

**Forum:** General Assembly 4

**Issue:** The question of Greenland

**Student Officer:** Leo Wang

**Position:** Deputy Chair

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## Introduction

Greenland is the world's largest island, located between the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, officially a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. It has a majority Inuit population and has been moving toward greater autonomy and potential full independence. Greenland controls most domestic matters such as education, health, and natural resource development, while Denmark retains authority over foreign affairs, defense, and security. The island's vast natural resources and strategic position in the Arctic have attracted geopolitical interest, notably from the United States. The sovereignty question involves balancing Greenlandic aspirations for independence, Danish sovereignty claims, and international geopolitical pressures (Jakobsen, 2024; Belfer Center, 2025).

## Definition of Key Terms

### Greenland

Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, inhabited primarily by Inuit peoples. The island's economy relies heavily on Danish subsidies, but it also has significant natural resources such as minerals and fisheries. Greenland is important for Arctic geopolitics due to its location and resources (Jakobsen, 2024).

### Self-Government Act (2009)

This act expanded Greenland's autonomy, granting the government powers over many internal matters while leaving Denmark responsible for foreign policy, defense, and security. It recognizes Greenlanders' right to self-determination, allowing for a future referendum on independence (Jakobsen, 2024).

## **GIUK Gap**

The Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap is a strategic naval choke point in the North Atlantic critical to monitoring Russian naval activity. Greenland's location is key for NATO defense and U.S. missile warning systems (Belfer Center, 2025).

## **Pituffik Space Base (Thule Air Base)**

A U.S. military installation in northwestern Greenland with significant missile warning and space surveillance functions, central to Arctic defense strategies (Belfer Center, 2025).

## **Self-determination**

Self-determination is the right of a distinct people or community to govern themselves and make decisions about their own political status and future. In the case of Greenland, this concept is embodied in the 2009 Greenland Self-Government Act, which officially recognizes Greenlanders as a distinct people with the authority to exercise self-rule. This legislation grants Greenland significant autonomy over internal affairs while affirming their right to determine their political future, including the option to pursue full independence from Denmark if they choose (EJIL Talk!, 2025).

## **Background Information**

### **Historical and Political Context**

Greenland was a Danish colony and became part of the Kingdom of Denmark. It was granted home rule in 1979 and expanded self-rule in 2009, reflecting growing Greenlandic identity and demands for independence. Greenlanders have a strong sense of distinct culture and have pushed for increased control over their affairs, seeking to shed colonial legacies. Despite autonomy, Denmark retains control over key external policies, although Greenland seeks more influence on international matters (Jakobsen, 2024; DIIS, 2025).

### **Geopolitical Importance**

Greenland's location in the Arctic makes it vital for military and security interests of NATO and the U.S., notably for missile defense and monitoring Russia. Climate change has increased access to natural resources, drawing global attention from powers like China and the U.S. Melting ice is opening new shipping routes, shortening global trade paths but also

raising concerns about environmental risks and the fragile Arctic ecosystem. This has led to geopolitical competition over Greenland's future (Belfer Center, 2025; EPRS, 2025).

### **U.S. Interest and Sovereignty Tensions**

The Trump administration renewed U.S. interest in acquiring Greenland for strategic reasons, including defense and resource access, proposing a purchase in 2019 and again emphasizing this stance into 2025. However, both Greenlandic and Danish governments firmly reject any transfer of sovereignty to the U.S., insisting on Greenland's right to self-determination and ruling out sales or annexations. This has caused diplomatic tensions but also highlighted Greenland's growing role on the global stage (BBC News, 2025; OSW, 2025).

### **Economic and Social Conditions**

Greenland's economy is small and dependent on fishing, hunting, and Danish financial support. Economic challenges slow full independence ambitions, but resource development and tourism offer potential growth. Social issues include maintaining indigenous culture and managing increasing international influence (Jakobsen, 2024; EPRS, 2025).

### **Government and International Response**

Denmark supports Greenland's self-government while maintaining sovereignty and handling foreign relations. Greenland's government seeks to expand its international presence and control over natural resources. The U.S. continues military cooperation through agreements, such as the 1951 Thule Air Base agreement, but respects Danish sovereignty. Other actors like China watch Greenland's resources and strategic potential closely. International law supports Greenlanders' right to self-determination, which complicates sovereignty negotiations because it requires balancing indigenous rights, state sovereignty, and interests of external powers. While the U.S. emphasizes security and cooperation under Danish sovereignty, other countries and international bodies may advocate more strongly for Greenland's full independence or greater resource control, adding layers of legal and diplomatic complexity (DIIS, 2025; EJIL Talk!, 2025; Belfer Center, 2025).

## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

### Denmark

Denmark is the sovereign state responsible for Greenland's foreign affairs, defense, and security. It advocates for maintaining the unity of the Kingdom while supporting greater autonomy for Greenland. Denmark rejects external attempts to purchase Greenland (BBC News, 2025).

### Greenland

Greenland's government represents the island's majority Inuit population and advances policies for increased autonomy and eventual independence. Greenland asserts the importance of deciding its future without external interference (Jakobsen, 2024).

### NATO

Greenland's location is vital for NATO's defense infrastructure, particularly controlling access points in the North Atlantic and Arctic (Belfer Center, 2025).

### United States

The U.S. views Greenland as strategically critical for Arctic security, missile defense, and countering geopolitical rivals like Russia and China. The Trump administration controversially proposed purchasing Greenland but faces rejection from local and Danish officials (OSW, 2025; BBC News, 2025).

## Viable Solutions

### Respecting Self-Determination and Sovereignty

A fundamental solution is ensuring Greenlanders' right to self-determination is fully respected, consistent with international law. This entails creating transparent, inclusive, and democratic processes to decide Greenland's political future, including the possibility of independence. Establishing clear legal frameworks for referendums, accompanied by extensive voter education, is crucial. Both Greenland and Denmark should engage in good faith negotiations to address outstanding issues like citizenship, resource rights, and economic transition plans before any final decision (Jakobsen, 2024; EJIL Talk!, 2025).

## Balanced Geopolitical Cooperation

Given Greenland's significant strategic importance in the Arctic, maintaining cooperative arrangements with Denmark and international partners - particularly NATO and the United States - is essential for regional security. However, such cooperation should always prioritize Greenlandic autonomy and avoid external political or military pressures that undermine sovereignty. Multilateral dialogue including Arctic Council states should be promoted to manage security interests in a way that respects Greenland's political aspirations and contributes to regional stability (Belfer Center, 2025; DIIS, 2025).

## Sustainable Economic Development

Strengthening Greenland's economic independence is key to enabling effective self-governance or independence. This includes investing in diversified industries such as fisheries, responsible mining, tourism, and renewable energy. Economic development programs should emphasize training and education to build local capacity, reducing dependence on Danish subsidies. International partnerships and investment must be structured to benefit Greenland's population directly and support environmental sustainability amid climate change challenges (EPRS, 2025).

## Enhanced Social Infrastructure and Cultural Preservation

Addressing social challenges such as housing, healthcare, education, and preserving Inuit culture is vital for Greenland's long-term viability as a self-ruled or independent entity. Social programs need to be adequately funded, culturally sensitive, and aimed at improving quality of life, which in turn strengthens political stability and national identity (Jakobsen, 2024).

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