

## ‘Societal Security’ and Iceland\*

Alyson Bailes  
gestakennari við stjórnmálafræðideild  
Háskóla Íslands  
Þröstur Freyr Gylfason  
stjórnmálafræðingur og  
aðstoðarmaður við rannsókn Bailes

1. tbl. 4. árg. 2008  
Erindi og greinar

\* This study is derived from a larger research programme carried out on behalf of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and Swedish National Defence College, to whom the authors express their acknowledgement and gratitude.

### Abstract

*The doctrine of “societal security” is applied in some other Nordic countries to coordinate policy and action on all (non-military) internal emergencies, terrorist, man-made or natural. It stresses a society-based rather than sovereignty-based outlook and should empower economic and social actors to help build their own security. An elite opinion survey in Iceland, spring 2008, suggests that many Icelanders would welcome such an approach as a way to update, balance, and widen ownership of national security policies. Many think it would help avoid any departmental monopoly and enhance the head of government’s coordinating role. The concept would however need major adaptation to Iceland’s threat profile - where natural disasters and economic interdependence loom larger - and in order to preserve independent non-state competences such as the volunteer rescue force. An Icelandic move in this direction could facilitate cooperation with the Nordic group but also EU and other institutions.*

*Nevertheless, Iceland is only mid-way through a major policy adjustment following US troop withdrawals in 2006, and some opinions on security remain widely polarized. Near-term domestic developments are subject to many uncertainties but, as the opinion survey suggests, Icelandic policies will surely converge more with their neighbours’ over time.*

### 1. ‘Societal Security’: what’s in a name?

The names given to security concepts can be as important as their content for determining their mobilizing power and the attitudes they evoke, both among the people they are designed to protect and others. Such labels can convey a more cooperative or a more hostile colouring; a more ‘old-style’ or ‘new-style’ impression; a more ‘inclusive’ or ‘exclusive’ message about who owns the policy and who takes part in it – to mention only a few key variables. These effects are becoming more important as the process of national strategy making and implementation becomes not only broader in functional terms, embracing more and more aspects in addition to military defence, but also more open and ‘democratized’ at every stage. Parliaments expect, at the least, to be informed of policy developments and in a language they can understand. Official agents of policy like armed forces or civilian security cooperatives often have to use their own initiative and need an internalized grasp of the guidelines. Clear co-ordinating concepts are needed for the always-widening range of specialized ministries and agencies whose work is seen as affecting security, from immigration, border, crime and export controls through to the strategic management of finance and credit, energy, food, environment policy and health. The private business sector holds a constantly expanding and diversifying role<sup>1</sup>, often in the front line against risks arising in financial, economic, technical and functional fields; while non-governmental organizations, charities and individual volunteers may fill crucial gaps both in emergency response at home and the export of

1 See especially the first report in the series on this (section III and figures 4-7).

human security abroad. For these last kinds of actors in particular, there can be no idea of applying simple *command* procedures as within the military, or in a Communist society. Policy definitions, together with framework-setting laws and regulations and the active promotion of sectoral and popular understanding, become ‘invisible strings’ pulling into action those who cannot be manipulated like puppets by more tangible controls.<sup>2</sup>

This article is about one particular policy label, ‘societal security’, that has gained wide currency in the larger Nordic states since the late twentieth century and through which Nordic elites have tried to meet at least some of the needs indicated above – the modernization of security agendas, the coordination of diverse state actors and the motivation and mobilization of non-state ones. After briefly recalling how and why this concept has developed and what place it holds in other nations’ practice, the main part of the text explores its possible relevance for the future of security policy in Iceland. Although ‘societal security’ has never yet been used as a policy definer in this country and perhaps never will be, bringing it into contact with Iceland’s realities – two years after the unilateral US force withdrawal – offers a laboratory-style opportunity not only to test the concept but to learn more about Iceland itself. In that spirit, the base for this study was provided by a detailed elite opinion survey of 38 Icelandic respondents, the results of which provide the hard core of the analysis and conclusions below.

### 1.1. A new security concept for a new environment

In the highly-developed European context and perhaps above all in the Nordic region, the threats of external war and of internal violent conflict are among the least probable risk factors for the general population - Nordics can expect to encounter them only if they travel (far) abroad. Political and economic ‘threats’,<sup>3</sup> involving potential harmful behaviour of a deliberate kind by defined adversaries, are also relatively limited but do exist: at inter-state level, because of the continuing ambiguity of Russia’s role in the region, and in the ‘transnational’ dimension as regards international terrorism, smuggling, organized violent crime and cyber-sabotage. The remaining categories of risk that loom large for individual citizens and aggregate national interests alike include some human

2 A whole further set of issues relate to the *external* impact of policy definitions, which can have roles of warning, intimidation and deterrence but also of transparency, self-legitimation, inspiration for imitation and cooperation, and so forth. These points are not pursued here except – later on – insofar as they relate to the role of definitions in easing/obstructing inter-Nordic cooperation.

3 The definition of ‘threat’ and ‘risk’ is a much-discussed issue, but the present authors prefer to draw the distinction in terms of human intentionality rather than other criteria sometimes used (specific or diffused nature, functional dimension etc). For a more thorough account based on this definition, see AJK Bailes ‘A world of risk’, Introduction to *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, OUP 2007.

processes that may indirectly affect security (consequences of migration and multi-ethnic societies); human accidents, especially those that affect the functioning of large-scale infrastructure (power, transport, heating, food distribution, cyber-communication) and nuclear events; cut-off of crucial supplies from outside by accident or intent (notably energy); and purely 'natural' processes such as specific natural disasters, pandemic disease, and the longer-term impact of climate change. (There are also important risks to the individual arising from the excesses of an advanced society such as over-eating and drinking, drug use, venereal disease, traffic accidents etc but these are rarely if ever seen as 'security' matters.)

Even among such similar neighbours as the five states members of the Nordic Council, the use of 'societal security' as a concept to deal with this new security environment has no single rule or definition. What can safely be said about it is that:

- a) It centres attention on the set of threats and risks that lie closest to the individual citizen and the workings of society as a whole, rather than those relating to state borders, sovereignty and integrity (traditional war, political blackmail etc). Thus it typically covers transnational and national non-military threats like terrorism and crime, and non-intentional and natural risks across the whole field surveyed in the last paragraph: a wider range than that traditionally connected with 'internal security', and coming closer to the idea of 'human security' which is commonly applied to poorer societies;<sup>4</sup>
- b) Consequently, its main executors and 'owners' at official level are not the armed forces – though they may have specialized and supporting roles – but civilian departments and agencies, which may be grouped and coordinated in a variety of ways. In the existing Nordic examples, the armed forces are left in charge of 'hard' security matters such as military attack, which remain covered by a separate and long-standing 'total defence' concept;
- c) As it focuses on society's 'readiness' and 'robustness' in depth, and covers many fields where property is privatized and initiative localized, societal security at least *offers the potential* for business entities, social groupings and individuals to play a part in their own preparedness and in protection, emergency response and re-normalization for society as a whole. At the very least, the authorities of local government will be expected to play a substantial part in policy execution and may indeed have major competences delegated to them;
- d) As most 'societal security' challenges arise from man-made and natural factors operating and/or having consequences across larger areas than any single nation-state, the concept provides a basis for international cooperation and community-building that is independent from military alliance relationships

4 Beyond this, a main variable is how far the concept covers economic and financial subjects; see next section.

and that can draw non-state as well as state actors into fruitful cross-border cooperation.

Supporters of 'societal security' sometimes claim that it also guards against the risk of over-enthusiastic state security policies becoming so oppressive and intrusive that they damage other values important for an advanced society, such as privacy, freedom of choice, freedom of movement, and respect for diversity. In principle, if society's wellbeing is the starting-point and measure of policy and if the state's duty is seen as preserving not just life but the quality of life, it should quickly become obvious if a proposed tightening of security in one field is going to cause disproportionate damage to society in some other dimension. While this is an important reminder of how democracy and human rights can and should enter the picture, it would be too much to claim that the mere use of words like 'societal security' will create the necessary safeguards in practice. More depends on the state's sensitivity to public concerns and reactions on the one hand, and on the ability of 'society' itself (whatever that means in a given territory) to make mature and balanced judgements on the trade-off between its security requirements and its broader needs, ambitions and values.

As of mid-2008, two Nordic states –Sweden and Norway – have adopted 'societal security' as the denominator of their overall national security policy, while retaining 'total defence' (though now with a very low profile in Sweden) as an insurance against residual military threats. Finland is conducting a comprehensive policy review in which the possible introduction of 'societal security' nomenclature is one of the issues under consideration. However, in practice the existing Finnish policy of 'protecting the vital functions of society' already displays much of the content, and the pattern of non-state involvement, that one would associate with societal security approaches elsewhere. Denmark, finally, prefers to define its policy in terms of 'readiness' and protection for internal 'vulnerabilities', but its handling of non-military threats and risks meets all the four criteria associated with 'societal security' above, while its military has given up territorial defence and now defines half of its *raison d'être* as supporting the civilian powers in societal emergencies.

It is thus fair to see societal security as a characteristic, and widespread, Nordic invention of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and this view is borne out by its recent international handling. Efforts to introduce 'societal security' as a guiding principle and conceptual framework for the civil emergency policies of the European Union (EU) have been made especially by Sweden but are supported by other Nordic members. The Nordic Council has adopted a motion ('Framställning 5/2006' of 26 April 2006) calling for exploration of the potential

5 The Icelandic versions of decisions taken at that date are:  
[http://www.norden.org/sagsarkiv/docs/Fremst\\_05\\_2006is.pdf](http://www.norden.org/sagsarkiv/docs/Fremst_05_2006is.pdf) and  
[http://www.norden.org/sagsarkiv/docs/ZIB\\_01\\_2006-isl.pdf](http://www.norden.org/sagsarkiv/docs/ZIB_01_2006-isl.pdf).

for pan-Nordic cooperation in the societal security field, including a conference to debate the issue.<sup>5</sup> The Presidium of the Nordic Council at its winter meeting in 2007 expressed some irritation at slow follow-up, but commented that holding a conference in 2008 would be better late than never.<sup>6</sup> (In the meantime, the Council had also noted the importance of including maritime security aspects in the debate.) The programme of the Presidium of the Nordic Council for 2008-9 duly includes proposals to focus cooperation on the distinctively Nordic approaches to security building – defined as ‘*civilian crisis management and societal security*’ – both at home and abroad; and a regional seminar is now expected to take place by autumn 2008, leading to a report tabled at the next full Nordic Council meeting.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile the Nordic group of Ministers have made a decision of their own (on 16 June 2008, discussed further in the Conclusions below) to commission an independent study of Nordic security cooperation across the board. It may finally be argued that the main sub-regional cooperation groups of the Nordic/Baltic region – the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS, established 1992) and Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR, established 1993) – have developed their agendas and priorities in a way that reflects a Nordic-supplied brand of collective ‘societal security’ thinking, even if they have never found it tactically appropriate nor necessary to use those precise words.<sup>8</sup>

That said, the match between societal security terminology and actual practice is quite variable – and not always particularly close – in day-to-day Nordic reality. Sweden’s system which labels itself most strongly as societal security-based sometimes seems the least well-anchored in society as a whole, inter alia because it is reluctant to engage private business as a collaborator and cautious even in its use of social volunteers. There is also a widespread view – at least, outside Sweden – that the system remains too ‘statist’ and top-down in nature, encouraging citizens to offload security concerns of all kinds upon the government, while the government itself has a somewhat ‘de-securitized’ outlook as a not unnatural consequence of two hundred years of peace. Norway appears more security-minded, down to individual level, but the official societal security machinery ensures close public-private cooperation only in a limited number of ‘strategic’ sectors (oil and gas, power generation, shipping etc) and coordination at head-of-government level remains quite weak. Finland and Denmark, the two countries not (yet) using societal security terminology, come out relatively well in

6 See a report to the Nordic Council in Swedish at <http://www.norden.org/session/2007/talet/sk/view.asp?id=1934>.

7 See text of the Presidium’s programme in Swedish at [http://www.norden.org/session/2007/sk/pdf/dok03\\_2007.pdf](http://www.norden.org/session/2007/sk/pdf/dok03_2007.pdf).

8 Thus the CBSS, without ever describing itself as a security institution, has covered topics like emergencies at sea, defence against pollution and disease, prevention of smuggling and human trafficking; the BEAR was created with the explicit aim of improving societal conditions in North-west Russia to guard against sudden surges of emigration that would swamp and disrupt North Norwegian society.

terms of the breadth of definition of essential social/economic functions, the exploration of all useful forms of public-private partnership, and the exploitation of bottom-up resources (though in Finland's case still largely in the form of an old-style military conscription and reserve system). Aside from these substantial variations there are also diverging national solutions in terms of governmental structure – Denmark and Sweden for instance place their civil security coordinating mechanism under the defence ministry, while Norway (like Iceland) puts the ministry of justice/interior in the lead, and in Finland the largest formal scope for coordination lies with the trade ministry.

### 1.2 Security concept as instrument

The diversity among Nordic applications of societal security ideas helps to illuminate the wide range of *instrumental* functions that one single concept may play in a highly developed, democratic and pluralistic European environment. Its first-order and most straightforward effects may be defined as:

- *illuminating and extending* the official conception of national security interests, to bring theory and practice in line with 21<sup>st</sup> century realities ('concept as catalyst')
- *identifying and prioritizing* vital assets (and qualities of life, values etc) to be protected and the means for protecting them, across a broad front ('concept as yardstick')
- *coordinating* action for preparation, prevention, incident handling and recovery in the relevant fields ('concept as gathering ground')
- *mobilizing* non-state capacities within society that may have existed before, but were not previously identified and honoured as 'security' contributions ('concept as empowerment')

In addition to these, individual countries appear to have used the concept for the more political and tactical purposes of:

- *legitimizing* a transition away from older purely military concepts of national defence/security and in particular, replacing (or reducing the primacy of) 'total defence' ideas that implied civilian subordination to the military
- *reassigning* practical power and resources away from one agency of government (generally, the armed forces and defence ministry) towards others (generally, the interior ministry or equivalent); and more broadly speaking, away from the military towards civilian authorities ('concept as lever, or as weapon')
- (in the more fully developed cases) *legitimizing and facilitating* a new concentration of authority at the level of the head of government, which can also have as both aim and effect the reconciling of clashes of interest and demarcation disputes between individual ministries
- *seeking common ground* with other nations or with trends in European security



thinking and development as a whole, by placing the security emphasis in a domain where alliance differences or varying military systems are no longer relevant and where national particularities might prove easier to overcome ('concept as tool of international socialization').

It should be clear from this catalogue that, whatever the intrinsic merits of the societal security concept, the implications and effects of introducing it in a given national situation will depend on a variety of factors and will not automatically produce 'good' results – namely, an improvement on what went before – in objective security terms. The decisive variables include long-standing national traditions, ways of thought, features of social and administrative structure, motives of those supporting the concept, motives and capacities of any opposing it, the nature and quality of structural adaptation, the roles given to non-state partners, the application of resources, and the quality of follow-through and follow-up in general. If these are in negative combination, the concept may remain a dead letter, or even have perverse effects by creating new gaps and disproportions in security provision and new frictions among the actors involved. If all the other factors are set positive, the national security elite may be capable of producing the same good results that the societal security concept is designed for without ever actually using that concept and that name. It is precisely this relativity that makes it interesting to 'test-drive' the concept by bringing it into contact with the everyday security realities of the one Nordic country that has never so far discussed introducing it – Iceland.

### 2. Iceland as a test laboratory

Why Iceland? The short answer is that this small but newly wealthy Nordic republic is having to embark on a gradual reassessment of its whole defence and security system following the unilateral departure of US troops – who had provided it's only military cover and also several civil security assets - in autumn 2006. A government decision in late 2007 to launch a 'risk assessment' by an independent commission can be seen both as a recognition of this need and as a possible first step in efforts to build a new policy scheme and consensus, depending on how the report turns out (expected autumn 2008). Second, and by contrast with (especially) Sweden and Denmark, the Icelandic establishment's understanding of security has never in the past extended much beyond classic, 'Westphalian' military definitions. Since safety in the Cold War was equated directly with US military hardware, the notion of security was distinctly under-conceptualized and its multilateral or transnational dimensions were poorly grasped. Since only a few politicians and officials had any daily dealings with what was thought of as security work, and very few academics gained expertise in it, it was predominantly an elite and 'top-down' affair. Finally, since around half of Icelanders were fiercely opposed to the US solution at the outset, the subject was also politically and socially divisive. These circumstances could hardly be



farther removed from the ideal notion, and desired results, of a 'societal' security approach as outlined above.

At the same time, since Iceland has never created its own armed forces and is never likely to create them, it offers a laboratory where in principle, a particularly pure version of civilian-owned, civilian-executed societal security might be experimented with. Given awareness of other Nordic and European experience, its policy makers also have the chance to learn from others' trials and tribulations and to 'jump ahead' to a state-of-the-art solution. By pursuing the hypothetical question of whether the adoption of a societal security doctrine *would* be feasible and productive in the real-world setting of Iceland today, we can expect to gain a better understanding of Iceland but also – in a way that few other thought experiments would allow – of 'societal security' itself.

### 2.1 Iceland's *prima facie* threat/risk profile

In the areas generally recognized as falling under 'societal security', the first thing to stress about Iceland is that it has a distinctive and somewhat limited threat/risk profile even by Nordic standards. As usual in this region, any kind of internal conflict, large-scale violent crime and direct experience of terrorism are absent; non-Nordic immigration has also started growing only recently, though already generating some tensions. The country is 80% self-sufficient in energy, all from renewable sources; has no severe environment problems and may look forward mainly to easements of life from climate change.<sup>9</sup> Rather few dimensions of civil security are thus left as priorities for policy to address, although the country's small population, far-flung communications and often freakish weather make all of them potentially tricky to handle:

- a) The *natural disasters* proper to the country, which include volcanic eruptions, 'glacier bursts' and major earthquakes as well as the avalanches, storms, tidal extremes and floods that affect other Nordic neighbours;
- b) *Infrastructure breakdowns* that might be triggered either by such natural events or by accident or (least likely) terrorist sabotage: the most serious could involve electricity distribution and district heating systems, cyber-breakdown, or a sustained blockage of traffic at the country's international airports.<sup>10</sup> Accidents at sea are of especial concern for both historical and

9 There is, however, a growing awareness in Iceland of the more general consequences of temperature change and the melting of the Arctic ice, which is likely to boost local tourism and (especially maritime) traffic, but could also lead to large-scale sea accidents, big-power competition over local resources, and possibly ecological changes harmful to fish. These issues are not discussed further in the present report because they belong more to the category of new-style external challenges than to 'societal' ones – though they are extremely relevant to impending moves on Nordic cooperation.

10 Keflavik international airport has a throughput of over 3 million passengers per year, ten times Iceland's own population, and provides access for the huge majority of tourist visitors.

## Stjórnmal og stjórnsýsla vef tímarit (erindi og greinar)

practical economic reasons. Another vulnerable area is food security given the amount that has to be imported through very few choke-points, though the country is close to self-supplying in several basics;

- c) A high-fatality *human disease epidemic*: animal epidemics could also have major economic impact, but less acute effects;
- d) *Terrorist* activity, perhaps especially in the form of hijacking and kidnapping. While it is hard to see Iceland becoming a target in its own right (unless for anti-whaling protestors!), there is real concern among experts that an incident directed against other constituencies or to seize world attention might be staged there, and that a rather small number of determined terrorists would be sufficient to control important choke-points such as the facilities at Keflavik.

Three other sets of concerns could potentially be included in a 'societal security' concept tailored for Icelandic conditions, even if they normally lie outside mainstream Nordic definitions. One is *economic and financial vulnerability*, as demonstrated by a specifically Icelandic credit crisis in spring 2006 and by the speculative attacks aimed at Icelandic banks and the Icelandic currency during the global crisis of early 2008. This issue should logically militate for close cooperation between the government and private bankers and investors, helping to ensure that any future Icelandic security concept cannot become too 'statist' or anti-capitalistic.<sup>11</sup> The same might be said of another issue that is just starting to arouse elite interest, namely the '*corporate social responsibility*' (also in security-linked fields) of these same large Icelandic corporations who are now responsible for the safety of several important assets – including flagship hotels and shops – they have acquired in nearby parts of Europe, together with large numbers of foreign and Icelandic employees.<sup>12</sup> Finally, as already mentioned, a minority of Icelandic politicians and some thinkers would argue that potential security issues related to growing Central European and non-European *immigration* need to be taken seriously and not smothered by 'political correctness'. While political capital is normally made of this issue in relation to the supposed more violent lifestyle and criminal tendencies (drugs, smuggling, prostitution, begging) of certain immigrant groups, it would also be pertinent to consider whether clusters

11 This issue would also be considered a security matter under Finland's doctrine of 'protecting the vital functions of society', since the Finnish concept assigns high priority to the (largely private-owned) means of communication with and competition upon the global economic stage.

12 On 9 May 2008 Iceland's first institute for Corporate Social Responsibility was inaugurated, to be based at the University of Reykjavik and supported by several large companies as well as the Foreign Ministry. The accompanying publicity put emphasis on the need, and opportunity, for Icelandic businesses to learn from networking with Nordic neighbours (esp. Norway and Denmark) now that they have such large overseas holdings in those countries and elsewhere. The initiative is further supported by UNDP which has helped Iceland to develop a business outreach programme to poorer countries.

of foreign residents could be factors of special vulnerability in the case of natural disasters and service breakdowns that would bring risks remote from their personal experience.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2 Icelandic resources and responses

What concept and system does Iceland currently have for attending to non-military, internal or transnational factors of security? The country was relatively slow to develop a cold-war 'civil defence' structure of the type prescribed by NATO, establishing the AVRIK (National Civil Defence Agency) in 1962 and extending it to cover non-war emergencies such as volcanic eruptions in 1967. A system of local Civil Defence Committees was set up, in parallel to rather than subordinated to AVRIK, under the authority of the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs (henceforth MOJ) and a National Disaster Fund provides insurance for the social costs of the most predictable emergencies. The only official personnel earmarked for emergency action, aside from the Coastguard who proved their toughness in three 'cod wars' with the UK, were and are the regular police force – recently supplemented by a special-duty 'Viking squad' trained in the use of weapons. An extremely important role is played by the 4000-strong volunteer rescue force, ICE-SAR, which (together with the Red Cross) has formal cooperation agreements with the MOJ but has remained outside the government's direct control.

The present (and long-standing) Minister of Justice, Björn Bjarnason, has been associated since he first took that post with a sustained effort to modernize the handling of traditional 'internal security' matters – namely, natural disasters, law and order, border control and antiterrorism. In 2003 he renamed the system as one of 'civil protection' rather than civil defence, and replaced AVRIK by a coordinating civil protection department based in his Ministry and using the police hierarchy for executive action. He was the member of the government who took earliest and most decisive action in response to the US military pull-out, announcing the plans to acquire new coastguard and helicopter assets, to systematize intelligence work, to step up security measures and drills at Keflavik, and in general to improve coordination and centralization of national assets. Under his latest Civil Protection Act passed in May 2008, a stronger coordination and control centre for 'emergencies of *all types*' (i.e. not excluding military attack) will be co-located with the National Police Commissioner, with an eleven-person group to ensure inter-departmental coordination, and for the first time a coordinating 'Council' for civil emergencies will be created at the level of the Prime Minister's office<sup>14</sup> – even if it is only expected to be convened for the gravest occasions.

13 After the Selfoss earthquake of May 2008, discussed later in this text, it was stated that the authorities were concentrating special help on the very young, the very old, and 'people of foreign origin'.

14 This will include representatives of at least 7 central Ministries, and of the local authorities.

Within the new coalition government, there is also something of a dialectic between him and the Foreign Minister, Social Democratic Alliance Party leader Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, who has stood on the one hand for the continuing primacy of external security relationships (NATO, UN), and on the other for exploring a 'softer', more comprehensive approach to non-military security. (See below on how this might affect the 'micro-political' climate for introducing societal security ideas.)

Comparing Iceland's general approach to security with that of other Nordic countries, what stands out for most observers is the relative detachment of the general population and the dislike for preparedness and planning. The first point is clearly related to the lack of armed forces (and hence of any conscription system); but it also reflects the fact that risks which do affect and are tackled by ordinary people – natural disasters, rough weather, isolation, supply problems – have not so far been linked in anyone's mind with 'security', while the activities most Icelanders *would* classify as 'security' – the US base and its successors – have been (a) the business of a limited elite and (b) politically contentious, hence more comfortable to ignore. The dislike for preparation and, consequently, for any extended structural machinery to identify dangers and practise solutions are usually attributed to (i) the historic Icelandic temperament based on 'expect the unexpected and take each day as it comes', and (ii) the fact that improvisation does actually work pretty well in such a small, close-knit, skilled, robust and inventive society. Thus, in contrast to some other Nordic settings (and most obviously Sweden), the lack of apparent 'societal security' structure and activity does not mean that the average Icelandic is not security-minded and security-capable when it comes to it – rather the reverse.

Much the same applies to private business entities, who may profess to see no connection between themselves and security but whose leaders and employees will in fact pitch in selflessly to help the community in any case where human lives and safety are at stake. These theses have been tested in a number of actual natural disasters in populated areas since the 1970s, where first response and rescue was actually very effective, but where the lack of clear rules and divisions of authority made itself felt afterwards through weaknesses in follow-up, reconstruction work and lesson-learning.<sup>15</sup> In more recent disasters involving Icelandic citizens abroad, which have led to heart-searching about performance in some other Nordic countries – the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Lebanon evacuation – Iceland seems to have come out rather better, perhaps because the MFA was the only authority involved and worked sensibly *ad hoc* with private actors.

15 For a very detailed study of this see 'Small-state crisis management: the Icelandic way' ed. A.E. Bernhardsdóttir and L. Svedin, pub. CRISMART, Stockholm, 2004.

3. 'Societal security' as an official policy for Iceland: *prima facie* pros and cons  
In this section, the main arguments that can be made *prima facie* for and against the usefulness of an explicit 'societal security' concept for Iceland, against the background of the analysis above, are set out as a hypothesis to be tested by the results of the elite opinion survey.

### 3.1 Arguments in favour

Like other Nordic states since 1990 if more belatedly, Iceland is clearly under pressure to move away in conceptual terms from a narrow, traditional and military view of national security. More than any other state, it also has to wean itself away practically and mentally from a former almost total strategic dependence on the USA. The logical and habitual content of the 'societal security' concept would make it a good candidate to serve both these purposes. For the first purpose, it stretches far beyond the military dimension without necessarily denying the importance of territorial defence. For the second purpose, it prescribes measures which for the most part Icelanders could take themselves and/or where they could seek the outside help they need from several sources besides Washington (including the EU, and the UN system). As a new concept that is not, so far, tied to any particular 'owner' within Iceland, it might also serve the tactical purpose of a 'neutral ground' where different political forces and shades of domestic opinion could work towards a new consensus and division of powers.

Certain 'softer' or functional issues that have a central place in societal security thinking are objectively important for Iceland's future security, economic success and welfare – notably the handling of natural disasters, protection of critical infrastructure, and public health. Other Icelandic preoccupations such as finance and overseas investment might be accommodated within a tailor-made national definition, perhaps gaining inspiration from Finland's 'vital functions of society' concept.

Iceland has strong business and social actors, and age-old popular instincts of self-sufficiency and solidarity, that could be mobilized to good effect as part of the 'bottom-up' and 'resilience' dimensions of a societal security framework.<sup>16</sup> The involvement of such actors – aside from optimizing a very small state's resources – would strengthen the national and social 'ownership' of security policy, and should help to give it a more 'globalized' and outward-looking character than if it was framed exclusively by professional politicians.

A switch to societal society terminology and practice ought to ease Iceland's cooperation with other Nordic states which apply the concept under the same or

16 It is this that led one well informed respondent in our survey to reach the striking conclusion that 'Iceland has *only ever* "done" societal security' (while free-riding on others for the 'hard' variety...). A full but anonymous statistical summary of answers is available from Alyson Bailes at alyson@hi.is.

another name, and would give the country an even stronger say in possible further developments of the Nordic Council's work on this topic. It might produce new ideas for meeting the widely felt need to 'flesh out' the security co-operation MOUs recently signed with Norway and Denmark, where implementation so far has focused on military visits. Depending on how the societal security dossier develops in Brussels, Iceland's familiarity with the term might also open new doors for its dialogue and cooperation with organs of the European Union in such fields as infrastructure protection, health, energy, environment and climate change.

### 3.2 Arguments against

None of the existing ways that the societal security concept is applied and instrumentalized elsewhere in Norden could simply be transplanted to Iceland, because of its objectively different size, geo-strategic setting and threat/risk profile. The 'cohabitation' of societal security with a continuing 'total defence' concept based on the armed forces is also out of the question because of Iceland's lack of the latter. Finally, there could be psychological resistance in some Icelandic circles to the imposition of any outside norm, given the strong Icelandic feeling of specialness and the importance still attached to national independence.

Iceland's history of pragmatism and improvisation in security matters casts doubt on the instrumental value of any mere 'concept'. It is much easier to imagine decisive progress occurring here through new political deals between parties and individuals, plus the impetus of real-life events and experiences - including specific demands from external powers and institutions.

The earlier very narrow Icelandic understanding of security and defence makes it a particularly big, and perhaps impractical, jump to try to extend the understanding of these concepts in one fell swoop to the full societal security spectrum. This is a sharp contrast with Finland where the security concept applied under the name of 'total defence' has already become wider than most other Nordics', so that switching to societal security terminology would be hardly more than a matter of re-packaging.

As confirmed by opinion research, it is hard to get non-governmental constituencies in Iceland to accept security roles and responsibilities for themselves in generic terms, or to put much effort into planning of any kind. The fact that they nevertheless 'get it right on the night' more often than not, and arguably no worse than any other Nordics, weakens the case for and chances of using societal security as a 'mobilizing', 'gathering' or 'empowering' tool.

These same attitudes create a risk that if 'societal security' were introduced as an official concept, it might end up as just another bit of 'government-speak' that would strengthen the temptations for further centralization and top-down handling of security, albeit with a somewhat wider group of officials involved. The risk might be greater or less depending on which politicians first

appropriated the concept, and also on whether the government set out from the start to develop it together with social partners and NGOs. A particularly interesting nuance here is that in contrast to other Nordic countries where the introduction of 'societal security' has gone hand in hand with migration of power to the justice ministry or equivalent, in Iceland the majority view would be that that ministry has more than enough power already (and that too many burdens have already been loaded on the police). The 'societal' concept could thus be instrumentalized by people wishing to argue that the ownership of national security should be widened to include a larger and more balanced group of ministries, and/or that the Prime Minister's office should take more overall responsibility – a further illustration of the *relativity* of the concept in a real-life political context!

As noted, several 'soft' security dimensions that are critical for Iceland relate not to its internal circumstances but to its interdependence and engagement with the outside world: tourism, transport, cyber-communications, food deliveries, imported disease, migration, and other players' reactions to climate and environmental change in the North. Elsewhere in Norden, the application of societal security concepts to such external and transnational factors is one of the weaker sides of thinking and practice – even if Sweden has done much to explore a continent-wide version of the concept for EU purposes. As a result, societal security experts from elsewhere would have little guidance to offer Icelandic state and non-state elites on how best to play their hand (and allocate resources) in the corresponding external institutions and relationships.

#### 4. Lessons of the opinion survey

A survey of 35 Icelanders (and 3 well-qualified foreign residents/observers speaking in a personal capacity) was carried out by the authors between April and June 2008, using a questionnaire in parallel English and Icelandic versions. The respondents were selected from the public administration, business and services organizations, the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi), academic institutions, media leaders and NGOs. The acceptance/completion rate, out of the full initial sample, was a respectable 47% and was higher among public servants, academics, media and independent consultants than in other groups. As indicated by the term 'elite' survey, all the interviewees were more likely to be in positions somehow relevant to national security management, and in most cases were also better informed, than the average Icelandic citizen. The authors do not consider this a weakness given the specialized and sophisticated nature of the enquiry. In fact, in terms of policy relevance, it should be a bonus that the sample reflected many of those constituencies that would be concerned in any real-life decision to 'go for' societal security. An effort was made to balance respondents in other respects such as age, gender, profession, and known political leanings: but if anything the sample has a leftward and centrist bias, partly because the more professional (and



often conservatively inclined) security elite is so small. (One group of informants, working in disaster response services, are also poorly represented because during the time of the survey they were preoccupied with responses to a Richter 6.3 earthquake!)

### 4.1 The main story

The first thing that stood out from the answers to the survey<sup>17</sup> was their variety and inventiveness – which reflects Icelandic individualism but probably also the lack of an entrenched ‘security culture’ that would generate more stereotyped answers or at least, awareness of what answer ‘should’ be given. Many respondents commented that they had to do some original thinking to answer the questionnaire and found it enlightening – it remains to be seen how this may feed back into the real-life Icelandic security debate, in accord with the ‘observer effect’! Thus, while some macro-differences could be found e.g. between those on the left or right of politics, women and men, or those who had or could not be said to have had ‘ownership’ of official policy up to now, there was also great ‘micro-variation’ at the level of the individual.

The other, frankly somewhat unexpected result was the *clear majority in favour of experimenting with the introduction of a ‘societal security’ doctrine* or, at least, something similar under another name. Among those respondents who gave an explicit answer, the majority in favour was of 27 against 5, with one ‘not sure’. Two broad features that help explain this were that (a) all the positive responses came from outside the ‘hard’ security elite (though including several officials with more specialized security responsibilities, and academic or political figures with security expertise), and (b) all the same respondents answered ‘Yes’ to the question of whether the Icelandic system already had elements of societal security without naming it as such (see more below). (These positions were also shared by all the small group of qualified foreign observers who took part in the survey.) Thus, of the possible instrumental roles of the concept set out in section 2 above, we may immediately identify two as having broad support among the positive respondents:

- the *concept as catalyst*, for moving to a more up-to-date security paradigm<sup>18</sup> and a larger ‘ownership’ of security within society, and
- the *concept as empowerment*, i.e. recognizing and better mobilizing positive security contributions being made outside the traditional elite.

17 Details of the questionnaires are omitted here for reasons of space but the texts, and a full but anonymous statistical summary of answers, are available from Alyson Bailes at alyson@hi.is.

18 A couple of respondents explicitly suggested that the Icelanders like, need, and respond quickly to ‘new’ things.

Analysing the answers of this positive group in more detail, we find that the positive aspects of societal security most often mentioned were:

- The possibility of better coordination between different dimensions and security and different actors (*'concept as gathering ground'*); as will be seen later, several interviewees also saw the concept having a 'gathering' or reconciling effect between Right and Left;
- The possibility to devote more attention to 'new' aspects of security including climate change, economic threats, terrorism, but also 'down-to-earth' problems of society like social violence, deprivation, and traffic safety; here we see a mixture of the *concept as (new) yardstick* for security priorities, but also a hint of the *concept as an (internal-political) lever* to the extent that respondents felt the existing official structures or balance of personalities had not allowed justice to be done to these aspects before;
- The possibility of helping Iceland to realize its own strengths/values better and display them to others: here we see a mixture of the mobilization theme and the role of the *concept as a tool of international socialization*. However – as discussed further below – the number of respondents overall who were interested in the international effects of the doctrine was significantly smaller than those who saw it as, simply, good for Iceland itself.

What conclusion to draw from these positive results is a less obvious matter and will be returned to in the final section below.

The respondents who were negative on the idea were divided between those who thought introducing societal security as a 'label' would not change anything, and those who thought the idea would help the wrong people – either offering the right wing a new chance to impose controls on society and divert more resources to security, or giving the left wing a chance to cast off 'hard' security (implying, also, partnership with the USA and NATO) altogether. For those who feared authoritarianism, the danger of the concept lay in the way it mixed 'hard' threats like terrorism with natural hazards (or 'security' with 'safety'): for those who saw it as a kind of 'anti-security', the sense of being already on a historical slippery slope since the US withdrawal may have played a role. These apparently contradictory perceptions deserve to be taken seriously because they highlight the painful polarization of opinion that has characterized Icelandic security debates up to now, and the sense of precariousness of the country's present policy balance – a perfectly fair perception given the profoundly disruptive impact of the 2006 events, two serious currency crises in two years, and the unusual and perhaps transient composition of the currently ruling Grand Coalition.

### 4.2 Detailed responses on other questions

A large majority of respondents (32 to 6) shared the diagnosis offered earlier in this paper that Icelanders' level of understanding and concern about security had

been relatively low up to now (except for a small elite), and the majority of these thought this level was too low and/or the concern was wrongly focused. The views were widely held that Iceland (a) had a parochial and particularist vision, (b) had relied on others for its security, and (c) had an out-of-date conceptual view which missed the significance of new threats ranging from terrorism to climate change and economic vulnerability.

All respondents saw some change in Icelandic preoccupations since the Cold War period. The focus on Russia and 'hard' security had diminished (though re-awakened by occasional scares) and priorities had become more varied – a couple of people added that opinions were actually too easily blown back and forth by short-term trends. The general direction of the shift was seen as being towards new internal preoccupations linked with social and economic change and especially urbanization - economic vulnerability and inequalities, social stresses, immigration and crime; towards global 'new threats' like terrorism, and natural challenges like climate change. (There is not necessarily a contradiction to be between these answers and the views expressed under the last question about lack of up-to-date priorities. The majority understanding seems to be that Icelandic perceptions *are moving in the right direction* under pressure of events, but have *not yet* reached a balanced and up-to-date synthesis.)

(Question 3): A large majority, 34 to 3, believed that the Icelandic system and experience already had elements that could be related to 'societal security', when the latter was defined as an approach that

- put the focus on society
- embraced all issues that might affect society and the safety of individuals, and
- acknowledged the active role of non-state players.

By far the most common example cited was the large size of and good work done by volunteer rescue services, as well as other NGOs devoted to meeting social needs. No respondent showed anything but positive views about this phenomenon, though it was remarked that volunteerism was also good fun and rewarding. Some respondents showed concern that such non-state groups should not be inadvertently damaged by a more formal societal security approach, for instance if this facilitated efforts to bring them under more direct governmental discipline. In addition, many respondents (mostly working in official contexts) mentioned the capacities of the existing civil protection system, the range of specialized expertise available on non-military security, and the protective nature of Icelandic social policies. A couple of others suggested that Icelanders in general had a sense of social solidarity and respect for the community, which showed at its best in moments of crisis. Finally, only one person volunteered a positive reference to the business sector which was seen as one channel for feeding more cosmopolitan security experience back into the country, while another was concerned that the security responsibilities going with Icelandic business's expansion had not yet been properly grasped.

Interviewees – who had been told about other Nordic countries' use of 'societal security' in their official policies - were rather evenly divided on whether it was helpful for Iceland to be influenced by this wider Nordic practice. Of those who reacted positively, about half took the relaxed view 'Why not?', while others saw stronger merit in learning from other Nordics' experience (good and bad) or using their example to provoke debate. Those who were negative cited both the objective differences in Iceland's position, and subjective attitudes such as Iceland's insistence on its independence and uniqueness, social egalitarianism, greater openness to US ideas, less 'modern' thinking etc etc. It is fair to add here that many of those who did advocate a societal security approach, and were open to Nordic lessons, also stressed that the concept would have to be properly *adapted* to Icelandic conditions and carefully *explained* in terms that made sense to an Icelandic public.

This last point was also frequently made when interviewees were asked if the actual words 'samfélagsöryggi' (the most direct possible translation of Swedish samhällssäkerhet or Norwegian samfunnssikkerhet) would be positively received and well understood. Two thirds of respondents did not see why not, *given proper explanation* (preferably with concrete examples). Several commented that the novelty of the expression would help, that bringing 'security' into contact with the concept of 'society' would have positive and modern overtones, and that the expression seemed broad and flexible enough to accommodate all Icelandic concerns. A few people also hoped it might provide a way of reconciling the previously polarized views of Right and Left, or of 'hard' and 'soft' security proponents. Those who were negative thought exactly the opposite, i.e. that the expression could be 'captured' by one school of thought striving to upset the present policy balance. Either it would be interpreted in a pacifistic sense and give new ammunition to those attacking Iceland's efforts to maintain its hard security, or it could be manipulated by those with authoritarian tendencies to curb liberties in the name of collective 'social' needs.

Of those with negative views, those who were worried by the authoritarian scenario saw some interest in trying to find alternative language that would be more focussed on the individual, such as 'human security'; or would more explicitly widen the understanding of 'security' as such; or would keep the word 'security' out of the societal realm altogether. Otherwise, most of those who discussed alternatives were pro-societal security but ready to consider alternative ways of 'selling' it. Perhaps the most interesting option they came up with is using the adjective 'borgarlegur' or 'samborgarlegur' which has a nuance relating to the citizen rather than society as a collectivity. Other ideas were to work within the existing concepts of comprehensive 'national' security, civil protection, and emergency management; or to find an Icelandic equivalent to vulnerability-based analysis and 'preparedness' which feature strongly e.g. in the Danish approach.

When interviewees were asked to name at least four areas they thought would need to be prioritized when/if a societal security-based policy was introduced, the responses were as shown in the Table below:

**Table: Most frequently mentioned security dimensions,  
with number of mentions<sup>19</sup>**

Natural disasters 24	Economy inc. fish 15	Maritime safety 3
Crime, law+order 18	Terrorism 12	Immigration 4
Climate/environment 17	Infrastructure 7	
Disease 16	External 'hard' security 7	

Others mentioned: drug/alcohol abuse, sexual violence, gender inequality, traffic safety/accidents, gun control, border security, drug smuggling+people trafficking, 'climate refugees', food security, cybersecurity, health/stress, child protection, safe housing, social inequality/tensions/lack of cohesion, privatization, 'organized neighbourhood deprivation' and decline in welfare, 'quality of life for all', improvement of security mechanisms+training.

The first thing standing out here is that the items and their prioritization closely match the attempt made earlier in this paper to sketch an 'objective' multi-functional security profile for Iceland. In both cases, general economic and financial security (which most respondents mentioned in broad terms, only a minority citing fisheries as a main issue) enters the picture to a greater extent than it does in – notably – the Swedish and Norwegian 'societal security' concepts.<sup>20</sup> In fact the Icelandic 'basket' of issues resembles the Finnish concept of 'vital functions of society' more closely than anything else in the region. These results are intriguing because they suggest that, just as Icelanders may be 'walking the walk' of societal security without knowing it (the voluntary services, power of business, etc), some sectors at least of the educated elite can actually 'talk the talk' very accurately on the basis of their own experience and common sense. Moreover, the range of issues given a one-off mention (at the end of the table) suggests that Icelandic imaginations can stretch the security concept very far into the 'softest' and most individual areas of social experience when given the chance.

Two other local features are worth noting. Whereas in other Nordic countries 'hard', military defence is separated from and exists parallel to civilian-

19 Clearly, the number of mentions is much larger than that of respondents as interviewees were allowed to mention as many items as they wished. The most favoured topics in numerical terms were also those most often mentioned first in people's lists. A full but anonymous statistical summary of answers is available from Alyson Bailes at alyson@hi.is.

20 It may, of course, readily be argued that this result was a trick of the timing, prompted by the grave currency and credit crisis suffered by Iceland in early 2008 - which the media had reported in highly securitized terms of 'attack' and 'defence', and which had painful consequences for just about every Icelandic household. However, several interviewees when noting this point added that the lesson once learned about economic and financial vulnerability would now remain part of the Icelandic mindset for good. A full but anonymous statistical summary of answers is available from Alyson Bailes at alyson@hi.is.

administered societal security, a significant minority of Icelandic respondents clearly saw no reason not to combine the two in a single comprehensive concept. Since a single civilian government system has always been expected to look after both, and one of the problems in recent years has been to reach financial and political balance within it between the Ministries of Justice (internal security) and Foreign Affairs (external security), it would in fact make a lot of sense to tailor any new Icelandic security concept to encompass and balance this whole spectrum. Some of those who included the 'hard' item were clearly looking for a new reconciliation along this path, while others were simply concerned to give external and military security its due.

Finally, most of those who listed immigration as a problem were people with liberal sensibilities who were concerned to find a way of handling its specific side-effects – notably, increased crime and street violence – without sliding into xenophobia. The issue is relatively new in Iceland and only one minor Party has sought to exploit it politically, with mixed success, yet there is a very general view that it will loom larger in future (see also below).

When asked about the possible impact of a switch to societal security on the governance of security in Iceland several people found the question perplexing, perhaps because there has been little awareness here of the inter-departmental tussles and new centralizing measures that have accompanied this part of security policy evolution in other states. Of those who did reply, most (20 against 9) thought some change would be necessary and this was not necessarily a bad thing – while 5 of the 9 saw specific pitfalls that should be avoided. The most frequent likely change mentioned was an increase in central coordination under the Prime Minister's authority, although several added that the PM's staff is not really designed or sized for such duties at present. More specific suggestions included new committee structures (the UK model may have been in people's minds here), new cyber-networks, a more widely-based coordinating agency, or a new 'Ministry of Security' (though there were also voices warning against this last!). Seven respondents hoped that there would be a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of priorities and better coordination in carrying them out, while six hoped that the contributions of business, NGOs and individuals would be better recognized and mobilized. Of those who saw a likely shift of power and/or resources between ministries, six expected this to be in favour of 'softer' functions while only one thought the Ministry of Justice would increase its coordinating role (but NB also the strong warnings offered by some about an 'authoritarian' danger). While too much should not be made out of a very few replies, these responses do fit with the remark made above that Iceland has gone further than most already in concentrating 'societal security'-related functions in one Ministry, so that those looking for change are almost by definition likely to be seeking *either* greater power-sharing *or* checks and balances though greater involvement of the Prime Minister.

A majority (20 to 10) thought that adopting a societal security concept would have some positive effect on Iceland's external cooperation. Those who disagreed



thought that cooperation was already good as it needed to be, or that the 'societal' path was a bad one (because it distracted from hard security needs, or over-complicated the matter, or would let the wrong people speak for Iceland); or that other Nordics might have a greater interest in Iceland's 'conformity' than in actually providing what the country needed. Those with more positive views thought that a more comprehensive definition of security would clarify both Iceland's own strengths –and potential contributions – and what it most needed to get from others. They foresaw easier comprehension with partners, and one made the shrewd point that sub-state agencies and groups could more easily more together across borders if their roles were more similarly defined. Not everyone was clear about which foreign relationships were likely to benefit, but most mentions were made of cooperation with other Nordics (15) followed by the EU (12), NATO (10), and a few references to the Icelandic role in global organizations, (the UN and its agencies, the World Bank for development work, environmental efforts etc).

A clear majority, 22 to 7, thought Icelandic conditions would (continue to) shift in a direction that should increase interest in and acceptance of a societal security-type approach over the next 5-10 years. Reasons were seen as being partly external – the ever more obvious impact of globalization, including hazards like climate change and energy competition, and growing economic interdependence – and partly internal, such as worsening economic and social stresses, further growth of immigration, and the simple fact of generation change. A mention was made of growing awareness of business's security problems and growth in business's own security awareness. Four respondents volunteered their view that Iceland would have to join the EU during this period: another saw no change unless Norway took that step first!

Interviewees were given a chance to add their own comments at the end, but most did not. A few, still pondering on how a societal security policy might be introduced in practice, talked about using the opportunity of the present threat assessment report to launch such a debate, or consulting other Nordics about the best way ahead, or building up 'soft security' cooperation with Nordic, US and UK partners in the meantime. Some wanted to re-emphasize individual policy concerns, for instance the need not to let hard security be neglected; to promote specific issues like the environment; to restore the central balance of power vis-à-vis the Ministry of Justice; or to preserve the 'peace' theme and the non-military tradition in Iceland's identity. A couple warned that prospects for this or, indeed, any other major policy development would depend critically on developments in national and municipal politics over the next few years including the fates and actions of individuals.

### 5. Brief Conclusions

The last comment reported above from the opinion survey provides a good place



to start a final assessment of this study's findings. It is a pertinent reminder of the unusually open, personalized and volatile nature of Icelandic politics, where external forces can drive the country rapidly in one direction or the other, but Icelandic responses are rarely easy to predict according to outsiders' logic.

It is right to start, nevertheless, by noting that this 'test-drive' exercise brought many positive results regarding *societal security*. It has shown that the concept can be grasped, and often remarkably well adapted and developed for local conditions, by a group of decision makers and opinion formers most of whom have never encountered it before and a majority of whom are not security experts. True, there were several hints in the survey that the novelty of the concept was part of its charm and even those who liked it most could imagine 'wrapping the parcel' in different ways. However, it cannot be an accident that several of the promising features seen by Icelanders in this particular doctrine – a catalyst for change, a mobilizer of non-state forces, a gathering ground for different expertises and political views, an enabler of international cooperation – were the same that have guided the hopes and aims (if not always the results!) of Nordic elites striving to develop societal security in other settings.

At the same time, this Icelandic enquiry has highlighted yet again the *malleability* of the 'societal' concept and the *relativity* of its implications and effects. If it were to be implemented in Iceland, on the basis of what an outsider would see as the nation's main priorities or of what our respondents here were asking for – and as noted, these two recipes come remarkably close – the product would be significantly different from the way it works in Sweden, Norway and potentially in Finland. Indeed, the questionnaire replies ring true in suggesting that the uniqueness of any Icelandic variant would probably be the key to its local acceptability *and* effectiveness. Some of the potential adaptations have been noted in the foregoing section: e.g. high priority for general financial and economic vulnerabilities (which immediately dictates close liaison with business), inclusion of 'hard' security under the same conceptual umbrella, and higher recognition for volunteer and NGO contributions while preserving their independence and 'cool' image. Other adaptations would flow from physical realities such as the wider range of natural disasters facing Iceland, the high importance of all maritime dimensions, and the need for a climate security policy that can cope with likely beneficial changes as well as hazards.

Finally, in governance terms it is reasonable to accept that any new Icelandic structures should be very 'light' and designed to achieve networking, synergy, good prioritization and operational coordination between a range of empowered authorities rather than building any kind of 'super'-agency either in the form of a further expanded MOJ ('Ministry of Security'?) or within the Prime Minister's office. The traditional Icelandic instinct to preserve room for improvisation and to push initiative downwards and outwards makes sense given the population's qualities, with the caveat that the implications of a growing part of that population being foreign need some sober thought. Indeed, as shown again by

the latest Selfoss earthquake, the work is still in progress of finding a local/central balance that assures the locals of the help they need (especially *post facto*), but stays out of their way when they – and the volunteers – can manage best by themselves. These observations also suggest that care will be needed in the *manner* of moving towards a societal security policy in Iceland: only if the impetus is seen as coming as much from the ‘bottom up’ as from ‘top down’, and if voices from outside the traditional security-managers’ elite are given a fair hearing, can the necessary modicum of confidence and active buy-in be guaranteed from the centre-left as well as centre-right segments of popular opinion.

A point that has already come through clearly is that if the Icelanders do move towards their own brand of societal security, they will do it to please themselves, not the other Nordics. Nevertheless, other factors have already set the stage for greater Icelandic interest in their Nordic neighbours’ experience and in their potential help. On the ‘hard’ side of security and the more conservative side of politics, the value of new defence cooperation MOUs with Denmark and Norway is appreciated and there have been hopes that the new military cooperation between Norway, Sweden and Finland might have some useful spin-offs for Iceland (e.g., the hints about possible air defence cooperation in the far North). The decision of Nordic Ministers on 16 June to commission a specific, and hopefully comprehensive, pan-Nordic study of the state of security cooperation<sup>21</sup> will provide a better entrée for Iceland to this debate than previous bilateral/trilateral initiatives and will doubtless be appreciated for that. More specifically, Iceland’s growing focus on the Arctic security issues linked with melting ice, oil/gas exploitation and possible militarization is one of the factors pushing it towards a more active role in regional policy making, and may offer scope to make common cause with Norway in particular. In the left and centre of politics, where the chance to diversify security relationships is seen as a silver lining in the cloud of problems caused by the US departure, Nordic cooperation has always been ideologically acceptable and the transition from earlier ‘social’ to ‘societal’ cooperation in softer security areas should not be particularly difficult. In this part of the picture, therefore, an Icelandic move towards ‘societal security’ could be seen not so much as a catalyst but rather as a way to add extra oil to the wheels of regional partnership, also in the context of possible further development along these lines in the Nordic Council and the group of Nordic Ministers.

Drawing any conclusion about what may actually happen within Iceland itself is far more difficult. Alongside all its positive findings, the survey has also drawn attention to Icelandic fears, frustrations, a perhaps excessive self-critical or self-punishing streak, and the difficulty of reconciling the most strongly felt views at

21 For a press release in Icelandic see <http://www.norden.org/webb/news/news.asp?lang=5&id=7946>.

both ends of the political spectrum. Though the range of concerns listed in paragraph 4.2.7 above is conceptually impressive, looked at in another way it also underlines how hard it would be to devise a single policy concept that all parts of the elite could recognize and want to 'own' (while this study has not even touched on the probably diverging agendas of the man and woman in the street).

An obvious conclusion is that if anyone can overcome these problems and find a way ahead to a more comprehensive and balanced security concept (under whatever name), it must be the Icelanders themselves. The way ahead for them is perhaps best seen as a kind of critical path which may branch off unexpectedly at each key point. The first is of course the presentation and reception, this autumn, of the risk assessment commission's report – which is not particularly likely to advocate 'societal security' as such but will certainly cover many of the relevant dimensions and will need to say something about combining, balancing and reconciling them. The next question is how the government may want to proceed with it: most probably starting with some kind of study and debate within parliament, before even considering the step to officially proposing a new policy and/or machinery.<sup>22</sup> A parallel issue is how long the right-left coalition itself will survive, and if it does run its course to the next elections, whether there will be personnel changes within it – and with what results. Naturally, the result of the next general elections will be of great importance: and in simplified terms it may be said that any result other than a clear dominance by the right wing would keep the way open for further moves towards 'societal'-type policies, though with differing degrees of cross-party support depending on the exact composition of parliament.

However, even systematizing the factors to this extent gives a misleading impression since there are so many other 'wild cards' involved. The interplay between these issues and the increasingly open speculation about Iceland's entry to the EU is one obvious complication. Change in Iceland can be extremely fast, very slow, or retrograde depending on a number of external and internal triggers. Perhaps the safest conclusion to offer in closing is the same as that emerging from most Icelanders' answers to question 10 above: over the medium-to-long term, both external and internal pressures seem bound to guide Iceland towards a more comprehensive understanding and practice of security, and towards agendas that come to resemble more closely its Nordic and West European neighbours'.

22 Another issue still hanging open in this connection is whether the government will proceed to create a new security thinktank of some kind and if so in what form – academic institute, inter-party political group, networking agency or what. For a paper on this issue see 'Skipulögð umfjöllun á Íslandi um öryggis- og alþjóðamál eftir brotthvarf varnarliðsins'. Þróstur Freyr Gylfason, Stjórnsmál og stjórnsýsla, 2. tbl. 2. árg. 2006 (<http://www.stjornmalogstjornsysla.is/images/stories/eg2006h/throstur.pdf>). The new Defence Agency at Keflavik has academic liaison among its duties and will possess research funds but is probably not the direct or final answer to this question.