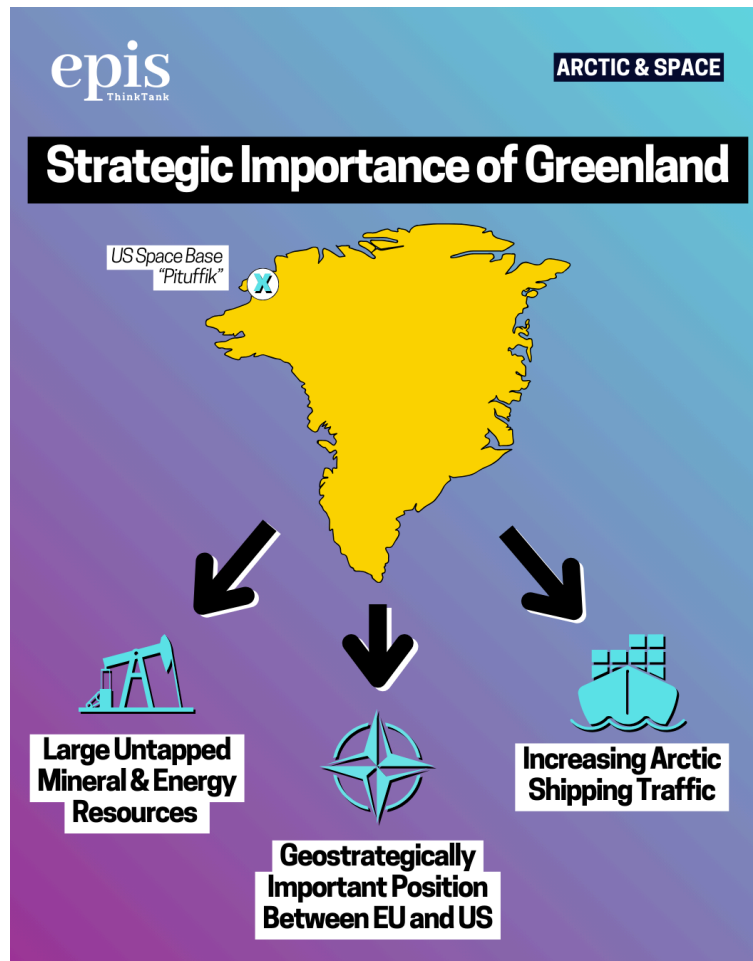


Greenland's Strategic Importance in the Arctic



Recently, talk about a usually rather overlooked, yet in no way insignificant territory has made international news: Greenland. With a post on his platform *Truth Social* on Christmas Day 2024, Donald Trump restated his interest in a US acquisition of the territory. His [post](#) reads: “To the people of Greenland, which is needed by the United States for National Security purposes and, who want the U.S. to be there, and we will!” In the following weeks, Trump repeated this message and, in a press conference on January 7th, refused to rule out military intervention as a means to acquire this territory.

His statements have provoked a series of reactions on the international stage, ranging from amusement to outrage. This brief will take a look at what we should make of Trump’s statements, why he has decided to restate his interest in the territory and what role Greenland plays to other actors in this dispute.

Greenland is one of the two autonomous Danish overseas territories, the other being the Faroe Islands, meaning that it has its own parliament and government with executive power over local government affairs. Greenlandic foreign affairs and defence policy, however, are still decided by Denmark. This has long

been a subject of debate in Greenland's politics, with many demanding Greenlandic independence from its former colonial power Denmark. As Greenlandic prime minister Múte B. Egede made clear earlier this month, while many in Greenland want independence from Denmark, they also have no interest in being bought by the US: "Greenland is for the Greenlandic people. We do not want to be Danish, we do not want to be American. We want to be Greenlandic" [CBS](#)

Some voices from Egede's cabinet have welcomed the attention Greenland is getting through Trump's renewed claims, such as Naaja Nathanielsen, Greenland's minister for housing, family, infrastructure, justice, gender equality and minerals. In a recent interview, the minister told the [Guardian](#), that Greenland had been seeking closer cooperation with both the EU and the US for several years, and that especially the relationship with Greenland's former colonial power Denmark could be impacted by Trump's statements and the renewed interest in the territory on the international stage.

Denmark's head of state, Mette Fredriksen, announced in a [statement](#) on Wednesday, January 15th, that Denmark was "open to taking greater responsibility" regarding strengthening security in the Arctic. In fact, Denmark [announced](#) a large increase in defence spending for Greenland shortly after Trump's initial post on Truth Social, boosting the Greenlandic defence budget by "a double-digit billion amount".

Earlier this year, responding to Donald Trump Jr.'s informal visit to the island, Fredriksen underlined Prime Minister Egede's [statement](#) that Greenland was "not for sale", and that it ultimately belonged to the people of Greenland. Considering the continued calls for Greenlandic independence from Denmark, it remains to be seen how the Greenlandic-Danish relationships unfold in the future. Notably, the Danish Palace has just released an updated version of the official royal coat of arms, that more prominently features the polar bear, the symbol representing Greenland. This act can be interpreted as an effort to reinforce ties with the territory amidst the ongoing tensions regarding Greenland's independence from Denmark.

The acquisition of Greenland has long been a plan of different US administrations, not just since Trump's first attempt to buy Greenland in 2019. Since the 19th century, several unsuccessful attempts to purchase the island were made by various US administrations. This continued interest in the territory can be explained by Greenland's strategically important position, as it is located at one side of the so-called [GIUK-gap](#) (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom-Gap) and thereby of central importance for securing sea supply and communication lines between the US and its European NATO partners. Partly for this reason, the US has maintained a permanent military presence in Greenland through the *Pituffik Air Base*. But, as Epis Fellow Iasmina Stoian has outlined in a [January Brief](#), defence strategy is not the only reason for the continued US interest in the territory: Greenland holds extensive, yet largely untapped resources such as rare earths, minerals and oil. It is therefore likely that the US interest in the region is connected to the attempt to "assert dominance in the Arctic resource competition"

Trump's interest in the region can be explained by strategic military considerations as well as an interest in Greenland's vast resource capital. How successful his current attempts are remains to be seen, but the amount of stakeholders in the Greenland question and the overall increase in geopolitical interest in the Arctic testifies to the strategic importance of this region and raises the question of who will dominate in the race for Arctic resources and territory. Considering the role Greenland plays in these questions, Trump's

claims to the territory sound less outlandish than one might initially think, albeit [some observers](#) call his refusal to rule out the use of the US military, which would be an effective violation of a fellow NATO member's territorial integrity, "Clumsy Arctic Geopolitics".