

Greenland, Denmark, and U.S. Relations

January 22, 2026

President Trump and other Administration officials have asserted repeatedly that Greenland, a [self-governing](#) part of the Kingdom of Denmark, is vital to U.S. national security in terms of countering [Russia and China in the Arctic](#) and bolstering [missile defense](#). Since late 2025, the President has intensified rhetoric about bringing Greenland under U.S. control. Denmark's and Greenland's leaders maintain that Greenland is [not for sale](#) and Greenland's future is for Greenlanders to decide.

Tensions over Greenland have strained the historically close U.S.-Denmark relationship, become a source of contention in U.S.-European relations, and raised concerns about implications for NATO (the Kingdom of Denmark, including Greenland, is part of NATO). Congress may assess recent developments and consider whether and how to shape U.S. policy concerning Greenland.

Background and U.S. Presence in Greenland

Greenland is located to the northeast of Canada, between the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans (see **Figure 1**). Its population of around 57,000 is [predominantly Inuit](#). Greenland was a Danish colony for over 200 years, until its 1953 incorporation into the Kingdom of Denmark; it increasingly has [governed itself](#) over time. Greenland has a [parliament](#) and [government](#) responsible for many domestic policy areas (including [mineral resources](#)). Denmark is responsible for defense, most aspects of foreign affairs, and monetary policy. Although Denmark is a member of the European Union (EU), Greenland [opted out](#) of EU membership. Denmark provides Greenland with an [annual block grant](#) of around \$630 million. The [Self-Government Act of 2009](#) recognizes the people of Greenland as “a people pursuant to international law with the right of self-determination” and outlines a negotiated process for any prospective independence bid.

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Figure 1. Map of Greenland

Source: Map created by CRS.

The United States has had a military presence in Greenland since the Second World War. Denmark's 1949 entry into NATO as a founding member brought Greenland into NATO. The 1951 U.S.-Danish [Agreement Concerning the Defense of Greenland](#) (with 2004 [amendments](#)) has facilitated the U.S. military presence in Greenland and provides avenues to expand it. At the height of the Cold War, the United States [reportedly](#) had over 10,000 troops and 17 military installations in Greenland; today, it maintains one base in Greenland, the Space Force-operated [Pituffik Space Base](#), which supports missile warning, missile defense, and space surveillance missions.

Recent Developments

According to media reporting, the Trump Administration has considered options including [outright purchase](#) of Greenland and a [Compact of Free Association](#) or similar relationship with Greenland. Other potential options to achieve the Administration's stated policy goals could include expanding the U.S. military presence in Greenland through the 1951 agreement, addressing Arctic security concerns through NATO (seven out of eight Arctic countries are NATO allies), and updating or negotiating new agreements with Denmark and Greenland; it is unclear whether the Administration is considering such options.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen [said](#) a January 14, 2026, meeting between himself, Greenland Foreign Minister Vivian Motzfeldt, Vice President JD Vance, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio was "frank but constructive." The parties gave seemingly different accounts of the next steps; Rasmussen [said](#) the parties had agreed "to explore if a common way forward can be found to address the American security concerns in relation to Greenland," whereas the White House press secretary [said](#) the focus would be "technical talks on the acquisition of Greenland."

On January 17, 2026, President Trump [said](#) he would impose tariffs beginning February 1 on Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Finland "until such time as a Deal is reached for the Complete and Total purchase of Greenland." The announcement came after the named countries (all NATO allies) sent a [few dozen military personnel](#) to Greenland for [exercises](#).

After previously [declining](#) on [multiple occasions](#) to rule out the use of force to acquire Greenland, President Trump said during his January 21, 2026, speech at the World Economic Forum that he wanted “[immediate negotiations](#)” on the matter but did not intend to use military force. Shortly thereafter, President Trump [said](#) he would not be imposing the previously announced tariffs and that he and NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte had discussed a possible “framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and ... the entire Arctic Region.” In a January 22 [statement](#), Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said that “NATO is fully aware of the Kingdom of Denmark’s position. We can negotiate about everything politically—security, investments, the economy. But we cannot negotiate our sovereignty.... The Kingdom of Denmark continues to seek a constructive dialogue with allies on how we can strengthen security in the Arctic.” (translation via [Politico](#)).

Reactions in Greenland and Denmark

Danish officials have underscored that they share U.S. concerns about Arctic security, have invited discussions about an [expanded U.S. presence](#) through the 1951 agreement, and have increased Arctic [defense spending](#). Danish and [Greenlandic](#) officials also have expressed support for a [stronger NATO role](#). In Greenland, some of President Trump’s statements have [sparked public concern](#) and [drawn rebuke](#) from political leaders. On January 13, Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen [stated](#), “If we have to choose between the United States and Denmark here and now, we choose Denmark.... Greenland does not want to be governed by the United States.” In a [January 2025 poll](#) in Greenland, 85% of respondents said they would not want to leave Denmark to become part of the United States.

Issues for Congress

In 2026, some Members have introduced bills on Greenland, including concurrent resolutions affirming the U.S. partnership with Denmark and Greenland (H.Con.Res. 70 and S.Con.Res. 26), a resolution of inquiry on the Administration’s Greenland policy (H.Res. 1001), the Greenland Sovereignty Protection Act (H.R. 7013), and H.R. 7012, to authorize the annexation and subsequent admission to statehood of Greenland. Some Members also introduced bills to limit the use of funds to assert control over the sovereign territory of a NATO member (S. 3624 and H.R. 7016) and to prohibit actions or expenditure of funds to purchase a NATO member or NATO-protected territory (H.R. 7088).

Congress also may use legislative and oversight tools to assess the impact of ongoing tensions on U.S. relationships with Denmark, Greenland, other European partners, and NATO; evaluate the Trump Administration’s stated justifications for U.S. acquisition of Greenland; facilitate or constrain any policy options pursued by the Administration; and consider Congress’s role under different policy scenarios.

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