

# 'Irreplaceable' base and very little else

LONDON

## U.S. military has reduced its footprint in Greenland since the Cold War ended

BY AMELIA NIERENBERG AND JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

Decades ago, the United States had a big footprint in Greenland: thousands of troops, more than a dozen bases, strategic bombers, weather stations and a cavernous facility under the ice. Today, there is just one active base, a remote missile defense station. Some of the old ones have been turned into commercial airstrips. Others have faded into rusty ruins.

President Trump has said the United States needs Greenland for national security. After previously threatening to seize the island by force, he signaled last week that he's open to compromise. One proposal under discussion would allow the United States to own pockets of land in Greenland for military bases.

Greenland, which is an overseas territory of Denmark, and Denmark have bristled at giving up any of their sovereignty, and it's not clear that such a plan could work.

### WHAT'S THERE NOW?

The Americans have the Pituffik Space Base (pronounced Bee-doo-FEEK) in northwestern Greenland. Its 150 personnel run missile defense and space surveillance. Its location at the top of the globe, not far from the North Pole, allows its radar to detect missiles in their earliest moments of flight.

### The Pituffik base is relatively undefended, so one possibility would be to install short- to medium-range air defense weapons nearby.

"It is quite literally the outermost eye of American defense," said Peter Ernstved Rasmussen, a Danish defense analyst. "Pituffik is where the U.S. can detect a launch, calculate the trajectory and activate its missile defense systems. It's irreplaceable."

### WHAT USED TO BE THERE?

A lot. During World War II, the Germans invaded Denmark and set up clandestine weather stations on Greenland's east coast. Around the same time, the United States military built its own weather stations on the west coast to help forecast conditions for battles in Europe.

Soon, the United States was building airstrips in places like Narsarsuaq, Ikateq and Kangerlussuaq, all in the southern half of the island. These runways served as a steppingstone for long-range bombers flying between the United States and Europe.

After the war, many bases closed down. Some, like the Sondrestrom Air Base in Kangerlussuaq, remained under American control until 1992. During the Cold War, the United States set up a string of early warning radar stations across the island that could detect missiles flying over the North Pole.

Today, some of the old American

airstrips, like the one in Kangerlussuaq, have been upgraded into small commercial airports and are used by Air Greenland, the national airline.

Other bases, like in Narsarsuaq and Ikateq, lie in shambles. Most of the Cold War radar stations have been dismantled but one still stands on a hilltop in Kangerlussuaq. Locals call it "Mickey Mouse." Its two big circular dishes, which haven't been turned on in decades, resemble a pair of giant ears.

### POSSIBLE EXPANSION

Most of the old American bases are in such disrepair that they would be almost impossible to restore.

The most likely place to expand would be around the active Pituffik base, said Troy J. Bouffard, the director of the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The site is relatively undefended, so one possibility would be to install short- to medium-range air defense weapons near the base.

"Otherwise, Pituffik gets destroyed easily," he said. "And then we're blind."

Another likely place for expansion might be the Kangerlussuaq airport, a Danish military official said. It was big in World War II and situated in a protected spot with reasonably good weather.

Mr. Trump has spoken about placing antimissile interceptors on Greenland as part of a so-called Golden Dome missile defense shield, but where they could go is not clear.

### U.S. SECURITY CONCERNS

American officials have indicated they are worried that their access to Greenland could be curbed if the island broke off from Denmark and went independent. If that ever happened, Greenlanders say it is most likely decades away.

Under a 1951 Danish-American defense pact, the United States already has sweeping access to build new bases and station more troops.

The Trump administration wants a new arrangement, and one proposal is modeled on the "sovereign base area" agreement in Cyprus, where Britain's military bases are British territory.

Mr. Trump has also repeatedly said that Russia and China threaten Greenland.

But China is too far away to mount a major incursion, said Mikkel Runge Olsen, a researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. And Russia's navy is inferior to NATO's sea capacity, he said.

"A Russian surface fleet making its way to Greenland?" he said. "They'd be massacred."

Dr. Bouffard said that even if there's no significant military threat to Greenland right now, the world is changing fast.

"Pituffik was never really a top-tier target before," he said, adding, "It's going to increase in importance — big time."

Experts say that as global warming melts the ice in the Arctic Circle, there will be a lot more competition for resources and shipping lanes that become more accessible.

Dr. Bouffard said that, contrary to what Mr. Trump claims, there is no immediate threat from Russia or China.

But, he added, "There will be."

Maya Tekeli contributed reporting from Copenhagen.



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# The costs of his Greenland push

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which gives the United States almost unlimited rights to base troops, missiles, aircraft and the U.S. Navy on Greenland — he described it as "a much more generous deal."

Of course, there is the possibility that Mr. Trump's retreat from a demand for ownership is just temporary, until he finds another reason to revive what has been a yearslong ambition, to pull off an American land acquisition slightly larger than the Louisiana Purchase. (Historians note that Napoleon Bonaparte sold the French territory to Thomas Jefferson for \$15 million to raise funds; Denmark has consistently said it has no interest in a deal for Greenland.)

For now, though, Mr. Trump has retreated from his recent declaration to The New York Times that ownership is key because "that's what I feel is psychologically needed for success." It is unclear what that means about other places where he has threatened action, from Mexico to Cuba to Iran.

But there was a longer-term price, harder to measure.

Even as Mr. Trump backed off, he clearly did damage to a post-World War II system that Washington itself had designed. It is a system that for all its many flaws, helped prevent direct superpower conflict for three-quarters of a century. Along the way it brought huge advantages to the United States.

After Greenland, nothing will be quite the same in the Atlantic alliance. The perception of how America envisions using its military and economic power has shifted, perhaps permanently.

And in an era of so many urgent threats, from China's menacing of Taiwan to Russia's appetite for European territory beyond Ukraine — how did

Greenland emerge as Washington's most urgent security concern?

"Estranging allies is the cost," said Richard Fontaine, the chief executive of the Center for a New American Security and a former aide to the late Senator John McCain, while the benefit of owning Greenland "seems minimal."

The estrangement is real. Allies began to talk about their survival strategies in a world where Washington could no longer be trusted. "We've now de-escalated," Alexander Stubb, the president of Finland and a friend and golfing partner of Mr. Trump, told CNN's Christiane Amanpour. "But obviously, it's not over yet."

### European leaders have good reason to wonder where Mr. Trump's demands will next fall.

Some spoke obliquely about preserving the "rules-based system," not wanting to directly challenge Mr. Trump. But one leader was astoundingly direct: Mark Carney, the prime minister of Canada, a former central banker who took on Mr. Trump with a bluntness that shocked many in the audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos and generated sustained applause.

"Every day we're reminded that we live in an era of great-power rivalry," Mr. Carney told the crowd last week, before Mr. Trump reversed course. "That the rules-based order is fading. That the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must."

That last line draws from Thucydides, the ancient Greek historian whose "History of the Peloponnesian War" has, for hundreds of years, served as the funda-

mental text on managing raw power.

"This aphorism of Thucydides is presented as inevitable, the natural logic of international relations reasserting itself," Mr. Carney said. "And faced with this logic, there is a strong tendency for countries to go along to get along. To accommodate. To avoid trouble. To hope that compliance will buy safety."

"Well, it won't," he concluded.

But that leaves America's allies with uncomfortable choices. It is one thing to declare that the United States can no longer be trusted. Some will hedge; Mr. Carney visited Beijing, where he agreed to open Canada to Chinese electric vehicles, which the U.S. has banned.

But it is a stretch to say that any of America's biggest allies — including Britain, France and Germany — can truly afford to go their own way. They have no replacement for a system where the United States stands at the center of their defensive strategy, bolstered by the American nuclear arsenal. They cannot pretend to have the kind of exquisite military reach that Mr. Trump has showcased, from the strike on Iran's nuclear sites to the rendition of Nicolás Maduro, the former Venezuelan leader.

It would take decades, and hundreds of billions of dollars, to replicate what the Pentagon has built up over generations. Few countries in Europe have the stomach for that. Nor do they possess the budget or the technology.

Mr. Trump rarely misses a moment to remind them of this reality. NATO, he has said repeatedly, is "nothing" without American power at its core.

And in Davos, he was repeatedly dismissive of Europe's willingness to fight. He questioned, in an interview with Fox Business, whether Europe would "be there" if the United States "ever needed

them." He acknowledged that NATO had sent troops to Afghanistan, but insisted "they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines."

That was too much for Mark Rutte, the secretary general of NATO, who usually flatters Mr. Trump in public and thanks him for forcing European nations to spend far more on defense. But this time he pushed back hard.

"For every two Americans who paid the ultimate price" in Afghanistan, he reminded Mr. Trump as the two men sat onstage at the forum, "there was one soldier from another NATO country who did not come back to his family."

Mr. Rutte bolstered his reputation as a Trump whisperer by quietly negotiating the "framework" that alleviated the immediate crisis over Greenland. Speaking to Sky News from Davos, he said that in his private meeting with the president, U.S. ownership of Greenland had never come up and that the president was "really focusing NATO again on how can we collectively save the Arctic from the Russians and the Chinese."

Perhaps Mr. Rutte's diplomacy will hold. But after Greenland, European leaders have good reason to wonder where Mr. Trump's demands will next fall. Last spring, he was claiming that Canada had to become America's 51st state and that if it did, it would get the protection of the Golden Dome for free.

He has not revived that demand. But he did take on Mr. Carney, whose critique clearly stung. And he did so with a not-very-veiled threat on Wednesday, one that sounded a lot like the way he was talking about Denmark until then.

"Canada lives because of the United States," Mr. Trump said. "Remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements."

# Bringing Europe together: Threats from great powers

NEWS ANALYSIS  
BERLIN

## Territorial sovereignty proves to be core tenet of the continent's unity

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

As if the Europeans needed another wake-up call about the contempt in which President Trump holds them, his mocking antipathy at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, was a good reminder.

But Davos presented another lesson to Europe. Standing together on the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty, while warning of severe economic countermeasures, the Europeans achieved an apparent retreat from Mr. Trump over Greenland.

Sovereignty and the inviolability of borders are fundamental tenets of the European project, built out of the ruins of World War II, when the aggressive imperialism of big powers led to millions of deaths. The lesson was clear: Defending borders collectively is the only way small states are protected from the predations of larger ones.

Now Europe finds itself again confronted by big powers with expansionist goals. Russia continues its effort to conquer Ukraine, whose sovereignty it had



Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen of Greenland at a protest against President Trump in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, this month.

military alliance of 32 nations. "That borders can be challenged by force, and the threat of force, threatens the core

linging the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity is a serious concern."

World War II has been about taming sovereignty and pooling it" in multilateral institutions, he said. But the new

don postwar international norms and treaties and rely instead on "economic integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited."

There is a rupture in the old order, Mr. Carney said. "When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself." Europe has been absorbing that lesson.

Europeans have resisted Mr. Trump's demands that Ukraine hand over to Russia territory that Moscow has not conquered. And the Europeans have insisted that even if a peace deal left Russian troops occupying 20 percent of Ukraine, the occupation would never be recognized as permanent, not even in Crimea.

The Europeans have come up with more money and military aid for Ukraine than the United States, and they have largely picked up the slack after Mr. Trump cut off funding for Ukraine.

They recently agreed to another 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) in economic and military aid to Kyiv.

And it has been the Europeans who have expressed solidarity with Denmark and Greenland against Mr. Trump's demands to annex the island on the same principle of territorial integrity, and who seem to have caused him to back down.

President Emmanuel Macron of

is vital, said a senior European official, speaking anonymously, given the sensitivity of the U.S.-European relationship. In essence, he agreed, Europe has learned that a little flattery is fine, so long as you have a gun in your pocket.

That was the case with Denmark and Greenland.

For many weeks, European leaders and officials hoped that Mr. Trump would back down over his intention to take Greenland "the easy way" or "the hard way." Instead he threatened even more punitive tariffs.

In the face of Mr. Trump's threats, the Europeans suspended a pending U.S.-E.U. trade agreement on tariffs that had been criticized as too weak. Instead, they prepared a retaliation of €93 billion (\$109 billion) in countertariffs on American goods — the gun in the pocket.

The prospect of those countertariffs upset the markets, said Mr. Leonard of the European Council on Foreign Relations. The effect appeared to have an impact on Mr. Trump and his aides, he said, by showing "that the Europeans were serious and through the markets they pushed Trump to pull back."

The president declared victory, but the real winners in this case were the Europeans, both the European Union and NATO, grasping this core principle of no border changes without the consent of the countries involved.

After the E.U. summit meeting on Friday, Ursula von der Leyen, the president