

GREENLAND FACTS

As international powers expand their global footprints, with both Russia and China developing more advanced military capacities, the United States has considered expanding defensive capabilities in Greenland.

Did you know?...

- The US has [operated](#) Pituffik Space Base - formerly known as Thule Air Base - since World War Two, operating as America's northernmost installation. Pituffik supports missile warning, missile defense, and space surveillance operations for the U.S. and NATO.
- In response to concerns over missile threats from Russia and China, President Trump has [pledged](#) to construct the next generation of missile defense called the "Golden Dome," a ground- and space-based capabilities center that can detect and stop missiles at all four major stages of a potential attack.
- Using a geology-based assessment [methodology](#), the U.S. Geological Survey estimated undiscovered, technically recoverable resources of 7.8 billion barrels of oil and 91.9 trillion cubic feet of gas in the West Greenland-East Canada Province. Using [current](#) EIA-style price anchors, this amounts to over \$1.0 trillion in gross value for the entire province.



Concern Grows Over China's Potential Access to Rare Earth Elements

Over the past several years, China has expressed interest in investing in Greenland to expand its infrastructure. Greenland holds vast strategic reserves of natural resources, including rare earth elements; the wealth and access to these materials remain a consideration for the United States.

Greenland [ranks](#) eighth globally for rare earth reserves, with 1.5 million tons, and is home to two of the largest rare earth deposits in the world.

Greenland Facts

Executive Summary

The United States has maintained a military presence in the country of Greenland since World War II, with the Pituffik Space Base, formerly known as Thule Air Base, operation as the northernmost outpost of the American Military. Pituffik operates as a key base for American missile defense and surveillance strategy for monitoring Russia and Chinese actions in the Arctic Circle.

As international powers rise against the United States, with both Russia and China developing more advanced military capacities, the United States has considered expanding defensive capabilities in Greenland. A key example would be utilizing the proposed “Golden Dome” missile defense system to include Greenland, which would serve to increase missile protection for North America.

Additionally, Greenland holds vast minerals and resources yet to be developed, including rare earth elements and oil. Many of these resources, including rare earth elements, would allow for the creation of a new supply chain which would lessen the power of China over American infrastructure. However, Chinese interests have expressed interests in investing in Greenland and working on building out the country’s infrastructure.

History

The United States and Greenland have a long history of mutual defense and cooperation to counter powers outside of the Northern Hemisphere, including the US defending Greenland from invasion by Nazi Germany.

- The total area of Greenland is [approximately](#) 2,166,086 square kilometers, slightly more than three times the size of Texas. About 80% of Greenland is covered by ice, meaning most of its over 50,000 population live on the southwestern coast around the capital, Nuuk. Its economy is mainly [based](#) on fishing, and it receives large subsidies from the Danish government.
- For over 300 years, the country of Greenland has been [governed](#) by the Kingdom of Denmark. Greenland was governed as a colony of Denmark until 1953, when the island was made a part of the Kingdom of Denmark. In 1979, a home rule referendum gave Greenland control of most policies inside the country with Denmark retaining control over foreign affairs and defense.
- During World War II, when Denmark was [occupied](#) by Nazi Germany, the United States invaded Greenland and established military and radio stations on the island. After the war, a 1951 defense agreement granted the US a role in the defense of the country, including the right to build and maintain military bases with the U.S. claiming jurisdiction on these defense “areas.”
- In 2004, the United States, Denmark, and Greenland [updated](#) their original defense agreement to detail that Thule Air Base (currently Pituffik Space Base) was the only U.S. Defense area left in [Greenland](#).

Defense Concerns Countering Russia And China

The US operated Pituffik Space Base in Greenland operates as a vital component of the missile warning, missile defense and space surveillance operations for the United States and NATO. With international powers, including Russia, advancing their missile systems, Greenland's defensive role in US strategy remains vital to US defense.

- The US has [operated](#) Pituffik Space Base - formerly known as Thule Air Base - since World War Two, operating as America's northernmost installation. Pituffik supports missile warning, missile defense, and space surveillance operations for the U.S. and NATO.
- As the northernmost U.S. base in the Arctic Circle, Greenland [provides](#) vital monitoring services for defending the United States from missile attacks from adversaries around the world, including Russia and China.
- Russia has continued to modernize their missile systems, including [investing](#) in Ballistic Missile Submarines capable of launching nuclear weapons, their air and maritime capabilities in the Arctic Circle.
- [According](#) to the Center for Strategic and International Studies: "Russia's modernization and expansion efforts at Severomorsk-1 air base, Gadzhiyevo submarine base, and Okolnaya submarine support base have significantly improved Russia's operational readiness and its ability to control the surrounding maritime space in the Arctic."
- In June 2019, the Department of Defense identified that their arctic strategy must evolve, [citing](#) concerns that increased ice thaw would allow for more ships to travel potentially ice-free in the summers by the 2040s. This could dramatically increase threats to the United States unless the United States can expand its vessel and submarine monitoring and detection abilities in the Arctic Circle.

Golden Dome

To counter the threat of missiles from Russia and China, President Trump has advocated for the next generation of missile defense platforms, colloquially called the "Golden Dome" with the note that increasing US military involvement in Greenland would make the program more effective.

- In the past several years, antagonists of the United States have continued to advance offensive technology with the goal of threatening the United States. In 2024, Russia was [identified](#) as advancing an anti-satellite weapon which could loiter in space for long durations before releasing a burst which could take out American satellites.
- In response to concerns over missile threats from Russia and China, President Trump has [pledged](#) to construct the next generation of missile defense called the "Golden Dome."
- [According](#) to CNN, the Golden Dome missile defense program is "envisioned to include ground- and space-based capabilities that are able to detect and stop missiles at all four major stages of a potential attack: detecting and destroying them before a launch, intercepting them in their earliest stage of flight, stopping them midcourse in the air, or halting them in the final minutes as they descend toward a target."

- Expanding US defense access to Greenland would enable a Golden Dome program to be more effective and more capable of [protecting](#) not just the United States, but all of North America including Greenland and Canada, from any threats from Russia or China

Economic Concerns

In the past several years, China has expressed interest in investing in Greenland to expand the country's infrastructure. As Greenland holds vast strategic reserves of natural resources, including rare earth elements, the wealth and access to these materials remains a consideration for the United States.

- For the past several years, Greenland has been [courting](#) Chinese investors and businesses for expansion in Greenland.
- In January 2018, Beijing laid out hopes to form a "Polar Silk Road" by [developing](#) shipping lanes that have been opened up by global warming and by encouraging enterprises to build infrastructure in the Arctic. Attempts by Beijing to expand into Greenland have also included offers of spending \$422.6 million to expand the Greenland airport to allow direct flights from Europe and North America.
- Using a geology-based assessment [methodology](#), the U.S. Geological Survey estimated undiscovered, technically recoverable resources of 7.8 billion barrels of oil and 91.9 trillion cubic feet of gas in the West Greenland-East Canada Province. Using [current](#) EIA-style price anchors, this equals over \$1.0 trillion gross for the entire province.
- [According](#) to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Greenland is rich in natural resources including iron ore, graphite, tungsten, palladium, vanadium, zinc, gold, uranium, copper, and rare earth elements.
- Over the past several years, supply chain [concerns](#) over Chinese controls on rare earth elements, essential for defense and commercial needs, has been a source of concern for Washington, DC.
- Greenland [ranks](#) eighth in the world for rare earth reserves, with 1.5 million tons, and is home to two rare earth deposits that are among the largest in the world. As more land in Greenland is accessible to exploration as global temperatures shift, more abilities to access these essential elements is possible and could solve a key supply chain concern for the United States.