Unintended Militarization of Greenland

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NATO vessels are visiting Greenland in a show of strength. Submarines are being reported in Greenlandic waters. Russia denies, and calls out Western aggression and NATO expansionism. At the same time, the controversial celebrity U.S. President wants to expand missile shields, including in Greenland. Greenland has been gaining more self-determination and wants to participate more in security policy discussion. However, it is not 2026; this is happening in 1983. The NATO vessels are part of the Standing NATO marine group, or as it was known at the time "Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT)." The submarine claims were made by the Danish authorities, as buoys used by submarines were found around Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The Russian individual denying the claim was a soviet reporter in the "Krasnaja Svesda" (Red star). The controversial U.S. celebrity president was Ronald Reagan, and instead of the Golden Dome, it is the Strategic Defense Initiative, nicknamed "Star Wars." Today, NATO has launched Arctic Sentry, and many NATO allies are participating in exercises in and around Greenland and Norway, and Danish defense spending in the Arctic and North Atlantic are rapidly increasing while Sweden and Finland have joined NATO. This article conducts a comparison among historic and contemporary events, and demonstrates that the Kingdom of Denmark has changed their policy on the defense of Greenland.

Introduction

Since the Cold War, Greenlandic politicians have been advocating against the militarization of Greenland. In the early eighties, Greenland had just gained Home Rule and the U.S. had elected Ronald Reagan as president, and the Soviet Union looked to be very powerful. The U.S. base at Pituffik, the Distant Early Waring line (DEW-line) across Greenland, as well as the bases at Kangerlussuaq and Kulusuk were the US military presence in Greenland. This involved the Danish Greenland Command in Ivittuut. The Danish policy with regards to the defense in Greenland had remained the same since the signing of the Defense Agreement between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Denmark on the defense of Greenland (Folketinget, 1983; United States of America & Kingdom of Denmark, 1951). This reflected the view that it was impossible for Denmark to afford the defense of Greenland, and this was part of the motivation as to why Denmark had signed the agreement in 1951. It was also considered a bilateral obligation between

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the Kingdom of Denmark and the U.S. by NATO allies, and NATO thus had no real role in the defense of Greenland except through its focus on the GIUK-gap and anti-submarine warfare in the Davis Strait (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1982a). This did not change, even after it came to light that Soviet submarines were supposedly patrolling the Greenland water on the west coast (p., 1983). It has been possible to maintain or even decrease some of the military activities in Greenland in the intervening years from 1983 until very recently. The coalition agreement between Inuit Ataqatigiit, Parti Naleraq from 2021 explicitly wanted less military in the Arctic, though this was mistranslated to 'demilitarization'. The Foreign, Defense, and Security Policy Strategy of the Government of Greenland from 2024 explicitly states that Greenland does not want non-Arctic States to expand their permanent military capabilities in the region (Naalakkersuisut - Ministry of Statehood and Foreign Affairs, 2024). As recently as 2022, it was also official Danish Policy to work to keep NATO out while acknowledging that the High North, here meaning Norway, was the purview of NATO (H. G. Pedersen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2022). It was viewed that any increase in any possible offensive capabilities in Greenland would be a provocation against Russia, even after the Invasion of Ukraine, and it was the goal to keep Greenland a matter for the U.S. and Denmark to manage.

The situation for Greenland is different now, however, as the U.S. has demanded that the Kingdom of Denmark and NATO increase their presence and activities in Greenland otherwise the U.S. will do it themselves. Greenlandic politicians are now talking less about militarization and talking more about the changed security policy situation today. There is currently no Greenlandic Head of Representation in China, and there is instead focus on increasing cooperation and engagement with the EU and European partners. More NATO members have visited Greenland, including military vessels, partly in response to the threats from the U.S. to invade Greenland and partly to assuage U.S. fear of Greenland being taken over by Russian or Chinese interests. Rather than accepting the U.S.' demand to own Greenland, Greenlandic politicians have accepted militarization of Greenland by Denmark and NATO allies.

The history of Greenland's involvement in defense policy

The foundational document of Greenland's status as a militarized country is the 1951 defense agreement[1] between the United States and the Kingdom of Denmark, which is the beginning of what is called the "Defense Arrangements." The most recent addition is the agreement signed on September 22, 2026, which also defines what the "Defense Arrangements" mean (Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland & Government of the United States of America, 2026; Udenrigsministeriet, 2026; United States of America & Kingdom of Denmark, 1951). It is noteworthy, that the full name of the agreement is "*Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark pursuant to the North Atlantic Treaty concerning the defense of Greenland*" (United States of America & Kingdom of Denmark, 1951). There was no recognition of the fact that the agreement was also meant to ensure U.S. homeland defense, though members of Greenland's Parliament have always been aware that American security was the primary reason for the presence of U.S. military in Greenland (Anorak rapporten, 1999; Forsvarsministeren, 1983; Heinrich, 2012; Heinrich et al., 2025).

[1] Though the Kaufmann agreement of 1941 technically is first, it was supplanted by the 1951 agreement.

The parliament of Greenland was created in 1979 when the Home Rule Act came into effect. Prior to this period, matters of Defense in Greenland did not directly involve Greenlandic politicians, though there were Greenlandic members of the Danish Parliament (Heinrich, 2012). The latest additions are the agreement package of 2020 that was the resolution of the Service Maintenance Contract (Government of Greenland & Government of the United States of America, 2020; Høegh, 2024; Olsvig, 2024) and the agreement that ended Trump's desire to purchase Greenland signed in New York in September 2026 (Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland & Government of the United States of America, 2026). The package included this passage *"In view of Pituffik's and Greenland's key role in Greenlandic, **U.S.,** and transatlantic security…"* (Government of the United States of America and the & Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland, 2020; my emphasis on **U.S.** is to point out that this is the first time in the text that Greenland contribution to U.S. security is recognized in official documents.) The agreement from 2026 includes two passages in the preamble that recognizes Greenland's contribution to the 'Parties' security, as it was phrased in the text:

> *"Acknowledging as well Greenland's contribution to the Parties' mutual security interests and its consequent sharing of the associated risks and responsibilities, and the commitment of the Parties to continuing close cooperation within NATO in ensuring North Atlantic security, as set forth in the 2004 Igaliku Agreement;"*

and

> *"Recognizing the Parties' common goal of international peace and peaceful co-existence, and respecting the important contribution of Greenland to this goal;"*

This has been long recognized by academia (Archer, 1988, 2003; Olsvig, 2022). The latest agreement is the conclusion of the recent negotiations between Greenland/Denmark on one side and the United States of America on the other side regarding the future of U.S. Military presence (KNR - Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa, 2025). The same kinds of negotiations were ongoing in the 1980's. Starting in 1983 (Forsvarsministeren, 1983), they resulted in the 1991 memorandum (Udenrigsministeriet, 1991). They started again at the end of the 1990's and resulted in the 2004 agreement (Udenrigsministeriet et al., 2005) where Greenland was a signatory for the first time. Greenland has thus four times been part of negotiations regarding U.S. military presence in Greenland, resulting in four agreements established in 1991, 2004, 2020 and 2026[2].

The 1991 Memorandum of Understanding handed over the two U.S. bases, Kangerlussuaq and Kulusuk, to the Kingdom and created the Permanent Committee which is the forum through which the Kingdom and the U.S. have shared plans and discussions regarding the development of Pituffik (Olsvig, 2022a, 2024; Udenrigsministeriet, 1991). It indirectly reduced the U.S. military presence in Greenland to Pituffik. The 2004 Agreement, usually called Igaliku agreement, created the environmental sub-committee in the Permanent Committee, and was accompanied by a joint declaration that created the Joint Committee on civilian cooperation between the U.S. and Greenland, with Denmark acting as the third wheel (Olsvig, 2022a, 2022b; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2026). The Igaliku agreement also limited U.S. military presence to only Pituffik, though they could increase after consultation with the Kingdom, thus including Greenland. This was the first time

[2] Greenland did participate in some capacity during the exchange of notes in 1986 regarding non-fraternization (Elleman-Jensen, 1986)

Greenland was a signatory to any agreement regarding U.S. military presence in Greenland. The 2020 agreement package included an exchange of diplomatic notes, where Greenland was addressed for the first time (The Embassy of the United States of America, 2020)[3].

However, the situation in 1983 most closely reflects the one that is ongoing today. It was the Cold War, where the world was full of tension, and the U.S. were increasing their military engagement in South America and the Middle East. This time period is also characterized by Greenland's increasing autonomy, where for the first time, Greenlandic politicians were the legislators and ministers in charge of running the country (Heinrich et al., 2025; Høegh, 2024). At the same time, the Soviet Union and the United States were increasing their rhetoric with the ascension of Ronald Reagan (Farnham, 2001; Myers & Dansk udenrigspolitisk institut, 1997). The increasing autonomy of Greenland was first seen as a threat to the Soviet Union due to fears of an independent Greenland becoming a greater partner to NATO.

Defense policy of the Kingdom of Denmark with regards to Greenland

In 1983, the Parliament of Greenland was in its fourth year of existence and the rules of procedure and legislation of how the Government of Greenland would be run were not yet created (Hjemmestyreloven, 1978; Olsvig & Gad, 2025). The commission on the Home Rule of Greenland had described that the new Parliament of Greenland and Government of Greenland could not assume responsibility of security and defense policy (Kommissionen om hjemmestyre i Grønland, 1978). The Distant Early Warning (DEW) line was still operational, together with several of U.S. military bases around Greenland to support the maintenance of the DEW line. Kangerlussuaq and Kulusuk airports were still American air bases, but with possibility for supporting civilian airplanes. Soviet KGB had started to look to Greenland as it gained more autonomy in 1979 (Hjemmestyreloven, 1978; Nissen & Pelt, 2009). Ronald Reagan considered the USSR the main security threat to the U.S., particularly due to threat from intercontinental ballistic missiles, and thus the importance of early warning was clear in his priorities, with Greenland playing a particular role as the Atlantic Wall with the DEW line (Archer, 1988; Farnham, 2001; North Atlantic Military Committee, 1980b). This prompted a debate in Greenland throughout the 1980's on the American bases in Greenland and the upgrade of the DEW lines, and included discussions about whether or not the upgrade on radars in Greenland would violate the ICBM treaties with the USSR. These discussions were particularly salient after the KBG's active measures in both Denmark and Greenland which included the release of a book that partly claimed that Greenland is only of interest to the U.S. and not NATO, and therefore is an excuse by the U.S. to prepare attacks on Russia (Købehavn (AG), 1987; Lyberth, 1983; Nissen & Pelt, 2009; P., 1983b; Poljukhov, 1983).

There was more discussion among Greenlandic politicians about being involved in the bilateral discussions between the U.S. and the Danish Government, especially as the explanation that the Inughuit hunters moved of their own accord during the building of Pituffik was voluntary came to be challenged (Archer, 1988). This experience has since been recognized as a forcible removal of the Inughuit (Brøsted & Fægteborg, 1985; Statsministeriet, 1999), and was acknowledged by the U.S. in the base renaming ceremony in 2023 (U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark Alan Leventhal, 2023). The radar system at Pituffik at the end of the 1970's was becoming obsolete and

[3] The note begins with: "The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Energy of the Government of Greenland…"

needed to be updated, and the members of the Parliament of Greenland wanted to be part of these discussions (Archer, 1988; Forsvarsministeren, 1983). The parliament had adopted the nuclear free zone in the Arctic resolution by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (Inatsisartut, 1983), and because the members were keenly aware of the Cold War, they asked for caution about announcing allegiance to either the West or the USSR, and instead wanted to promote peace internationally (Joelsen, 1983; Rosing, 1983). The increasing debate in Greenland and its focus on security policy was also instigated by the increased focus in the Danish Parliament, where certain politicians were very inquisitive of the role of U.S. Military in Greenland and in particular the Thule Air Base's role in the offensive capabilities of the U.S., including as a threat to the Soviet Union. This particular line of questioning was brought on by a Swedish book that was translated and published in Denmark, claiming that the strategic importance of Greenland was much bigger than publicly acknowledged. This prompted the Danish Minister of Defense, Hans Engell to say the following in a debate in the Parliament of Denmark (Folketinget, 1983; translated into English by the authors):

> *Som en naturlig følge af rigsfællesskabet for Grønland og Danmark påhviler der os et ansvar for forsvaret af Grønland. Forsvaret af den sydlige del af Danmark stiller imidlertid så store krav til landets forsvarsberedskab og økonomi, at det inden for alle realistiske rammer vil være umuligt for os at afse de tilstrækkelige midler til Grønlands forsvar. Disse fakta var blandt forudsætningerne, da Danmark den 27. april 1951 indgik en overenskomst med USA om forsvaret af Grønland, og disse forudsætninger har ikke ændret sig i de mere end 30 år, der er gået siden da.*
>
> *As a natural part of the Realm for Greenland and Denmark, the responsibility for the defense of Greenland rests on us. The defense of the southern part of Denmark, however, requires such high demands for the country's defense and economy, at within all realistic expectation, it would be impossible for us to find funds for the defense of Greenland. These facts were among the presupposition when on the 27th April 1951 Denmark entered into an agreement with the USA for the defense of Greenland, and these presuppositions have not changed in the over 30 years that has passed since then.*

1983 was a seminal year for Greenlandic politicians' participation in Danish defense and security policy discussions. Their insistence on being part of the discussion about Greenland has never gone away, as demonstrated by the Greenlandic Minister of Foreign Affairs remarks at the Arctic Circle Assembly in 2026 (Bennett, 2026). But the policy of a bilateral solution for the defense of Greenland has always been stable, as has the desire for Greenlandic politicians to be part of the conversation and decision making process (Ackrén, 2025; Anorak rapporten, 1999; Motzfeldt, 2006). This has been consistent even until today (Jacobsen & Olsvig, 2024; Olsvig, 2022b, 2022a; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2026).

NATO's role in Greenland before the change

The NATO Defense Planning Committee visited Greenland in 1979 (North Atlantic Council, 1980), and the North Atlantic Military Committee issued a report that focused on the threat from the USSR's Northern Fleets access to the GIUK gap (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1980b). The usual route of the STANAVFORLANT(Standing Naval Force Atlantic) in the image shows that the fleet did not go further northwest than Iceland. The west coast of Greenland was not an area of patrol for STANAVFORLANT. Though NATO had talked about the sea west of Greenland, it was mostly in terms of ASW, and continental shelf mining between Greenland and Canada, meaning the Davis Strait (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1982a, 1982b). This was

one of the motivations for NATO's STANAVFORLANT finally visiting the West Coast of Greenland in 1983 (Lyberth, 1983).

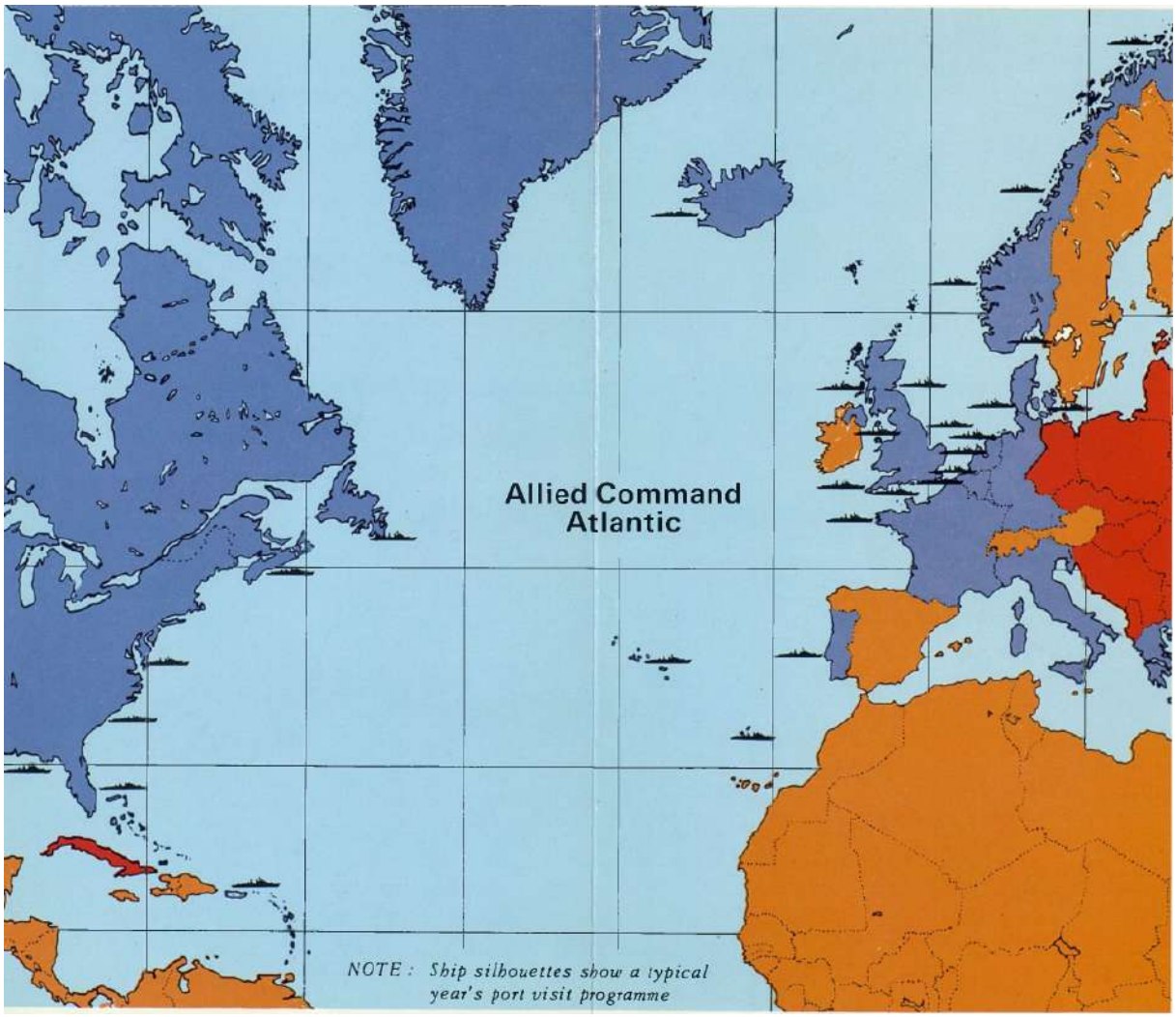

Figure 1. The ships in the image shows the usual patrolling route of the STANAVFORLANT, from Northern Norway through Europe South to the Azores and North to Iceland, and where the West Coast of Greenland is not included *(NATO Information Service, 1978)*

With the expanding Northern Fleet of the USSR and the importance of the GIUK gap, as well as the increased focus on the Arctic by the USSR, NATO needed to show its ability to operate in Greenland. That was manifested as the STANAVFORLANT visit to Greenland in September 1983 (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1983; P. M. Pedersen, 1983a). What is in the background of these events regarding Greenland, was the fact that NATO Military Authorities had been criticizing Denmark for not living up to their responsibility in the Baltic Sea and their inability to have a standing force than can defend Denmark until reinforcements arrive (Defence Planning Committee, 1980a; North Atlantic Military Committee, 1980c). However, despite this, the U.S. considered Denmark a loyal partner to the Alliance (Defence Planning Committee, 1980b). Denmark had met their commitments, and even exceeded them, in the maritime forces, which included fisheries inspection, surveillance and a limited anti-submarine warfare around Greenland

and the Faroe Islands (Defence Planning Committee, 1980a), but was thoroughly criticized for nearly all other efforts, including being the cause of a new term for a country trying to pay as little as possible in NATO "Danmarkificering" (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1980c; Villaume, 2012). Denmark did, however, continue to meet the expectation held by the U.S. regarding the defense of Greenland, and NATO was more concerned with the GIUK gap, and not so much the Western coast of Greenland. This was considered a bilateral problem to be solved by the U.S. and Denmark, including related logistics (International Military Staff, 1983).

There was an expectation that Soviet submarines were in and around Greenland and off the coast of North America, and NATO thus commissioned studies on the continental shelf from Greenland to Scotland, as well as from Greenland to Canada in Baffin Bay to learn more about how deep sea mines could be effectively used for both defense and attack (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1980a, 1980b). The Danish authorities had reported as much, where they found buoys they thought were left behind by Soviet submarines (P., 1983). So it was still important for NATO to show its ability to reach Greenland and to cover all of NATO's area of responsibility, which they did with the STANAVFORLANT in 1983 (North Atlantic Military Committee, 1983; p., 1983a; p., 1983b). They also had two carrier battle groups as far north as the North Norwegian Sea for the first time through the GIUK gap in 1981 (DIRECTOR PAT, 1981). However, NATO has had a secondary role in the Arctic during the Cold War (Dordoni, 2025). It was mostly to secure the GIUK gap and conduct North Atlantic patrols. The Danish-American defense cooperation in Greenland, meaning the warning and communication systems that are operated by the U.S., and the surveillance and inspections by the Danish forces was part of the NATO deterrence and defense strategi, but was not in itself a NATO operation (Forsvarsministeren, 1983). This remained the same until very recently (Den Sikkerhedspolitiske Analysegruppe, 2022; H. G. Pedersen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2022).

Today

The U.S. and the Danish Ministry of Defense have been aware of the need to invest in domain awareness in and around Greenland since at least 2013 (Forsvarsministeriet, 2016), and the Danish Minister of Defense together with the Danish Parliament set aside 1.5 billion DKK in 2018, which were later set aside for investing in the Danish Defense's Arctic Capabilities (Forsvarsministeriet, 2021). The funding was mostly for surveillance and domain awareness of the air space above Greenland and the Faroe Islands as well as the surface ocean around Greenland (Forsvarsministeriet & Naalakkersuisut, 2022). As part of the preparation of the upcoming defense budget negotiation in the Danish Parliament, the Government of Denmark tasked an analysis group to investigate the security landscape of the Kingdom of Denmark until 2035[4] (Den Sikkerhedspolitiske Analysegruppe, 2022). Much of the situational analysis is consistent with how NATO strategic concepts and the American Director of National Intelligence view the threats in the future, namely Chinese military expansion, Russian aggression, and climate change (Den Sikkerhedspolitiske Analysegruppe, 2022; NATO, 2022; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2025). The more immediate military threat is Russia and the war in Ukraine, and the long-term strategic opponent is China. This is reflected in the focus of the Danish defense investment, that has been focusing on mainland Europe defense (Forsvarsministeriet., 2022). Then

[4] The author was part of this analysis group on behalf of the Government of Greenland

in 2025, the President of the United States began criticizing Denmark for not being able to defend Greenland and re-igniting his desire to purchase Greenland (Adler, 2026; Starcevic, 2025). Suddenly the slow and steady increase in investments in domain awareness in and around Greenland were not enough for the U.S., even though they have been involved in situational awareness in Greenland. They no longer feel that what Denmark had planned for Greenland, and what NATO was doing in the Arctic and the High North more widely, were enough. They have even moved away from how the NATO strategic concept from 2022 had laid out how to focus on the High North (NATO, 2022). The main strategic challenge had been that Russia's abilities in the High North could disrupt allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation. There was no mention of how Russian or Chinese submarines were threats. This, however, has now changed. Even the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs considers the U.S. security considerations to be 'legitimate" (Greve Møller, 2026)

Greenland's Security Policy Status

The main US military installation in Greenland is the Pituffik Space Base, and Greenland is considered to have mineral resource that are considered strategic by the US, EU, and China (Bouffard et al., 2025; Jacobsen & Gad, 2017; Olsvig, 2022b; Olsvig & Gad, 2025; Repræsentationen i Danmark, 2024; Sørensen, 2018). Ever since the U.S. began placing greater attention on the Arctic as well as great power competition with China, Greenland's security policy status has been rising in importance, while Greenland has also been increasing its autonomy and participation in defense and security policy (Olsvig, 2022a, 2022b, 2024; Olsvig & Gad, 2025). The importance of Greenland's role in U.S. homeland security has been made official (Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland & Government of the United States of America, 2026; Government of the United States of America and the & Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland, 2020). Denmark has recognized the need to include Greenland in discussion regarding Security and Defense (Departement for Selvstændighed og Udenrigsanliggender, 2025; Naalakkersuisut & Forsvarsministeriet, 2022). Possible Chinese investments in Greenland have been making headlines for over a decade, and although they are absent in Greenland, this narrative represents a dangerous situation for the U.S. and thus a leverage point against the Kingdom of Denmark (Edstrøm et al., 2025; Gad, 2017; Olsvig, 2022a; Sørensen, 2018). The mere possibility of Chinese investments in Greenland has made the U.S. extremely worried, but the narrative is partly driven by misunderstandings of how much Chinese activity there actually is and partly driven by thinktanks and analysts coming up with worst case scenarios (Gray, 2025). Concerns about Russian and Chinese submarines around Greenland while the U.S. is shifting focus to the Pacific Ocean has resulted in the U.S. forcing its allies to step up in securing the North Atlantic. Denmark has thus significantly increased their defense spending in Greenland and the North Atlantic from the paltry 1.5 billion DKK increase in 2018 to now increasing spending to 42 billion DKK. The 1.5 billion DKK in 2018 took 3 years of negotiation to come to an agreement on what to spend it on. The 42 billion DKK was announced in 2025 and 2026 with pre-defined priorities on what to spend it on. This urgency of action is because the U.S. has changed their understanding of the Security situation around Greenland. Denmark and NATO are now catching up.

NATO's role in Greenland today

In response to increased Russian military activities, Chinese interests in the Arctic, and the ascension of Sweden and Finland to NATO, NATO has been increasing its attention and capabilities in the Arctic (NATO, 2026a, 2026b). NATO had been increasing its attention on the High North since Russia began to increase their capabilities in the Arctic and Norway had been working on engaging more with NATO and the U.S. in the High North (Boulègue et al., 2024; Dordoni, 2025).

The U.S. is expecting and demanding that NATO allies increase their spending, which includes the Kingdom of Denmark (The White House, 2025). Several NATO members' vessels have visited Greenland and participated in exercises lead by Danish Defense, and will continue through 2026 (Danish Defence, 2026). The Defense budget agreements, which are made together with the Government of Greenland, include increasing of defense spending in Greenland to support NATO's area of responsibilities, and the text itself includes mention of China's ambition to operate submarines in the Arctic Ocean (Departement for Udenrigsanliggender, Erhverv og Handel, 2026). The new Danish Government has included in their coalition agreement that they will increase their ability to support NATO in the region (Regeringen, 2026). Furthermore, the recent trilateral agreement on Greenland includes provisions that only NATO allies (members or partners) may invest in sensitive areas in Greenland, and that non-members are not allowed to build close to defense areas (Government of the Kingdom of Denmark together with the Government of Greenland & Government of the United States of America, 2026). The language is pretty clear: China is not allowed build even a shed in the vicinity of a defense area.

Then and now

The table below gives a quick overview of some the key issues in 1983 and today. It is important note the fact that there was more actual submarine activities around Greenland in 1983 and the threat of Nuclear War was looming large during this height of the Cold War, but still the policy of the Kingdom of Denmark, NATO, and the U.S. did not change with regards to Greenland. It remained a bi-lateral issue for Denmark and the U.S., but eventually became a trilateral between Greenland/Denmark on one side and the U.S. on the other.

Table 1. The views on issues in 1983 and 2026

Issue	1983	Today
GIUK Gap	• Both the U.S. and Denmark consider it strategically important, and the U.S. is focused on this gap • STANAVFORLANT is lead from Norfolk, VA, focuses on the North and Eastern Atlantic Ocean • Focusing on securing the GIUK gap, in particular the US to Europe supply lines in case of conflict	• It is strategically important for the support of Europe, but the U.S. has turned towards the Pacific, and expects NATO allies to focus on this gap. • Arctic Sentry is lead from Norfolk, VA, focuses both on the High North and the Arctic • Explicitly acknowledges that NATO must take more responsibility
NATO	• Has no real role in the defense of Greenland	• Bigger and more important role in the Arctic, and the High North

	• Focus on Anti-submarine capabilities in the GIUK-gap	• Not doing enough to support American security and demands • A standing military activity, Arctic Sentry to support the collective understanding that NATO must do more in the Arctic
Russia/USSR	• Greatest security and military threat to the World, both Europe and the U.S.	• Denmark views Russia as the primary military threat to Europe • The U.S. considers Russia to be Europe's problem, or at least annoyed that the Europeans cannot end the war and make peace with Russia
Submarines	• Denmark has limited ASW capabilities, and is not expected to have the capacity • Soviet submarines expected to be around the GIUK gap to disrupt supply lines in case of a major conflict	• Denmark has limited ASW, and the U.S. is expecting Denmark to step up their capability • According to the U.S. Russian and Chinese submarines will be in and around Greenland in the near future to threaten the U.S.
Greenland	• An autonomous region, under the sovereign control of the Kingdom of Denmark, on which the U.S. is relied upon to defend • Danish and US surveillance capabilities are adequate	• The U.S. sees a near-independent country, ripe for infiltration by the Chinese and Russia • The U.S. is impatient of the lack of domain awareness around Greenland, and actually demands the Kingdom of Denmark increase their spending, and that an independent Greenland will continue these obligations

The official position of the Government of Greenland, even despite the threat of Nuclear War in 1983, was to not militarize Greenland. This has completely changed in 2026, where the Government of Greenland is welcoming, and even desires, that NATO allies are in Greenland and that the Danish Defense increase their presence in Greenland. Denmark has quite significantly increased their budget for the defense of Greenland, including promising to acquire P-8 surveillance plane (Departement for Udenrigsanliggender, Erhverv og Handel, 2026). The table is showing that what used to be a bi-lateral issue of Defense of Greenland, the United States demands that Denmark and NATO allies step up to defend not only Greenland, but the entire North Atlantic Treaty Area.

Conclusion

It has been a longstanding position of Greenlandic politicians not to militarize Greenland, and it has been a position that was shared by the Government of Denmark and the Government of the U.S.. However, this position has been challenged by the Trump Administration and the demand they put on their allies to step up and defend both Greenland and the United States. It has served as a wakeup call for NATO allies that what the U.S. has been saying diplomatically since Obama needs to be taken seriously: the strategic and long-term competition with China is of such danger that it is urgent for allies to defend the North Atlantic so that the U.S. can focus on the Pacific.

This has challenged the Kingdom of Denmark, which has since 2018 tried to appease the U.S. with slowly increasing its defense expenditures in Greenland that is reminiscent of the 'foot-noting' policy of the 1980's. Denmark has historically been accused of dragging their feet in meeting the NATO forces requirements, even as some in Greenland said that Denmark got a 'NATO discount' because of the U.S. military presence. It is therefore a dramatic change that NATO is invited into the defense of Greenland and the Arctic, together with a massive increase of Danish defense expenditure. The U.S., now more than ever, expects Europe and NATO to take responsibility of its defense, including in the Atlantic, so they can focus on China and the Pacific, where there is no North Pacific Treaty Organization.

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