

context of the Cold War. The international response to the British import ban was that the Soviet Union, seeking both greater influence with Iceland and division in NATO, offered to buy more Icelandic fish to offset the loss of the British market. This in turn prompted the United States to also start buying Icelandic fish and encouraged other NATO members to do the same. Britain found itself isolated and was forced to concede to Iceland and recognize the new four nautical mile limit in 1956⁸⁸. Iceland had not even had to deploy its Coastguard to defend and extend its interests. It instead made use of its geographic strategic value to major powers and used that as a bargaining chip to secure its objectives.

Perhaps emboldened by their success and recognizing the strength of their strategic position, Iceland decided in 1958 to further extend the fishing zone to 12 nautical miles, a unilateral extension that was opposed by Britain and by NATO⁸⁹. Britain took a harder line this time and sent warships to protect British fishing vessels operating in the disputed area. This was a major escalation in relation to NATO where one NATO member was using military assets against another⁹⁰. Iceland's small Coastguard which was seeking to enforce the new fishing zone was completely outgunned against the more numerous, modern warships of the Royal Navy that were protecting the British trawlers. Despite this the Icelandic Coastguard continued to attempt to enforce fisheries regulations, as a law enforcement function, despite the coercive presence of the British warships leading to a number of confrontations including the firing of warning shots by the Icelanders and threats to sink the Icelandic vessels by the Royal Navy⁹¹. These confrontations and the string British military approach to the issue led to Iceland threatening to withdraw from NATO. Once again Iceland played its strategic geography card in a confrontation where resort to force would lead to Icelandic defeat. NATO immediately began to mediate the dispute, with Iceland's strategic value outweighing the interests of British fishermen. In 1961, Britain agreed to the Icelandic 12 nautical mile limit but received some concessions to fish for a limited period in the outer six nautical miles of the Icelandic zone. This result was very similar to the arrangement Iceland had offered Britain at the beginning of the dispute. Despite the coercive influence of one of the world's most powerful navies, Iceland won the day. It secured the maritime zone it desired at the expense of British interests⁹². Military power offered no solution to this problem as Britain found out to its cost.

⁸⁸ Gudni Th. Johannesson, **To the Edge of Nowhere: US-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War**, *Naval War College Review*, (Vol. LVII, No.3/4, 2004), 118-119.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

⁹⁰ Steinsson, 267.

⁹¹ Paddy Johnston, **The Cod Wars against Iceland: The Royal Navy as political instrument**, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, (Vol.5:2, 1991), 11-13.

⁹² Johannesson, 121-122.