



# Why Greenland and Canada became the new geopolitical playing field

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## **Why Greenland and Canada became the new geopolitical playing field**

In one of his recent press conferences, President Trump claimed that Canada should be part of the United States and that the US should secure Greenland, by force if necessary. As usual, his remarks were met with derision and ridicule, even anger in some quarters. However, there are good reasons for President Trump's "desires". He sees gaining control of Canada and Greenland as a way to protect the American-led global order from a rising China and go down in history as one of the most important US presidents. As one Canadian diplomat told *Le Journal de Montréal*, Canada should prepare for the worst (*se préparer au pire*). This time it is more than brinkmanship.

The United States virtually won the First World War and became one of the main winners of the Second one. It became the most powerful nation in the world. It could have turned all its conquests into colonies, but in 1945 it chose utopia over empire by creating the United Nations. After both world wars, the United States refused to become a formal empire and instead experimented with institutional universalism and integration. Today it is clear that this experiment has failed, and the United States is belatedly reconsidering the possible utility of empire, and perhaps not for selfish reasons. Recent statements by President-elect Donald Trump should be understood in this context. In his first term, he made clear what he thought of the situation and how it should be remedied. Since then, he has regularly said that the situation has become more dangerous and directly threatens US national security. For President Trump, defending the US against a rising China and others is a matter of moving in concentric circles. And for him, both Canada and Greenland are part of the core territories and interests.

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 has in some ways evolved into what could be called the Trump Doctrine of 2025, particularly in the context of the North Atlantic. Geopolitical realignments driven by climate change and the desire to leave a lasting mark are the driving forces behind it. President Donald Trump wants to be remembered as one of the most important American presidents, similar to George Washington. To achieve this vision, he is planning a major geographical consolidation of North America, followed by the integration of the Western sphere. Canada and Greenland will play

a key role in this endeavour. The goals of the new Trump administration will consist of long-term and short-term objectives involving these two countries.

The long-term goals mainly concern the unification of the North American continent and should be analysed in a separate study. Here I will deal only with the short-term objectives that President Trump considers. There are two such interrelated issues. The first is the new security and geopolitical situation in Europe and the North Atlantic. The second is the new energy strategy for the Western sphere. In both these closely-related issues, Canada and Greenland play a central role, not only because they are resource-rich, but also because they occupy a unique geostrategic position in the North Atlantic. The fundamental question is: who should control these resources and this strategic location, Europe, the United States or ultimately China?

Until now, the answer has been simple—the transatlantic community built around NATO. But since 2016, when President Trump was first elected, the question of burden-sharing has created tensions in this community. He could only partially resolve them by forcing "delinquent" NATO members to comply with the 2% of GDP annual defence spending quota. But the war in Ukraine and global competition with China ensured that this was too little. The Biden administration's strategy was to intertwine the economic systems of the Western sphere, in particular by creating energy interdependence between the two sides. But even he could only provide a partial solution: the oil and gas prices offered by the United States were high compared to Russia's. So the new Trump administration has two urgent problems to solve: increasing NATO budgets and lowering energy prices for Europe. But there are certain problems that may be more intractable than he thought.

### **The hypothetical British alternative**

The robustness of the American presence in Europe, facilitated by the NATO alliance, has been greatly underpinned by the strength and stability of the European Union. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union consequently undermined both entities. The subsequent Global Britain initiative posed a direct challenge to the global position of the United States, but the Obama administration chose not to engage with it as its prospects diminished. From Washington's perspective, following the failure of Global Britain, the UK continues to lead the development of alternative frameworks that further erode the appearance of unity within the American-led North

Atlantic order. Over the past decade, it seems that not only China but probably the British as well, have perceived a diminished United States. Taking advantage of heightened tensions with Russia over Ukraine, Britain has been actively building and strengthening bilateral and mini-lateral defence arrangements outside the NATO framework. These deliberate actions can be interpreted as a strategic measure to mitigate the risks of a potential US withdrawal from NATO, but taken together the prevailing perception is that the UK is building a credible would-be alternative for NATO, operating in the alliance's shadow in a region stretching from the North Atlantic to the western Arctic. However, for President Trump's pressure on NATO members to succeed there must be no alternatives.

The UK has separate defence agreements with the Scandinavian countries, the Baltic states, Poland, Germany and France. And through its Joint Expeditionary Force, it increasingly looks like the *de facto* leader of the North Atlantic. If Canada and Greenland, through its link with Denmark, were to join this loose defence confederation, it would be a serious challenger to the hegemonic power of the United States in its own neighbourhood. At the same time, its instrument of power over Europe, the NATO alliance, would be greatly weakened. If the British were to succeed, the United States would ultimately have to withdraw from continental Europe. Chancellor Scholz has already declared that Germany would not spend more than 2% of GDP on defence, backed up by the Trinity House Agreement (2024). More worryingly for the US, Britain regularly offers military assistance to Canada to defend the Arctic, wanting to create legitimacy. By sending a strong message to Canada and Greenland, President Trump hopes to regain control of the North Atlantic and reduce the potency of the "British" alternative to NATO.

### **Securing critical minerals and sources of energy for the integrated West**

The ability of European countries to pay for increased defence spending depends on their economic strength. This in turn depends on their access to cheap minerals and energy sources for their industries. From the 1950s until the 1990s, Europe was dependent on Middle Eastern oil, which indirectly increased Europe's dependence on the United States as the military power that guaranteed this resource. But this changed when Europe, and Germany in particular, decided to import oil and gas from Russia. After a decade or two, Europe began to believe that it did not need the United States as much as it needed Russia and China. After Russia's aggression in Ukraine in

2022, the US saw a rare opportunity to reverse the trend by incentivising Europe to shift its dependence back to the United States. However, this policy may be jeopardised if someone other than America comes to control the vast mineral, oil and gas reserves of the Arctic and North Atlantic, made available by the rapidly melting ice. This is the most likely reason why President Trump has laid claim to these regions.

## **Conclusion**

President Trump is a strong leader; he does not like to beat around the bush. When he says he wants Canada to join the union, or that he wants Greenland for national security reasons, he does so because he sees strategic value in holding these locations. The reasons are obvious to those who want to see them: the United States needs to consolidate its core before it can defend the West against all the possible challenges and dangers that are emerging every day. The bluntness of Trump's tone suggests that he has waved goodbye to dysfunctional global institutionalism. The aim is to protect and strengthen America, which in turn will protect the entire Western sphere. He has sent a powerful message to friends and foes alike: do not tamper with my domains.