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Trump and Greenland: Why This is a Win for China and Russia ... and a Loss for the Rest of Us

Adam Lajeunesse and P. Whitney Lackenbauer

An American invasion of Greenland would mean the end of NATO. That was [the warning](#) from Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen late last week. The transatlantic alliance, now seventy-six years old, has proven itself to be one of the most enduring and powerful exercises in collective defence in history. Over that time, it has bound together much of the developed world, made allies of former enemies, and out-competed the Soviet Union to win the Cold War. While it survived fractious European politics and decades of Soviet pressure, it may ultimately find its end in an aggravated reality-TV actor turned president.

Trump's threat to NATO goes beyond the obvious. While a US military attack on an ally would result in an unprecedented break, a more subversive approach may be equally destructive. The White House's suggestions that Greenland be purchased, bribed, or coerced into a 'Free Association Compact' (similar to Micronesia) undermines the basic principles that have made NATO so successful.

NATO has never been a purely transactional partnership – where states agree to mutual defence purely out of immediate self-interest. It has long been anchored by something far more powerful: genuine solidarity. The mutual defence commitment derives its real power from the fact that NATO allies are (generally speaking) friends that would be willing to fight for one another.

Unlike the shallow and transactional partnerships between Russia and North Korea (or China), NATO partners are bound together by societies that view one-another as a kind of family. NATO partners did not fight in Iraq and Afghanistan to achieve favourable trade terms or for some other *quid pro quo* – they did so from a genuine solidarity with the United States. That emotional and moral commitment, the willingness to sacrifice based on shared values rather than deals and spreadsheets, is what has kept the alliance together and convinced our enemies that the commitment was real.

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What Trump is doing in Greenland threatens that foundation. He is not looking to jettison NATO, but he does want to rebuild it in the form of a business deal. He is offering American military security in exchange for concessions of sovereignty and demanding that allies 'pay up' or face abandonment.

As history has repeatedly shown, alliances reduced to business deals are fragile things. They invite constant renegotiation, they breed resentment, and most critically, they make adversaries wonder whether the commitment will hold when tested.

This is how deterrence dies, not with a bang but with a quiet loss of trust. When mutual defence becomes transactional, adversaries begin probing for the price point at which commitments dissolve. They will test whether the alliance fractures under pressure and whether the sentiment that once bound it together has been sufficiently eroded.

A NATO built on friendship and shared values is formidable because it is unpredictable in the best way. Adversaries cannot calculate when or whether it will act because the commitment transcends rational cost-benefit analysis. A NATO reduced to transactions becomes predictable, calculable, and therefore vulnerable.

In a world where the US treats NATO as a business partnership to exploit, the mutual defence pledge will quickly lose its currency. Europe and Canada will lose core collective security benefits, but so will the United States – although no one seems to have explained this to President Trump.

This week, the only people cheering are in Beijing and Moscow, and perhaps misguided Americans who have succumbed to their own country's disinformation about Chinese and Russian threats around Greenland. The NATO that trades Greenland for trade or security isn't a real alliance, it's a business arrangement – and a brittle one at that.