

TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY: TRUMP'S GREENLAND DREAM

by
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U.S. President Donald Trump's dream to acquire Greenland through sale has sparked debate. Why is Trump talking about this now? What does this mean for Denmark, and European security at large? While Greenland's Prime Minister claims the territory is not for sale, any future trajectory of Trump's proposition could have serious ramifications on the transatlantic partnership.

Much before history could repeat itself with the swearing-in of Trump to the White House on January 20, 2025, he has been sending shockwaves across the Atlantic. In this regard, Europe finds itself in the eye of the storm. Ranging from tariff threats, intimidation to increase defense spending, possibility of withdrawal from NATO as well as other multilateral institutions, retribution in case of increasing market engagement with China, claiming to end the war in Ukraine in under 24 hours, to expressing the desire to purchase Greenland, Trump is here to show that he means business. Greenland, the world's largest island located in the resource-rich Arctic region, is an autonomous territory of Denmark, which is very much an active member of the EU as well as the NATO.

A Strategic Play

The island is home to a number of [critical raw materials](#) including rare earth minerals, graphite, lithium, uranium, and iron, much popular with the increasing battery requirements for electric cars. These resources, however, remain underdeveloped owing to the fact that [80 percent](#) of its territory is covered by ice and the progress in infrastructure development has been slow.

It occupies a unique geopolitical position located between the U.S. and Europe. With the North-West Passage shipping lane running along its coast, the island is a part of a strategic maritime region,

called the [Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap](#). Acquiring Greenland would provide the U.S. not only exclusive access to resources, but also a base closer to the Arctic, which can be leveraged for defense and ballistic missile warning systems. This makes it all the more critical for the U.S, in context of Russian and Chinese aspirations to create a presence in the region, which could be a future point of contention.

As the ice cover melts in the Arctic faster than the rest of the planet, a renewed "Great Game" competition is brewing among the world's superpowers as they seek to exploit the resources as well as new commercial shipping and military sea routes through the ice-free seas.

Historically, U.S. Presidents Andrew Johnson and Harry Truman have also attempted to take over or purchase Greenland citing strategic concerns in 1867 and 1946, respectively. However, it is Trump with his unpredictable policy-making, who has gone one step ahead to introduce a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives called "[Make Greenland Great Again Act](#)", to authorize talks for the purchase of the island. Trump claims that taking control of Greenland is an "[absolute necessity](#)" for U.S. national security and does not rule out the possibility of escalating military aggression or economic conflict against Denmark to make it happen.

Trump supporters in the U.S. believe that this could be one of the biggest real estate plays ever, overpowering the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Is this going to be yet another feather in Trump's metaphorical cap, rather crown, of transactional diplomacy?

'Not for Sale'

Although Greenland is a self-governing territory with the right to secede by means of a referendum, the Greenlandic Prime Minister has clarified "[that Greenland is not for sale](#)" and the Danish Prime Minister reaffirmed that "[Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders](#)". In 2019, Denmark had firmly rejected a similar offer made in Trump's first term, with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen calling it

“absurd”. This was after Trump announced on his social media that according to polls, 68 percent of Greenlanders supported independence from Denmark. Extrapolating these trends to his second term, Trump has been threatening the country with tariffs if they refuse to give up Greenland.

It is only natural that Trump’s threats of using military force and other aggressive means to acquire the island have been met with uneasiness and skepticism in Europe. Key member-states of the EU, France and Germany, have been criticizing Trump’s Greenland threats reiterating that the EU will not tolerate threats against its sovereign borders, citing that the inviolability of borders is fundamental international law.

If force is used to change the borders, U.S. relations with its European allies would fundamentally change. In addition, any future cases of U.S. encroachment into the European borders, even through economic and political pressures to take control, would not easily be ruled out, strategically exposing Europe to conflicts through the Atlantic.

It is also important to note that for the U.S., using military force against Denmark would mean attacking a weaker NATO ally to seize territory, terminally and perennially weakening the alliance.

End of Transatlantic Partnership?

The major problem with Trump’s proposition is his perceived approach that the Europeans can be walked all over. It appears that he seems to believe that the level of dependency that the Europeans have on the U.S. is so high that he can simply demand any potentially strategic territory he desires. He is unlikely to stop, lest the European leaders stand up to this

geopolitical bullying.

In this context, Europe needs to step up their security game in the Arctic in order to showcase that they can defend Greenland and the region by themselves. This could be done through increasing investment in Arctic defense, and closely working with Greenland to bolster maritime defense capabilities and ensuring economic security in the region.

Transatlantic cooperation dates back to the Second World War, in the aftermath of which a liberal world order was established. The American and European allies have since established a relationship of trust and cooperation, which would see an untimely demise at the hands of Trump in exchange for compromised security in the region. The EU and the U.S. have the world’s largest bilateral trade and investment relationship, accounting for [42 percent of the global GDP](#), and supporting over 16 million jobs. Not only would Europe lose its biggest ally in terms of military, trade and investment, and security cooperation, but the long-standing transatlantic partnership, which is all the more critical in enhancing security and growth in a contested and geopolitically volatile global landscape, would have to say goodbye to its glorious past. The question remains: Does Trump see this as a trade-off worth making?

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