

GREENLAND IN THE US NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY 2026

ГРЕНЛАНДІЯ У НАЦІОНАЛЬНІЙ ОБОРОННІЙ СТРАТЕГІЇ США 2026 РОКУ

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Abstract. *The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic conceptualisation of Greenland in the US National Defence Strategy 2026. It examines the transformation of the United States' approach to the Arctic region in the context of growing geopolitical competition, increased military activity by the Russian Federation and the strengthening of the economic presence of the People's Republic of China. It has been established that Greenland is institutionalised in the strategy as a 'key terrain,' guaranteed access to which is considered a component of US territorial defence and an element of continental security in the Western Hemisphere, aligning with the "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine". Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the strategy text, it was determined that the island is mentioned five times in the document in the context of ensuring military and commercial access to strategically important areas. This indicates that Greenland has been established as a structural element of modern American defence planning, particularly involving critical assets like the Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) for early warning systems. Particular attention is paid to the international consequences of this approach. The reaction of the Kingdom of Denmark, the European Union and NATO to the strengthening of the island's strategic status has been analysed. It has been found that Denmark responded by asserting its sovereign control and significantly boosting its Arctic defense spending by 12–15 billion DKK (over \$1.6 billion USD) in 2026, aimed at modernizing infrastructure such as adapting civilian airports in Nuuk to support F-35 fighter jets. It is concluded that the rethinking of Greenland's role in 2026 reflects a broader process of integrating the Arctic space into national and collective security systems, which is shaping a new configuration of strategic interests in the North Atlantic.*

Keywords: Greenland, National Defence Strategy 2026, United States, Denmark, European Union, NATO, Arctic geopolitics.

Анотація. У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз стратегічної концептуалізації Гренландії у Національній оборонній стратегії США 2026 року. Досліджено трансформацію підходів Сполучених Штатів до Арктичного регіону в умовах зростання геополітичної

конкуренції, активізації військової діяльності Російської Федерації на Крайній Півночі, а також посилення економічної та інфраструктурної присутності Китайської Народної Республіки. Встановлено, що у стратегії Гренландія інституціоналізується як “key terrain” (ключова територія), гарантований доступ до якої розглядається як невід’ємна складова захисту території США та елемент континентальної безпеки Західної півкулі, що узгоджується із новою геополітичною доктриною – так званим «доповненням Трампа до доктрини Монро» (Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine). Методом якісного та кількісного контент-аналізу тексту стратегії визначено, що острів згадується у стратегічному документі п’ять разів у контексті забезпечення військового й комерційного доступу до стратегічно важливих просторів та контролю над критичною інфраструктурою, зокрема Космічною базою Пітуффік (Pituffik Space Base, колишня авіабаза Туле), яка є найважливішим елементом раннього попередження про ракетний напад у межах NORAD. Окрему увагу приділено міжнародним наслідкам такого підходу. Проаналізовано реакцію Королівства Данії, Європейського Союзу та НАТО на посилення стратегічного статусу острова. З’ясовано, що у відповідь на американські прагнення Данія у 2026 році наголосила на суверенному контролі над островом та суттєво збільшила власні арктичні оборонні витрати на 12-15 млрд данських крон (понад 1,6 млрд дол. США), спрямовані на модернізацію інфраструктури Арктичного командування в Нууку та адаптацію цивільних аеропортів для прийому винищувачів п’ятого покоління F-35. Зроблено висновок, що переосмислення ролі Гренландії у 2026 році відображає ширший процес інтеграції арктичного простору до системи національної та колективної безпеки, що формує нову конфігурацію стратегічних інтересів у Північній Атлантиці та на північному фланзі НАТО

Ключові слова. Гренландія, Національна оборонна стратегія 2026, США, Данія, Європейський Союз, НАТО, арктична геополітика.

Introduction. In the contemporary context of global security environment transformation, the Arctic region occupies an increasingly significant place in the strategic planning of the world's leading powers. Growing geopolitical competition, the intensification of the Russian Federation's military activities in the High North, and the strengthening of the economic and infrastructural presence of the People's Republic of China necessitate a revision of approaches to regional security and the role of Arctic space in the global system of international relations.

In this context, particular attention is drawn to Greenland as an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, which possesses a unique geostrategic position between North America and the Arctic. Its territory, airspace, and adjacent maritime waters play an important role in early warning, monitoring, and transatlantic security systems. Simultaneously, the island's resource potential and its location near key Arctic routes amplify its significance amidst intensifying competition for control over critically important spaces.

The US National Defence Strategy 2026 reflects the institutionalization of this approach, delineating Greenland as one of the key terrains within the security architecture of the Western Hemisphere. This document demonstrates a reorientation of United States defense planning toward ensuring guaranteed military and commercial access to strategically important spaces, which indicates the strengthening of the Arctic dimension in contemporary American strategic discourse.

At the same time, such conceptualization has a broader international resonance, as it directly relates to the US allied commitments within NATO and affects the balance of responsibility in the North Atlantic. For the European Union, which views Greenland as a partner in sustainable development and strategic resources, the strengthening of the military dimension in the region actualizes the issue of aligning security and economic priorities. Thus, the Arctic direction is increasingly integrated into the joint transatlantic agenda, combining national, European, and collective security interests.

The relevance of the study is driven by the necessity of scientific understanding of Greenland's place in the new configuration of US defense policy 2026, as well as the determination of its role in shaping the contemporary security architecture in the Arctic region and the transatlantic space as a whole.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the strategic conceptualization of Greenland in the US

National Defence Strategy 2026 and its impact on US-Danish relations, EU policy, and the NATO security architecture.

Literature Review. The issues of the Arctic's strategic significance and its place in the United States' defense planning have been reflected in the works of Ukrainian and foreign researchers who analyze the transformation of American security policy in the context of growing geopolitical competition. The transformation of US foreign policy priorities under Trumpism has been the subject of research by I. S. Marchenko, who examines the reorientation of the strategic guidelines of American policy and changes in approaches to national security (Marchenko, 2025). His conclusions establish a conceptual foundation for understanding the logic of contemporary US strategic discourse.

A separate group of sources consists of strategic documents, in particular, the US National Defence Strategy 2026, which defines the priorities of American defense policy and outlines approaches to ensuring access to strategically important territories (National Defense Strategy, 2026). The analysis of this document makes it possible to identify new emphases in the conceptualization of the Arctic space and its integration into the US homeland defense system.

The issues surrounding the politico-legal status of Greenland and its autonomous position within the Kingdom of Denmark are examined in the works of A. V. Hubinko, who focuses on matters of sovereignty, autonomy, and potential scenarios for the development of relations between Denmark and the United States (Hubinko, 2025). M. P. Zan investigates Greenland as an ethnic territorial autonomy, analyzing the mechanisms of self-government implementation and the specifics of its institutional functioning (Zan, 2025).

Essential for understanding the European dimension of the issue are the regulatory and policy documents of the European Union, in particular, the Multiannual Indicative Programme for Greenland 2021–2027, which outlines the economic and institutional aspects of the island's development (European Commission, 2021).

Despite the existence of studies on US strategic policy and the legal status of Greenland, the issue of its conceptualization specifically in the US National Defence Strategy 2026 and the analysis of the international implications of such institutionalization remain insufficiently explored, which necessitates further scientific analysis.

Main results of the research. From the perspective of the United States of America, the strategic significance of Greenland has a deep historical foundation and has evolved in line with changes in the international security environment. During World War II, following the occupation of Denmark by Nazi Germany in 1940, the United States assumed responsibility for the defense of the island based on the 1941 agreement between the US and the Danish government-in-exile (*Agreement Relating to the Defense of Greenland, 1941*). This decision was aimed at preventing the use of Greenland's territory as a staging ground for potential attacks in the North Atlantic and laid the foundation for a long-term American military presence (Tamnes, 1991).

During the Cold War, the strategic importance of the island increased significantly. The establishment of Thule Air Base (now Pituffik Space Base) transformed it into a vital element of the missile early warning and space surveillance system within NORAD (U.S. Space Force; NATO, 2022). The island's geographical location between North America and the Arctic provided control over northern air and maritime routes, which was of key significance for transatlantic security (Brady, 2017). Thus, Greenland gradually integrated into the strategic defense architecture of the United States and NATO.

In the 21st century, the island's significance has acquired new dimensions. Climate changes causing the melting of the ice sheet open up new Arctic maritime routes and increase the accessibility of previously hard-to-reach territories (IPCC, 2021; Arctic Council, 2021). In addition to its geostrategic location, Greenland possesses substantial resource potential. Its territory hosts deposits of rare earth elements (including neodymium, dysprosium, and yttrium) that are of critical importance for the defense industry, high-tech electronics manufacturing, and the development of renewable energy. The island also contains reserves of uranium, iron ore, zinc, lead, nickel, cobalt, copper, and titanium, as well as promising deposits of graphite and lithium, which play a key role in shaping global supply chains of critical raw materials (U.S. Geological Survey, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

The prospects for developing offshore oil and natural gas deposits, despite environmental and

political constraints, further amplify the strategic attention of external actors to the region. Coupled with the expansion of the Russian Federation's military activity in the High North and the economic presence of the People's Republic of China in the Arctic space, this actualizes for the United States the issue of guaranteeing access to strategically important territories and resources. It is within this context that the provisions of the US National Defence Strategy 2026 must be analyzed, where Greenland is outlined as one of the key territories of modern defense policy.

In the introductory section of the US National Defence Strategy 2026, Greenland is mentioned in the very first paragraphs of the document as one of the so-called “key terrains”—territories where access is of critical importance for the national security of the United States. Specifically, it states that upon the inauguration of US President Donald Trump in January 2025, US access to “key terrains, such as the Panama Canal and Greenland, was increasingly in doubt” (National Defense Strategy, 2026, p. 2).

The use of the term “key terrain” carries a distinct military-strategic meaning. In US military doctrine, this concept refers to territories or assets whose control or guaranteed access provides a significant operational or strategic advantage (U.S. Department of Defense, 2001). In a theoretical dimension, such conceptualization can be interpreted through the lens of securitization theory, developed by representatives of the Copenhagen School of international relations. According to this theory, security emerges not merely as a reaction to objective threats, but as a result of a discursive process within which political actors, by declaring a certain issue to be an existential threat, move it into the realm of security and legitimize the application of exceptional measures (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). In this context, defining Greenland as “key terrain” in a top-level strategic document can be seen as an act of securitization that integrates the Arctic space into the US national security system and justifies the expansion of military-strategic instruments in the region.

This approach aligns with the threat assessment outlined in the strategy, particularly the rising military activity of the Russian Federation in the Arctic and the economic presence of the People's Republic of China in the region (National Defense Strategy, 2026, p. 2). The strategy directly links the growing influence of competitors in the North Atlantic and the Arctic to the risk of restricting US access to strategically important spaces, which shapes a new configuration of the regional balance of power. In this interpretation, Greenland appears not merely as a geographical object, but as an element of a deterrence system aimed at preventing external actors from establishing a foothold in key locations of the Western Hemisphere.

Further analysis of the strategy demonstrates that the issue of Greenland is not limited to the rhetoric of the introductory section, but is integrated into the primary mission of the Department of Defense to defend the U.S. homeland (Defend the U.S. Homeland). The corresponding section emphasizes the need to guarantee military and commercial access to key territories “from the Arctic to South America,” explicitly highlighting Greenland alongside the Panama Canal and the Gulf of Mexico (National Defense Strategy, 2026, p. 3). This formulation demonstrates that the Arctic direction is integrated into a broader logic of continental defense, where control over strategic spaces is viewed as a prerequisite for ensuring national security.

Thus, for the first time, the Arctic space is so clearly integrated into the logic of Western Hemisphere defense, where guaranteeing access is viewed as an element of deterring competitors and preserving a strategic advantage. The document explicitly emphasizes the intention to prevent the loss of influence over “key terrain” and to ensure that the president has “credible military options” to protect US interests in the region (National Defense Strategy, 2026, p. 3). This indicates the growing role of military-political instruments in the Arctic dimension of American strategy.

Of particular significance is the reference to the so-called “Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine,” which effectively updates the traditional concept of US dominance in the Western Hemisphere. In this interpretation, Greenland is viewed not merely as an Arctic region, but as part of a broader system of continental security, in which control or guaranteed access to strategic spaces serves as an instrument to prevent external influence and maintain geopolitical balance (National Defense Strategy, 2026, p. 3). Consequently, the inclusion of Greenland in the priorities of the homeland defense mission demonstrates its institutionalization as an element of the Western Hemisphere's defense architecture and confirms the trend toward rethinking the Arctic as a component of the domestic, rather than merely external, security of the United States. The quantitative

component of the content analysis of the National Defence Strategy 2026 text further confirms this trend: Greenland is explicitly mentioned in the document five times, especially in the context of key provisions regarding guaranteeing military and commercial access to strategically important territories. Such frequency of mention in a top-level strategic document indicates the consolidation of the island as a structural element of modern American defense planning.

The institutionalization of Greenland as “key terrain” in the US National Defence Strategy 2026 has direct implications for the Kingdom of Denmark as a sovereign state, of which the island's autonomous territory is a part (National Defense Strategy, 2026). Although the American military presence in Greenland is based on the 1951 Defense Agreement between the US and Denmark (*Agreement Relating to the Defense of Greenland, 1951*), Washington's new strategic rhetoric in 2026 has heightened the political sensitivity surrounding sovereignty and security cooperation formats.

In 2026, official Copenhagen emphasized that the status of Greenland is determined solely by the constitutional mechanisms of Denmark and the provisions of the island's self-government; any changes in military cooperation with the US are possible only within the framework of existing bilateral agreements and in agreement with the Government of Greenland. Thus, Denmark's reaction was aimed at reaffirming sovereign control over the autonomous territory and preventing interpretations that could call into question its territorial integrity (Reuters, 2025).

Parallel to diplomatic statements, Denmark activated its own defense policy in the Arctic direction. In 2026, the government announced a significant increase in defense spending on Greenland's security; according to Danish media reports, the volume of funding is approximately 12–15 billion Danish kroner (over \$1.6 billion USD) (Reuters, 2025). The planned measures include expanding the personnel of the Joint Arctic Command in Nuuk, modernizing infrastructure, and adapting one of the main civilian airports to receive fifth-generation F-35 fighter jets. Government representatives noted that during previous years, the Arctic direction had not received a sufficient level of investment, and the new decisions aim to strengthen national presence and defense capabilities in the region (Ministry of Defence of Denmark, 2023).

The European Union's response to the strengthening of US strategic rhetoric regarding Greenland in 2026 was focused on emphasizing the principles of sovereignty and stability in the Arctic region. EU institutions stressed the need to respect the territorial integrity of member states and adhere to international law in matters of security and defense. Within the Multiannual Indicative Programme for Greenland 2021–2027, the island is viewed primarily as a partner in sustainable development, education, green transformation, and strategic raw materials, rather than as an object of military-political rivalry (European Commission, 2021). Thus, the EU's approach differs from the security-centric logic of the American strategy, emphasizing multilateral governance and economic partnership as the basis for stability in the Arctic.

NATO's reaction to the strengthening of US strategic attention to Greenland in 2026 was characterized by a desire to preserve Alliance unity and avoid internal friction among allies. Since Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, a NATO member state, the issue of expanding the US military presence on the island automatically acquires a collective defense dimension. In the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, the Arctic region is defined as a space of growing strategic competition, particularly due to the military activity of the Russian Federation (NATO, 2022). Consequently, the North Atlantic is viewed as a critically important direction for transatlantic logistics, maritime deterrence, and air defense.

At the same time, the institutionalization of Greenland as “key terrain” in the US national strategy potentially creates tension between Washington's national defense logic and the mechanisms of collective decision-making within NATO. The Alliance operates on the basis of consensus, which requires aligning strategic moves among all member states (NATO, 2022). If the rhetoric regarding guaranteeing control over strategic territories is perceived as a unilateral initiative, it could raise concerns about maintaining the balance of powers and collective planning procedures.

A separate aspect is the risk of further militarization of the Arctic space. In 2024–2026, NATO increased its attention to the northern flank following the accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance, which significantly altered the geostrategic configuration of the region (NATO, 2023). Strengthening defense capabilities in Greenland, combined with Russian activity, could lead to growing strategic competition in the North Atlantic. For NATO, this implies the need to

simultaneously strengthen deterrence and prevent escalation, which complicates the balance between demonstrating force and maintaining regional stability.

Conclusions. The conducted analysis demonstrates that in the US National Defence Strategy 2026, Greenland is for the first time explicitly institutionalised as a "key terrain"—a strategically vital territory where control or guaranteed access is viewed as a prerequisite for ensuring the national security of the United States. This conceptualisation integrates the Arctic space into the logic of US homeland defence and expands the conventional understanding of continental security within the Western Hemisphere.

Greenland's strategic status is determined by a combination of its geographical location, military-infrastructure significance, and substantial resource potential. Climate change, the expansion of the Russian Federation's military activities in the Arctic, and the economic presence of the People's Republic of China intensify US focus on guaranteeing access to critically important territories. In this context, Greenland emerges not as a peripheral region, but as a structural element of the system of deterrence and preservation of strategic advantage.

At the same time, the institutionalisation of the island as part of the US defence architecture has multi-dimensional international implications. For Denmark, this implies the necessity of balancing allied commitments with the protection of the autonomous territory's sovereignty. For the European Union, it means aligning security and economic approaches to Arctic development. For NATO, it requires adapting collective defence to the new geostrategic configuration of the North Atlantic amid intensifying great power competition.

Thus, the transformation of Greenland's strategic status in 2026 reflects a broader process of rethinking the Arctic as a space where national, allied, and global security interests intersect. Further developments will depend on the ability of key actors to combine military-strategic priorities with the principles of international law and multilateral governance.

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