

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: *Greenland's Aspirations for Independence in Times of Climate Change*

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October 2017



Introduction

“Greenland is a country full of contradictions.”

Kuupik Kleist, former Premier of Greenland.¹

In 2009, Greenland officially became a self-governing territory of the Kingdom of Denmark. The landmark agreement between Greenlandic authorities and the Danish government recognized the Greenlanders as a distinct people according to international law, giving them the additional the right of secession from the Kingdom of Denmark if a majority of the people so decides. Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark are officially a part of *Rigsfælleskabet* or the *Commonwealth of the Realm* of Denmark.²

According to the agreement, the so-called annual block grant or financial contributions from Denmark, which amounts to about half of Greenland’s budget, was fixed at a certain level. While the Greenlandic government’s full control over the country’s natural resources was recognized, a road-map was also established on the modalities of possible independence –

¹ Kuupik Kleist, interview, Nuuk 9 June 2017.

² In this paper *Rigsfælleskabet* will be translated as Commonwealth of the Realm.

once Greenland would be able to stand on its own feet without financial handouts from Copenhagen.

This paper focuses on the status of Greenland from political, military, cultural, economic and social perspectives; its relationship with Denmark and the interests of other countries, including the United States and China; and its role in the Arctic.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze – from historical and contemporary perspectives – the status of Greenland and its role in the Arctic; its political, economic, and legal relationship with Denmark; and the interests of other countries, including the United States and China. Coinciding with Greenland's Self-government arrangement, the world's attention turned to the Arctic due to climate change and to geopolitical developments, such as the Russian North pole flag-planting episode. Pertinent questions were not only raised about the opening of new transarctic shipping lanes and increased possibilities of harnessing the region's wealth, especially oil and gas. There were also dire prophecies of a new Great Game or geopolitical conflict over territorial disputes in the Arctic. Such scenarios, it has turned out, have not materialized, not least to a shared commitment by all the major Arctic stakeholders to the Law of the Sea Convention. Yet, as will be shown here, increased activities in the Arctic as a result of climate change have already affected Greenland in many ways. With the question of statehood having been put on the political agenda, Greenland has simultaneously been coping with interest from foreign states, such as China, and international businesses. These globalized developments have, in turn, put the spotlight on two interrelated factors: whether they pose a risk to Greenlandic Inuit identities and values and whether they will lead to an unbridgeable divide between Greenlandic and Danish self-images and national narratives.

Apart from the independence option, this paper will discuss possible alternatives to independence or the status quo by looking at neighbouring countries such as Canada and Iceland. Finally, an attempt will be made to determine the main drivers of Greenland's push for increased self-determination by exploring economic, national, and post-colonial factors.

The topic will be studied within the context of the Danish-Greenlandic constitutional relationship in the present and the past; territorial claims in the Arctic Ocean; Arctic governance (UNCLOS, the Arctic Council, the "Arctic Five"); the rights of indigenous peoples and post-colonialism; and natural resource exploitation. Apart from Greenlandic-Danish relations, a special emphasis will be put on the role of the European Union (climate change; access to natural resources; and political and economic cooperation), the United States (military rights) and China (access to natural resources).

The argument is made here that despite considerable political backing for secession, Greenland is not likely to initiate such a process any time soon, mainly because of its financial dependence on Denmark. This does not, however, mean that the maintenance of the status quo is acceptable to the Greenlanders. It will be stressed that the tendency by Danish politicians to emphasize the financial dependence of Greenlanders on Denmark their inability to stand on their own feet and to accuse them, in paternalistic way, of "ungratefulness" risks a nationalistic backlash, which could increase pressure for a political divorce.

Denmark's reluctance to even to acknowledge the colonial status of Greenland and its refusal to admit the wrongdoings of past colonial rule are fueling Greenlandic nationalism. It will be contended that Denmark systematically undervalues the contribution of Greenland, which includes the hosting of a US military base, to the foreign policy and Danish Kingdom's security interests. It will be argued that despite a contractual obligation to grant Greenland the choice of independence, Denmark has aspirations for a power status in the Arctic on the basis of its external control of Greenland. To resolve this contradiction, Denmark has resisted Greenlandic plans for secession

This work is based on scholarly publications, memoirs and media reports in Greenland, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Iceland. Interviews were also conducted with several influential persons, with knowledge of the Greenlandic question, in Greenland and Denmark.³

The paper is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter focuses on the origins of Danish sovereignty over Greenland and how it was secured by enforced isolation of the island. Political developments during the Second World War undermined this policy and the decolonization process in the post-war period forced Denmark to annex the colony. It will be explained how this act brought to the surface the problem of the inequality between Danes and Greenlanders.

Chapter 2 focuses on the mining potential in Greenland and how hopes of foreign investment, which were supposed to finance Greenland's secession from Denmark, have run into obstacles.

Chapter 3 deals with the position of Greenland within the context of increased focus on the Arctic in general. It will be shown that despite the rhetoric of a "race for the Arctic," the region has, by and large, been a model for international cooperation. At the same, questions of geopolitical motives have been raised in connection with the interest of foreign companies, most of which are Chinese-owned.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the geopolitical importance of Greenland, which has elevated the status of Denmark on the global stage. It begs the question of whether the control of Greenland has been a profitable investment for Denmark within NATO and in its relationship with the United States.

Chapter 5 scrutinizes the problem of whether Denmark can aspire for a "major Arctic power" status, while at the same time recognizing Greenland's right to, and wish for, secession. Denmark has largely left the defense of Greenland to the United States and NATO and focused, instead, of exercising sovereignty through maritime surveillance. The question will be asked what would be the alternatives of Greenland, if it would go its own way?

³ Translations from Danish, English, French and Icelandic are by the author.

In Chapter 6, it is argued that even though the doors of the European Union might be open to Greenland, full membership would be problematic since Greenlandic nationalism has its roots in opposition to the EU.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how deeply the effects of climate change are felt in Greenland. Despite the ecological and social problems posed by climate change, it is pointed out that it may partly be a political and/or economic blessing in disguise for Greenland by putting the island on the global agenda and by possibly facilitating the path towards independence through increased access to natural resources.

Chapters 8 and 9 take a look at efforts for Danish-Greenlandic reconciliation and argue that Denmark's negative reaction to efforts to come to terms with a colonial past in Greenland may have been a lost opportunity. Moreover, the question will be pondered, to which extent, Greenland's population identifies with its classification as an indigenous people. The focus will also be on different self-perceptions between Greenland's Inuit people and Danes and how they create obstacles to mutual understanding and cooperation.

Finally, some future Greenlandic status scenarios will be discussed in chapter 10 based on the experiences of neighbouring countries. The argument is put forward that if economic criteria are the sole basis for a decision on secession from Denmark, Greenland's independence is unlikely to happen anytime soon. However, history shows that questions of nationality, national pride and feelings can be an influential trigger for independence movements. For this reason, the question of Greenlandic statehood is set to be an option, even if current realities do not favour it in the near future.

I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance:

In Nuuk: Svend Hardenberg, CEO of Mannvit, Lars-Emil Johansen, the Chairman of the Inatsisartut (The Parliament of Greenland) and former Premier of the Naalakkersuisut (the Government of Greenland), 1991-1997, Kuupik Kleist, also former Premier, 2009-2013, Jacob Isboethsen, Natuk Lund Olsen, Pernille Bengtsen and Kai Holst Andersen, all current or former senior officials of the Ministry of Independence, Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, Sigurjón Björnsson, Economic Officer at the Ministry of Finance and Taxes, Ida Matthiasson, member of the Reconciliation Commission, Magdalene Møller, Head of Secretariat of the Reconciliation Commission, Lene Kielsen Holm, scientist and project leader at the Greenland Climate Research Centre, Aqqaluk Lynge, former President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, 1995-2002, Poul Krarup, former CEO and Editor-in-Chief of Sermitsiaq.AG, Juaaka Lyberth, writer and musician, and Pétur Ásgeirsson, the Consul-General of Iceland.

In Copenhagen: Jens Heinrich, historian and former member of the Reconciliation Commission, Søren Espersen, member of Folketinget, the Danish parliament, Bo Lidegaard, historian, former Editor-in-Chief of Politiken.

In Brussels: Minninguaq Kleist, Chief of Greenland's representation to the European Union, Mari Kleist, former Head of Secretariat of the Reconciliation Commission, and currently researcher within the field of archaeology, Deborah Seward (director), Petra Hongell (Nordic desk), both of UNRIC.

In Reykjavík: Dr. Valur Ingimundarson, Professor, University of Iceland, Hrafn Jökulsson, journalist and chairman of the chess club Hrókurinn, Damien Degeorges, academic, Kristjana G. Guðmundsdóttir, geologist, Frank W. Sands, MA.



1. Greenland, Denmark, sovereignty and the outside world

"(Erik the Red) called the land which he had found Greenland, because, quoth he, "people will be attracted thither, if the land has a good name.""

Grænlendinga saga – The Saga of the Greenlanders⁴

About 80% of Greenland's territory is covered by ice. Technically the world's biggest island, Greenland has an area of around 2.2 million square kilometers – as big as half of Europe or Germany, France, Spain and Italy combined. Despite the ice domination of Greenland, the ice-free part of the country alone is as big as Norway. The population, however, is only 58,500 – or roughly the same as the population of Bermuda, Andorra or the Marshall Islands. Indeed, towns such as Delray Beach City, Florida (US), Neuilly-sur-Seine (France), and Vejle (Denmark) are of a similar size.⁵ To illustrate how small they are, the number of children born in China in less than a day and a half amounts to the entire population of Greenland.⁶ When it comes to population density, there are only 0.0258 persons per square

⁴ "The Saga of the Greenlanders," *Notendur-Háskóli Íslands*, <https://notendur.hi.is/haukurth/utgafa/greenlanders.html> retrieved 22 June 2017, 1,

⁵ "Cities in the world with 55,000 to 60,000 inhabitants in 2005," *Mongobay.com* http://www.mongobay.com/igapo/2005_world_city_populations/2005_city_population_19.html, "2000 Census: US Municipalities Over 50,000", *Demographia.com*, <http://demographia.com/db-usc98.htm>, retrieved 25 June 2017.

⁶ "How many people are born in China every day?", *Quora*, <https://www.quora.com/How-many-people-are-born-in-China-each-day>, retrieved 22 September 2017.

kilometer, compared to 7,909 in Singapore, which has the biggest population density of any independent country.⁷

The oldest remains of human settlement in Greenland can be traced back to almost 2,500 BCE, but the so-called Thule Inuits, the ancestors of the current population, migrated to the island from Alaska via Canada 1200 CE or even more recently. In the tenth century Nordic settlers, mostly from Iceland and of Norwegian origin, settled in the south and south-western parts of Greenland, making them the Western most European settlement. The original Nordic settlers disappeared around 1450 after a presence spanning almost five centuries. Their fate is among the hottest-debated unsolved historical mysteries. After centuries of neglect by its colonial masters, three Danish expeditions reached Greenland in 1605, 1606 and 1607, but it was only in 1721, that a permanent link was re-established.⁸ That year a Norwegian missionary, Hans Egede (1686–1758), arrived in Greenland in search of the now long since disappeared Nordic settlers with the support of the King of the United Kingdom of Denmark and Norway.

This was the beginning of direct Danish rule of Greenland. Missionaries were soon followed by merchants and administrators, initially in the future capital Nuuk (Godthåb), with gradually more settlements established along the coast. The Kongelige Grønlandske Handel (Royal Greenlandic Trading Company) was founded in 1776, and had a total economic monopoly in Greenland for the most part of the next two centuries. Not only foreigners but individuals and companies from Denmark and other parts of the kingdom, such as Iceland, were banned by the monopoly from any commercial or economic activity in Greenland. Even Danish journalists were refused travel to Greenland without special permission until after the Second World War.⁹



Since the Danish state refused to bear any cost of administrating the island, the notion that the Egede's and his successors' missionary activities should be financed by trade with the indigenous people became the unwritten rule from the very beginning. In the name of financing the mission and maintaining a colony and related services in Greenland, the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company enjoyed a crushing monopoly and exerted complete control over Greenland's

hunters' product and exports, including all vital imports. This harsh principle was in place in Greenland until well into the 20th century and its effects can be felt to this day.¹⁰

⁷ "Population density," *The World Bank*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST?locations=GL>, retrieved 23 August 2017.

⁸ Hans Christian Gulløv, (ed.), *Grønland. Den Arktiske koloni. Danmark og kolonierne*. (Copenhagen: Gads forlag, 2017), 16

⁹ Jeppe Strandsbjerg, "Making sense of contemporary Greenland. Indigeneity, resources and sovereignty," in *The scramble for the poles. The Geopolitics of the Arctic and Antarctic*, ed. Klaus Dodds, Mark Nuttall (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 264.

¹⁰ Finn Gad, *Grønland* (Copenhagen: Politiken 1984), 218.

“The independence of small Greenlandic societies was gradually replaced by a dependence on trade, and once that dependence was created, the typical pattern of colonization ensued,” says Aqqualuk Lynge¹¹, former President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), the international forum of Inuits from Greenland, the United States, Canada and Russia.

The Danes exercised a similar commercial monopoly for centuries in neighboring dependencies Iceland and the Faroe Islands. When the last remains of trade monopoly were lifted in the two other North-Atlantic island communities in the 1850s, Greenland was excluded from the decision. The official reasoning behind the de facto enforced isolation of Greenland until the mid- 20th century and maintaining the monopoly was, ironically, in the words of the Danish historian Finn Gad (1911–1986) “for the good of the Greenlanders.” However, the monopoly was also necessary to secure the self-financing model and thus full control over the island. As historian Bo Lidegaard puts it: “It also served the interests of Denmark.”¹²

The Danes were not, however, the only Europeans interested in Greenland, since English, Basque and Dutch whalers had been present for centuries in the seas around Greenland and had traded with local Inuits. When precious whaling stocks dwindled around Svalbard in the 18th century, European whalers turned their attention increasingly towards the Davis straits along the west coast of Greenland. The Dutch had on average 75 ships in the Davis Straits at any given time in the years 1713–1728, and as many as 157 ships were to be found in Greenlandic waters in the next few decades after Egede’s arrival.¹³

In 1739, the Danish crown eventually took military action against the encroaching Dutch. An agreement was reached in 1762 through English and French mediation, in which the Dutch obtained recognition of their rights to whaling, but, at the same time, recognized the Danish commercial monopoly in Greenland. Most importantly Danish sovereignty over Western-Greenland was recognized by the Dutch as well as the British and French mediators.¹⁴

The biggest challenge to Denmark’s sovereignty over Greenland came from the United States and Norway. The American explorer Robert E. Peary (1856–1920) explored Greenland’s high north in his polar expeditions from 1886 to 1909 in order to establish whether it was indeed an island or – more compellingly for the Americans – a part of the North American continent. Peary spoke and worked openly for the US acquisition of Greenland. This was not a new idea since Secretary of State William Seward (1801–1872) wanted to follow up the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 with that of Greenland. It was not until 1917 that the United States acknowledged Denmark’s sovereignty over Greenland as part of the deal to purchase the Danish Virgin Islands. In 1945, the United States offered cash-strapped, post-war Denmark \$100 million (nearly \$1.4 billion in 2016) to buy Greenland, an offer which was rejected by the Danish government despite the struggle of pulling itself together after years of German occupation and the loss of Iceland from the Danish Kingdom.

¹¹ Aqqualuk Lynge, interview, Nuuk, 6 June 2017.

¹² Bo Lidegaard, interview, Copenhagen, 12 October 2107.

¹³ Gulløv, Grønland, 33, 52–79.

¹⁴ Finn Gad, Grønland, 145, 176.

The Norwegian presence in Greenland was an even more concrete threat to Danish sovereignty. The eastern coast of Greenland has historically a much smaller population than the western one, and especially the south-western part, and Denmark only gradually extended its control there in the 19th and even into the 20th century.

Norwegian seal hunters had been active on the east coast from the beginning of the 20th century. In the early 1930s, they occupied two substantial stretches of land between 71° and 75° North and later further south between 60° and 63°. Under pressure from public opinion, the Norwegian government claimed sovereignty over Eastern Greenland. The Danish government referred to the dispute to the International Court in the Hague, which ruled in its favour in 1933, basing its judgement, *inter alia*, on the Kiel Treaty of 1814.¹⁵

An even bigger threat to Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland occurred during the Second World War. Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany in April 1940. Danish officials in Greenland continued administrating the island, but soon the United States sent a Consul-General to Greenland, a move followed by Canada, and the US coast guard patrolled the island's coast. On 9 April 1941, Denmark's Ambassador to Washington, Henrik Kauffmann (1888–1963) and Cordell Hull (1871–1955), the US Secretary of State, signed an agreement which gave the Americans the rights to establish military bases in Greenland in exchange for the defense of the island against Nazi Germany. Commerce with Denmark had, of course, ceased during its occupation and now the United States became Greenland's main trading partner. Subsequently, Greenland became a theatre of war: When Germany established weather observation posts in Eastern Greenland, the US air force attacked and managed to neutralize them.

Denmark has held on to its sovereignty over Greenland for almost 300 years with a relatively little effort and, thanks to the Dane's self-financing policy, little investment, at least until after the Second World War. The war and its aftermath proved to be a catalyst for change in Greenland.

After the creation of the United Nations in 1945, Greenland was put into the category of "non self-governing territories" due to pressure from the United States and France. Denmark reluctantly had to report to the world organization, but portrayed its rule of Greenland as a role model for colonial powers since its sole motive was ostensibly the protection and development of the Greenlandic people.

A commission appointed to prepare a new constitution for Denmark in 1946 put forward proposals for the future relationship between Denmark and Greenland, which were submitted to the so-called *Landsraader*, or elected regional assemblies for southern and northern Greenland, respectively. The commission advanced three options: 1) Integration; 2) Independence; 3) Free Association. However, for reasons unexplained, only the first two options were presented to the two consultative, elected assemblies, for northern and southern Greenland.

¹⁵ Finn Gad, Grønland, 270-273.

The new constitution was submitted to a referendum in Denmark, but it was never put to a vote in Greenland, although the assemblies had opted for integration. As a consequence, when the constitution was adopted in 1953, Greenland officially became a recognized region in Denmark. In a 1954 declaration submitted to the UN, Denmark stated that the Greenlanders had freely agreed to become an integral part of Denmark. Therefore, it was explained that the decolonization process should no longer apply to Greenland.¹⁶ The fact that the Greenlanders were not consulted directly did not sit well with all UN member states. While much of the world was in various stages of decolonization, some considered it a dangerous precedent to let a potentially easily-manipulated representative body give a green light to a continued close relationship with a colonial power. As a matter of fact, Portugal was later to single out Greenland as a counter-example, when it was criticized by the Nordic countries for continuing its colonial rule of African countries in the 1970s. In addition, it was problematic from the Danish perspective for Greenland that the Thule area and Eastern Greenland had no representation whatsoever in the *Landsraaderne*.

Greenland's new status was accepted in committee at the UN with 34 votes in favour, 4 against and 12 abstentions. Later the General Assembly did the same with 45 states supporting it. One state, Belgium, voted against the measure and 11 states abstained.¹⁷

The Speaker of the Greenlandic Parliament, Lars-Emil Johansen, a "founding father" of Greenland's independence movement, admits that if the decision had been voted upon in Greenland, it might well have had much support since it was seen, somewhat ironically, as marking the end of colonialism.¹⁸ Indeed, many Greenlanders had unrealistic expectations that they would soon be equal to Denmark socially, politically and economically. Later, they would be sorely disappointed.

The end of the Greenland's official colonial status went hand-in-hand with the introduction of industrial fishing, which was supposed to take over seal-hunting as the main occupation and source of income for Greenlanders. A foreseeable consequence was the forced concentration of large segments of the population in larger village settings and the abandonment of smaller settlements. While the commercial monopoly of the state was ending, another element of the "modernization" of Greenland was the introduction of Danish as the language of teaching in schools.¹⁹

While Greenland was just another part of Denmark on paper, the very existence of the special Ministry for Greenland showed that this did not reflect reality. The uneven power relationship between the Danes and Greenlanders soon came under scrutiny. Wages in Greenland were much lower than in Denmark due to the different levels of productivity between the island and European Denmark according to Danish authorities. But Danish officials stationed in Greenland continued to receive Danish salaries, while their local counterparts were paid according to Greenlandic standards with the introduction of a "birth-place criteria." This became a major source of discontentment for educated

¹⁶ Gulløv, Grønland, 307-311.

¹⁷ Mads Lidegaard, *Ligestilling uden lighed. En oversigt over det statretlige forhold mellem Grønland og Danmark*. (Copenhagen: Schultz forlag, 1973), 61-62.

¹⁸ Lars-Emil Johansen, interview, Nuuk 8 June 2017.

¹⁹ Gulløv, Grønland, 312-315, 334.

Greenlanders in the 1960s and fueled the first wave of Greenlandic nationalism, which centered on obtaining equality within the Kingdom of Denmark.²⁰ The demand for self-rule and possible independence gradually took the center stage and has dominated Greenlandic politics in the 21st century.

²⁰ Gulløv, Grønland, 335-337.



2.Greenland: Independence thanks to climate change?

"I don't look Danish, I don't speak Danish; Danish is not my mother tongue, and Greenland is far away from Denmark. The Union is like a marriage, which has now been put on ice. Now we are talking about a happy divorce. It is just a question of time."

Aleqa Hammond, Premier of Greenland (2013–2014) on Danish TV. ²¹

In an episode of the award-winning Danish criminal TV series "Borgen," a fictional Prime Minister of Denmark travels to Greenland to placate the local Home Rule government after the outbreak of an international scandal involving Greenland. On her way to the airport, the Prime Minister's advisor briefs her on the situation in Greenland, focusing on three issues: the local economy, the statistics on suicide.²² and the number of child molestation cases. The fictional Danish Prime Minister's reason for visiting the far away Arctic island is to brief

²¹ Martin Breum, *Balladen om Grønland. Trangen til løsrivelse, råstofferne og Danmarks dilemma*. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2014), 16.

²² Greenland has the world's highest suicide rate 82.8 per 100,000 people. In some villages like Kangeq, the rate is 400 per 100,000. Victoria Herrmann, "What the Forthcoming Paris Agreement Rulebook Mean for Arctic Climate Change", *The Arctic Institute*, 13 February 2017, <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/paris-agreement-rulebook-arctic-climate-change/>, retrieved 22 June 2017.

the Premier of the Home Rule government on the CIA's use of Greenland for "rendering" suspected Al-Qaeda members on their way to interrogation in "black holes" in authoritarian states.

The United States has, in fact, operated a military base in Thule, in North-Eastern Greenland since 1941, which still serves as an important Ballistic Missile Early Warning Site for the defense of North America. This episode of the TV series brilliantly portrays the developing image of Greenland in Denmark, from an economically and socially depressed legs from the colonial times virtually absent from the front-pages to the front-line of global politics and international news.

Since 2009, Greenland has been, as noted, a self-governing nation within the Kingdom of Denmark. Greenland had enjoyed "Home Rule", or autonomy limited to some internal matters, since 1979. On 25 November 2008, more than three quarters of Greenlanders voted "yes" to a negotiated agreement on Self-government with the right to secede entirely from the Danish Kingdom through the Act on Greenland Self-Government. On Greenland's national day in mid-summer 2009, a solemn ceremony took place in the capital Nuuk. Dressed in the Greenlandic national costume, Queen Margarethe II of Denmark, handed over the Act on Greenland Self-Government to Josef Motzfeldt, the chairman of the Greenlandic parliament.

Self-government grants Greenlanders the legal right to proclaim independence, but whether that would be in their best interest is a legitimate question. Greenland will have to increase its revenues considerably in order to compensate for the loss of Danish subsidies. According to the potential "road map" to independence, it could be triggered when Greenland is wealthy enough to be able to live without annual financial contributions from Denmark, which amount to about half of its current state budget,²³ that is, \$570 million or roughly \$10,000 per capita.

Covering this financial shortfall is without question a tall order, but in the last few decades, many auspicious opportunities have emerged. In addition to as much as 10% of the planet's fresh water resources and huge potential in generating hydro-electric power from its waterfalls, Greenland possesses natural resources, such as iron, diamonds, gold, copper, platinum, uranium, and titanium as well as so-called "rare earths" so vital to the international production of high technology.²⁴ According to some sources, Greenland could satisfy as much as 25% of the world's needs for rare earths in the next 50 years.²⁵

While these rare earth elements are, at last, accessible due to climate change and the melting of Greenland's vast icy expanses, paradoxically they will eventually help to establish a green economy since these minerals are indispensable to many "green" innovations, such

²³ "Danish doubts over Greenland vote", *BBC News*, 27 November 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7752660.stm>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

²⁴ K. Secher, O. Johnsen, "Minerals in Greenland", *Geology and Ore* 12 (2008): 1-13.

<http://www.geus.dk/minex/go12.pdf>, retrieved 16 July 2017, 1-13.

²⁵ Damien Degeorges, "The role of Greenland in the Arctic", *Laboratoire de l'IRSEM*, no. 7. (2012): 47.

<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/164606/1766615/file/The%20Role%20of%20Greenland%20in%20the%20Arctic.pdf>

as wind turbines and hybrid cars. They are also important in the production of high-end computers, smart phones, high-capacity batteries and even cruise missiles and night-vision goggles for soldiers.

Last but certainly not least, Greenland is expected to possess what may be among the world's largest uranium reserves, a truly precious global commodity with increasing demand and a falling supply. Needless to say, uranium is of immense strategic importance, both in arms manufacturing and as fuel in nuclear power plants.²⁶

On 1 January 2010, authorities in Nuuk gained full control of Greenland's non-living natural resources. Finding new ways of financing, the budget has been a priority of the Greenlandic authorities. Not only has the annual block grant been frozen at DK 3.7 billion, while government expenditures are growing, but in order to become independent and self-sufficient Greenland, Danish hand-outs will have to be abandoned.²⁷ To have any chance of becoming financially independent, Greenland will have to attract foreign investment and substantial revenues from oil and minerals.

The Danish National Party (Dansk Folkeparti) was the only political party in the Danish parliament to oppose the agreement on natural resources. As Søren Espersen, vice-chairman and spokesman of the party on Greenlandic affairs put it:

We were opposed exclusively on economical grounds. Denmark has never profited from Greenland, but it has cost us a lot through the years. We find it unfair to Denmark that the agreement gives all revenues from natural resources to the Greenlanders.²⁸

Commodity prices have fallen since authorities in Nuuk started looking for investors, and in such an economic environment, they face an uphill battle due to the relatively high costs of operating in Greenland. Factors, such as the lack of sufficient infrastructure, tough climatic conditions, the remoteness of Greenland – all contribute to high costs making the country relatively uncompetitive. The same can be said of relatively high wages and inflexible labour laws, and of the bigger projects, which would require the importation of skilled and unskilled workers. Sophisticated laws on the protection of the environment are all too often considered unattractive by mining companies.²⁹

In 2017, the mining industry has still not taken off in any substantial way, and, currently, there are only a couple of relatively minor mine projects in operation. Nevertheless, the number of research projects has increased, and there are 56 active licenses for companies to prospect for gold, rubies, diamonds, nickel, copper and other valuable minerals in Greenland.

²⁶ "Greenland split over uranium mining", *the Copenhagen Post*, 4 July 2012

(<http://cphpost.dk/business/greenland-split-over-uranium-mining>, retrieved 6 July 2017).

²⁷ The block grant is indexed to inflation in Denmark, which is usually lower than in Greenland.

²⁸ Søren Espersen, interview, Copenhagen 11 October 2017.

²⁹ "Større interesse for mineraler i Grønland", *Sermitsiaq.Ag*, 9 July 2017, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/stoerre-interesse-mineraler-i-groenland>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

Not long after the 2009 Self- government act entered into effect, the Nuuk authorities' focus turned to Asia, notably China and, to a lesser degree, South Korea. One of the first mining projects to be discussed seriously was an iron-ore project in Isukasia in the region of Nuuk, which was to be financed by the London Mining company. It became controversial for two reasons: one was the interest of Chinese investors in the London Mining company and the other the company's plans to import 2,000–3,000 Chinese workers. The expected arrival of 2,000 miners triggered a passionate debate not only in Greenland but also in Denmark. A change in the immigration laws would have required Denmark's approval, and the Danish trade unions fiercely opposed what they called "social dumping." A law has to be passed in the Inatsisartut, the Greenlandic parliament, as well the Danish Folketing to permit the import of foreign workers to facilitate such large-scale projects. According to the Danish media, the imported workers would only in name get similar wages to Greenlandic workers, but will, at the end of the day, have similar revenues as they do in their homeland and enjoy less social protection.³⁰

Estimates on how many foreigners will be needed vary between 10,000 and 200,000, depending on how many mining, drilling and industrial projects will be realized simultaneously. The 2,000 Chinese workers needed for the Isukasia projects would have represented 6.25% of the 32,000-strong work force of Greenland.

For a country that has been isolated for so long and whose culture has allegedly been jeopardized by Denmark's hegemony, it is, indeed, ironic that Greenland's independence would come at the cost of having to accommodate thousands of foreigners – with unpredictable results. "People have to imagine the consequences of what the influx of foreign labor will be. Being a minority in your own country, is that what you want?", Aqqaq Lyngø asked.³¹ In an odd twist, Chinese workers finally did join Greenland's work force in 2017, but instead of 2,000 or 200,000 miners, 36 workers were hired to work in fish factories despite domestic unemployment rate of over 10%.³²

Notwithstanding low prices and decreasing Chinese demand for basic metals, the project that currently looks most promising is a Chinese-backed lead and zinc mining project in Citronen fjord on Peary Land, just 800 km from the North Pole. A few hundred people will be employed – 80% foreigners, at least initially. The remote location will presumably make the import of foreign workers less socially sensitive than industrial projects closer to major towns. A large investing firm, China Nonferrous, will build the mine on behalf of an Australian company and facilitate Chinese financing for around two-thirds of the costs, with a potentially lucrative option to buy a substantial stake in the project.³³

³⁰ "Danmark siger ja til social dumping i Grønland", *Politiken*, 10 December 2012 (<http://politiken.dk/udland/ECE1838821/danmark-siger-ja-til-social-dumping-i-groenland/>, retrieved 26 January 2013).

³¹ "Climate Change Brings New Risks to Greenland," *The Guardian*, 24 January 2014. <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/climate-change-brings-new-risks-to-greenland-16992>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

³² "Kinesiske medarbejdere er ankommet til Uummannaq," *Sermitsiaq.Ag*, 1. July 2017. <http://sermitsiaq.ag/kinesiske-medarbejdere-ankommet-uummannaq>, retrieved 4 July 2017.

³³ Jichang Lulu, "China, Greenland and competition for the Arctic", *China Policy Institute*, 2 January 2017, <https://cpianalysis.org/2017/01/02/china-greenland-and-competition-for-the-arctic/>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

The London Mining company, however, was not in a position to realize the proposed project in Greenland because of financial problems due, among other reasons, to the Ebola outbreak in Africa. After years of rumours of Chinese involvement, finally in 2015, a Chinese company, General Nice Development Limited, took over the project in Isukasia, which will cost up to 13 billion DK, or more than three times the Danish annual block grant to Greenland.³⁴ According to Chinese industry sources, however, it is not likely that the mine will be operational any time soon.³⁵

Chinese involvement in the bellwether of Greenlandic mining projects at Kvanefjeld (the Danish name of Kuannersuit) in southern Greenland could become the most important investment in Greenland's history. Not only does it involve the coveted rare earths but also uranium. Until recently, Greenland had a zero-tolerance policy for any kind of uranium mining, which was consistent with previous Danish policy. The issue is of huge importance since it is believed that Greenland has large uranium reserves at a time, when the global supply is falling and demand is rising.³⁶

Not only is uranium needed for civilian nuclear power plants but increasingly in arms manufacturing as well. The debate on the use or non-use of uranium has raged for decades both in Denmark and Greenland, because of the risks of damage to the environment. Only in 2013 did the Greenlandic parliament give a green light after a long and acrimonious debate – which slowed down the decision-making process and may well have put off nervous investors. The Danish government has declared that the sale of uranium, should, at least in certain cases, fall under Greenland's foreign and security policy, which is still handled by Denmark.

In the summer of 2017, there was guarded optimism in Nuuk that the Kvanefjeld-project might at last take off despite fierce opposition from environmental organizations. It would become the world's fifth-largest uranium mine and the second-biggest rare earths operation.³⁷ 80% of the commercial deposits in Kvanefjeld are rare earth minerals, while uranium accounts for approximately 5-10%. However, the debate over the project's environmental damage is not limited to uranium and radio-active dust. Hundreds of millions of tons of rocks would be crushed during the 37-year life span of the open-air pit, and there are concerns about the use of chemicals and the disposal of millions of tons of radioactive waste. On the other hand, the mine could create around 400 jobs and become a significant direct and indirect source of government income.³⁸

³⁴ "Kinesere skal redde Grønlands gigantiske mineprojekt", *Berlingske*, 12 January 2015, <http://www.business.dk/oekonomi/kinesere-skall-redde-groenlands-gigantiske-mineprojekt>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

³⁵ Jichang Lulu, China Greenland.

³⁶ "Greenland split over uranium mining", *the Copenhagen Post*, 4 July 2012, <http://cphpost.dk/business/greenland-split-over-uranium-mining>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

³⁷ "Greenland rare earths: No special favours for EU," *BBC News*, 15 January 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21025658>, retrieved 26 January 2013).

³⁸ "Greenland closer to building world's fifth-largest uranium mine", *Mining.com*, <http://www.mining.com/greenland-closer-building-worlds-fifth-largest-uranium-mine/>, retrieved 16 July 2017. "Fakta: Her er planen for uranminen i Grønland," *DR*, 10 March 2017, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/penge/fakta-her-er-planen-uranminen-i-groenland>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

The Australian company, Greenland Minerals & Energy, which stands behind the project, claims that sales income would generate \$55 million annually to the Greenlandic government, not including tax income from payroll, import duty and royalties. This amounts to about 10% of the annual block grant from the Danish state.³⁹ The Kvanefjeld project was delayed not only because of the political debate on uranium, but also due to a lack of investors. One hurdle seemed to have been overcome in December 2016 when the Chinese Shenghe Company bought 12.5% of the stocks of the Australian company Greenland Minerals and Energy, with an option to acquire 60% of the company, when it received its exploitation license.

When the debate over Chinese investment in Greenland raged in 2012, Greenland's Premier Kuupik Kleist – in an op-ed co-signed by the well-known Greenlandic geologist Minik Rosing – called on the Danish government and private investors, such as pension funds, to invest in minerals industry in Greenland. The Danish Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, immediately welcomed the initiative. But five years later, there has still been no Danish investment to speak of in the Greenlandic mining sector and, for that matter, little mining activities in general.⁴⁰

Bo Lidegaard argues that it is poorly understood in Greenland that all these minerals can also be found elsewhere in the world and can be exploited at a lower price than in Greenland. Extracting mineral resources generally yields more to those making the investment and doing the mining than to the country of the deposits. Recounting a visit to study potential mining sites in Greenland with Rosing and a representative of the McKenzie company, he points out that not one of them turned out to have a serious potential to attract commercial foreign investment. The reasons are different from site to site, but they include the lack of infrastructure, labour shortages and the harsh climate. The initial investment just makes it far more expensive than elsewhere.

There may be a potential for small scale projects, indeed a few are in process, but it seems unlikely that exploitation of mineral resources will become a major source of income anytime soon. This, according to Lidegaard, applies to the much-talked about uranium project and a large scale rare earth extraction. Besides, big and complex mining projects in Greenland require such an influx of capital and people that it would by itself be incompatible with current Greenlandic realities and capacities. Greenlanders would become a minority in their own country.⁴¹

Controversies over the import of foreigner workers, "social dumping" and Chinese investments are mild compared to the passions that the notion of drilling for oil in the Arctic provoke, but this fight goes on mostly outside the island. Greenland may have reserves of 20 billion barrels of oil within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), or the equivalent to as much as half of the entire North Sea oil fields. However, just like mining, the Scottish oil

³⁹ "Social and economic impact issues," *Greenland Mineral and Energy*, <http://gme.gl/en/social-and-economic-impact-issues>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

⁴⁰ "Kuupik åbner for dansk deltagelse i råstofeventyr", *Sermitsiaq.AG*, 19 November 2012, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/kuupik-aabner-dansk-deltagelse-raastofeventyr>, retrieved 17 July 2017.

⁴¹ Bo Lidegaard, interview.

company Cairn Energy's drilling has not yet yielded concrete results despite a \$1.2 billion investment in oil exploration.⁴² Environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace International, have campaigned vigorously against oil drilling off the coast of Greenland. The director of Greenpeace was arrested and deported after having scaled an oilrig in June 2011. Before climbing the rig, he described the campaign to stop Arctic oil drilling as "one of the defining environmental battles of our age."⁴³

Such protests have certainly had an impact and partly explain why only a relatively minor oil company has yet ventured in search of oil in Greenland. After the infamous BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, some big oil companies have suggested it is simply not worth the risk of a spill to drill in a region where its effects could be devastating and cleanup efforts extremely costly, not to mention the public relations consequences. Christophe de Margerie, the chief executive of the French oil company Total, told the Financial Times in 2012 that the risk of an oil spill in such an environmentally sensitive area was simply too high. "Oil on Greenland would be a disaster," he said in an interview. "A leak would do too much damage to the image of the company."⁴⁴

Environmental concerns, as important as they are, are probably not the main reason for decreased interest in drilling in Greenlandic waters. In less than a decade, or since 2008, the price of crude oil per barrel has gone down by two-thirds, and at \$50, there are cheaper alternatives to risky drilling in expensive and extreme conditions.⁴⁵ After some initial success, Cairn Energy abandoned its efforts as all other oil companies have as of mid-2017 withdrawn their licenses in West Greenland. It remains to be seen what happens when and whether the search for oil starts in even more hazardous conditions in the waters around North-East Greenland.⁴⁶ According to a US Embassy in Copenhagen cable from 2008, the possible oil and gas reserves of approximately 31.4 billion barrels in that area could make the region the 19th largest hydrocarbon reserve in the world, on par with Alaska's North Slope.⁴⁷

Not only has successful mining proved illusive in Greenland, but so has transpolar navigation, which has been named as one of the consequences of climate change that could benefit Greenland economically. Ships sailing between East Asia and Western Europe could save more than 40% in transportation time and fuel costs by navigating the northern sea lanes north of Siberia rather than the southern route through the Suez Canal. Safe, efficient transpolar navigation – straight through the Arctic sea – could be possible within decades.

⁴² "Grønland kan være tæt på stort oliefund", *Politiken*, 8 November 2011(<http://politiken.dk/erhverv/ECE1444385/groenland-kan-vaere-taet-paa-stort-oliefund/>, retrieved 26 January 2013).

⁴³ "Global Head of Greenpeace Deported from Greenland", *Greenpeace*, 21 June 2011 (<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/press/releases/Global-Head-of-Greenpeace-Deported-from-Greenland/> retrieved 21 January 2013).

⁴⁴ "Total warns against drilling in the Arctic," *Financial Times*, 25 September 2012. <https://www.ft.com/content/350be724-070a-11e2-92ef-00144feabdc0>

⁴⁵ "Crude oil prices – 70 year historical chart," *Macrotrends.net*, <http://www.macrotrends.net/1369/crude-oil-price-history-chart>, retrieved 28 June 2017.

⁴⁶ "Olíeventyr slut: Sidste olieselskab er ude af Vestgrønland", *Sermitsiaq.Ag*, 7 June 2017, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/olíeventyr-slut-sidste-olieselskab-ude-vestgroenland>, retrieved 28 June 2017.

⁴⁷ "Greenland votes on greater autonomy", *Wikileaks*, 21 November 2008 https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COPENHAGEN614_a.html, retrieved 16 July 2017.

But due to the ever-changing weather and harsh condition, even in an ice-free Arctic sea, transportation of goods would be too unpredictable to be reliable.

As if it was not enough that most of the mining and projects and transpolar sailings seem to be out of reach for the time being, the very idea of harnessing resources to secure independence has been undermined. A commission of experts published a report in early 2014 predicting that even if investors flocked to Greenland and most of the mining projects would become reality, it would not be enough to replace the current annual block grant from the Danish state in the Greenlandic budget. In the expert group's model, it would take the income from 12 different mining projects – at least five operating simultaneously at any time – until 2040 to come anywhere near replacing the annual grant. When the report was published, only six such projects had yet been identified.

In order to avoid importing most of the work force that such projects demand, experts suggest a slower economic tempo, among other things, to gain time for local capacity building. They also suggested limiting the activities to certain zones and within a limited time frame for environmental and cultural reasons. The Danish newspapers' headlines were almost triumphant in response to commission's conclusions. As it was put – in a rather slanted coverage – by the newspaper *Berlingske*: "Greenland's independence cannot be covered by the benefits of mining."⁴⁸ To many Greenlanders, this attitude was typical for Danish condescending dismissal of Greenlandic aspirations for independence.

⁴⁸ "Grønlands selvstændighed kan ikke dækkes af mineindtægter", *Berlingske* 23 January 2014, <https://www.b.dk/nationalt/groenlands-selvstaendighed-kan-ikke-daekkes-af-mineindtaegter>, retrieved 3 July 2017.



3. The importance of being Arctic

“The North is only a case of the general principle that man finds it easier to change the face of nature than to change his own mind.”

Canadian/Icelandic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic*, 1944.⁴⁹

The world woke up to what seemed to be a race for the Arctic in 2007 when the Russians used mini submarines to penetrate the ice on the North Pole and “raise” a Russian flag made of titanium on the seafloor. Although the flag planting was first and foremost a public relations coup, it provoked a furious reaction. As the Canadian Foreign Minister at the time, Peter MacKay put it: “This isn’t the 15th century. You can’t go around the world and just plant flags and say, ‘We’re claiming this territory.’”⁵⁰ Some analysts, like Scott Borgerson in a Foreign Affairs article in 2009 even predicted a 21st century “Great Game” in the Arctic region, referring to the Russian and British empires’ fight for supremacy in Central Asia in the 19th century. Borgerson drew a somewhat exaggerated picture of the situation where

⁴⁹ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic*. (New York, the Macmillan Company, 1944), 713.

⁵⁰ “Russia plants flag under N Pole”, BBC news, 2 August 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm> retrieved 1 July 2017), Lawrence W. Brigham, “Think Again: the Arctic”, *Foreign Policy*, Sept/Oct 2010.

claiming that in the next few years, it would be determined if there would be “international harmony and the rule of law, or a Hobbesian free-for-all.”⁵¹

Denmark has laid official claim to an area of roughly 150,000 square kilometers north of Greenland, including, somewhat ostentatiously, the North Pole. Canada and Russia have made overlapping claims to the potentially mineral and oil-rich Lomonosov Ridge, which they claim is an extension of their continental shelves.⁵² The Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf will examine this claim, made on the basis of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), but has no actual power to enforce its decisions. There is a consensus in the region that UNCLOS will be the main international treaty governing the Arctic and the eight state Arctic Council the main international body. Although it is not a party to UNCLOS, the United States shares this opinion and continues to adhere to UNCLOS.

Only five percent of the natural resources of the Arctic are understood to be geographically situated in the areas that have not been assigned to individual states’ economic zones.⁵³ In addition, the melting of the ice cap has opened up new perspectives in the Arctic regions, with the retreat of glaciers and the spectacular and dramatic melt of centuries-old ice.

Most analysts refer to a 2007 US geological survey that estimates that as much as 30% of the world’s undiscovered gas reserves and 13% of oil can be found in the Arctic as well as important supplies of coal, copper, diamonds, gold, lead and zinc.⁵⁴ Yet, few commentators have bothered to mention the huge climatic, geographic, environmental and geopolitical obstacles, which have already convinced major oil companies to shelve their Arctic plans. Indeed the 2007 figure is still used as a basis for policy despite the fact that oil prices have nose-dived in the past decade, thanks to new drilling techniques, notably fracking, that have unlocked vast reserves of gas and oil that were unreachable until just a few years ago, not to mention justified fears of oil spill in the aftermath the BP Gulf of Mexico incident.⁵⁵

So far, Borgerson’s “Great Game” has yet to take place. On the contrary, in the decade that has lapsed since Borgerson’s article, international cooperation seems to have held remarkably well. Despite the Arctic Council’s power limitations, the main regional body has been successful in dealing with the interest of non-arctic states. The image of the Russian flag-planting on the North Pole was exceptionally strong, putting diplomats on “high alert.” The result was the so-called Ilulissat Declaration by the five coastal Arctic States: the United

⁵¹ Scott Borgerson, “The Great Game Moves North”, *Foreign Affairs*, 25 March 2009, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64905/scott-g-borgerson/the-great-game-moves-north>, retrieved 1 July 2017

⁵² “Why does Denmark think it can lay claim the North Pole?”, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/dec/16/why-denmark-thinks-it-can-lay-claim-to-north-pole>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

⁵³ Martin Breum, *Når isen forsvinder. Danmark som stormagt i Arktis, Grønlands rigdomme og kampen om Nordpolen*. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2013), 231.

⁵⁴ “Arctic may hold as much as a fifth of undiscovered oil and gas reserves”, *New York Times*, 24 July 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/business/worldbusiness/24iht-arctic.4.14767779.html?pagewanted=all> retrieved 12 November 2012 Chen Gang: “China’s growing Arctic interest.” <http://www.esi.nus.edu.sg/docs/event/china-s-growing-arctic-interest.pdf>, retrieved 30 June 2017.

⁵⁵ “How American energy independence could change the world”, *BBC*, 3 April 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-23151813>, retrieved 30 June 2017.

States, Russia, Norway, Denmark on behalf of Greenland and Canada. The declaration was issued at a meeting of the “Arctic Five” in May 2008. It was convened by Denmark with the magnificent icebergs of the UNESCO World Heritage site Ilulissat icefjord in Greenland as a backdrop, which added a wonderful photo opportunity to the event itself.⁵⁶ In reality, there was nothing new in the declaration as such, since it reiterated previous commitments of the five states to abide by UNCLOS.⁵⁷ The fact that the five coastal states made the declaration and not the Arctic Council was meant to underscore that the stakeholders were sovereign states with coastlines near the Arctic. Indigenous people who would have a voice in the Arctic Council were excluded from this venue, while the voices of those who have campaigned for the Arctic to be a part of world heritage were similarly unheard.

The Ilulissat conference, which was a direct consequence of the flag-planting episode, projected, an image of “normalcy” versus “exception” with calls for an international treaty and the like to protect an “exceptional” treasure of humanity. But as the scholars Steinberg, Tasch and Gerhardt point out.

The very existence of a declaration affirming the Arctic’s normalcy suggests that the Arctic is *not* completely normal. Or if it is normal, there are enough perceptions of it being exceptional that its normalcy is contested, and therefore must be defended.”

58

At the Hotel Arctic in Ilulissat, international calls for the protection of the Arctic remains the proverbial elephant in the room, where the coastal states proclaimed the status quo and business as usual. China has, for example, shown increased interest in the Arctic, not least Greenland, over the past decade. In a landmark speech in 2009 in Svalbard (Spitsbergen), Hu Zhengyue, China’s Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that China recognized the rights of coastal states and would abide by international law. Tellingly, however, he added that international laws should be refined and developed due to new circumstances arising from the melting of the ice and that the Arctic states should recognize the interests of non-Arctic states in what he called “the common heritage of humanity.” He called for a “balance between the interests of Arctic coastal states and the shared interests of the International community.” This call for a stake-holding message corresponds to China’s current self-identification as a “near-arctic” state.⁵⁹

Science is one of the reasons for China’s interest in the Arctic. China is, of course, well aware of the implications of climate change in the North on weather patterns globally, including China. It has for many years operated an Arctic scientific research center in Svalbard. Although the research budget for scientific work in Antarctica still dwarfs financing for Arctic

⁵⁶ Philip E. Steinberg, Jeremy Tasch, Hannes Gerhardt, *Contesting the Arctic. Politics and imaginaries in the circumpolar north*. (London: I.B. Tauris, London, 2015), 23.

⁵⁷ The United States has not ratified the convention but approved it as a means of resolving border issues concerning the continental shelf in the Arctic by Presidential Directive 9 January 2009. Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020*, (Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), 20.

⁵⁸ Steinberg, Tasch, Gerhardt, *Contesting the Arctic*, 5–10.

⁵⁹ François Perrault, “The role(s) of China in the Arctic” in Elena Conde, Sara Iglesias (eds.): *Global challenges in the Arctic region. Sovereignty, environment and geopolitical balance* (Oxon: Routledge 2017), 424.

research, the opening of transpolar shipping routes is used as an argument to increase funding and research in the Arctic region.

In addition to economic reasons, China is very sensitive to tensions and insecurity in the Malacca straits, through which up to 75% of Chinese oil imports are shipped, and would welcome alternative transport routes.⁶⁰

In late 2016, authorities in Nuuk were caught unawares when a Danish website, the Defense Watch, reported that Denmark had withdrawn an abandoned naval station from sale, to stop a Chinese company from purchasing it. The decision was taken without consulting the Greenlandic authorities, which could be interpreted as a violation of the so-called Itilleq declaration, a joint-declaration between Nuuk and Copenhagen on the involvement of Greenlandic authorities in foreign and security policy.

The base in Kangilinnguit (Grønnedal in Danish) was established by the US army in 1942 and taken over by Denmark in 1951. It was closed in 2014 and put up for sale. The Minister of Defense said at the time that the army “had no use for it,” and it even disappeared from army maps. The interest of a Chinese company provoked a change of heart. It was, indeed, hard to see what benefits a foreign company could have from the derelict buildings, not to mention the costly clean up necessitated after military use.⁶¹

Danish authorities refused to comment on the issue, but according to Bo Lidegaard, from a security policy point of view, it would raise concerns both in Nuuk and Copenhagen if a foreign major power established itself on a former military base. “I believe this creates complications in a general security policy perspective.”⁶² It is certainly legitimate to question whether Chinese interests in Greenland are political, economic or both. The company, which had shown interest in the naval base, was the same that bought the iron-ore project in Isukasia in the Nuuk-fjord, the General Nice Development Limited. “While the “hand of the Chinese state becomes visible when a company declares that an investment “implements a minister’s vision,”” says Chinese commentator Jichang Lulu in an analysis published by the China Policy Institute, it can still be “guessed behind moves, like the bid for a naval base, with no more plausible motivation than earning the state’s favour.”

⁶⁰ Maria Ackrén, Uffe Jakobsen, *Greenland as a self-governing sub-national territory in international relations: Past, current and future perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271898950_Greenland_as_a_self-governing_sub-national_territory_in_international_relations_Past_current_and_future_perspectives retrieved 23 August 2017.

Emmanuel Lincot, Barthélemy Courmont, *La Chine en défi*, (Paris, Éditions Érick Bonnier, 2012), 215-224. Ian Storey, “China’s “Malacca Dilemma””, *China Brief*, Volume: 6 Issue: 8, 12 April 2006 http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31575&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=196&no_cache=1, retrieved 24 August 2017.

⁶¹ “Danmark forhindrer kinesisk opkøb af marinebase i Grønland”, *Defense Watch*, 14 December 2016, <http://www.defencewatch.dk/danmark-forhindrer-kinesisk-opkoeb-marinebase-groenland/> retrieved 16 July 2017.

⁶² “Kinesisk selskab i Grønnedal vil vække bekymring”, *Kalaalit Nunaata Radioa*, 20 December 2016, <http://knr.gl/da/nyheder/kinesisk-selskab-i-gr%C3%B8nnedal-vil-v%C3%A6kke-bekymring>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

There is no evidence that everything China does in the Arctic is part of a grand strategy, but the major force driving investments has been the Ministry of Land and Resources.

The Ministry controls, in fact, the Chengdu Institute for the Multipurpose Utilisation of Mineral Resources, the largest shareholder in the Shenghe Company. As mentioned previously, the Chinese company bought a large part of the Greenland Mining and Energy, which is behind the rare earth-uranium project in Kvanefjeld. To Jichang Lulu, Shenghe's actions in Greenland can be read as part of state-directed strategies concerning rare-earth assets abroad and Arctic resources.⁶³ The previously mentioned lead and zinc mining project in Citronen fjord on Peary Land is operated by China Nonferrous, which is owned by the Chinese central government. Jichang Lulu points out that China Nonferrous is explicit about its "pioneering role, that goes beyond its primarily economic motivations."⁶⁴

Danish politicians have not been vocal about Chinese interest in Greenland, perhaps because of efforts to attract investment in Denmark proper. The Danish army, on the other hand, has been openly suspicious of Chinese motives.⁶⁵ It has been argued that not only might the Chinese want to protect Chinese economic interest but also thousands of Chinese workers, if they ever join the Greenlandic work force. The evacuation of 36,000 Chinese workers from Libya in 2011 provoked a debate in China and was used as an argument for strengthening its naval forces. What happened in Libya could happen in Angola, where the Chinese work force is 80,000 strong (bigger than the population of Greenland). While no one contemplates a civil war in Greenland, the presence of Chinese workers and economic interests, could have important geopolitical consequences and constitute a security threat. However, after almost a decade of speculation Chinese mining has yet to come into fruition, although they may be closer to be realization now than at any point in the past few years. The 36 Chinese workers in the fishing factory still constitute the only Chinese personnel in Greenland.

Some Chinese academics have in the past few years urged that China should develop a "regional identity" by becoming a "provider of global goods" in the Arctic by investing in infrastructure and capabilities. There are indications that China is willing to make such investments.⁶⁶ Talks took place in 2015 between Vittus Qujaukitsoq, who at the time held both foreign affairs, trade and finance portfolios in the Greenlandic government, and potential investors in China on hydraulic and mining infrastructure projects.⁶⁷

What needs to be stressed is the limited infrastructure in Greenland. There are roads in and around major settlements and the only deep-sea harbours are on the west-coast. The only international airport was built by the US army, naturally with its own needs in mind. China's interest in Greenland is not new. As early as 2005, then Prime Minister of Greenland Hans

⁶³ Jichang Lulu, China Greenland.

⁶⁴ Jichang Lulu, "Greenland's mines could finally attract Chinese investment", *China Policy Institute*, 7 December 2015, <https://cpianalysis.org/2015/12/07/greenlands-mines-could-finally-attract-chinese-investment/>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

⁶⁵ Jichang Lulu, China Greenland.

⁶⁶ Perrault, The role(s) of China, 428.

⁶⁷ Jichang Lulu, "Greenland airports: possible Chinese investment?", *Jichang Lulu Blog*, 9 December 2015, <https://jichanglulu.wordpress.com/2015/12/09/greenland-airports-possible-chinese-investment/>, retrieved 16 July 2017

Enoksen visited China. Ove Karl Berthelsen, Greenland's Minister for Industry and Natural Resources was also received on an unusually high-level by China's Vice-Premier (and future Premier) Li Keqiang, while visiting China in November 2011.⁶⁸

Perhaps most important of all was Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Denmark in 2012. Then Greenlandic Prime Minister Kleist flew to Copenhagen to be present. The Arctic was not formally on the agenda during the 3-day state visit, but some leading commentators suggested that Greenland was, at least, present in spirit. "He didn't come just to look at the Little Mermaid," said Damien Degeorges, a French Greenland expert. "Most analysts agree that when China looks towards Denmark, it also looks towards Greenland."⁶⁹

Since launching its "break-out" or "going global" strategy, China has over the past decade and a half actively encouraged its companies to invest abroad. One aim is to foster a closer relationship with commodity producing countries, primarily in Latin America and Africa and secure access to the raw materials needed for China's continued economic growth.

The Western world has been relatively impotent, while a *Chinafrica* or *Chinafrique* has emerged, where China has bought the hearts and minds, and natural resources often by financing and building pet projects for authoritarian regimes, such as parliamentary buildings and sport stadiums. Except for access to raw material and minimal support for Chinese objectives (such as severing the ties with Taiwan and ignoring the Dalai Lama), there are no strings attached to Chinese aid and investment as long as there are no complaints regarding bad governance or any human rights violations.⁷⁰

Chinafrica was clearly welcomed in African countries like copper-rich Zambia, where the Chinese invested not only in mining but also in tourism. Chinese immigrants moved into towns and started and built schools and hospitals. Many jobs were created, but then conflicts broke out. China's mine owners have been prepared to use fire-arms against miners, when they demanded improved work-safety, but criminal charges that were raised against the owners were suddenly dropped after Chinese pressure on the Zambian government.

Michael Sata (1937–2014), a former Zambian President who was elected on an anti-Chinese ticket, had no sooner taken office than he cozied up to Chinese interests. "By that time, China's stake in Zambia was such a vital component of the economy that only a supreme effort of political resolve could have reduced Beijing's influence", was the verdict on Sata in

⁶⁸ Degeorges, The role of Greenland, 10-11.

⁶⁹ However, one cannot overlook that Denmark was at the time Chair of the six-month rotating EU Presidency and certainly China's bid for a permanent observer status in the Arctic Council could also have been discussed, if the Arctic subject was mentioned at all.

"In Denmark, Hu Jintao sets eyes on Greenland", *Euractiv.com* 18-19 June 2012 (<http://www.euractiv.com/sustainability/denmark-china-sets-eyes-greenland-news-513354>, retrieved 27 June 2017).

⁷⁰ Serge Michel, Michel Beuret, *La Chinafrique* (Nouvelle édition augmentée). (Paris: Pluriel, 2009), 369, 373. Joseph S. Nye, "China's Soft Power Deficit", *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 May 2012 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304451104577389923098678842.html>, retrieved 21 August 2017.

an obituary in the Daily Telegraph. “Having been the first senior African politician to challenge China, he became a compliant partner for Beijing once he was in power.”⁷¹

Whether other foreign investors would behave differently is anybody’s guess. Chinese companies are certainly not the only ones accused of taking advantage of poor countries, but for the time being for Greenland China is the only show in town.⁷² It is worth noting that in the context of India’s colonization by the Great Britain that there was no Grand Plan of political domination when merchants first installed their businesses in India: political designs followed and did not precede the investment. In other words, Chinese investment could – even if it is not politically motivated – potentially engender Chinese political interference in the region as a consequence, despite being understood to be an integral party of the Western sphere of influence.

Bo Lidegaard points out that there has been “a lot of talk” about Chinese investment but that nothing has materialized:

There was a real Chinese interest in Greenland ten years ago with all these big projects coming up, but it has vanished. I think they have bigger fish to fry and when their President was here five years ago, they may have realized that the potential secession of Greenland is comparable to situations at home, which they want to avoid. Since then, they have been careful in dealing with the Danish government, and don’t want to create the impression that they are helping some break-away.⁷³

⁷¹ “Michael Sata- obituary”, *The Telegraph*, 29 October 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11195960/Michael-Sata-obituary.html>, retrieved 20 July 2017.

⁷² “China in Africa: The New Imperialists?”, *The New Yorker*, 12 June 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/china-in-africa-the-new-imperialists> retrieved 20 July 2017

⁷³ Bo Lidegaard, interview.



4. Greenland: key to Denmark's "Arctic super power"

Ironically, as Greenland aspirations for independence have been influenced by Climate Change, that very same phenomenon fuels Denmark's dreams of becoming "a major power" in the Arctic. How Denmark can aspire to a prominent role in the region without Greenland is a legitimate question.

In many ways, Greenland and Denmark are strange bedfellows. On the one hand, there is the world's biggest island, with 2.2 million square kilometers, and on the other hand a small European country, ranking 30th in size in Europe with 45,000 square kilometers. Including Greenland, it is Europe's second largest and the world's 12th biggest country by area. So small is Denmark by comparison that Greenland's rank would barely change on the list – it would move only down one position – if it would stand-alone on the list without Denmark.⁷⁴ But while barely 60,000 people live in Greenland, Denmark is home to about 6 million people. As a matter of fact, Danes often refer to their country affectionately as "et lille land" or the small country.

But the same geographical factors that contributed to Greenland's isolation for centuries are now putting it center stage, and at the same time considerably increasing Denmark's strategic importance.

⁷⁴ "Countries of the World by Area", *Nationsonline*, http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/countries_by_area.htm, retrieved 23 August 2017.

The strategic importance of Greenland for the United States has been acknowledged since the times of US President Abraham Lincoln and the acquisition of Alaska from Russia in the 19th century. Denmark, on the other hand was, from a military and strategic point of view, of small value to the United States when it weighed the pros and cons of a military alliance to match a perceived Soviet threat in the prelude of NATO's creation after the Second World War.

Greenland, however, was considered indispensable along with Iceland and the Azores to implement the so-called "stepping stones" strategy by connecting North America and Europe. In February 1949 Tom Connally (1877–1963), the chairman of the U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee argued that the advantage of NATO membership for the US was the access it permitted the installation of military bases in Greenland and Iceland. Without that, in his view the US had little to gain from the North Atlantic Treaty.⁷⁵

In 1951, Denmark and the United States signed a defense treaty to update and replace the 1941 agreement without consulting the population of Greenland. As a result, the US acquired its sought-after military bases, improving its security tremendously. Danish forces were to play no significant role in defending Greenland, but to maintain Danish sovereignty, they were given such tasks as monitoring of sea routes, search and rescue, and fisheries inspection as well as operating the SIRIUS Sledge Patrol.⁷⁶

The military and geopolitical importance of Greenland has changed since the 1950s. Most of the US military bases closed after 1990 with the exception of the Thule base.⁷⁷ After 9/11 Thule has become critical once more for the US Army as a hub for ballistic missile early-warning systems and space surveillance. Currently the base hosts a staff of fewer than 1,000 persons, including a couple of hundred US army personnel, but this could be increased to 10,000 if filled to capacity.

Climate change and globalization have definitely turned the world's attention to Greenland. Until the 20th century Nordic statesmen and the odd EU diplomat and US general were virtually the only foreign dignitaries to visit the island. This all changed in the last decade. The leaders of the hitherto remote and isolated Arctic country received more important statesmen than most of their Nordic neighbours and more than many much bigger and important independent countries. The official visit to Greenland in September 2012, of Lee Myung-Bak, the President of South-Korea was truly historic and a reminder that China is not the only Asian country interested in the Arctic.⁷⁸

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Greenland in 2007 and the flow of visiting statesmen has not stopped. The US participation in the 2011 Arctic Council Ministerial

⁷⁵ Ralf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North*, 41-44, quoted in: Valur Ingimundarson, *Í eldlínu kalda stríðsins. Samskipti Íslands og Bandaríkjanna 1945-1960*. (Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell, 1996). 129

⁷⁶ Jørgen Taagholt, Jens Claus Hansen, *Greenland: Security Perspectives*. Trans. Daniel Lufkin. (Fairbanks: Arctic Research Consortium of the United States, 2001).

<https://www.arcus.org/files/publication/24792/greenland.pdf> , retrieved 21 June 2017, 31.

⁷⁷ Ackrén, Jakobsen, Greenland as a self-governing, 3.

⁷⁸ "Grønlandsk jubel efter historiske aftaler," *Sermitsiaq.AG*, 10 September 2012 <http://sermitsiaq.ag/node/135453>, retrieved 1 July 2017.

Meeting was upgraded to Secretary of State level when Hillary Clinton attended the meeting in Nuuk.⁷⁹ Her successor, John Kerry, also visited Greenland in the spring of 2016, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council also visited the island in 2014 and 2016.⁸⁰

Some Greenlandic leaders such as former Premier Lars-Emil Johansen complain that Danish ministers are the hosts when foreign dignitaries visit Greenland. "In 2017 Denmark still thinks it has the right to treat Greenland as its back-yard. They should show more respect towards the fact that Greenland is on its way towards independence," says Johansen, who is currently the Speaker of Inatsisartut, the Greenlandic parliament.⁸¹

Danish politicians and opinion makers have in recent year increasingly embraced publicly the geopolitical importance of Greenland. "We carry simply more weight in Beijing and Washington and Berlin, because we are linked to Greenland. It is one of the elements that make Denmark unique in foreign policy term," says Martin Lidegaard the Greenland-born former Foreign Minister of Denmark (2011–2014), adding that Denmark's influence in the Arctic elevates the country in general on the international stage. "It means that we can better promote Denmark's general foreign policy interests and goals."⁸²

Rear Admiral Nils Wang Commandant of the Royal Danish Defense College goes even further: "As Danes we should be conscious that we have a central position thanks to Greenland. Without Greenland, we would be reduced to a very ordinary small European country that would only exceptionally be invited to the high table with the United States, Russia and China."⁸³

Greenlandic politicians are well aware of the strategic importance of their country and the leverage that the bases gave Denmark vis-à-vis the US. "By controlling Greenland, Denmark grew in significance to the American administration," Kuupik Kleist wrote in 2010.⁸⁴ Some even maintain that for Denmark the annual block grant that it pays to Greenland is actually a very good investment; after all, US demands less of Denmark in terms of military spending because of its access to military bases in Greenland. As recently as in 2016, Vittus Qujaukitsoq, the outgoing Minister for Foreign Affairs claimed that Greenland has been cheated out of compensation for hosting the US bases, which only "fostered trouble and pollution" while Denmark gained more influence via its NATO membership.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ "Hillary Clinton lands in Greenland for Arctic summit", *Reuters*, 11 May 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-arctic-clinton-idUSTRE74A4ZH20110511>, retrieved 28 June 2017.

⁸⁰ "Secretary Kerry visited Denmark and Greenland", *US Embassy in Denmark*, 6 July 2016 <https://dk.usembassy.gov/secretary-john-kerry-visited-denmark/> "Formand Donald Tusk besøgte Danmark og Grønland 17.-18. maj 2016", *Det Europæiske raad*, pressemeddelelse 13 maj 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/da/press/press-releases/2016/05/13-tusk-visit-denmark-greenland/>, retrieved 25 June 2017.

⁸¹ Lars-Emil Johansen, interview.

⁸² Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 204.

⁸³ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 221.

⁸⁴ Kuupik Kleist, "Greenland is getting ready to stand alone", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/15/independent-greenland-mineral-resources-denmark>, retrieved 26 June 2017.

⁸⁵ "Greenland blasts Denmark", *The Copenhagen Post*, 13 December 2016, <http://cphpost.dk/news/greenland-blasts-denmark-your-arrogance-is-devastating.html>, retrieved 10 August 2017.

Such rankling claims have sometimes in the past provoked sharp rebuke from Denmark. Klaus Carsten Pedersen, then director of The Danish Foreign Policy Society, accused Greenlandic politicians recently of promoting “false myths”:

It is a misunderstanding that Denmark earns some kind of a billion-dollar rebate within NATO in compensation for the US military presence in Greenland. Nothing indicates that the Americans have ever paid rent for the Thule Air Base. Neither can it be demonstrated that Denmark pays less to NATO than other member states.⁸⁶

Carsten Pedersen’s comments carry weight because of his directorship at the time in the Foreign Policy Society, whose protector is the Crown Prince of Denmark. In fact, Denmark’s military expenditure in 2015 was 1.18% of GDP, well below the NATO average of 2.42% and the 1.43% European NATO average. While military spending was below the 2% target advocated by the US, the Danish defense budget was equal in percentage to that of Germany but considerably less than that of Norway.⁸⁷ Søren Espersen “doesn’t buy” that Denmark has got a free ride within NATO because of Greenland. To him, we also „have good-will because of the contributions of our top class and modern military in Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁸⁸

During the cold war, the United States was concerned about the reluctance of the Danish government to increase military spending. The Danish government was quite aware how this imbalance in the military importance of Greenland presented for the alliance on the one hand and the challenge that the defense of Denmark on the other hand. As a matter of fact, Denmark used Greenland as a bargaining chip when it came to the former’s total contribution to NATO defense. The Americans were asked to compensate for the use of military basis in Greenland, with American concessions to Denmark. The government of Hans Hedtoft (1903-1955) explicitly “requested special security guarantees for southern Denmark as compensation for a permanent American presence in Greenland in 1949–1950.”

In addition, the continuation of American military aid in the 1950s, despite the fact that Denmark did not meet “NATO’s strength goals”, can be legitimately seen as compensation for the US bases in Greenland. Indeed, the Danish government was hailed for giving “the United States quite a free hand in Greenland” in a report to President Eisenhower in the late 1950s.⁸⁹

In a memorandum to President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973) before the visit of Danish Prime Minister Jens Otto Kragh (1914-1978) to the US in 1964, Secretary of State Dean Rusk (1909-1994), warned that Danish contributions to NATO defense were low and not expected

⁸⁶ “Myter om bloktilskud skaber ondt blod”, *Sermitsiaq.AG*, 6 December 2012, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/kl/node/142291>

⁸⁷ “Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2008-2015),” *NATO*, 28 January 2016, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_01/20160129_160128-pr-2016-11-eng.pdf, retrieved 4 July 2017.

⁸⁸ Søren Espersen, interview.

⁸⁹ Taagholt; Hansen, *Greenland: Security Perspectives*, 39.

to rise. "Denmark regards, with justification, the rent-free base rights which the United States enjoys in Greenland as a significant contribution to Western security." Soon after, the US Embassy in Copenhagen emphasized in a status report that "Denmark quite rightly continues to regard Greenland and our activities there as a major contribution to NATO."⁹⁰

Bo Lidegaard acknowledges that seen from Beijing, Washington or Moscow "the first thing you see is Greenland; it is much bigger from any perspective, much more important." But in his opinion, this "is like having a discussion, after 600 years of marriage, about who owes what to whom, who took care of the children, who made the money. This calculation simply doesn't add up, because you cannot compare incomparable things."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Here after: *Danmark under den kolde krig Den sikkerhedspolitiske situation 1945-1991. Bind 2, 1963-1978*, (Copenhagen: Dansk institut for international studier, 2005), 693-696. „Memorandum for the President“, Dean Rusk, 6. June 1964, NARA, RG 59, General Records of the Dep. of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Box 2113. „Danish-American Relations in Retrospect“, AmEmbassy to Dep. of State, 16. May 1964.

⁹¹ Bo Lidegaard, interview.



5. Raising the flag

"We are not a major power in the Arctic because we raise the Greenlandic flag once a year."

Gitte Seeberg, former MP and MEP and Secretary-General of WWF.

Climate change has (so far mostly in theory, less in practice) paved the way for harnessing Greenland's rich natural resources. Paradoxically the consequences of a warming arctic are both fueling of the independence dreams of Greenlanders and Danish aspirations of becoming a major power in the Arctic, all thanks to Greenland. It can be argued that Greenland will hardly be independent if Denmark is to become an Arctic superpower and Denmark will not even be Arctic without Greenland, let alone a major power in the region.

Despite Greenland's right to secession, Denmark's role as a major power in the Arctic is at the center of a new Arctic strategy as well as in a new Foreign Policy white paper issued on behalf of the Commonwealth of the Realm. As late as 2013 Martin Breum, a well-known Danish TV anchorman, turned Greenland expert, published a book titled: *When the ice disappears. Denmark as a major power in the Arctic, the richness of Greenland and the fight over the North-Pole*. Only a year later Breum published a follow-up entitled *The Ballad of Greenland. The wish for secession, the minerals and Denmark's dilemma*. The two book titles together sum up neatly the current contradictions that Danish leaders are trying to live with.

Some have criticized the Danish government for not following up on its rhetoric. The decision to introduce a Greenlandic flag day in Denmark was met with derision. “It is hard to overlook Putin’s arms race in the Arctic,” commented Gitte Seeberg, former Conservative MP and MEP and Secretary-General of WWF. “Meanwhile, [Danish Prime Minister] Lars Løkke Rasmussen shows his interest in the Arctic by flagging the Greenlandic flag once a year in state institutions, while at the same time Eskimology studies at the University of Copenhagen have de facto been closed down... We are not a major power in the Arctic because we raise the Greenlandic flag once a year.”⁹²

Russia is by no means the only country to have challenged other countries in the Arctic by waving a national flag. “Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the Arctic: Either we use it or we lose it,” former Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, even before Russia’s North Pole flag was planted. He followed up by announcing the building of six to eight new Arctic patrol ships and a deep-water port to help reassert Canada’s sovereignty in the “Far North.”⁹³

Neither Canada nor Denmark are innocent of flag-planting, albeit not on the North Pole but on *Tartupaluk* (‘Hans Ø’ in Danish, Hans Island in English) a small island between Greenland and Ellesmere Island in Canada. Ownership of the islet has been disputed by Canada and Denmark on behalf of Greenland, since the early 1970’s. Denmark has sent coast guard vessels to raise the “*Dannebrog*”, the Danish flag, on the island, but in August 2005 the Danish flag was provocatively taken down and replaced with the Canadian maple leaf flag by the Canadian Defense Minister, Bill Graham. The Danish flag, however, was politely sent to the Danish Embassy in Ottawa and the issue is the subject of ongoing discussions between the two NATO countries.⁹⁴

Polar bears do not recognize any borders. But for the past fifteen years, Canada has increased border patrols on both sides of the Greenlandic-Canadian border and hunters have had to stop hunting their prey when they reach the demarcation line of national territory. “For the Polar Eskimos the land across the border belongs to them traditionally and culturally. They suffer,” says Natuk Lund Olsen, a Senior Greenlandic Official and a native of this region.⁹⁵

One can argue that the core of Danish security policy and defense in Greenland and the Arctic consists in simple act of raising the flag. Defense is one of the issues that remain in the hands of Denmark according to the self-rule agreement, but it is de facto delegated to the US. In the Danish Kingdom’s Arctic Policy (2011–2020) defense is virtually only mentioned in passing since it is “covered by the NATO treaty Article 5 regarding collective defense.” The task of the Danish Armed Forces is the “(e)nforcement of sovereignty, (which)

⁹² Gitte Seeberg, “Danmark er ikke en arktisk stormagt, fordi vi hejser grønlandske flag én gang om året”, *Jyllands-Posten*, 28 January 2016. <http://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/blogs/gitteseeborg/ECE8402100/danmark-er-ikke-en-arktisk-stormagt-fordi-vi-hejser-groenlandske-flag-en-gang-om-aaret/>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

⁹³ “Ottawa buying up to 8 Arctic patrol ships”, *CBC News*, 9 July 2017 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa-buying-up-to-8-arctic-patrol-ships-1.651892>, retrieved 6 July 2017. Andreas Kuersten: “The Arctic Race that Wasn’t Hyperbole, Imaginaries, and the North Pole”, *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, 20 August 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/2015-08-20/arctic-race-wasn't>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

⁹⁴ Breum, Når isen forsvinder, 289-290.

⁹⁵ Natuk Lund Olsen, interview, Nuuk, 7 June 2017.

is exercised...through a visible presence in the region where surveillance is central to the task.”⁹⁶

The exercise of sovereignty is also at the core of the so-called Taksøe-report, named after Danish diplomat Peter Taksøe-Jensen, who was given the task of producing a white paper with recommendation for the future Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Denmark. One of the major recommendations is that the Arctic should be “up-prioritized”, given the fact that the Kingdom of Denmark is a “major power” in the Arctic. Sovereignty shall be exercised by increased reliance on surveillance by satellite and an increased funding to the military, including at least one frigate, which should be devoted to the Arctic.⁹⁷

If visibility is important to exercise sovereignty, then virtually-invisible satellites are doubtfully any answer. Traditionally 2–3 coast guard ships patrol the 2,700 km-long East-coast of Greenland, which has a population of about 6,000. Since there is no deep-sea port on that side of the island, they operate out of Reykjavik, the capital of neighbouring Iceland.

Since the Second World War, “The Sirius Patrol”, a special forces unit equipped with dog sleds patrols the wilderness in northern and eastern Greenland; 12 elite soldiers and dozens of dogs exercising sovereignty on thousands of square kilometers. Some concrete steps have already been taken to increase the presence of the Danish armed forces. In 2012, the Arctic commando and Faroese commando of the Danish Navy merged and its headquarters were moved to Nuuk. This decision has been criticized as a demonstration of Danish power in Greenland. “Where else do you see soldiers dressed in uniform on the streets of a capital city?”, asks Svend Hardenberg, former Greenlandic senior official and pro-independence advocate.⁹⁸

As Denmark controls the Kingdom of Denmark’s foreign policy, “white paper” public meetings were held both in Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. This is, however, not reflected on the cover of the report where it is described, in a subtitle, a “the way forward for Denmark’s interests and values until 2030.” This subtitle is for unrevealed reason omitted in the English language Executive Summary. “The foundation of Denmark’s strategic orientation is our *European* identity, the membership of NATO and the Nordic welfare society, Greenland’s and the Faroe island’s position in North-America and the North-Atlantic, as well as our strong relationship with the United States.” In this text, there is no room for anything but pure European identity and western solidarity. There is no mention of Inuit identity and relationships with other Inuits or Indigenous people in the US, Canada or Russia, not to mention such “nuances” that the two other parts of the Kingdom of Denmark are not members of the European Union. Greenland and the Faroe Islands are more seen as geopolitical assets of Denmark since they are apparently not considered equal partners.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, 20.

⁹⁷ Peter Taksøe-Jensen (ed.), *Dansk diplomati og forsvar i en brydningstid. Vejen frem for Danmarks interesser og værdier mod 2030. Udredning om dansk udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik*. (Copenhagen: Ministry of foreign affairs, 2016)

⁹⁸ Svend Hardenberg, interview, Nuuk 8 June 2017.

⁹⁹ Taksøe-Jensen, *Dansk diplomati*, IX.

When it comes to the Arctic policy, documents refer to the Ilulissat declaration as a self-proclaimed Danish foreign policy triumph. While all of this was done in the name of Greenland, it emerged that there was no consensus there on the issue. Kuupik Kleist, the leader of the leftist Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) became Prime Minister after winning the June 2009 elections in Greenland. By then he had criticized Denmark's claim to an area near the North Pole for at least two years. "In my opinion, it is in Greenland's interest that the North Pole and the area around should not be allocated to any state. It should be of common responsibility and devoted to research under international control."¹⁰⁰

The Danish Foreign Ministry was either ignorant of – or patently ignored – the Greenlandic Prime Minister's point of view until 2011 when the Danish newspaper Berlingske broke the story. Kleist reiterated his point of view and added that he would welcome that the North Pole belonged to the international community regulated by a treaty, just like Antarctica. Preparation for an Arctic Council Summit in Nuuk were underway when the story broke and a new Arctic Strategy for the Kingdom of Denmark was in the finishing stages. After pressure from Copenhagen, Kuupik Kleist gave in and said that he had expressed only his personal opinion.

The new Arctic Strategy was issued in May the same year in the name of Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands with the Ilulissat Declaration, as its core. Lene Esperen, Denmark's Foreign Minister said there was a consensus that a "nature reservation" on the North Pole was a "beautiful vision", that could be possibly be looked at after the area had been divided between the coastal state under the mechanism of UNCLOS. However, this 'vision' was not even mentioned in the Arctic Strategy.¹⁰¹

Many scholars have analyzed developments following the Russian flag-planting on the North Pole almost a decade ago along with the Ilulissat process and have come to the conclusion that the imagery or narrative of an "Arctic race" or "scramble for the Arctic" is overblown.¹⁰² It can even be argued that the international cooperation and international law has functioned remarkably well in the region and states have declared that the UNCLOS process will determine claims to the remaining area outside their economic zones.¹⁰³

Scholars such as Valur Ingimundarson, professor at the University of Iceland dismiss "the scramble for the Arctic", as "media hype, political rhetoric and posturing" which has "created an exaggerated picture of Arctic resource possibilities and conflict scenarios."¹⁰⁴ The Danish Strategy for the Arctic refers to the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008, saying that it has "hopefully once and for all dispel(led) the myth of a race to the North Pole."¹⁰⁵ Indeed,

¹⁰⁰ Breum, Når isen forsvinder, 143-147

¹⁰¹ Breum, Når isen forsvinder, 143-147.

¹⁰² Kristine Offerdal, "Interstate relations", in Rolf Tamnes, Kristine Offerdal (eds.): *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 82.

¹⁰³ Andreas Kuersten, "The Arctic Race that Wasn't. Hyperbole, Imaginaries, and the North Pole", *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, 20 August 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/2015-08-20/arctic-race-wasnt>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Valur Ingimundarson, "The Geopolitics of Natural Resources", *The European Parliament*, 31 August 2010, <http://www.tepsa.eu/download/Valur%20Ingimundarson.pdf>, retrieved 17 July 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Kingdom of Denmark, 10.

there are no immediate military threats in the region according to the Danish parliamentary agreement on defense from 2009.

But if there is in fact no 'Scramble for the Arctic' and no military threats to speak of, it begs the question as to why Denmark is so concerned about increasing its capacity for defense, surveillance and the exercise of sovereignty.¹⁰⁶ Some independence activists in Greenland claim that the rhetoric should be viewed in the perspective of Greenland's aspirations for independence. Denmark's role in Greenland resides largely in exercising sovereignty, coast guard duties and foreign affairs. Sven Hardenberg sees the escalation of the presence of the Danish army in Greenland in this perspective: the more dangerous the situation is, the more important it will be for Greenland to rely on the Denmark's protection and financing, and the harder it will be for Greenland to become independent.¹⁰⁷

Paradoxically, former Prime Minister Jonathan Motzfeldt (1938-2010), who signed off on the Danish Kingdom's plans to claim areas around the North Pole, claimed that Denmark's motives were, "without doubt" to underline Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland and "anchor" its rule over the island. Former Danish Foreign Minister, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, says that there is real military escalation in the Arctic, such as the establishment of Russian Arctic forces and the reintroduction of the Russian Air Force's overflights and patrolling and, last but not least, the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty in Crimea. He has called for increased military presence in Greenland, since a "power vacuum will always be filled" "Let us say it straight out: it is about military presence – navy ships, soldiers and the aircraft that are necessary to defend Greenland's sovereignty. If Denmark, will one day, not any more take on these objectives, others will replace it."¹⁰⁸ Critics point out, however, that even when the Arctic was the theatre of tensions between the superpowers during the Cold War, there was no traditional defense capability in Greenland. Even the Thule air base has been without active defense since 1965.¹⁰⁹

Ellemann-Jensen is not alone in worrying about increased tension between Russia and the West, including the increased Russian military presence in the Arctic, not least after the annexation of Crimea. President Putin announced in April 2014 a new Arctic command structure and the establishment of four new Arctic brigades, the construction of 50 airfields by 2020, increased long-range air patrols and the addition of 11 new nuclear icebreakers. Despite these plans, no dramatic increase in Russia's naval and air presence has been detected in the North Atlantic and Arctic, likely due to Russia's heavy military engagement in Syria and elsewhere.¹¹⁰

Senior foreign affairs officials in Nuuk say that Greenland neither can nor wants to establish a military, but they look towards neighbouring Iceland to a certain extent as a model in terms of surveillance and exercise of sovereignty. With the closure of the Keflavik military

¹⁰⁶ Offerdal, *Interstate relations*, 82.

¹⁰⁷ Svend Hardenberg, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 134-135, 222-223.

¹⁰⁹ Nikolaj Petersen, "Arctic Challenge to Danish Foreign and Security Policy" in James Kraska (ed): *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 158

¹¹⁰ "How has cooperation in the Arctic survived Western-Russian geopolitical tension?," *Arctic now*, 4 January 2017, <https://www.arcticnow.com/voices/analysis/2017/01/04/how-has-cooperation-in-the-arctic-survived-western-russian-geopolitical-tension/>, retrieved 23 August 2017.

base in 2006 after more than half-a-century of presence, Iceland, a founding member of NATO, which has no military, negotiated successfully that the removal of US fighter aircraft would be compensated by rotating air surveillance operations, involving several NATO countries.

Since NATO decided to undertake these operations in 2007, countries such as the United States, Canada, the Czech Republic, Norway and Denmark have participated. Two other neutral Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden, decided to join the operation as of 2014.¹¹¹ Jakob Isboethsen, the Greenlandic Acting-Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs says it is premature to talk about defense of the island if and when it would become independent, but says that the Iceland model is “definitely interesting.”¹¹² Uffe Ellemann-Jensen is not convinced:

The comparison between Iceland and Greenland doesn't add up. Just look at the size of Greenland....Greenlanders will never manage alone; it is even a question if Greenland and Denmark will be able to take care of all operations together in the future.¹¹³

It should be pointed out that neither would Greenland automatically become a part of NATO after becoming independence; nor is it clear that it would apply for membership. Such air surveillance could alternatively be treated as a bilateral issue between Greenland and the United States.

¹¹¹ “Skýrsla Gunnars Braga Sveinssonar, utanríkisráðherra um utanríkis- og alþjóðamál, 2015-2016. *Alþingi*, <https://www.althingi.is/altext/pdf/145/s/1009.pdf>, retrieved 8 August 2017. “Finland and Sweden Reaffirm Commitment to Air Surveillance over Iceland”, *Iceland Review online*, 30 October 2012, <http://icelandreview.com/news/2012/10/30/finland-and-sweden-reaffirm-commitment-air-surveillance-over-iceland>, retrieved 16 July 2017.

¹¹² Jakob Isboethsen, interview, Nuuk 9 June 2017.

¹¹³ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 225.



6. US bases: the past – and probably future of Greenlandic Defense

“Anyone who knows where Greenland is on the world map knows that in reality it will be American aircraft and ships, who will defend Greenland’s sovereignty.”

Author Martin Breum.¹¹⁴

Denmark has “exercised sovereignty” in Greenland, but its military presence is seen more as a symbolic than a realistic military defense.¹¹⁵ The military muscle has mostly been American since 1940. Thanks to more than seven decades of US military presence on the island, the relations with Washington are the single most important relations of Greenland, with other states. As previously mentioned Greenland has been seen as a key to the defense of America. US presence on the island predates the attack on Pearl Harbour and US participation in the Second World War. The American commitment, from 1941 and 1951, to the defense of Greenland were reiterated in the so-called Igaliku Agreement, co-signed by Denmark and the Home Rule government of Greenland in 2004.¹¹⁶

There has arguably been a remarkable consensus on the US presence in Greenland, despite serious hick-ups in the last few decades and crises that have provoked debates even in Copenhagen, where Greenlandic affairs are headline news, except for social problems and

¹¹⁴ Breum, Balladen om Grønland, 218.

¹¹⁵ Ackrén, Jakobsen, 6.

¹¹⁶ Petersen, Arctic challenge, 146.

in recent years climate change. One of the reasons is that authorities have been keen to minimize contact with the Americans and the Thule base in the high-north is quite isolated. Neither was the US military keen on indigenous presence and this led to the forced relocation of the Polar Eskimos in 1953. In addition to a public apology they were awarded financial compensation after a protracted court case.¹¹⁷

But it has been the violation of the non-nuclear status of Greenland (and Denmark) that have caused the biggest tensions. The accident involving a nuclear armed B-52 military plane that crashed in Thule in 1968 was bad enough, but when it emerged in the 1990s that Prime Minister Hans Christan Hansen had secretly allowed the US to store nuclear weapons in Greenland in the late 1950s, it became a national and even international scandal. Danish authorities have ever since struggled to regain credibility in the eyes of Greenlandic leaders and public opinion, not least when it comes to safe-guarding the interests of Greenland vis-a-vis Washington.

The latest upheaval in the United States-Denmark-Greenland triangle concerns cleaning-up of 200,000 liters of diesel fuel, low-level radioactive waste from a nuclear reactor and other chemical and toxic waste. Camp Century was a top-secret US missile base dug into the ice cap in North-western Greenland. It closed half a century ago but a scientific report published in August 2016 has revealed the need for a hurried clean-up effort. "This waste won't remain covered by the ice forever. If climate change continues, the waste will reach the surface of the ice and lead into the ocean," researcher Dirk van As said. The United States promised to clean up when Camp Century was closed but according to media reports they refuse to foot the bill. At virtually the same time local contractors lost lucrative contracts with the US Army, provoking anger in Nuuk.

The crisis escalated and the Greenlandic parliament called for renegotiations of the defense agreement with the United States provoking a crisis in US-Greenlandic relations. Vittus Qujaukitsoq, who handled foreign affairs at the time in the Self-rule government added fuel to the fire of controversy by criticizing Denmark for allowing the presence of US bases, which he described as "75 years of accumulated frustration and powerlessness." Qujaukitsoq went further and lived up to his threats of bringing the case to the UN.¹¹⁸ He did that without the consent of his colleagues in government, which led to his removal from his foreign affairs portfolio and eventually his full resignation. The unsuccessful coup attempt when Qujaukitsoq challenged Prime Minister Kim Kielsen for the leadership of the ruling Siumut party in July 2017 showed that few even in the relatively radical independence party Siumut have the stomach for the time being to burn bridges with Denmark and that "attacking" the United States may be a red-line which must not be crossed.

¹¹⁷ Gulløv, Grønland, 340-346.

¹¹⁸ "Grønland truer Danmark og USA", *Politiken* 16 November 2016, <http://politiken.dk/udland/article5655532.ece>, "Greenland threatening to drag Denmark and the US in front of the UN", *The Copenhagen Post*, 18 November 2016, <http://cphpost.dk/news/greenland-threatening-to-drag-denmark-and-the-us-in-front-of-the-un.html>, retrieved 10 August 2017. "New atomic scandal uncovered in Greenland", *The Copenhagen Post*, 15 August 2016, <http://cphpost.dk/news/new-us-atomic-scandal-uncovered-in-greenland.html>, both retrieved 10 August 2017.



7. Once upon a time there was Grexit

Greenland was the first territory to secede from the European Union. When Denmark joined the forerunner of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1972, Greenland followed although 70% of its voters were against membership.

In many ways, the referendum on EU membership was the baptism of fire of Greenlandic nationalism and has been described as an eye-opener on the different interests of Denmark and Greenland. In 1972, Greenland was legally just a region in Denmark but the granting of Home-rule in 1979 paved the way for a new referendum and this time the anti-EU side won, taking 52% of the vote. Subsequently, Greenland negotiated a status as one of EU member states Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). Greenlanders continue, however, thanks to their Danish citizenships to be EU citizens.

Since the original “Grexit” in 1985, Greenland and the EU have had considerable

cooperation, and the EU is Greenland's main trading partner with 92.7% of its exports. As an OCT member Greenland benefits from certain arrangement that aim "to promote the economic and social development of the OCTs". Greenland can only benefit from this as a part of the Kingdom of Denmark.¹¹⁹

Greenland has been compensated for EU access to Greenlandic waters with considerable financial aid. Owners of vessels paid \$20.5 million annually 2007–2013 for fishing licenses in Greenlandic waters and the EU paid in the same period \$28.8 million per year as a part of a separate partnership agreement. Assistance from EU (excluding fisheries) has increased and will total \$250 million 2014-2020. Greenland has ear-marked the EU money for education. The renewed partnership agreement for this period reflected Greenland's geopolitical importance, with a focus on climate change, sustainable development and minerals.

One of the reasons for the European Union interest in Greenland is related to its attempts to become an actor in the Arctic. The European Parliament passed a resolution in 2008 calling for an Antarctic-style treaty on the Arctic. The Antarctic Treaty, which was signed in 1959 twelve countries including the Soviet Union and the United States, sets the Antarctica aside as a scientific preserve.¹²⁰ Several prominent global environmental organizations such as the WWF and Greenpeace¹²¹ have launched a petition for "a global sanctuary" on the North Pole.¹²² The EP's "Resolution on Arctic governance" was the first official EU document to address EU-Arctic Policy.¹²³ It was a bold step since it challenged the rights of the Arctic coastal states under the Law of the Sea and was met with fierce opposition. The European Commission did not follow up on the resolution and backtracked the same year. It recognized the stewardship role of the Arctic Council states on the basis of UNCLOS. This paved the way for an application for an Observer status in the Arctic Council. Initially it met Canadian opposition due to the 2008 ban on trade in seal skins which also hurt the Greenlandic economy. No sooner had this issue been solved between the EU and Canada when Russia retaliated for the western sanction regime imposed on it following the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of the Crimea by refusing to give a green light to the European Commission's inclusion as an Arctic Council Observer.¹²⁴

It was, however, China's decision to impose limits on exports of rare earths, which attracted the EU's attention towards Greenland in 2010. China produces more than 90% of the world's rare earths and as a consequence prices more than doubled. The United States, the

¹¹⁹ Cécile Pelaudeix, "EU-Greenland relations and sustainable development in the Arctic," (306-324), in Rolf Tamnes, Kristine Offerdal (eds.): *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 306-310.

¹²⁰ *Antarctic Treaty. Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research* (<http://www.scar.org/treaty/> Retrieved 18 November 2012)

¹²¹ Breum, Når isen forsvinder, 45-49.

¹²² Ulrik P. Gad, A post-Danish sovereign nation, 104

¹²³ "A new integrated EU policy for the Arctic adopted," *The European Commission*. Press Release, 27 April 2016, europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-1539_en.htm, retrieved 5 July 2017.

¹²⁴ Duncan Depledge, Dimitry Tulupov, "EU-Russia relations in the Arctic on ice", *The European Council on Foreign Relations*, 17 May 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_eu_russia_relations_in_the_arctic_on_ice, retrieved 23 August 2017. Pernille Grøne, *The European Union's Strategy towards the Arctic - A Normative Power in the Region?* Master Thesis in Development and International Relations 31 May 2016, *Martin.Breum.dk*. 29-31, <http://www.martinbreum.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AAUDIR-Final-Thesis-.pdf>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

EU and Japan complained to the World Trade Organization which eventually struck down China's export quotas in 2014.¹²⁵

The EU countries are entirely dependent on imports of rare earths and at the height of this crisis, two European Commissioners were sent to Greenland. Not only had China limited exports, but also shown interest in investing in Greenlandic rare earths. The Prime Minister of Greenland and Antonio Tajani, Commissioner for Industry and Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development and Co-operation, signed a letter of intent with the aim of securing European access to rare earths in return for technological and environmental mining know-how.

After his visit to Greenland, EU Commissioner Tajani admitted in an interview with AFP that EU was already playing catching up with China, when it came to what he called the "frontier Eldorado." One of his advisors went much further: "We are engaged in a 'war' with the Chinese" over these precious resources.¹²⁶ Former Prime Minister Kleist said at the time that the EU politicians asked Greenland to limit China's mining for rare earths, which he categorically refused, saying that he would not favour the EU over China or other investors.¹²⁷ Whatever status Greenland chooses in the future, it is clear that it will continue to be a "strategic partner of the EU in the Arctic," and it is hardly conceivable that it will let China in the long run get an important foothold there, not least if the island declares independence.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Pelaudeix, EU-Greenland relations, 311.

¹²⁶ "EU fights to catch Chinese in Greenland rare-earths gold rush", *AFP*, 5 August 2012, (<http://business.inquirer.net/75115/eu-fights-to-catch-chinese-in-greenland-rare-earths-gold-rush>, 27 June 2017).

¹²⁷ "Great expectations fill Greenland as China eyes riches", *Reuters*, 5 November 2012 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/05/us-greenland-idUSBRE8A40MR20121105>, retrieved 3 July 2017) "Greenland rare earths: No special favours for EU," *BBC News*, 15 January 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21025658>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

¹²⁸ Pelaudeix, EU-Greenland relations, 318-319.



8. Climate change and indigenous rights

“Climate change is a part of this ongoing struggle to assert our human rights. Inuit and other indigenous people have done very little to cause climate change, yet we are among the first to feel its effect.”

Aqqaluk Lynge. ¹²⁹

80 tons of ice blocks from Greenland were arranged in a clock formation on Place du Panthéon in Paris where they slowly melted during COP21, the UN Climate Change Conference, while the Paris Climate treaty was negotiated. The installation, Ice Watch, by Icelandic-Danish Artist Ólafur Elíasson and Professor Minik Rosing, showcased ice from a fjord outside Nuuk with the aim of inspiring public action against climate change.¹³⁰

One key reason for increased international attention devoted to the Arctic is climate change. The year 2016 was the hottest year on record, surpassing the exceptionally high temperatures of 2015, according to a consolidated analysis by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The global average temperature in 2016 was about 1.1°C higher than

¹²⁹ Lynge, An Inuit Voice, 14.

¹³⁰ “Ice blocks in Paris make climate change tangible”, *UNRIC*, 8 December 2015, <http://unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/30003-ice-blocks-in-paris-make-climate-change-tangible>, retrieved 18 June 2017.

during the pre-industrial period. At the same time the Arctic sea ice was the lowest on record both at the start of the melt season in March and at the height of the normal refreezing period in October and November. The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the global average.¹³¹

Greenland's importance has changed and increased, ironically thanks to climate change and its effects, not only on the island but on the Arctic in general. Denmark has used Climate Change to raise its profile in the international arena. Conferences have been held in Greenland and Danish ministers have seldom missed the opportunity to host foreign dignitaries who have visited the "front line" of Climate Change. Not only does Denmark pride itself of being an "international front runner" in the "integration of climate and foreign policy", but climate friendly or "green" solutions are also a big export industry in Denmark.

The integration of climate and foreign policy dates back to the appointment of Connie Hedegaard as Minister of Environment in 2004. A year later, she launched the so-called "Greenland dialogue," a series of informal ministerial conferences held twice in Ilulissat (2005 and 2009) and once in Africa and in South-America. In December 2009, Denmark hosted COP15, the UN Climate Conference, which was certainly not as successful as hoped for. Yet, it raised the profile of Copenhagen and Denmark as an international actor, although its government's handling of the negotiations has been criticized. At least Copenhagen was the center of the world's attention for a couple of days when it was visited by world statesmen such as US President Obama, the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to name a few. Despite the failure of the Copenhagen Summit, Hedegaard, by then Minister of Climate and Energy, was appointed to the climate portfolio in the European Commission.¹³²

Greenland has become the symbol of the consequences of Climate Change on the Arctic. In March 2014, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon travelled to Greenland to see first-hand the impacts of climate change. The UN chief's visit was aimed at building momentum for climate action.¹³³ And indeed there was momentum, which resulted in the Paris Agreement a year and a half after his visit to the island. In Greenland, however, Ban was faced with contradictory policies adopted by UN Member States. On one hand the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark versus the rights to independence of the Indigenous Greenlanders; the responsibilities of Denmark as an industrialized nation in the climate negotiations versus the rights of Greenlanders to development.

Greenland was denied a seat at the negotiation table. Although Denmark is in charge of foreign policy within the Kingdom of Denmark, in the climate change negotiations, it is represented by the European Union – of which Greenland is not a member.

¹³¹ "WMO confirms 2016 as hottest year on record", *World Meteorological Organization*, 18 January 2017, <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-confirms-2016-hottest-year-record-about-11%C2%B0C-above-pre-industrial-era>, retrieved 18 June 2017.

¹³² Petersen, *Arctic Challenge*, 154-155.

¹³³ "Countdown to Climate Change Summit", *UNRIC*, 27 March 2014. <http://unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/29120-majestic-greenland-provides-ban-first-hand-look-at-impacts-of-climate-change>, retrieved 18 June 2017.

According to Pernille Bengtsen, who was a member of Greenland's delegation at COP 21 in Paris, Denmark and several other EU countries had lobbied for the inclusion of the judicially binding referral to indigenous people's right to development as a part of the EU position in the negotiations. "There was no consensus in the EU group and therefore no support for the EU to bring it forward."¹³⁴

Senior officials from Greenland were present and fought for their special interests, sometimes within the framework of Indigenous peoples' forum and the cooperation of Northern indigenous people, who lobbied for four major principles:

1) That climate change is recognized as a human rights issue; 2) the acceptance of traditional knowledge to be placed next to Western scientific knowledge; 3) the acceptance of Indigenous Peoples as members who have a right to be at the negotiating table; and 4) direct access to climate finance for indigenous people.¹³⁵

Only the second of these goals was given lip-service in the historic Paris Agreement; in the preamble to the treaty, there is a vague reference to traditional knowledge. This was far from satisfactory for the authorities in Nuuk.¹³⁶ The Naalakkersuisut announced in April 2017 that it would ask for a so-called territorial opt-out from the Paris agreement. In announcing the decision, Vittus Qujaukitsoq, the minister responsible for foreign affairs in the Self-government, referred to the rights of indigenous people to development, when he explained the reasons for Greenland's opt-out. "From the point of view of Greenland, we are disappointed that a judicially binding referral to indigenous people's right to development was not included in the final outcome document. This was our wish."¹³⁷

The United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples which was adopted by the General Assembly 13 September 2007 recognizes indigenous peoples' right to development since they "have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests." Furthermore, Article 23 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development," while Article 32 recognizes their "right to determine and develop priorities

¹³⁴ Pernille Bengtsen, email 23 June 2017.

¹³⁵ "Indigenous Involvement in the COP21 Climate Change Talks," *The Arctic Institute*, 25 November 2015, <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/indigenous-cop-21-paris/>, retrieved 18 June 2017. International indigenous peoples' dialogue with states on the UNFCCC negotiations, 17 October 2015. http://www.iwgia.org/images/stories/int-processes-eng/UNFCCC/Final_political_position_paperOct2015.pdf, retrieved 18 June 2017.

¹³⁶ "Klima: Internationale forpligtelser", *Naalakkersuisut*, 31 March 2016. <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Departementer/Natur-Miljoe/Natur-og-Klimaafdelingen/Klima/Internationale-forpligtelser>, retrieved 25 June 2017.

¹³⁷ "Grønlandsk territorialt forbehold for klima-aftalen", *Naalakkersuisut*, 19 April 2016, <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Nyheder/2016/04/190416-Klimaafale>, retrieved 15 October 2017.

and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.”¹³⁸

The minister added that the only way for Greenland to be a party to the treaty would be through a solution within the Kingdom of Denmark. In other words, Denmark, an industrialized country, would have to shoulder an increased burden to facilitate Greenland’s development and its accession to the Paris agreement. “In this context, the Naalakkersuisoq (the Minister) considers that it will not be possible to come to an agreement between the parties that would take into consideration Greenland’s right to industrial development,” Qujaukitsoq said.

Independence is contingent on the removal of Denmark’s generous financial aid, and since the only possible new revenues lie in oil, gas and mining, it is clear that this would also mean considerable increase in CO2 emissions. “Our signature would have cost us hundreds of millions of dollars and we would never be independent,” Kai Holst Andersen, the former Deputy-Foreign Minister said.¹³⁹

In Paris, Greenland had to fight for a special position as an undeveloped region within an industrialized state. According to the principle adopted at the UN of “common but differentiated responsibility” as a part of Denmark, Greenland belongs to the group of industrialized states versus developing countries that shoulder lesser burden when it comes to cutting of CO2 emissions. This is problematic because according to the climate treaty developed countries provide financial, technical, and political assistance in mitigation, adaptation and damage efforts in developing states through Climate Finance, the Adaptation Fund, and Loss and Damage, which are all crucial to advancing the Paris Agreement, Victoria Hermann argues in an article on the webpage of the Arctic Institute.

There is a disadvantage to understanding climate change policy in this way. It makes invisible the developing communities within developed states, those that are both on the front lines of rapid climate change and at the periphery of both the political and financial geographies of their countries like the Arctic.¹⁴⁰

Despite the prominence of the fate of Greenland in the debate prior to COP21, the feeling that Greenland’s interests and special needs were overlooked remains deep in Greenland. As Aqqulak Lynge puts it:

Despite our rights as indigenous people – which include the rights free, prior, and informed consent regarding developments that will affect our lives...we still do not have a real say in the international climate change negotiations. ¹⁴¹

The Greenlanders resent having to pay the price of belonging to a developed country, and thus finding themselves on the wrong side of the “common

¹³⁸ “The United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples”, *United Nations*, March 2008. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf retrieved 19 June 2017.

¹³⁹ Kai Holst Andersen, interview, 10 May 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Victoria Herrmann, *The Forthcoming Paris Agreement Rulebook*

¹⁴¹ Lynge, *the Inuit Voice*, 15.

but differentiated responsibilities” principle of international environmental law. The discourse of the Greenlanders on indigenous issues, however, masks a fundamental difference. The Greenlanders welcome industrialization as a vehicle for their independence as a national state, while most other indigenous people of the Arctic are skeptical or even dismissive. To many, industrialization represents yet another invasion by the “white man,” posing a threat to traditional lands and indigenous ways of living.

And there is no doubt that climate change is having serious implications for Greenlanders, not least for hunters. Traditions that go back hundreds or thousands of years are in danger of being lost. In Natuk Lund Olsen words:

A father can’t share his traditional knowledge on hunting with his son anymore because so many things are changing. He can’t tell him anymore what it means, how the skies look like on a given day... The weather has become so unpredictable; one goes out to hunt in nice weather in the morning, but in the afternoon there is a storm.¹⁴²

In many areas, the dog sledge has become an irrelevant mode of transport because the ice is gone and the hunters can’t hunt. The traditional hunt in Greenland requires travelling over very long distances to get to the prey; thus, the unpredictability of climate change is quite dramatic.

Researcher Lene Holm Kielsen of the Greenlandic Nature Institute has travelled widely in the country to study the impact of climate change. She concludes that it is important that researcher like herself make sure that lessons learnt are not forgotten, now that traditional hunting is undergoing radical changes.

If we don’t do it today it will be lost. If the hunting ceases, a part of our culture will disappear with it.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Natuk Lund Olsen, interview.

¹⁴³ Lene Kielsen Holm, interview. Kai Holst Andersen 10 May 2016. The Interviews with Kai Holst Andersen and Lene Kielsen Holm were conducted in Nuuk in May 2016 for the UNRIC website and published in all 5 official Nordic languages. “*EKKI bara ísbirnir heldur líka fólk*”, UNRIC, 11 August 2016. <http://www.unric.org/is/frettir/26807-ekki-bara-isbirnir-heldur-lika-folk>



7.To come to terms with the past

"Only by freeing ourselves from the nightmares of the past can we make our dreams of the future come true," Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen's speech at the celebration of the centenary of the hand-over of the West Indies to the US, 1 April 2017. ¹⁴⁴

"Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter," Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) ¹⁴⁵

A couple of hours sailing from Nuuk, there is a little island called Qoornoq with brightly painted houses. One day in early spring there is not a soul to be seen. No wonder since the villagers have long since moved to Nuuk. Sailing back, there are huge apartment blocks facing the sea. "That's where the population was moved," the captain of the boat explains. No less than 1% of the population of Greenland lived at one point in the biggest of these apartment blocks, the notorious "Blok P," which was demolished in 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Lars Løkke Rasmussen, "We cannot undo the past. What we can do is to improve the future", speech (in English) by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, *Statsministeriet*, 1 April 2017, <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/statsminister-lars-loekke-rasmussens-tale-ved-100-aaret-for-overdragelsen-af-de-vestindiske-%C3%B8er-til-usa/>, retrieved 26 June 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Jerome Brooks, "Chinua Achebe, The Art of Fiction No. 139", *The Paris Review*, Issue 133, Winter 1994. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1720/chinua-achebe-the-art-of-fiction-no-139-chinua-achebe>, retrieved 14 July 2017.

Appointed by the Greenlandic Self-government in 2014, a Reconciliation Commission has prioritized such issues as the forced abandonment of remote villages deemed “unprofitable, unhealthy and unmodern” as a part of a Danish-Greenlandic plan to urbanize the island in the 1960s. The idea of the Reconciliation Commission was launched by the then Prime Minister of Greenland Aleqa Hammond in 2014. “To come to terms with the colonization of our country it is necessary to have reconciliation and forgiveness,” Hammond explained. The reaction of the Danish government was immediate and unequivocal and blunt. In the words of Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, “We don’t need reconciliation.”

The debate in the Danish press concentrated on the question whether Denmark’s handling of Greenland warranted a commission such as the truth commission in post-apartheid South Africa. The members of the commission quickly distanced themselves from the South-African model. Ida Matthiasson a commissioner from Eastern Greenland explained it this way:

This commission is unique and made for our needs, because it is not a truth commission. It is an internal commission and we do not expect the Danes or those who were responsible for colonialism to apologize or pay compensation. Our aim is to increase understanding within society in Greenland.

“The Commission is not about finger pointing,” her former commission colleague Jens Heinrich added.¹⁴⁶

The gigantic apartment blocks of Nuuk are a reminder of the post-war attempts of modernizing Greenland. In the 1950s and 1960s, Greenland’s population increased considerably. Such apartment blocks, which were considered a vast improvement on traditional Greenlandic housing, received many of those who moved to towns either of their own free will or were forced by closures of their settlements.

Their design worked perfectly for the bicycling inhabitants of Copenhagen, but it turned out that the apartments did not accommodate some important needs of Greenlandic part-time hunters and fisherman. The narrow doorways made it difficult, or sometimes impossible, to enter and exit wearing thick cold weather clothing, and common European style closets were too small to store fishing gear. The bath tubs were not suitable to cut up a seal; so soon there were big problems with the plumbing. But the biggest problems were inside the heads of the hunter families who were used to the great wilderness of snow covered Greenland and now had to get used to claustrophobic apartment blocks. Ida Matthiasson argues that there has been attempt made to address people’s feelings about those who were deported from their homes. As she observes:

One doesn’t ask; one just closes down settlements and moves the population away. Some of them are still hurt, and this hurt will be inherited by their children and grandchildren if this remains a taboo.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Jens Heinrich, interview by email 26 July 2016.

¹⁴⁷ Ida Matthiasson, interview, 10 May 2016.

In dealing with these issues, the commission indirectly addresses the question of modern Greenlanders' priorities, such as to what extent, they want to safeguard their indigenous roots and their hunting culture. To achieve independence, Greenland needs to stand on its own feet economically. As further closure of settlements in northern and eastern Greenland may be one way of cutting costs; independence might well erode the traditional indigenous ways of living even further.

Jens Heinrich argues that the work of the commission aims at convincing people that they can express themselves and contribute to the narrative that every community needs to define itself. Denmark reacted quite negatively to the creation of the commission, and, at least, initially boycotted it. Heinrich points out that there is still no history of Greenland written by the Greenlanders themselves. "The Danes still have a responsibility for Greenland and if the Commonwealth (of the Realm) is to survive in the future it must review its common history." He also emphasizes that colonization includes the years after 1953, when Greenland formally ceased to be a colony and was supposed to become just another part of Denmark.

Danification made virtually everything Greenlandic second class and this feeling of wrongness is still sits with today's Greenlanders. Even with the acquisition of Home Rule in 1979 did we not challenge this phenomenon. I personally think that the commission is a challenge to stereotypes or the way Greenlanders and Danes see each other and themselves

Danes have been a role model and ranked first in a hierarchy as being the most developed, the best educated, the richest and the happiest – and the Greenlanders have been anything but. The goal is to increase the pride and self-respect of Greenlanders, so we can have equality within the Commonwealth of the Realm.¹⁴⁸

The giant apartment block, "Blok P" has been demolished and the site remains empty. Meanwhile on the island Qoornoq, some of the former inhabitants return to their summer houses for a spring cleaning. The lack of electricity after the authorities decided to abandon the village is not a concern any more thanks to solar energy panels, which can be seen on every house, often next to the red and white Greenlandic flag. It is a refreshing reminder that this small nation in a huge land is ready for the challenges of the future.

Greenlandic self-image



The Greenlanders tend to focus on the narrative of their Inuit and indigenous roots and their hunting traditions, as well as on their closeness to nature and their capacity for survival in the Arctic. This is not always well understood in the western world where Greenland has been at the receiving end of public opinion for traditional practices in seal hunting as well as whaling. For

¹⁴⁸ Jens Heinrich, interview.

Greenlanders the hunting, killing and consumption of certain wild animals must be protected in order to protect their culture.

The polar bear, just like the whales and the pandas, has become a symbol for environmentalists. Inuits point out that they are not responsible for the emissions and pollution that threaten the polar bear and did not hunt whales to extinction. Former Deputy-Minister Holst Andersen, makes the point that it is often forgotten that there are millions of people living in the Arctic:

We find ourselves at the receiving end of global pressures towards regulation by NGOs. The purpose of highlighting what's happening in the Arctic these years should not be about saving an iceberg, or a polar bear – it ought to be about saving traditions of thousands of years and a lifestyle that is being lost. Wildlife is a part of this, but man lives in a cycle with wildlife; man is a part of that. And I think too often in the sort of global agenda, the sustainable development discourse gets lost along the way when it comes to the Arctic and it becomes about protecting an iceberg.¹⁴⁹

Full time traditional hunters are, however, probably only 5% of the Inuit population. Hunting is for most a pastime, albeit a culturally vital one. 75% of Greenlanders are urbanized¹⁵⁰ and have embraced many modern, Western or Nordic ideas, such as democracy and social welfare, which are now considered core values of present and future Greenland.¹⁵¹

Minik Rosing, the Greenlandic geologist who lives in Denmark has been a vocal opponent of speedy Greenlandic independence. He has pointed out that even the narrative about a 4,500 years old Inuit culture in Greenland is based on wild exaggeration. The people who lived in Greenland for the first 3,000 years, were a totally different people, Rosing argues and there are no genetic connections between the original settlers of Greenland, who died out, with present day Greenlanders.

It is stupid to build a nation on a lie. There is a tendency to worship the noble savages who respected nature – but it is nonsense. The traditional strategy of indigenous people is to migrate to regions where they use everything – search and destroy- until the resources are depleted. Then they moved on and let nature recover. This attempt to create an image of Greenlanders as noble savages is a self-parody.¹⁵²

Indigenous or independent?

The recognition of Denmark of Greenlanders as a nation is not dependent on their status as indigenous people, but as the population of Greenland, which includes thousands of people of Danish origin, and native Danish speaking Greenlanders as well. In other words, ethnicity is not a criteria for citizenship of Greenland, the whole population of Greenland, ethnic

¹⁴⁹ Kai Holst Andersen, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Steinberg, Tasch, Gerhard, *Contesting the Arctic* 79.

¹⁵¹ Ulrik P. Gad, "Greenland: A post-Danish sovereign nation state in the making", *Cooperation and Conflict* 2014, Vol. 49(1), 101.

¹⁵² Breum, *Balladen om Grønland* 165.

Danes as well as Inuits, qualify. The Inuit heritage certainly has a vital role in Greenlandic society, and there is a consensus on the strengthening of ties to other Inuits, notably in Canada, who are culturally and linguistically much closer to the Greenlanders than the Danes. Greenlandic Inuits have been enthusiastic participants in the Inuit Circumpolar Council as well as the UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous People.

The Danish researcher Jeppe Strandsbjerg points out that the Inuit conception of sovereignty may challenge conventional understanding of political statehood and sovereignty. Yet, Greenlandic politicians have for the most part chosen the path of the nation state, and the aspirations of Greenlandic leaders has clearly been set towards a distinctive independent state, while Inuits in Canada, the United States and Russia, are fighting for different levels of recognition and/or autonomous status within their respective federal states.

“The question is what happens to Inuit indigenous rights when Greenland moves towards statehood and integrates into the global economy?” Strandsbjerg asks. There is a certain rift, on the one hand, between the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) which advocates a concept of sovereignty that seeks to transcend the Westphalian model, and the Greenlandic government on the other hand which has embraced it. Former Premier Kuupik Kleist and other leaders have taken a pragmatic approach, since “alternative arrangements of sovereignty” are simply “not taken seriously” in the international arena.

This is one of the issues that the Commission on the constitution is expected to address, and may be the subject of discussion in the series of debates that are planned on constitutional issues. Another issue where there may be a clash involving indigenous rights is the Inuit concept of property. The UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples recognizes their particular concept of property, which is often collective in nature and custom-based.

This is the case in Greenland, where one cannot own land as private property and collective ownership is recognized traditionally. A citizen can own a house, but not the land it stands on. It goes without saying that, whether or when large scale mining starts in Greenland, this concept may be challenged. There may be a clash between owners of mining companies and potential “stone pickers” who can claim custom-based indigenous rights to the land and its resources. This has already happened in the past, and it is a legitimate question as to how it is possible to grant exclusive rights to mining on a certain land to a mining company if the ground is owned collectively. It will certainly be a challenge for Greenlandic authorities to reconcile indigenous rights and the establishment of a modern political economy.

Since mining is fundamental to Greenland’s sovereign aspirations, independence may come at a cost of a major challenge to what it means to be indigenous and Inuit. The debate on the future constitution will certainly cover fundamental rights and values, but it remains to be seen if indigenous rights and indigenous political identity will play a major role.¹⁵³ Aqqualuk Lynge, one of the founding father’s of Greenlandic nationalism, draws a red line when it comes to common ownership of land which he considers fundamental to Greenlandic society. If it is violated, he says, “it is over”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Strandsbjerg, *Making sense*, 260-263, 269-272.

¹⁵⁴ Lynge, interview.

Vivian Motzfeldt, the chairwoman of the Constitutional Commission, stresses that it has just started its work and does not want to go into details, but makes it clear that one of the tasks is to make sure that “natural resources both on land and in the ocean will remain in the ownership of the Greenlandic people.”¹⁵⁵

8. Danish identity, colonialism and Greenland



The outrage in Denmark and non-participation in what was perceived as a “name and shame truth commission” on the South-African model, clearly undermines the outcome of the reconciliation commission. It is no exaggeration to say that it is problematic for Denmark to come to terms with its colonial past. Researcher Ulrik P. Gad points out that the Danes feel they are on the side of the weak and that equality in the world and being colonizers is at odds with Danish self-image and identity projection.

The Kingdom of Denmark has been severely reduced geographically in the past two centuries, with the loss of Norway (1814), its southern part to Prussia in the 19th century, the independence of Iceland (1918/1944) and its colonies in Africa, India and the West Indies in the 19th and 20th century. Researcher Astrid Nonbo Andersen, of Aarhus University argues that Denmark has, ever since the loss of these territories, portrayed itself as a small, human and homogenous Danish speaking nation and perhaps because of this, has had special need to stick to a fairy-tale version of its colonialism. Andersen has expressed her surprise that the Danish government refused cooperation with the reconciliation commission, since the co-responsibility of Denmark for many of Greenland’s problems is well documented. One reason, she says, is the belief that Danish colonialism was not as violent as British, Belgian or French atrocities in their respective colonies. Another reason is the fear of having to pay expensive compensation to the Greenlanders.¹⁵⁶

There seems to be some – albeit very limited – willingness to admit responsibility for Danish colonialism in the past *outside* the North-West Atlantic. In a speech to commemorate the centenary of the handover of the Danish Virgin Islands to the United States in 2017, the Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen called Denmark’s responsibility for the slave trade “a dark and disgraceful part of Danish history.” However, while he offered scholarships to young students from the islands, he stopped short of an anticipated apology.¹⁵⁷

Denmark has for the most part been reluctant to admit wrongdoing in their North-West Atlantic colonies and bylands. In 2009, the Danish Prime Minister was asked in parliament if he intended to issue an official apology and compensation to the children and their families who were removed from their families in Greenland and sent to Denmark for adoption or placed in orphanages in the 1950s. In a short answer, the Prime Minister, Lars Løkke

¹⁵⁵ Vivian Motzfeldt, interview, Nuuk, 9 June 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ Lars Løkke Rasmussen, “We cannot undo the past”.

Rasmussen stated that forced removal of the children from their families was initiated with good intentions: "History cannot be changed. The government considers the colonial era a closed part of our common history."¹⁵⁸

At the end of the day neither Greenlanders nor the Virgin Islanders received an apology, but the Danish narratives of colonialism in the Northern Atlantic and the Caribbean are sometimes quite different. In the aforementioned speech in the Virgin Islands, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen praised the indigenous labour rights advocate David Hamilton Jackson (1884–1946):

The story goes, that when David Hamilton Jackson once criticized the Danish Governor in a harsh tone, the Governor replied by calling Jackson a dreamer. "This was probably meant as an insult – but isn't it rather a badge of honor? Only when we dare to dream of a brighter future will the beacons of freedom be in sight."¹⁵⁹

This Obamaesque description of political activists as dreamers stands in a stark contrast to the rhetoric of Løkke's own political party, Venstre, when it comes to the independence movement in Greenland. Claus Hjort Frederiksen, the spokesman of Venstre, on Greenlandic affairs described then Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond as a dreamer in 2014 when criticizing her pro-independence policies: "It seems like, that she builds her politics on some kind of dreams, and it is unhealthy for any country, if its efforts are based on something that is illusionary and unrealistic."¹⁶⁰

As a matter of fact, Denmark has offered an apology for its forced resettlement of Polar Inuits to make way for American military activities at the Thule base. This was, however, an isolated incident, and the apology was co-signed by the Prime Minister of Greenland at the time. Former Greenlandic Premier, Aleqa Hammond, has pointed out that the Canadian government has apologized for removing children from Inuit families, and both Sweden and Norway have done the same with respect to indigenous peoples of their countries, the Sami people, for violations of their rights. The same applies to Australia and its Aborigines.

The most sensitive events that might qualify for an apology from Copenhagen are in addition to the above-mentioned forced removal of children, the compulsorily relocation of the 500 inhabitants of Qullissat in western Greenland in 1972; the secret permission given to the United States to place nuclear weapons in Greenland; the negligence in cleaning up after closed US military bases; and the so-called fatherless children legislation, which deprived children fathered by Danes in Greenland contact to and heritage from their fathers.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Kenn Nakata Steffensen: "Prime Minister's question on forced removal and assimilation of Greenlandic children", *Cultural meanings*, 23 August 2009, <https://culturalmeanings.wordpress.com/2009/08/23/prime-minister%e2%80%99s-question-on-forced-removal-and-assimilation-of-greenlandic-children/>, retrieved 26 June 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Lars Løkke Rasmussen, "We cannot undo the past".

¹⁶⁰ "Venstre kalder Grønlands leder for en »drømmer«", *Berlingske*, 24 January 2014, <https://www.b.dk/politiko/venstre-kalder-groenlands-leder-for-en-droemmer>

¹⁶¹ Breum, Balladen om Grønland, "Lov om juridisk faderløse skal afdækkes", *Kallaalt Nunaata Radioa*, 12. juni 2010 <http://knr.gl/da/nyheder/lov-om-juridisk-faderl%C3%B8se-skal-afd%C3%A6kkes>, retrieved 26 June 2017.

The last event is the final in line of extremely sensitive topics in the relationship between authorities in Nuuk and Copenhagen and is worth a closer look. According to Danish laws, children born outside of marriage had legally no right to recognition or inheritance from their fathers. However, the new legislation did not apply to Greenland, even after the island was annexed and became a part of Denmark in 1953. The law was not adopted until 1963 in West Greenland and 1974 in North and East Greenland.¹⁶²

The issue of the rights of these children has been discussed for years, and finally a commission was appointed to investigate the matter and handed over a report to the office of the Danish Prime Minister in 2011. The commission's conclusion showed that there was a substantial difference between the legal status of children born out of wedlock in Greenland and their counterparts in Denmark from 1914 to 1974. Laws ensuring children's rights in Greenland to have acknowledged fathers, determined rights to inheritance and bear the father's family name were not applied in Greenland until 1963/74.

The Danish parliament Folketinget enacted a law that gave the concerned children the right to know their father, bear his name and eventually a right to inheritance if the father is still alive. The Prime Ministers of Greenland and Denmark, Aleqa Hammond and Helle Thorning-Schmidt disagreed on the issue at a meeting in January 2014. Denmark refused to acknowledge any retroactivity, when Greenland demanded compensation to those who were deprived of the right to know the identity of their fathers and the right to inheritance. "This case is about a principle, that is very important for the people of Greenland," Aleqa Hammond said. "All citizens in the Commonwealth of the Realm should enjoy the same rights."¹⁶³

The case was not closed for many Greenlanders, since the commission's report has cast a light on the archaic colonial attitudes of Danish officials towards the Inuits in the first decades of the 20th century. The case of the "fatherless" showed that, just like in colonies in other parts of the world, different laws applied to the indigenous and the colonizers – in this case the Danes, even after Greenland was annexed by and formally made part of Denmark.



The report showed clearly that well into the 1930's Greenlanders were considered to be on a lower culture and civilization level than the Danes. A senior Danish official, Knud Berlin (1864–1954) was quoted as saying in the report that "the indigenous people belonged to an alien, culturally lower standing, primitive race", which was not "sufficiently mature" to be subject to modern laws.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Jens Heinrich, Sniff Nexø Andersen, Linda Nielsen, *Historisk udredning om retsstillingen for børn født uden for ægteskab i Grønland 1914-1974*. Statsministeriet, Copenhagen, 2011.

Mari Kleist, email 10 June 2016.

¹⁶³ "Thorning afviser kompensation til Grønlands faderløse", *Sermitsiaq-AG*, 8 January 2014.

<http://sermitsiaq.ag/thorning-afviser-kompensation-groenlands-faderloese>

¹⁶⁴ Heinrich, Andersen Nexø, Nielsen, *Historisk udredning*, 64.

Indeed, the tendency to treat the Inuits as immature children goes back to the colonizer-in-chief himself, Hans Egede: “One has to deal with people who are like children or the blind, actually people who are as stupid as animals. It has been necessary to treat them like children and indoctrinate them in the simplest way in Christian truths.”¹⁶⁵

The Danes are by no means the only colonizers to use metaphors of children to describe colonized people and justify their rule. Researcher Ulrik P. Gad argues that the child-parent narrative has to be examined in a modern perspective. The annual block grant from Denmark to Greenland is thus seen much as the country’s generous development aid and adds “to the Danish self-image of being a force for good in the world.”¹⁶⁶

Denmark is a generous donor of Official Development Aid (ODA), and one of few countries that has reached the UN target of 0.7% of GNP. It emerges from research on Denmark’s ODA that Denmark feels it has a special role in giving other countries a lesson on the organization of society. The export of its *Etat Providentiel* has become a part of the Danish self-image, but there are strings attached to ODA on democracy, good governance, accountability and transparency and so on.

Danish politicians often emphasize that there are family bonds between the two nations – 16,000 Greenlanders live in Denmark – not to forget a long common history. Gad argues that this metaphorical link is used to infantilize the Greenlanders who are without exception given the role of the child in relation with the mother country, Denmark. A parent must, however, love his or her child unconditionally and, therefore Denmark cannot impose conditions on the aid to Greenland and must treat Greenland, so to speak, as an adolescent child. The aid given by Denmark to Greenland is an annual block grant; which means that Greenlanders themselves are free to do what they want with a fixed amount of money, contributed by the Danish state.

This question is very important since the debate on Greenland’s continued membership of the Commonwealth of the Danish Realm Kingdom or its independence, has almost exclusively centered on the Danish annual block grant. The annual \$566 million block grant is “gigantic” grant, to use the words of Danish Foreign Policy Society Director Pedersen, since it amounts to 24% of the GDP of Greenland.¹⁶⁷ However, this amounts to only 0.34% of Denmark’s state budget of 2015.¹⁶⁸ To put this into some perspective, the annual grant to Greenland amounts to Denmark’s contribution to multilateral development aid (UN agencies and the World Bank (DK 3.6 billion)) but is somewhat higher than the country’s costs of receiving refugees (2.8 billion).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Jean Malaurie: *Lettre à un Inuit de 2022*. (Paris: Fayard, 2015), 58.

¹⁶⁶ Ulrik P. Gad, Greenland, 102.

¹⁶⁷ It should be pointed out that due to the annual block grant and some other factors the GNI of Greenland is –unusually higher than the GDP, but the statistical bureau of Greenland does not provide GNI statistics. Sigurjón Björnsson, email 21 September 2017.

¹⁶⁸ “Offentlige sektors udgifter budgetteret til 1.092 mia.i 2015”, *Danmarks statistik*, <http://www.dst.dk/da/statistik/nyt/NytHtml?cid=18973>, retrieved 1 July 2017.

¹⁶⁹ “Danmarks officielle bistand til udviklingslandene fordelt på hovedkategorier”, *Danida*, <http://openaid.um.dk/da/oda/main-categories/>, retrieved 3 July 2017.

After examining debates in the Danish parliament, Folketinget, Gad concludes that a majority of the Danish political parties treat Greenland as an adolescent who is not worthy of full confidence. The only exception is the Danish National Party (Dansk Folkeparti), who voted against the Self-rule law, and wants Denmark to assume the role of an “authoritarian parent” and teach the rebellious “adolescent” a lesson.¹⁷⁰

The family narrative is not only used by Danes and academics, but frequently as a metaphor in the discourse of Greenlandic politicians. Explaining why she took on the challenge of the chairmanship of the constitution commission of the Greenlandic Parliament, Vivian Motzfeldt explained: “Of course we can manage by ourselves. That is how we bring up our children. They should be able to stand on their own feet.”¹⁷¹ Elder statesman Lars-Emil Johansen agrees: “It is like any boy or girl who grows old and has to decide where to live, choose friends, et cetera. It is time we take these decisions instead of others choosing for us.”¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ulrik P. Gad, “Un avenir postcolonial groenlandais ? Trois scénarios pour la dissolution de la communauté de Royaume et les autres pour son maintien et sa modification”, *Nordiques*, 2009, no.18, 74-76.

¹⁷¹ Vivian Motzfeldt, interview.

¹⁷² Lars-Emil Johansen, interview.



9. Eying a different future

Greenland's and the Faroe Islands' calls for increased self-rule and eventual independence has been met with the reinvention of the concept "Community of the Realm" [Rigsfællesskab], to substitute a hierarchical relationship within the Kingdom of Denmark in which, theoretically at least, the two self-administered islands enjoy an equal status with Denmark and share the Sovereign, defense, foreign affairs, currency, et cetera. However, this is undermined by the fact that the decisions of the home rule governments in Nuuk and Thórshavn can be overruled or revoked by the Danish parliament.

While Greenland's political elites are Inuits, most officials in the central administration, including senior management, the business elite, media, academia and most of the teachers are Danish. Leading academics from Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Denmark and Iceland concluded in a major study in 2004 that "Within the Kingdom of Denmark the Inuits of Greenland and the people of the Faroe Islands are some kind of second-class citizens as members of marginalized minorities."¹⁷³

The focus turns immediately towards the annual block grant whenever Greenland takes steps to prepare for independence. A crisis broke out between Nuuk and Copenhagen in the spring of 2017. Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen threatened to phase out the annual

¹⁷³ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 25-26.

block grant rapidly if Greenland adopted a new constitution, even if its entry into force was postponed, *sine die*. The Inatsisartut had adopted a resolution and appointed a commission to write two versions of a constitution. One part of the constitution would go into effect under the self-rule and compliment the Danish Kingdom's constitution on Greenlandic matters within the framework of the Danish state. "The other half of the constitution will only be effective when Greenland leaves the Danish state and the Greenlandic people have established their own state." ¹⁷⁴

Lars Løkke Rasmussen, told the Danish Parliament, that if the Greenlandic people adopted a new constitution, then the annual block grant would be discontinued within four years, regardless of Greenland's possibilities to stand on its own feet. Such a vote would be interpreted as a *de facto* secession from the Kingdom and Denmark and would trigger negotiations according to the laws on Self-rule. ¹⁷⁵

The Prime Minister's threats are widely seen as history repeating itself since his predecessor Poul Nyrup Rasmussen managed to persuade the Faroese to backtrack on a parliament decision to hold a referendum on independence in 2000. That time a threat to withdraw annual block grant proved successful. Since then, the Danish justice department has twice (2010 and 2011) vetoed Faroese constitutional drafts limited to domestic affairs within the Kingdom of Denmark. This shows, of course, that the equal status of the three parts of the Commonwealth of the Realm is a myth, since democratic decisions taken locally can be overruled by Danish officials in a government ministry in Copenhagen.

Lars Løkke's outburst in parliament could also have had more to do with domestic politics than anything else. His minority government has for many years depended on the support of the Danish National Party (Dansk Folkeparti), which is not a member of his coalition. The party's spokesman on Greenland, Søren Espersen, has been a vocal critic of Greenlandic aspirations for independence and alleged free-spending of the annual block grant.

It has been pointed out that Løkke overlooked in his speech the fact that the proposed constitution is intended to be in two parts: the first part within the framework of the Danish constitution and the second part with an independent Greenland, whether and when that happens. In a later interview with the Greenlandic newspaper *Sermitsiaq.Ag*, Løkke made the point that it was not clear if the constitution was meant to be a constitution of an independent Greenland or within the Commonwealth of the Realm of Denmark. "If the purpose is to write a constitution-draft ... and submit it to a vote with a future execution date, then we are in a *de facto* secession process," the Danish Prime Minister said.

The newspaper concluded that with a constitution in two stages, one for Greenland within the Commonwealth of the Realm and the other one for an independent country, the immediate phasing out of the annual block grant could be avoided. But this, however, may

¹⁷⁴ "Forfatningskommission", *Naalakkersuisut* (no date), <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Departementer/Selvstaendighed-Udenrigsanlig-Landbrug/Forfatningskommision>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

¹⁷⁵ "Løkke: Bloktilskuddet fjernes hvis forfatning bliver vedtaget", *Sermitsiaq.AG*, 31 May 2017, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/loekke-bloktilskuddet-fjernes-forfatning-vedtaget>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

be a quite optimistic interpretation of Løkke's comments.¹⁷⁶ His remarks may also have been a veiled warning to the Faroese who have announced in early January 2018 a referendum on a constitution ostensibly within the framework of the Danish state.

That different constitutions exist within the Danish Kingdom is nothing new. Outside the office of the Icelandic Prime Minister, there is a statue of Christian IX King of Denmark. As early as 1874 the Danish King visited Iceland to personally deliver a separate, constitution for Iceland, 30 years before Iceland even got home rule (1904), 44 years before it became a sovereign nation (1918) and 70 before it cut its last ties to Denmark (1944).

The Danish constitution seems to have served Iceland well since it has survived with few changes to this day. Needless to say, Iceland and Denmark have, much more in common politically, historically and culturally than Greenland and Denmark. The current constitution of Denmark and the Commonwealth of the Realm was adopted in 1953 after it was submitted to a referendum, but only in Denmark. Lars-Emil Johansen says that the constitutional process is a milestone for Greenland. "In my opinion, this is the most concrete step we have taken towards independence after the Home-rule in 1979 and Self-rule in 2009. If the process takes 3 years or 10 years, I don't know, we will see." ¹⁷⁷

Denmark has boycotted the constitutional process, but Icelandic specialists, such as Dr. Guðmundur Alfreðsson, a law professor, have served as advisors to the authorities in Nuuk. In August 2017, the members of the Commission visited Iceland to meet with some former members of the Constitutional Council and were received by the President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson. ¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ "Forfatning i to gear kan redde bloktílskuddet", *Sermitsiaq.Ag*, 14 June 2017, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/forfatning-i-to-gear-kan-redde-bloktílskuddet>, retrieved 7 August 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Lars-Emil Johansen, interview.

¹⁷⁸ "Stjórnarskrá Grænlands í undirbúningi," *RÚV* 4 August 2017, <http://www.ruv.is/frett/stjornarskra-graenlands-i-undirbuningi>, retrieved 7 August 2017.



10. Next stop independence?

Most Greenlanders aspire for independence in principle, but disagree on when and how. This is, however, not only a nuance since the most radical supporters of a speedy independence process, such as former Premier Aleqa Hammond see it “within their live-times.” which means within a couple of decades or so.

As noted, much of the debate has focused on whether Greenland can generate income to phase out Danish financial hand-outs, but the economy is not the only obstacle. Greenland’s Inuits dominate the political process thanks to democratic elections, but Danish officials dominate state institutions, not only in the central government ministries but also in the local government. Only 13 Greenlanders are among the 30-strong staff of the Ministry of Finance, not one among the senior staff and not all of them are native or fluent Greenlandic speakers. Most entrepreneurs and business people are Danish, and many teachers, if not most, are Danish.¹⁷⁹ All of this does not rhyme well with the fact that Greenlandic became the official language of the island in 2009.

¹⁷⁹ Sigurjón Björnsson, email 8 August 2017. Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 25.

Recent attempts of raising the level of education of the Inuit populations have backfired despite considerable increase of educational budgets. This is one of the biggest hurdles to Greenland's independence. As former Premier Kuupik Kleist puts it:

We have in the last five to ten years doubled our spending on education, but that doesn't mean that we have twice as many graduates. On the contrary, we have doubled the number of drop outs. If you don't improve then the product remains the same, we need substantial reforms.¹⁸⁰

"If and when" are not the only issues concerning independence but also "what" kind or form of independence. The constitution commission travelled to Iceland only months after taking office. Iceland, in addition to being Greenland's only next-door neighbor to the east, shares some of its history. Norsemen settled Iceland in the 9th century AD and continued to settle Greenland a century later. While the connection with Greenlanders was lost in the late middle ages, both islands were handed over to the Danish crown after the dissolution of the Danish-Norwegian state in the Kiel Treaty of 1814.¹⁸¹

In the 19th century, Icelandic nationalists based their claims for independence on historical rights, insisting that their relations with Denmark (as a successor of Norway) was based on a bilateral-treaty (*Gamli sáttmáli*), which had not been respected and thus allowed for reparation claims among other things due to the perceived evils of the imposed trade monopoly (1602–1874).

Iceland was given a special constitution in 1874 with limited Home Rule, and a Minister for Icelandic Affairs responsible to parliament was appointed in 1904. In the Act of the Union of 1918, Iceland became a sovereign state as the Kingdom of Iceland. Nevertheless, the Danish King continued to be Iceland's head of state.

While doubtlessly provocative and humiliating for occupied Denmark, Iceland exercised its contractual rights to review the Act of the Union after 25 years.

A major reason for good post-independence relations between the countries is the agreement on the return of the medieval Icelandic Sagas from Denmark to Iceland beginning in 1971. The British weekly *The Economist* called this "an act of unusual cultural generosity".¹⁸²

There may also be lessons to be learned from Canada, Greenland's neighbour to the west. Like Iceland it became independent from the mother country of the majority of its European settlers, Great Britain, but did not immediately cut all constitutional or administrative ties, but instead phased them out over a long period of time. On the 1 July 1867, Canada became a self-governing colony of the British Empire and celebrated 150 years of independence in 2017. Gradually or from 1909, Canada developed its own foreign policy and in 1923 Canada signed its first international treaty with the United States without any British involvement.

¹⁸⁰ Kuupik Kleist, interview.

¹⁸¹ Breum, *Balladen om Grønland*, 78-80.

¹⁸² "The end of a saga", *The Economist*, 24 April 1997, <http://www.economist.com/node/147998>, retrieved 5 July 2017.

The Queen of the United Kingdom continues to this day to serve as the Monarch, or head of state of Canada.¹⁸³

One of the assignments of the Constitutional Commission is according to its mandate to “prepare a draft for decision, which permits our country to join a inter-state cooperation, like a Free association treaty with another state, when Greenland’s independence has been achieved.” Greenlanders have followed closely the experience of Pacific Islands countries, such as the Cook Islands (population 21,000), a self-governing country with a Free Associations treaty with New Zealand, and are well aware of Puerto Rico’s status vis a vis the US. New Zealand handles Cook Island’s foreign affairs in consultation with its government. However, the islands have their own diplomatic relations with 43 countries. They do not have their own seat at the United Nations, but have a “full treaty-making capacity” recognized by the world organization. The Cook Islands have signed treaties on maritime borders with the United States and France.¹⁸⁴

Sovereignty and independence are increasingly symbolic in today’s globalized world. In the UN Climate Change negotiations, for instance, Greenland was, as mentioned earlier, represented by Denmark, which, in turn, is only symbolically present since it has shared sovereignty with 27 EU member states that have given a mandate to the European Commission to negotiate on their behalf.

It is hard to see how Greenland can become independent in the foreseeable future without a considerable decrease in living standards, since the annual block grant from Denmark covers virtually half of the state budget. In addition, Greenland would theoretically take over costly sectors currently operated by Denmark, such as the coast guard, the judicial system and the foreign service. While the annual block grant amounts to \$566 million (3.7 billion Danish Kronor), it is estimated that these sectors cost the Danish state another \$96 million a year (600 million DK), while the cost of the Arctic commando and several military and civilian operations is estimated at another \$96 million.¹⁸⁵

In the Self-rule agreement, a road-map has been outlined on phasing out of the annual block grant and paving the way for independence. Asked in the Guardian in 2010 why Denmark was willing to pay Greenland the annual contribution, then Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist said: “The immediate and official answer would be that Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and therein lies a responsibility to assist the former colony economically.”¹⁸⁶

Would this weighty responsibility simply disappear if Greenland were to go its own way? Greenlandic independence politics has certainly focused on when and if Greenland can phase out the Danish annual grant but the leftist-nationalist party, Inuit Ataqatigiit, of

¹⁸³ Laurence Cros, “Vive le Canada libre (ou presque), *Historia*, numéro special no.36 (July-August 2017).

¹⁸⁴ Breum, Balladen om Grønland, 23-24.

¹⁸⁵ Juaaka Lyberth, “Forøgelse af BNP er forudsætning for selvstændighed,” *Sermitsiaq.Ag* 24 July 2017, <http://sermitsiaq.ag/blog/juaaka/forogelse-bnp-forudsætning-selvstaendighed>, retrieved 1 September 2017.

¹⁸⁶ Kuupik Kleist, “Greenland is getting ready to stand alone”, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/15/independent-greenland-mineral-resources-denmark>, retrieved 24 August 2017.

former Premier Kleist has suggested that self-sufficiency is not necessarily a *sine qua non* for independence: "Why should we be ashamed if our independent country would accept, let's say, up to 20% from outside aid?"¹⁸⁷

Former colonial powers, such as France, the United Kingdom and Belgium, are all generous donors of their former colonies. France, the world's fourth largest donor, has since 2014 had *la Francophonie* as the official target group of its development aid. Former colonies and (to a certain degree) French-speaking countries, such as the Côte d'Ivoire, Vietnam and Morocco were among top recipients of French aid.

The UK, the world's second most generous donor, prioritizes former colonies and English-speaking countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nigeria. Belgium, the 14th biggest donor, provides the vast majority of its aid to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda – all former colonies.¹⁸⁸

Denmark's investment in the modernization of Greenland – the precursor to the annual block grant – only took off after the Second World War. This has to be analyzed in the context of the global post-war decolonization movement, a major focus of the newly created United Nations, and the beginning of economic aid for development. The cold war and Greenland's strategic position also played a major part in renewing interest in Greenland.¹⁸⁹

In 2016, Denmark's Official Development Aid (ODA) was 16 billion Danish kronors (\$2.34 billion) or more than four times the annual block grant given annually to Greenland.¹⁹⁰ However, Greenland has a much higher per capita income than most developing countries. Tanzania, which tops the list over recipients of Danish ODA had a per capita GNP of only US\$2,740 in 2016, while Greenland had US\$50,473 – which, of course, includes the annual block grant.¹⁹¹ Tanzania received 365 million Danish kronor in ODA, less than 10% of the annual block grant to Greenland.

Paradoxically, in the case Greenland declares independence and aid based on conditions replaces the annual block grant, Denmark's influence on domestic politics in Greenland might actually increase.¹⁹²

Minerals and oil may be the biggest future question in Greenland, but it is by no means the only one. The fact of the matter is that few nations have declared independence for

¹⁸⁷ Ulrik P. Gad, *Un avenir postcolonial*, 79.

¹⁸⁸ "Europe's former imperial powers continue to target aid to ex-colonies", *The Guardian* 22 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/22/europes-former-imperial-powers-target-aid-ex-colonies>, retrieved 8 August 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Gulløv, *Grønland*, 312.

¹⁹⁰ "About Danida", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark*, <http://um.dk/en/danida-en/about-danida/>, retrieved 7 August 2017.

¹⁹¹ "Grønland udfordret trods stærkt fiskeri," *Danmarks Nationalbank*, 16 August 2016. http://www.nationalbanken.dk/da/publikationer/Documents/2017/08/Analyse_Gr%C3%B8nland%20udfordret%20trods%20st%C3%A6rkt%20fiskeri.pdf, retrieved 22 September 2017.

¹⁹² "GNI per capita", *the World bank*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=TZ>, retrieved 23 September 2017. "Danida: open aid," *Udenrigsministeriet*, <http://openaid.um.dk/da/countries>, retrieved 23 September 2017.

economic reasons alone. Svend Hardenberg admits that without the Danish annual block grant, Greenland will probably suffer, at least initially. "It is, however, a question of mentality - not growth ratio." He adds:

Denmark uses this rhetoric a lot. The Danes say, you can't do it. But I think we are ready to go tomorrow. We can tell the world we are going to be independent in let's say in 5 years. Then we can negotiate deals with others without Denmark. My theory is that Denmark doesn't want Greenland to develop, at least not too fast; it is not in its interest. A declaration of independence will in itself create a momentum.¹⁹³

However, when it comes to independence, other leaders, such as Kuupik Kleist, do not see any other alternative than a robust economic growth driven by foreign investment, which has proven quite illusive. "Greenlandic society is facing economic, political and social challenges." As Kleist puts it:

The Greenlandic economy is in stagnation. Foreign investors do not find Greenland attractive any more, and they are not coming any more; on the contrary, they are leaving. And unfortunately, people are leaving the country, and more seriously, young people who study abroad are not returning home. No, I can't see that independence is possible for many, many years to come.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Svend Hardenberg, interview.

¹⁹⁴ Kuupik Kleist, interview.



Conclusion

For the time being, advocates of a relatively slow march towards Greenland's independence seem to have the upper hand. Opinion polls even suggest that the younger generation is more cautious than their parents' generation when it comes to secession from Denmark. The current Prime Minister Kim Kielsen easily survived a leadership challenge in July 2017 within the ruling Siumut Party when he beat former Foreign Minister, Vittus Qujaukitsoq. Kielsen sees independence as a reality for his children or grandchildren, but his opponent wants a speedier process. But even in the latter case, the leader of the most radical independence party says that he is not for a "as-soon-as-possible" independence.¹⁹⁵

Political life in Greenland focuses, to a large extent, on the question of independence, and this quest has arguably become a part of the national identity of Greenlanders. The struggle for secession from Denmark will perhaps eventually be replaced by domestic opposition to foreign troops or membership in a military or an economic alliance, such as the EU, or perhaps to foreign exploitation of precious national resources. Nationalist parties born out of the struggle for independence have updated their policies in due course; in the case of the biggest political party of Algeria, Front de Libération Nationale and also for the Independence Party in Iceland, both have sought their legitimacy in the fight against foreign rule, many decades after their secession from colonial powers.

¹⁹⁵ "Vittus: Langsomme til værks", *Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa*, 28 July 2017, <http://knr.gl/da/nyheder/langsomme-til-v%C3%A6rks>, retrieved 8 August 2017.

The most likely development in Greenland is that independence will be an incremental process over the next couple of decades, and the likeliest scenario by far is some kind of continued relationship with Denmark. The pace of the process depends on Greenland's economic success (or lack of it) and ultimately on world market price of the commodities that Greenland produces. But just as Brexit was not born out of hopes for economic glory, the decision that comprise Greenland's future will not be taken on economic grounds alone, although the importance of Denmark's financial aid should not under-estimated.

Whether Greenland opts for an Icelandic-style "hard" independence or a free association with Denmark will ultimately depend on the authorities in Copenhagen's position. For the time being a hardline position – threats of immediate cessation of financial aid to quash any and all steps towards independence – seems inevitable.

The Greenlandic narrative of the Self-government agreement as a road map to independence and the Danish narrative of a treaty that permits Denmark to get a share of Greenland's potential riches are essentially incompatible. Copenhagen seems to be confident that Greenlandic authorities will not call its bluff or that the threshold – total financial self-sufficiency – would be too high for the Inuits to overcome. As a result, Danes have chosen to ignore both the Reconciliation commission's efforts as well as the work of the constitutional commission.

Ulrik P. Gad has proposed scenarios for the future of the Commonwealth of the Realm. In his opinion, the different narratives of Greenland and Denmark and their opposing self-images are big obstacles to its survival and well-being. On the one hand, he argues, both Danish impatience towards the "ungrateful" Greenlanders could lead to its dissolution, and so could the impatience of Greenlanders towards Danish paternalism. He argues that they key word for the continuation of the Commonwealth lies in the word "possible" – that Greenland may choose partners other than Denmark. Gad suggests that it should be a common project of the two parties to prepare Greenland for the choice of independence; Denmark should renounce rights to any profits from oil or mining and become a "sponsor" of Greenlandic development. In this manner, Denmark would demonstrate that its support is, indeed, non-self serving and unconditional.

The advocates of a continued Commonwealth of the Realm can only hope that a totally autonomous Greenland freely decides to guard the link to Denmark, just like parents hope that their children continue to visit them in the old people's home or maybe even allow them to live in an annex to the main house.¹⁹⁶

Given its abundant resources and strategic location any power vacuum in Greenland, including uncertainty in regard to its future alliances, should be a matter of concern for neighbouring countries and the "international community." However, radical geo-strategic changes are not likely as NATO membership and the defense agreement with the United States will almost certainly be the cornerstone of an independent or semi-independent Greenland. In addition, Greenland will need continued cooperation with Denmark, other

¹⁹⁶ Ulrik P. Gad, *Un avenir postcolonial*, 84-87.

Nordic countries, the EU and close ties to other Inuits and Indigenous Peoples.

While “hard security” may be less of a concern in Greenland for the time being, few countries are as vulnerable to “soft security” issues, such as climate change, oil spills and economic “warfare” instigated by powerful and influential NGOs, not too mention rogue fishermen and miners. “If someone would simply go to Greenland and say “this is ours”, and perhaps drill for oil without permission, what could we do?”, Per Stig Møller, Denmark’s foreign minister asked in 2010.¹⁹⁷ This question is, of course, even more relevant for an independent Greenland.

Another question is how Greenland can defend its economic independence, especially if it is based on one or few resources. If Greenland would, for instance, obtain its independence on “petro dollars”, an oil spill could become devastating to its income potential. As a matter of fact, just as Greenland might become dependent on a sole commodity to finance its independence, it could also become dependent on one powerful state.

A direct UN involvement in any future divorce settlement may not be needed, for the current Danish-Greenlandic contractual arrangements grant the Greenlandic people the right of secession and full sovereignty, if they choose. However, as has been stressed in this report, many of the issues dealt with here – such as indigenous rights, the Law of the Sea, sustainable development and climate change – have been prioritized by the UN. They do not only have a direct bearing on Greenlandic society and economy but also its future status. Another important factor is that Great Powers, like the United States and China, and regional organizations, such as the EU, have shown interest in Greenland for various military, political, and economic reasons. So far, the Arctic, of which Greenland is an important part, has been spared geopolitical tensions, with fears of a new “Great Game” in the region having proved to be unfounded. The relationship between the primary intergovernmental organization, the Arctic Council, and the ad-hoc venue of the five Arctic Coastal states has been managed, not least because of a shared commitment to the Law of the Sea Convention. On behalf of Greenland, Denmark has submitted its claims to an extended continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean. Overlapping claims are being dealt within the framework of UNCLOS. Hence, the role of the UN has been respected in accordance with international law. Yet, the international body should be prepared to step in if tensions flare up because of contested territorial claims in the Arctic or because of spill-over effects of other geopolitical conflicts.

Since Greenlandic independence is currently not on the agenda and would not necessarily need international mediation or interference unless a crisis erupted in the Danish-Greenlandic relationship, a list of recommendations involving the UN is not called for. However, a few suggestions will be made pertaining to the Danish-Greenlandic constitutional relationship. There are actual and potential conflict issues that the Danish government and the Greenlandic authorities need to engage in a more constructive manner. They include, the issue of the representation of Greenlanders – for example in international forums – as an Arctic nation; a clarification of the extent and limits of Danish foreign and defense policy prerogatives when it comes to controversies such as uranium

¹⁹⁷ Breum, Når isen forsvinder, 30

mining; the question of a Greenlandic constitution; and the handling of historical Greenlandic grievances as a former Danish colony.

Realist theory does not give small states much hope of leverage when it comes to dealing with great powers. Iceland did, however, successfully use the “Russian” card to get its way with its NATO allies during the cold war. Iceland, “the most arrogant little country”, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, had “ever encountered,”¹⁹⁸ also has a reputation in the past of playing one superpower against another to secure financial aid, fishing rights and access to markets. An independent Greenland could follow in Iceland’s foot-steps by simultaneously flirting with the EU, the US and China, as well as Denmark and other actors. The cold war history of the region could well repeat itself with new actors in the leading roles.

Just a week after the German invasion of Denmark 16 April 1940, a child was born in Copenhagen to Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Ingrid of Sweden. Only a month later, Iceland was occupied by the British Army and subsequently became an independent republic in 1944. The future Margarethe II Queen of Denmark never became Queen of Iceland, despite her parents’ decision to give her a very Icelandic middle-name Þórhildur, in addition to the more traditional Christian names, Margrethe, Alexandrine and Ingrid.

Everyone agrees that the Danish Royal family is popular in Greenland. On many occasions, they have shown special interest in – and affection for – the island’s people. Perhaps deliberately following their elders example, Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary gave their twins Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine Greenlandic middle-names, Minik and Ivalo. Will history repeat itself? Will with these young royals never become acknowledged as the Royal Family of Greenland in a reenactment of what transpired in Iceland during the Second World War? Only time will tell.

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¹⁹⁸ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 172-173

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Illustrations

All photographs are by the author.

The illustration on page 8 is from Paul Gaimard (ed.), *Voyage en Islande et au Groënland exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette la Recherche*, (Paris : Édition Arthuis Bertrand, 1838).

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