down to a largely military focus under pressure of nuclear arms race marked by rapid, sustained, and strategically important improvements in technology" (Buzan, 1997, p. 6). The state was the main actor and its principal aim was survival in a bipolar world dominated by the two nuclear powers.

When the Cold War was cooling down many scholars began to redefine the concept of security, as the narrow state centric definition of security tended "to focus on material capabilities and the use and control of military forces by states" (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 9). They suggested that a broader definition was needed instead

of the narrow military security definition that had dominated international relations. In short, they were arguing that the time had come to include a wider perspective when potential threats to nations are discussed and evaluated – such as migration, human rights and economic and environmental issues (Mathews 1989; Moran, 1990; Ullman, 1983; Weiner, 1992).

What followed was a discussion that tried to deepen the debate on security studies where the aim was either to move “down to the level of individual or human security or up to the level of international or global security, with regional and societal security as possible intermediate point” (Krause & Williams, 1996, p. 230). While Walt (1991) maintained that even though ‘non-military phenomena’ like poverty, AIDS, and the likelihood of environmental hazards could become a threat to ‘states and individuals’ this kind of broadening the security concept did run “the risk of expanding security studies excessively; by this logic, issues such as pollution, disease, child abuse, or economic recessions could all be viewed as threats to security” (Walt, 1991, p. 213).

In 1994, the United Nations Development Program published a report where it introduced the concept of *human security*. The report states that security had been defined too narrowly: It should be broadened beyond “security of territory [and] external aggression”. Instead, the meaning of security should include “ordinary people’s concerns” which were forgotten during the Cold War. “For many of them, security symbolized protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards” (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). In short, the report argued that human security was a ‘universal concern’.

In the 1980s and 1990s security got politicized as the narrow state centric definition of security, the threat of use of force was challenged by a broader understanding of the term. In essence, the meaning of security was widened out referring to new and more important threats such as societal security, environmental security, economic security, human security, gender security, migration and cultural security. The term evolved from national security studies, which focused primarily on military science to strategic studies that researched grand strategy during the Cold War to international security studies at the end of it examining both military security and non-military security issues including the reasons for conflicts (Fierke, 2007, p. 16).

Iceland: the security policy

When Iceland decided to join NATO in 1949 it based its security policy on the military alliance and later on the defence agreement with the United States of America in 1951. The main interest of the Icelandic economy was the export of fish. It became clear to Icelandic governments that if unregulated fishing by foreign vessels close to Icelandic shores was to go on unhindered, the main source of the island’s income would fall dramatically. This process might even endanger the survival and security of the nation. The Icelanders considered this an international issue and therefore presented the matter to the United Nations, hoping to gain international recognition of the right to preserve the fish stocks and to further extend the fishing zone around the island (Valdimar Unnar Valdimarsson, 1993, p. 240).

There are some reasons to believe that the Icelandic political elite, during the extension of the fishing zone from 4 miles in 1952 to 200 miles in 1976, understood that the unique strategic position of the island in the North Atlantic created an opportunity to use the bipolar system of the Cold War to Iceland’s advantage. Corgan (2002) argues that the Icelandic political elite made a “logical connection between core

national values and concrete interests that must be defended” (Corgan, 2002, p. 99). Others suggest that Iceland’s foreign policy/security decisions during the period were more based on domestic politics where nationalism and sovereignty played a big part and were not so much based on international security issues. As Valur Ingimundarson (1996) states that the Icelandic people did not define ‘national security’ only as a threat from a foreign state. In Iceland it was considered to be important to safeguard the Icelandic nationality and culture.

The broadening of security in Iceland

The following section is divided into four parts. The aim is to show how the Icelandic security debate changes from 1970 to 1995 as broader security definitions are introduced into the security policy of Iceland. When Icelandic policy makers decide to become more active internationally after the Cold War, that demonstrates a correlation between that decision and the broadening of the security concept and the policy presented after 1990.

The 1970s

In the early 1970s security was defined narrowly. The Icelandic political elite began to move gradually away from the ‘narrow’ state centric definition of security and towards a broader definition of security. At the end of the decade a broadening of security is hinted at. In 1971 the left wing government of the Progressive Party, the Union of Liberals and Leftists and the People’s Alliance announced its intent to terminate the defence pact with the USA and shut down the military base in Iceland. At the same time a parliamentary resolution was proposed to the Icelandic parliament by the opposition, where it was suggested that Iceland should reassess its security needs. The proposal suggested that:

- Iceland should examine the value of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the security of Iceland.
- Iceland should investigate the increased navy activity by the superpowers in the North Atlantic.
- The value of the radar stations and fighter planes¹ based in Iceland for the security of the country and NATO should be examined.
- Iceland’s opportunities to participate in surveying the North Atlantic, at least over the territorial waters of Iceland, should be examined and the 100-mile pollution zone on sea around Iceland monitored (Jón Ármann Héðinsson, 1971).

This proposal is interesting for several reasons. Security is defined narrowly with a focus on the state and its security needs. Military aspects of security are central and broader security definition is not included. The value of territorial waters and pollution in them is highlighted; one explanation is the issue of fishing rights and the protection of the fishing stock. Thus, the control over the fishing zone is connected with security affairs of the state.

¹ The proposal is rather unclear at this point, in Icelandic the words “*varnarkerfis í heild*” are used, translated this means ‘the whole defence system’. Thus it is unclear what is to be valued. NATO or the defence system in the North Atlantic.

In 1974 the left wing government is no longer in office and the Independence Party and the Progressive Party are in power. The new prime minister of the Independence Party Hallgrímsson (1974) explains the security policy of his pro-NATO government. He prioritises Iceland's participation in the UN, as well as Nordic Cooperation and Western defence collaboration. Hallgrímsson then emphasises the importance of human rights and the protection of national resources and the environment. The value of NATO membership is reiterated. What is interesting about this statement is the hint of broadening of interests detected here, i.e. human rights and the environment. A year later Hallgrímsson restates the country's most important foreign policy: the expansion of the exclusive fishing zone to 200 miles, but Iceland had recently extended the fishing zone from 50 miles to 200.

The aim is to secure our possession over all this area, so we can control how the resources are utilized... I am pleased with the solidarity that exists among the nation in this matter... the interests [of the fishing zone] are vital for the nation's survival (Hallgrímsson, 1975).

Not only does the prime minister define the main interests, he states that they are vital for the continued existence of the nation. Thus, it is important for the security and prosperity of Iceland to protect this vital resource.

The next significant step occurs in 1978, when Ólafur Jóhannesson, the prime minister of Iceland, introduces the intent of the government, of his Progressive Party, the Social Democratic Party and the People's Alliance to form a security committee (The Icelandic Commission on Security and International Affairs – ICSIA).

The committee shall conduct a thorough research on security needs of Iceland, i.e. the position of the country in world conflicts, analyze security policy alternatives, the present state of security affairs and the effects thereof on Icelandic society. To investigate the future of the military bases after the armed forces leave Iceland and security measures to deal with terrorist groups (Corgan 2002, p. 130; Ólafur Jóhannesson, 1978, p. 56,).

Two things are interesting in the text: First the suggestion that the committee shall look into alternative security policies. Even though it is not specified what these alternative policies could be, the text suggests less military security in favour of unconventional measures. Secondly, security and society are linked, which suggests a wider perspective on security.

1980-1986

The foreign policy reports from 1980 to 1986 stress the value of NATO for Icelandic security. At the same time, new security issues emerge more frequently in the debate, which becomes more and more global in its outlook. For example, in the foreign policy report by the Progressive Party foreign minister in 1981 'universal' values are expressed.

Iceland supports peaceful relations between all nations. All states big or small should solve their differences with international agreements and other peaceful means... in accordance with the principles of the United Nations and international law' (Ólafur Jóhannesson, 1981).

In 1984 the foreign minister from the Independence Party addresses the importance of international disarmament, as well as freedom and democracy which

are, according to the minister, fundamental issues for Icelandic foreign policy (Geir Hallgrímsson, 1984). In a space of ten years Hallgrímsson has gone from describing the cornerstones of Icelandic policy, in 1974, as the membership of the UN, Nordic cooperation and NATO membership. Now he identifies freedom and democracy as the two most important factors.

A glimpse from the past is detected in 1986 when the right wing government of the Independence Party and the Progressive Party is in power. The main goal is to secure the independence of Iceland. Nordic cooperation, international economic affairs, NATO and the UN remain important. Iceland's policy of disarmament is restated and it is stressed that Iceland must guard the 200-mile exclusive fishing zone. Peace, human rights, and liberty are named as the key to the independence of Iceland as well as the foreign and security policy of the state. The section in the report about defence and security does not mention other broader security issues. Thus, security is defined narrowly, emphasizing the role of the American defence force and the military base (Matthías Á. Mathiesen 1986).

1988-1993

NATO and the defence agreement with the USA remain vital for the security and defence of Iceland. Steingrímur Hermannsson, the foreign minister in 1988, repeats this in the foreign policy report by the government of the Independence Party, Social Democratic Party and his Progressive Party. According to Hermannsson "Iceland [is] no longer isolated in the North Atlantic; therefore, it must participate in world affairs. Iceland has a duty to participate in making the world a safer place" (Steingrímur Hermannsson, 1988). This can be seen as a step from 'free rider policy' in international affairs, to the suggestion that Iceland has something to offer internationally. A hint of broadening of the security concept is detected when Hermannsson (1988) states, that Iceland will always evaluate security, peace issues and the defence of Iceland independently. In a certain way security is treated as more than military defence. This policy shift continues in the next years.

In 1989 the Cold War is ending. A new government, led by the Progressive Party with the support of the Social Democrats and the People's Alliance, is in power. In the foreign ministry a Social Democrat is at the helm. His goal is to strengthen the independence and the international interests of Iceland. The solution now is active participation: In the United Nations, NATO, EFTA, The Nordic Council and other international organizations (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, 1989). In order to achieve these goals Hannibalsson mentions that Iceland should assist developing countries. He emphasizes human rights, peaceful relations between states and support for a nuclear free zone around the island. Icelanders must research military matters and evaluate Iceland's security needs. In international environmental affairs, including pollution in the North Atlantic, Iceland should be active. Finally, Iceland must prepare for the changes in Europe within the European Economic Community and secure its economic interests (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, 1989). The minister nonetheless mentions that this policy is based on the same principles that have guided previous governments for the past 40 years: NATO membership and military protection through the defence agreement with USA. These, according to Hannibalsson (1989), are the cornerstones of the security and defence policy. Human rights, economic and environmental issues are, from the perspective of broader security, identified as essential to Icelandic prosperity and security. A similar security perspective emerges when Hannibalsson (1990) presents his next report to the parliament. International events have now altered the political landscape in Europe as the Cold War is over.

The reunion of the two German states, East and West Germany, is in the cards. Lithuania has declared independence which Iceland supports. Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson mentions that important for Iceland are the negotiations between EFTA and the EEC on the European Economic Area as well as international trade and international agreements. Furthermore, nuclear disarmament in the oceans remains vital for Icelandic fishery interests. The defence treaty with the USA and NATO membership continue to be the core of Icelandic security and defence policy. Hannibalsson argues that Nordic cooperation remains one of the cornerstones of Icelandic foreign policy. The minister says that the time has come for government is to act on its promises and begin wholeheartedly to support developing nations (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson 1990).

The minister not only suggests new international responsibilities for Iceland; he states that the foundations for Icelandic defence and security have remained the same for half a century. A clear broader security agenda is not declared. The broader definition appears in 1992 in the foreign policy report by the new government of the Independence Party and The Social Democratic Party:

[Now] the importance of military security has diminished. As political matters have become more significant which means increased cooperation in international affairs. At the same time, economic, environmental, and even social issues have become more important in international relations (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, 1992).

Then the minister emphasizes that Iceland's security will be strengthened by the associate membership of the Western European Union, which it joined in 1992. The underlying gist of the statement is that in the future Iceland might need to look increasingly to Europe for security as the continent gradually becomes more integrated (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, 1992).

1993-1995

In 1992 the foreign minister of Iceland forms a committee to evaluate Iceland's 'standings in the new security and defence climate' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993, p. 5). The findings of the committee are published in 1993 and a broader definition of security is specified.

During the Cold War, the concept of security carried primarily a military connotation. This situation has changed substantially. Within the past few years, economic and commercial considerations have assumed a far greater importance in international relations. The ideological struggle of the past has yielded to competition between nations which all adhere to some form of market economy. As a consequence, security must to a degree be based on extensive economic and commercial cooperation; also, environmental considerations, social affairs, ethnic freedom and human rights have assumed greater importance. Things previously seen as internal affairs have in many cases assumed the status of international problems, giving rise to dispute and conflict. The concept of security is more complex than ever before, being interwoven with multifarious aspects of national and international affairs. Nevertheless 'security' in the traditional sense is far from being an obsolete notion... ensuring the security of the citizens by adequate defence must still be viewed as a fundamental duty of any government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993, p. 7).

Hannibalsson reaffirms the committee's statement in 1993. "Foreign affairs are not as clear cut as before, security issues, for example, are now more intertwined with

economics, international trade, human rights and the environment than ever before” (Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, 1993). Both the committee’s report and the foreign minister state that the international situation is changing and that this influences Icelandic security. Participating in international affairs and cooperation in defence matters with neighbouring states is therefore vital. According to Hannibalsson (1993) Iceland has to find new ways to enhance its security, while the defence treaty with the USA and participation in NATO still remain vital for Iceland’s security. In 1995 Halldór Ásgrímsson from the Progressive Party has become foreign minister in the coalition government of his party and the Independence Party. Participation in NATO and the defence treaty with the USA remain essential for the security of Iceland. Ásgrímsson, however, emphasizes that Europe is at the crossroads and security is no longer limited to military issues.

‘Security is now a combination of many different issues; military, political, economic, societal and human concerns. There will be no peace unless economic wellbeing, mutual understanding and respect for human rights are guaranteed’ (Halldór Ásgrímsson, 1995).

Ásgrímsson argues that all democratic nations have the duty to contribute to a new security system for the European continent. “We have the responsibility to act” (Halldór Ásgrímsson, 1995).

Icelandic security policy is changing and has begun to take into account broader definitions of security. The international understanding that security was no more just military security had influenced the policy of Iceland. Ásgrímsson and Hannibalsson believe that Icelandic security will be guaranteed with active participation in international affairs.

Conclusion

Icelandic security policy from 1971 to 1995 was primarily connected to NATO membership and the defence agreement with the USA. Ministers from the left or centre generally define security from a broader perspective than the ministers from the right wing Independence Party. The broader definition of security finds its way into the security policy as the Cold War recedes. International affairs and definitions of security play a role in how the Icelandic security policy changes. International cooperation and human rights appear frequently in the security policy as security definitions become broader in the 1980s and the early 1990s. The broadening of security is included in the security policy with the 1993 report and in the statements by the foreign ministers in 1993 and 1995, even though the value of NATO is reiterated. Thus, the broader definitions of security influence the security policy of the Icelandic state as Icelandic policy makers decide to become more active internationally.

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