

# Factsheet on Greenland

(With an Accent on Defence Issues)

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Greenland's flag

The discussion about Greenland's affiliation with Denmark goes back in particular to 1814. In the so-called Peace of Kiel after the Napoleonic wars, Norway was given from Denmark to the Swedish king. And Greenland remained Danish. The Norwegians tried a good 100 years later to get the right to East Greenland. But the International Court of Justice in The Hague confirmed in 1933 that Greenland is part of the Danish kingdom.

When NATO was established in 1949, Denmark was one of the founding members. And thus Greenland was also covered by the NATO pact, i.a. with its so-called "Musketeer oath" in paragraph 5 NATO Statutes: An attack on one NATO country is considered an attack on all. Only once has this paragraph been activated. It was after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

In addition to NATO, in 1951 Denmark made a special defense agreement with the USA regarding Greenland. This gives the USA the right to have military installations in Greenland. At one point there were 17 different American installations in different places in Greenland, and there were about 30,000 military personnel on them. Today ( 2025 ) there is only 1 aircraft and radar base left - with about 100 US military personnel. It is called Pituffik Space Base (the former Thule Base). In addition, there are several hundred Greenlandic, Danish and Canadian civilian employees on the base.

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All other things being equal, this development shows that the USA has also - especially in the 1990s - scaled back the presence and thus the prioritization of the defense of Greenland.

If the USA wants to strengthen its presence in the defense of Greenland, it can be requested within the applicable treaties. This has not happened so far.

Denmark continues to have the main responsibility for the defense of the country. In 2012, ARCTIC COMMAND was established with headquarters in Nuuk (the capital of Greenland). It is responsible for the defense of both Greenland and the Faroe Islands. It is led by the Danish Major General Søren Andersen.

Arctic Command is - in addition to the defense itself - also responsible for e.g. the fisheries inspection, the search and rescue service, environmental monitoring, pollution control, etc.

In the current situation with President Trump's stated desire for an American takeover of Greenland, the EU has given *full* support to Denmark at a summit in February 2025. And the United Kingdom has also given the Danes their full support at the same time.

At the same time as well, the head of the EU's Military Committee, the Austrian general *Robert Brieger*, has publicly said that, in his opinion, one should consider deploying troops from the EU countries in the defense of Greenland.

At the same time, NATO's Secretary General, the Dutchman *Mark Rutte*, has also said this week that a unified NATO solution will be found for a stronger defense of the Arctic regions, which includes many NATO countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Canada and the USA).

Already from 2017, there is a somewhat similar case with NATO's multinational battlegroups in each of the NATO countries that border Russia, Belarus, etc. Denmark is currently contributing 800 soldiers to the multinational group for the defense of Latvia.

At the same time, the Danish government has recently put forward a bill to initially strengthen Danish defense in the Arctic with DKK 14 billion.

In other words: Yes, there are serious problems. But there are also serious possibilities for a solution.



**Greenland on the world map**

**Niels Jørgen Thøgersen**

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