

ICELAND

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(Speech given by
The Honorable Bjarni Benediktsson
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland
at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in
Washington, D.C., on April 4, 1949.)

"The nations who are now forming this new brotherhood are unlike each other in many respects: Some of them are the greatest and most powerful in the world. Others are small and weak.

"None is smaller or weaker than my own--the Icelandic nation. My people are unarmed and have been unarmed since the days of our Viking forefathers. We neither have nor can have an army. My country has never waged war on any country, and as an unarmed country we neither can nor will declare war against any nation, as we stated when entering the United Nations. In truth, we are quite unable to defend ourselves from any foreign armed attack.

"There was, therefore, hesitation in our minds as to whether there was a place for us as participants in this defensive pact. But our country is, under certain circumstances, of vital importance for the safety of the North Atlantic area. In the last war Great Britain took over the defense of Iceland, and later we concluded an agreement with the United States Government for military protection of Iceland during the war. Our participation in this pact shows that for our own sake, as well as for the sake of others, we want similar arrangements in case of a new war, which we all indeed hope and pray never will occur.

"But it is not only this realistic reason which has decided our attitude. We also want to make it crystal clear that we belong and want to belong to this free community of free nations which now is being formally founded.

"It is a fact, as I said before, that we are unlike each other in many respects, but there are many things which bind us solidly together.

"We all face the same danger. In this world of ours, where distances have vanished, peace indeed is indivisible. The same disruptive elements are everywhere at their sinister work. Everywhere they are accusing us, who are working for peace, of being warmongers.

"When we were discussing this pact in the Parliament of Iceland, those elements tried with force to hinder that venerable institution in its work. Such violence has never before been tried against the thousand-years-old Parliament of Iceland.

"The misguided crowd which tried this pretended they were shouting for peace. This contradictory behaviour of throwing stones with your hands while you are clamouring for peace with your lips is not in accordance with Icelandic tradition nor is it in conformity with Western culture. We all know where those habits originate, and this mentality certainly is the greatest menace to the world today.

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(1) "But it is not only this threat to world peace and human well-being which unites us. Neither is it only the fact that we all live in the same part of the world. There are stronger bonds which bind us together.

"We all belong to the same culture. We would all prefer to lose our lives rather than lose our freedom, either as individuals or nations. We all believe in friendly cooperation among nations. We all want peace for all the world and well-being for mankind.

"Therefore, we gather here today hopefully to sign this solemn treaty."

(2) ... "The nations we represent, above all, are peaceful nations. No nations have shown more clearly that they are opposed to the use of force and abhor aggression. The spirit of friendship and understanding has prevailed. I hope that that spirit will be maintained and peace may be preserved for mankind."

("The Scotsman", May 19, 1950.

Mr. Benediktsson, Addresses at the end of the London session of the twelve Foreign Ministers of the Atlantic Council)
