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Who's 'New and Beautiful Greenland'?

By

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Executive Summary

- The 22 September agreement between the US, Denmark and Greenland clears the way for two new US bases and Trump's "Golden Dome", whilst reaffirming Danish sovereignty.
- Militarily, it largely codifies existing US rights. The real changes are a US role in investment screening, obligations that would bind an independent Greenland, and no end date
- The biggest risk is the gap between text and rhetoric. The agreement grants no mining or drilling rights, yet Trump has announced "massive" exploration in "our new and beautiful Greenland".
- Each claim of ownership reopens questions the agreement was meant to answer.
- Denmark kept its sovereignty and avoided a rupture inside NATO but traded policy autonomy without fully subduing Trump's ambitions.
- Greenland gained recognition as a party in its own right, but its route to independence is now more costly and more dependent on US approval.
- The Arctic is hardening into a Western bloc governed by NATO-aligned investment rules and a Sino-Russian bloc built around the Northern Sea Route.
- Whether US money follows Trump's claims will decide if the gap between text and talk closes, just not on Denmark or Greenland's terms.

Key Picture: NATO and Russian Military Installations Across the Arctic



Source: Nova.News

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1. Introduction

Greenland has been on Donald Trump's agenda since 2019, but was sidelined when Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen dismissed the idea as absurd.[1] He reinstated his aspirations weeks before Trump's second term, declaring that "the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity"[2], not ruling out military force to do so. The island sits on the shortest missile path between the US and Russia whilst guarding the approaches from the Arctic and the North Atlantic and holding critical minerals that China currently dominates. As melting ice opens new shipping lanes and vulnerabilities, Trump argued that Denmark and NATO weren't doing enough to keep the threat of Russia and China out. In January 2026, this dispute turned to crisis as talks of annexation and tariff threats against longstanding European allies, as the prospect of NATO's most powerful and founding member taking territory from another grew. Denmark even took action to draw up plans to destroy its own airports and critical infrastructure in the event of a US invasion.[3]

The crisis was averted as a framework was agreed at Davos earlier this year and led to the US, Denmark, and Greenland signing a security agreement at the UN General Assembly on 22nd September. This deal amended the 1951 Defence of Greenland Agreement, clearing the way for two new US bases and Trump's 'Golden Dome' missile defence system, whilst reaffirming Danish sovereignty and Greenlanders' right to self-determination. However, weeks later, Trump announced that "massive" oil, gas and mineral exploration was about to begin in "our new and beautiful Greenland". Despite the fact that the agreement grants no mining or drilling rights to anyone, uranium mining is banned in Greenland. This stark gap between the written agreement, tangible action, and what Trump says reflects growing global uncertainty and unpredictability in his behaviour with allies.

2. What Has Actually Changed?

Militarily, the agreement is less groundbreaking than headlines suggest, as the 1951 treaty already granted the US sweeping rights to establish defence areas, station forces, and move freely across Greenland's land, air, and territorial waters. During the Cold War, those rights were vital to supporting 17 installations and more than 10,000 personnel. In this regard, whilst the new treaty expands Pituffik Space Base and names two new sites, it largely just further codifies what the US was already entitled to build.

In other aspects of the relationship, there are significant developments. Despite Trump seemingly warm relationships with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, he has repeatedly expressed concerns over China and Russia's military activity near Greenland.[4] Further expressing concerns that adversaries could establish a presence there to threaten the US, although there has been neither adverse activity nor any indication that China or Russia were establishing bases. The agreement explicitly bars non-NATO military presence without all three parties agreeing, highlighting NATO's role in Arctic security.

Additionally, it gives the US a new role in investment screening into Greenland, stating that the three states have to agree that investments in sensitive sectors, such as infrastructure, from states outside NATO, its partners or the EU, don't constitute a national security risk. As Washington has never had such a direct say over another jurisdiction's economic choices, one concern is that the US' personal political priorities become part of its decisions. The agreement also includes provisions in case Greenland becomes independent, where it would inherit Denmark's obligations and stay inside NATO, which eases concerns that the 1951 treaty left open. Most important of all, the agreement has no end date and can only be changed by mutual consent. It permanently changes the operating environment.

3. Trump is Already Defying The Agreement

Trump is already describing a different deal from the one it signed. At the UN, Trump said it gave the US "permanent control over security and all other needs"[5] in Greenland. Before the text was published, he called it an "Infinite Life" agreement, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Greenland would "forever" sit within North America's strategic defence area.[6] On 14 October, Trump claimed Greenland had more easily accessible oil than

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almost anywhere else in the world and that huge exploration is set to begin in "our new and beautiful Greenland."[7] Denmark and Greenland have firmly pushed back on these claims, reaffirming that US investors will not have any preferential treatment.

Trump's bold claims followed a midterm campaign stop in Wasilla, Alaska, for Senator Dan Sullivan. In a state whose economy runs on oil, gas and mining, promises of Arctic resource riches play well with voters, which suggests the message was aimed at a US audience rather than consolidating its relationship with Denmark or Greenland. It fits a familiar pattern of deals without enforcement, but this time the agreement is real and binding, yet the president keeps describing a different one. Advisors have warned that it's dangerous to view the September agreement as something that would change Trump's intentions, Washington appears to treat the treaty as the beginning rather than the end. Each claim of ownership from Trump and the US reopens a question the agreement sought to close, and several US companies are already active in Greenland's minerals and oil, which makes this threat more viable.

4. Greenland and Denmark

Some have argued that Denmark has extricated itself from a period of coercive US diplomacy over Greenland, calling the deal with Trump a victory for diplomacy over bullying.[8] However, others, such as NATO Defence College fellow Richard Weitz, counter this, asserting that Trump got almost everything short of annexation.[9] Both are partially right, as Denmark has kept its sovereignty and avoided a rupture inside NATO, but it has traded this for policy autonomy, whilst not completely subduing Trump's ambitions.

Greenland's position is more ambiguous, it has gained real recognition with signing a security treaty as a party in its own right for the first time, but at the expense of its future choices. Greenland's route to independence now seems more costly, for example, replacing the huge Danish grants it receives depends on the US' approval, which may be challenging, as some have suggested China as a likely future replacement. Whether Trump's 'our new Greenland' rhetoric was meant purely for his domestic audience or not, it lands awkwardly with Greenland, where 85% opposed joining the US in a 2025 poll.[10]

5. Russia and China

The rhetoric from the US appointed Russia and China as drivers of its ambitions to secure Greenland, but both have dismissed these claims as baseless. Russia rejected this as a matter for those involved, claiming Arctic cooperation with the US was not on their agenda. Further, as Chinese investment in Greenland was negligible after Greenland's 2021 uranium ban effectively froze the main Chinese-linked project. Therefore, the investment screening clause closes an opportunity China wasn't taking.

At the height of the crisis in January 2026, Chinese strategists saw the US alliance network as Washington's greatest advantage over China, and its unravelling as a strategic gift. The agreement repairs that rift on paper, which is a loss for Beijing, but every new ownership claim from Trump reopens it. Chinese observers now expect Western Arctic states to grow warier of China, pushing it closer to Moscow.[11] This has already started to happen, during Nikolai Patrushev's visit to China in October, the two sides discussed linking China's Maritime Silk Road with Russia's Trans-Arctic Transport Corridor.[12] The Polar Silk Road already runs through Russian waters. Last year the first Chinese container ship to reach Europe via the Northern Sea Route docked at Felixstowe, roughly halving the usual journey time. This suggests the Arctic is becoming two separate markets. A Western one governed by NATO-aligned investment rules and a Sino-Russian one built around the Northern Sea Route, which carries sanction risks but may be faster.

6. Where This Leaves Greenland

The September agreement settles sovereignty, at least in the short term, but not the contest over Greenland, nor Trump's ambitions. Whilst in some regards, it is largely just codifying existing rights for the US, their larger stake in Greenland's economic prospects and autonomy can be seen as a significant change to the operating

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environment. The biggest risk at the moment is the gap between the agreement and Trump's rhetoric, as it grants no resource rights, yet Trump claims to be starting a huge exploration of minerals and claims ownership of the island. Each claim of ownership reopens questions that the agreement was set to answer. Further, it invites US companies to test whether pressure can bring preferential treatment and risks making Greenland increasingly wary of American capital.

The precedent reaches further than this treaty, as the US has turned the coercion of an ally into permanent written concessions, and other allies with strategic assets could take note. Meanwhile, the Arctic is hardening into Western and Sino-Russian blocs. It is important to see whether US money follows Trump's claims, as, if it does, the existing gap between text and talk will close, just not on Denmark or Greenland's terms.

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