

January 7, 2026

Trump's Greenland threats should be taken seriously but it is not for sale

Gabriella Gricius
NAADSN Fellow and Media Coordinator

President Donald Trump has again raised Greenland to the top of the international agenda, [calling](#) the Danish territory needed for “national security.” After Trump expressed his initial interest in buying Greenland in [2019](#) and again in [2025](#), he did so for a third time over the holidays through January 2026. This [escalation](#) in rhetoric has been [backed](#) up with similarly outlandish claims by policy aides like Stephen Miller, who have [said](#) that Greenland belongs to the US.

While it's tempting to dismiss the inaccurate claims about national security and overt US imperialism at play, Trump's interest is clearly not going anywhere. His repeated statements, the rumored [influence](#) operation, and the appointment of Jeff Landry as a Special Envoy to Greenland show that we must take this seriously. That means being firm that any choice about Greenland's future lies with Greenlanders themselves and being clear about what exactly Trump wants when he speaks about annexing Greenland.

What must be taken even more seriously than Trump's pronouncements is that Greenlanders overwhelmingly do not want to be part of the US. In January 2025, 85 percent of Greenlanders [voted](#) against joining the US, even if a vast majority (84 percent) do want independence from Denmark. This is not to say that an independent Greenland would not continue their defense and economic security cooperation with the US through existing agreements and does not seek further engagement – but Greenland is not for sale.

US Interest in Greenland: homeland defence and critical minerals

American interest in Greenland is not new. The US government has previously [discussed](#) acquiring Greenland in 1867, 1910, 1946, 1955, 2019, and 2025. Its current interest in Greenland is underlined by two factors: homeland defense and critical minerals. For US homeland defense, Greenland was important during the Cold War due to its important location both for aerial and maritime reasons. From an aerial perspective, Greenland offers an important place to track ballistic missiles that could reach the US from Russia using specialized radar that was initially built in the 1950s, upgraded in the 1980s and modernized in 2009. Greenland is also

important for maritime surveillance as it lies near to the GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-UK) gap, which is a chokepoint for the Russian navy and its submarine fleet to leave the Arctic and enter the Atlantic.

Today, the US gets **everything it** needs from Greenland when it comes to homeland defense. US usage of Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) gives it access to the important radar capabilities. Owning the land beneath the base would add no discernable benefit. When Trump describes the proximity of Russian and Chinese ships to Greenland, he misspeaks as these ships **are** in the Bering and Barents Seas (both closer to Russia), rather than the North Atlantic.

Newer interest in Greenland has **centered** around critical minerals. These minerals, like graphite and zinc, are essential for newer defense projects like F-35 strike fighters, newer technologies like electric vehicles, and even smartphones. Currently, the US is 100 percent import **reliant** for 12 minerals that are deemed critical by the US Geological Survey and 50 percent reliant for another 29. **China** currently dominates processing for the over 90 percent of the world's rare earth minerals. Greenland is home to many of these minerals and can be seen as a way to reduce dependence on China.

“This is enough”

Despite the US' legitimate interest in Greenland, on 4 January Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen took to Facebook, **stating** of Trump's threats, “this is enough”. This firm refusal from Greenland has been backed up with **statements** from the Danish Prime Minister that the US cannot annex another country and that a US takeover of Greenland would mean **the end of NATO**. **European** and **Nordic** leaders have also come out in support of Greenland.

Why Trump's words are dangerous

Trump's statements are not only inaccurate; they are also dangerous. They are quite literally dangerous to the people of Greenland as his words reduce them to objects to be owned, rather than a people in of themselves with the right to self-determination. He also poses a threat to Denmark as his threats seem to indicate that he seeks to annex or forcibly take Greenland – a constituent part of the Kingdom of Denmark – away from the country. Yet this is also a threat to NATO itself. While there have been disagreements between NATO allies in the past, notably between Greece and Turkey, there has never been direct military confrontation. As the Danish Prime Minister said, a forcible annexation **would** spell the end of NATO.

However, more importantly for Trump himself, his words have a damaging impact on American national security. As Trump continues to speak in ways that alienate American allies, he isolates the US on the world stage. Without NATO and the support of its European allies, the US is far weaker on the world stage. He **makes** it easier for states like Russia and China to gain footholds in other countries and beefs up the power of disinformation that portrays the US as a bad faith imperial actor. It could even legitimize Russian aggression in Ukraine and potential Chinese action towards Taiwan.

What's next?

There is legitimate US interest in Greenland. Rather than threatening to annex or buy Greenland, the Trump administration would better be served by developing better diplomatic relations with Greenlandic politicians, and investing in a long-term partnership that benefits both parties. This might look like a renegotiated defense agreement or more financial aid to Greenland. But as it stands, if Greenlanders are not interested in being part of the US, it is not for sale.

[This Quick Impact was originally published under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial Unported 3.0 License by the London School of Economics. *](#)*