

Arctic misfire

The chilly public reception turned the Vance visit into a pointless parody and an embarrassment for Donald Trump

BY ANITA PRATAP

Trump blinked. Greenlanders won. US Second Lady Usha Vance's self-declared "heritage tour" of this remote Arctic island morphed from charm to harm to flop offensive. Outraged by President Donald Trump's brazen plans to annex their land—a semi-autonomous region of Denmark—Greenlanders declared frostily that the Vance entourage was uninvited and unwelcome. Citizens refused to even meet her and husband J.D. Vance. The "cultural" excursion to see a dog-sledding race and other gems were unravelling into a media disaster for the whole world to see: a shuttered museum, empty streets, snowy landscapes without dogs and protesters turning their backs to the motorcade, holding placards that read, "Make America Go Away".

So Trump withdrew. Video from Greenland capital Nuuk's airport showing American armoured cars retreating into the hull of two Hercules aircraft was the first clue that Trump had blinked. Gleaming bulletproof cars had arrived for the motorcade through

COLD COMFORT

Vice President J.D. Vance and wife, Usha, at the Pituffik Space Base in Greenland



WHY TRUMP WANTS GREENLAND

Strategic location between North America and Europe, crucial for military and geopolitical influence

Key to monitoring the GIUK Gap (Greenland-Iceland-UK), a naval choke-point

Key to monitoring Arctic shipping lanes and future trade routes

Hosts Pituffik Space Base of the US (formerly Thule Air Base), built in 1951

Holds several minerals deemed critical to American security including rare earth elements, graphite and niobium

Climate change making Greenland's resources more accessible as ice melts

Offshore estimates suggest up to 31,400 million barrels of oil and 148 trillion cubic feet of natural gas

US MILITARY PRESENCE

US has maintained a military presence in Greenland since 1941

Pituffik Space Base remains the northernmost US base, a critical part of the US missile defence system

Around 600 US Air Force personnel and contractors operate radar, satellites and missile warning systems from the base

Part of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) for tracking ballistic missile threats

Played a key role in nuclear deterrence and Arctic surveillance during Cold War

charming Nuuk, home to one-third of Greenland's 57,000 citizens.

But as there would be no cheering Greenlanders lining the streets, all public events were abandoned, the cars were sent back, and Team Vance flew directly to the icy, isolated US Space Base in Pituffik, 2,000km from Nuuk. Locals have no objection to Americans visiting their out-of-sight base.

Trump covets Greenland for its mineral wealth and to surveil the Russians and the Chinese prowling the Arctic. Both goals are achievable without an invasion. The US can sign mining leases with Greenland, and as NATO leader, it has operated, closed and augmented bases here for decades. But invasion is about power and profiteering.

Greenlandic authorities viewed the "cultural" foray as "highly aggressive" because it initially included National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Republican Senator Mike Lee, a grab-Greenland trooper. The Signalgate scandal and Greenlanders' glacial reaction persuaded the White House to drop the officials. J.D. Vance stepped in last-minute. When he stepped out into the Arctic base, he blurted, "It's cold as shit here. Nobody told me." His mobile phone probably did. The irony—he was speaking from the world's most sophisticated space surveillance centre.

GETTY IMAGES

GREENLAND'S WEALTH

Key mining sites



Kvanefjeld (South Greenland): Rich in uranium, neodymium, dysprosium

Motzfeldt (South Greenland): Niobium, tantalum, zirconium

Ilímaussaq Complex (South Greenland): Large uranium and rare earth deposits

Disko Island (West Greenland): Potential for nickel, copper and platinum group metals

Citronen Fjord (North Greenland): Significant zinc and lead deposits



DISTANCE FROM KEY CITIES TO NUUK



GRAPHICS SREEMANIKANDAN S.

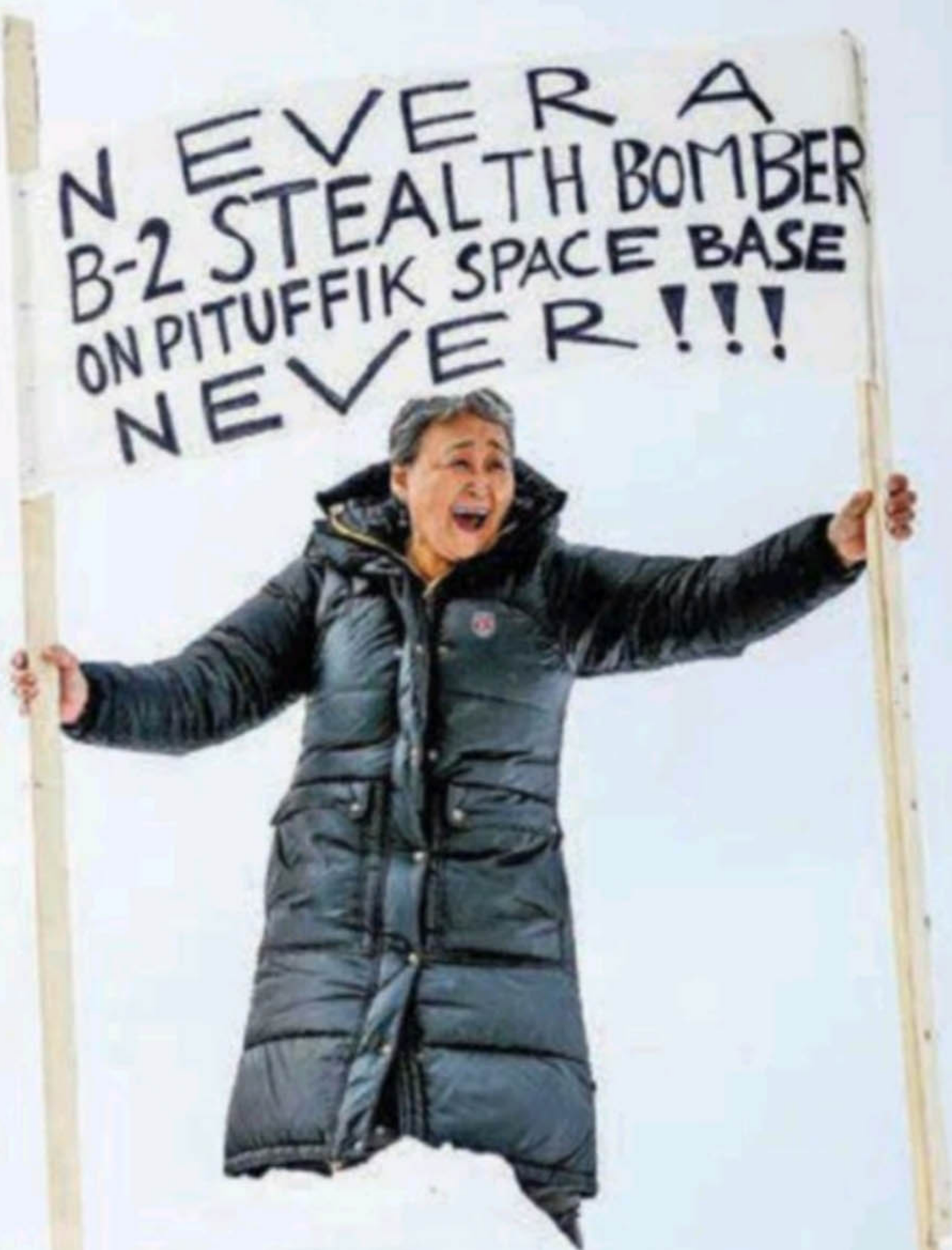
Still, why waste a trip? Europe-baiter Vance, who “loathes” Europeans for being “pathetic freeloaders”, baited NATO ally Denmark for “neglecting” Greenland,

whose independence movement he endorsed in a staged video from the maximum-security base. Greenlanders want independence from Denmark but equally want to stay out of US control. Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said the botched Vance soft-power visit arose from the “false American narrative” that the islanders would enthusiastically welcome the visitors and happily become US citizens. That myth originated

from Trump’s namesake son, Jr., who landed in Greenland in a Trump jet in January, even before his father took office. He invited 15 allegedly homeless people to lunch, distributed MAGA caps, shook hands, showed off dad, went home and “raved about how cool it was”.

That myth imploded as the chilly public reception turned the Vance visit into a pointless parody. What cultural activity could Usha Vance do in a military encampment with its 10,000-foot runway, deep-water port, radar systems and a satellite receiving station—but not a single receiving Greenlander? The heritage expedition became a nonsensical Vance Voyage, flying 16 hours to speak to a few US service personnel. Local entrepreneur Jakob Nordstrøm summed it up: “It is a big win for Greenland.”

Trump blinked, but his third eye opens. He told NBC, “We’ll get Greenland, 100 per cent.” Nuuk resident Nanna Jørgensen, 34, fears for her and her son’s future. She worries, “I don’t think it’s over. On the contrary, I’m afraid it’s only just begun.”



YANKEE GO BACK

A protester in Nuuk demonstrates against increased military presence because of the visit of the US delegation