



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on March 14, 2025

Trump Is Right About Greenland's National Security Implications

President Donald Trump is serious about acquiring Greenland. But his administration is not the first to make overtures for this strategic island with national security implications and an abundance of valuable natural resources.

The Greenland issue came up again Thursday during an Oval Office news briefing with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte.

Responding to a question from a reporter about his desire to obtain the territory, Trump said, "I think it will happen." He [added](#):

We've been dealing with Denmark, we've been dealing with Greenland, and we have to do it. We really need it for national security. I think that's why NATO might have to get involved. ... We really need Greenland for national security. ... We have a couple of bases on Greenland already, and we have quite a few soldiers. Maybe you'll see more and more soldiers go there. I don't know.



Ministry of Defense of Ukraine/Wikimedia Commons
A Ukrainian military transport aircraft refueling at the U.S. Pituffik Space Base in Greenland

Greenland is a pseudo-sovereign territory of NATO member Denmark. The United States has one military base on the island, the Pituffik Space Base, formerly Thule Air Base. It did have more, but they have since been closed.

Rutte, for his part, was apprehensive about commenting on this sensitive issue. He said he didn't want to drag NATO into the matter.

As for Greenlanders, it likely will take some convincing to warm them up to the idea of becoming part of the U.S. Earlier in March, the center-right Democrats defeated the governing left-wing coalition, while a pro-U.S. party notched its best showing ever. The winning party supports Greenland's independence, but gradually and only after the icy territory, which has a total population of less than 60,000, becomes more politically and economically developed. The party's leader, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, has [said](#) Greenland is not for sale. Nielsen has called Trump's interest in acquiring it "a threat to our political independence," and wrote on Facebook:



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Trump's statement from the US is inappropriate and just shows once again that we must stand together in such situations.

Whatever route the Trump administration takes in its effort to obtain Greenland, it must rule out force and rely on economic incentives and diplomatic means.

History of U.S. Attempts to Acquire Greenland

The U.S. has had its eye on Greenland for more than a century.

In 1941, America made a pact with Denmark that rendered us responsible for Greenland's defense during World War II. This gave the U.S. military permission to build facilities to land its planes. The Pentagon saw Greenland as the world's largest aircraft carrier. The military used the island as a refueling stop for bombing runs into Germany. Top officials in the Harry Truman administration so appreciated the strategic asset the island proved to be during the war that they offered Denmark \$100 million in gold for it, but to no avail.

This wasn't the first time the U.S. had tried to acquire the island. Abraham Lincoln's secretary of state, William Seward, who spearheaded the purchase of Alaska, also tried to buy Greenland, as did Howard Taft's U.S. Ambassador to Denmark Maurice Egan in 1910. Taft's administration proposed a three-way trade that would have made Greenland a U.S. territory. The proposal was this: Denmark would cede Greenland to the United States, and in exchange the United States would give Denmark a group of islands in the Philippines, after which Denmark would turn around and give those islands to Germany in exchange for the Schleswig-Holstein territory Denmark had recently lost. But nothing came of that.

In 1951 the United States signed a new treaty with Denmark that provided wider military latitude to use Greenland as a base of Arctic operations. The U.S. military built the massive Thule Air Base on the northwest coast of the island. Its construction has been compared to that of the Panama Canal because of its complexity.

National Security Implications

Greenland's strategic national security value was acknowledged long before the U.S. built up China into the threat it is today. General H.H. "Hap" Arnold once said, "If there is a third world war, its strategic center will be the north pole."

As talk of another world war and tensions with China intensify in today's multipolar world order, Greenland's national security value is once again at a focal point.

Matthew Shoemaker, a former intelligence officer with the Navy and the Defense Intelligence Agency who served on the Russia desk as part of European Command and the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre, made the American case for Greenland back in December in an [op-ed](#) for *The Hill*.

The U.S. must assert greater control over Greenland to safeguard its national security interests, he said. Trump's goal is based on the legal framework established by the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement. "This agreement empowers the U.S. to significantly influence and potentially control this strategically vital territory, making a compelling case for action that Congress and diplomats cannot ignore," Shoemaker wrote. The 1951 agreement gave the U.S. significant rights and responsibilities within Greenland. "The agreement's provisions grant significant authority for increased American control when national security is invoked," Shoemaker added. The pact gives the U.S. broad access



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rights within Greenland, including the use of air, land and sea spaces near defense areas.

Shoemaker said Greenland's strategic value has only increased, writing:

A warming Arctic is opening new shipping routes and exposing vast mineral resources, attracting the attention of global powers like China and Russia. In this context, the provisions of the 1951 agreement take on renewed significance.

Alexander Gray, a senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council and former chief of staff of the National Security Council under Trump, seconds Shoemaker's sentiment. He penned a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed titled "[Why Trump Really Should 'Buy' Greenland.](#)" Among his points:

If [Greenland] separates from Denmark, it would be responsible for its own security, a task it is ill-equipped to handle. This is a grave concern given the second important development: Russia and China are threatening the status quo in the Arctic. Moscow has claimed significant chunks of the Arctic Sea, including inside Greenland's Exclusive Economic Zone.... China has declared itself a "near-Arctic state," [and] established a shipping network called the "Polar Silk Road" to bind Arctic communities closer to Beijing's economic and political agenda.... Western security and economic interests would be threatened if an independent Greenland surrounded by predatory foreign actors lacked outside protection. Mr. Trump has the chance to negotiate the deal of the century.

Rare Earth Minerals Galore

If there is at least one thing the Joe Biden and Trump administrations agreed on, it was that mining rare earth minerals is a matter of national security.

Greenland is home to a goldmine of rare earths. It is filled with oil, natural gas, and a long list of mineral resources including rare earth metals, graphite, copper, nickel, zinc, gold, diamonds, iron ore, titanium, vanadium, tungsten, and uranium.

The world's superpowers see access to rare earth minerals as a must. These resources are critical to high-tech products, including cell phones, computer hard drives, electric and hybrid vehicle parts, and flat screen TVs and monitors. They're used in medicine and energy storage as well. But, more importantly, these minerals are also crucial for national defense. They are used to make electronic displays, guidance systems, lasers, and radar and sonar systems.

Most rare earths used for products today come out of China, with recent reports [saying](#) China processes 90 percent globally. In 2019, the U.S. imported 78 percent of its rare earth minerals from China.

The United States is trying to wean itself off China's rare earths, and in 2023 it accounted for 12.3 percent of global production. The reopening of Mountain Pass Mine in California was a big step toward reducing reliance on China. And, of course, there's Trump's attempt to gain access to Ukraine's rare earths. The abundance of these resources in Greenland makes the Arctic island all the more valuable.



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