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## Russian Press Agencies on the US-Annexation-of-Greenland Crises: Lessons for Canada

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The second Trump administration started with the threat that Greenland would be annexed to the United States one way or another. This month, we have seen a resumption of this effort, with the US administration pushing the misleading narrative that if the US do not own the island, it will fall to Russia and/or China.<sup>1</sup>

In this *Quick Impact*, we analyze how the Russian press agency TASS covered these crises, first from 24 December 2024 to 18 February 2025 (34 articles) and then from 3-8 January 2026 (15 articles). Our main hypothesis anticipated that the Russian press agency would emphasize divisive issues that punctuate the relationship between Greenland and Denmark. Articles published by the Russian news agency TASS often discuss Greenland, particularly from the perspective of its political autonomy and the resulting governance dynamics. Our analysis of the content of these articles, however, reveals that Russian rhetoric focused on American territorial ambitions rather than on traditional sovereignty tensions between Denmark and Greenland. In fact, rivalries or points of tension between the Danish state and its Arctic territory were rarely discussed.

Russian communications do not seem to consider Greenland as an autonomous subject, but as the scene of an expansionist race led by Donald J. Trump and his administration, the repercussions of which threaten the security balance in the Arctic as a whole. Hence, Greenland and Denmark are depicted as having little agency, and instead they are presented as a victim of broader geopolitical dynamics over which they have no influence. The same logic is also apparent in the messaging from the Trump administration, reinforcing the idea that this is a “great power” issue related to Russia, China and the U.S. – and rarely about Greenland itself, and even less so about Denmark.

Likewise, Trump’s Greenland initiative has functioned as a reinforcement for popular narratives about the Arctic frequently adopted by Russian press agencies over the last decade. Lackenbauer, Bouffard and Lajeunesse’s typology<sup>2</sup> listed six common narratives present in Russian information operation about the Arctic:

- Theme 1: The US and NATO are a destabilizing force in the Arctic;
- Theme 2: Arctic states are pawns of the US;
- Theme 3: The idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous;
- Theme 4: NATO and the US are poor houseguests;
- Theme 5: US colonialism and interference in internal Arctic states' affairs;
- Theme 6: Participation of Arctic states in US/EU sanctions damages their own Arctic economic interests.

After analyzing the 49 articles, we detected several popular Russian narratives in coverage of Trump's campaign to annex Greenland:

Themes (according to Lackenbauer, Bouffard and Lajeunesse)	Frequencies (n=49)	Percentage (%)
#1	13	27
#2	6	12
#3	0	0
#4	0	0
#5	32	65
#6	5	10

Theme 5 (US colonialism and interference in internal Arctic states' affairs) is by far the most prevalent, having been detected in 65% of the articles surveyed. In this context, the United States is generally portrayed as an intrusive and destabilizing actor seeking to interfere in the internal affairs of Arctic states. In this sense, it is the United States that occupies center stage in Russian discourse, much more than Greenland. The Trump administration's exertion of pressure on Greenlanders and on the Danish government is interpreted not as an economic or diplomatic proposal, but as an external, existential threat. This stance also seems to be interpreted and presented as a form of aggression against the principle of sovereignty that the United States' allies (and particularly NATO members) promote. In TASS stories, the expansionist ideology of the American president drives the United States when it suggests the potential use of coercion or military intervention.

What stands out in the analysis of the TASS articles is a narrative portraying the United States as the main factor of instability in the Arctic. The Greenland examples reinforce how Russian press agencies seek to normalize the idea that the United States' overtly expansionist ambitions expose its assertion of power over other Arctic states, including their allies. TASS coverage does not treat Greenland's sovereignty as an issue in its own right, but rather uses it as a narrative device to talk about the United States. This framing is indicative of the Russian perception of security dynamics in the Arctic that are structured by rivalry between the major powers. For example, when asked about President Trump's statement regarding the annexation of Greenland, the Russian special envoy to the Danish public broadcaster DR commented: *"Russia calls for strengthening stability in the Arctic. This can only be done based on efforts to build international security that would be equal for all the Arctic nations. An attempt by the US to ensure its national security at the expense of other countries could further worsen the situation in the Arctic, and Russia will take this into account in its military planning."*<sup>3</sup>

Theme 1 (US and NATO are a destabilising force in the Arctic) was present in 27% of articles. The Russian media portrays the United States as a disruptive actor in the Arctic region, particularly through the strengthening of military capabilities and presence, which undermine the stability of the region and encourage securitization. The United States is also portrayed as a destabilizing force in Arctic cooperation, as it fuels confrontation at the expense of diplomatic strategies. The Arctic is therefore described as a region weakened by the intervention of external powers that impose security considerations on an area already affected by international geopolitical dynamics.

However, the discourse on this topic contains a contradictory aspect. The TASS narrative seems to associate the deterioration of stability in the Arctic with the increased presence of the United States and NATO in the region, which the Kremlin perceives as growing militarization on the part of the West. The media outlet propagates a narrative that blames NATO and US approaches and associates them with confrontation rather than collaboration. This links the North Atlantic Alliance's political and military attitudes to the deterioration of diplomatic relations with Moscow. In an interview with TASS, Russian Ambassador to Denmark Vladimir Barbin stated that *"the intensifying trend toward the militarization of the Arctic, the cultivation of confrontational approaches by NATO countries, and the giving of access to Arctic land to foreign militaries do not contribute to maintaining military and political stability in the region."*<sup>4</sup> This narrative completely sidelines how the Kremlin's choices, and particularly its invasion and ongoing war against Ukraine, have severed diplomatic relations with the West. By pointing the finger at the United States and NATO, however, TASS narratives position Russia as a defensive actor, even though it has been waging war against a sovereign state for several years.

In addition, several articles combine themes 1 and 5, prompting Russia to downplay the impact of the war against Ukraine on security balances and cooperation between Arctic states. This narrative could also discreetly justify Russia's expansionist ambitions by calling into question the principle of territorial sovereignty of states.

Although less prominent, themes 2 (Arctic states are pawns of the US) and 6 (participation of Arctic states in US/EU sanctions damages their own Arctic economic interests) are also present in 22% of articles. Russian discourse presents the United States as the sole decision-maker in the region, while Denmark and Greenland are portrayed as secondary or marginal actors whose interests are subordinate to those of the Americans. By extension, the Nordic countries lack agency and are forced to adjust their positions and policies in accordance with Washington's orders.

This narrative suggests that the United States is not content with merely interfering in regional affairs, but is trying, as best it can, to redraw Arctic borders to its advantage. This attitude is explained by its strategic interest in controlling natural resources, particularly critical minerals, which it considers essential to its national security. To support this idea, the TASS agency quotes presidential adviser Nikolay Patrushev, who said in an interview with a major Russian newspaper: *"US President-elect Donald Trump outlined his interests in relation to Greenland, the Panama Canal, Mexico, and Canada. Redrawing the world map to suit his interests and interfering in the affairs of countries on different continents is an American tradition."*<sup>5</sup>

On theme 6 (participation of Arctic states in US/EU sanctions damages their own Arctic economic interests), Russia argues that US policies aim to dominate the Arctic while weakening Europe to make it dependent. According to this narrative, Washington is taking advantage of current geopolitical crises to force its allies to depend on US resources, such as liquefied natural gas, instead of continuing to purchase Russian gas. This argument attempts to demonstrate that European countries are being “used” by the United States to the detriment of their own interests, thus connecting with theme 2. By adhering to the sanctions that Washington has imposed on Russia, Europe is harming its own economy, which would have continued to flourish otherwise.

The comments of expert Alexander Stepanov, quoted in the Russian media, illustrate this theme and carries the argument further by claiming that American financial interests would buy up European companies to control their industries and technologies. *“Despite the US-centricity of Trump’s policies, nobody is planning to let Europe drift freely,”* Stepanov insists.

*As a rival, the EU no longer poses a threat to the US: the systemic economic crisis, triggered, among other reasons, by the damaging initiative by Brussels to block energy cooperation with Russia, has undermined Europeans’ potential by plunging them into decades of reliance on US LNG supplies. [...] The expansion of transnational funds with US jurisdiction, absorbing local assets with a view to ultimately cementing external governance over regional industries and technological base, toward the European continent will continue. All this is forming a new European reality and total technological dependence on the United States<sup>6</sup>”.*

This short analysis casts a spotlight on how the US attempts to annex Greenland are framed in the Russian information space to reinforce popular Russian narratives about the Arctic. Russian accusations that the US is a destabilizing force and treats its Arctic allies as pawns resonates in TASS media depictions of developments under the current Trump administration.

For Canada, this offers a lesson that we must digest. The fear that Russian disinformation will try to divide Canadians and pit Northerners against Southerners in the case of a crisis with the US may not correspond to reality. If the Greenland case is indicative, Russia may invest its strategic messaging efforts in making Canada invisible, a powerless victim of great power politics, and stripping any agency from Canada as a sovereign actor capable of standing its ground. American will and self-interested objectives will be presented as unstoppable, and its great power desires portrayed as something that a smaller power must accept and resign itself to, given the futility of resistance or opposition. Preemptive information campaigns from Canadian actors, conveying our sovereignty and strength, should anticipate and prepare to answer these narratives, ensuring that we are not marginalized in the narrative battle with Russia.

# QUICK IMPACT



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Butt, M. January 15 2026. Trump accused of exaggerating Russian threat to Greenland as European troops arrive. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/trump-greenland-russia-china-nato-b2900970.html>

<sup>2</sup> Lackenbauer, P.W., Bouffard, T., and Lajeunesse, A. 2022. Russian Information Operations: The Kremlin's Competitive Narratives and Arctic Influence Objectives. *Journal of Peace and War Studies*, 4, pp. 161–186.

<sup>3</sup> TASS. Russia's military planning to take note of US attempts to use Greenland to ensure security. January 9 2025, World Service Wire.

<sup>4</sup> TASS. Denmark shows readiness to meet US wishes in Greenland, Russian ambassador says. February 1 2025, World Service Wire.

<sup>5</sup> TASS. Trump will be assertive in relation to Mexico, Canada, Greenland – Patrushev. January 14 2025, World Service Wire.

<sup>6</sup> TASS. Trump-led US will hardly let Europe loose, Russian expert argues. January 9 2025, World Service Wire.