



# GOING GREEN

Barry Scott Zellen explains why – as Trump 2.0 begins – Greenland is taking centre stage

It was just over five years ago, in August 2019, that President Trump first proposed purchasing Greenland from Denmark, and to thereby complete the centuries-long project to decolonize the North American Arctic that began with the Alaska purchase in 1867, which ended Russia's colonization of the far North-West of North America, and the British North America Act that very same year bringing self-governance to Canada as well. The last colonial outpost in Arctic North America to be

ruled by a distant European sovereign is Greenland, which is an autonomous region of Denmark. Trump's initial bid to acquire Greenland was quickly and soundly rejected by both the Danes and Greenlanders, the latter famously responding: "We're open for business, not for sale." The negative response to Trump's Greenland interest was as dismissive as that which greeted Secretary of State William H. Seward's 1867 Alaska purchase, which was widely lampooned as a "folly." Now, with

Members of the US Special Operations Mountain Warfare Training Centre and Danish special forces in the mountains of Mestersvig, Greenland

**President Trump returned to power with a decisive electoral mandate, America and the world are once again witnessing his unorthodox diplomatic vision for the Arctic, including a reiteration of his proposal for America's Arctic expansion by gaining possession of Greenland. And once again, both Greenland and Denmark have rejected all such talk as folly.**

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen reiterated on 7 January – the very day the President's son, Donald Trump Jr., flew to Nuuk on Trump Force One for a quick but largely symbolic private visit – that once again: "Greenland is not for sale," adding for good measure that: "we need to stay calm and stick to our principles." She added that America remains Denmark's: "most important and closest ally," and that she welcomed the President's interest in the Arctic, cautioning that it should: "be done in a way that is respectful of the Greenlandic people. At the same time, it must be done in a way that allows Denmark and the United States to still cooperate in, among other things, NATO." Greenland's Prime Minister, Múte Egede, continues to call for independence from Denmark, and for its liberation from a long colonial history, while Aaja Chemnitz, one of Greenland's two representatives in Denmark's parliament, told the press that: "most people don't want" to join the United States, adding: "I think some people find it quite disrespectful. And the way it has been done, and just the fact that you're saying that you can buy another country." But Trump, if anything, can be a persistent suitor when he sets his mind to it. Just ask the American electorate.

A Greenland purchase, despite its unpopularity with most Danes and Greenlanders, does have its own historical and geopolitical logic, as it would unify the North-Western and North-Eastern flanks of Arctic North America under the constitution of the United States for the first time, bringing to an end one of the continent's most persistent insecurities, which last gained strategic attention at the highest levels when Denmark fell to the Nazis and war came to the North Atlantic, with the defence of Greenland falling to the United States, as it would continue to do during the Cold War. The idea of purchasing Greenland for \$100-million was briefly floated in 1946 as America faced the threat posed to North America by Soviet bombers. Potential price points now-a-days range from a low of \$230.25-million as estimated by the *Daily Mail* to a more robust \$12.5-billion (based on the GDP-adjusted purchase price of the US Virgin Islands, purchased primarily for strategic defence reasons) to \$77-billion (based on the GDP-adjusted purchase price of Alaska, acquired primarily for strategic economic and diplomatic reasons) as estimated by the *New York Times* to as high as \$1.1-trillion, based on the tongue-in-cheek "sum of the parts" valuation of Greenland's total untapped natural resource wealth as estimated by the *Financial Times* FT Alphaville blog – all which make the original price paid for Alaska, \$7.2 million, just two cents per acre, a veritable bargain (even when taking into consideration its inflation-adjusted purchase price in today's dollars of \$153.5-million).

Trump's strategic interest in Greenland reflects his continuing, one might even argue maturing, recognition of the realities of climate change, most

notably in the Arctic. This irony has not been overlooked; as *The Guardian* has recently reported: "Donald Trump's desire to seize control of Greenland and the Panama canal is being shaped in part by a force that he has sought to deny even exists – the climate crisis." But if you look closer at Trump's vision for Greenland, and maximising its natural resource potential, you see not the denial of climate change but its acceptance. The only difference is that instead of crafting a policy designed to mitigate or prevent climate change as done under both Presidents Obama and Biden, Trump wants to position America first and foremost to benefit from climate change, by expanding America's own Arctic footprint and thereby increasing its energy security and securing access to increasingly important strategic minerals. Where his rivals saw a glass half empty and feared the end of the world was upon us, Trump sees a glass half full and a future of prosperity.

## GREENLAND NOW HAS A CHANCE TO RECONSIDER TRUMP'S OFFER FOR IT TO BECOME PART OF AMERICA

It should thus come as no surprise that when naming his pick for Ambassador to Denmark, President Trump reiterated his ambition for Greenland to join the American constitutional family after its dormancy since 2019, announcing on social media: "For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity." This wording signalled an intensification of Trump's Greenland interest and his vision for a more united North American Arctic, placing it firmly within America's national interest as he conceives it. Trump has aligned his Greenland vision with the values and rhetoric of his MAGA base, evident in his social media comments announcing his son's visit to Greenland on 7 January: "Don Jr. and my Reps landing in Greenland," Trump wrote. "The reception has been great. They, and the Free World, need safety, security, strength, and PEACE! This is a deal that must happen. MAGA. MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!"

Greenland now has a chance to reconsider Trump's offer for it to become part of America – and in so doing, help shift the conversation back to a more balanced and inclusive role for Greenland in the region's future, and away from Trump's more muscular consideration of economic coercion and the potential use of force to take Greenland should it not embrace his vision of constitutional union. Nuuk will, of course, expect a seat at the table, as called for in its first Arctic strategy, *Greenland in the World – Nothing About Us Without Us: Greenland's Foreign, Security and Defense Policy 2024-2033 – an Arctic Strategy* released last year.

Already, Greenland seems to recognise the historic opportunity presented by President Trump's renewed interest in the island, albeit nervously and without the same enthusiasm that Trump has. As reported in the *New York Times*: "Greenland's prime minister said

the territory would like to work more closely with the United States on defence and natural resources,” citing Prime Minister Egede’s remarks to a press conference in Nuuk: “The reality is we are going to work with the US – yesterday, today and tomorrow. We have to be very smart on how we act... The power struggles between the superpowers are rising and are now knocking on our door.” How might such a conversation between Greenland and the United States unfold? Perhaps the conversation with

## TRUMP’S STRATEGIC INTEREST IN GREENLAND SHOWS HIS RECOGNITION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Trump will start with his territorial acquisition/ statehood vision, and evolve from there toward genuine support for Greenland’s independence as America’s renewed relationship with Greenlanders grows, along with the desire to extend more robust American protection to Greenland in its struggle to be free, the very same fundamental struggle that gave birth to America almost 250 years ago.

Such a trajectory parallels how Trump 1.0 evolved its views on Afghanistan, whose forever war Trump inherited and which despite two decades of mission creep and institutional momentum within the pro-war military-industrial-academic complex,

he brought to an end with strong bipartisan support. Trump found through peace negotiations with the Taliban that his administration and his political base rooted in the “America First” imperative of the MAGA movement ultimately had more in common with their military opponent, the Taliban, as people of Faith, than they did with America’s very own client state and military partner that it had installed in Kabul 18 years prior. Moreover, President-elect Trump has a long track record of testing and provoking America’s allies, and appears to find more common ground with America’s traditional opponents than its customary friends. His interest in Greenland, and decoupling it from the sovereign orbit of its NATO partner Denmark, would definitely do that – siding with the independent-spirited Greenlanders over their colonial rulers in Copenhagen, and creating a new, more robust security architecture for North America through an expanded and reinvigorated NORAD in favour of continued reliance on a more fractious NATO for American security.

This conversation is only just getting under way, and we have (at least) four years to watch it unfold. During this time, there will be many new opportunities for Greenlanders to win the confidence of President Trump, and, through spirited negotiation, persuade him to embrace their vision of sovereign restoration and collaborative diplomacy with the United States and its other NATO partners, as articulated in its innovative and visionary 2024 Arctic strategy, *Greenland in the World* – *Nothing About Us Without Us* ●

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**A US Air Force LC-130 practices ski landings and takeoffs at Camp Raven, Greenland**

