

The Island of Greenland and the Transatlantic Relationship

(Translated)

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Greenland has never been merely a silent, frozen mass of ice in the far north; it has always been at the heart of the great power struggles. Today, US President Trump is reviving century-old ambitions, transforming the Arctic silence into political noise and a clash of wills. Amidst the Davos agreements, Chinese ambitions, and the weakness of the old continent, questions arise: Is the moment approaching for Greenland to break free from Danish rule, and become a new American state, or will it remain a battleground for the next Cold War?

On January 22, 2026, Trump announced that he had reached a “framework agreement” with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte regarding Greenland and the entire Arctic region, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He then announced that he was backing down from imposing additional tariffs on European countries, which were scheduled to take effect on February 1, as a gesture of “goodwill” following European concessions on the matter.

To understand the nature of the conflict, it is essential to consider the facts about this island; it is the largest island in the world, with snow and glaciers covering approximately 80% of its surface area. The ice-free area is roughly the size of Sweden, but only a very small portion of it is suitable for agriculture.

- Total area: 2,166,086 km²
- Inland ice and glaciers: 1,755,637 km²
- Ice-free area: 410,449 km² and coastline length: 44,087 km
- Greenland has a population of approximately 56,500, with about one-third (19,900) concentrated in the capital city of Nuuk.

The United States’ interest in Greenland dates back to the 19th century, and it has attempted to purchase the island from Denmark several times, just as it purchased the Danish West Indies in 1917. The issue has garnered attention in American political circles at various times, most notably in 1867, 1910, 1946, 1955, 2019, and 2025. Several American officials have advocated for acquiring the island, including US Secretaries of State William H. Seward and James Byrnes, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, and most recently, US President Donald Trump during his first term in 2019, and again after his election in 2024, as a means of strengthening American influence.

The issue is not only related to the recently discovered minerals and oil, but also to its strategic geographical location, which the Trump administration considers a vital and integral part of US national security.

To understand America’s relationship with the island, news reports have highlighted the strong and long-standing military presence in Greenland, which includes the Pituffik Space Base, formerly known as the Thule Air Base and early warning radar systems. This relationship dates back to 1941, when the Thule Agreement granted the U.S. military the authority to defend Greenland against potential Nazi attacks. In the 1950s, the island became a site for air defense systems equipped with nuclear weapons, giving the United States complete freedom of operation on land, in the air, and at sea there.

On April 27, 1951, the Thule Agreement (Thule I) was signed with the United States, which aimed to assist Denmark in defending Greenland within the framework of NATO. The military airbase at Narsarsuaq was developed into a joint base for Danish and American forces. At the end

of 1953, the United States established a weather station 140 km from the army base in Kangerlussuaq. The American forces built the station without Denmark's knowledge or permission. On March 15, 1954, the expansion of Thule Air Base began, including the installation of a new generation air defense system equipped with nuclear weapons. In February 1958, the U.S. Strategic Air Command (SAC) deployed four nuclear weapons (Mk-6 atomic bombs and MK 36 thermonuclear bombs) to Thule, along with 15 non-nuclear components.

On November 25, 2008, a referendum was held on the Greenland Self-Government Act, and a large majority of 75.5% voted in favor of expanded self-government. The act is seen as a step towards full independence from Denmark in the future. On June 21, 2009, an expanded self-government agreement came into effect. Only foreign policy and defense remained under Danish responsibility. The Greenlandic government assumed responsibility for the police, justice, and coastal protection, including those aspects affecting the provision of naval services, which include:

- The Greenlandic government will gain a significant degree of independence in determining its foreign affairs.
- Many aspects of foreign policy will no longer be tied to Danish policy.
- Control of the Greenlandic military coast guard will be transferred to the Greenlandic government.

These measures weakened Greenland's ties to Denmark and attracted other powers, such as China, which has designated the region a "new strategic frontier." China is seeking to shape international rules in the Arctic under the guise of scientific research, which experts view as a cover for long-term security interests.

- "It's very difficult to split the economic interests that China has from its strategic or security-driven interests. They are all interlinked," said Helena Legarda, an analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies, a Berlin-based think tank.
- "They want to expand its presence first through economic and scientific, and diplomatic means. Then in the future, they could argue that they have to be able to also project military power in the region to safeguard those interests," said Matti Puranen, an associate professor at the Finnish National Defence University in Helsinki.

Alongside China's ambitions, Russia stands out as a dominant polar player, possessing the largest fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers, which Trump considers a direct threat. This makes controlling Greenland a military necessity to break Russian dominance in the Arctic.

The issue, therefore, revolves around Trump's strategy of asserting dominance through the exercise of power. While he may have accepted the current concessions as interim objectives, he is planning for complete control, exploiting the weakness of the European Union, whose independent defense capabilities have been shown to be inadequate by the experience in Ukraine. Domestically, with the midterm congressional elections approaching in November 2026, Trump needs significant achievements to galvanize his electoral base, which revels in seeing their leader as a "maker of historic deals" who is restoring America's absolute power.

In conclusion, Greenland appears to be no longer just an island, but rather a barometer of international power dynamics. If Trump succeeds in imposing his vision, he will not only alter the region's geography but also officially declare the end of the era of traditional transatlantic partnerships, and the beginning of an era of comprehensive American "custodianship" over the North's resources and waterways.