



# Greenland: Resources, Power, and the Return of Territorial Geopolitics

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*Greenland has ceased to be an enormous, frozen, empty island and has become a geopolitical node of the first order, as the Trump administration openly tests the limits of multilateral rules and allied sovereignty.*

## Key takeaways from the piece:

- **Greenland signals** how competition for critical minerals and Arctic routes is reshaping geopolitical priorities.
- **Existing multilateral security frameworks** show clear limits when hard-power behavior emerges within allied systems.
- **Control over critical resources by state and/or private actors** increasingly outweighs legal and institutional constraints, redefining how power is exercised in the 21st century.
- **The core dilemma** is whether the logic of *fait accompli* comes to define the rules of the global order.

## From Frozen Territory to Strategic Asset

Recent statements by Donald Trump regarding the need for the United States to “possess” Greenland—by hook or by crook—should not be read as an eccentricity or an isolated provocation. The underlying argument is clear: if the United States does not act, China or Russia will, sooner or later.

The firm response from Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, defending the island's sovereignty and ruling out any negotiation over its status, was immediate, as were statements from various European leaders.

What is at stake is much deeper: the explicit return of territorial geopolitics and competition for strategic resources at the heart of the Western world, with an additional disruptive element: this is no longer a struggle between

adversaries, but between allies. This places NATO at the center of a tension for which it is not designed.

As I noted in my column on Venezuela, these are not disconnected episodes, but rather the same logic reasserting itself: when critical resources and strategic security come into tension, institutions and alliances take a back seat to hard-power.

Greenland is no longer a remote territory; it has become a strategic asset shaped by minerals, routes, and power competition.

## Greenland: A Strategic Reserve

With a population of barely 57,000, Greenland might seem irrelevant from a demographic standpoint. However, from the geopolitical perspective of the 21st century, the exact opposite is true. Its true value lies not in its population or its current economy, but in what lies beneath the ice and its future projection.

Various geological studies agree that Greenland holds one of the largest untapped concentrations of strategic minerals on the planet:

- **Rare Earth Elements (REE):** Greenland is considered as one of the world's largest sources of critical minerals. While current production is limited, geological assessments (GEUS/USGS) suggest that its deposits could represent a significant double-digit percentage of the global resource base, with certain strategic minerals reaching up to 25% of the Western world's potential supply. These elements are essential inputs for advanced weapons systems, electronics, artificial intelligence, and energy transition. Today, China controls more than 60% of the global supply and nearly 90% of refining capacity, making any viable alternative a first-order asset. A single Greenlandic deposit, such as Kvanefjeld, is already recognized as one of the largest multi-element deposits in the world, capable of rivaling the scale of major Chinese complexes currently in production.
- **Uranium:** Identified resources are estimated to range between 500,000 and 600,000 tons, figures comparable to major producing countries. This positioning is critical at a time when nuclear energy is once again being considered a pillar of global energy security and decarbonization. While current local regulations present challenges, the scale of these resources makes Greenland a potential strategic reserve of global significance.
- **Lithium, Graphite, Cobalt, and Nickel:** Critical minerals for batteries, the military industry, and dual-use technologies. Although still underexploited, several projects on the island show grades comparable to active deposits in Australia and Canada.

Added to this is a decisive factor: the accelerated melting of the Arctic. What is a tragedy from a climatic point of view, is, from the logic of hard geopolitics, a factor that drastically reduces the costs of access and extraction. Over the next two decades, Greenland could transition from being a potential reserve to an

effectively exploitable one, just as global competition for critical minerals intensifies.

## **Routes, Defense, and Control of the North Atlantic**

American interest is not new. After several failed purchase attempts and a subsequent pact among allies with Denmark, the United States has maintained an active military presence since the Cold War, centered on the Pituffik Space Base (formerly known as Thule). Thus, the island remains key for early warning systems, missile defense, and control of the North Atlantic. However, the current emphasis marks a transcendental shift: it is about possession and the resulting direct control, rather than just about presence or cooperation.

The Arctic is transforming into a new strategic corridor that demands close attention. Emerging maritime routes could reduce transportation times between Asia and Europe by up to **40%**, altering global trade and naval projection. Strategically speaking, controlling Greenland is equivalent to securing a fixed point from which to project military, economic, and logistical power in a region undergoing full reconfiguration.

The central issue is not territorial ownership, but the method by which power is exercised when strategic interests are at stake.

## **The Parallel with Venezuela**

This is where the link with Venezuela becomes inevitable. For decades, Venezuela was treated as a hemispheric energy reserve, not only for its oil but for what it represented in terms of regional autonomy and control of critical resources. Today, Greenland occupies an analogous position, though in a different theater and with different assets: strategic minerals instead of oil; the Arctic instead of the Caribbean; technological competition instead of classic energy security.

In both cases, despite being very different in nature, the pattern involves territories with underutilized strategic wealth and limited capacities to independently protect and manage assets that impact global security in one way or another. The response from great powers, then and now, follows a familiar logic: when resources are strategic, sovereignty takes a back seat.

## **NATO: The Dilemma of Ally Against Ally**

The role of NATO is as central as it is uncomfortable. Formally, Greenland is part of the Alliance's security space. In practice, the debate exposes a question that no one wants to ask openly: how far does an ally's sovereignty extend when resources and positions critical to collective security are at stake?

Although NATO has not yet issued a standalone assessment of Greenland's situation, senior officials and allied governments have underscored the importance of ensuring Arctic security within the framework of the Alliance, as well as defending the sovereignty of member territories. They have reaffirmed that any unilateral attempt to alter territorial status would have profound implications for alliance cohesion and collective defense.

Taken together, this reflects an implicit recognition that the dispute is neither symbolic nor diplomatic, but structural—and that the Alliance faces an unprecedented internal tension.

The dilemma NATO faces is radically different from that of Ukraine, making the comparison inevitable. In Ukraine, the Alliance did not intervene directly because Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty—collective defense—was not applicable: Ukraine is not a member. The legal framework was clear, however politically uncomfortable.

In the case of Greenland, the situation is the inverse and far more explosive: the territory is part of NATO's security space, and the potential threat comes not from an external actor, but from the Alliance's most powerful member.

Here, three basic principles of the Treaty come into tension: Article 1, which obligates allies to settle disputes by peaceful means and to refrain from the threat or use of force; Article 4, which allows for consultations whenever the territorial integrity or security of an ally is threatened; and finally Article 5, whose spirit relies on the—unwritten—premise that no ally will be the source of the threat. The problem is that the Treaty was never designed to operationalize such a scenario.

If Denmark were to invoke Article 4 in the face of coercive pressure from the United States, NATO would be forced to deliberate on an internal threat. And if that pressure were to escalate, Article 5 would be conceptually paralyzed: collective defense cannot be activated against its primary military guarantor.

This marks a structural limit of the system: NATO was designed to deter external threats, not to contain disputes within the alliance. If the situation escalates, not only NATO's credibility but its very continuity would be at risk.

## **Possible Scenarios: From Direct Control to Prolonged Dispute**

Rather than anticipating a single outcome, the Greenland case compels us to consider plausible scenarios—power configurations that could consolidate in the coming years. These are not predictions, but analytical frameworks to understand the type of order that would emerge in each case.

### **Scenario 1: Direct U.S. Control**

In this scenario, the United States imposes effective control over Greenland, either through formal annexation or—more likely—through a military, administrative, and economic presence so dominant that the Danish position becomes irrelevant in practical terms. A classic occupation or an explicit declaration of annexation would not be necessary. Control over defense, critical infrastructure, routes, and the exploitation of strategic resources would suffice. Formal sovereignty might persist but emptied of real substance. This scenario would set a high-impact precedent: confirmation that, even among allies,

control of strategic assets can be imposed through direct use of force when power asymmetry is extreme. The immediate gain would be for the United States; the structural gain for any actor willing to emulate the logic of the accomplished fact.

### **Scenario 2: Co-government or Functional Protectorate**

A second possibility is the creation of a hybrid scheme, presented as a pragmatic solution. Greenland would retain its formal status within the Kingdom of Denmark, but the United States would assume a decisive role in defense, security, strategic infrastructure, and access to critical mineral resources. This model would avoid the political cost of open annexation and allow for the maintenance of a discourse of respect for international law while consolidating effective strategic control. Sovereignty would be maintained at the administrative level, but not at the strategic one. The risk of this scenario is its replicability. It would turn Greenland into the first visible case of a 21st-century protectorate, designed for territories with low population density and high value. It would not be an exception, but a model.

Greenland may evolve toward multiple outcomes: consolidation, shared governance, strategic accommodation, or prolonged uncertainty driven by power asymmetries.

### **Scenario 3: Forced Sale or Cessation under Pressure**

Although often dismissed as anachronistic, this scenario cannot be excluded. Economic, political, and strategic pressure on Denmark could lead to a deeply asymmetrical negotiation, presented as a voluntary agreement but born from the practical impossibility of sustaining full sovereignty. This would not be the first time a territorial cession is formalized under conditions of extreme imbalance. The legality of the process would not eliminate the fundamental question: to what extent a decision made under structural pressure can be considered truly sovereign. This scenario would reinforce an uncomfortable but

persistent idea: when resources are strategic, sovereignty becomes a negotiable variable.

#### **Scenario 4: Internationalization of the Territory**

The option most aligned with multilateral logic would be the internationalization of Greenland or some of its key assets under some type of special regime that limits unilateral appropriation and guarantees regulated access to strategic resources and routes. However, this scenario faces a central obstacle: it lacks a guarantor with real enforcement capacity. In the context of great-power competition, no actor willing to project power seems interested in sharing control of critical assets. Rather than a realistic alternative, this scenario serves as a reference for the current limits of multilateralism when it comes into tension with first-order strategic interests.

An element frequently underestimated in this debate is the position of Greenland's own population. Although numerically small, it has consistently expressed that it does not wish to become U.S. territory. This fact does not invalidate external control scenarios, but it does introduce a factor of structural friction: any arrangement that ignores the locals' will increases political, security, and legitimacy costs.

#### **The Privatization of Strategic Sovereignty**

This renewed pressure on Greenland goes beyond a mere display of state-driven geopolitical muscle. It is increasingly fueled by a new technological and financial elite that views the island's potential for the 21st century. High-profile sectors, ranging from the pioneers of the AI-industrial complex—driven by the need for energy-dense resources—to traditional strategic investment networks, are positioning themselves to control the underlying value chain of the Arctic.

What makes this scenario truly disruptive is that the United States does not advance these ambitions alone. Behind the official rhetoric of the White House operates such powerful technological and financial network that views Greenland as a tabula rasa for a new model of power projection.

In fact, prominent figures from Silicon Valley—some of them associated with projects of urban secession and private sovereignty, such as the ideologues behind so-called Freedom Cities—are projecting libertarian, high-technology utopias onto the Arctic territory.

The plan is ambitious: the creation of autonomous development zones operating outside the regulatory jurisdiction of the European Union, where automated mining, massive data centers, and energy-intensive infrastructures could function under bespoke corporate legal regimes. Greenland's glacial climate, far from being an obstacle, becomes a strategic asset, offering natural cooling for large-scale computing systems.

For these actors, Greenland represents the final frontier where capital and code can attempt to rewrite the rules of the nation-state. Sovereignty, in this model, is no longer exclusively exercised through public institutions, borders, or treaties, but increasingly outsourced, privatized, and shielded from democratic accountability.

The conclusion is clear: power today is not exercised solely through foreign ministries or defense establishments. It is fragmented, externalized, and rendered opaque, raising profound questions about responsibility, governance, and the future architecture of global order.

## The Sign of the Times

Greenland is not for sale. But its subsoil, its routes, and its geographical position are already in dispute. As occurred with Venezuela, the case reveals a world in which multilateral rules lose weight against the logic of interests and the control of critical resources, to the detriment of the legal and institutional structures of the past.

The real danger for the future is the normalization of the *fait accompli* as a method for reshaping the global order.

Greenland is a confirmation of this new geopolitical era. The question lingering is about the methodology. Will this raw and dangerous way of conducting

international politics die out with the leaders who embody it, or will it definitively consolidate as a way of exercising power that is here to stay?

But there is a second question, equally or even more uncomfortable and decisive: What position will be taken by States, societies, and leaderships that are aware that this logic favors only a few, before the *fait accompli* method stops being the exception and becomes the rule?



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