

Trump's bid for Greenland and the imperialist redivision of the world

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The US corporate media initially treated the controversy surrounding Donald Trump's public bid to buy Greenland from Denmark as another laughable example of the US president's posturing as the peerless deal-maker-in-chief who viewed the proposal, in his own words, as just another "large real estate" deal.

The coverage shifted somewhat after Trump announced that he was canceling a state visit to Denmark set for the beginning of September because the country's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen had dismissed the public proposal as "absurd." Trump described this response as "nasty," adding, "You don't talk to the United States that way, at least under me."

Trump came under criticism for snubbing Denmark, a NATO ally which has functioned as a slavish supporter of US imperialism around the globe, sending troops into Washington's wars of aggression in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

What most of the media has chosen to ignore, however, are the real imperialist interests that underlie Trump's crude transactional approach toward Denmark and Greenland.

The world's largest island and a natural barrier between Eurasia and North America, Greenland has long been an area of strategic interest for US imperialism. During the Second World War, after the Nazis occupied Denmark, the US military occupied Greenland, then a Danish colonial territory, to prevent the German military from establishing airbases that could be used to bomb US cities.

After the war, the Democratic administration of President Harry Truman made an offer to purchase Greenland for \$100 million in gold, roughly the equivalent of \$1.3 billion today. The offer was made in 1946 as Washington prepared in the wake of the Second World War for military confrontation with the Soviet Union.

While the Danish government refused to sell the territory, it did grant Washington sweeping rights to deploy the US military on Greenland. Thule Air Base, established during World War II in the far northwest of Greenland, was built up as a major installation in Washington's nuclear war machine, providing a frontline monitoring station for the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Warning System as well as a key base in the US military's spy satellite program.

Under the Kennedy administration, there was an attempt to turn Greenland into the launching pad for a nuclear war of aggression against the Soviet Union. Under the codename Project Iceworm, the US military developed a plan to deploy some 600 medium-range missiles with nuclear warheads under Greenland's icecap. The plan called for the construction of 2,500 miles of subsurface railroad tracks connecting thousands of firing positions spanning a territory roughly the size of New York state, making it difficult for the Soviet military to pinpoint launch sites. In the end, the Pentagon abandoned the plan when it discovered that the shifting of the ice sheet covering Greenland made the maintenance of such a subsurface complex impossible.

It is not merely a coincidence that the latest controversy over Greenland has erupted precisely at the point that the Pentagon is conducting test firings of a new land-launched, medium-range cruise missile previously banned under a treaty abrogated by Washington.

While the operations at Thule were scaled down following the dissolution of the USSR, Greenland has once again become a focal point for US strategic interests in the context of a "scramble for the Arctic" that is part and parcel of the preparations for another world war.

Climate change has turned Greenland into a new front line. The melting of the region's ice sheet, while threatening rising sea levels and a global catastrophe, has begun to open up new sea routes linking Europe, Asia and

North America. It has also created the possibility for exploiting the Arctic's resources, which are estimated to include 30 percent of the world's unexplored natural gas reserves and 13 percent of its undiscovered oil, as well as major mineral deposits, including rare earth minerals, strategic materials whose production is currently dominated by China.

China last year unveiled plans for a "Polar Silk Road" and has sought investment deals in Greenland, including in the construction of airports and seaports, against which the US has pushed back aggressively. Russia has also sought to develop its far north and asserted sovereignty over much of the region inside the Arctic Circle.

Last May, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo flew to Finland to attend a meeting of the Arctic Council, delivering a thuggish speech in which he proclaimed the region "an arena of global power and competition." He charged that China was attempting to turn the Arctic Ocean into "a new South China Sea" and said that Russia was "leaving snow prints in the form of army boots." Both countries, he said, were engaged in a "pattern of aggressive behavior."

The US military is preparing "freedom of navigation" operations in the Arctic, like those in the South China Sea, in an attempt to provoke a military confrontation with Russia, while it has threatened military force to prevent China from gaining a foothold in the region.

In its editorial Thursday criticizing Trump's dealings with Denmark, the *New York Times*, acknowledges—in language that could have come from the president's own mouth—that "acquiring Greenland would be nice for the United States," citing its resources and strategic importance.

It goes on to say, however, that "the world in which major powers deemed it their civilizing mission to conquer or buy territories and colonies is long over."

Similarly, Denmark's prime minister stated during a trip to Greenland on Sunday, "Thankfully, the time where you buy and sell other countries and populations is over."

Both are wrong. Trump's crude bid to buy Greenland is not an aberration, a mere demented echo of his days as a real estate swindler, casino con man and reality television mogul.

US imperialism has waged uninterrupted wars of neocolonial conquest for nearly three decades, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. To claim that the days of conquering territories are over requires a staggering degree of self-serving amnesia on the part of the *Times*, which supported each and every one of these wars.

In the final analysis, the militarist and imperialist policies pursued by US governments—under both Democrats and Republicans—have been their response to the crisis of global capitalism, which is incapable of overcoming the anarchic character of an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and unable to reconcile the vast development of a globally interconnected economy with the continued framework of the capitalist nation-state system.

In his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in the midst of the First World War, Lenin declared: "the fact that the world is already partitioned obliges those contemplating a redivision to reach out for every kind of territory, and (2) an essential feature of imperialism is the rivalry between several great powers in the striving for hegemony, i.e., for the conquest of territory, not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony." These are precisely the motivations underlying Trump's demands over Greenland, which are directed against not only China and Russia, but Europe as well.

That the president of the United States speaks today in the unvarnished language of imperialist annexations and colonial conquest is only one more manifestation of the advanced stage of the drive toward a third world war.

The reckless and destructive policies pursued by US imperialism are giving rise to an immense growth of social tensions and class struggle around the world, including in the United States itself. Therein lies the only viable answer to the growing threat of a new world war. The decisive question is the building of an international, socialist antiwar movement based upon the working class.



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