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## **Greenland: Why all the fuss?**

Steve Bakke  March 2, 2026



Why the sudden interest in Greenland? Sudden? Not by a long shot! And the current events regarding Iran put an exclamation point on dealing with our many national defense concerns.

Recall Secretary of State William Seward, of “Seward’s Folly” fame. In 1868, a year after his purchase of Alaska, he tried to add Greenland to the U.S. His interest was spurred by an 1867 survey that described Greenland as a “land of abundance.”

Seward argued: “Greenland has, in vast quantities, whale, walrus, seal and shark, cod, salmon, salmon-trout and herring; foxes, wolf, reindeer, bear, a myriad of birds....good coal....good harbors....” and the mineral cryolite, that would empower the United States to “command the commerce of the world.” Seward failed.

In 1910, the U.S. tried to make a “3-party-trade” for Greenland: America would get Greenland from Denmark; the Philippines would be ceded to Germany by the U.S.; and Denmark would receive the Schleswig-Holstein region from Germany (lost in 1864). Again, there was little support.

WW2 proved the valuable strategic location of Greenland. Although declared as neutral, Denmark was occupied by Germany. America took control of the island, thereby preventing Germany from doing so. More than 10,000 Allied aircraft landed on Greenland to refuel for bombing runs on Germany. Some referred to Greenland as “the world’s largest stationary aircraft carrier.”

In 1946 the State Department proposed purchasing the Island from Denmark for \$100,000,000 in gold. The offer met with shock and dismay and was summarily refused.

Soon the Cold War demonstrated Greenland’s strategic importance by being mid-way between nuclear powers. The U.S. and Denmark signed a treaty in 1951 that gave America significant military latitude for arctic operations.

As many as 10,000 U.S. troops have been housed at Thule Air Base in Greenland. It’s now the “Pituffik U.S. Space Force Base. An interesting footnote to this quiet but important history is that even President Eisenhower’s administration was interested in buying Greenland.

Times have changed and other “attractions” now spur interest in Greenland. Today, Greenland population is under 60,000, mostly Inuit, with an economy of only \$3 billion. They would be vulnerable without the existing defense treaty. Hopefully that agreement can be improved on.

In addition to Greenland's continued strategic geographic value, closely related is the abundance of rare earth minerals, essential for technology and defense manufacturing in today's world. We now rely on China to supply much of our massive demand for rare earth minerals. In addition, Greenland is rich in Uranium, and oil and gas reserves. And Greenland would be an important part of Trump's nuclear missile defense plan named "Golden Dome."

Greenland has been politically and culturally associated with Europe for centuries. It was associated with Denmark from 1814, first as a colony, then "home ruled," and eventually became "self-governed" in 2008. It's still very much dependent on Denmark.

Nevertheless, Greenland is geographically part of North America and America needs an even more enduring "arrangement" involving Greenland's dominant defensive location as well as its abundance of rare earth minerals.

Of no surprise, China and Russia are also interested in Greenland. The necessity of preventing those countries from having a North American and arctic military foothold is obvious. They would benefit from similar advantages as would America.

Trump understands Greenland's immense value. Unfortunately, his anticipation of possible negotiations led to his infamous "saber-rattling." I think he does this automatically to create a sense of urgency. In this case, unfortunately, it's just his style. This and his "trolling" have no place here. Save it for adversarial situations. Denmark and Greenland don't deserve that.

Secretary of State Rubio has stepped into this situation with his landmark speech to European leadership at the Munich Security Conference. He blunted many of the hard feelings stirred when Trump turned Europe into a punching bag.

Having Greenland solidly with the U.S. is of immense importance. We have an existing treaty which needs to be strengthened, not ripped up. Greenland's importance as a valuable ally transcends national defense and rare earth minerals. Handling this negotiation properly also strengthens our valuable European relationships.

Success is invaluable for America's defense and prosperity and benefits Europe as well. Let's move on and enhance our relationship to ensure "enduring rights" in Greenland.