

**Brottför varnarliðsins – þróun varnarmála**  
**Iceland National Security in the Post-IDF Era**  
**National Museum, 6 October 2016**

**Keynote Address by**

**H.E. Lilja Alfreðsdóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking Varðberg, NEXUS and the Institute of International Affairs at the University of Iceland for organizing this conference, commemorating that 10 years have passed since the closure of the military base in Keflavík. Highlighting these crossroads is important as the US presence in Iceland shaped the national debate on foreign and defence policy for decades.

The closure of the Keflavík naval airbase in September 2006 reflected a broader geopolitical trend that should be seen as positive, namely that the likelihood of conventional military conflicts were decreasing. New and more complex threats and risks were arising from global terrorism, failed states, organized crime, cyber-attacks and natural disasters that called for a more comprehensive approach to security challenges. This is the world that we are faced with today.

Following the US withdrawal, Icelandic authorities had, within a relatively short period of time, to assume greater responsibility of its own national security. This also presented new opportunities to forge a wider political consensus on the basis of our own needs and

circumstances. And I think I'm not overstating when I say that we have managed in a decade to develop a more open and proactive approach to our own security and defence than in the previous 65 years or so. Today, I will focus my remarks on some of the key milestones in this process and the way forward.

Let me first say a few words about how we have managed our international cooperation following the US departure. It goes without saying that a small nation with neither capability nor the will to maintain its own armed forces will always have to work actively with others. As the strategic focus shifted away from conventional warfare and the North-Atlantic towards new threats in more distant parts of the world, Iceland had to develop a more proactive approach in order to maintain and nurture these commitments.

NATO's decision, in 2007, to conduct periodic air-surveillance missions in Iceland was key to our peacetime security interests. NATO's regular presence provided a strategic and political link between Iceland and the Alliance. Since 2008, 9 NATO nations have contributed to 26 deployments. The mission also offers opportunities for Allies to sustain their awareness of the situation in the North Atlantic region and ensures that our own agencies maintain the experience of working with NATO Allies. Iceland maintains and operates NATO infrastructure and systems in Iceland and we have also gradually increased our contributions to NATO missions and

activities with civilian expertise and funding, as our Ambassador to NATO will tell you about in more details.

Much energy has been devoted to discussing the decision to close the naval airbase in Keflavík. However, it is important to keep in mind that the decision did not undermine the value of our bilateral defence agreement from 1951, which remains in full force. This is reflected in the Joint Statement from 2006 between Iceland and the United States, which provides for a practical and political framework for expanding and developing our bilateral relationship. This also includes regular high-level consultations and practical cooperation, which we highly value. The United States has, furthermore, expressed its commitment to the defence of Iceland with their active participation in NATO's air-surveillance missions, exercises and close cooperation with various national agencies, in particular the Icelandic Coast Guard.

Also, the 2009 Stoltenberg report on closer Nordic cooperation on foreign and security policy cooperation was welcomed by Iceland as it tabled many interesting ideas at a time when we were taking a fresh look at our own policies and vision. Since then, the 2011 declaration of solidarity between the Nordic countries has seen the light of day and the Nordic Defence Cooperation, NORDEFECO, has continued to develop and contribute to enhanced regional security. Strengthened bilateral cooperation, based on MoUs with our Allied

neighbors, including Canada, Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom, is also part of this same picture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to our own homework in shaping the institutional, legal and political framework for our security and defence, which, to some extent, can be described as a process of trial and error.

Following the departure of US forces, Icelandic authorities had to develop a legal and institutional framework for defence-related tasks while making sure that NATO facilities and equipment, not least the Icelandic Air Defence System, were kept fully operational.

The 2008 Defence Act was the first comprehensive legislation for defence-related matters. The Act defines the tasks and responsibilities at hand and relations with national agencies and international partners. Some changes and adjustments were made in the years to come, including in our institutional set-up when the Defence Agency was laid down. Today however, I am convinced that our current arrangements, whereby the Icelandic Coast Guard is mainly responsible for implementing defense-related tasks, is working very well.

On the policy side, the first comprehensive risk assessment for Iceland was completed in 2009 based on a broad and inclusive

definition of security - including civil, military and societal security aspects. Soon after, in 2011, work started on a National Security Policy led by a committee of parliamentarians from all political parties. The committee presented its proposals to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, my predecessor, in early 2014. The proposals were further developed and turned into a parliamentary resolution on Iceland's National Security Policy – the first one in Iceland's history.

In fact, one of my first tasks as Foreign Minister was to present this proposal to Parliament, which was, last April, adopted in a broad consensus across the political spectrum. The National Security Policy takes a point of departure in a holistic approach and focuses on three major policy strands – active foreign policy, defense policy in cooperation with other states and civil security. Within this framework, the Policy outlines guidelines and emphases related to, for example, environmental security in the Arctic, cyber defense, terrorism and continued active participation in NATO and the defense relationship with the United States, based on the 1951 bilateral defense agreement.

One of the key recommendations of the policy is to establish a National Security Council. The Parliament, again without anyone voting against, agreed on a legislation for the Council last month. The Prime Minister will chair the Council, which also includes other ministers and officials, and its main responsibility is to oversee the implementation of the National Security Policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This work, of course, did not take place in a vacuum. The global security environment has continued to evolve and threats that seemed distant are more present now than before.

In the East, we witness a more assertive and unpredictable Russia undermining the international rule-based order. In the South, we have the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria causing humanitarian catastrophe and mass migration of refugees. Recent lessons from extremist attacks in Europe and beyond underscore that today's threats are not bound by any borders.

This directly affects us, both as participants in international security cooperation and at home. I am, however, confident that the policies and institutions we have developed are robust enough to meet and adapt to these new challenges with greater openness and democratic participation than before.

We are not at our destination yet, and probably never will be. Our work will need to continue and adapt at any given time. In this respect, last June, I signed, along with US Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work, a Joint Declaration between Iceland and the United States where we reiterate our defense commitments and cooperation. The declaration also frames and formalizes in a transparent manner periodic deployment of US forces in Iceland, which have taken place since 2008 and, more frequently, since 2014. Our relationship is dynamic and will, no doubt, continue to evolve.

To conclude.

A lot has changed in the past 10 years. The security environment has changed and our policies and institutional set-up have adapted accordingly. Iceland has assumed increased role and responsibilities in securing its own defenses. That is only normal and in a decade we have come a long way.

Today's risks and challenges call for a holistic approach to security and the newly adopted National Security Policy provides the necessary framework and political acceptance to take this work further onwards.

International cooperation, in particular with NATO and the United States, are key pillars in our National Security Policy. Our relationship has changed since the US forces discontinued their permanent presence in Iceland. It is now more even-handed and cooperative - and still very important.

Thank you.