

**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** The question of Greenland

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**Position:** Head Chair

## **Introduction:**

The question of Greenland tests international law, sovereignty, and geopolitical power in the Arctic. As the world's largest island, situated between the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, the territory offers vast strategic value in controlling the North Arctic sea lines. These lines represent some of the world's busiest shipping routes connecting Western Europe and North America, transporting consumer goods, industrial materials, and raw materials. The island is also known for its possession of rare earth materials, which are essential for global technology and green energy. Therefore, with such apparent geopolitical power and potential in a self-governing region, the core issue is who rightfully governs Greenland, how its self-determination should be protected, and what measures should be taken to fairly distribute and secure its resources. Without consensus on these questions, Arctic stability is put at risk as rival powers are able to exploit governance gaps.

For instance, in recent months, American leaders have openly made statements insinuating their willingness to annex Greenland, moving beyond previous ideas of buying the region from Denmark in 1946, to much more aggressive acts, threatening unity among NATO allies, as both the US and Greenland, under Denmark, are NATO members. Showcasing exactly how fast political tensions can push aside international law. However, several European nations came together to support Denmark and promptly warned that any forceful acts would break global rules set after World War II. Although the US remains the only foreign state to have a military base in Greenland, due to a 1951 treaty with Greenland establishing it as a NATO defence outpost, other global powers have expressed interest in the Arctic region as well. Including China, which has pursued infrastructure projects, often rejected by Denmark, and Russia, which has increased military patrols nearby. Consequently, the US feels especially threatened, arguing that Chinese or Russian occupation in the territory would give such rival powers a dangerous edge, reaffirming its 'need' to acquire Greenland through any means. Such unregulated tensions and competition risks conflicts involving resource weaponisation, environmental harm, and inequity, where more powerful states monopolise all benefits. For this

reason, binding and specific orders must be made to prevent escalation, maintain Arctic peace, and protect the rights of indigenous peoples living there.

Current international frameworks like the UN Charter and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) lack the enforcement urgently required to neutralise the current tensions over Greenland, creating gaps that demand Security Council action. These acts must govern non-negotiable risks like coercive annexation, foreign military transparency, and equitable Arctic resource distribution.

### **Definition of key terms:**

**Autonomy:** The right of a country or region to be independent and govern itself. This includes the ability to make its own decisions without the influence or control of any external authority.

**Colonial legacy:** The long-term social, political, economic, and cultural impacts of a colonial relationship, even after the colonial rule ends. An example of such an impact includes the loss of national identity.

**Home rule:** A system in which a region has limited governance, often including managing its internal affairs, while still being a part of a sovereign state. Thus, deeming them dependent on the sovereign state they are a part of to represent them in international affairs.

**Independence:** The state of being free from external control, influence, or support, allowing for self-governance, autonomy, or self-reliance.

**Inuit:** The indigenous people of the Arctic regions, including Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and Siberia.

**Referendum:** A submitted public vote on a specific proposal or political issue. It works as a tool of democracy for citizens to directly approve or reject the issue. The results can be binding, by adopting a new law, or advisory, by just taking note of the public's opinion.

**Self-determination:** The power or right of a nation or people to make their own choices and determine how they will be governed without foreign interference.

**Sovereignty:** The full authority and power of a state or governing body to manage all of its own affairs, territory, and population without external interference.

**Territorial integrity:** The prohibition of states from using force to violate another sovereign state's borders or political independence.

## **Background:**

Greenland's historical connection to Denmark dates back to the 1380 union between the Norwegian Kingdom, which originally ruled over Greenland, and the Kingdom of Denmark. In 1721, Danish-Norwegian missionary Hans Egede arrived in Greenland to continue Denmark's colonial involvement in the region, particularly in the spread of Christianity. However, in 1814, the Treaty of Kiel was signed, ending the Denmark-Norway union after the Napoleonic era. As well as redistributing their territorial claims, leaving Greenland and the Faroe Islands under Danish control.

Post World War II, Denmark listed Greenland as a non-self-governing territory (NSGT) with the newly established UN. By 1953, due to the UN's push for the decolonisation of NSGTs, the territory was constitutionally integrated into Denmark, gaining two seats in the Danish parliament and acknowledgement as an equal part of the Danish Realm, which consisted of Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. Thereafter, the region's autonomy expanded with the implementation of the Greenland Home Rule Act, which transferred internal responsibilities such as education and churches to Greenland. Thirty years later, the Home Rule Act was replaced by the Self-Government Act, and between the two acts, Greenland adopted its own flag and national day. The new act gave Greenlanders the right to self-determination and established a pathway to independence through a referendum with Denmark's consent. This period marked a significant development in Greenland's international identity, including the recognition of Greenlandic as the official language of Greenland. Nonetheless, Denmark still holds authority over international matters and the judiciary, including but not limited to the supreme court and foreign policy. Although Denmark never lost sovereignty, Greenland gained progressive autonomy within the Kingdom and continues to be supported financially and represented internationally by Denmark.

## **Strategic, Economic, and Maritime Value**

The importance of Greenland stems from its location, natural resources, and its role in Arctic security. It lies between North America and Europe, providing a strategic position for defence

and monitoring. The island contains valuable resources such as rare earth minerals, oil, gas, zinc, and good fishing grounds. Additionally, as Arctic ice melts, more shipping routes and resource areas will become accessible, increasing potential for economic growth and interest from foreign powers. Furthermore, Greenland's surrounding waters form part of its Exclusive Economic Zone, granting special rights over up to 200 nautical miles from its coast. In some areas, Greenland may also have continental shelf rights, meaning it can claim rights over the seabed beyond the 200-mile limit if it can prove the underwater landmass is a natural extension of its territory. These factors make Greenland not only economically valuable but also highly important for maritime control and international competition.

### **The Inuit Population and Its Role**

Approximately 90% of Greenland's population is Inuit, the island's Indigenous people. Their history, culture, and political rights lie at the heart of the Greenland issue, since decisions about the territory directly impact them. Through Greenland's self-government system, Inuit leaders gain a stronger voice in decision-making via the parliament and government, particularly on land use, natural resources, and social policy. International agreements like UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169 reinforce their right to consultation, requiring consent for major decisions. Political parties such as Inuit Ataqatigiit advocate for independence to protect land rights and prevent foreign resource exploitation.

### **Timeline of Key Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
14/01/1814	The Treaty of Kiel, established during the Napoleonic Wars, ended the conflict between Denmark and Sweden at the time by Denmark giving up Norway to Sweden, while retaining old Norwegian settlements, including Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands.
09/04/1941	The Danish Minister, Henrik Kaufmann, signed an agreement with the USA, permitting them to defend Greenland during World War II and establish military bases. Article I of the agreement states that

	the American government must reiterate its recognition and respect for the sovereignty of Denmark over Greenland.
14/12/1946	American President Truman offered to purchase Greenland from Denmark for \$100 million in gold, but Denmark rejected the offer.
05/06/1953	Greenland was granted two seats in the Danish parliament as well as full integration as an equal part of Denmark.
05/06/1954	Denmark informed the UN that Greenland was no longer a non-self-governing region due to its constitutional integration into Denmark.
01/05/1979	The Greenland Home Rule Act came into effect, granting Greenland limited self-governing responsibilities, including internal affairs like education, health, and fisheries, to Greenland, while Denmark retained foreign policy and defence responsibilities.
01/02/1985	Following a referendum, Greenland withdrew from the European Economic Communities (EEC) and was reclassified as an overseas country and territory (OCT), which allows for association with the European Union (EU) without being subject to all its rules, especially regarding fisheries.
21/06/2009	The Self-Government Act replaced the Greenland Home Rule, expanding Greenland's autonomy and recognising its right to independence through a referendum. While reaffirming its status as an equal partner in the Danish Kingdom.
29/03/2017	Russia's President, Putin, visited the developments of the "Omega" field base, an Arctic Trefoil on Alexandra Land, which is a Russian territory near Greenland.
26/01/2018	China self-proclaimed itself as a "near-Arctic State" in its official Arctic policy white paper. The paper communicated China's plans on developing a "Polar Silk Road", aiming to create its own shipping routes and resource exploration in the Arctic region.

18/08/2019	During President Trump's first term, he publicly voiced his plans on buying Greenland for strategic reasons.
03/01/2026	Venezuelan President, Maduro, and his wife were captured amidst an American military strike in Venezuela. The President was held at the Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn, facing drug and weapon charges.
07/01/2026	Soon after the removal of Venezuela's President, President Trump renewed his calls for a US takeover of Greenland.

**Major parties involved:**

**Arctic Council:** The Arctic Council's interests include maintaining peaceful cooperation in the Arctic, promoting environmental and indigenous people protection, while supporting sustainable development. Its motivation is its will to preserve the Arctic region. However, its ability to shape the question of Greenland is limited as it's not a security organisation and cannot create binding decisions on sovereignty. Its role primarily consists of consultation and coordinating acts of consensus-based cooperation and policy dialogue at an international level.

**Greenland:** Greenland's core interests include self-determination, economic development, and protection of Greenlandic and Inuit people. Its motivation is its will to ensure that decisions about Greenland's future are made by Greenlanders themselves and that external powers don't override local interests. Therefore, it's an extremely influential party in the situation at hand, as Greenlanders do have the right to protect their self-determination. Greenland currently has authority over domestic matters as a self-governing region, but it doesn't have full control over foreign affairs, which remain tied to Denmark. It has already implemented the home rule and self-government, aiding the region in creating its own political identity and having more influence over local matters.

**Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark):** Denmark is interested in maintaining sovereignty over Greenland. Its motivation is its respect for Greenland's autonomy and will to protect the Arctic region from the pressure of major powers. The Kingdom of Denmark, as the sovereign state to which Greenland belongs, is one of the most influential actors in this issue. It has passed the self-government framework with Greenland and reaffirmed that Greenland is not for sale, acting

at both a national and international level through diplomacy and treaty-based cooperation. However, if Denmark were to ever change stances, the situation could change drastically.

**North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO):** NATO prioritises collective defence, deterrence, and stability in the Arctic and North Atlantic regions. Especially as military competition globally increases, its motivation is to keep key elements like the Arctic sea routes, allied territory, and important infrastructure secure. The alliance argues that Russian militarisation and Chinese expansion near Greenland threaten these key elements, including the GIUK gap. Due to these motivations and the alliance's core values, NATO has a great capability of influencing the regional dynamics, coordinated acts enhanced by Greenland's indirect membership via Denmark, which obliges NATO to defend the territory as part of Danish soil under Article 5. It has already increased attention to Arctic security by boosting High North operations. This builds on Cold War vigilance, where the alliance relied on Danish partnerships for surveillance over Greenland. Even then, NATO stressed multilateral defence rather than direct territorial claims. Therefore, its role is primarily international and defence-oriented.

**People's Republic of China (China):** China has declared itself as a "near-Arctic state" with growing interest in Greenland, primarily on the grounds of economic and strategic access. The nation argues that Greenland's rare earth minerals, potential infrastructure projects, and proximity to developing Arctic shipping routes offer opportunities for resource security and global trade advantages. Given China's economic motivation, the state has a significant ability to shape the situation through commercial influence. This has become noticeable in recent years as China pursued research partnerships and mining proposals in Greenland.

**Russian Federation (Russia):** Russia's presence in Greenland has become more evident over recent years with its rebuilt Arctic bases and naval capabilities. The nation's interests in Greenland primarily stem from wishes of military development and resource independence, as Greenland is known for its rare earth minerals. Russia argues that Western control over Greenland restricts Russia's Northern Sea Route and continental shelf claims. Russia, as a major geopolitical power, has a formidable ability to influence the dynamics of the situation, especially as it develops more infrastructure and patrols in Greenland.

**United States of America (USA):** The United States has repeatedly declared its interest in occupying Greenland, primarily on the grounds of national security concerns. The nation argues

that Chinese and Russian influence in Greenland gives such rival powers an advantage in the Arctic region and creates security risks for the United States. Given the USA's major motivations and significant military and economic power, the state has a strong ability to shape the situation. This has become especially noticeable under President Trump, who has renewed interest in Greenland and suggested that the USA should secure Greenland by any means necessary.

This stance contrasts with the USA's past position in World War II, where the state defended Greenland and maintained a long-term defence relationship with the Arctic region through Greenland. Even then, the USA had stated their interest in Greenland for national security; this interest was focused on purchasing Greenland through negotiations with Denmark instead of the current implications of annexation and coercive international acts.

### **Relevant UN treaties, resolutions, and reports:**

**The UN Charter – Adopted on 25/06/1945:** The UN Charter provides the fundamental principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination. These are all key terms directly applicable to the case of Greenland.

**UNGA A/RES/1541(XV) – Adopted on 15/12/1960:** Especially useful when referring to the history of Greenland, which went from being listed in the UN as a non-self-governing region in 1946 to its integration into Denmark's constitution in 1953. This resolution sets the criteria for self-governance and the integration of self-governing territories.

**UNCLOS – Adopted on 10/12/1982:** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea deals with maritime boundaries, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and continental shelf rights in the Arctic; particularly important to the case of Greenland, in terms of Greenland's resource claims and the interests of neighbouring nations.

**ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 – Adopted on 27/06/1989:** The International Labour Organisation's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention protects the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples to consultation, participation in decision-making, and use of their land, which is relevant to Greenland's Inuit population. Moreover, the convention also gives indigenous and tribal peoples the right to free and informed consent for major decisions affecting their territories, which is required before such decisions are made.

**The UNDRIP (A/RES/61/295) – Adopted on 13/09/2007:** The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognises indigenous rights to self-determination (Article 3), autonomy (Article 4), and control over lands and resources (Article 26, 32).

### Previous attempts to solve the issue:

**1951 US-Denmark Defence Agreement:** One of the most significant attempts to manage the Greenland issue was the 1951 US-Denmark Defence Agreement. This NATO-based treaty allowed the US to establish and operate Thule Air Base (now Pituffik Space Base) in northwest Greenland for missile warning and defence purposes. Specifically, the treaty enables US and NATO monitoring of the GIUK-gap (Greenland-Iceland-UK). It was significant because it explicitly recognised Danish sovereignty over Greenland, but it also left Greenland without a voice in the situation, as it came before the Self-Government Act. Although the treaty remains in force, it failed to fully resolve the issue as it rather emphasised Greenland's strategic importance without addressing Greenlanders' concerns about foreign military presence.

**Chinese commercial proposals in the 2010s:** Chinese proposals, including developing airports and mining projects in Greenland, initially appeared to be economic development projects but eventually raised serious security concerns due to the use of infrastructure with dual-use value, meaning it could also be used for military purposes. Denmark ultimately blocked or restricted several of these proposals, and the plans failed because they were not seen as sufficiently transparent.

**Trump Administration's Interest in buying Greenland:** The American proposals to acquire Greenland over the years were all major attempts to alter the issue at hand. The Trump Administration framed its interest in Greenland over the years, mainly in terms of national security and Arctic strategy. Nonetheless, Denmark and Greenland have repeatedly rejected the proposals as they've ignored Greenland's status and Denmark's sovereignty, dismissed the principle of self-determination, as well as clashed with international norms against territorial coercion. The proposals showed no respect for Greenlandic consent and even turned hostile to the point where they created diplomatic tensions with European allies and NATO.

## Possible solutions:

**Uphold Greenland's Self-Determination:** Clauses could affirm Greenlanders' rights to decide their political future through a free referendum, with international observers to ensure transparency and prevent external coercion. Binding agreements could be made with other states to ensure they respect the outcome, regardless of Independence or continued Danish ties.

**Emphasise Foreign Base Transparency:** Clauses could establish mandatory disclosure requirements for any foreign presence proposals in Greenland, requiring Danish-Greenlandic approval. As well as in-depth descriptions of the programme purpose and planned acts, and a guarantee that any acts diverging from the proposal must be reported as soon as possible, if not, they could be investigated and stopped if necessary.

**Regulate EEZ and Resource Competition:** Clauses could potentially create an oversight mechanism under the UNCLOS to mediate overlapping EEZ and continental shelf claims, ensuring Inuit free prior informed consent for projects. Focus solutions on equitable benefit-sharing to fund Greenland development.

**Strengthen Indigenous Protections:** Clauses could strengthen pre-established frameworks like the UNDRIP and the ILO Convention 169, by updating them with binding enforcement mechanisms and Security Council oversight to ensure states respect indigenous consultation rights in Greenland's resource and sovereignty decisions.

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