

## Climate Change and New Security Issues

H.E. Dr. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, President of Iceland

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us.

Today it is our honor to welcome His Excellency President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson of Iceland to our breakfast program. He will be discussing one of the most challenging problems facing the entire planet, climate change and security issues.

While this subject may appear to be complicated and uncertain, the underlying premise is fairly straightforward: Climate change is taking place very quickly and is already having a significant impact in many regions and on most ecosystems, particularly in developing countries. With melting ice sheets, huge increases in sea levels, stronger and more numerous hurricanes and tornadoes, climate change is posing an increasing threat to our very being.

Global warming has the potential not only to aggravate existing international crises, but to create additional problems which, in turn, can present mounting security issues on a global scale. For example, in some locations we have already seen how societies have outstripped the food-bearing capacity of the land, resulting in chronic hunger, environmental degradation, and a large-scale exodus of desperate populations migrating to neighboring countries. Other consequences we can expect to see are increased frequency and severity of disease outbreaks, which may heighten the risk of state failure and regional conflagration.

In 1988, *Newsweek* first raised the issue of global warming. It was later revealed that at the time there were doubts about the reality of this warming. However, two decades later, not only do all scientists acknowledge that this is a real phenomenon affecting us, but knowledgeable leaders who care about the future of our world also agree that something needs to be done.

President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson is a pacesetter who is rapidly gaining attention for bringing Iceland's quest for using clean energy to the attention of the world. In recognizing that new threats demand new solutions, he has been foremost among world leaders not only in aggressively debating how to respond to the threat of global warming, but in also setting an example by working on ways to decrease his country's dependency on fossil fuels. By encouraging Iceland to find clean energy alternatives to coal and oil, our speaker stands out as an inspiration. He has made a conscious strategic commitment to develop his country's domestic geothermal energy resources, thereby taking the necessary steps to ensure that Iceland's future will be a sustainable one. Today, approximately 70 percent of Iceland's total energy usage is tied to geothermal sources, essentially eliminating most carbon emissions and dramatically reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels of any type.

Long, long ago, the exploits of Iceland's early heroes were chronicled in a collection of old Norse poems called the [Eddas](#), which are still read today. This morning we greet a contemporary Icelandic hero who is helping to forge a new epic. This time it is one that involves a climatic struggle whose success will serve as a prototype for generations to come.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to Iceland's newest conquering hero, His Excellency President of Iceland Olafur Ragnar Grimsson.

Thank you for joining us.

## Remarks

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is both an honor and a privilege to address you here this morning on a subject which, for the last ten years, has profoundly influenced not only my responsibilities, but also my intellectual journey. As we all know, for a long time, it was indeed an uphill battle to have these matters addressed in a proper way, because the doubters and the naysayers often occupied center stage. But recently, in the last year or two, we have seen a fundamental shift, primarily because—I would almost say "unfortunately"—the evidence is now overwhelming. The latest research on the Arctic and the Greenland ice sheet indicates that the extent of the melting which previously was expected to take place by the middle of this century has already taken place.

But the people of Iceland don't really need to read extensive international reports, because we are witnessing back home the alarming rate of the melting of the glaciers, glaciers which have for centuries, even thousands of years, been the largest in Europe. The pace of retreat in my country is now so striking that some mountains and valleys which have been covered by ice for centuries are now visible for the first time.

In many ways, my country can be described as a theater of the climate-change process. It's not only because we have the largest glaciers in Europe, but also because—although it surprises many—we are also struggling with the largest desert in Europe. We are, in addition, very much aware of how the Gulf Stream, sent to us courtesy of Mexico, encircles our island, joining the water produced by the melting of the Arctic, and so creating what can be described as the motor that drives the entire conveyor belt of ocean currents influencing climate, not only in Europe, but also in Asia, in Africa, and the Americas.

But Iceland, as was mentioned in the introduction, can also serve as an inspiration, as an example of how to battle climate change through comprehensive transformation of our energy systems. In the early years of my life, over 80 percent of Iceland's energy needs were met by oil and coal. I was brought up in a small fishing village where oil was the only energy resource. Now 100 percent of our electricity is produced from clean energy resources, and over 75 percent of our total energy needs, including cars and shipping, are met by either hydro or geothermal power. In the lifetime of one generation, we have transformed Iceland from being predominantly a fossil fuel country into becoming a world leader as regards the production and the consumption of clean energy. I strongly believe that if we could do it, so can others.

Therefore, as we should remember, the fight against climate change is fundamentally a question about the future of energy. Global warming could clearly be slowed down, or even averted completely, if, I may say, the Icelandic model were followed on a global scale, by utilizing the variety of clean energy resources which are available to every country in the world. When we began this process, we had been for centuries one of the poorest countries in Europe. If such a country could achieve this transformation within a single generation, I fundamentally believe that there are very few excuses for others.

The problem is, however, that the time on this issue is very short and the hurdles are, of course, enormous. Unfortunately, it seems wise to prepare our nations and the international community for dealing with the consequences of climate change. A formidable body of scientists now has concluded that we only have 10 to 15 years to transform our energy systems in ways which could prevent irreversible effects of climate change.

I have, this summer, been president for 12 years. To me, it's not a long time. I know there are some people in my country who think it's long enough. But I mention it here today to indicate that 10 to 15 years is a shockingly short time.

There are others who argue that we might have 20 to 30 years to achieve the same result.

In either case, it is indeed a very short period. Therefore, even the ultimate optimists might find it difficult to believe that our national economies and our global system could be radically altered within such a short time span.

I do, however, believe that it can be done. I want to emphasize that very strongly here this morning. In that sense, I am perhaps the ultimate optimist. Yet I am also a realist, molded by decades of involvement in national and international politics and decision making. I know that the pace of reform can indeed be slow and often frustrating. Even if you can, as we say in my country, lead the horse to the water with strong and persistent goading, it's not easy to make him drink.

It therefore seems to me prudent to follow two simultaneous and parallel courses of action. One involves the transformation of our energy systems, our lifestyles, our societies, our economies, in order to minimize, and preferably prevent, climate change. Although, as I have said this morning, it is a colossal task, it can be achieved, especially if we are guided by the same vision and confidence which inspired the ending of the Cold War and

brought mankind through the Great Depression and two world wars into a new security framework.

But the other course of action consists of preparing for the disastrous consequences of the global warming which is already on the horizon, to engage in a comprehensive and profound dialogue on the new security challenges facing us, on how to map out the global and the regional institutions, and how they could tackle the task ahead.

When the Security Council met in 2007 to discuss climate change, some doubted that it was the proper forum for such a discussion. [Margaret Beckett](#), who was then the British foreign secretary, argued, however, that the conflict erupting in Sudan was an example of a crisis which climate change could only make worse. In the UK concept paper, it was argued that since no other international forum had addressed these challenges, a discussion by the Security Council would make a useful initial contribution, dealing with such questions as how the Security Council could play a part in a more integrated approach to conflict prevention in connection to climate-related factors and how the international community could prepare more effectively to support states or regions facing increased risks of instability due to these same factors.

But others argued at the time that the Security Council was not the right venue for these discussions. They said that the General Assembly, on the other hand, where all member-countries were represented, was the appropriate forum.

But whatever position one takes on these procedural questions, it is clear that in the year which has passed since the Security Council held its open debate on the relationship between energy, climate, and security, a consensus has emerged that security challenges caused by climate change must indeed be addressed, and in a comprehensive manner. The International Alert report last November claimed to identify 46 countries at risk of violent conflict and a further 56 facing a high risk of instability as a result of climate change. The UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) executive director, [Achim Steiner](#), and other speakers warned at the Bali Conference that climate change was indeed a security issue. Scholars at the University of Hong Kong reminded us that it was the oscillation of agricultural production brought about by long-term climate change that drove China's historical war-peace cycles.

Three weeks ago, [Javier Solana](#), together with the European Commission, presented a report to European heads of state and governments. Its core argument was that climate change is already having a profound impact on international security and that this development will be intensified in the years ahead, because climate change aggravates the stresses and the strains both within and between countries, threatening to overburden those countries and regions which are already fragile and conflict-prone.

Javier Solana emphasized that those most affected by climate change are not the countries most responsible for causing it, but rather the poor and the least developed nations. Many others have stressed this point. Thus, climate change could intensify the North-South resentment and pit major polluters against those most seriously affected, thus widening an already troubling divide.

This important report is the European Union's first in-depth study of the impact of global warming on security policies.

It is interesting that a week later, it was known in Britain that Prime Minister [Brown](#) intends to establish a special national security council designed to combat the threats of terrorism and climate change. Increasingly, many small island states are giving high priority to these security concerns. For them, the prospect of the rising sea levels and the increased frequency of destructive hurricanes poses a greater threat than any military scenarios have done up to now. Similarly, continental states with long and low coasts are rapidly becoming aware of what could happen. This applies to prosperous and poor nations alike. Around a fifth of the planet's population lives in coastal areas, which are threatened by rising sea levels. Hurricane Katrina and the fate of New Orleans was therefore a wake-up call, not just for this country, but also for all of us.

In my visit to India last February, where I was accompanied by Icelandic experts both in glaciology and economic and social development, we entered into what I called a missionary dialogue with my friends and many prominent Indian leaders and scientists in order to raise the alarm over what is indeed happening to the glaciers in the Himalayas. This is a development that has hitherto been among the most neglected parts of the global climate change debate. These glaciers have created great water reservoirs for almost 700 million people on the Indian side alone and provide the basis for both food and energy production. If China and other Himalayan states are included, the impact of the melting of the Himalayan glaciers could drastically affect the livelihood, the food, the economic security of over 1 billion people.

Although more research indeed needs to be done in this area, some experts are already predicting that the Himalayan glaciers might disappear completely within the next 40 to 70 years—an alarming prospect for nations which together account for a third of mankind.

Yet there is no regional mechanism for dealing with this problem, for promoting the necessary scientific or policy cooperation. Perhaps the [Arctic Council](#), which was established in the 1990s by eight countries encircling the Arctic, including the United States and Russia, could serve as a model for what I have called a new Himalayan council. Like the Arctic Council, it could initially serve as a forum for the promotion of the necessary research and consequently, hopefully, help to evolve a constructive dialogue on how to meet these drastic challenges.

The [Arctic Climate Impact Assessment](#) published by the Arctic Council in 2004 and based on work by scientists in the eight founding countries was the most systematic and extensive account of recent climate change until the [IPCC](#) [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] published its comprehensive statement last year. This Arctic report demonstrated that climate change was taking place three times faster in the northern regions than in any other part of the world.

I believe, therefore, that the Arctic Council and its development could provide both important lessons and constructive guidelines for India, China, and other Himalayan states, which could prepare for what might happen, unfortunately, in the next few decades, a council which could initiate similar programs of scientific cooperation as were created between Russia, the United States, and the other Arctic countries.

But although the prospect in the Himalayas is among the most alarming to be found on this issue, we have to acknowledge that all nations everywhere on the planet will be disastrously affected by climate change. It is therefore necessary that every state become a constructive partner in an advanced global dialogue on the security implications of climate change, even if this dialogue is mostly of an exploratory nature in the early stages. We need to move from the old ways of looking at national, regional, and international security towards the unfamiliar yet highly urgent challenges that lie ahead.

The international institutions which were established in the aftermath of the Second World War were based, as we all know, on traditional security analysis. But it's now important to emphasize, as is done by the recent EU report, that the multilateral system is at risk if the international community fails to address the threats associated with climate change. Therefore, I fundamentally believe it is both timely and wise to start examining these new security issues in a systematic way. I will offer you here this morning the following list of ten relevant areas, based on analysis by experts and scientists, alerting us to the complicated yet important task ahead, to the conflicts which the warming of the planet could create.

First, a widespread water crisis, caused by the drying up of lakes and rivers, by the spreading of deserts, and the melting of glaciers. Since many of the earth's biggest rivers run through many countries, the drying up could cause nations to take drastic, even military action in order to secure their own water supplies. Already, the water systems in the Middle East are under intensive stress. Two-thirds of the Arab world depends on water resources originating outside their borders. Israel might lose 60 percent of its water supply this century. China, with a fifth of mankind, only has access to a very few—some people say only 7 percent—of the global water reserves.

Secondly, in all continents, the reduction of arable land will have a severe impact on food security and create an acute crisis for hundreds of millions of people. As we know, historically, the conflicts over water and land, the basis of agricultural production, have led to wars in Europe and elsewhere. Climate change would introduce gigantic dimensions into these traditional causes of military conflict.

Third, increased flooding and prolonged droughts will intensify these developments and make it extremely difficult to deal with them in a comprehensive and systematic way, especially in view of the fourth item of my list, migration.

Migration between states, regions, and even continents could reach a level hitherto unknown. The migrants would be climate refugees trying to escape droughts, hunger, water shortages, and rising sea levels, looking for new and secure homes, because theirs would have been destroyed by either storms or flooding.

Almost 2 billion Asians live within 35 miles of the coastline. A large proportion of them will lose their homes as a result of rising sea levels. The tsunami tragedy in the Indian Ocean three years ago just gives us an idea of what could happen.

The fifth is the urge to enter countries which fare better in the era of climate change. This urge could grow to such an extent that all the resources and capabilities of those fortunate countries would be threatened to the same degree as if they were faced with a massive military invasion. Furthermore, deep-rooted ethnic and religious tensions could escalate and might lead to radicalization and conflicts that would prove almost impossible to control.

Sixth, fragile and weak states could be in danger of collapsing, and small island states could see all or most of their territories disappear. Thus, entire state structures could wither away, leaving the population in what we could call a political no-man's land and entirely reliant on emergency aid from abroad. Similarly, communities

within states, communities with special ethnic and historical characteristics, might see the land destroyed, causing great strains on the capacity of respective national governments. The consequences could be some form of civil war or other prolonged conflicts.

Seven, climate change will also have a dramatic impact on our energy systems, on our capacity to generate electricity and harness the power which is the basis of our economic prosperity. Rising sea levels could damage oil and gas reservoirs and make some of them inaccessible in different parts of the world. We only have to call to mind the problems of the Middle East in recent decades and the importance of oil to realize what could be at stake.

Eighth, the energy resources in the Arctic, which amount to a quarter of the untapped global stocks. These are also highly relevant with respect to the new security dimensions created by climate change. The placing of the Russian flag on the ocean bed by a submarine expedition last year was a sign that a new security era had indeed dawned in the Arctic. The access to the region's energy resources could be a strategic advantage in the 21st-century global economy.

The ninth is related to this, the opening of new sea routes caused by the melting of the Arctic ice, both the so-called Northern Sea Route and the Bering Sea Route. Those not only shorten the ocean trade routes from Asia to Europe and America in a revolutionary way, but they also require systematic arrangements and formal agreements and treaties if they are going to be successful, involving Russia, the United States, Canada, and the Nordic countries. These new sea routes could become as important for global trade in the 21st century as the Suez and Panama Canals were in their time. As we all know, those canals gave rise to serious tensions and sometimes military conflicts.

It is therefore clear that the control over the new sea routes which climate change will open up in the Arctic will confer enormous power and wealth on those countries that find themselves in the key geographical positions.

The final element on my list here this morning is humanitarian crises caused by extreme weather events, which will become, unfortunately, more frequent and more dramatic, creating societal and cross-border stresses with the potential for multiple security implications. When many such crises occur simultaneously, it will severely test the capacity of the existing international institutions. The global demand for relief action could put the Security Council and other UN bodies into a more challenging crisis than they have ever envisioned.

These ten areas of new security concerns caused by climate change which I have briefly outlined here this morning support the view expressed at the Bali Conference that combating climate change would be the central peace challenge of the 21st century. It is therefore of utmost importance to marshal our forces, both nationally and internationally, in order to prevent disastrous global warming, since the consequences of failure could aggravate old tensions and trigger new ones all over the world, spilling into violence, wars, and military threats. Countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and both the Americas would be affected. No one will be immune from these threats to the permanent security of our nations.

Within one or two decades, the dramatic transformations which I have just outlined here this morning—and some might think they are too dramatic, but I fundamentally believe that they are almost a clinical analysis of what could happen—would dominate the international agenda. Time is therefore not on our side. Metaphorically speaking, we could almost say that we are already close to midnight. Even now, the evidence indicates that the warming of the planet and the melting of the ice has taken place more quickly, as I mentioned in the beginning of my speech, than was previously predicted.

We must therefore seek guidance from the heritage which grew out of earlier global crises and model our actions with respect to the frameworks already in existence in the treaties and also in the institutions, both regional and global, which have up to now provided the pillars of the existing international community. The dialogue on how this should be done, how to proceed from this kind of analysis to preventive action, how to extend and develop our international security framework, is, I believe, now a clear priority. We must use the next few years to build consensus and agreement on the necessary measures. Otherwise, the consequences of climate change could become more tragic than we ever imagined, causing upheavals in global institutional frameworks, especially the main one which was created after the Second World War.

But we were able to contain the Cold War by a series of treaties which at first seemed unattainable. We witnessed the building of a new democratic and free Europe within a single decade, transforming global politics from deadly confrontation to a more interconnected world. We were able to land a man on the moon and gain extensive knowledge of its landscape. We have now to face the startling fact that we know less about the earth's oceans than the lunar landscape.

The [Law of the Sea](#), which was created a few decades ago, after a prolonged period of negotiations, was a monumental achievement, regulating what before had been open to conflicts and confrontation. Its wisdom is now being acknowledged even by those who earlier were reluctant to sign on.

The Law of the Sea therefore can be a model and an inspiration for the task ahead. For my country, the Law of the Sea was a triumphant proof that military confrontation and conflicts over economic zones could be replaced by a legal and systematic approach to solving problems between nations. It guaranteed the security of our waters, while enabling the nation to harness the ocean resources. It was an innovative and brilliant framework, created by constructive cooperation between scientists and experts, legal minds and policymakers, political leaders and international authorities.

We now need a similar call to action, a visionary collaboration between brilliant minds, but accompanied by an invitation to all concerned—all citizens—to become involved, to be heard, and to be counted.

As we face potentially the greatest security challenge of the 21st century, we must not allow ourselves to fail in this endeavor. If we do so, our children and our grandchildren will have every right to blame us.

Thank you very much.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** I would like a progress report on Iceland's intent to become a hydrogen power.

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** We created a project seven or eight years ago, together with DaimlerChrysler—or Mercedes-Benz, as it was at that time—Shell International, and Norsk Hydro. The aim was to use Iceland as a laboratory or as a model for transforming our traffic system from being based on oil over to hydrogen, to create a traffic system with zero emissions into the air—only water coming out of the cars.

In many ways, it has been quite successful. We opened the first hydrogen, what we would call gas station in the old traffic system, in the world, for hydrogen cars to come up and get fuel for their needs. We introduced buses into the Reykjavik traffic system to test out how people reacted to this. We are now beginning to have private cars. Last year we got the first hydrogen private car. I was fortunate enough to be invited to test it. I was so thrilled that after a few minutes, I exceeded the speed limit. I was told I was the first individual to exceed the speed limit in a hydrogen car in my country. Fortunately, the police were not present, so I didn't get a ticket.

In many ways, it has been an interesting cooperation—interesting also because this is one of the major car producers in the world and one of the big oil companies in the world involved. When Shell came to us eight years ago, I must admit, I was a bit suspicious. I asked them, "Why on earth are you interested in this hydrogen project?"

The answer was very revealing. They said, "We still want to be in business in 100 years' time." They realize, perhaps better than the rest of us, that the oil will run out.

But, of course, hydrogen can be expensive to produce in many other countries. There are various problems still with this project. But in my country we have clean energy to produce the hydrogen. If you are going to produce the hydrogen from coal and so on, you might have a different proposition. But certainly the development of the hydrogen experiment is one of the contributions that Iceland has made to this problem, by opening the country up, the entire country, as a kind of testing ground for this experiment.

I must admit, however, that in the last year or so, I have been increasingly fascinated by the great progress in electric cars. I think we will probably see more electric cars on the roads than hydrogen cars. But hydrogen could be very effective for the shipping, for the fishing fleets, for the cargo ships, and so on. So we need the combination of all these clean energy resources.

The progress of this project has been much faster than I would even have expected when they first came to us with the idea.

**QUESTION:** Thank you for the sobering note and for an excellent speech.

While agreeing 100 percent on the security aspects of dealing with the issue of climate change, I find myself in a little bit of difference as to where we deal with this issue. With all the confidence we have in the Security Council, particularly after Iceland is going to join recently, we still believe that the forum to discuss these issues is much more to the General Assembly and to the [ECOSOC](#), the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Why? You mentioned it directly. What is happening in Darfur is an issue of underdevelopment. While we all recognize that there is a humanitarian situation that needs to be addressed in Darfur, there is no effort to elevate this underdevelopment situation in Darfur. While the United Nations is spending \$1.3 billion—with a capital "B"—on a peacekeeping force that's going to be there, per year, there is not enough money to elevate this underdevelopment situation.

If we put much more money on the development aspect, through the General Assembly, through ECOSOC, it will immediately balance the effect of the security concerns that you have highlighted, particularly on issues like Sudan and many of the African countries that are in dire need of development.

So I agree fully with the concerns, but I see that there is some division of work that has to be done between the Security Council, the General Assembly, and ECOSOC, and some division of resources to be allocated to security, to development, and to other aspects of life.

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** Thank you very much for these constructive points. I agree with you. As I said in my speech, whatever position we take on these procedural discussions that took place last year or so, it is important that we start the dialogue on this, that we start to educate ourselves, and that we bring in, as I said before, scientists and experts, as well as policymakers.

Quite frankly, this is an issue where, with all due respect to myself and the colleagues in governments and all the policymakers, we will not progress very much without involving the scientific community in a very constructive way.

As I stated also, it's unfair that the effects of climate change are more destroying the basis of life and economic activity for those who are least responsible for this effort. Therefore, I believe those of us in Europe and in this country, with all due respect, need to be more constructive and more active on this and engage other large countries, like India, China, Brazil, Russia, and the others, in a constructive way.

Since time is very short, if the scientists are correct—and I don't really care whether it's 20 to 30 years or 10 to 15 years; in either case, it's extremely short. It's now more than 20 years since [Reagan and Gorbachev met in Reykjavik](#) to begin their dialogue.

Therefore, we should have this open discussion in every forum, everywhere. It has to be an open invitation to everybody to participate. We should not, as I hope I made clear in my speech, restrict it to any formal organization, whether it is the General Assembly or the ECOSOC or the Security Council or regional institutions, like the European Union or the African Union or whatever. It is such a mammoth task that it has to be a broad invitation to everybody to be involved.

Quite frankly—let's face it—we are all responsible. Nobody can put the blame on somebody else exclusively. As individuals, in the way we behave and so on, especially those of us who come from the developed part of the world, we are all, to a smaller or larger extent, responsible.

While realizing that I put the issue in stark terms here this morning, I did it because I couldn't reach any other conclusion, looking at the evidence. The challenges are enormous. And it must be a broad invitation to all institutions and all citizen groups and scientific bodies to get involved. Quite frankly, nobody knows at this stage how we are going to do it.

**QUESTION:** I would like you to tell us a little bit more about the Himalayan council proposal of yours. Which arenas has it been raised in—intergovernmental, parliamentary? It seems like a very interesting proposal.

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** It is an idea which I first raised in India a few months ago, to my friends there. I raise it here publicly, perhaps, for the first time in a speech which is on the record. I do it because I think without such cooperation in the Himalayas, it will be very difficult to deal with this enormous challenge of the melting of the Himalayan glaciers.

But this is a very sensitive area. There are large parts of the Himalayas that are military territories. There have been sensitive wars. I don't have to describe the political situation to you here this morning.

The Arctic Council is an interesting model. When it was established in the early 1990s, there was a great reluctance to let it do anything. As I have sometimes said to my friend [Bill Clinton](#), even his administration hardly wanted it to be anything more than a letterhead and a very informal-discussion club, with no secretariat, no systematic tasks, and so on and so forth.

But it has evolved in a very interesting way, in a very constructive way, because the task was important. It's very fascinating that Russia and the United States are sitting at this table with Canada and the five Nordic countries, constructively cooperating on this issue and making it primarily scientifically and research-driven. So the policy discussion, which in the beginning was hardly there, has evolved very gradually.

That is why I believe the model of the Arctic Council—if somebody had said 15 or 20 years ago that Russia and the United States could cooperate on the Arctic, which was the key area for the missile/nuclear confrontation during the height of the Cold War, and could sit together around the table—of course, the presence of the Nordic

countries has helped, to some extent.

But the Himalayas are, in a way, also an area where you have dominant, big countries, but you also have small countries. I believe that combination offers interesting diplomatic and political possibilities, which, in the case of the Arctic Council, have proved to be very constructive.

But there is still no secretariat. There is still only a rotating chairmanship.

By the way, with all due respect to officials who work in secretariats, it has also turned out to be a politically fascinating and very productive model.

**QUESTION:** Could you discuss the role of nuclear energy and water desalinization in the scheme of things?

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** I'm no expert on nuclear energy. Fortunately, my country has been able to become a clean-energy country without having to utilize nuclear energy to any extent.

What I have, however, observed is the debate in Europe, the difficulties with countries as different as Sweden, the United Kingdom, Germany, and others. It's absolutely clear from the European debate that it is still a fundamentally very divisive issue. Some of the fundamental problems have not been solved to such an extent that a broad consensus, national or even regional, can be created on going in a big way towards nuclear power to help us to solve this problem. So it's absolutely clear that, politically and scientifically, a lot more work needs to be done if, for example, those countries which have utilized nuclear power longer than most others are going to agree to use that option in a big way.

**QUESTIONER:** What about water desalinization?

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** As I say, I would hesitate to make any statement on that. It's not within an area where I find myself sufficiently on solid ground. I'm still, after 12 years as president, in the business of wanting to speak in a way that I know something about instead of just reading out text that somebody else wrote for me. [Laughter]

**QUESTION:** Mr. President, thank you for a fabulous *tour de force* here on this subject.

I claim some seniority here, in the sense that I first found out about wind power just south of Iceland in 1940 in a hurricane, with 70-foot waves. I thought I was going to drown. I thought we would capsize.

I just read recently that Denmark has excess windmill power, energy developed from windmills, which they sell sometimes to other Scandinavian countries. Could you also mention what your country is doing on wind power?

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** Although we have a lot of wind, as you demonstrated, we have been blessed by the Almighty with such enormous hydro and geothermal resources that, up to now, we have not yet had to tap the wind resources.

But you are absolutely correct to point out the case of Denmark with respect to wind. I think it's one of the neglected cases in terms of people being aware of what Denmark has done in this area. I sometimes say to my friends in the United Kingdom, when they are discussing the future, why is it that Denmark has exceeded the United Kingdom enormously in terms of wind energy production, whereas the United Kingdom, basically situated in the same place on the globe, could also do the same?

The combination of different clean energy sources—solar, wind, geothermal—within the same power system, even within the same national grids, is, I think, one of the most productive and positive aspects of this development. But we have tended up to now to talk about them in separate boxes. We talk about wind power separately; we talk about solar power separately; we talk about geothermal separately; hydro separately. We need to integrate them.

For example, in the case of Africa, there are many countries in Africa, in the Rift Valley—Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti—which, of course, have enormous potential for sun power. But they also have enormous potential for geothermal power. We are engaged, in Iceland, in cooperation with Djibouti, which now relies completely on oil for its energy sources, to transform Djibouti into an almost comprehensive geothermal country, making Djibouti, hopefully, in not such a long time, the first clean-energy country in Africa.

In India, I learned on my last visit that there has been enormous and fascinating progress in India in terms of wind and solar power. This has not been very much noted by the rest of the world. Even some people in India tell me that it has not been noted sufficiently in India.



By combining those resources with geothermal and hydro, one can create in countries like India and China very impressive, comprehensive networks of different clean energy sources.

California, here in the United States, and many other states within the union also have this potential, to a large extent.

I was in Mexico a few weeks ago on a state visit. I found it very interesting to talk to the president and the different governors and others about the possibility of linking up solar, wind, and geothermal energy to make Mexico a much stronger clean-energy country than it has been up to now.

So I think, fundamentally, we need to start talking about integrating all these different sources of clean energy.

**QUESTION:** Mr. President, every time I listen to a speech by you, I leave the room with a tremendous amount of knowledge and fascinating information. This time, as the last time I listened to you, you added so much to my experience and you enriched it to no end.

Also I am among other ambassadors who started our lives as junior diplomats, and we were very active members of the Law of the Sea. For us in Palestine, in fact, the Palestine Liberation Organization entered the UN system before the General Assembly. We entered it as observers in the Law of the Sea.

Of course, we were and are still extremely occupied by issues related to putting an end to occupation and becoming an independent state. Yet we were asked to participate in this fascinating field of the Law of the Sea. We tried to participate and contribute to that process as much as possible. But I think people can understand why we were very much attached to the issues at hand of dealing with the tragedy of our people.

My question is related to that. Many of us in the South—in Africa, in Asia, in the Middle East, in Latin America—who are very much occupied with issues of poverty, of development, of, in our case, putting an end to occupation and having independence for our people and putting an end to the tragedy of our people—how do we reconcile dealing with the issues at hand, the day-to-day issues—in India, for example, poverty and development—and yet join others, particularly in the North, who are maybe taking the lead in dealing with the issue of climate change, without us being left behind? How can we participate in this process, while we are so much preoccupied with day-to-day issues that are extremely important to us?

We don't want to be, as in the past during the colonial time, always left behind, while others in the North create the problem of climate change and take the lead of trying to fix it and to impose on us, in both cases, the end result of their contribution.

Again, I am so delighted to see you.

**OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON:** Thank you very much for your words and for the compliment you paid my speech. I hope I also left you with an optimistic message. Although I described a dramatic analysis of what could happen, let me stress again that I am fundamentally an optimist. I believe we can deal with this in a constructive way. I don't accept that we will have to face this no matter what.

I take that encouragement not only from my involvement, in the 1980s and the 1990s, in the Cold War politics, as was referred to here before, when I was president of an international parliamentary organization which spent a lot of effort trying to create different perspectives in the Cold War tensions between the superpowers and working with many of your countries in a constructive way, having meetings with [Amre Moussa](#) when he was ambassador here and many others on how to deal with this deadly confrontation between the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, NATO and the United States. Most people at that time were feeling absolutely without hope. We had a million people demonstrating here in the middle of New York in 1983, if I remember correctly, or 1982. We had hundreds of thousands demonstrating all over Europe.

But if I look at the history of my country, which was for centuries the poorest country in Europe, it had to fight for 100 years for its independence. Once we got it, we still had the British and the German and the Belgian and the other trawlers in our economic zone. If we hadn't extended it, first to 4 miles, then to 12 miles, then to 50 miles, and then to 200 miles, the republic would have collapsed, in my opinion, economically, because there would have been no economic basis for the new state.

So it was a question of utter survival for us. Every time, with all due respect, the British sent the navy to try to stop us. It was a very serious, risky confrontation. We even threatened to leave NATO if the U.S. and the others didn't deal with this. You can read in [Kissinger's](#) memoirs a description of when [Nixon](#) and he came to Iceland to meet with [Pompidou](#) in the 1970s. This was in the middle of one of the cold wars. The Icelandic government took this up with the U.S. president and then threatened to kick out the American base and leave NATO if they didn't deal with this.

Kissinger remarks that this was the first occasion when he saw the small threatening the big in this way.

Of course, the problems of Palestine and the issues you referred to are much more complex and much more difficult. But I believe there are solutions to this also, in the economic way. In terms of the sun energy, for example, in India, in this remarkable institute, [TERI](#) [The Energy and Resources Institute], which [Dr. Pachauri](#) heads up (who received the Nobel Peace Prize with [Al Gore](#) on behalf of the IPCC), they have developed a small sunlamp to produce electricity and light. It's a very small lamp, designed for the villages and the poor, the households that suffer electricity shortages and power cut-downs.

There are about a billion people on the earth that do not have light from clean resources. Either they have no light at all in their households or they have to burn fire or kerosene and so on.

The total cost of bringing these lamps to a billion people, a fifth of mankind, is only \$15 billion. It's really a tiny amount.

I mention this here today to indicate that there are already technical solutions that can transform the livelihood and the economic opportunities of small households or small companies in difficult areas, so they don't have to rely on the power structures or the electricity generated by either neighboring countries or players who are not willing to play by the book.

To create an energy independency for an individual or a household or a village or a small company can be an important element in helping to solve a crisis, not only in what you refer to, but to others.

Just recently, I made a visit both to Qatar and Abu Dhabi, two small countries in the region. My foreign minister went to Egypt. We have found it very interesting to engage in this sort of constructive dialogue. As you know, the Nordic countries have traditionally been very willing to play a helpful role in this area.

But we must, above all, be optimistic. If I look at the history of my country, up to the 1970s it was classified by the UNDP as a developing country, a nation of farmers and fishermen. A few months ago, it reached the number-one spot on the UNDP human development index. It is a story that leaves you with optimism. That's why I'm still in this business, because I believe we can change things.

Thank you very much.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Thank you very much for your optimism and enthusiasm.

Thank you all for coming.

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