

European troops off to Greenland as US talks stall

Denmark

Oliver Moody, Alex Maxia
Copenhagen

Denmark and at least three of its northern European allies are sending troops to Greenland after negotiations in Washington failed to deliver a breakthrough on President Trump's demands for the territory to be handed over to the United States.

The hastily convened military deployment, a prelude to a larger exercise called Operation Arctic Endurance, will involve soldiers, naval vessels and aircraft from Denmark, and small numbers of unarmed or lightly armed personnel from Germany, Norway and Sweden. Norway confirmed that it was sending two officers and Germany, which described the deployment as a "reconnaissance" mission, will send 13 personnel. France, Canada and the Netherlands are among the other Nato allies that may make contributions.

The mission, which began yesterday and will last until Saturday, was pitched in vague terms as a reassurance initiative to boost security in the Arctic and lay the groundwork for larger naval surveillance operations in the future.

The Danish defence ministry said further exercises this year might include guarding "installations critical to society" as well as fighter jet deployments and naval operations.

Troels Lund Poulsen, the Danish defence minister, declined to give details on the scale of his country's contribution but said it was a step towards a "more permanent presence" on Greenland. Asked whether the soldiers would defend the island against an American invasion, Poulsen said it was a "highly hypothetical question" and he did not believe it was likely that one Nato ally would attack another.

Yesterday Trump said Nato ought to be "leading the way" for the US to acquire Greenland because it would make the alliance "far more formidable and effective". He later said he had spoken to Mark Rutte, Nato's secretary-general, about the issue, adding: "He really wants to see something happen."

Trump said America needed the territory to realise his vision of a "Golden Dome" defence system with the capacity to shoot down "almost 100 per cent" of cruise or ballistic missiles aimed at the US, which he has pledged to establish by 2029.

Since decapitating the Maduro regime in Venezuela on January 3, Trump has doubled down on his pursuit of Greenland, arguing that a US takeover is the



JD Vance and Marco Rubio leave the talks held with Vivian Motzfeldt and Lars Lokke Rasmussen, below

only way to keep China and Russia out of the island. He said he felt a "psychological need" to obtain the territory, likening it to a piece of real estate and insisting that the US would acquire it "the easy way or the hard way".

Yesterday Lars Lokke Rasmussen and Vivian Motzfeldt, respectively the Danish and Greenlandic foreign ministers, visited the White House complex for negotiations with Marco Rubio, the US secretary of state, and JD Vance, the vice-president. Any residual optimism about the possibility of a swift compromise was dashed when, in the middle of the talks, the White House social media account posted a meme showing a pair of dog sleds representing Greenland confronted with a choice between an American flag bathed in sunlight and a lightning storm decorated with the Chinese and Russian flags. The caption read: "Which way, Greenland man?"

Afterwards Rasmussen said the "frank but constructive" talks had not overcome the "fundamental differences" between the two sides. He also said that Greenland would remain part of Denmark "for the foreseeable future".

"We didn't manage to change the American position," Rasmussen said. "It's clear the president has this wish of conquering over Greenland [sic]. We made it very clear that this isn't in the interest of the kingdom of Denmark."

Rasmussen said that the issue would be addressed by a "high-level working group" that would meet "within weeks".

"We agree that it makes sense to sit down on a high level and explore whether there is the possibility to accommodate the concerns of the [US] president while we respect the red lines of the kingdom of Denmark," he said. "Whether that is doable, I don't know. I hope it could take down the temperature." Rasmussen said it was "absolutely not necessary" for the US to annex

Greenland because Denmark would look kindly on any requests to expand the American presence on the island.

He denied Trump's claim that China had sent warships into the area, saying no Chinese naval vessels had been observed there in more than a decade, and said that strict investment screening meant there was "no Chinese presence in Greenland".

Motzfeldt was more reserved, saying Greenland wished to "strengthen co-operation" with America but "that doesn't mean we want to be owned by the United States".

Hours earlier several European leaders had issued their strongest condemnations yet of Trump's tactics. President Macron is said to have told his cabinet that any American attempt to capture Greenland would lead to "unprecedented consequences" and that France would be obliged to take unspecified "actions" against it. The French president also said the seriousness of Trump's threats should not be underestimated. Paris announced that it would open a consulate in Nuuk, the Greenlandic capital, next month.

The leaders of the European parliament issued a statement "unequivocally condemning" Trump's rhetoric, which they described as a "blatant challenge ... to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a Nato ally".

"Such statements are unacceptable and have no place in relations between democratic partners," they added.

It is expected that further European Nato members will join the Greenland mission over the coming days.

Poulsen, the Danish defence minister, framed it as a sequel to last summer's Arctic Light exercise, which involved Denmark's Jaeger Corps special forces alongside 550 troops from allies including France, Germany, Sweden and Norway. He said it was a "clear priority" for Denmark to bolster Nato's military presence in the high north "at a time when no one can predict what will happen in security policy terms".

The Greenlandic government said it "attached great importance" to having Nato strengthen the territory's security.

Denmark and Greenland's efforts to cultivate a critical mass of opposition to Trump's plan within the Republican Party also appear to be bearing fruit.

A number of senior figures in the party, including John Thune, the majority leader in the Senate, have broken cover to warn against a military intervention. This dispute is likely to play out on the floor of Congress. One Trump loyalist has introduced a bill that would authorise the president to add Greenland to the US. Lisa Murkowski, a Republican senator, responded by joining her Democratic colleague Jeanne Shaheen in drawing up a bipartisan rival bill that would prohibit the use of government funds in any military operation against a Nato ally.

