

"NO ONE THINKS OF GREENLAND": US-Greenland Relations and Perceptions of Greenland in the US from the Early Modern Period to the 20th Century

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Abstract: The history of US-Greenland relations and the perception of Greenland in the US is a near complete historical desideratum with only few works dealing with the subject at all and those publications covering mainly the few well-known historic events. Neither US nor Danish or Greenlandic historians have dealt with the perception of Greenland in the US from Early Modern to today in its entirety.

The article provides an overview of the history of the perception of Greenland in the US and the bilateral relations of these countries from Early Modern to today, but more importantly also asks the question why this subject has been largely ignored. The title of John Griesemer's novel *No One Thinks of Greenland* is used as a parable to describe these reasons and the attitude of the US and US foreign policy towards Greenland. Furthermore, it is analyzed why the US tried purchasing Greenland several times and why certain groups in the US had an interest in keeping the US-Greenland relations in the shadows. It is also described how not purchasing Greenland made perfect sense for the US and generated a political vacuum on the island that provided some unique opportunities for the US military. Throughout history it remained true that nearly nobody in the US thought about Greenland, resulting in a unique history of bi-lateral relations.

No One Thinks of Greenland is not only the title of a novel written by John Griesemer in 2003,¹ it is also a good analogy for US-Greenland relations throughout history and more importantly the perception of Greenland by and in the US. While there were a few short periods in the 19th and 20th centuries when Greenland was in the focus of the US foreign policy, Greenland remained mostly the large and nearly uninhabited island not too far away from the US, nearly completely covered by ice and without any relevance or interest for the US. Public knowledge about Greenland in the US can be summarized as being the largest island on the globe, completely covered by an icesheet, in geological terms belonging to the North American continent and previously the stepping-stone for Vikings when they sailed to America. In addition, it might be known that Greenland was the home of US military bases during World War II and again a stepping-stone: This time for ferrying fighter airplanes from manufacturing facilities in the US to the European theatre of war.

Even in the historiography of US foreign relations, Greenland is barely mentioned. The situation might be different only when talking with military strategic planners or Arctic scientists, as for these two groups Greenland has always been of special interest, though for very different reasons.

This article analyzes the US-Greenland relations during the long 19th and 20th centuries

with a focus on the perception of Greenland in the US and furthermore explains why the US-Greenland relations gained only little attention, or why it might have been even in the interest of certain groups in the US to keep the relations in the shadows. It might be true that the hospital for Vietnam War veterans with incurable wounds that is at the center of Griesemer's novel and the movie *Guy X* (based on the novel) never existed, but it might also be true that the novel and the movie are telling a deeper story that will help us understand the specifics of the US-Greenland relations and why there has been an interest in keeping it out of sight. This paper does not aim to provide a complete account of the US-Greenland relations throughout history. This would require not only a detailed discussion of the perception of the US in Greenland but also the effects on US policy on Greenland and Greenland-Denmark relations and in particular the questions of representation of the Greenlanders within the wider Danish system, and the issue of Greenlandic sovereignty at large. It might be said that the main aim of the paper is a discussion of the 'US's Greenlandic relations.'

A historical paper would normally begin with a discussion of the historiography of the subject in this place. The only reason why there will be no such discussion in this paper is the simple fact that such a historiography barely exists. Historians dealing with US foreign policy and/or relations have either not dealt with the US-Greenland relations at all or, if dealing with the larger question of US-Nordic relations, treated Greenland merely as a footnote.

1 John Griesemer, *No One Thinks of Greenland* (New York: Picador USA, 2001).

The same is true for the small community of Greenlandic historians and even the somewhat larger community of Danish historians. Of course, these historians have dealt with the history of Greenlandic foreign relations, but they have for a variety of reasons chosen to focus more or less exclusively on the Greenland-Denmark relations, which is up to a certain degree an obvious choice given the fact that Greenland was a Danish colony for most of the modern era. Few works mention the role of the US for Greenlandic history at all, despite its obvious importance, and in the end most of these publications provide only a few lines dealing with the US-Greenland relations prior to, during, and after World War II.² Exceptions are a 1997 study published by Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Institut on Greenland during the Cold War era that focuses mainly on Danish-American perspectives and does not really relate to the direct US-Greenland relations.³ Another is a 2010 study by Beukel, Jensen, and Rytter on the phasing out of Greenland's colonial status incorporating the US-Greenland relations as one of the factors to be considered when discussing the decolonization of Greenland.⁴ Recent publications looking at the US-Greenland relations from an American perspective are mainly highly

specialized works on the history of US Coast Guard activities in the Greenland region,⁵ without a doubt important works, but shedding light only on a limited sector of the larger story. Overall, the US-Greenland relations and the perception of Greenland in the US are largely a historical desideratum, and this article will aim to stimulate further research on the topic.

It is hoped that the article will provide a first overview of the US-Greenland relations, and that it might contribute to a better understanding of US foreign relations with extremely small nations or relations that need to be considered extremely asymmetric from the outset. It is also hoped that the article will shed light on US foreign relations with nations the average American has no idea even exist or has no knowledge about beyond some stereotypes. Finally, it will be discussed how these relations could be exploited for various interests in the US and in particular for projects that could not be realized in the US due to the fear of public non-acceptance. In other words, this article is also about US policy towards a nation 'no one thinks about' in the US.

2 Axel Kjær Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland in the Twentieth Century* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2009).

3 Henry Allen Myers, *Greenland During the Cold War: Danish and American Security Policy 1945-68* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Affairs, 1997).

4 Erik Beukel, Frede P. Jensen, and Jens Elo Rytter, *Phasing out the Colonial Status of Greenland, 1945-54: A Historical Study* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2010).

5 Thaddeus D. Novak, and P. J. Capelotti, *Life and Death on the Greenland Patrol, 1942* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2005); John A. Tilley, and United States Coast Guard, *The Coast Guard & the Greenland Patrol* ([Washington, D.C.]: [Coast Guard Historian's Office], 1992).

Early US-Greenland relations

Scattered reports about Greenland can be found in American newspapers and chronicles since the first half of the 18th century. Although these reports were not based on personal knowledge of Greenland, as their writers did not visit Greenland, they provide information on the beginnings of a US-Greenland history, as these articles have shaped the image and perception of Greenland in Colonial America and consequently the early US.

One of the earliest of these reports about Greenland was featured in a 1744 issue of *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*.⁶ This thorough article provided an overview of the geography of Greenland, the inhabitants of the island and their culture, and discussed the economic potential of Greenland.⁷ The article is based on information provided by the Danish missionary Hans Egede after his return from Greenland to Denmark in the year 1736.⁸

The picture of Greenland drawn in the article is typical for early reports on all Arctic regions and Greenland in particular. The island is described as an extreme and hostile Arctic environment that is nearly uninhabitable and without any relevant features for economic activities. The Inuit population is described as 'savages' of low

intellectual capacity and without any higher level of social organization or civilization.⁹

While this picture can be found in several variations in most articles about Arctic regions in American or European newspapers of the 18th century, there are a few details unique to this article: The Greenlandic economy is described as a subsistence economy based on fishing and to a minor degree hunting, even though the hunting of sea-mammals was clearly the main basic economic activity in Greenland.¹⁰ In addition, the article discusses minor deposits of minerals, but states at the same time that they have not been explored in detail. The article concludes that there is no potential for a future economic cooperation between Greenland and America. On top of this already bleak perspective, it is mentioned that the Inuit were not supportive of, even hostile to, the only American economic interest in the region, the whaling industry: "The Greenlanders, for as indifferent they are, do not want industry to avail themselves of the plenty of their seas."¹¹

This text can be seen as the beginning of a tradition of articles typical for the perception of Greenland in the US: in essence a country that might be interesting as a curiosity for the feuilleton sections of the media but without any real relevance for Colonial America or the early US and by no means an economic partner.

6 L.N. Richardson, *A History of Early American Magazines, 1741-1789* (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1931). 38.

7 "Conclusion of the New Description of Greenland," *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 1 (1744), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=834454692&Fmt=7&clientid=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

8 "Conclusion of the New Description of Greenland."

9 "Conclusion of the New Description of Greenland."

10 Ole Marquardt, *From Sealing to Fishing: Social and Economic Change in Greenland, 1850-1940* (Reykjavík: North Atlantic Fisheries History Assoc.).

11 "Conclusion of the New Description of Greenland."

Half a century later, the picture of Greenland remained unchanged. Considering that most articles were still based on second-hand accounts or information already published in America, nothing else was to be expected. When for example the *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* reported about Greenland in March 1792,¹² even the title of the article referred directly to an older publication that was available in an English translation as early as 1767.¹³ At least the original publication by David Crantz was based on first-hand experience, as Crantz had lived for one year in Greenland in the Moravian missionary stations. Covering the same topics as the earlier article in *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, the only new aspect was an extensive report on the missionary activities of the Moravians on Greenland.

The United Brethren's Missionary Intelligencer occupied a somewhat unique position among 19th-century American newspapers reporting on Greenland. Published since 1822, the *Intelligencer* was a hybrid between an internal newsletter for the American branch of the *Unitas Fratrum* (Moravian Church) and a missionary newspaper for a broader

audience.¹⁴ While it was not uncommon that such newspapers reported about missionary activities overseas, it was unique for the *Intelligencer* to include such relatively thorough coverage of Greenland. As the Moravians operated four missionary stations in Greenland, the reports were primary records, although they were translations of reports and letters sent to the main headquarters of *Unitas Fratrum* in Europe. Although the focus of these reports was the missionary activities, they provided detailed insight into everyday life in Greenland. These insights consisted of news on health and epidemics, results of hunting and fishing, population growth or shrinkage, educational topics, etc. – in other words, topics found in coverage of rural villages within the US.¹⁵ This is at the same time the main reason why these articles were so unique. Originating with Moravian missionaries who lived in Greenland, they were not seeking the spectacular but provided plain information about everyday life.

The religious journals of the US continued to be a most valuable source of information about Greenland as some American clergy were allowed to visit Greenland despite the official Danish closed-country policy for Greenland.

12 "Account of the Greenlanders, Their Habitations, &C. From Crantz's History of Greenland," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 3, no. 3 (1792), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=789332472&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

13 David Crantz, *The History of Greenland Containing a Description of the Country, and Its Inhabitants: By David Crantz. Translated from the High-Dutch, ... In Two Volumes* (London: Brethren's Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel among the Heathen, 1767).

14 Gisela Mettele, *Weltbürgertum Oder Gottesreich: Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine Als Globale Gemeinschaft 1727-1857* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). 187.

15 See for example: "Greenland," *The United Brethren's Missionary Intelligencer, and Religious Miscellany; Containing the Most Recent Accounts Relating to the United Brethren's Missions among the Heathen; with Other Interesting Communications from the Records of that Church* 3, no. 9 (1830), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=559659652&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

For example, in 1864 two members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) got the chance to visit Greenland.¹⁶ One of them, Isaac Sharp, wrote a detailed article on the trip to Greenland after his return that was published 1865 in the *Friends' Review*.¹⁷ Like the earlier articles by and about the Moravians, Sharp focused on the missionary activities in Greenland, but embedded this information into a personal story of his own (religious) experiences. This story was again similar to reports by missionaries to rural areas all over the world and did not use the common stereotypes about Greenland. Of course, it also needs to be recognized that Sharp's visit occurred at a time when Danish missionaries had been working in Greenland for a substantial period and thus the society had undergone more than a century of development.

While the scattered reports in religious journals provided a more or less realistic picture of Greenland to their American readership in the 19th century – at least between the main lines that dealt with the success of the missionary activities—other journals of the 19th century continued in the style of the 18th century to report about Greenland as a cold wilderness inhabited by 'savages.'

16 "Quaker Evangelists Going to Greenland," *New York Evangelist* 35, no. 19 (1864), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=846034442&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

17 Isaac Sharp, "Narrative of Isaac Sharp's Visit to Greenland in 1864," *Friends' Review; a Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* 19, no. 1 (1865), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1115755472&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

During the second half of the 19th century, the attitude towards Greenland in American newspaper shifted completely. The question of the Viking settlements in Greenland and the Viking journeys from Greenland to America came into focus.¹⁸ Interestingly, American journals combined their reports on the Vikings with information on contemporary Greenland and, even more interestingly, introduced a new perspective on the Inuit:

*A few of those legends and scenes of modern life in Greenland have been illustrated by wood-cuts [sic], executed by the Esquimaux [sic] themselves under Dr. Rink's direction, which afford considerable proof of their intelligence and capability of improvement.*¹⁹

Additional articles in a variety of American journals followed this line when they stressed the differences between Inuit and Native American cultures,²⁰ but did at least not directly construct Greenlandic culture as inferior. One of the

18 "Discoveries in Greenland," *Army and Navy Chronicle* 7, no. 6 (1838), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=792305062&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

19 "Traditions of the Esquimaux," *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion* 29 (1868), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1592985012&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

20 See for example: "Courtship in Greenland," *Flag of Our Union* 24, no. 18 (1869), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=776992092&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>, and "Dress of a Greenland Bell," *Harper's Bazaar* 2, no. 30 (1869), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=753055142&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

reasons for this minor shift might have been the writings of Danish colonial administrator Heinrich Rink now being available in the US and thus publications that praised the success of Danish colonial administration of Greenland.²¹

At the same time more first-hand accounts on Greenland became available in the US, although the general coverage remained sparse. Reports and short notices about scientific expeditions began to dominate the stories about Greenland, and while it was an improvement to have first-hand reports, it also meant that the focus of the news shifted towards scientific research, mainly in the context of geography, geology, and the natural sciences at large. In addition, a few articles and reports started covering the cryolite deposit near Ivigtut – the only Greenlandic natural resource that would become critically important for the US economy.²²

The next period of US-Greenland relations was directly related to the acquisition of Alaska by the US in 1867. One of the most prominent advocates for expansion beyond the territory that constitutes the 48 contiguous states of the US was William H. Seward. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Seward thought that the aim of the US was not limited to expanding

the territory from coast to coast but also to the North. As early as 1846 he stated: "Our population is destined to roll its resistless waves to the icy barriers of the north, and to encounter oriental civilization on the shores of the Pacific."²³ After becoming Secretary of State in 1861, Seward did not prioritize the idea of an expansion to the North due to the Civil War. After the war Seward came back to his idea that the US was destined to expand to the Arctic and the Pacific shores, an idea that finally resulted in the purchase of Russian America / Alaska in 1867.

Lesser known than the Alaska purchase is the fact that proponents of a further expansion of the US, for example the expansionist Robert J. Walker, suggested in 1867 to Seward that he consider not only obtaining the Caribbean islands of St. Thomas and St. John from Denmark, but also Greenland and Iceland.²⁴ While Seward's reaction to the suggestion did not result in immediate political action, he had at least a somewhat positive attitude towards the idea. Seward asked Walker to put his suggestions in writing and to substantiate his ideas with facts about the islands to be readily available, whenever the government might consider the topic.²⁵ Walker had the United States Coast Survey prepare a report

21 H. Rink, *Danish Greenland: Its People and Products* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974) (originally published 1877 by Henry S. King & Co. in London).

22 "Cryolite - Aluminum Minerals," *Scientific American* Vol. VIII., no. 23 (1863), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=164236801&Fmt=7&clientId=3505&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

23 Cited after: Thomas Andrew Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980). 360.

24 Brainerd Dyer, "Robert J. Walker on Acquiring Greenland and Iceland," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (1940). 263.

25 Dyer. 264.

about Greenland and Iceland, including sections dealing with the resources available on the islands. When the report was completed, Walker delivered it to Seward, who must have not only been convinced of the importance of the report, but also of the idea of acquiring the territories. Why else would he have authorized the printing of the report with an introduction by Walker that highlighted not only the most relevant passages of the report but furthermore stressed the potential and relevance for future American economic activity?²⁶

Nonetheless, not all members of Congress were in favor of further expansion, and in particular the purchase of Alaska was by no means undisputed. In a discussion about the appropriation of the 7,200,000US\$ required for the purchase, critical voices limited their response to Seward's ideas not to Alaska, but they included cynical comments about St. Thomas and St. John as well as Greenland, as the Walker report had become available to some members of Congress prior to official publication.²⁷ While the critical voices sarcastically called on the great need for the US to acquire the valuable Greenlandic glaciers and Icelandic geysers, moderate members of Congress argued that the idea of any further purchases would have to wait until the national debt had been substantially reduced.²⁸ As Seward's immediate targets besides Alaska

were neither Greenland nor Iceland, but still the Danish possessions in the Caribbean, he did not officially bring up the two islands in the North. When Congress finally somewhat unexpectedly denied the plans for the acquisition of the islands of St. Thomas and St. John, Seward and Walker had to realize that there was no chance of getting any kind of approval for a potential purchase of Greenland or Iceland by Congress.²⁹ The US expansionism had been brought to a halt for now. When the report on Iceland and Greenland was finally published in 1868, the debate on an actual acquisition of the two islands was already obsolete, as Seward and Walker had realized that they would never be able to secure a majority in Congress. Although the Walker report ultimately failed its primary purpose, it had served another: Greenland had entered the stage of public discussion in the US and among US policy makers.

Thus, with the publication of the Walker report in 1868, a good deal of information about Greenland had become available in the US and, more importantly, American companies had already begun to import Greenlandic cryolite.³⁰ In addition, polar research was no longer limited to the search for a Northwest Passage, the somewhat Romantic ideas related to the search of the lost Franklin expedition of 1845-1848 (identifiable in the context of the Grinnell expeditions

26 Dyer.

27 Dyer. 265-266.

28 Dyer. 266.

29 Dyer.

30 Benjamin Mills Peirce, and United States Department of State, *Report on Resources of Iceland and Greenland* ([Washington?]: U.S. G.P.O., 1868).

of the 1850s), or the search for an open Polar Sea.³¹ Now, attempts to reach new Farthest Norths and ultimately the North Pole became hot topics. Especially the expeditions of Robert E. Peary and Frederik Cook received substantial attention in the US, but they were mainly discussed in the context of exploring uncharted lands in the High Arctic or reaching the North Pole and did not change the American understanding of Greenland as an Arctic wilderness.³²

The Danish Virgin Islands

The next time that Greenland surfaced on the political agenda of the US was in 1916-17, when the US negotiated with Denmark about the purchase of the Danish Virgin Islands. Although the main interest of the US was to secure the approaches to the Panama Canal and the Danish interest was to get rid of a financially struggling colony, the final agreement between the parties included a clause that the US accepted Danish sovereignty over the whole of Greenland, which was to a certain degree contested by Norway that had split from Denmark in 1804 to join a union with Sweden and become a sovereign country only a few years prior (1905). Although there was an intense public debate in the US on the US-Danish Virgin Islands treaty, the Greenland

clause was never a real point in this discussion. It seems that the Danish government had managed to add this clause to the treaty without gaining major attention in the US. 'No one thinks about Greenland' was once again true in the US.

Given the fact that since Peary's various expeditions to North Greenland, there was at least certain US interest in North Greenland, it is astonishing that the Greenland issue never became a real element of the debates on the US-Danish Virgin Islands Treaty.³³ While the Greenland clause of the treaty might be considered as a minor concession to Denmark, it also sheds light on the relevance given to Greenland in US foreign policy. Traditionally, US foreign policy towards Latin America was based on the principles of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904 became a justification for direct intervention against European colonial nations in Latin America. Nevertheless, the US granted with the Greenland clause a European colonial nation full sovereignty over an island that belongs to the western hemisphere. Thus, the clause needs to be understood as a complete contradiction to US foreign policy, which can only be explained by the US not caring too much about Greenland.

31 Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin, 1853, '54, '55* (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1856).

32 See Lyle Dick, "Robert Peary's North Polar Narratives and the Making of an American Icon," *American Studies* 45, no. 2 (2004), and Bruce B. Henderson, *True North: Peary, Cook, and the Race to the Pole* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005).

33 For the nexus of Robert E. Peary's activities in Northern Greenland, related US designs for the wider Thule region and the US-Danish Virgin Islands Treaty, see Marc Jacobsen and Sara Olsvig, "The History of the United States' Securitizations of Greenland," in *Greenland in Arctic Security: (De) Securitization Dynamics under Climatic Thaw and Geopolitical Freeze*, ed. Marc Jacobsen, Ole Wæver, and Ulrik Pram (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).



The abandoned cryolite mine in Ivigtut in July 2022. Besides using Greenland as a stepping stone for ferry-flights between the US and Europe, the cryolite mine in Ivigtut was one of the main reasons for US military engagement in Greenland during World War II. (Copyright: Ingo Heidbrink, 2022)

Cryolite and World War II Bases

The main reason why Greenland gained US interest during the first decades of the 20th century was cryolite. The only known natural deposit of this mineral that is large enough for commercial exploitation is in southwest Greenland, close to the village of Ivigtut. While described by Danish veterinarian and physician Peder C. Abildgaard as early as in the late 1790s, it was the Pennsylvania Salt Manufacturing Company that would become the first major user of the

mineral. First used by Penn Salt for manufacturing caustic soda, it was the Hall-Héroult process of aluminum production that caused the main demand for cryolite in the US. Penn Salt never became directly involved in the operation of the mine, as the Danish Kriolith Mine og Handels Selskabet A/S owned a monopoly on the extraction of cryolite since 1864. Nevertheless, Penn Salt managed to negotiate a contract with the Danish government that made the company the exclusive US importer of cryolite.

As long as cryolite was only used for caustic soda production, it had no major relevance for the US-Greenland relations. It was an exotic mineral brought to the US from Greenland by a single company and without much relevance for the economy at large. This situation changed when the US industries increased aluminum production for aircraft manufacturing at the beginning of World War II. As the Hall-Héroult process was the only known method for industrial scale aluminum production and required the use of cryolite, the deposit in Ivigtut was now of crucial relevance for the war industries, as aluminum required for war-plane production could only be manufactured by using cryolite and the only known deposit for this mineral was in Greenland. Consequently, Greenland was no longer the country nobody cared about in the US, but a country that was instrumental to the American war effort.

US Coast Guard (USCG) cutters had even begun operating in Greenlandic waters prior to the US officially entering the war, and the so-called Buskø-Incident³⁴ sparked public debate in the US, as the USCG had seized the Norwegian-flagged ship belonging to the so-called home fleet in Greenlandic waters and brought it to Boston, de-facto bringing the first prisoners of war to the US in October 1941, at a time when the US was officially not

even part of the war.³⁵³⁶ With Japan attacking Pearl Harbor a few weeks later and the US officially becoming a combatant, the Buskø-Incident quickly became overshadowed, but Greenland remained a country of relevance, at least in military circles. But why was the USCG operating off Greenland at a time when the US had not entered the war? The first reason is the simple fact that the USCG was responsible for the operation of the International Ice Patrol, a monitoring service for drifting icebergs in the North Atlantic established after the loss of RMS TITANIC in 1912,³⁷ which was suspended for the war only in December 1941.³⁸ The second and more complex reason was that after the German occupation of Denmark, the Danish ambassador to the US, Henrik Kaufmann, refused to cooperate with the Nazi-German forces in Denmark and negotiated on his own initiative with the US an agreement related to the defense of Greenland. The agreement was signed by Kaufmann and US Secretary of State Cordell Hull on April 10, 1941, and later approved by President Roosevelt.

With Greenland not being occupied by Nazi-German forces and the local governors being

34 Frode Skarstein, "'A Cursed Affair'—How a Norwegian Expedition to Greenland Became the USA's First Maritime Capture in World War II," *Polar Research* 26, no. 2 (2007).

35 During the German occupation of Norway, the vessels of the so-called home fleet, the fleet of German-occupied Norway, flew the Norwegian flag as well as the ships of the Notraship fleet under the control of the Norwegian government in exile.

36 Skarstein.

37 Robert De C Ward, "A Cruise with the International Ice Patrol," *Geographical Review* 14, no. 1 (Jan) (1924).

38 "Icy Waters Patrolled," *The Science News-Letter* 49, no. 12 (1946).

in support of the agreement, Greenland had become de-facto a sovereign nation.³⁹ Key elements of the agreement were the defense of the island against a potential occupation being provided by the US, the background for the seizure of the BUSKØ by the USCG, and the right to establish all kinds of US military installations in Greenland. The main reasons for the US to sign the agreement were to secure access to the cryolite deposit and the geo-strategic position of the island as a stepping-stone between the US and Europe. This stepping-stone was of particular importance in the context of the lend-lease agreements and the delivery of US-manufactured military aircraft to Europe, as these aircraft could not cross the Atlantic without having a base available for re-fueling. Other reasons why Greenland was of special interest to the US Army Air Force (USAAF) included long-range reconnaissance flights to cover the mid-Atlantic gap, weather observation for forecasts for Europe, and simply a deterrent against Nazi-German occupation of the island. The agreement marked a substantial change in US-Greenland relations. Now Greenland had become a country for which a foreign policy needed to be developed. An American consulate had already opened in Godthåb (today Nuuk) in 1940.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the

agreement provided the US nearly unlimited rights to establish military installations and finally with Greenland being dependent on imports for daily life, a potential market for US consumer products.

Over the course of World War II, the US established several military installations in Greenland, including two complete airbases. Based on various accounts of cooperation between the Greenlandic authorities and the US military, it is safe to state that the relations between Greenland and the US were characterized by a situation in which the Greenlandic authorities de-jure were responsible for everything going on in Greenland, but that de-facto the US military could do whatever it pleased. Given the special circumstances of the war and Greenland being completely dependent on supplies brought to the island from the US, this situation was no surprise, but it would also become a pattern characteristic for the US-Greenland relations ever since. Furthermore, all developments in Greenland were more or less outside any political control. From the American perspective, developments in Greenland were developments in a foreign country, thus outside the direct control of the political institutions of the US, and while Greenlandic institutions were in theory responsible for the political control, they were de-facto not able to oppose any development proposed by the US military, as the 1941 agreement provided the US military nearly unlimited rights. The island had become an area where the US military basically could do whatever

39 Aviâja Rosing Jakobsen, and Jens Heinrich, *Sorsunnersuaq Kingulleq Nunarpullu = Anden Verdenskrig og Grønland* (Nuuk: Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu, 2005). 2005 37.

40 Thomas P. Ostrom, *The United States Coast Guard in World War II: A History of Domestic and Overseas Actions* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2009). 81.

they wanted without effective parliamentary control. The US congress cared little about what was going on in Greenland, if the military objectives were met, and the Greenlandic institutions were not strong enough for any opposition to the US military given the complete dependence on US supplies and the US military being the only protection against potential occupation by Nazi-German forces.

When it comes to the Greenlandic institutions during World War II, it needs to be noted that these were not representatives of a Greenlandic nation, but Danish colonial administrators with the Danish Ambassador to the US, Henrik Kaufmann, and Governor Eske Brun being the most important actors. They might not have agreed with the official Danish policy during the German occupation and have established a de-facto independent government for the island, but not because they were interested in developing Greenland into an independent sovereign nation. They were looking for pragmatic solutions for Greenland and making sure that a potential Nazi-German attempt to occupy the island could be averted.⁴¹

On the other hand, the US activities in Greenland resulted in modernization of the island. While the former Danish colonial policy was determined by a paternalistic approach

with a strict no-contact policy at the center, the US did not continue this policy, but even opened the island to US mail-order trade. Thus, the World War II period is remembered in Greenland as a period of rapid modernization. Kerosene instead of train-oil lamps, electricity and radio sets as well as a news service providing information on the world outside Greenland, widespread use of rifles instead of hand-held harpoons are just some examples of the modern amenities that became available in Greenland during the war.⁴²⁴³ Several administrators in Greenland remained skeptical about the modernization of the island and demanded that the US military continue the no-contact policy, but in the end, the pragmatic approach of the US prevailed, resulting in the indigenous population having for the first time ever real access to the consumer world of the 20th century without the colonial administration controlling the indigenous population's access to the world.

After the end of World War II, Greenlandic officials decided to return to Danish rule and thus a colonial status again. Nevertheless, Pandora's box had been opened with the Greenlandic population now having access to 20th-century consumer culture and consequently a balance between traditional and modern life had to be found. The former

41 For a discussion of the actions and motifs of Eske Brun and Henrik Kaufmann during World War II see: Bo Lidegaard, *I Kongens Navn: Henrik Kauffmann I Dansk Diplomati, 1919-1958* (København: Samleren, 1996).

42 Of course, rifles had been introduced to Greenland earlier within the context of various expeditions and by the colonial administration to increase efficiency of the hunt, but during World War II, they finally became accessible to all Greenlanders.

43 Jakobsen, and Heinrich.

Danish no-contact policy was paternalistic and no longer acceptable in the mid-20th century, but it had helped preserve a unique culture that was now at risk of being eaten up by US consumer culture.

Post-World War II Developments

While the 19th-century proposals for acquiring Greenland were more or less of a theoretical nature, the US had a vital interest in Greenland after the end of World War II, as the bases in Greenland—in particular the two airbases—were now of crucial relevance for the developing conflict between the US and the Soviet Union. More importantly, Greenland's geographical position in the middle between Washington and Moscow made the island prime real-estate for the development of future military installations. However, the Danish position on the future of US military installations in Greenland was completely opposite to the American stance. Denmark considered the 1941 agreement on US bases on Greenland obsolete and as an agreement that had lost its justification with the end of the war. Danish politicians were asking for a phasing out of the US military presence in Greenland, but the US was not willing to give up the bases.⁴⁴

When the Danish Foreign Minister, Gustav Rasmussen, visited Washington in 1946 to discuss a potential withdrawal of US troops, US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes presented him with a memorandum including three

proposals for the future of US military presence in Greenland. Two of the options were modifications and amendments to the 1941 agreement, while the third option was a straightforward proposal that the US purchase Greenland for US\$ 100 Million,⁴⁵ thus basically reverting to the same politics that have characterized the US Denmark/Greenland relations in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century.⁴⁶

While the US considered purchasing Greenland as the easiest and best solution to secure future base-rights in Greenland, the Danish side was taken by complete surprise. From the point of view of the Danish Government, giving up sovereignty over Greenland or selling the island to another nation was not an option at all. It remains unclear if the American offer to buy Greenland was openly rejected or simply ignored,⁴⁷ but the result was that Denmark retained the recently regained sovereignty over Greenland and did not sell the island to the US.⁴⁸

It is also unclear if the proposal of an American purchase of Greenland was discussed on the island itself, but it is doubtful. On the one hand, Governor Brun was definitely in favor of continuing with Denmark, as his behavior

44 Beukel, Jensen, and Rytter. 49.

45 Beukel, Jensen, and Rytter. 50.

46 Peter Hough, *International Politics of the Arctic: Coming in from the Cold* (New York: Routledge, 2013). 25.

47 Beukel, Jensen, and Rytter. 51

48 Natalia Loukacheva, *The Arctic Promise: Legal and Political Autonomy of Greenland and Nunavut* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). 132.



The US Narsarssuak airbase on Greenland in the mid-1950s. The base was originally established during World War II (1941) with the code-name Blue West One. Adjacent to the airbase was since 1943 a military hospital with 250 beds. (Source: Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. URL: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NarsarssuakAB1956.jpg>)

at the end of the war had demonstrated when he decided to give up the de-facto sovereignty and to return the political power back to Copenhagen.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the domestic discussion in Greenland in the immediate post-war period was characterized by the question of simply returning to the old administrative structures of the pre-war period or to modify the administrative structures within the Danish context and to provide better representation of the Greenlandic

49 For a precise discussion of the return of the political control over Greenland to Danish institutions, the role of Eske Brun in this context and Eske Brun's post-war activities, compare: Jens Heinrich, *Eske Brun Og Det Moderne Grønlands Tilblivelse 1932-64: Ph.D.-Afhandling* (Nuuk: Ilisimatusarfik, 2010).

population in the political process or even to give up the trade monopoly.⁵⁰ Opting to become part of another country was not on the agenda, as neither constituted sovereignty. Ultimately, the proposal to purchase Greenland demonstrated that the US had understood the geostrategic relevance of the island in the new global political order that emerged post World War II and would finally result in the Cold War with Greenland being right in the middle of a situation defined by nuclear deterrence, strategic bomber fleets, ballistic missiles, and long-range radar.

50 M. J. Dunbar, "Greenland During and since the Second World War," *International Journal* 5, no. 2 (1950). 134.

The Danish request to the US to give up its military installations in Greenland demonstrated equally clearly that the Danish government had by no means understood this new global order or had not yet decided on which side of the new conflict Denmark would be, when the US offered to purchase Greenland, but was just hoping to be able to return to a pre-war world. Asking the US to give up all military installations in Greenland might be understood as naïve, but it needs to be understood that Denmark was in a very special situation with Soviet troops having left Bornholm only in April 1946 after nearly a year of occupation since the surrender of the German troops. From the Danish perspective, selling Greenland to the US might have looked very much as an invitation to the Soviet Union to return to Bornholm. In the end, every US military base in Denmark or Greenland as well as in Norway or Iceland could also be understood as a justification for Soviet demands for military bases in the same countries, in particular on Bornholm or within the Spitsbergen archipelago.⁵¹ Thus, the Danish position might not have been naïve, but simply focused on an island much closer to home than Greenland.

For the US it might have been convenient to be able to purchase Greenland and thus avoid the need to negotiate with Denmark in the future about military developments, but simply ignoring the Danish request for withdrawing US troops from Greenland

demonstrated as early as 1946 the pattern that became characteristic for the military aspects of the US-Greenland relations during the Cold War. This pattern might in the end have been even more convenient for the US military, as the military could still basically do whatever it pleased and did not need to fear that domestic politics of the US or concerns for the local population affected them too much. In an oversimplified version, the final answer to the question of purchasing Greenland from Denmark might have been as simple as: Why purchase something when you can use it for free?

This approach remained characteristic for the US-Greenland relations over the following decades. While Greenland became a testing area for US military activities and equipment, it remained officially a part of Denmark and thus US politics did not need to worry too much about it. Probably the clearest case of this policy was the construction of Camp Century and the related plans for the so-called project Iceworm.⁵² This new US policy towards Greenland became obvious for the first time when the US military decided to build a new airbase in the North of Greenland. Once the best location for this new airbase had been determined, a region close to the Greenlandic village of Thule in the far North of the island that was already the location of a small US military installation

51 Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Naval Institute Press, 2007). 51.

52 For a complete history of Camp Century, see Kristian Hvidtfelt Nielsen, and Henry Nielsen, *Camp Century: The Untold Story of America's Secret Arctic Military Base under the Greenland Ice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

during World War II, Danish and American authorities cooperated in a way that would become stereotypical for the US-Greenland relations of the Cold-War period. In short, the US requested from Denmark everything that was required for the construction of the base, most importantly the land, and Denmark simply agreed to the request without consulting the Greenlandic population. In fact, the local population of Thule was forced to resettle to nearby Qaanaaq, resulting in substantial hardship and, ultimately, only a 2003 [sic!] judgment by the Danish Supreme Court classified the relocation as an unlawful act against local population, granting ex-post compensation for expropriated property.⁵³

Once Thule airbase had become a reality, the projects became more extreme with Camp Century as the first step of Project Iceworm. Camp Century was a US military station literally in the Greenlandic ice-shield, designed to prove the concept of an autonomous military station in polar regions. The design even included a small nuclear power station that operated from 1960 to 1963. This nuclear power plant is a good illustration of the US-Greenland politics at this time: Denmark was skeptical of the use of nuclear power, but the Danish administration and parliament did not question the US idea of establishing a nuclear power plant at Camp Century. In other words, while Denmark was

critical against such projects on the Danish mainland, it was not an issue for them when it happened in Greenland. In short, if the Danish administration did not care about it, there was no reason for the US to question this decision, given the pro-nuclear position of the US. The result of these two policies was a regulatory vacuum, which could be used by the US military. US regulations did not fully apply, as Camp Century was not in US territory, and while Danish regulations and parliamentary control would have theoretically been applicable, they were of no real relevance, as Camp Century was in Greenland and not on the Danish mainland. The US could state that it was a Danish responsibility and Denmark could simply state that it was a decision by the US military. The only ones never asked about their opinion in this context were the inhabitants of Greenland itself.

The situation becomes even more interesting when discussing the plans for the never-realized Project Iceworm. To date there is only little information about the project available, but the basic idea of Iceworm was to dig an enormous network of tunnels into the icecap and to use them as a base for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles with nuclear warheads.⁵⁴ While some historians doubt that anybody in the US military ever thought that Iceworm could become a reality and place the whole

53 For a complete account of the forced resettlement compare:
Per Walsøe, *Goodbye Thule: The Compulsory Relocation in 1953* (Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter, 2003).

54 Compare the following publications for the little information available about Project Iceworm: Nikolaj Pedersen, *The Iceman That Didn't Come: "Project Iceworm" and the Search for a Nato Deterrent, 1960-1962* (Aarhus: Institut for Statskundskab, Aarhus Universitet, 2005) and Erik D. Weiss, "Cold War under the Ice: The Army's Bid for a Long-Range Nuclear Role, 1959-1963," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 3 (2001).

project idea into the context of inner-service rivalries between the different branches of the US armed services, the information available again sheds light on the US-Greenland relations and the special role of Denmark within these relations.⁵⁵ According to Nikolaj Pedersen, Camp Century as the initial test project for Iceworm was announced to Denmark as a platform to test construction technologies under Arctic conditions, including the use of portable nuclear power plants, and to support scientific research related to the icecap.⁵⁶

Given Iceworm's top-secret status, the ideas for this project were never publicly announced in the US or in Denmark. Greenland was once more a sandbox for futuristic projects of the US military about which US politics did not really care, as they happened outside US territory and Denmark was willing to accept the superficial and incomplete explanations provided by the US. Again, nobody cared about Greenland, which once more had become a place for projects developed in the military ivory tower and would have resulted in the island becoming a prime target for Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles, if it would have ever become a reality. Such a project would never have found public approval if it were proposed to be established in the US or on the Danish mainland.

Ultimately, the decision not to purchase Greenland provided the US military with a unique chance to establish a sandbox for all

kind of military developments that provided even greater opportunities, as if Greenland were a part of the US. If Greenland had been purchased by the US making Greenlanders US citizens, it would at least theoretically have been impossible to simply neglect them when planning projects like Camp Century or Iceworm. Of course, the experiences of residents of the US-Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, Micronesia, and the District of Columbia, as well as indigenous Alaskans show that being part of the US does not necessarily result in equal and full representation in the political system of the US,⁵⁷ but at least the moral obligation for US politics to consider the interests of Greenlanders would have been higher than if the Greenlanders remained Danish citizens. With Greenland continuing with Denmark and Danish government mainly caring about the affairs of the Danish mainland, Greenlanders ended up in a de-facto political vacuum and without major recognition of their problems by US media and the public, a situation that might be described as convenient for any military planner.

The ultimate pinnacle of this situation became finally obvious in the context of the crash of a B-52 bomber at Thule airbase in 1968. As Danish and American historians have extensively discussed the history of the B-52 crash

55 Weiss.

56 Nikolaj Pedersen, "The Iceman That Never Came," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 33, no. 1 (2008). 78.

57 Abraham Holtzman, "Empire and Representation: The U. S. Congress," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1986). 271.

and its wider ramifications,⁵⁸ there is no need to provide a detailed account. In short, a B-52 strategic bomber of the US Air Force crashed on January 21, 1968, near Thule. The bomber carried four hydrogen bombs that were destroyed during the crash, releasing substantial amounts of nuclear material into the environment. Following the accident, the USAF, in cooperation with Danish authorities, initiated a clean-up effort nicknamed Operation Crested Ice aiming to collect all radioactively contaminated debris as well as contaminated snow and ice. Crested Ice was officially terminated on September 13, 1968, with roughly 90 percent of the contaminated material removed from the island.⁵⁹

The main reason why the Thule accident of 1968 is important for any history of the US-Greenland relations is neither the crash itself nor the following clean-up operation. It is the mere fact that there were four hydrogen bombs aboard the B-52 strategic bomber that makes it relevant. For the US it was obvious that strategic bombers operating in the context of the Chrome Dome program needed to carry nuclear weapons as a nuclear deterrent. Denmark, on the other hand, already

had decided in 1957 on a no-nuclear weapons policy on Danish territory and thus there should have been no such weapons onboard the B-52. Immediately after the accident the Danish and the US government stated that the plane was not on a nuclear-armed mission in Greenlandic airspace but had turned towards Greenland only because of an emergency, thus making the presence of the hydrogen bombs in Greenlandic airspace an acceptable consequence of a flight emergency.

When the US in 1990 finally declassified documents related to the accident, it became obvious that the Danish government could have been aware of the presence of nuclear weapons at Thule airbase, causing the so-called Thulegate scandal. The official report commissioned by the Danish government finally concluded that the Danish Prime Minister Hans Christian Hansen must have been aware of the US deploying nuclear weapons to Greenland but had chosen to ignore this knowledge.⁶⁰ Thus he contradicted the Danish no-nuclear weapons policy and resorted as early as 1957 to not mentioning the policy in negotiations with the US about Thule airbase. He followed up on the discussion with a letter, in which he replied to the US question of whether or not he wanted to be informed if the US would decide to deploy nuclear weapons to Thule. He responded that this question did not give cause to any comments on his part.⁶¹ De facto the Danish government simply decided

58 Knud Juel, "The Thule Episode Epidemiological Follow up after the Crash of a B-52 Bomber in Greenland: Registry Linkage, Mortality, Hospital Admissions," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 46, no. 4 (1992).
G. E. Torres, ed., *Project Crested Ice* (Kirtland, New Mexico: U.S. Air Force, 1970).

59 For an assessment of the radiation doses resulting from the accident, see Kaare Ulbak, ed., *The Thule Accident: Assessment of Radiation Doses from Terrestrial Radioactive Contamination* (Copenhagen: National Board of Health, 2011).

60 Myers.

61 Jeroen van Dongen, *Cold War Science and the Transatlantic Circulation of Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). 247.

already in 1957 to turn a blind eye towards the issue of US nuclear weapons in Greenland. Again, the situation was as follows: US policy towards Greenland was not a direct policy towards a sovereign nation, but a subset of US foreign policy towards Denmark. Thus, from an American perspective, Copenhagen was the only partner for any discussion regarding Greenland. For the Danish government, good relations with the US were important and if a request by the US did not affect the Danish mainland, there was little reason not to comply. Simplified, the US used the official channels for requesting permission to station nuclear weapons in Greenland with the request not being denied. Denmark was not directly responsible for bringing the weapons to Greenland and had not permitted another nation to do so. Again, nobody thought about Greenland and though being directly affected by the US bringing nuclear weapons to Greenland, ultimately resulting in the nuclear contamination of parts of the land after the B-52 crash in 1968, Greenland was not a part of any bilateral negotiations.

Towards a New Regime within US-Greenland Relations

With the Danish approach towards Greenland changing substantially in the 1970s, the US approach changed too. In 1979 Greenland became a self-governing overseas administrative division of Denmark, and while self-governance was limited to domestic affairs during the early years, more and more areas

of administrative and political responsibility were transferred from Copenhagen to Nuuk in the following decades. In addition, the end of the Cold War limited the geo-strategic relevance of Greenland for the US and US military activities in Greenland were heavily reduced. At the same time, trade between Greenland and the US increased and Greenland became a destination for US based cruise ships.

However, the 'no one thinks of Greenland' pattern continued to a certain degree but now with a different twist. There is not a single freight shipping line providing direct services between the US and Greenland despite the comparatively short distance between the countries. Even the icons of American consumer culture that can be found in nearly every country on the globe that has no hostile relation with the US, McDonald's and Coca Cola, neglected Greenland until the early 2000s. For McDonald's, the reason for having no outlet in Greenland was and is simply that there is not a single place with enough population to fulfill the requirements for a franchise. For Coca Cola the situation was a little different, as the company could cooperate with a Danish/Greenlandic soft-drink company, but the fact that Coca Cola did not require the use of its iconic bottles but accepted Coca Cola to be bottled in 0.2l standard Greenlandic bottles, easily shows that the company considered Greenland different from other nations. Greenland was the only country on the globe where not using the iconic Coca Cola bottles was an acceptable option for

the Atlanta-based company that cared about its brand identity all over the globe, but not in Greenland.⁶² When Air Greenland in 2008 decided to offer a direct service between Baltimore and Greenland, the service was ended after only a couple of round-trips as there were not enough passengers to sustain the new route. Not enough US residents were thinking about Greenland or, more precisely, were interested in going there to sustain even a once-a-week-only flight connection. There have been several visits of high-ranking US politicians to Greenland in recent years, and cooperation between the US and Greenland within the Arctic Council is today a diplomatic routine, but in the end, the main characteristic of the US-Greenland relations is still that they are surprisingly limited, in particular with Greenland being part of the North American continent and only a few hundred nautical miles from the US.

In a surprise statement, then US President Donald J. Trump proposed in the summer of 2019 to purchase Greenland from Denmark, causing an immediate rebuke by the Danish government. While Trump compared the idea to a real estate deal and suggested potential strategic benefits for the US, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen simply replied that Greenland was not for sale and that Greenland belonged to

Greenland.⁶³ The issue was dead on arrival but once again shed light on the perception of Greenland in the US. As President Trump stated himself, the issue was not a priority for the US,⁶⁴ and it is unclear if he was ever serious about the proposal, or if it was just another stunt during an already severely troubled presidency, to distract from domestic issues. While the idea of purchasing a country might have been acceptable in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was unacceptable in the beginning of the 21st century. The simple fact that a sitting US president could propose such an idea in 2019 showed again that Greenland was not accepted as an equal partner, or in other words, that nobody in the US really thought about Greenland. Consequently, it was no wonder that after some days of making the headlines in the US, the proposal simply vanished, with President Trump focusing on other aspects of his troubled presidency. The US-Greenland relations had returned to normal, with Greenland being the ice-covered island nobody really cared about.

Fortunately, this situation may have changed recently. When US Minister of State Anthony Blinken visited Greenland in Spring 2021, he not only confirmed that the US no longer wants to buy Greenland but spoke of his hope to strengthen commercial relationships.

62 "Coca-Cola Comes to Greenland," *Nunatsiaq News* (Iqaluit), Aug, 20, 2004, 2004, https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/coca-cola_comes_to_greenland/.

63 Scott Neuman, "No Joke: Trump Really Does Want to Buy Greenland," NPR, 2019, accessed 15 Nov. 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/19/752274659/no-joke-trump-really-does-want-to-buy-greenland>.

64 Neuman.

Furthermore, the US had already re-opened their consulate in Nuuk the previous year and pledged US\$ 12 Million in aid for civilian projects.⁶⁵ During his first visit to Washington, DC, in June 2022, Greenlandic Prime Minister Mute Egede called the US Greenland's most important strategic partner and courted investments from the US.⁶⁶ Whether this will be the beginning of a new era of Greenland-US relations remains to be seen, but direct exchange between high-ranking Greenland and US officials seems to be a signal that things might change and Greenland is considered a real partner for the US, instead of a military playground whose representatives and citizens simply could be ignored.

John Griesemer's novel *No One Thinks of Greenland* is a work of fiction and there is no indication that a US military hospital like the one described in the book ever existed. Nevertheless, what with the various US military projects in Greenland, such a secret hospital might have existed, and given the structures of the US-Greenland relations at this time, neither the US nor the Danish institutions and administrations would have intervened, while the Greenlandic administration and, more importantly, the Greenlandic people would not have been asked. Thus,

Griesemer's novel is the perfect parable for the US-Greenland relations or at least the perception of Greenland in the US until very recently, and it clearly shows why not purchasing Greenland made perfect sense for the US. Why should you purchase something if you can make nearly unlimited use of it for free? Fortunately, it seems that this logic no longer determines the US's Greenlandic relations, and that Greenland is no longer the large icy island nobody cares about in the US.

65 Helen Sullivan, "US No Longer Wants to Buy Greenland, Blinken Confirms," *The Guardian*, 2021, accessed 9.9.2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/21/us-no-longer-wants-to-buy-greenland-blinken-confirms>.

66 Melody Schreiber, "Greenland PM Calls for Closer Us Ties in Washington Visit," *ArcticToday*, 2022, accessed 9.9.2022, https://www.arctictoday.com/greenland-pm-calls-for-closer-us-ties-in-washington-visit/?wallit_nosession=1.

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