



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on January 15, 2026

European Forces Arrive in Greenland Amid Trump's Unyielding Bid to Acquire It

U.S. and Danish officials failed to reach an agreement over Greenland during Wednesday's meeting at the White House. Afterward, a group of NATO nations sent military troops to the island.

Officials from Denmark and Greenland tried to convince the White House to forget about acquiring the Arctic island, but to no avail. [According](#) to reports, the Danes and the Americans share a "fundamental disagreement" over the geostrategic location.

Danish Foreign Affairs Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen [said](#) the focus should be on both America's security concerns and Denmark's wishes:

We agree that it makes sense to try to sit down on a high level to explore whether there are possibilities to accommodate the concerns of the president while we at the same time respect the red lines of the Kingdom of Denmark.

Instead, Rasmussen [added](#), the American president is more interested in "conquering" Greenland.

Rasmussen met with Greenland's minister for foreign affairs, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and other officials on Wednesday.

Trump Determined

U.S. President Donald Trump has framed his determined push to own the island as a national security priority. According to him, if America doesn't step in to secure the island, Russia or China will take it over. "If you take a look outside of Greenland right now, there are Russian destroyers, there are Chinese destroyers ... there are Russian submarines all over the place," he [said](#) last week. "We're not gonna have Russia or China occupy Greenland — and that's what they're going to do if we don't."

Trump remained steadfast after Wednesday's meeting, [telling reporters](#):

There's not a thing that Denmark can do about it if Russia or China wants to occupy Greenland, but there's everything we can do. You found that out last week with Venezuela.

Greenland officials recently said that if they have to choose between being a territory of Denmark or the United States, they choose to remain under the Danes. Greenlanders have been seeking complete autonomy for years now, including from Denmark, but it looks as if Trump has taken that option off the table.



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Trump has implied that he's open to doing whatever it takes to get American control over Greenland, including using the military. He [said](#) last week that he'd prefer to make a deal the easy way, "but if we don't do it the easy way, we're going to do it the hard way." "Whether they like it or not," he added, "we are going to do something on Greenland."

Valuable Island

America's attempt to bring Greenland under Uncle Sam's roof goes back more than a century — all the way back to the 1860s and Secretary of State William Seward, who made the deal for Alaska. U.S. military experts have long coveted the island, which was used by America during World War II for bombing runs into Germany. But the retreat of sea and land ice in the area has further increased its value. It has exposed more of the resources available there and opened new shipping lanes. All this has intensified competition among major powers vying for global domination.

Do Russia and China Truly Pose a Threat?

Nevertheless, there is a difference of opinion on how much of a threat the Russians and the Chinese actually pose in the region. Alexander Gray, a senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council and former chief of staff of the National Security Council, [said](#) that "Russia and China are threatening the status quo in the Arctic":

Moscow has claimed significant chunks of the Arctic Sea, including inside Greenland's Exclusive Economic Zone.... China has declared itself a "near-Arctic state," [and] established a shipping network called the "Polar Silk Road" to bind Arctic communities closer to Beijing's economic and political agenda.

Even Rasmussen agrees that the security situation in the Arctic has changed.

Nevertheless, the Europeans don't like the Americans' domineering approach here, and they don't think the threat is as urgent as Trump makes it appear to be. The research director for Arctic and ocean politics at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo, Norway, Andreas Østhagen, [said](#):

There are no Russian and Chinese ships all over the place around Greenland. Russia and/or China has no capacity to occupy Greenland or to take control over Greenland.

The Associated Press reported that, per Lin Mortensgaard, an expert on Arctic international politics at the Danish Institute for International Studies:

While there are probably Russian submarines — as there are across the vast Arctic region — near Greenland, there are no surface vessels. China has research vessels in the Central Arctic Ocean, and while the Chinese and Russian militaries have done joint exercises in the Arctic, they have taken place closer to Alaska.

Europe Boosting Military Presence

Meanwhile, the Europeans are beefing up security on the island. NBC [reported](#) that "small numbers of military personnel from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden



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were arriving in the Arctic island early Thursday.” And Danish officials said they were boosting their “military presence in and around Greenland” in cooperation with NATO.

The Europeans are framing the heightened security largely as an attempt to show the White House that they’re more than capable of protecting Greenland. But, at this point, they’re more concerned with an imminent American invasion than a Chinese or Russian one. Last week, the Danish defense minister said that “Danish troops will immediately respond to any invasion of Greenland with force,” [according](#) to British media. “Soldiers would be required to counter any foreign invasion without awaiting orders under the military’s rules of engagement.”

This saga has added to the already growing strain between the Americans and Western Europeans. It’s also irritating some Eastern powers, mainly China and Russia.

The most glaring silver lining that may emerge here is the possibility that all this, wherever it leads, may result in the dissolution of NATO as it now exists. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said early this month that if America attacks another NATO country, “then everything stops, including NATO.”

The United States should prioritize getting out of NATO over taking Greenland. NATO’s antagonizing activity in Eastern Europe poses a greater risk of drawing U.S. troops into a conflict than does Greenland’s status.



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