



Written by [Gregory Lyakhov](#) on January 21, 2026

## Why Trump's Push for U.S. Control Over Greenland Is Anything but Crazy

Public discussion of President Trump's interest in Greenland has largely treated the idea as a joke rather than a serious policy proposal. But however implausible U.S. control of Greenland may sound, the concept is neither impulsive nor unserious. It reflects a calculated assessment of American security interests in the Arctic — a region that has rapidly emerged as a central arena of great-power competition.

The United States and Denmark have cooperated over Greenland for more than a century. In 1916, the United States paid Denmark [\\$25 million](#) in gold for the Danish West Indies — now the U.S. Virgin Islands — and, in return, recognized Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland. That agreement established a stable partnership that later expanded through the 1951 bilateral defense agreement, amended in 2004, which still [guarantees](#) American military access to Greenland. The claim that Trump introduced something unprecedented by pursuing U.S. control over Greenland ignores a well-established legal and historical framework. The strategic relationship already exists. What has changed is the environment surrounding it.

The Arctic is said to be warming nearly [four times](#) faster than the global average. That perceived shift has turned a previously frozen frontier into a region defined by militarization, resource competition, and technological expansion. Russia has modernized its Arctic bases, expanded bomber flights, and increased under-ice submarine activity. China, which is not an Arctic nation, has pursued scientific and commercial activity in the region that carries clear dual-use implications. Both Moscow and Beijing recognize that geography in the Arctic translates directly into political and military leverage.

Greenland sits at the center of that transformation. Its location offers unmatched advantages for surveillance, early-warning radar, missile detection, and monitoring Russian submarine routes moving through the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap. Geography determines how quickly the United States can detect a nuclear launch or track submarine activity. No technological substitute exists for a fixed, ground-based position with Greenland's vantage point.

Some argue the United States already has what it needs in Greenland through existing treaties. But the



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last decade shows that access alone does not guarantee security. Washington has [repeatedly](#) warned Denmark about Chinese-linked companies seeking to build mines, ports, telecommunications networks, and research infrastructure in or around Greenland.

In the Arctic, infrastructure is never just infrastructure. A port can become a naval access point. A research station can collect intelligence. A fiber-optic project can provide surveillance capabilities.

From the American perspective, this gap is no longer acceptable. U.S. early-warning systems depend on Greenland. American forces defend the island. American cities rely on the radar at [Pituffik Space Base](#) for minutes of additional detection time that no continental installation can replicate. Yet the United States must rely on another government — one far removed from the consequences of failure — to monitor, deter, and block adversarial activity.

Russia's Northern Fleet, which operates [most](#) of its nuclear-armed submarines, must transit waters that Greenland helps monitor. As these submarines become quieter and longer-range, early detection grows more critical.

Shipping routes in the Arctic are also expanding rapidly. Russia's Northern Sea Route carried more than [36 million](#) tons of cargo last year — an increase of roughly 700 percent over the past decade. Control over maritime surveillance, search-and-rescue jurisdiction, and governance frameworks will influence global trade patterns for decades.

China adds economic risk. Greenland contains roughly [1.5 million](#) tons of rare-earth oxides, essential for missile guidance, radar systems, and advanced electronics. China already controls about [60 percent](#) of global production of rare earth minerals and more than [80 percent](#) of processing capacity. Allowing Chinese-linked companies even limited footholds in Greenland's mining sector would deepen an already severe U.S. vulnerability.

Nations do not protect their interests by assuming current arrangements will hold forever. They protect them by recognizing when the stakes have changed. The United States cannot cede control over territory so central to its security. Trump understands that the question is not whether Greenland will shape American defense strategy — it already does — but whether the United States will secure the degree of control those responsibilities require.



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