

# Greenlanders Shocked, Angry, Confused and, Most of All, Scared

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ish law, the island has the right to call for a referendum on independence and split off. But that hasn't happened yet, in part because Greenland still relies on hundreds of millions of dollars each year in Danish subsidies.

Part of the discomfort of this moment is that the island has been thrust into a geopolitical maelstrom it is ill equipped for. Despite its vast area, bigger than Mexico's, Greenland, the world's largest island, has just 57,000 people. Once again, decisions that could drastically affect it will be made in offices thousands of miles away.

Mr. Trump and his team are attracted to Greenland for a host of reasons: its size, its minerals and its strategic location bordering Canada, the Arctic Ocean and the Atlantic. The United States has been interested in Greenland for more than 150 years, for many of the same reasons.

Under a Cold War treaty, American forces already enjoy almost unfettered military access, which many Greenlanders were quick to point out. So why, they wonder, does Mr. Trump keep citing "national security" as a rationale for seizing the territory?

Instead of trying to win hearts and minds, Mr. Trump's approach to Greenland seems to reflect a view that in global affairs the strong act, vying with each other for dominance, and the weak live with the consequences. Just as he justified seizing control of Venezuela's oil output in part by saying that otherwise China or Russia would do so, he has claimed that if the United States does not take over Greenland, one of those other powers will.

Greenlanders don't like that outlook, and especially his vow to simply "get" their island.

"We've never heard anyone talk like that about another country before," said Ellen Frederiksen, a retired doctor in Narsaq, a town in the south.

Greenlandic officials are trying to kick into high gear. They are working to overcome internal political differences and speak in one voice. They've shuttled back and forth between Nuuk, the capital, and Copenhagen. They've made increasingly blunt statements that they don't want to become part of the United States.

"If we have to choose between the United States and Denmark," the island's prime minister, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said on Tuesday, "we choose Denmark."

But relations with Denmark remain touchy.

An online meeting last week between Danish and Greenlandic officials exploded into accusations and shouting, according to Ms. Lyngé and numerous reports in the Danish news media. Ms. Lyngé said that she was furious when she found out that Danish officials were excluding her from other meetings about Greenland and that she raised her voice and pounded the table, accusing her Danish colleagues of acting "neocolonialist."

"I'd had enough," Ms. Lyngé said. "We've raised the same is-



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MARKO DJURICA/REUTERS

Clockwise from top: Houses in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark that has a population of 57,000; the U.S. Consulate; and travelers arriving on Monday.

sues for years, and if I had stayed diplomatic nothing would have happened."

She also said the Danish officials had later agreed to include Greenlanders in more discussions.

The row hit upon one of the most contentious underlying questions: Should Greenland still be part of the Danish Kingdom?

"It makes no sense," said Vittus

Qjuakitsiq, a former Greenlandic minister. "We've been ignored long enough."

Still, he said, he didn't want to become part of the United States. He prefers independence.

Polls and interviews show that there's a small contingent of pro-American Greenlanders, including a bricklayer who attended Mr. Trump's inauguration. But a majority of the population fears being

absorbed into the United States and seems to be drawing closer to Denmark, viewing it as the best protection from Mr. Trump.

It's a feeling shared in Nuuk, which resembles a small, modern Danish town with its supermarkets and razor-straight roads, and in remote outposts like Kulusuk, in the east, where a few hundred people live in brightly painted houses huddled along the sea.

"I hunt whales and seals," said Kunuk Abelsen, who lives in Kulusuk. "In the United States they think whales and seals are cute and shouldn't be hunted. That's what I'm afraid of."

He wants to stay with Denmark.

One idea floating around as a potential compromise is a free association agreement with the United States, like those some Pacific island nations have with Washington. Such arrangements allow small countries to be independent, with seats at the United Nations, while the United States provides subsidies and its military provides for the nations' de-

fense.

Ms. Lyngé said she didn't want such a relationship and feared her homeland, under the United States, could become "a mining island."

She speaks forcefully, but the pressure shows. She has been sleeping badly, she said, and feels an enormous weight of responsibility.

"I don't want to look back and think I should have done more," she said.

As the interview wrapped up, she pulled on her coat and stepped outside, into the gathering snow. She parted with a message to the world: "Stand with us."