

neutrality was highly regarded. Harder heads prevailed and once again, due to the importance of Icelandic geography in monitoring Soviet surface, submarine and air traffic US forces returned to Iceland under the 1951 Defence Agreement⁷⁹.

The Iceland-US Defence Agreement is an agreement of eight short articles that gave bases in Iceland to US forces to operate out of. It did not specify the number of US forces posted to the country but it did acknowledge that numbers needed to be agreed with the Government of Iceland⁸⁰. The US forces were known as the Iceland Defense Force and over the years included an air element that provided air policing and air space surveillance, naval elements including naval aviation for maritime patrol and a contingent of Marines for ground defence. All up during the Cold War the Iceland Defense Force consisted of just over 1000 personnel and included small numbers of military members from other NATO countries such as the UK, Norway and the Netherlands⁸¹. The Iceland Defense Force served from 1951 until 2006 when the US and NATO decided that it was no longer required and it was disbanded and facilities handed back to Iceland. Despite the initial reluctance of the Icelandic population to join NATO in the late 1940s the US decision to remove its last forces from Iceland was met with considerable disappointment from Icelanders and their government⁸².

Despite the disbandment of the Iceland Defense Force, Iceland still possessed vital strategic geography as it related to Russian air and sea movements. Following a number of Russian incursions into Icelandic air space the Icelandic Government made a request to NATO through the North Atlantic Council for rotational air policing from other NATO members. This was agreed to in mid-2007 and the first deployment of French fighter aircraft arrived in May 2008. Successive deployments have continued to the present day⁸³.

With Iceland's geography still strategically relevant to NATO it has been able to continue the policy of not maintaining military forces. With the existential and grand strategic interests met by NATO Iceland has chosen to only possess law enforcement capabilities, capabilities that have, nonetheless, actively pursued Iceland's national interests and contributed to Iceland's international security commitments. Iceland has two law enforcement organisations, the Iceland National Police and the Icelandic Coast Guard. It also has a mechanism to deploy both Police

⁷⁹ Valur Ingimundarson, **Britain, the United States and Militarisation of Iceland 1945-1951**, *Scandinavian Journal of History* (Vol.37, Issue 2, 2012), 208-212.

⁸⁰ **Defense of Iceland: Agreement Between the United States and the Republic of Iceland, May 5, 1951**, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/ice001.asp

⁸¹ Iceland Defense Force <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/idf.htm>

⁸² Valur Ingimundarson, **Iceland's Security Dilemma: The End of a U.S. Military Presence**. (31.1 Fletcher F. World Affairs. 7, 24 (2007)), 15.

⁸³ Icelandic Air Policing <https://www.shape.nato.int/icelands-peace-time-preparedness-needs>