

Greenland shows costs of Trump's power plays

NEWS ANALYSIS

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President climbed down, but not before harming NATO and his credibility

BY DAVID E. SANGER

Even by President Trump's own mercurial standards, his whipsawing over the past few weeks on Greenland — insisting on the largest land acquisition in American history and then dropping it without explanation, threatening allies and then reversing himself — was a remarkable and revealing exercise in a new era of American coercive diplomacy.

Mr. Trump began, as always, with a maximalist demand. This time, it was that a small European power, an ally that had shed blood for the United States in Afghanistan and beyond, turn over a vast and icy territory for the sake of U.S. national security. The president was clearly testing the boundaries of the Atlantic alliance, arguing that handing over the land was a small price for lesser powers to pay for continued American protection.

It was a formula familiar to anyone who has tracked the approach to power that Mr. Trump honed in the New York real estate world and brought with him to the White House, one that leans heavily on bullying and an ability to keep opponents off-balance.

"We want a piece of ice for world protection, and they won't give it," the president complained about Denmark in a speech to the world's elite in Davos, Switzerland, adding with a hint of menace: "You can say yes, and we will be very appreciative. Or you can say no, and we will remember."

But last week Mr. Trump also discovered the limits of his coercive powers. After he threatened a wave of new tariffs, markets fell abruptly, which always seizes his attention. Allies objected, this time openly. And by the time the president returned to Washington on Thursday, it was clear that he had left considerable damage to the Western alliance in his wake.

When the climb-down came, it was with only the vaguest explanation from the president.

Mr. Trump said Wednesday on social media that a "framework of a future deal" had been reached, one that did not resemble full American ownership. Instead, speaking on Air Force One on Thursday, he floated the idea of what sounded like a lease for expanded military bases in Greenland in which "the time limit is infinity" and "we can do anything we want," including to support the Golden Dome, his ambitious missile defense plan.

When pressed about how the new arrangement would expand America's right beyond an existing 1951 treaty —

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