

# Greenland isn't for sale

*Greenland is not for sale, the mineral-rich island said after a newspaper reported that US President Donald Trump was asking advisers whether it's possible for the United States to buy the Arctic island*

## Washington, United States

President Donald Trump's reported wish to buy Greenland may have been rejected by Denmark, but it underscores the rapidly rising value of the massive, ice-covered island due to global warming and to China's drive for an Arctic presence.

The accelerating polar ice melt has left sparsely populated Greenland, a self-governing part of Denmark, astride what are potentially major shipping routes and in the crosshairs of intensifying geopolitical competition between superpowers.

It also has untapped natural resources like oil, minerals and valuable rare earth elements that China, the United States and other major tech economies covet.

A Chinese government-backed group's offer last year to build three new international airports on Greenland sparked alarms in Copenhagen and Washington.

The Chinese plan was finally nixed in exchange for Danish funding and a pledge of support from the Pentagon.

Trump's idea to buy Greenland, reported by the

Wall Street Journal on Friday, "is not a serious proposal," said Heather Conley, a specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

But, "The administration has awoken to the Arctic as a geo-strategic issue," she said.

## Strategic value since WWII

Greenland has been essential to US defence since World War II when it was a base for monitoring Nazi ships and submarines passing through the "Arctic Avenue," the sea gateway to the north Atlantic.

In 1943 the US Air Force built its farthest-north air base at Thule, Greenland.

Thule was crucial in the Cold War, a first line of monitoring against a potential Russian attack. With a population of 600, the base today is part of the NATO mission, operating satellite monitoring and strategic missile detection systems and handling thousands of flights a year.

"The early warning radar system in northern Greenland helps protect North

America and is a key part of our missile defense apparatus," said Luke Coffey of The Heritage Foundation.

"Luckily the US is able to ensure and meet its security interests by maintaining this air base in northern Greenland. There's no requirement to buy Greenland to keep America safe."

## 'Aggressive' China and Russia

Conley said that after the Cold War ebbed in the 1990s, Washington stopped thinking about the Arctic.

Yet as the polar ice sheet began to shrink, the Russians became more active and China has moved to establish itself in the region.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo underscored the revived US interest in a speech in May in Finland, where he slammed China and Russia for "aggressive behavior" in the Arctic.

"The region has become an arena of global power and competition" owing to vast reserves of oil,

gas, minerals and fish stocks, he warned.

"Just because the Arctic is a place of wilderness does not mean it should become a place of lawlessness," he said.

But Washington has not taken many concrete actions, Conley said. Pompeo only offered that the State Department would position a diplomat in Greenland's capital Nuuk for six months of the year.

"The rhetoric and the reaction -- there is a very big gap," she said.

## Arctic newcomer China

With no geographical claim to the region, but whose massive commercial shipping industry would benefit from new polar routes as the ice melts, China is the newcomer whose presence could shift the balance.

It began sending scientific missions in 2004. In the past several years, a Chinese company has gained mining rights for rare earths, partnering with an Australian company in the Kvanefjeld project.

In January 2018 Beijing unveiled its "Polar Silk

Road" strategy to extend its economic footprint through the Arctic.

To gain favor in Nuuk, the Chinese have wined and dined government officials, said Coffey. "China's role in the Arctic has been more about expanding its economic influence, soft power," said Coffey.

"Ice melting is part of the interest, it is opening up new economic opportunities, but it's also opening up challenges. The US is aware of that," he said.

In a sign of Washington's rekindled interest, US President Donald Trump will go to Denmark in September, and Vice President Mike Pence will visit Iceland.

But Conley says more assertive moves are needed.

"I think we have a remarkably strong position now in Greenland. Denmark is an incredibly strong military partner to the US," she said.

"But if we are interested in potentially being an alternative to Greenland looking towards China for investment, are we going to put US investment there? I've not seen any of that."



A resident of Kulusuk carts water in the town of Kulusuk, Greenland

## Wildlife meet mulls trade rules to counter species declines

### Geneva, Switzerland

Amid growing alarm over accelerating extinctions, a major international conference opened in Geneva Saturday aiming to tighten rules on trade in elephant ivory and other endangered animal and plant species.

Thousands of conservationists and policymakers from more than 180 countries will meet for 12 days to evaluate regulations and species protection listings under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

"Business as usual is no longer an option," CITES Secretary General Ivonne Higuero said at the start of the meeting, warning that "nature's dangerous decline is unprecedented."

The treaty, created more than four decades ago, regulates trade



Delegates attend the United Nations's Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

in over 35,000 species of plants and animals and contains mechanisms to help crack down on illegal trade and sanction countries that break the rules.

The meeting follows warnings about rapid species decline, with a UN report in May indicating that one million species are being pushed to the brink of extinction.

"My fear is that we are... now really on the edge," Higuero told AFP ahead of the conference, saying she hoped the delegates in Geneva would "make what we call transformative change."

Inger Anderson, who heads the United Nations Environment Programme, echoed her sense of urgency, warning the conference that "we are losing species at a rate never seen before."

### Poaching illegal trade

But she voiced confidence in the effectiveness of the CITES treaty in protecting vulnerable species by ensuring all trade in them is sustainable.

"We need to find a workable balance between people and nature," she said.

The devastation caused to many species by poaching and booming illegal wildlife trade will be in the spotlight during the meeting, as will new challenges arising from illicit commerce increasingly moving online.

The plight of African elephants is expected to dominate the discussions.

Some countries are calling for stronger protections for all African elephants, while countries in southern Africa, where

populations are better protected and healthier, are requesting resumption of ivory stockpile sales.

One of 56 proposals on the meeting's agenda aims to prevent traffickers from passing off illegal elephant ivory as coming from mammoths, by listing the long-extinct mammals as a threatened species and thus subject to regulated trade.

Southern white rhinos, the American crocodile and a range of shark and ray species are also on the agenda, as is the African giraffe, amid warnings that the gentle giant is facing a "silent extinction."

"The future of biodiversity is at stake but .. we have a unique opportunity to change the course," Andersen said.