

News Greenland

Relief at Greenland deal, but

Steven Swinford, Oliver Wright
David Charter

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

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

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-