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Introduction

Greenland is a great unknown, despite being the largest island in the world (González, 2015), home to the second largest ice sheet on the planet, having the lowest population density in the world and having the largest national park of all continents, the Grønlands Nationalpark (972,000 km²). In addition, the oldest existing DNA has been found in its territory and it is considered the cradle of life on Earth (Objective, 2022).

In Greenland it was recently discovered that, 4 billion years ago, the most primitive known forms of life existed and were found in the iodine volcanoes of Isua (Parolari, 2025). The oldest DNA was also found, dating back two million years ago (one million years older than that detected in a mammoth bone in Siberia).

More than 75% of its area (2,166,086 km²) is covered by a permanent ice sheet (inlandsis), which is up to 3,000 meters above sea level and is slowly shrinking (Price et Alii, 2011), to which must be added the risks to the environment and health due to the harmful gases accumulated in its permafrost layer. Greenland contains so much ice that, if it melted, it would raise the sea level by seven meters (Chudley, et alii. 2025). Already in the 15th century, the disappearance of the Vikings on the island was due to a climatic change in the transition from the Medieval Warm Period (900-1250 A.D.) to the Little Ice Age (1250-1900 A.D.), with the consequent rise of the waters, which made the habitable areas disappear (Young, et alii 2022, Borreggine, et alii., 2023).

As a consequence of all this, the habitable part is scarce and, together with the climatic conditions, makes it the country with the lowest population density in the world (Ecosystem, C.D.S. 2024). All internal mobility is by plane, boat, snowmobile and sled, as there are no roads or railroads.

Its population is about 57,000 people, of which about 18,000 live in Nuuk, its capital. Inuit (mainly Kalaallit) make up 87% of the population (Soto, 2025), possibly making Greenland the country with the highest proportion of indigenous people in the world. All of them are Danish citizens, as Greenland is a self-governing territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, where Greenlandic is spoken and the Danish krone is used as currency. Since 1979 it has been self-governing, in the form of a parliamentary representative democracy,

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although Denmark retains powers in foreign affairs and defense. At the parliamentary level, Greenland has two of the 31 members of the Danish Parliament. And, although Denmark is a member of the European Union, Greenland is not.

Greenland's economy is based mainly on fishing, with exports accounting for 85% of economic activity, and hunting. However, its main source of income is the economic contribution of the Danish government, which accounts for more than half of total income and employs more than 10,000 people in a labor market of just over 25,000 workers. Annex I shows the socioeconomic data that explain the current situation.

As for mineral resources, according to the 2023 report of the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland (GEUS, n.d.), moderate to high deposits of the 38 minerals listed as essential by the European Commission (An EU regulation..., n. d.) exist in the non-ice-covered lands (400,000 km²). However, these resources are currently only at prospecting stage (Sanches, 2025).

The United States (US) Air Force has, since 1941, its northernmost military base at Thule (1,524 km south of the North Pole), today called Pituffik Space Base. Presently, among other facilities and forces, it houses the early warning system for intercontinental ballistic missiles that could be launched against the USA and 2,600 flights are carried out annually, which gives an idea of the geostrategic importance of the island for the USA. At Thule the fastest wind speed ever measured above sea level has been registered: 333 km/h - 207 mph (8/03/1972).

In 1968, a U.S. B-52 carrying four hydrogen nuclear bombs crashed in the waters near the base, causing one of the worst radioactive contamination disasters in history (Nuclear disasters, n. d.).

From a security and defense standpoint it should be noted that Greenland has a small contingent of defense forces, consisting mainly of Danish military personnel, 150 persons from the 1st Squadron of the Royal Danish Navy that focuses mainly on domestic operations in and around the Faroe Islands and Greenland. In addition, Denmark has increased defense spending (BBC, 2025) for Greenland in response to growing tensions in the Arctic and the Russian military presence.

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As additional information, Annexes II and III show the relations between Spain and Greenland that are considered interesting and little known. Annex II also shows Greenland's relations with the European Union.

Political status, history and sociology of Greenland in the face of the race for the arctic

The race for the Arctic

In the first weeks of August 2007 three countries successively claimed sovereignty over the Arctic.

On August 2, after placing a titanium flag at the North Pole and at the bottom of the Ocean, Russia started the escalation which was immediately joined by Canada, and finally, on August 12, the Danish pronouncement was made. In fact, Copenhagen sent a scientific expedition to collect geological data to prove that the submarine chain of Lomonosov Mountains is connected to Greenland.

At that moment, the race for the riches began to materialize. These riches lie in the form of oil and gas, that hides in the seabed of an icy north over which Norway and the USA also claim to have rights, since Alaska is a state of the Union. The remoteness of Alaska from Greenland means that its interest in the latter seeks to increase both its rights and its geostrategic position.

Thus, for nearly 20 years, claims to the Arctic have been based on the interpretation of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, with countries seeking the most favorable interpretations and arguments.

US interest in Greenland and Canada

US interest in Greenland, and in Canada, is by no means new – in 1868, Secretary of State William Seward commissioned a report on the acquisition of Greenland, which would also require Canada to join the Union – but, until the start of President Trump's second term on January 20, 2025, the possibility that any of the powers involved, beyond specific disputes over small islets, would seek to improve their position in the Arctic by also adding to their territory a large country, 10 million km², like Canada, or an island like

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Greenland, which enjoys an autonomous status that provides for the possibility of self-determination, was not on the table of international discussions.

Although between 2017 and 2021, during his first term, Trump had already made more or less explicit references to Greenland, the change made in the White House Oval Office, with the placement of the portrait of Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the United States, now makes perfect sense. It was a significant gesture that, in light of recent events, can be linked to the ideology of Manifest Destiny, of which Jackson was the best representative.

Manifest Destiny argued that, given its exceptionalism, the United States has the duty and the right to advance into other territories to ensure the development and expansion of the country's experiment in freedom and self-government. This includes securing resources to sustain the economy and guarantee the country's security.

Thus, in his second inaugural address, President Trump could not have been clearer: "We will pursue our manifest destiny to the stars, launching American astronauts to plant the Star-Spangled Banner on the planet Mars," he stated.

Days earlier, Trump had stated that Canada should become the 51st state, named the Panama Canal the US Canal, and agreed, by presidential order, to rename the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America.

However, nothing seems more coveted than Greenland; in fact, on January 7, 2025, at a press conference in Florida, Trump, echoing Senator Maine, who believed in 1941 that the purchase of Greenland was a military necessity, did not rule out the use of force to control Greenland or the Panama Canal; "We need both for economic reasons," and added, "We need Greenland for security reasons."

The political status of Greenland

Greenland was colonized by Denmark in 1721, and was administered exclusively by the Danish government until the mid-19th century, when assemblies were established and administrators elected to manage purely local affairs.

In 1973, following Denmark's integration into the European Union, a process began

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whereby local authorities in Greenland assumed certain tasks, culminating in the Home Rule Act of 1979.

In 1985, the island ceased to be part of the EU, obtaining overseas territory status. In 2008, it obtained its Home Rule Statute, which establishes a roadmap to independence, transfers all powers to the Greenlandic government except for foreign affairs, security, and financial policy, and Denmark provides an annual subsidy of \$633 million or \$11,300 per capita.

Commercial transaction between the US vs. the will of the Greenlandics

While the entire world was wondering what Greenland really was, beyond a gigantic frozen island that appears on the world map in schoolbooks, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen retorted that "Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders" and "it is the Greenlanders themselves who will define their future."

Thus, and without ruling out the unimaginable hypothesis of a forced occupation, in the coming months or years, the debate about Greenland will revolve around what its citizens want for themselves and for future generations.

The paradigm shift compared to other similar times or situations means that sovereignty over Greenland, in line with what is established by its autonomy statute, depends on the will of its inhabitants and not on a mere commercial transaction between states, as was the case with Alaska in 1867.

In this context, the protagonists of Greenland's future status, which affects, more than any other issue, the long-term geostrategy and geopolitics of the major powers, including China, are the Eskimos or Inuit—unlike in other places, the term "Eskimo" is derogatory—whose remote origins lie in the Amerindian peoples who lived north of the Yukon.

Thus, although from a Eurocentric perspective, the island was discovered in 982 by the sailor and explorer Erik Thorvaldsson, Erik the Red, who colonized the south until, in the 15th century, the Little Ice Age made life impossible for Europeans, the history of Greenland is characterized by successive waves of peoples from islands in the north of the American continent and cultures that were born and died in an extreme territory

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where, sooner or later, the struggle for survival failed. There are traces of this intermittent presence dating back to 2,500 BC.

57,000 protagonists in search of well-being and security: a unique decision

The citizens of Greenland are spread across five municipalities (regions), some larger than Spain, and two unincorporated areas: the Northwest National Park, with 972,000 km² and 233 inhabitants, and the US air base at Thule.

They constitute a people whose hunting and traditions are part of their essence; and, despite the fact that their economic subsistence is impossible without the transfers from Denmark, they maintain a relationship of deep mistrust toward the metropolis.

The massive campaign of sterilization, without consent, of Inuit women and girls, carried out since 1965, and the uprooting and language difficulties of young people returning from Copenhagen after their studies, are issues that widen the discrepancy gap. In fact, in the words of Ramón Hernando de Larramendi, a Spanish explorer and businessman based in Greenland, the Greenlanders only respect the Crown, with the king and queen enjoying enormous popularity.

The results of the elections held on March 11, 2024, for the 31 seats in the Greenlandic Parliament clearly reflect the desire for independence; the only party advocating remaining in Denmark only obtained 7% of the vote and two seats. However, a calm analysis suggests that uncertainty about the future was also a factor influencing the decision of many voters.

Otherwise, the electoral victory of Demokraatik, the party advocating gradual independence from Denmark, with 30% of the vote, would have been difficult. Meanwhile, Naleraq, the second largest party with 24.5% of the vote, advocates for express independence and has proposed signing a free association agreement with the United States in exchange for economic support and security.

Probably, as Peter Harmsen, author of the book "Fury and Ice: Greenland, the US, and Germany in the Second World War," asserts, "it all comes down to two factors: location and minerals, and this hasn't really changed." In any case, the decision that will affect, in

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one way or another, the geostrategic and global balance depends on a group, a people, made up of 57,000 Inuit people, who, like everyone else, seek security in addition to well-being.

Resources

Greenland's ecosystem and nature, one of the most unique and extreme on the planet, is severely affected by climate change and rising temperatures, causing accelerated melting of its frozen surface.

This melting is revealing the potential for harnessing what are known as rare earths, which are being captured and focused on by countries such as the United States, China, and Russia, among others.

Before discussing rare earths, which is one of the elements that explain the interest in the current state of the issue, it is nevertheless considered appropriate to discuss from a general and cross-cutting perspective, all the natural resources that define and shape Greenland.

According to World Bank data, Greenland's fishing industry accounts for approximately 90% of the country's total exports, accounting for nearly 50% of its GDP (World Bank, 2025). Species such as cod, halibut, mackerel, shrimp, and others are some of the most emblematic.

Greenland has a huge capacity due to the energy harnessed from melting ice. According to a study by the University of Cambridge (National Academy of Sciences, 2016), Greenland is capable of producing more hydroelectric power than the ten largest hydroelectric plants in the world.

Furthermore, various studies (GEUS, 2025) estimate that there are 18 billion barrels of undiscovered oil on Greenland's western continental shelf, as well as 148 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. However, since 2021, the Greenlandic government has suspended the issuance of new exploitation licenses, given the impact on climate change. Specifically, Baffin Bay has significant hydrocarbon potential (estimated at 13% oil and 30% natural gas according to the United States Geological Service -USGS), but its natural

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conditions (Arctic conditions and lack of infrastructure) currently pose significant challenges for exploitation.

Another of this territory's riches are its minerals. According to a 2023 GEUS report, the 400,000 km² plus of land not covered by the Greenland ice sheet is estimated to contain moderate to high deposits of 25 of the 34 minerals considered critical by the European Commission, according to Jakob Kløve Keiding, a GEUS consultant. The main ones, given their high precious value or utility, are copper, graphite, niobium, uranium, zinc, gold, rubies, sapphires, platinum, palladium, nickel, cobalt, titanium, and rhodium... (El Independiente, 2025).

However, one of the main conclusions of this report is that Greenland is still not widely explored geologically, with the main estimates of its resources consisting of measurements based on historical calculations or projections.

In total, this represents a figure of 36.1 million tons of mineral materials, located primarily in the Kvanefjeld and Kringlerne deposits, among others, and in the currently active mines of Qaqqortorsuaq and Nalunaq, both in the south of the island.

Uranium deposits are of particular interest, their exploitation raising public opposition due to the impact on their way of life (The Guardian, 2025).

Finally, the aforementioned GEUS study also estimates that 25% of all rare earths on Earth are found in Greenland—or 1.5 million tons—turning this land into the global epicenter when it comes to these energy resources. However, despite the media hype, countries such as the US, China, Brazil, India, and Australia, according to this study, are ahead of this frozen island.

The lanthanides, or "rare earths"¹ encompass 17 chemically similar metallic elements (the lanthanides, scandium, and yttrium) that occur in a wide range of minerals and are mined collectively. According to the latest studies, Greenland possesses 14 of these 17 elements, whose main industrial uses range from catalysts and batteries, to engine alloys

¹ Rare earths are not only rare elements or materials, but they are difficult-to-exploit deposits.

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and lasers, to advanced ceramics and semiconductors.

All of this data leads to conclude that Greenland has significant potential for undiscovered deposits that, despite requiring further geological mapping and mineral exploration, cannot be ruled out as exploitable in the future (El Independiente, 2025).

Geostrategic situation

Greenland brings the US closer to China and Russia, and vice versa. The construction of Thule Air Base after World War II and the missile shield are examples of this. For the US, Greenland is part of its "Homeland Security" (Cánovas Sánchez, 2020), hence the importance the US has recently attached to it.

Added to this is the fact that the US would facilitate monitoring and alerts of the GIUK Gap (an imaginary line between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom, through which anyone transiting from the Arctic to the North Atlantic must pass. This line has traditionally been controlled by Russia or the former USSR and constitutes a strategic point of vital importance for both NATO and Russia (Vazquez Orbaiceta, 2023).

Additionally, the melting of the Arctic not only facilitates the extraction of raw materials but also facilitates movement through its waters. China needs to exploit these new maritime routes, which not only enable the overall increase in its maritime traffic and the acquisition of necessary raw materials, but also allows it to get closer to the US. Therefore, since 2011, coinciding with Greenland's increased autonomy, it has stepped up its influence on the island, leading to an increase in Greenland's exports by almost 20% (Aznar, 2024).

For Russia, Greenland means greater control over the Arctic, where it is intensifying its control with new bases, and, like China, greater proximity. This desire for control is part of its strategy, since the melting of the ice has made new Arctic routes viable. News such as the fact that the last nuclear submarine is destined to operate in the Arctic makes this visible. Greenland's independence would represent a radical change in Russian perception, as it would cease to be NATO territory, and would open up new possibilities for action.

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For the EU, Greenland's withdrawal from the EEC meant reducing its territory by almost half and placing a clear geographical restriction on the Arctic. Although it cannot replace Denmark, it can "provide a reference, provide political patronage, and economic and regulatory support. And, above all, protection from external pressures" (Kobza, 2016). In fact, in recent statements by its government, Greenland has requested EU support. Fishing rights are also one of the key elements in maintaining the relationship.

It may seem that the desire to break with Denmark is gaining ground in Greenland, but Greenlanders differ on the degree of autonomy. Denmark faces a very difficult situation. Despite having supported the country during difficult times, it seems that the interest unleashed by the major powers could lead it to assume a secondary role. However, on the other hand, it is true that this is a difficult decision to undo. Its control over the island would allow it to be a leader in the exploitation of resources when conditions allow it to do so efficiently. The Prime Minister's recent visit proves that she is not willing to lower her interest. Despite all the inconveniences, Denmark remains the main player in the country.

Trump's latest words, which are not new, if more aggressive, generate uncertainty that major powers wish to exploit.

Impacts of a possible us takeover of Greenland

The number of plausible scenarios presented today is almost unlimited, so this section presents some of those considered most relevant, due to the actions of the US, and primarily its president.

Impacts depending on the form of takeover

Takeover by force

President Trump declared in a press conference on January 7 that he would not give up US military force to purchase Greenland from Denmark.

It would not take much effort for the US to militarily defeat Denmark. However, the use of

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force in relations between states has been prohibited since 1945, according to Article 2.4 of the United Nations (UN) Charter. Therefore, US military action against Denmark would constitute a serious violation of international law.

The UN would be powerless to stop such an attack, as the US holds veto power in the Security Council. Therefore, the UN's reputation as the main guarantor of world peace would be significantly damaged. Furthermore, the aggressor country is the largest contributor to the UN budget and the host country of its main headquarters.

On the other hand, an attack by a NATO country (the US) on another NATO member (Denmark) would undermine the foundations of NATO, which does not contemplate aggression between its own members.

As for the European Union (EU), the mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty) does not provide sufficient credibility, as shown by the fact that Sweden and Finland have considered NATO membership necessary for their security. Article 42.7 itself refers to NATO regarding military aid. In any case, the EU's international reputation would be damaged by its lack of defense capacity against aggression from a third country.

Finally, a US forceful intervention in Denmark would generate an attitude of outright rejection by the Greenlandic population of the aggressor forces, provoking a high level of social conflict and a risk of the conflict becoming entrenched if a local guerrilla group were to form.

Peaceful takeover

A peaceful US takeover of Greenland could be achieved through three means: a voluntary sale of the island to the US by Denmark; a decision by Greenland, once it has gained independence, to surrender its sovereignty to the US; or a deepening of the *de facto* control that the US already exercises over the island by dominating its economy, foreign policy, and security and defense policies.

Regarding the transfer or sale of the island to the US—this is not the first time it has been raised, since in 1946 former President Harry Truman offered Denmark \$100 million in gold for the island, equivalent to \$1.3 billion in today's dollars—Denmark has made it clear

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to the US that Greenland is not for sale, and that the island's residents must solely determine its future.

Greenland's surrender of its state sovereignty to the United States would require a prior agreement between Greenland and Denmark on the terms of independence, followed by a referendum convened by the Greenlandic authorities the result of which needing to be in favor of the territory's independence (Article 21 of the island's 2009 Statute of Autonomy) and subsequent approval of independence by the Danish parliament in accordance with Article 21 of the Danish Constitution. Once independence is achieved, the Greenlandic population could submit to a referendum the renunciation of its sovereignty as a state and its integration into the United States as an associated state of the American federation or as its 51st state. This final step would probably not be immediate and would require a generous financial offer from the United States.

Some analysts have estimated that Greenland is worth about \$50 billion, subtracting the Danish subsidy and taking into account the net present value of the taxes that Greenlanders would pay annually in the United States as American taxpayers, with an average tax rate of 16%. Therefore, each Greenlander would be eligible to receive \$1 million, which, combined with the promise of future income from the exploitation of the island's natural resources, could convince Greenlanders of the advantages of dependence on the United States.

As a third peaceful means of achieving control of Greenland, it must be said that the US was actually already exercising significant *de facto* control over the island and was destined to fully exercise it in the medium to long term. This control has manifested itself in three ways: first, attempts to increase China's economic presence on the island have been successively vetoed by Greenland, under US influence; second, US military dominance over the island with its air and communications base in Thule, northwest of the island (Pittufik Airport), which has done everything possible to prevent Chinese and Russian control of the Arctic maritime routes involving Greenland; and third, the US is, with the possible exception of China, the only power with the technical and financial capacity to bring Greenland's significant mineral wealth into production (extraction and,

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above all, processing or refining). Greenlanders didn't seem bothered by US influence on the island until Trump's recent threatening statements, which have offended and humiliated them, making them less supportive of a potential "American solution" for the island.

The best option for the US and Greenland

A US seizure of Greenland by military force would lead to a severe crisis of the rules-based international order established in 1945 after the Second World War. This action would also create a shock wave within NATO and provoke a serious crisis in the European Union, for the reasons discussed above. Managing the island after the military attack would be seriously hampered by a local population opposed to the aggression, which would lead to numerous episodes of social conflict. Furthermore, the conflict could become entrenched if a local independence guerrilla group were to form in Greenland, possibly with the support of other actors, such as Russia or China.

A peaceful US takeover of Greenland would not give rise to the aforementioned problems, but would require a US strategy on the island based on soft power and attitudes of utmost respect for the local population. US control of Greenland could be favorable to the interests of the Greenlanders, who could benefit from a stronger security umbrella and, in the medium and long term, from increased revenue from the exploitation of the island's resources. These revenues could, in the long term, exceed Denmark's current monetary contribution to the island.

Conclusions

With each passing day, uncertainty grows. Forecasts are overwhelmed by the facts, and no analysis can withstand the day after. What is certain is that, currently, and especially looking to the future, Greenland is an essential piece on the global geopolitical chessboard.

There is no doubt that, due to its strategic position in the Arctic, which also brings the major powers closer together, Greenland is an essential piece in the geostrategic arena, not least because it is also a reserve of raw materials that everyone wishes to exploit. If

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climate change continues along the path of recent years, the actions of all these major powers will intensify.

The demographics and morale of its population will be key to the outcome of the conflict, barring unilateral US intervention, which is considered unlikely. The economic, institutional, and territorial integrity ties between Greenland and Denmark are strong. Denmark provides stability to a little educated, poorly structured population living in an inhospitable climate, and this relationship doesn't seem likely to break easily.

There is no doubt that, due to its strategic position in the Arctic, which also brings major powers closer, Greenland is an essential player in the geostrategic theater, but it is also important because it is a reserve of raw materials that everyone seeks to exploit. If climate change continues along the path of recent years, the actions of all these major powers will intensify.

The polls obscure the situation rather than clarify it, and they are also fluid. Self-determination, which does not appear to be supported by the latest polls and government coalitions, would require the support of a major power, and if that were the case, in all likelihood the US would take control, despite the significant backlash that President Trump's imperialist nature is causing. In any case, it seems that the Inuit population, the 57,000 Greenlanders, would choose the option that, in addition to a better quality of life, would provide greater security for themselves and for future generations.

Any US action using force could mean the end of NATO, but neither Russia, which is greatly weakened by the war in Ukraine, nor China, which has no Arctic capabilities, are expected to take action in the region, although they could use present developments as an excuse to initiate similar actions in their sphere of influence. In any case, the outlook for stability in the region is not favourable.