

TRUMP vs GREENLAND



Barry Scott Zellen *discovers if NATO will survive this latest crisis as it has its many prior challenges since 1949*

Just a few months ago, when the White House's 2025 National Security Strategy was released in late November, many Northerners were puzzled by the omission of the Arctic from the document. There was no Arctic section, in contrast to the previous NSS document in 2022, and no mention at all of the vast island of Greenland, which has featured so prominently in President Trump's vision of expanded American hemispheric power.

Like a North Atlantic iceberg, Greenland had drifted off the global media's radar in recent months, as other places and events dominated headlines. From the ongoing military conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, to the new year's showdown in Venezuela. Then just before Christmas, this drought in headlines ended, with the media spotlight shining brightly once again on the world's largest island.

As Royal Danish Defence College associate professor Marc Jacobsen noted on LinkedIn: "I don't believe the US will use military force to take control of Greenland," as a: "US invasion of Greenland would be catastrophic – effectively marking the end of NATO and any remaining credibility of US commitment to international law. It would also put an end to any peace prize ambitions Donald Trump may hold. That said, I remain confident that such a scenario will not happen, as there are still responsible actors capable of stopping an idea this unreasonable."

But after America's successful lightning strike on Venezuela and the abruptness of Trump's pivot to Greenland in the hours and days that followed, it is unclear whether there remain influential actors in the President's inner circle willing to stop, or even interested in stopping, such an idea. Given the deep moral injustices in past Danish colonial policies in

Greenland and the continued suffering that resulted, one can now envision a confluence of humanitarian intervention, commercial interests (particularly rare earths and uranium), and national security aligning as they did in Venezuela, providing justification for another forceful implementation of the Trump Doctrine.

But not all voices favour a military solution for Greenland. President Trump's appointment of Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry as his special envoy to Greenland could inject new energy and much-needed civility to this long-simmering diplomatic dispute between America and Denmark over Trump's aspirations. Indeed, Governor Landry's appointment could be perceived as a voice of peace, given that his home state of Louisiana is rich in symbolic and historic significance of a non-military nature.

As Landry himself has observed, this is because of Louisiana's heritage as one of America's largest and peaceful territorial expansions, via the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. As reported in *The Hill*: "The United States has always been a welcoming party. We don't go in there trying to conquer anybody and trying to – you know – take over anybody's country. We say: 'Listen, we represent liberty, we represent economic strength, we represent protection' ... Look, no one knows better than Louisiana. My family has been in Louisiana for over 300 years. We've lived under more flags than anyone living in the continental United States over the history of America. We ended up settling under the United States of America's flag, and for that, Louisiana has been so much better."

As Arctic geopolitical expert Klaus Dodds observed on LinkedIn: "While it is common for commentators to talk about the Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, I would focus on another analogy that you will see with current US posture towards Greenland. Why you might ask was the Governor for Louisiana asked to act as special envoy to Greenland – one answer might be that the potential acquisition of Greenland has been compared by some to the 19th century Louisiana Purchase – in territorial size at least. Before his election in 2024, Trump reportedly told journalists in 2022 that: 'I love maps. And I always said: 'Look at the size of [Greenland]. It's massive. That should be part of the United States.'"

But after America's strike on Venezuela, few observers were talking about the Louisiana Purchase as a model for Greenland's constitutional future any longer. Indeed, the conversation had shifted at the White House in the exuberant aftermath of the successful Maduro snatch-and-grab, when confidence in the newly asserted Trump Doctrine was at a zenith – and President Trump himself described his application of the Monroe Doctrine as the "Donroe Doctrine," borrowing this colourful term from a prescient 8 January, 2025 front page of the *New York Post*.

The headlines have been dramatic, from the BBC ("We need Greenland": Trump repeats threat to annex Danish territory) to *The Guardian* ("US attack on Greenland would mean end of Nato, says Danish PM: Mette Frederiksen criticises Donald Trump's 'unacceptable pressure' as Greenland counterpart condemns 'fantasies'") and *CNBC* ("Denmark in 'crisis mode' as Trump sets sights on Greenland after Venezuela attack"). As *CNBC* reported, Trump told the press on Sunday aboard Air Force One: "We need

Greenland from the standpoint of national security and Denmark is not going to be able to do it, I can tell you."

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a now iconic image widely circulated from the X account of Katie Miller, wife of Trump's Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller (a leading architect of Trump's aggressive Venezuela policy), portrayed a map of Greenland superimposed by the red, white and blue with the ominous (to Denmark) caption: "SOON" in all caps – which has since been reposted all around the world, in both mainstream news as well as social media, including the LinkedIn feed of Klaus Dodds who observed: "the days have long since passed that such images can be simply laughed off. No doubt few in Denmark and Greenland will forget President Trump remarking last year that the US would acquire Greenland one way or another."

US INVASION WOULD PUT AN END TO ANY PEACE PRIZE AMBITIONS FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP

Soon after his wife's controversial X posting, Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller doubled down on America's right to possess Greenland in a fiery interview with Jake Tapper on CNN's *The Lead*. Noting Greenland's small population (and getting it wrong by half), Miller added: "The real question is about what right does Denmark assert control over Greenland? What is the basis of their territorial claim? What is their basis of having Greenland as a colony in Denmark? The United States is the power of NATO. For the United States to secure the Arctic region to protect and defend NATO and NATO interests, obviously, Greenland should be part of the United States." Miller added: "we live in a world, in the real world ... that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power. These are the iron laws of the world."

Miller reminded Tapper it has "been the formal position of the US government since the beginning of this administration, frankly going back to the previous Trump administration, that Greenland should be part of the United States." When Tapper pressed Miller on the potential use of force, Miller cautioned: "There's no need to even think or talk about this in the context that you're asking of a military operation. Nobody's gonna fight the United States militarily over the future of Greenland."

But so far, political leaders in Greenland continue to insist the island is not for sale. As reported by Al Jazeera: "Greenland's political parties have rejected United States President Donald Trump's repeated threats to take control of the Arctic island, saying that its future must be decided by its people... 'We do not want to be Americans, we do not want to be Danes, we want to be Greenlanders,' they said in the statement, posted on social media by Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen."

But as CNN headlined, the "US will take Greenland the 'hard way' if it can't do it the 'easy way,' Trump says." Never one to mince his words,

Political leaders in Greenland continue to insist the island is not for sale

ABC News reported President Trump added: "We are going to do something on Greenland whether they like it or not". Indeed, President Trump may see no option but to send his armada next to Greenland and take by force what he cannot get through negotiation – just as he did in Venezuela.

CNN SAID: THE "US WILL TAKE GREENLAND THE 'HARD WAY' IF IT CAN'T DO IT THE 'EASY WAY'"

But Greenland and America have been through a lot together, and the bonds forged from the commercial whaling and polar exploration days of the 19th century through World War II and the Cold War run deep. If America were to take Greenland, it would be less a hostile takeover and more a messy divorce leaving bruised feelings and broken hearts, all mendable with time. Indeed, one can think of an American intervention as something of a rescue mission, bringing a decisive end to a long and messy forced marriage between the Danes and Greenlanders.

This would not be the first time that the American military has come to Greenland's rescue. First there were the Nazis, who infiltrated weather teams on Greenland during World War II to radio updates to the Wehrmacht to help its long fight against the Western allies. The US sent the Coast Guard to serve as the Greenland Patrol and they held the line. The Germans, caught between the tightening vise grip of advancing Western allies in the West and the Red Army in the East, were unable to break out of mainland Europe to threaten Greenland and beyond that Labrador, Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence as many then feared they would.

Soon after the second world war ended, a new nemesis arose, when the US' old war-time partner, Stalin, turned his victorious forces of Eastern Europe's liberation from Hitler into an army of occupation that quickly subjugated half the continent, snuffing out the embers of democracy for nearly half a century to come. America quickly pivoted from postwar euphoria and demobilisation to planning for a long, cold war. It was bad enough that from 1945 to 1948, Eastern Europe fell under Stalin's thumb. But then in 1949, the Soviets split the atom and the USSR thereby emerged as the world's second nuclear power ●

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"The Donroe Doctrine" as visualised on the cover of the 8 January, 2025 edition of the New York Post.