

Greenland isn't the answer to U.S. Arctic security. This place is.

BY ALICE ROGOFF

The United States faces serious security vulnerabilities in the Arctic. The region's strategic positioning and critical mineral deposits make it essential that we control it. That means making use of key territory to secure our defensive posture.

That territory, however, is not Greenland. It lies across the Arctic Circle — in Alaska.

Greenland is a long-term security priority. Following the meeting between President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in Davos, positive progress is being made, with Trump declaring that he would scrap planned tariffs on Europe. But the relentless focus on Greenland risks drowning out the calls for bolstering U.S. defenses in Alaska and leaving us open to arguably more immediate threats from Russia and China.

With decisive government action, the U.S. could start building a true Arctic fortress on its own territory tomorrow, without any blowback from Denmark or NATO or anyone else. It's a process we cannot afford to delay.

The Arctic region is on its way to becoming a giant ocean beltway. Its summer ice surface area has shrunk to just 50 percent of what it measured in 1980. Just as automobiles travel circular asphalt roads to save time and speed travel, huge ocean-going tankers are already cutting across the Arctic to shave weeks off travel time and vastly reduce costs. Decades from now, once the Northwest Passage across the top of Canada becomes more reliably ice-free, we're likely to see the greatest revolution in international shipping since the opening of the Suez Canal.

But there are only two ways to access the Arctic Ocean by sea. One is through the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom, or GIUK, gap in the North Atlantic. The other is the Bering Strait, above the Pacific Ocean.

Alaska sits next to the Bering Sea, across from

Russian Siberia. Russia and China already recognize the value of these seagoing routes and have conducted joint naval exercises near Alaskan waters. In the summer, the Northern Sea Route is heavily trafficked, with 50 ships headed both east and west making more than 100 transits all the way through it in 2025. Crossings through the Bering Strait alone were more than 600. These are cargo and container ships as well as tankers running the busy liquefied natural gas trade between Russia and China.

The North Atlantic route to the Arctic is already well-protected by NATO assets. In contrast, the Bering Sea is vulnerable. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) recently warned that the U.S. is "woefully underinvested" there.

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One solution to this involves expanding our surface fleet — a major priority for Trump — by developing and building a new generation of icebreakers and security cutters to patrol and escort ships in the American North Pacific and regularly show presence in the face of Russian and Chinese incursions.

Additionally, dredging and building a network of deepwater ports along the Western Alaskan coastline, starting with the Port of Nome, would provide not only bases for naval ships but friendly harbors for American and allied commercial shipping taking advantage of future Arctic routes.

The Arctic region is also essential for U.S. missile defense, from the days of the Cold War to the "Golden Dome" envisioned by Trump. Greenland serves an important purpose here: Its location closest to the North Pole makes it an ideal early warning point for

Russian missiles crossing the Pole toward North America.

But the U.S. already has the ability to increase its missile monitoring and defense capabilities on Greenland, not to mention the buy-in of NATO allies. Crucially, however, Greenland is not in an ideal position to protect the U.S. from missiles launched from Asia. Alaska is far better situated for this purpose. As rogue North Korea and regionally belligerent China flex their nuclear muscles, Alaskan-based monitoring must be elevated to an essential defense priority.

Alaska also offers easier, faster access to many of the same rare earth minerals found in Greenland. We know that Greenland contains vast deposits of these important minerals, but they're under thick sheets of ice, far from any shoreline and inaccessible by road. Even if the U.S. started mining in Greenland immediately, the cost of extracting from those deposits will be extraordinarily high and the delivery timeline painfully slow.

The deposits in Alaska may be smaller, but they are readily accessible in places such as Boker Mountain on Prince of Wales Island. The federal government could quickly prioritize mining there, and fast-track the process. Over the decades, a robust coordination structure between federal and state agencies, private companies and environmental groups has been built up in Alaska that allows for balance between mineral exploration and protecting pristine natural resources.

Everyone involved in the Greenland discussions has generally the same end goal: bolstering the West's security capacity in the Arctic. That makes the odds of a favorable resolution more likely, however long it may take.

But the U.S. has a chance to move swiftly and unilaterally to increase our Arctic defense posture by fortifying Alaska with increased naval and missile defenses, as well as critical mineral development. This bold, decisive action would immediately give us another crucial foothold in the Arctic, along with time to develop our strategic capabilities as the ice melts and bad actors' interest in the region grows.

The writer is publisher of Arctic Today and co-founder of the Arctic Circle Assembly.