

GREENLAND'S ARCTIC STRATEGY



Barry Scott Zellen considers the security concerns as Greenland explores a collaborative vision for an Inuit sovereign restoration

Greenland has been projecting a more assertive and autonomous voice in world politics, gaining valuable experience in anticipation of what it expects will be an amicable and inevitable independence from the Kingdom of Denmark. Indeed, for a decade now, it has been strengthening its diplomatic presence on the world stage, with overseas diplomatic representations now in four countries, starting with Washington in 2014 (with its representation office hosted at the Danish Embassy to the United States); Reykjavik in 2018 (where it opened its own separate representation office); Beijing in 2021 (with its representation office hosted at the Danish Embassy to China); and at NATO in 2023 (as part of the Permanent Representation of Denmark to NATO – DANATO – in Brussels). It plans to open its next diplomatic representation in Ottawa, and even sooner will assume the lead role on behalf of the Kingdom of Denmark at the Arctic

Council. That Greenland is laying such a solid diplomatic foundation now should go far to ensure its future success upon a formal sovereign restoration.

In addition to expanding its diplomatic footprint, presently as part of the Kingdom of Denmark (and importantly, the Arctic component of the Kingdom), Greenland released its very first Arctic strategy on 21 February, 2024, *Greenland In The World: Nothing About Us Without Us*, presenting its comprehensive and nuanced vision for a peaceful and inclusive Arctic with a decidedly western strategic tilt along with a globalised economic vision. The strategy's 13 sections include the following 11 topics in addition to its introduction and closing remarks, which all would be important factors in Greenland's sovereign restoration: the Arctic Council; climate and the ocean; the United States; Iceland; Canada; international trade; connectivity; a newly proposed Arctic North American forum; East Asia; multilateral cooperation and international political agendas (including the Arctic, ICC, Nordic cooperation, United Nations, European

Union, other organisations); and security and defence policy. While the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) creatively asserted its own distinct vision of collaborative Arctic sovereignty in 2009 (in its Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty), and on resource development in 2011 (in its Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat) by aligning Inuit and state interests in a mutually beneficial collaborative relationship that fell short of sovereign independence for the Inuit, Greenland in 2024 is instead asserting its own ambition to achieve a formal sovereign restoration in the Westphalian world, likely becoming the world's very first Inuit state to join the world's family of nations – leveraging its unique position at the crossroads of the Indigenous and Westphalian worlds.

The United States, Canada, Iceland, China, the Arctic Council and NATO all feature prominently in Greenland's strategy, and represent key partners from which Greenland seeks support as it travels along the road toward independence, each with numerous overlapping alignments of their own – for instance, the United States, Iceland and Canada are fellow Arctic Council members and fellow NATO members, reinforcing their shared Western alignment, while China is an observer to the Arctic Council and an important economic partner for Greenland as it seeks new markets in quest of economic self-sufficiency, a necessity once independence is achieved. Relationships with all of these partners, East or West, North or South, will be essential to Greenland's future when it becomes an independent state.

Greenland In The World: Nothing About Us Without Us outlines Greenland's vision of a world bound closer together by its many overlapping partnerships, aligning the interests of Arctic states (of which it is a part), non-Arctic states (such as China, trade with which it will develop economic self-sufficiency), future Arctic states (as Greenland aspires to become), Indigenous organisations (to which Greenland belongs as a majority Inuit polity), and a broad array of intergovernmental and international organisations, from the regional to global level (such as the Arctic Council, where it is dually represented by both the Inuit Circumpolar Council as one of six Indigenous permanent participant organisations, and the Kingdom of Denmark, of which it is a constituent component). It articulates a vision of Greenland as a cooperative if largely Western-aligned member of the Arctic North American region, playing an increasingly autonomous role as it seeks to develop its full economic potential, while also seeking new powers in matters of state and defence.

While its quest for independence differs from the more transnational and less Westphalian vision of sovereignty expressed by the Inuit Circumpolar Council in 2009, it is nonetheless reminiscent of the ICC's commitment to a multilateral, collaborative Arctic where state and tribe coexisted peacefully, united by their many shared interests. Greenland's strategy articulates a similar vision of collaborative Arctic, where it will likewise be an essential partner on all matters of strategic importance to the Arctic, captured so well by the subtitle to Greenland's strategy, "Nothing about us without us."

Indeed, "Nothing about us without us" captures the spirit of co-management evident in the ICC's 2009

declaration on circumpolar sovereignty, and before that in the 1996 formation of the Arctic Council with its eight member states and six Indigenous Peoples organisations with special status as permanent participants. That spirit manifests itself throughout Greenland's 2024 Arctic strategy, where Greenland's proposed collaboration in partnership with multiple states, alliances and international organisations is outlined in detail, and its catchy subtitle could likewise be a nutshell definition for co-management as it evolves toward what some scholars describe as a post-Westphalian sovereignty – as the: "seat at the table" that co-management has enabled becomes ever more global. As Greenland's Arctic strategy eloquently describes in Section 11 (Multilateral Cooperation and International Political Agendas): "History has shown us that it is necessary to have a seat at the table if Greenland is to ensure that its voice is heard. Greenland aims to play an active role in the world's main multilateral bodies wherever possible and, more importantly, whenever it is relevant. This is an inherent consequence of Nothing about us without us."

GREENLAND AIMS TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE WORLD'S MAIN MULTILATERAL BODIES

Greenland's aspiration for independence and its vision of a collaborative world in which it can not only survive but also thrive as an independent sovereign state, are essential to its first Arctic strategy. Greenland's strategy is thus a bold declaration of decolonised thinking about its place in the world, one where it is increasingly independent when it comes to matters of state and statecraft. A peaceful and cooperative Arctic remains the goal, but with Greenland's increased engagement and agency as a NATO ally and partner – while simultaneously fostering the formation of a new Arctic North America Forum to help strengthen the unity of the regions of Arctic North America (Alaska, in the USA; Yukon, NWT, Nunavut, and Nunavik, in Canada; and Greenland in the Kingdom of Denmark, at least for now); pursuing continued cooperation at the international and regional level through the UN, EU, Arctic Council, Nordic cooperation councils (Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Council, and West Nordic Council), and Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); maintaining close bilateral ties with neighbouring allied states, foremost of which is the United States for its military power and prominence in NATO, but also Canada and Iceland; and nurturing its evolving relationship with China and other East Asian trading states.

At the centre of these multiple overlapping collaborations stands Greenland, as a partner to all of these diverse stakeholders, revealing a complex, balanced, pragmatic, thoughtful and independent approach to statecraft that illustrates its maturation as an emergent sovereign polity, ready not only for its seat at the table, but its place among the world's family of nations ●

Greenland's vision is of a world bound closer together by its many overlapping partnerships

Barry Scott Zellen, PhD, is intersec's International Arctic Correspondent