

Greenland

'I am just so tired of Trump': Greenland on alert as US hovers

Anxiety and patriotism swirl as details of a 'future deal' touted by US president trickle out

Jacob Judah in Nuuk

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The FT's Jacob Judah finds Greenlanders exhausted but defiant after a week of twists and turns © Produced by James Sandy/FT

Annassi Hansen, a traditional Inuit carver, stares blankly at a chunk of narwhal tusk, a collection of uncut rubies and other rare Greenlandic minerals, unable to focus on transforming them into tiny figurines.

"Trump makes me sick in the head," he said from his ramshackle workshop in Nuuk, Greenland's capital. "He just does not shut up."

Hansen, like many Greenlanders, is increasingly exhausted from hanging on to Donald Trump's every word. The US president has repeatedly stated that he wants to acquire Greenland and insists the Arctic island is vital to his country's security.

There had been growing worry in Nuuk that Washington's threats to take control of Greenland's vast and mineral-rich land would result in US military action.

Greenlanders' worst fears have eased for now, after Trump ruled out using force to prise the island from Denmark, which has ruled the semi-autonomous territory for more than 300 years. This was quickly followed by news that the US president and Nato secretary-general Mark Rutte had agreed a draft framework to defuse tensions.

But much remains unclear. Greenlandic and Danish officials were not present at the Wednesday meeting between Trump and Rutte, who reportedly discussed Denmark's long-standing defence agreement with the US.



'Trump makes me sick in the head,' says Annassi Hansen, a traditional Inuit carver. 'He just does not shut up' © Jacob Judah/FT

Copenhagen, meanwhile, has tried to strengthen its Greenlandic footprint following Trump's criticism that it has not invested enough in Arctic security. Soldiers are increasingly visible around the clapboard military headquarters by Nuuk's dockside.

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, Greenland's prime minister, said on Thursday afternoon he remained largely in the dark about Rutte and Trump's deal. Nielsen said he was open to a permanent Nato mission in Greenland to address American security concerns.

"Greenland continues to be at the centre of a serious situation," he added, in a punchy press conference that reiterated the government's desire to remain tied to Denmark.

The lack of concrete information about a potential deal has fuelled speculation among the island's 57,000 residents and onlookers abroad. Nielsen dismissed reports that discussions had taken place within Nato about Greenland potentially giving the US sovereignty over "pockets" of land around military installations.

"Sovereignty is a red line," Nielsen said, adding that he was not aware of any discussions between Rutte and Trump over mineral rights in Greenland.

Pele Broberg, the hardline pro-independence opposition leader, appeared to be on the same page. "Not one inch to the Americans," said Broberg when asked about whether he would be open to discussing handing over land around US military installations.

Greenland remains under pressure as the US and its allies begin to discuss the "future deal" touted by Trump. On Wednesday, Greenlanders were presented with an emergency preparedness booklet recommending they stock up on water, food and medicines to keep them alive for five days. Alongside blackouts and natural disasters, conflicts and geopolitical tensions were namechecked as emergencies that could throw the island into crisis.

Kirsten Petersen, whose small dog was virtually camouflaged against the snow, was among those who had taken heed. She rushed out to buy a generator before they sold out.

“Just in case,” she said, adding that it would help keep her frozen fish and reindeer meat edible if the Americans did invade.

“I am just so tired of Trump,” Petersen said. “It is hard mentally. We don’t know where we will stand in a week or a month.”



Kirsten Petersen’s dog Theo. Petersen is among those who have bought emergency supplies © Jacob Judah/FT
Many Greenlanders are also worried that discussions might be taking place above their heads.

“Nato has no authority to make deals about Greenland without Greenland,” said Aaja Chemnitz, one of the territory’s two MPs in Copenhagen. “All decisions concerning our country go through us, the Greenlandic people.”

But the threats from Washington have stirred patriotism in Nuuk.

Red-and-white Greenlandic flags abound, fluttering in the Arctic wind that sweeps southwards from the North Pole. Many Greenlanders have printed the banner on A4 sheets and stuck them in their home and office windows.

“We have to stand together,” said Ivaag Kriegel, who runs Nuuk’s cultural centre.

Most Greenlanders support moving towards independence, but there are divisions about how quickly to cut ties with Denmark.

Trump's obsession with growing the American Arctic has forced Greenlanders into a deeper reckoning about identity and belonging.

"We are thinking about who we are, what we stand for, what our culture is," Kriegel said.

Greenlandic artists have offered their art to his cultural centre for free and musicians have been dusting off patriotic ditties. "They are singing about our country," he said. "This beautiful land."



Greenlanders welcome foreign minister Vivian Motzfeldt, centre right, at Nuuk airport on Tuesday following her trip to the US © Evgeniy Maloletka/AP

More than 100 Greenlanders, cheering and chanting, lined the airport road above the snow-dusted tarmac in Nuuk on Tuesday to welcome foreign minister Vivian Motzfeldt home from Washington, where she had delivered a firm message: Greenland would not become American.

Motzfeldt was visibly emotional as she was bundled on to an impromptu stage to speak, clutching a flag that had been thrust into her arms. “We are doing everything we can to ensure that our country can once again become safe,” she said.

“This flag belongs to you,” Motzfeldt told her audience, which included a dozen transfixed toddlers in fluorescent jackets who were sitting on the terminal floor alongside photographers jostling for a better view. “You are the ones who will carry our traditions forward,” she said. “It is important that you grow up knowing the strength of your heritage and the stories of our ancestors.”

The eight-month-old son of Eva-Rosa Kanuthsen was too young to understand. He was pinned to her chest and struggling to keep aloft the small plastic flag that his mother had put into his hand.

“We are very proud of her,” Kanuthsen said of Motzfeldt. “She is doing this for us.”

Eva-Rosa Kanuthsen and her eight-month-old son © Jacob Judah/FT

But Greenlanders are well aware that Trump can be fickle. Hansen, the carver, said that he was doing his best to remain calm as anger over the US president's pretensions boiled inside him.

It is not easy. Hansen has taken to the Facebook front lines to argue with pro-Trump Americans about Greenland's future. "I am trying to defend our country," Hansen said, whipping out his phone to scroll through posts.

Hansen tipped a box of red-and-green gems on to his workbench. He moved his fingers along some rare local stones called Greenlandite.

"Trump always goes for what he wants," Hansen said. "He wants to take all of it."

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