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Trump and the United States' Declared Imperative to Annex Greenland: Preliminary Reflections

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There is so much wrong about Trump's recent declarations about the alleged US imperative to acquire Greenland that it is hard to know where to begin.

First, there is the fake news from the President's own mouth that "Greenland is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place," requiring that Americans need to take over Greenland "from the standpoint of national security." There are no such ships, plain and simple. This is pure invention.

Then there is the disinformation that the Kingdom of Denmark has "underinvested" and is not defending Greenland. It does so, reliably, as part of NATO – the most powerful alliance that the world has ever seen. In October 2025, Denmark announced that it was increasing defence spending by \$4.2 billion to improve security in Greenland and the broader Arctic and North Atlantic regions. Furthermore, it committed to spend \$4.5 billion to buy 16 additional F-35 fighter jets from the United States (bringing its F-35 fleet to 43) and accompanying "wingman" drones. The US was only too happy to ink the lucrative deal with its NATO ally.

There is also the inaccurate claim that the US is somehow constrained in its ability to defend North America based on its current arrangements with the Kingdom of Denmark and Greenland. Longstanding agreements already provide the United States with extensive military access and strategic capabilities in the region, with the 1951 Defense of Greenland Treaty granting the US the right to "construct, install, maintain, and operate" military facilities in the island, and facilitating "free access" for American ships, aircraft, and military personnel to designated defence areas. Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) is a primary hub in the U.S. ballistic missile defence system, with its early-warning radars, space surveillance systems, and satellite tracking facilities. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen have explained that existing agreements already offer "ample opportunity" for a stronger U.S. presence if the Americans request it. The White House has not done so, likely because there are other motivations at play than actually bolstering American national security.

I am typically not an alarmist. I have been writing about Arctic security issues for years, extolling Canada and the United States as “premier partners” in the region and downplaying the risk of regional armed conflict. Any military conflict in region, I have insisted, will be a spillover from global geopolitical dynamics, not territorial disputes. Arctic state sovereignty is not under threat, because Russia has a vested interest in adhering to the international law of the sea in a region where it has the most coastal frontage on the Arctic Ocean and the most continental shelf. For its part, China has no claim to sovereign jurisdiction in the region, and does not purport to. The problem was that I could not conceive of the United States as anything but an ally that respected the sovereignty of its neighbours and saw the benefits of collective security.

Today, Canadians should be concerned. The threat is Donald Trump and his coterie of advisors who seek to paint more of the Western Hemisphere in red, white, and blue. [Republican congressman Buddy Carter’s bizarre introduction of a bill](#) last February, seeking to rename Greenland as “Red, White, and Blueland,” seemed almost laughable. “America is back and will soon be bigger than ever with the addition of Red, White, and Blueland,” Carter stated at that time. “President Trump has correctly identified the purchase of what is now Greenland as a national security priority, and we will proudly welcome its people to join the freest nation to ever exist when our Negotiator-in-Chief inks this monumental deal.”

But few are laughing now. Just before Christmas, Trump appointed Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry as a special envoy to Greenland to lead the acquisition efforts, renewing criticism from Danish and Greenlandic officials. “In Greenland nothing has changed. The future of our country is decided by the people of Greenland. We are not Danes. We are not Americans – and we do not wish to become so. We are Inuiaat Kalaallit, we are the people of Greenland,” [Greenlandic foreign minister Vivian Motzfeldt explained in December 2025](#). “Our country belongs to us and it is not going to be controlled or owned by others.”

Trump and his inner circle indicate that they have no intention of consulting with Greenlanders as rightsholders. Instead, guided by their “might makes right” philosophy, they perceive this whole matter as a real estate transaction, with the superpower dictating the terms. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s statement on Monday that the Trump administration did not plan to invade Greenland but would buy the island from Denmark offers little comfort for proponents of Indigenous rights and respect for self-determination. As a [State Department spokesperson told the BBC](#) on 7 January 2026, the US is “eager to build lasting commercial relationships that benefit Americans and the people of Greenland.” This is a different narrative than one about national security imperatives – and perhaps speaks to the [revelations by Martina Di Licosa in Forbes](#) about the billionaire investors who drew Trump’s attention to Greenland in the first place and are counting on their President to give them a favourable return on their investments.

An American invasion of Greenland would mean the end of NATO. Europe will lose core collective security benefits, but so will the United States – although no one seems to have explained this to President Trump. Instead, he hears his sycophantic [Interior Secretary Doug Burgum](#) suggesting that “Europeans should be cheering that the U.S. wants to get involved there.”

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They are not. On Tuesday, the leaders of the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Denmark released a [joint statement](#) affirming that “Greenland belongs to its people, and only Denmark and Greenland can decide on matters concerning their relations.” NATO already has prioritized Arctic security, they reiterated, and “must be achieved collectively.” It is tragic that they had to remind the US, the cornerstone of NATO and a historically consistent champion of liberal democracy, about the importance of “upholding the principles of the UN Charter, including sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders.”

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. Hopefully upcoming discussions with Secretary Rubio will, as Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen expects, resolve “certain misunderstandings.” Much damage, however, has already been done. Canadians who know the map of North America recognize that we cannot turn a blind eye to what is transpiring. If “Red, White, and Blueland” indeed comes to pass through American coercion, we will be the only country standing between Alaska and what would be its new dependency in the North Atlantic. As Sinclair Lewis reminded us in his 1935 novel, the belief that “it can’t happen here” fosters a dangerous complacency that can lead to catastrophic consequences.