

# Small States Conflict Resolution (CR)

Iceland

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# Small States & Conflict Resolution - Historical Background

- No major traditional conflicts
  - Internal disputes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century
  - Military occupation by the Allied forces in WWII – and founding member of NATO
  - Cod Wars with the UK from 1958-1976
  - Various domestic political conflicts – i.e. NATO membership, US Defence agreement, EEA agreement, civil unrest related to the bank collapse in 2008, Icesave dispute etc.
- Importance of vulnerability and dependence on larger states
  - Iceland has no army but has a bilateral defence agreement with the US
  - All issues relating to defence and security were outsourced
  - Since 2006 a new reality for Iceland – expertise and knowledge now being built

# Small States & Conflict Resolution: Historical Background II

- Expertise in peace-making and peace-keeping
  - Iceland has no expertise in traditional peace-keeping in conflict areas but has for example provided a platform for dialogue between conflicting sides – Reykjavik Summit in 1986
  - Iceland's contributions to peace-keeping missions
    - Aviation control in Kosovo and Afghanistan
    - Civil experts seconded to missions i.e. Gender expertise within NATO and in peace-keeping missions worldwide
    - Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit from the Icelandic Coast Guard trains and supervises
    - Icelandic Coast Guard participates in patrols in the Mediterranean
    - Training of police and provided judiciary expertise and training in Balkans
    - Participation in Nordic peacekeeping mission in Sri Lanka

# Small States & Conflict Resolution: Major current conflict & issues

- Current issues of conflict
  - Internal political disputes – mainly relating to the EEA agreement and Iceland's relations with the EU
  - Increased tension in the Arctic at the regional level
  - Return of the US?
  - Increased Chinese economic/political interest
  - NATO concerns about its influence in the region
  - Climate change
  - Greenland and West-Nordic region
- Internally, concerns about Iceland's sovereignty prevail

# Small States & CR: Defining the nature and resolution of conflict

- Political parties define the line between the contesting arguments
- Regarding EU/EEA membership
  - International cooperation vs. isolationism
  - Nationalism vs. internationalism
- Regarding environmental issues domestically
  - Rural vs. urban
- Regarding multilateral cooperation
  - Young vs. old – modern vs. traditional
- Regarding the Arctic –
  - Environmentalists vs. potential investors

# Small States & Conflict Resolution – institutional mechanisms

- Ministry for Foreign Affairs
  - Defence Directorate (small unit within the MFA)
  - Iceland Crisis Response Unit (seconded to international organizations)
- Ministry for Justice
  - Iceland Coast Guard (250 personnel)
  - National Police Force (682 officers)
- Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue, Ice-SAR (4000 volunteer)
- International presence: IMF during the economic crash

# Small States & Conflict Resolution– Institutions/Agencies

- International institutional and arbitration mechanism
  - Domestic court system
    - District courts
    - Appeal court
    - Supreme court
    - Ombudsman – related to Alþingi, the Icelandic parliament
  - Regional
    - EFTA Court
    - ESA
  - International
    - Human Rights Court

# Small States & CR – Bilateral & multilateral relations

- Iceland traditionally has good relations with its neighbours and allies – exceptions include
  - UK – Cod wars and Icesave dispute
  - US – leaving Iceland in 2006
  - Russia – Sanctions following Crymea and Ukraine
  - Nordic states – fishing disputes i.e. mackerel and not bailing out Iceland after the economic crash in 2008



# Small States & CR- Societal beliefs & public opinion

- All the disputes revolve around Iceland's sovereignty in the domestic debates – and according to public opinion, sovereignty has always prevailed
- Public opinion remains devoted to Iceland's exceptionalism – i.e. public opinion on the Cod Wars – Icelandic heroes defeated the British empire – limited recognition of NATO and US involvement
- Negative media coverage and public opinion of Icelandic participation in military peace-keeping missions - i.e. Kabul and Chicken street incident

# Small States & CR: Challenges & Learning

- Increased tension in the Arctic leading to military buildup
- Increased presence by the US military in Iceland and visits from senior US officials
- Increased interest from China – misconceptions?
- Environmental challenges related to climate change
- Challenges associated with search and rescue responsibilities in the Arctic