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SUBJECT: Iceland's Bid for the UN Security Council

Classified by: Amb. Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C/NF) Summary: Iceland's bid for one of two available WEOG seats on the UN Security Council in 2009-10 is rapidly drawing to a close. The campaign, hamstrung by a slow start and tepid support at home, has found its legs over the last year under the enthusiastic direction of Foreign Minister Gisladottir. Iceland has campaigned on a strategy of "every vote counts," but in recent months has taken particular aim at competitor Austria. As a Security Council member, Iceland would be generally supportive of U.S. priorities, though particular engagement would be necessary on questions of armed intervention. The small size of Iceland's foreign service and lack of depth on many issues would force Iceland to look often to its friends and neighbors for advice. Lobbying in other Nordic capitals



will be of key importance should Iceland win a UNSC seat. End Summary.

Getting a slow start at home and abroad

2. (C) Iceland is one of three candidates for two Western European and Other Group (WEOG) seats on the UN Security Council in 2009-10, running against Turkey and Austria. Iceland's bid for a Security Council seat did not begin to properly get organized until late 2006 under then-Foreign Minister Valgerdur Sverrisdottir. Previous FMs -- particularly David Oddsson from 2004-2005 -- did little to win support at home or get organized overseas for the effort. Should Iceland fail to win a seat, many supporters of the bid will point the finger at Oddsson and the Independence Party as a whole.

3. (C) Reflecting the ambivalence inside the government, the Icelandic public has also split on the issue. The campaign's cost (roughly \$3.33 million from 2001 to 2007, with an additional \$800,000 budgeted through October 2008) is an easy target for those who think Iceland should have a less activist foreign policy as well as critics of government spending, particularly on the left end of the spectrum. However, even some close to the Prime Minister's Independence Party and in favor of a robust foreign policy have told PolOff that they are dubious that Iceland can effectively carry out the responsibilities of a UNSC member. Under current FM Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir, who has made winning a UNSC seat a priority, polls show support for Iceland's candidacy is only 46 percent, with 36 percent against.

Every vote counts...but especially if we take them from Austria

4. (C) Valgerdur Sverrisdottir made the campaign more of a priority than her predecessors during her 2006-2007 tenure as Foreign Minister, but it still gained little traction. Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir took several bold moves immediately after her arrival in May 2007 at the ministry. Pledging to make the UNSC campaign simultaneously cheaper and more effective, Gisladottir appointed a special envoy to head the effort and allowed her to assemble a dedicated team. FM Gisladottir also began a series of high-visibility trips to regions outside of the usual Nordics-U.S.-Europe circuit: since May 2007, she has gone to the Middle East five times, and Africa three times, as well as making visits to the Caribbean and Afghanistan.

5. (C/NF) Senior MFA officials as well as working-level officers in the UNSC campaign office have told post that in addition to the FM's travel, the ministry as a whole is racking up frequent-flyer miles. Rather than targeting strategic countries to influence a whole regional bloc, the Icelandic approach has been one of stumping for each and every vote -- a huge strain on a foreign service of only 205 people worldwide. In a July 2 meeting with Ambassador, Permanent Secretary Gretar Mar Sigurdsson allowed that the campaign "has been bloody hard for us," as he described having to spend the better part of a week on a Pacific islands trip to counter Micronesia's declaration of support for Austria.



6. (C/NF) Austria is Iceland's main target in the campaign. Though Ministry officials declined to confirm this directly, the tone and content of MFA pitches to Ambassador and visiting USG officials indicate that they believe Turkey is a sure winner, but Austria's dubious economic and energy ties to Iran and Russia may create an opening for Iceland. Iran's nuclear efforts are likely to be the most significant challenge to the UNSC in 2009-2010, MFA PermSec Sigurdsson has argued to Ambassador and visiting U.S. officials, and Iceland has neither the problematic history of dealings with Iran nor the economic exposure that Austria does. Beyond substantive concerns, Icelandic officials have also accused Austria of unfairly leveraging Vienna's role as host to multiple UN agencies, and were incensed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's comments in May 2008 apparently supporting Austria's bid -- in their eyes, another sign of shady campaigning by Austria.

7. (C/NF) The "every vote counts" perspective has also influenced Icelandic performance on other foreign policy issues over the last year. Increased ties to the Middle East have translated into contacts with both Syria and Iran. Similarly, Iceland has appeared reluctant to annoy Russia on recognition of Kosovo and the conflict with Georgia. Though in both cases Iceland eventually lined up with USG views -- recognizing Kosovo within a couple of weeks of independence and eventually calling in the Russian Ambassador here regarding events in Georgia -- there were some questions as to whether the UNSC bid made the MFA more gun-shy than it might otherwise have been.

What would UNSC member Iceland do?

8. (C/NF) Iceland has made a principled case for a UNSC seat based on its impeccable democratic credentials, support for the UN system, and the idea that all UN member states should have the chance to sit on the Security Council. What it has not done is present a concrete picture of what kind of Security Council member (and chair) it would be. Post's analysis is that Iceland would be generally in agreement with USG priorities. Some disagreements do exist, and the FM's discomfort with the use of military force would require strong engagement on questions of intervention. Iceland's initiatives would closely mirror the interests of FM Gísladóttir: Iceland would work for progress on the empowerment and security of women, the broader concept of human security, and possibly even environmental security concerns.

9. (C/NF) In approaches to USG officials, Iceland has consistently appealed to the history of our bilateral relationship and our common membership in NATO. Post believes that our close defense ties and the U.S. treaty obligations as Iceland's first defender in war -- notwithstanding the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iceland in September 2006 -- and Iceland's voting record at the UN would translate into a commonality of views on most issues. We have consistently been on the same side of human rights issues in the UNGA Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council, and Iceland has been a staunch supporter of U.S. efforts on UNSCR 1820 on the security of



women in conflict and the UNGA declaration on Prisoners of Conscience.

10. (C/NF) Areas of disagreement do exist which may be exacerbated by Iceland's lack of military and the Foreign Minister's personal discomfort with the use of force. Iceland shares a broad European skepticism on USG policy towards Cuba, and has not voted our way on the Cuba embargo resolution. Similarly, Iceland has followed the Nordic line on anti-Israel resolutions in recent years. On Iraq, the previous Icelandic government pledged its political support to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and later sent personnel in support of explosive ordnance disposal and the NATO Training Mission-Iraq. However, FM Gísladóttir campaigned in the 2007 elections on a pledge of "removing Iceland's name" from the Coalition of the Willing and called back the lone Icelander at NTM-I. Beyond simple opposition to the Iraq war, FM Gísladóttir's views are colored by the fact that Iceland has no military, which she thinks gives Iceland a unique moral role, as an honest broker and example, in world affairs. This does not translate into a complete opposition to armed intervention -- under Gísladóttir, the MFA has maintained financial and logistical support for NATO operations in Afghanistan -- but it means that Iceland will need to be fully convinced that diplomatic efforts have run their course.

11. (C/NF) A final complication is the tiny size of Iceland's foreign service, which greatly limits both the information at hand as well as the ability to process that information. The International Organizations Department Head noted wryly to PolOff that until now, Iceland had the luxury of deciding which issues to follow, but that this will come to a swift end in October should Iceland be voted in. The MFA's Security Council campaign office has carefully examined the UNSC experience of Costa Rica, another comparatively small state without an army. Much of the expense of the UNSC campaign stems from the expansion of the permanent mission in New York; current plans are to double the size of the mission to 20 diplomats should Iceland win election. Given that this is nearly 10 percent of Iceland's total diplomatic corps, the entire personnel transfer season for this year is on hold pending the vote results.

12. (C/NF) In practical terms, this means the Icelanders will look more than usual to their Nordic colleagues for background and advice on key issues. A division of labor across issues already exists, according to MFA contacts and the Norwegian Embassy in Reykjavik, and the Norwegians are expecting to be asked for quite a bit more help. This stems both from the traditionally close relationship between the two countries as well as the warm ties between FMs Gísladóttir and Stoere. Though Iceland has formally abandoned a previous proposal to dual-accredit other Nordic diplomats at the UN, Nordic ties and collaboration in New York and capitals will be very close if Iceland wins its bid. For the USG, this will mean that engagement in other Nordic capitals will take on new significance in influencing Iceland's position.

13. (C/NF) Comment: Despite some policy differences and the challenges of working with such a short-staffed diplomatic corps,

Post is confident that Iceland would work closely and productively with us on the Security Council. Iceland is a member of NATO with impeccable diplomatic credentials, and its default worldview is generally in line with U.S. values and priorities.

VAN VOORST

