February 2026. Greenland update

The US's push for Greenland is its boldest territorial ambition in over a century. Following various threats of tariffs and military action, the US President took a pause at Davos; and agreed with NATO a preliminary understanding about Greenland. A sort of framework.

The Pituffik Space Base, on Greenland, is at the hub of US interest. It is the Pentagon's northernmost facility and located 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle, home to an early-warning radar over polar route that detects inward-bound missiles heading towards the US mainland. One of the most important sensors in the entire US missile defence system, the radar provides crucial extra minutes of warning time - enough to intercept threats from Russia, China, or North Korea.

Greenland's geography – of over 10,000 feet thick ice in some places - makes it the ideal solution because it is a great elevation for radars, with any missiles coming over the pole toward North America having to pass right by Greenland's eastern coast. To leverage this advantage, the US would need to install layered defences - everything from Patriot batteries to cold-weather short-range systems.

This is of course all part and parcel of the strategy behind the "Golden Dome" missile defence initiative - which the US government announced in early 2025 – which is an integrated shield protecting North America from all directions.

Additionally, Greenland sits at the western edge of the GIUK (Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom) Gap – the narrow entrance which, for example, Russian submarines must pass to reach the Atlantic. This crucial corridor was at the heart of Cold War naval strategy and it is now back in vogue, with Russian submarine activity hitting its highest levels in decades. Indeed, Moscow's Northern Fleet operates over 33 active subs. Atlantic shipping lanes are vital to US logistics and Greenland could give Washington the geographical addition which it needs to maintain maritime dominance for decades to come.

Undoubtedly, the Arctic has become a new arena of power and competition, with Greenland the easiest entry point for non-Arctic states wanting influence. China pre-emptively declared itself a "near-Arctic state" in 2018. Although, Chinese investment attempts in Greenland have failed unilaterally, to date. For example, a Chinese state-owned firm endeavoured to build airports at three Greenlandic towns in 2018 and Denmark needed to step in to help financially. In addition, Chinese proposals for a naval research station and satellite facility were - rightly or wrongly - blocked under pressure from the Danish and US governments. There also appears to be very little Chinese presence on Greenland currently.

Perhaps the biggest question is who shapes Arctic governance. The Arctic Council - made up of the US, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden - has traditionally worked by consensus, with military considerations rarely addressed. However, China has requested observer status and influence, and Russia is increasing its already strong presence along the Arctic coast. As such, the US currently has limited Arctic infrastructure and Greenland would dramatically expand US presence.

As is becoming increasingly clear, and a la Monroe Doctrine, an Arctic with Chinese research stations and Russian bases is not an acceptable geopolitical reality for the US. As such, the US is essentially indicating that the Arctic is the 21st-century Caribbean – that is, a near-abroad where US primacy can never be challenged.

In conclusion, it appears that Copenhagen is willing to discuss additional defence arrangements - including US participation in the Golden Dome over Danish territory – and Greenland's government is now open to economic partnerships with US firms. Although, Greenland's independence movement finds itself in a tough spot. Most Greenlanders don't want to be Danish or American – they are passionately Greenlandic. And, arguably, the recent pressure from Washington may have actually strengthened the case for staying with Denmark, for the moment at least.

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