

News Greenland

Relief at Greenland deal, but

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Britain must “step up” and bolster its security, military and economic ties with Europe after President Trump’s threat to invade Greenland, the prime minister has said.

Sir Keir Starmer said that the world was in a “better place now than we were earlier this week” after the US president dropped his threat to unilaterally annex Greenland and impose tariffs on Britain and other European nations.

However, Trump claimed yesterday to have secured “total access” to the semi-autonomous Danish territory for an unlimited period, after meeting the Nato secretary-general, Mark Rutte, on Wednesday.

“I’m not going to have to pay anything. We’re going to have total access to Greenland. We’re going to have all military access that we want,” Trump told Fox News. “We’re going to be able to put what we need on Greenland because we want it.”

Trump said the only expense was “the fact that we are building the Golden Dome”, a multibillion-dollar missile defence system that he envisages will be created before the end of his second term.

As details of the terms of the “framework” deal Trump said he had agreed with Rutte in Davos remained unclear, Denmark and Greenland said they had “red lines”, which included sovereignty and democracy for the island.

As he left Switzerland, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform: “Heading back to D.C. It was an incredible time in Davos. The Greenland structure is being worked on, and will be amazing for the U.S.A., and the Board of Peace is something that the World has never seen before — Very special. So many good things happening!”

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, Greenland’s prime minister, said the territory “continues to be the centre of a serious situation. We are ready to discuss a lot of things and we are ready to negotiate a better partnership and so on, but sovereignty is a red line.”

Starmer hosted Mette Frederiksen, the Danish prime minister, at Chequers yesterday. They said the security of the Arctic was “a matter for the entire Nato alliance” and Europe and Nato “would continue to drive forward progress”.

After the meeting, Frederiksen left a message with a Beatles lyric in the guest book: “We’ll get by with a little help from our friends.” She travelled on to Brussels, where EU leaders were due to discuss Greenland.

Frederiksen said that Nato should have a “permanent presence” in the Arctic, including around Greenland. “We said to the Americans a year ago that we can discuss our agreement on defence, but it has to be in the framework of us as a sovereign state,” she said.

Starmer said that threats from the US reinforced his view that in addition to keeping Nato together, Britain needed to “rise to the challenge” and build a closer relationship with the EU.

He told Channel 4 News: “It’s vital that we keep Nato together. It’s been the single most effective military alliance the world has ever known. And my focus this week has been on Nato unity and holding us together. But to rise to your challenge... I do think that Europe needs to do more, that Europe needs to step up. We need to be stronger on our own defence and security and that doesn’t just mean military capability and co-ordination.

“It goes to cyber, it goes to trade, it goes to energy. And it reinforces my argument that we, the UK, ought to be closer to Europe and we ought to have



The coldest of war zones, Golden Dome and Danes’ red lines: what’s at stake

Spooned by largely spurious rumours that the enemy was circling around Greenland, and pouring contempt on the dog-sled patrol that had been tasked with defending it, the Americans decided to move in with heavy machineguns and rifles (Oliver Moody and Bruno Waterfield write).

The year was 1941 and the occupation lasted until the end of the Second World War. Its conclusion was a diplomatic mess. The newly liberated Danes were mortified by Washington’s request for permanent bases on the island, and rejected Harry S Truman’s offer to buy the territory for \$100 million.

It took six years to reach a deal. Under the 1951 Greenland Defense Agreement, Denmark retained sovereignty over the island while the United States gained free access and a right to build military bases in certain “defence areas”, to be defined by bilateral negotiations.

This status quo is to be revisited as the central element of negotiations towards a grand bargain aimed at defusing the tensions that have threatened to pull Nato apart in recent weeks.

The devil, however, will be in the detail, and the Europeans are far from breathing a sigh of relief, aware that they could find themselves back at square one with a single tap on Trump’s smartphone screen.

Trump’s main preoccupation is his toweringly grandiose promise of a “Golden Dome” anti-missile system that would take the idea of Israel’s much smaller Iron Dome and expand it to cover all 7.7 million square miles of North America. This project, Trump said in Davos,

would work “much better when we have access to Greenland”, adding: “Everything comes over Greenland. If the bad guys start shooting, it comes over Greenland, so we knock it down.”

After fraught days of apparent misunderstanding over a Nato mission to the island, followed by explicit threats of tariffs against allies amid implicit suggestions that the United States might resort to force, on Wednesday Trump renounced those threats but insisted Greenland “belongs to us”.

Hours later, after a meeting with Mark Rutte, the Nato secretary-general, he backed away, hailing the “framework for a future deal” that would cover not just Greenland but the Arctic as a whole.

This time there is an implicit understanding, overseen by Rutte and Nato, that Trump will not stoop again to such sabre-rattling.

So far the “deal” brokered by Rutte is, said diplomats, “only a beginning”. Difficult questions of sovereignty over Greenland’s territory are to be thrashed out, a Nato spokesman said, to “ensure that Russia and China never gain a foothold — economically or militarily — in Greenland”. The spokesman said: “The secretary-general did not propose any compromise to sovereignty during his meeting with President Trump.”

Last week, Rutte said: “Denmark is completely relaxed about the fact that the US might, in the future, have much more presence in Greenland.” One pivotal issue will be the extent to which US military bases might be sovereign American territory.

Denmark has been emphatically clear that it is not prepared to hand

an urgent conversation about how we step up again in relation to defence, security, intelligence, collaboration and co-operation UK-EU.”

The framework deal on Greenland, reached by Rutte and Trump, contains five components, The Times has been told. The 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement, which already allows the

US to build military installations, house troops and operate with almost complete freedom in certain “defence areas”, will be updated to guarantee US autonomy and immunity at its bases.

According to a diplomat briefed on the discussions, the other main points are that Nato will gain a command centre in Greenland; a prosperity com-



Sir Keir Starmer in Hertfordshire yesterday promoting Labour’s warm homes plan; JD Vance, the US vice-president, toured Pituffik space base in Greenland last year

ponent will give the US the possibility of access to mineral resources; an exclusion agreement will rule out Chinese and Russian investment or involvement on the island; the US will have first refusal on acquiring Greenland if it becomes available. In return, the US agreed to drop the threat of tariffs and begin talks on the details.

Starmer earlier said Trump’s shift in position was a “good thing” after weeks of pressure on the UK and allies. He said it was a “reflection of pragmatism”. The prime minister also held a call with Rutte. Starmer told him the UK “stood ready to play its full part”.

Trump and Rutte reportedly reached a verbal understanding about Green-

land over territory. “We have a clear red line,” said Troels Lund Poulsen, the defence minister. “We will not cede sovereignty over parts of the kingdom.”

Yet diplomats believe there may be scope for concessions, and some observers float the model of Britain’s Akrotiri and Dhekelia bases on Cyprus.

The decisive but unpredictable element will be what Trump really wants from Greenland and the wider High North in security terms. The one remaining American military base on the island, the

Pituffik space base, has been scaled back to about 150 personnel whose main task is to operate a missile early-warning system. Fabian Hoffmann, a missile defence expert at Oslo University, said it was effectively a failsafe, part of a long chain of radar installations across the US and Canada. These are pointed upwards at a high angle to detect ballistic missiles that may for some reason have been missed by the infrared cameras on American satellites. “It’s not that critical. It’s basically a redundancy layer,” he said. Hoffmann believes

few details

How Nato chief became the daddy of Trump whisperers



STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA; JIM WATSON/REUTERS

Profile

A lot of people like to shout about their role as a Trump whisperer these days. It is a sobriquet that has variously been applied to Giorgia Meloni of Italy, Viktor Orban of Hungary and the chainsaw-wielding iconoclast Javier Milei of Argentina (Bruno Waterfield writes).

In Britain there have been occasional whisperers including Sir Keir Starmer, Nigel Farage and, once, Lord Mandelson. Then there are the whisperers of President Trump's inner orbit; the chief of staff who pulls the strings, the Wall Street titans and tech gurus with the president's ear.

None can perhaps claim to have been so obsequious in their efforts to charm and disarm the US president on the diplomatic stage as Mark Rutte, the daddy of Trump whisperers.

Rutte, or Teflon Mark as the Dutch secretary-general of Nato was known at home for his ability to steer clear of political trouble when he was the country's prime minister, has been praised for earning a rare concession from Trump at Davos.

Without Rutte's intervention, observers suggested, Trump would have ripped up the political rule book to an even greater extent in Switzerland, where he had been expected to announce the dismantling of Nato with his annexation of Greenland and a deepening of his tariff war with Europe. Instead, there was talk of Nato emerging unscathed and an easing of Trump's feud with Europe, albeit with substantial and serious sticking points still to be overcome.

Rutte had always been confident he could cast aside any criticism of his efforts to cosy up to Trump. "I'm not popular with you now because I'm defending Donald Trump," he told an audience in Davos, "but I really believe we can be happy that he is there."

The criticism of his apparent servility was only intensified by Trump publishing the contents of a private text message Rutte had sent before a conference where the future of Greenland was at stake.

"Mr President, dear Donald," Rutte began, before outlining how

he would defend Trump at Davos. "Can't wait to see you," the message concluded.

In Rutte's telling of it, the furore over Greenland, a territory of Denmark, a Nato member state, was actually a helpful process to highlight security for the high north and Arctic. The French and other European allies profoundly disagreed. And yet he managed to pull a white rabbit from his hat at Davos, vindicating his backroom diplomacy and "tactical seduction".

The events will add mystique to Rutte's legend as the greatest European Trump whisperer, skills that helped clinch the top job at Nato in 2024.

His approach to Trump is not dignified, certainly in terms of the traditional pomp and protocol of the diplomatic world. His unctuous descriptions of Trump as "incredible", "truly extraordinary", "daring", a "big success" and, at a Nato summit last summer, as "daddy" have been unconventional, to say the least.

It is an unlikely bromance, though. Rutte, right, is intensely private, a figure of great morality who is said to pray every evening. He likes to cycle to work and has a lifestyle that is the polar opposite to Trump's gilded opulence at Mar-a-Lago and Trump Tower. The Dutchman, 58, a confirmed celibate and bachelor, is famously frugal too. He has driven the same Saab 9-3 Sportwagon estate for more than 20 years.

They do, however, share a talent for political survival. Rutte only gave up his battered old Nokia phone, which had space for only 20 text messages, in 2022 under pressure from the Dutch secret service.

He first charmed Trump at a Nato summit in 2017, as the Dutch leader who heartily agreed with him that European allies needed to spend more on defence. He was invited to the White House a week later and was caught on camera telling the notoriously touchy, size-obsessed American leader: "Your desk is tiny." Trump replied ruefully,

laughing, "I know", quickly followed by: "I like this guy."

It is a relationship that is more banter than flattery, insiders say. Most importantly, while effusive and chatty with Trump in private, Rutte is totally discreet in public.

In truth, however, Trump's climbdown and the new Greenland deal is less to do with Rutte's undoubted charm than the granular reality of geopolitics. Trump's vainglorious boast this month to The New York Times that his power is only constrained by "my own morality, my own mind" was always going to end with a reality check.

His behaviour and statements, especially last weekend over troop operations in Greenland, were threatening to seriously disrupt an alliance that Washington still relies on to project its military might.

Rutte, and America's most senior military commanders, were able to explain in private that US operations in the Middle

East, especially Iran, are dependent on US airbases at Ramstein in southwest Germany as well as RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk.

On Arctic security, especially tracking Russian submarines headed to the Atlantic, America depends on European allies, especially the Royal Navy, RAF Lossiemouth and Norway's formidable clout in the region.

Given Russia's activities in the high north, albeit overhyped by Trump, and the Middle East situation it would be a very bad moment for Washington to blow up Nato. Trump appeared delighted with the turn of events and the securing of an "infinite deal" for the future of Greenland.

Rutte, though, was momentarily lost for words yesterday when asked the question everyone was asking. Was he a Trump whisperer?

"Why do I have to whisper to anybody?" Rutte said. "He doesn't need it." With help from the honeyed words of Rutte, realpolitik had won the day.



that implementing Trump's full vision for the Golden Dome, which would involve the ability to shoot down virtually any missile approaching the US, would be "absolutely not possible" and cost at least ten times the \$175 billion that has been mooted as its budget.

"In the best case scenario, you build something that kind of works, but then you have Russia and China rather frantically trying to counter it," he said.

Nor is there any obvious rationale for putting more components of the Golden Dome on Greenland. Most

of the detection systems would be based in space, while the interceptors could do their job just as well from the American mainland.

Nato is working to assuage Trump's broader concerns about Russia and China further militarising the Arctic. Nato's chiefs of staff discussed a mission covering Greenland and the High North this week but on the understanding that deployments would be delayed, allowing the row to die down in time for announcements at an alliance summit in Ankara in July.

land during their meeting at Davos. However, no document has yet been produced memorialising a future deal, CNN reported.

At a press conference in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, Nielsen said: "Respectful dialogue through the right channels is what we have been seeking from the get go, and I also feel that that's

the intention now from the other parties and I'm happy for that."

Speaking of Trump's threats to acquire Greenland, he said: "The rhetoric has been unacceptable. It will affect how we think about each other going forward."

Carney's wise words challenge divided Europe, Max Hastings, page 23

Ex-fighter pilot flies into alliance role

Larisa Brown Defence Editor

An RAF officer is to take on Britain's most senior role in Nato for the first time in more than four decades at a critical moment for the alliance, shaken by President Trump's threats to take Greenland.

Air Chief Marshal Sir John Stringer, a former fighter pilot who flew in the Balkans and Iraq, has been appointed deputy supreme allied commander in Europe. He will be second in command of Nato operations in Europe, a post by tradition held by a British officer.

The Ministry of Defence said the position reflected Britain's central position in the alliance and its "Nato-first" ap-



Air Chief Marshal Sir John Stringer saw action in Iraq

proach. The supreme allied commander in Europe is always an American.

Stringer will take over in March from Admiral Sir Keith Blount, who has been in post since July 2023.

He will be only the third RAF officer to serve in the role and the first since 1984.

The head of the armed forces is also an RAF officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton.

John Healey,

the defence secretary, said: "Johnny's deep experience in Nato ... makes him the right person to help lead the alliance. We need to meet this era of increasing threats with hard power, strong alliances and sure diplomacy — exactly what Nato represents."

Stringer said: "This is a critical time for the defence and security of Europe and the North Atlantic, deterring those who would do us harm and keeping the one billion citizens of Nato nations safe. I look forward to playing my fullest possible part with our vital allies and partners in maintaining our national and collective security."

Stringer, an Oxford graduate who flew Jaguar and Typhoon jets, has served as deputy commander of Nato's allied air command. His previous staff roles include chief of staff at UK joint forces command and director of strategy at UK strategic command.