



보도자료



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"Whose Security Is the Arctic For?": Great-Power Competition and the Clash over Greenland's Right to Self-Determination

- U.S. Arctic security strategy, Denmark's territorial sovereignty, and Greenlanders' aspirations for independence are increasingly colliding. -



이미지 출처: Wikimedia Commons, U.S. Space Force, 1st Lt. Danielle Rose, 2024

As Arctic ice melt accelerates, sea routes once blocked by ice are becoming increasingly accessible, while access to critical resources—including rare earth elements, oil, and natural gas—is expanding. As a result, the Arctic is no longer a geographically isolated space. It has emerged as a new strategic crossroads where

military security, resource supply chains, and the climate crisis intersect.

Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, has drawn particular attention from major powers including the United States, Russia, and China. It is regarded both as a military gateway linking North America and Europe and as a region rich in underground mineral resources.

The problem is that the logic of strengthening Arctic security may clash with the wishes of Greenland's people. The United States emphasizes Greenland's strategic importance in order to counter Russian and Chinese activities in the Arctic and to strengthen missile defense and space-surveillance systems. Denmark, meanwhile, maintains that Greenland's territorial sovereignty cannot become the subject of negotiations by external powers. Greenlanders also argue that their future must not be determined by great-power security deals or resource-development interests, and that the question of independence and political status should be decided by Greenlanders themselves.

A Clash of Systems: Three Competing Interests in the Arctic
Greenland belongs to the Kingdom of Denmark, but it operates its own parliament and government as an autonomous territory. After gaining home rule in 1979, Greenland saw its right to self-determination explicitly recognized through the introduction of the Self-Government Act in 2009. The Act also established an institutional basis for Greenlanders to choose independence through a referendum.

However, Denmark still oversees defense, foreign affairs, and monetary policy. As a result, Greenland's future cannot be

determined solely through internal political choices.

The first group of stakeholders consists of major powers—the United States, Russia, and China—that view the Arctic as a new security frontier. The United States uses Pituffik Space Base in northwestern Greenland, formerly known as Thule Air Base, as a key site for missile early warning and space surveillance. As Russia expands its Arctic military bases and icebreaker fleet, and China shows active interest in Arctic shipping routes and mineral development, Washington considers military access to Greenland and the expansion of its influence there to be strategically important.

The second group consists of the Danish government and the people of Greenland. Denmark supports security cooperation with the United States and other NATO allies, as well as stronger Arctic defense capabilities. At the same time, it makes clear that Greenland's sovereignty and political status are not matters for external actors to decide. Within Greenland, there is also significant support for independence as a long-term goal, provided that it is supported by economic self-reliance. Yet there is broad agreement that the timing and method of independence must be determined through the democratic choice of Greenlanders—not by the strategic needs of outside powers.

The third group includes the international community, environmental organizations, and Indigenous communities concerned about the environmental and human-rights consequences of Arctic militarization and development competition. Arctic ice melt may create opportunities for new shipping routes and resource extraction, but it can also damage marine ecosystems and intensify the climate crisis. If foreign states and corporations lead rare-earth and mineral development, local residents may bear the

environmental costs without receiving a fair share of the economic benefits.

Geopolitical Tensions: Containing Russia and China in U.S. Arctic Strategy

Greenland's strategic value is becoming even more significant as competition among the United States, Russia, and China intensifies. Russia has expanded military facilities and icebreaker capabilities across its Arctic coastal regions, strengthening its influence over Arctic shipping routes. China has likewise defined itself as a "near-Arctic state" and has shown interest in Arctic navigation, mineral exploration, and infrastructure investment.

The United States' interest in Greenland is not simply about expanding territory. Securing a strategic foothold in the Arctic is linked to monitoring missile threats directed toward North America and Europe, maintaining influence over emerging sea lanes, and stabilizing supply chains for critical minerals needed by advanced industries. Rare earth elements and other critical minerals found in Greenland are closely connected to supply chains for electric vehicles, wind power, and other advanced technologies. They are therefore seen as an attractive alternative for the United States and Europe as they seek to reduce their dependence on China.

However, the more extensive the strategic calculations of great powers become, the greater the risk that Greenlanders' political right to choose will be pushed aside. If Greenland is treated as a "tradable strategic asset" in the name of security and resource access, its autonomy and debates over independence may be weakened in practice. This raises concerns that an older imperial logic—one in which the fate of smaller societies was determined by military necessity and economic interest—could be repeated.

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