



JULIETTE PAVY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A protest against President Trump in January in Nuuk, Greenland. Mr. Trump has called the island, which is a Danish territory, strategically crucial to the United States.

In Greenland, a 'Covert' U.S. Operation Was in Plain Sight

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN and MAYA TEKELI

NUUK, Greenland — Last year, Denmark's national broadcaster delivered a bombshell of a story: Three Americans with ties to President Trump, it reported, were running "covert influence operations" in Greenland, the Danish territory that Mr. Trump covets.

Without naming the mysterious men, the report laid out in tantalizing detail how they had shuttled back and forth between the United States and Greenland, compiled lists of pro-American Greenlanders and tried to stoke a Greenlandic secessionist movement. Hours after the report aired, the Danish government summoned the top American diplomat in Copenhagen to protest.

It turns out that the figures at the center of the mystery have not exactly been hiding. Their activities have been less cloak-and-dagger and more the quite open blend of business and foreign policy that defines the Trump administration's approach to the world.

Two of them acknowledged to The New York Times that the Danish report most likely centered on them, and a person familiar with the matter said that Danish intelligence agents were indeed closely watching the two men. Both dismissed the suggestion that they were up to any skulduggery as nonsense.

One, Drew Horn, is a former Green Beret with a far-fetched plan to build a gigantic data center off a remote fjord that will one day be connected to an electricity plant powered by glacial runoff in a climate-changed world.

Another, Thomas Dans, is an Arctic adviser to Mr. Trump who has organized highly publicized trips for the president's inner circle, including his eldest son.

The third Trump ally who has been evangelizing for Mr. Trump in Greenland and who has caught the eye of Danish intelligence is, according to the person familiar with the matter, Chris Cox, the founder of an organization called Bikers for Trump.

Mr. Cox is also a member of the Trump administration's Homeland Security Advisory Council, a board that provides advice on security matters. He has blasted Denmark for mistreating Greenlanders and was featured last year on "60 Minutes." He was traveling around Greenland, he said on the episode, "to try to make some friends." He declined to speak with The Times.

If the three have been running an influence campaign, it has been conducted in plain sight. They have all made public announcements about their attempts to further American interests in Greenland, sat for television interviews and appeared in countless social media posts.

They are also clearly pushing interests of their own, in another demonstration of how those in the inner and even outer circles of Mr. Trump's orbit openly use their proximity to power to forge opportunistic relationships and make deals.

Greenland has become an enormous canvas for all of this. Mr. Trump has called the island strategically crucial to the United States, and even though he has backed down from his threats to seize it by force, his interest remains strong, which is true of his



SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS

Thomas Dans in Nuuk's old harbor last year. He now leads a federal agency that advises the president on Arctic research.



CARSTEN SNEIBJERG/BLOOMBERG

Drew Horn, of GreenMet, right, and Greg Barnes, the former owner of the Tanbreez rare-earth minerals site, last year.



MADS CLAUS RASMUSSEN/RITZAU SCANPIX, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chris Cox, the leader of Bikers for Trump, last year in Nuuk. He is also a member of the Homeland Security Advisory Council.



EMIL STACH/RITZAU SCANPIX, VIA REUTERS

Jorgen Boassen, a retired Greenlandic bricklayer, and Donald Trump Jr. Mr. Boassen has campaigned for President Trump.

allies as well.

The cosmetics billionaire Ronald Lauder, who is believed to have planted the Greenland bug in Mr. Trump's ear, has invested in businesses in Greenland. So has Howard Lutnick, Mr. Trump's commerce secretary, who used to lead Cantor Fitzgerald, a New York financial firm that took a stake in the island's mining potential.

It is the activities of the three lesser-known Trump allies mentioned in the Danish news report, though, that seem to have most alarmed the Danes. Asked about the three men, the White House declined to comment on its relationship with them or their activities. Instead, the White House said in a statement provided to The Times that it was working with Greenland and NATO on an agreement that will "be amazing for the U.S.A."

Mr. Horn made his first trip to Greenland about seven years ago, he said. At the time, he was an adviser to the Energy Department, during Mr. Trump's first term. He was scouting energy and minerals opportunities, he said, and helped draft the Trump administration's Arctic energy strategy.

"Ever since I went over there publicly as one of Trump's leads on this, I've assumed I was being monitored whenever I visited," Mr. Horn said in a recent interview with The Times.

After leaving government service at the end of Mr. Trump's first term, Mr. Horn set up a small company, GreenMet, that specializes in critical minerals projects, including one that he advised for rare-earth exploration in Greenland.

He said that he was amused by the way the Danish news media had characterized his work "to insinuate some nefarious scheme,"

and that he had been open about what he was doing and where he stood on Greenland.

"What President Trump is offering is billions of dollars of investment," Mr. Horn said in January in an interview on "Fox & Friends." He described a portfolio of private ventures "that span from A.I. data centers to multiple rare-earth and critical minerals projects."

"I mean, the sky is the limit," he said.

In February, Mr. Horn flew back to Greenland for what is perhaps

Trying to influence people and cut deals for President Trump.

his most pie-in-the-sky project yet. He facilitated a deal with a Greenlandic partner to build an enormous data center for artificial-intelligence servers in Kangerlussuaq, a remote town in western Greenland that sits on a fjord. Right now, Kangerlussuaq is pretty sleepy, with a few hundred people, a clump of weather-beaten houses and a small airport.

He says that the project will rely on ships carrying liquid natural gas to power the future data center, and that this is the first step of an even bolder plan to build a major hydropower station in the same area.

The idea is to use the constant glacial melt from Greenland's ice sheet, which makes up about 80 percent of the island, to generate hydropower that will eventually drive even more energy-intensive industries, such as aluminum smelting.

Mr. Horn did not want to talk

about how much money he had raised, saying it was "proprietary," and he brushed off any naysayers.

"Anytime you try to do something great," he said, "it's going to sound too good to be true until it's done."

During a trip last year, Mr. Horn overlapped with Mr. Dans in Nuuk, Greenland's capital.

Mr. Dans, a graduate of Brown who has worked in consulting and finance, organized the visit of Donald Trump Jr., the president's oldest son, to Nuuk last year. That plan was hardly a secret either.

Mr. Dans was recently appointed the chairman of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, a federal agency that advises the president and Congress on all kinds of Arctic research, including mineral deposits.

He served on the same commission during Mr. Trump's first term. Mr. Dans says the job does not preclude him from working in private business.

About a year and a half ago, he started a small nonprofit to build better relations with Greenland. He brought a retired Greenlandic bricklayer to the United States to help campaign for Mr. Trump's reelection, which turned the bricklayer into Mr. Trump's most visible supporter from Greenland and a widely reviled figure back home.

Mr. Dans believes he is one of the mysterious figures whom the Danish news media singled out in its bombshell on the "covert influence operations."

The day the report came out in August, he said, his phone lit up with messages, and many people, including himself, suspected that he was one of the three mysterious men.

"I had a fairly high-profile involvement earlier in the year," he

said, trying to explain why his work might have stirred up some suspicion.

Mr. Dans came up with the idea for Vice President JD Vance and his wife, Usha, to attend one of Greenland's biggest sporting events last year: an epic wintry dog sled race. But that fizzled.

After Greenlanders geared up for protests, the Vances changed their plans and instead made a quick visit to the remote American military base on the northwestern corner of the island.

The Greenland story has become one of the hottest subjects for Danish news media in years, and some Greenlanders feel the coverage tends to skew pro-Denmark and anti-Trump. Denmark's national broadcaster denied any accusations of bias and said that its report on the influence campaign was a "factual and accurate story about matters of great importance to Denmark and Greenland."

Denmark's foreign minister for the past several years, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, also defended his actions, including the decision to summon an American diplomat over the report.

"We can't simply ignore findings that foreign actors are carrying out influence activities within the kingdom," he said in a statement to The Times.

Mr. Cox, the leader of Bikers for Trump, declined repeated requests for interviews.

In his appearance last year on "60 Minutes," he walked up to a Greenlandic man standing in his snow-covered yard and said, "My name's Chris Cox, I'm from the United States, and, um, I've come here to try to make some friends."

In the video, the Greenlandic man just leans on a snow shovel and stares at him.