

# Chapter 11

## Global Security Problem in the Arctic Zone: NATO, Greenland, Denmark, China, and Russia – Greenland, the World's Biggest Military Unprotected Zone and a Future Task of NATO and the USA

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### ABSTRACT

*The American repeated offers to purchase Greenland has several times placed the world's biggest island at the heart of world affairs. However, as Greenland is actively seeking independence from Denmark, the future of Greenlandic defence has become crucial to understanding its independence aspirations. The threats against Denmark are very complex and are in a wider perspective the most unpredictable since the end of the Cold War. This is based not least on the aggressive behaviour of Russia, massive cyberattacks, China's economic aggressiveness, and the sustained terrorist threat against Europe and Denmark. This chapter examines the complexed international security situation in the Arctic zone. It focuses, especially, on the role of Greenland, de facto a demilitarized area in the northern hemisphere. What are the military and economic roles of Denmark, Russia, USA, Greenland, China, and further actors in the area? And what are the political, economic, military, and strategic consequences of the climate change in of the hot spots of security zones in the 2020s and in the future?*

### INTRODUCTION

The Americans repeated offers to purchase Greenland has several times placed the world's biggest island at the heart of the world affairs and great power rivalry in the Arctic. Greenland is currently enjoying

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considerable interest from both the U.S. and China while Russia is increasing its military capabilities in the region. Traditionally, Greenlandic politicians have not been interested in defence and military spending without civilian purpose. And as security policy is constitutionally outside the self-government's authority the issue has not been high on the agenda. However, as Greenland is actively seeking independence from Denmark, the future of Greenlandic defence has become crucial to understanding its independence aspirations.

However, the threats against Denmark are very complex and are in a wider perspective the most unpredictable since the end of the Cold War. This is based not least on the aggressive behaviour of Russia, massive cyberattacks, China's economic aggressivity and the sustained terrorist threat against Europe and Denmark. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the US commitment in Europe is maintained through NATO, which remains the cornerstone of Danish security policy. We must also strengthen the European security architecture and be at the forefront of the international cooperation on cyber security.

This article examines the complexed international security situation in the Arctic zone. Focus, especially, on the role of Greenland, de facto a demilitarized area in the northern hemisphere. What are the military and economic roles of Denmark, Russia, USA, Greenland, China, and further actors in the area? And what are the political, economic, military, and strategic consequences of the climate change in of the hot spots of security zones in the 2020s and forward?

## **Greenland, the Arctic Zone, and the Security Policy Situation**

The Arctic is a polar region located at the northernmost part of earth. The zone consists of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas and parts of the USA, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Russia, and Greenland/Faroe Islands (Denmark). The security situation in the Arctic is drastically changing. The primary reason is climate change, which with the retreat of the ice entails new safety risks at the same time as the North Pole area becomes more accessible to new shipping routes and new port cities, as well as new opportunities for extraction of natural resources and other economic activity. With this comes the fact that the great powers, and here the Arctic great powers both the United States and Russia as well as the non-Arctic great power China, attach an increasing geostrategic and geo-economic importance to the Arctic. The conditions of military activity in the polar region are rapidly changing, in the beginning of the 2020s. This entails reprioritizations and adjustments in the strategies and activities of the individual great powers in the region as well as in their mutual relations. The great power rivalry in the Arctic is not exclusively about the region's internal conditions and dynamics. It is just as much about whether and to what extent the general rivalry of the great powers propagates in the Arctic. (Rasmussen, 2019)

This was particularly evident in the speech of then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo just before the Arctic Council meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland, in May 2019, in which the behaviour of China and Russia both inside and outside the Arctic formed the basis for the United States' new strategic priorities for the Arctic region. In June 2019, this new strategic priority was confirmed in the Pentagon's updated Arctic strategy, which, unlike the previous one from 2016, highlighted that the Arctic region could potentially be used to facilitate military attacks on the United States and that Russia and China are US competitors in Arctic. Although military activity in the Arctic continues in 2021 is not on a par with the situation during the Cold War, there is a general build-up and increased exercise activity in the region, especially on the Russian side. A situation that increases mistrust as well as the risk of misunderstandings and unintended events. Arctic co-operation, especially under the Arctic Council, as well as the Greenlandic / Danish security policy situation is under pressure. (Conley & Melino, 2020)

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