

Trump Threats Spur Denmark's Ire

European leaders offer support as Copenhagen defends its largest territory

By YAROSLAV TROFIMOV

COPENHAGEN—In his long career as a senior Danish politician, including as minister of defense during President Trump's first administration, Claus Hjort Frederiksen said he always valued the Scandinavian nation's bond with the U.S.

But he said he is heartbroken by how the U.S. has turned from best friend to rapacious foe. Trump's claim on the Arctic island of Greenland, which accounts for 98% of the Danish kingdom's landmass, has become the most important feature of the bilateral relationship.

"It's very hard to experience that it doesn't mean anything anymore that we had fought alongside the U.S. in Afghanistan, in Iraq and many other places, that suddenly we are nothing," he said.

A YouGov poll conducted in February found that only 20% of Danish people hold a favorable opinion of the U.S., down from 48% in August 2024. In a more recent poll, for the Berlingske newspaper, 41% of Danes described the U.S. as a threat to their nation.

"It's a very big change in a very short time. We have always talked about the U.S. as our closest ally," said Rasmus Jarlov, a Danish lawmaker from the conservative opposition and a former minister of business affairs. "It's no longer well-regarded to go on vacation to the United States."

The Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, was shocked when Trump laid out his demand for Greenland in their initial conversation after the president's election to a second term, diplomats said. Trump later upped the ante by saying he wouldn't exclude using military force to seize the island.

To Copenhagen's relief, the issue of Greenland didn't come up during Trump's meeting with fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organization leaders at the alliance's summit last month. But Danish officials believe that it hasn't gone away.

As part of its response, Denmark has bolstered its engagement with Greenland's autonomous government, which seeks eventual independence but opposes annexation by the U.S. The Greenland government coalition garnered some 74% of the vote in the island's March elections, and is negotiating with Copenhagen on ways to expand its substantial self-rule.

Should the U.S. attempt a direct military takeover, there



In a poll conducted in February, 20% of Danish people held a favorable opinion of the U.S., down from 48% in August 2024.

isn't much resistance that Denmark, which maintains a small military presence in Greenland, could put up, Danish leaders realize. "It would be sort of pointless to fight it because we have four dog sleds and some civilian police there, that's it," said Danish military analyst Peter Viggo Jakobsen.

An outright invasion seems unlikely, at least for now.

Yet, European allies—especially France—have been working to back up Denmark even as they quietly try to persuade Trump to drop the issue of Greenland. French President Emmanuel Macron flew on a visit to Greenland in June, accompanied by Prime Minister Frederiksen. He announced in-

vestments and the opening of a French consulate in the capital Nuuk, now the site of only two foreign missions—from Iceland and the U.S.

"The situation in Greenland is clearly a wake-up call for all the Europeans...it is clearly perceived by the Europeans as targeting a European land," Macron, the first foreign head of state to visit the island in recent years, said in Nuuk.

Any U.S. moves to take over Greenland unilaterally likely would cause the end of the trans-Atlantic alliance as we know it, many European officials warn, and the breakdown of trade between the U.S. and Europe as a whole.

"If this was done in contra-

diction to the will of the Greenlandic people, it would also be very damaging not only to the Danish-American, but to the whole European-American cooperation," said Danish lawmaker and former Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard.

Greenland's main opposition party, Naleraq, which seeks rapid and full independence from Denmark, has been flirting with the Trump administration. Its leader, Pele Broberg, has raised the prospect of a free-association pact with the U.S., along the lines of those between the U.S. and Palau, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. With only 56,000 people, Greenland could be susceptible to election interference and manipulation, and some European nations have offered assistance from their anti-disinformation experts, usually focused on Russian information warfare.

For now, however, Washington's perceived bullying has alarmed Greenlanders so much that such assistance might not be required, said another former Danish foreign minister, Jeppe Kofod.

"We don't need to do anything now because Trump has actually managed to obtain the opposite of what he wanted," Kofod said. "He alienated the Greenlandic people and made many of them afraid."