

US-DK Greenland game

Background

Greenland has been occupied by native circumpolar people for at least 4500 years. From 986 when it was first visited by the Norse Vikings, Greenland came under Norwegian rule. The 13th century saw the arrival of the Inuit circumpolar people, and by around the late 15th Century the Norse settlers had died out, but the island was still deemed a part of Norway, and the island was resettled by Europeans (alongside the Inuit) from the early 17th Century. When Denmark and Norway separated in 1814, Greenland was transferred from the Norwegian to the Danish crown. Since the 19th century, Greenland was seen by the Danish kingdom as one of its ancestral lands and part of its national identity, linked to a thousand-year-old Nordic history.

The 1953 Constitution of Denmark integrated Greenland fully into the Danish state, ended its status as a colony and made the people in Greenland citizens of Denmark. As Danish citizens, Greenlanders can live, study and work in Denmark and the European Economic Area. In the 1979 Greenlandic home rule referendum, Denmark granted home rule to Greenland; in the 2008 Greenlandic self-government referendum, Greenlanders voted for the Self-Government Act, which transferred more power from the Danish government to the local Naalakkersuisut (Greenlandic government).

Due to the Constitution, the Danish government retains control of citizenship, monetary policy, Supreme Court, security policies (including military affairs), and foreign affairs. Most residents of Greenland are Inuit. With the melting of the ice due to global warming, its abundance of mineral wealth and its strategic position between Europe, North America and the Arctic zone, Greenland is of interest to great powers.

The United States has a NATO military base on the island (Pituffik Space Base) under the 1951 Greenland Defense Agreement with the Danish government. The United States recognized Danish sovereignty over all of Greenland for eternity by a 1917 treaty.

Some particular issues and information to be aware of:

- Greenland is mostly covered by an icecap, and all activity can be challenging, especially in the winter.
- The island has a population of 57,000, of whom 90% are Inuit, 7.5% Danish, 1% other Nordic and 2% others.
- Greenland is only reachable by ship and aircraft.
- Greenland is 2800 km from Denmark, so about 4 days travel by ship
- Greenland is 3900 km from the USA, so about 5.5 days travel

Current Situation

The current date is: 1 March 2025.

Once Donald Trump was elected to his 2nd term as President of the USA he started to suggest that Greenland should be a part of the USA, or at least brought under US control, as it was essential to US security (mainly in terms of trans-polar shipping and ballistic missile defence), but the raw materials locked under the ice cap (and which will become more extractable with global warming) are no doubt also part of his considerations. Both the Danish and Greenland governments rejected the proposals instantly, and there was a "horrible" phone call between Trump and the Danish Prime Minister (PM). On 7 Jan 2025, the day after Trump was inaugurated as President of the USA, Donald Trump's son arrived in

Greenland on a Trump liveried aircraft, ostensibly just on a holiday, but obviously to highlight Trumps claim. Trump has threatened Denmark with tariffs and other economic action if it fails to enter talks over Greenlands future and cede the country to the USA, and has also not ruled out using military force.

Challenge/Disagreement /Crux/Dissonance

The key issues, as of 1 March 2025 are:

- How will Trump aim to move his claim on Greenland forward. For the purpose of this scenario it is assumed that he does move the claim forward rather than letting it drift.
- What economic, and other non-military, possibly grey-zone, measures will he take to try and bring Denmark to the negotiating table?
- What will the Danish response be?
- What will be the response of Greenlanders be?
- What, if anything, will be the trigger for Trump to start to use military force, and what might this military force look like?
- How will Denmark and the Greenlanders respond to the use of military force?
- What are the implications for NATO, of which both the USA and Denmark are members - and where Article 5 states that if a country is attacked (such as Greenland/Denmark) then other countries should come to its aid (which includes the USA!)

Game Turns

Each game turn represents about 1 month of real time. Ensure that all actions are representative of what could be achieved in that amount of time.

The game plays for 6 turns, March 2025 to end August 2025. The turns are:

- Turn 1, March 2025
- Turn 2, April 2025
- Turn 3, May 2025
- Turn 4, June 2025
- Turn 5, July 2025
- Turn 6, August 2025

Actors

Where a real leader is named below, base the player on what real information you know about them and their personalities. For other players create a random player character as per the standard instructions.

The actors/players and their aims are:

- President Donald Trump, President of the USA
 - Aims
 - To bring Greenland under US control, either as the 51st state, or as some form of protectorate or client state
 - Ideally to achieve the goal through peaceful means
 - In extremis to use US military power first to signal intent, and then if that fails to blockade the island until Denmark gives in, and if that fails to seize the island by force
 - Views/Beliefs

- Greenland should belong to the USA for security and economic reasons
 - NATO is a joke with no guts and minimal capability without the USA
- Resources
 - The whole might of the US military, US State Department, CIA, cyber hackers at the National Security Agency, and a variety of Special Forces units. The military and special forces must be tasked through the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- General Charles Q Brown, The Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
 - You control the whole of the US Military, reporting to the President
 - Aims
 - To avoid going to war with a fellow NATO country
 - To follow the President's orders as much as possible so as to keep your job
 - Views/Beliefs
 - You have a lot of friends in NATO and don't want to go to war with them
 - The USA going to war with NATO will make Europe a target for Russia, and possibly encourage China to seize Taiwan.
 - Resources
 - The whole might of the US military, including a variety of large Special Forces units
- Mette Frederiksen, The Prime Minister of Denmark
 - You have been Prime Minister since 2019. Your politics are left of centre.
 - Aims
 - To keep Greenland part of Denmark
 - In extremis you might be able to accept a truly independent Greenland, with no U.S. control.
 - Views/Beliefs
 - Greenland is Danish, and will always be Danish
 - Trump is completely unpredictable, but you can't believe that US troops would fight other NATO troops
 - Resources
 - The Danish Army is only 2 Brigades strong, and the Navy has only 20, mostly small, ships. The airforce has about 60 fighter/ground attack aircraft.
 - Based in Greenland is the Sirius Patrol, a Danish Special Forces unit which continually patrols the remote coasts and interior of Greenland to deter or find any activity by hostile, or other, nations. It only consists of 14 soldiers, who deploy in 2 man patrols.
- Mute Bourup Egede, The Prime Minister of Greenland
 - You have been leader since 2021.
 - Aims:
 - Your ultimate aim is independence for Greenland.
 - You also need to find a route to economic independence.
 - Views/Beliefs
 - You know that your people would like Greenland to be an independent country, assuming it could be economically viable - and the resources being revealed beneath the icecap could enable that. You have been part of the work on a constitution for an independent Greenland for many years.
 - Resources
 - Nothing really in military or political/diplomatic terms since Denmark looks after all of those.
- Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General

- You have been Secretary General since 2024, before that you were the Prime Minister of the Netherlands for over 10 years. You are well regarded on the world stage. Your politics are liberal, slightly left of centre.
- Aims:
 - To avoid conflict between NATO members
 - To support Danish claims to sovereignty over Greenland whilst also recognising the principle of self-determination for the Greenland people.
- Views/Beliefs
 - NATO must stand strong and United in order to face the greater threat from Russia.
- Resources
 - Whilst you do not have direct control of the big armies of the European powers, and those US troops committed to Europe, it would be up to you to decide how to respond to any request for support from Denmark under Article 5, and then to issue to instructions to the military command in NATO to carry them out.

Randomise player order each turn.

Reporting

Unless otherwise instructed, play each game through without further input from the user. Summarise each turn in 2 sentences, and the whole game at the end in 300 words or less. Also at the end score each actor on a scale of -5 to +5, where -5 means that they have suffered very badly and achieved none of their aims, 0 means that they have achieved little but losses have been manageable, and 5 means that all aims have been achieved for minimal casualties.

Sources

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