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Greenland and U.S. National Security: Strategic Imperatives in the Arctic

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ABSTRACT

The research serves to draw the attention to the geopolitical relevance of the melting ice for the USA in the context of national security policy in the Arctic. And then there's Greenland which "simply" happens to be in the middle of the Arctic Circle and has had an anchor in the North American defense since World War II when the U.S. opposed the island to preserve shipping lanes in the North Atlantic. It is a legal basis outlined in 1916 with Danish sovereignty, and further specified in the bilateral Defense Agreement of 1951, and which has been kept up until today for NATO missile warning and space/base missile defense and space surveillance operations, and with the cornerstone Pituffik Space Base. Held by Greenland, the route place GIUK Gap is also of great international strategic significance for monitoring Russian naval activities. The Arctic's frozen edge is turning into a battleground between great powers as its melting ice transforms the region from frozen periphery to an enticing prospectus for Russia and China's cold-weather modernization plans and China's mission to further develop its 'Polar Silk Road'. The strategic interest of Greenland is enhanced by its raw material resources with a high concentration of rare earth elements, uranium, graphite and hydrocarbons. The two Trumps in 2019 and 2025 would have been responsible for sustaining the illusion that it was possible to get Greenland as a resource and as a security guarantee against Russia and China. According to this research, the goal of cooperation, rather than coercive acquisition, and alliance-based investment are the best ways to ensure air and missile defense of the United States' strategic interests without breaking the transatlantic unity and using existing legal mechanisms through transparent partnership working.

Introduction

Greenland which is located between the superpower in the North Atlantic and Arctic is the largest island in the world, a Danish colony which is a member state of NATO. The Arctic is warming at an average rate that is twice as fast as or maybe three times faster than the rest of the globe, resulting in a rapidly changing environment that the Army has to be ready to operate in (Corriveau, 2024). The Trump first administration's intent to purchase a Greenland during the summertime of 2019 brought Greenland's strategic location to the notice of a worldwide audience and revealed common misconceptions about its contemporary constitutional sovereignty. When Greenland immediately responded to a question about whether it was open to business and not sale variously signaled a profound change in American thinking about security, which increasingly began to perceive the Arctic through the prism of great power conflict between China and Russia. Access to vitally important resources, namely rare earth elements, and the island's advantageous strategic and military posture are the two main reasons for the United States' interest in Greenland. (Jacobsen & Olsvig, From Peary to Pompeo: The History of United States' Securitizations of Greenland, 2024).

But Trump second administration proceeded with his plan to annex the largest Island on the world within the sphere of influence of the US national security concerns, citing its importance to US national security matters (Stening, 2026). In an effort to demoralize China and Russia especially, the US starts secret negotiation to build more military buildings in Greenland as a part of a covert takeover of the island following Trump's invasion threat (English, 2026). Trump however has continued to work on his intentions irrespective of the claims by experts that purchasing Greenland of Denmark is not only unnecessary but also a hugely expensive decision considering the extent of military and commercial access to the region which already exists courtesy to an agreement being negotiated during the Cold War (Stening, 2026). Due to dangers, politics, and American pressure, Chinese attempts to engage in infrastructure and mining have mostly failed; nonetheless, U.S. overtures run the risk of pushing Greenland in the direction of other partners (Weisko, 2025). The Monroe Doctrine has been resurrected and radicalized by U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere under Trump's second term, casting the Americas as a U.S. sphere of influence while seeking territorial aggrandizement and coercive diplomacy (Spatafora, 2025).

The Arctic security has changed from being "low tension" related to the security environment to geostrategic. New trends include an "intensified American interest" in the Arctic region, which has, at the same time, faced the skeptical approach of Danes but compelled the government to combat any Chinese or Russian interference in the region. The Arctic region perceived threat from external powers have altered the formal representation and influence within the Danish Realm, lead to increase in discussion regarding independent Greenlandic agency (Jacobsen & Lindbjerg, Denmark's Security Perspectives on USA, China, and Russia in Greenland, 2024). The Arctic is changing from a remote area of collaboration to a crucial intersection of trends in geopolitics, the economy, climate change, and security. Climate change and melting ice increased maritime trade routes, the region has capacity to hold 90% of the world's economy and highly impact on the global security dynamic (Foggo & Gosnell, 2022). The post-Cold War era brought waning attention to the Arctic, but the 21st century has introduced new challenges: climate change, a global race for natural resources, new transportation routes, and old territorial disputes. These elements have produced a paradox in the area: they offer chances for Arctic states to work together while also posing fresh security risks (Janjgava, 2012).

In order to understand the present geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic, it is essential to analyze the traditional ways in which the US has represented the state of Greenland as a threat to American security or as an asset. A critical analyzing lens for comprehending how the United States has justified extraordinary measures in Greenland over the past 200 years to safeguard its shifting balance of power against changing adversaries is provided by applying the Copenhagen, Denmark School's framework of the securitization theory, which is focused on standardized scales, demographics, and cascading impacts (Jacobsen & Olsvig, From Peary to Pompeo: The History of United States' Securitizations of Greenland, 2024). The Russian forecasted economic and geopolitical destiny centers over the Arctic, and this is extensively reported by state-controlled media outlets. The native area Western Arctic, which consists of the US, Canada, and the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland), is noted in this discussion on strategy as the main generator of regional threat perception (Dalziel, Distorted Reality, 2025).

Literature Review

The previous studies included book Greenland in Arctic Security published in 2024 reveals that how securitization expanded and how foreign support is crucial for the Superpower U.S. to maintain its alliance and reputation. Book also discussed the challenges and threats at different scales, could impact the perception and legitimacy of the U.S. securitization efforts in future (Jacobsen & Olsvig, From Peary to Pompeo: The History of United States' Securitizations of Greenland, 2024). But book failed to explain the how securitization will impact on the U.S. national security in future. There were insufficient geopolitical analysis interplay role of military, politics economy and environmental sectors interlinked for U.S. future security architecture in the Greenland.

In 2025, research report named What Fuss over the Greenland published by the Institute for National Security Studies highlighted superpower rivalry in accordance to the independence of Greenland. Literature also elucidated the role of rare earth elements, how climate change is playing crucial role and yet china research investment remains dominated. It also help to understood how people sentiments manifest the powerful preferences for sovereignty rather than incorporate into United States created an obstacle to achieve the geopolitical interests (Weisko, 2025). The article failed to portray Greenland as a rebuilding economic tool for U.S. and its relevance in maintaining global world order mainly from China and Russia,

The research How to Understand Climate Change as Threat Multiplier in the arctic emphasized that understanding climate change is crucial to influence states policies, interests and military preparedness by filling gap of security dilemma in the arctic. It also specifically explored the security dynamics in the Barents and Russia Norway relations since 2008 (Knutsen & Pedersen, 2024). Literature failed to establish the how U.S. securitization shaped the recent geopolitics of arctic region, especially Greenland as pivot of its long-term strategy in order to claim the Russia is existential threat to U.S. National security.

The book titled *Greenland in the Arctic security having subtitle (De) securitization Dynamic under Climate Thaw and Geopolitical Freeze* in which Jacobsen and Lindbjerg discussed in their chapter *Denmark's Security Perspective on USA, China and Russia in Greenland* about the continuous foreign policy shift of Denmark towards Greenland in order to perceived threat from both others and them. They also analyzed the USA securitization in Greenland due to Russia and China rising interest in the arctic through military enhancement and research investment respectively. Russia concern about rebuilding the soviet base on Franz Josef Land around 1000 km east of the Thule Air Base led potential risks of conflict and Arctic exceptionalism (Jacobsen & Lindbjerg, *Denmark's Security Perspectives on USA, China, and Russia in Greenland*, 2024). The research gap in this focused on the USA interests in Greenlandic minerals, economic security and national security dynamics and how it is potential source of maintaining its dominancy over the resources and how it impacts on the Russia and china.

The article published in 2024 by Naval War College Review critically analyzed the U.S. Grand strategy focused on two key dominant elements which included the deep global engagements from president Biden's administration commitment to liberal international order to till a head and restrained grand strategy since Donald trump second time leadership including withdrawal from the Afghanistan, cut off the global health care funding, withdrawal of the peace keeping forces and defense budget trimming away from fighting wars. Research also analyzed the American choices of grand strategic formulation beyond the deep engagements and restrains in Strategic thinking and decision making (Dombrowski & Reich, 2025). This research critically analyzed the Greenland as part of American grand strategy and achieving long term goals in order to get benefited from the changing dynamic of Arctic climate, security and how important for America nationalizing Greenland into America or allowing to be part of Denmark.

In the Territorial North chapter of book Titled *Security Cooperation Governance* examined that emergence of the non-traditional threats e.g., climate change specifically in northern Canada will impact on human security. The chapters of book also analyze the integrity and security concern in the North America, melting of the sea ice in the north led exchange of goods, people and capital also changed the nature of the threats. According to the U.S. data the cross boarder traffic increased ten times in just few years the Alcan border post in Alaska as much traffic from Yukon with BC (Nicol, Lajeunesse, Lackenbauer, & Everett, 2023). The book chapters not extensively determined the policies towards non-traditional security threat and mutual cooperation between Canada, USA and Denmark.

The paper *Arctic Doctrine, Challenges and Perspectives of American Territorial Expansionism under Trump's Second Administration (2025-2029)* explored the American interest in Arctic seems like long term that including the national security, resources and power projection in future. It also indicated that how arctic mainland control led to the crucial for economic and logistical advantages, positioning itself as dominant and more influential global power. The Donald trump assertiveness and current Canada Greenland relationship with the USA remained crucial and directly linked to the military, diplomatic and economic interests or resource quest. Article also examined the how the Greenlandic territory remains crucial and USA capacity in order to monitor or deter its adversaries especially Russia and china were increased (Ugeda & Sanches, 2025). The article lacking in describe the growing role of China and EU resistance in acquiring the national interest remained crucial challenge for America.

Analyses of Trump's second-term Western Hemisphere policy describe a revived Monroe Doctrine adapted to 21st-century priorities. Spatafora (2025) characterizes the Americas as a testing ground for "Americas First" experimentation, blending territorial ambitions (Greenland, Canada, Panama), coercive tariffs for political ends, and selective security focus (narcotics, migration) at the expense of broader development aid. This departs from historical applications by emphasizing expansionism and domestic electoral resonance over uniform hemispheric order. The chapter maps regional reactions into "betrayed" allies (Canada, Mexico), ideological "enthusiasts" (Milei, Bukele), and cautious "fence-sitters," warning of trust erosion and opportunities for extra-hemispheric actors. It urges European strategic engagement to counter the Doctrine's transatlantic separation, aligning with broader debates on Arctic securitization, great-power rivalry, and small-state agency in a contested order (Spatafora, 2025). Research report only Emphasis on transatlantic/EU responses critique of inconsistent "maximum pressure" and linkage of Greenland claims to alliance distrust.

Hokkai-Gokuen University, Department of Political Science published research journal examined the two distinguish theoretical interpretation including center-periphery relations and the internal self-determination leading to external self-determination of colonial powers especially Denmark and Greenland. It also examined the master-servant relationship inherent in colonization of indigenous people by state and how it shape the real world politics post decolonization. The research indicated how the historical linkage between the state and indigenous people necessary to understand the current geopolitics. The local movement for autonomy and self-determination during cold war decreased the tension between the bipolar international orders. Article also elucidated the challenges facing by the diverse stakeholder values in the real politics of arctic Greenland (Takahashi, 2025). There is lack of comprehensive understanding between master-servant relationships and how the current great powers and EU interests evolved overtime and its impact on the arctic Greenland remained unexplained.

Research questions

1. How does the strategic location of Greenland, in the GIUK Gap, with its missile-exposing radar sites, rich reserves of rare earth minerals and recently opened shipping routes through the Arctic mean for the U.S. National Security interests in today's rapidly changing climate?
2. What is the political three-part aspect between Denmark and Greenland the home rule government in their quest for economic expansion and Chinese-Russian strategy in the Arctic affects the U.S. in its preservation of stable liberal international order in the Arctic?

Research Methodology

The Research methodology followed in this study is a qualitative research, which is based on the realist international relations theory. Qualitative method is suitable, due to the inability of the addresses of research questions to be quantified meaningfully. It is an interpretive, based on case-studies approach, where Greenland acts as the one-only example of how wider Arctic processes work. Sources include declassified documents of the U.S. government (such as State Department memos and National Security Council reports), official statements by the Danish and Greenlandic governments, published interviews with diplomats and military officials, articles in the scholarly journals in the field (such as the *Journal of Strategic Studies* and *International Politics* and the *Journal of Polar Bear Studies*), reports of think tanks (including the RAND Corporation, the Center of Strategic and International Studies, or the Polar Institute of the Wilson Center), reputable news media coverage of Arctic affairs and JSTOR articles. The analysis conducted on the basis of the three theoretical frameworks such as realism, the Monroe Doctrine, and the geopolitics. Each of the frameworks offers analytical prisms through which to understand U.S. behavior, the magnitude of Greenland, and great power competitions. The analysis is done chronologically in the historical background section so as to establish causal links and identification of path dependencies, with the variable sections taking into consideration contemporary factors like climate change induced ice melt, Chinese investment patterns, and Russian force posture adjustments.

Data Collection

1. Review of Literature

The proper research carried out by studying different published articles such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, reports of government officials such as U.S. Naval War College, scholars and policy documents. Study on geopolitics, Monroe doctrine, history and culture also included for detail understanding. A comprehensive highlight will also be taken for the Greenlandic geostrategic location especially trade routes, maritime and air defense system.

2. Content Analysis of Previous Speech and Interviews

Analyze U.S. National Security Strategy documents, NATO agreements, U.S. - Greenland relations, Danish Greenlandic constitutional arrangements, and Arctic policy frameworks. The analysis of prior interview, remarks of experts, political leaders, senior scholars, books and articles have been taken here in the research by focusing on strategic significance, Climate as threat and mutual economic dependencies for the great powers like U.S., Russia, China and EU.

Greenland's Strategic Imperative for U.S. National Security in the Arctic

The Trump administration has mapped around a few facts regarding the routes to making it to become influential or even dominant in the Danish territory of Greenland: Trump has made public announcements about his intention to buy Greenland from Denmark; pay the indigenous people of Greenland to sign over their country to him; and, if that doesn't happen, "take more drastic measures," such as war. The idea that the U.S. would be forcing "whether they like it or not" is a "highly hostile tone" for diplomacy talks, and has "shocked" allies so much that someone suggested it would "be good for the U.S. to get a little practice in that area. The sentiment for legislation toward annexation or acquisition by the United States are also aired by a few U.S. policy makers, who have been overall sympathetic to Trump, who have expressed their wish for such legislation. But such proposals and statements have faced swift diplomatic red lines as soon as they are heard in Denmark and Greenland, however, which take a stance for the right of the territory to autonomy and oppose sovereignty transfer. Both the Denmark-Greenland agreement and the blueprint minus suggestions given by Trump are deemed "illegitimate" and "non-starter" by the Danish prime minister and Greenland's premier (Alexander, 2026).

When sanctions threats reversed (and reversed) and so did sanctions, it leads to another round of uncertainty over how the United States intends to act, and fuels other concerns over Washington's strategy by Europeans. It also shows increased concern for America of "strategic denial" in areas beyond contest (as contrasted to areas contested) while American Navy ships were being competed away by others like Soviets and America's wish of denying others a "foothold" defined in the dictionary as "the support upon which the balance of the body is maintained." It also finds an increased concern amongst Americans of "strategic

denial” in areas beyond contest as opposed to areas contested the U.S.'s desire to “deny” others some “foothold” defined as “the support upon which the balance of the body is maintained.” In the Arctic the country concerned is thus similarly monitored in many arenas related to infrastructure investments, port use and the presence of scientists, and will increasingly be measured in the long-term areas of economic relations, which does not have to relate to warfare (Alexander, 2026).

How Greenland became a Frontline of U.S. Arctic Strategy (Thule to Nuuk)

The impetus behind this speed-up is not long for seeking. Russia is militarizing the Arctic, and in general, there is a great-power race in the world, bringing the High North back to the top of the U.S. strategic agenda. Greenland is located in the middle of that area. In October, 2022, an October 2022 Arctic Strategy the United States published explicitly refers to Greenland, part of the Kingdom of Denmark, as partners in pursuing a shared vision of the future of the Arctic (Belukhin, 2022). Management of alliances in the Arctic is one of the most sensitive and important parts of Danish foreign policy where American strategic priorities effectively dictate the strategy per the aforementioned parallel Danish strategic assessment released the same month. The urgent issue today is, in Belukhin's view, increasing the size of the domain awareness network a network of radars, drones, satellites, and coast guard patrol vessels that covers the huge territory and coastal waters in Greenland. This is clearly unlikely to be done with the resources Denmark has at its own disposal. Iceland ranks among the strongest supporters of this citizen monitoring system, which was initiated by the Danish Arctic Command and uses a mobile app or GPS tracking system to allow anyone in the country to report an incident, a sign of just how stretched the Danish surveillance capacity in one of the world's largest and most strategically important land masses (Belukhin, 2022).

The marketability of reading headlines about Greenland's strategic value today is built on three pillars military infrastructure and Arctic shipping potential and the placement of the country within the alliances with important caveats not always mentioned by the most vocal voices in geopolitics. Militarily, Greenland is home to the Pituffik Space Base, home of the U.S. early warning and space surveillance facilities, and is still within the GIUK Gap, which is significant today for tracking Russian navy movements in the North Atlantic. But it is noteworthy that there is not as much investment in Pituffik as there was during the Cold War, and that military use of the island is not the primary motivating power behind increasing U.S. interest, it is only that some have been more motivated than others (Hanlon & Spence, 2025).

From 2019 through 2022, the United States signed two memoranda of understandings with Greenland, restarted its consulate in Nuuk with eight staff and dispatched two packages of economic assistance for it and jointly conducted research visits to gauge potential radar installation sites throughout the island. In July 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Denmark for the inaugural meeting of U.S. and Danish Foreign Ministers for the U.S., Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which was again replicated in May 2021 with Secretary Blinken. By May 2022, the U.S. Embassy in Denmark had announced its intent to invest in the modernization of Pituffik Space Base, and American science teams found themselves on the ground conducting studies into potential sites for the new radar coverage (Belukhin, 2022).

The Navy's High North Maritime Fulcrum

The waters surrounding Greenland are instrumental to U.S. maritime strategy by blocking the major transit route to the North Atlantic for the Russian Northern Fleet submarine and surface combatant fleets the GIUK Gap. P-8 maritime patrol planes from the U.S. Navy are flying around Greenlandic waters to act as a watchdog for convoy defense against enemy subs and attack subs are doing their rounds too to monitor enemy boats under the ice. Greenland's deep-water fjords, like Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut, serve as logistics support points for a naval force: surface action groups including the destroyers, and soon, coast guard polar cutters, can get refueling, rest for their crews and emergency repairs while operating in the waters of Baffin Bay and the Labrador Sea. In Greenland's exercise of its exclusive economic zone, they held a series of “freedom of navigation” (FONOPs) operations, involving an array of vessels, to demonstrate international maritime law in opposition to Russian assertions of an Arctic route, called “the Northern Sea Route.” (Foggo & Gosnell, 2022).

The U.S. Department of the Navy's Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic and Advantage at Sea call on the Navy and Marine Corps to keep the seas free, sea denial, and sea control in the High North. Maritime strategy is achieved through the Marine Corps' concept of expeditionary advanced base operations: low-profile, versatile forces based at forward locations, where they can facilitate fleet sustainment and deploy in response to anti-access/area denial operations. Instead of U.S. marine forces going to sea, they could take sea duty from a series of expeditionary bases, each carrying an advanced anti-submarine warfare (ASW) system that would employ unmanned sensors and ground launched missiles to act as bottles to close up the Russian submarines in the GIUK gap. But the Marine Corps is not an “alley duty” unit on NATO's northern flank, and Norway also has an aversion to placating foreign bases and when the Americans start reinforcing NATO partners, they will have to penetrate a weapons-rich engagement zone. Presence in the Arctic is still intermittent for the Navy with persistent A2/AD networks being constructed by the Russians along the Kola Peninsula and RSGs rare visitors to the Barents Sea. Allied integration, interoperable command and control and new vessels such as the ‘Light Amphibious Warship’ must all be part of the equation to make maritime strategy

a success, when it comes to fighting in the cold, shallow waters of the High North, also known as the polar seas (Strauss, Gordinier, & Byrne, 2022).

In addition to foregoing the drudgery of manual upkeep, the U.S. Navy is also spending money on unscrewed surface vessels (USVs) and seabed sensor networks off the east coast of Greenland to monitor the development of new trans-Arctic trade routes. At the same time, U.S. and Danish/Norwegian naval operators conduct joint training to develop tactics for navigating and working in ice and to improve submarine ice under-ice training and damage control in cold weather. With the opening of new maritime futures, Greenland's ports and ocean areas grow even more important in setting up operations, in exercising sea control and in securing freedom from hostile navies in the High North. Therefore, gaining control of the US navy in the Arctic-Atlantic Theater is essential to achieving more control over Greenland's maritime realm (Foggo & Gosnell, 2022).

The concept of Polar Projection and Global Position

If you "flatten" the globe and map out its current geopolitical geology from a polar perspective, then the Arctic (along with the strategic center of Greenland) is what that map looks like. If you "flatten" the globe and "map out its current geopolitical geology" from a polar perspective, then the Arctic (along with the strategic core of Greenland) is what that map looks like. On the concept of Arctic Ocean as the "World Mediterranean", the author reminds readers of George T. Renner's idea that on any map centered on the Arctic, the land mass of Eurasia looks like a huge half-circle which curves around the Arctic, and Greenland and Iceland form two bulges that complete the circle and encircle North America almost (Mosbey, 2025).

This projection is of note because it shows that both the shortest aerial and maritime communication and transport links between North America and Eurasia and the shortest tracking's of military forces in pursuit of military power transit route go through or close to Greenland. DOD's 2019 Arctic Strategy, which is referenced in the article, lists two strategic corridors as having become critical: the Bering Strait between the United States and Russia, and the strategic corridor for Arctic and North Atlantic naval operations known as the Greenland-Iceland-UK-Norway (GIUK-N) Gap. In part Greenland's great landmass straddles the Arctic Circle and is poised on both northern flanks and serves as a geographical fulcrum for homeland defense (early warning of possible missile or bomber attacks from Russia) and power projection to the Indo-Pacific through the "northern flank". The Arctic's "geostrategic significance is difficult to overstate," former Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson and U.S. Gen. David Goldfein are quoted as saying. Is therefore in the best position to shape global strategic, aerial, and maritime outcomes via control of the Arctic and in turn Greenland? (Mosbey, 2025).

Prescriptive U.S. grand strategy options towards Greenland

Each of the five U.S. grand strategies designed by Dombrowski and Reich (primacy, deep engagement, sponsorship, restraint, and isolationism) can be represented by a different set of policy options regarding Greenland. Primacy would want to attach Greenland outright to the U.S. by way of either purchase or exclusive basing rights as floated by President Trump to keep Russia and China from having a stake in the land. The ideal would be deep engagement via NATO and Denmark to enhance Thule Air Base in a liberal, rules-based Arctic order, which would share the burden with allies. Sponsorship would imply the U.S. could intervene only at the request of Denmark or Greenland's government that offer maritime surveillance or search-and-rescue operations under international procedures, and would not initiate the process. Limited can mean that they have fewer soldiers permanently stationed in Greenland, and that they depend on over-the-horizon defense and allied defense, only deploying in Greenland when it is needed to defend their homeland (e.g., missile warning) (Dombrowski & Reich, 2025).

Isolationism would withdraw from almost all engagement in the Arctic; surrender strategic territory in the island to others; establish the U.S. homeland as the basis for its security interests; and maybe attempt a "Monroe Doctrine" in the Arctic without active patrol (hemispheric Monroe Doctrine without). These threads have been worked through over the last twelve years: Trump (first term) suggested isolationism and primacy (purchase talk); Biden had a deep engagement tone; Trump's second term - primacy and isolationist overtones with purchase suggestions. As a result Greenland is a real-life geographical case study of the implications of various grand strategies on the competing policy options available in the United States (Dombrowski & Reich, 2025).

Trump's Monroe Doctrine: The Case for Greenland

President Trump's desire to buy Greenland is nothing new, but rather the reincarnation of a long-standing American tradition that dates back to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Thus the fight over Greenland is not one between Denmark and Europe, but one between North and South America, as points out Barry Scott Zellen. For 200 years, the Monroe Doctrine has informed U.S. policy from time to time that the Western Hemisphere is America's region. Washington has questioned its taste for shutting its eyes to the world's largest island from hereto onward, from President William Seward's response in 1867 when he mailed a letter urging the sale of Greenland in addition to Alaska to officials in St. Petersburg, to explorer Robert Peary who claimed "Peary land" as a territory of the U.S. The White House saw a successful "snatch-and-grab" of Venezuelan oil when Trump

bought the proposal, and now it has its northern appetite satisfied, it was ready to start looking for Greenland's untapped mineral wealth (Zellen, 2026).

Anyone threatening the U.S. with war over the future of Greenland, Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller said in a blunt statement, "nobody's gonna". There are concerns about a rift in NATO but the military alliance has weathered previous divisions between Iceland and Britain (Cod Wars) and Greece and Turkey (Cyprus); France had even left the alliance's military command. Monroe Doctrine offers a historic and strategic justification since it is not an American challenge to Danish colonial claims in Europe, but rather America's assertion in North America. Author believes the allies will be compensated, fences will be mended, NATO will continue on. Trump's expansionism, in fact, would be no different than a rediscovery of an "American" logic, the one that has always defined Greenland as part of America's strategic sphere of influence (Zellen, 2026).

The Geopolitical Competition

The Arctic is now an undeclared, but hot, theater of great-power competition. More than 50% of the coastline is traversed by the Russian Union and the region holds strategic importance for them, with the strengthening of Soviet-era bases and the upgrading of its military nuclear and air-defense capabilities, at the least, being given special consideration due to the battalion of shortest missile routes from Russia to North America passing over the pole. China shifts from an observer to an icebreaker, organizes research expeditions, tries to establish dual-use infrastructure, and often cooperates with Russia in these efforts in the Arctic Council. This cooperation is not confined to coastal monitoring and is expanded to joint naval and air patrols, even off the coast of Alaska, sparking NATO's concern. Currently, Greenland is located at the center of these battles, occupying the GIUK gap, which is a very important corridor for monitoring Russian submarines as well as being the home of the U.S. Pituffik Space Base, which has a mission to detect aerial missiles and space surveillance (Nesheiwat, 2026).

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's push to grow its Northern Sea Route (NSR) as an alternative route for Russia's energy raw materials exports and a shipping lane to Europe from Asia, the Arctic has become a highly competitive region for geopolitical strife. Others consider the Arctic (including Greenland), continental shelf and deep-sea locations to be potential areas for energy and mineral activities that may merit special consideration. As the Strait of Hormuz continues to be closed, it is crucial to the economy and global transport. At the same time, however, the U.S.-Israel war on Iran has revealed the dilemmas the United States faces when it comes to using its huge military but its resources are finite. How much resources and capability should be committed by the U.S. to this admittedly strategic region? (Buchanan & Hammes, 2026).

The Arctic Council has been paralyzed due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Russia and China are filling the void by bilateral agreements. Also, the ice melts; new shipping lanes and energy sources are also found, ranging from oil to small nuclear reactors. But one of the perils of this rush is the risk of miscalculations in an overcrowded and sensitive environment in which Russia and NATO are also making moves: Finland and Sweden are joining the alliance; and NATO and Iran are also preparing their own trips. In the meantime, Indigenous Peoples and distinct ecosystems have been between the lines, and map coordinates form the boundaries of their home. Rather than simply a climate or resource arena, the Arctic is becoming a geopolitical chessboard where cooperation between Russia and China represents a growing threat to the influence of the West, and diplomacies will need to play catch up before power moves secure a new cold North (Nesheiwat, 2026).

Conclusion

Greenland is very important since the Cold War days. The island has come to be a high-stakes chess piece in the hands of great powers in the twenty-first century, after long having been a marital outpost, whose value had been assessed mainly in terms of its proximity to Soviet bomber routes. There are 3 forces shaping this change. The melting of the ice cap in the Arctic is opening up access to shipping routes and the creation of untapped resources. Russia's reconstruction of military forces and infrastructure is back, and is now a strong military power in the High North. The geopolitical location of China is also all the way from the Arctic, but on a long-term and gradual basis, China has been stepping up its economic and geopolitical presence in the region. Oil sands-related development overlaps with all three pressures in Greenland. Strategically, the island lies along the shortest trajectory of ballistic missiles from the Russian territory to North America, and the only deep-water gap that separates the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans. The island is situated in a location that military planners and strategists cannot afford to ignore due to its strategic position along the shortest ballistic missile trajectory from the Russian territory to North America and in the middle of the only deep-water gap in the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans.

The United States has reacted to this situation by making a sound change in its strategic direction of immediate focus. The 2026 National Defense Strategy makes no mention of Europe, but permits Washington to lower its strategic ranking, while, at the same time, elevating Greenland to a primary homeland security issue alongside the Panama Canal as land and water region which must be secured for ensuring America's interests in the Western Hemisphere. The words are intended: They remind readers of the Monroe doctrine, and issue a clear warning from the Pentagon that any effort by China or Russia to militarily or economically intrude into the Western Arctic is strictly prohibited. The bilateral "Arctic Watcher Program" tasked with tracking

and responding to foreign efforts to undermine the "neutrality" of the Arctic is being made "law" in the draft 2026 defense budget. From an economic perspective, Washington's \$12 billion commitment to building an inventory of critical minerals, plus its attempts to establish supply chains for sixty strategic materials, is a testament to the escalating importance the West puts on Greenland's rare earth resources as a commercial issue as well as a matter of national security.

But the battle for Greenland isn't just a Washington versus Washington's enemies' affair. Despite the heavy burden imposed by its war, Moscow has kept speeding up the development of the Northern Fleet, and has sought to extend the bases in Arctic regions sometimes citing scientific research as cover for military operations. The deployment of the Borei-A class ballistic missile submarine Knyaz Pozharsky, which can launch up to sixteen missiles on board with multiple warheads, is also evidence of Russia's efforts to maintain an Arctic ballistic missile arsenal even in the face of other challenges. The Chinese argument is more subtle but long-term impactful. Miners have come in under its radar, and Beijing has tied up scientific cooperation deals with the island as well as infrastructure projects to gain access to the precious metals found there, all necessitating investment in the island. China has developed, through mining investment, infrastructure projects and scientific cooperation agreements, a footprint in Greenland that is ultimately part of its broader pursuit of obtaining access to important minerals and diversifying its shipping routes. According to a U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence analysis from 2025, China was exploiting Greenland as a base to work toward pushing forward these Arctic objectives. But when dealing with Chinese activity in Greenland, much of the concern among Westerners is about what might happen, not what has happened, and this is something the scholars have correctly pointed out that needs to be taken into account when approaching policy responses.

The great structure dynamic is compounded by three structural issues. First of all, the chief forum till now for managing regional cooperation, the Arctic Council, is essentially paralyzed. Since a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, the seven western member states have withdrawn from political activities, while there is no resumption of cooperation at the ministerial level. Technical working groups are still functioning in limited capacity, but the lack of high level political involvement takes the supreme level of accountability from competition in the Arctic. Secondly, it's rapidly being militarized. In response to the failing state of the environment, Denmark has made the biggest investment in its peacetime military forces in its history D.K.W. 27.4 billion (DKK 1.4 billion) to strengthen its capability in the Arctic and North Atlantic, with a mix of new naval vessels, flying and patrolling drones, an early-warning radar installation on East Greenland, and a new Joint Arctic Command headquarters in Nuuk. A supplement contract to the naval deal also made Denmark's stockpile of helicopters bring the total to forty-three. The supplemental contract for the naval deal also included sixteen more F-35s, to bring Denmark's total of advance aircraft to forty-three. These are not mere tweaks to the existing policy, but rather a radical shift towards a more independent and NATO facing sense of security for the Arctic. Third, Council dysfunction create a governance vacuum which puts it increasingly vulnerable to the prospect of competitive dynamics spiraling out of control through miscalculations or unintended clashes.

Then, perhaps the most important variable for Greenland's future, and which is most often given less emphasis than any other given focus on great-power competition is the political agency of Greenland's own population. Eighty-four percent of Greenlanders voted in favor of their independence in a poll in 2025, a major swing from the 67.7 per cent of in 2019, while all 6 of the island's leading political parties have pledged to support independence as a future objective. Meanwhile, an equally spectacular 85 per cent of the Greenlanders voted against incorporation into America, expressing quite clearly their goal self-determination, rather than governments passing through. This may make all the difference in how the outside world should deal with Greenland. The economic self-sufficiency (mainly due to the incomes generated from mining) and the quality of the international partnerships will condition the way the island will reach the independence of the state. This dynamic has been recognized by the European Union, which has taken steps to increase its cooperation: by establishing an EU office in Nuuk in March 2024 and signing a strategic partnership memorandum on sustainable raw materials. NATO's renewed focus on the High North provides new opportunity to coordinate Western policy. Resumed together, all this indicates the necessity to consider Greenland as an active player and not just as a chess piece where great power influence is paramount, for the most effective way to secure the island's security will be to respect its interests and preferences.

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