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GREENLAND IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF THE ARCTIC: A MICRO-ARENA OF CONTEMPORARY GREAT POWER RIVALRY

Abstract

This paper analyses the geopolitical significance of Greenland in the contemporary international system, with a particular focus on its role as a micro-arena of great-power rivalry in the Arctic. Drawing on a realist theoretical approach, the study examines how contemporary geopolitical competition manifests through political, economic, and security instruments of power. The methodological framework is based on qualitative analysis and a case study of Greenland as a strategically relevant territory. The analysis shows that, despite the absence of open military confrontation, great power rivalry in the Arctic takes on complex and multidimensional forms, thereby assigning Greenland the role of a key micro-arena of contemporary geopolitical competition.

Keywords: Greenland, Arctic, geopolitics, great power rivalry, international relations

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Arctic region has become increasingly important in contemporary international relations. Climate change, the accelerated melting of ice cover, and the development of new

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technologies have contributed to transforming this region from a relatively peripheral space of international politics into an area of growing geopolitical significance (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 4–6). The opening of new maritime routes and the potential exploitation of natural resources have further increased the interest of major powers in the Arctic. In this context, Greenland, located within the Arctic Circle, occupies a particularly prominent place in contemporary geopolitical analyses. As the world's largest island, with an area exceeding two million square kilometres, Greenland holds an exceptionally important geostrategic position between North America and Europe (Darie and Bălăsoiu 2025, 1–9). Its location in the North Atlantic makes it a key node in the region's security architecture. Particular attention is devoted to relations between the United States, China, Denmark, Canada, and the European Union, as well as to the impact of climate change and natural resource exploitation on the transformation of regional geopolitics.

The analysis indicates that Greenland, despite its relatively small population and limited economic capacities, is gaining increasing strategic importance in contemporary international relations. Great power rivalry in the Arctic region manifests primarily through political, economic, and infrastructural instruments of power, which allows Greenland to be understood as a micro-arena of contemporary geopolitical competition. This transformation suggests that broader processes of restructuring the global order are underway, in which geographic spaces such as Greenland acquire strategic importance as power is redistributed in a new multipolar world. Its geographical position between North America, Russia, and Europe makes the island a focal point where diverse strategic interests and international rivalries intersect. At the same time, geological research indicates significant mineral reserves on the island, including rare earth elements that play a crucial role in the modern global economy (Morrison and Nuttall 2019, 2–3). These resources are of great importance for the development of high technology, the energy transition, and the production of modern electronic devices.

The contemporary geopolitical importance of Greenland is further reinforced by its specific political status. The island is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark but enjoys a high degree of political self-government. The process of political autonomy gained a new institutional framework with the adoption of the Self-Government

Act in 2009, which significantly expanded the competencies of Greenlandic institutions (Jakobsen and Larsen 2024, 9–10). In recent years, Greenland has attracted growing interest from international actors. The United States seeks to preserve its strategic influence in the region through military presence and political cooperation with Denmark and local authorities. At the same time, China is developing a strategy of economic presence in the Arctic region through investments in mining and infrastructure projects (Darie and Bălășoiu 2025, 9–12). There is also a persistent interest in the Arctic Circle on the part of the Russian Federation and Canada, another key Arctic state. This dynamic points to increasing competition for influence in the region and raises the question of whether the Arctic is becoming a new arena of geopolitical rivalry among great powers. For this reason, Greenland is increasingly viewed as a micro-arena of contemporary geopolitical competition (Vuppada 2026).

This paper aims to analyse Greenland's geopolitical significance within the contemporary dynamics of the international system and to examine the extent to which this area is becoming an arena of great-power rivalry in the Arctic. The methodological framework is based on a qualitative approach, employing the case study method. Greenland is selected as a crucial case because it represents a territory where the security, economic, and political interests of major powers intersect. The analysis encompasses security, economic, and political dimensions. Such a multidimensional analytical structure enables a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of contemporary geopolitical competition. The empirical basis of the research relies on the analysis of relevant academic literature, strategic and institutional documents, and selected credible media sources.

Main hypothesis: Greenland represents a micro-arena of contemporary great power rivalry in which economic, infrastructural, and political instruments of power predominate, while direct military confrontation remains secondary. *Auxiliary hypotheses:* The geostrategic position of Greenland increases its importance in the security strategies of major powers; Greenland's resource potential intensifies economic competition among international actors; climate change further accelerates the geopolitical transformation of the Arctic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The period following the end of the Cold War was marked by relative stability in the international system, characterised by a unipolar distribution of power dominated by the United States. However, during the first decades of the twenty-first century, new centres of power have gradually strengthened, leading to a transformation of the international system that increasingly assumes a multipolar structure. China's economic rise, the revitalisation of Russian foreign policy and military power, and the strengthening of regional powers worldwide have all contributed to this transformation of the global order. In such a context, the geopolitical significance of certain regions is redistributed, with these regions once again acquiring strategic importance as arenas of geopolitical competition. The Arctic region represents one of the most striking examples of such a transformation.

One of the most significant theoretical approaches in analysing these processes is realism in international relations. According to the realist perspective, the international system is characterised by an anarchic structure in which states seek to ensure their own security and increase their power (Waltz 1979, 79–101). In such a system, control over strategic territories, resources, and transport routes represents an important element of international politics. John Mearsheimer emphasises that great powers in the international system strive to achieve regional dominance and to prevent the emergence of rival powers in strategically important regions (Mearsheimer 2001, 29–32). This logic can also be applied to contemporary Arctic geopolitics, where various international actors seek to secure long-term access to natural resources and strategic transport routes.

The application of the realist theoretical framework to the Arctic region enables the identification of patterns of great-power behaviour grounded in the logic of power, security, and control over strategic resources, thereby confirming the relevance of this approach to the analysis of contemporary international relations. The geopolitical significance of certain territories has traditionally been explained through theories of classical geopolitics. Halford Mackinder argued at the beginning of the twentieth century that control over key geographic areas could have a decisive impact on the distribution of global power (Mackinder 1904, 421–437). Although Mackinder's theory was primarily

focused on Eurasia, contemporary authors suggest that a similar logic can be applied to the Arctic region as well.

For much of the twentieth century, the Arctic had limited geopolitical significance, primarily due to extreme climatic conditions, the difficulty of exploiting natural resources, and the underdevelopment of transport routes. Climate change is one of the key factors driving the transformation of the Arctic region. The accelerated melting of ice cover facilitates easier access to natural resources and opens up the possibility of developing new maritime routes between Europe, Asia, and North America (Darie and Bălăsoiu 2025, 4–12; Abis 2026). These changes have significant implications for global trade and energy security, but they are not merely environmental phenomena; they also serve as multipliers of geopolitical processes that redefine the strategic importance of particular regions (Vuppada 2026).

Estimates from geological research indicate that the Arctic region contains a significant share of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves, as well as numerous mineral deposits. Of particular importance are rare earth elements, which are essential for the development of modern technologies, including the production of batteries, electronic devices, and renewable energy systems (Darie and Bălăsoiu 2025, 3). Contemporary literature on Arctic geopolitics suggests that the region is becoming an arena of increasingly intense great power rivalry. Michael Byers emphasises that the Arctic is a unique region where the security, economic, and environmental interests of states intersect (Byers 2010, 15–18). For this reason, the Arctic region is becoming an increasingly important subject of study in international relations. Within this transformation, Greenland occupies a particularly prominent position. As the world's largest island, located between North America and Europe, Greenland holds a significant strategic position in the North Atlantic. In addition to global actors such as the United States, China, and Russia, regional powers, including Canada, also play an important role, shaping Arctic dynamics through territorial control and institutional presence.

Contemporary changes in the international system contribute to the renewed strengthening of Greenland's strategic importance. Today, great power rivalry does not manifest solely through military competition but also through economic competition, infrastructure projects, and control over resources. In this context, some authors use the term “mini Cold War” to describe regions where rivalry between great powers intensifies. Unlike the global Cold War between the United States and the Soviet

Union, contemporary forms of geopolitical competition often have a regional character and manifest through various instruments of power (Freedman 2017, 234–241).

GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GREENLAND

The geopolitical significance of Greenland stems from a combination of geographic, security, and economic factors that make this territory a key space in contemporary Arctic geopolitics. As the world's largest island, situated between North America and Europe, Greenland occupies a strategic position in the North Atlantic. It serves as an important link between the transatlantic and Arctic spaces (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 8–10). Such a geographical position gave the island particular strategic value throughout the twentieth century in the security planning of Western countries.

During the Cold War, Greenland was an important element of the West's security architecture. The United States established the Thule Air Base in the northwestern part of the island, which constituted a key component of the ballistic missile early warning system (Morrison and Nuttall 2019, 2–3). This base enabled monitoring potential Soviet missile attacks and was an important element of the U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy. Although the end of the Cold War reduced geopolitical tensions between great powers, Greenland's strategic importance did not diminish. Contemporary United States security strategies continue to view the island as an important element of North Atlantic security infrastructure (Morrison and Nuttall 2019, 3). The growing rivalry among great powers and the Arctic's increasing importance in global strategic calculations are driving renewed interest in this territory.

In addition to its military significance, Greenland also possesses considerable economic potential. Geological research indicates substantial mineral reserves on the island, including rare earth elements used in the production of electric vehicles, electronics, military technologies, and renewable energy sources. There are also deposits of uranium, iron, zinc, lead, platinum, gold, and other strategic minerals. Research further indicates significant oil and gas reserves on the seabed to the northeast and northwest of the island (Fernández-Montesinos 2024, 9–11).

In the context of global competition for access to these resources, Greenland gains additional strategic importance. Control over rare

earth elements is becoming an important component of contemporary geopolitical strategies, as these resources play a key role in the development of high technology and military systems (Fernández-Montesinos 2024, 10–11). For this reason, various states are interested in developing Greenland's mining industry. At the same time, climate change is transforming the Arctic and further increasing Greenland's geopolitical significance. The melting of ice cover facilitates access to natural resources and enables the development of infrastructure that was previously not economically viable (Fernández-Montesinos 2024, 10–11). In addition, climate change is contributing to the opening of new maritime routes between Europe and Asia that pass through the Arctic region. These routes can significantly shorten transport distances between major global economic centres. For example, the Northern Sea Route along the Arctic coast of Russia can reduce the distance between Europe and Asia by several thousand kilometres compared to traditional routes passing through the Suez Canal (Byers 2010, 55–58).

In this context, Greenland assumes an important geostrategic role in the Arctic. Its position enables control over segments of the North Atlantic and Arctic transport routes, further increasing the interest of major powers in this area (Fernández-Montesinos 2024, 10–11). The contemporary geopolitics of Greenland cannot be understood without analysing the broader context of great-power rivalry in the Arctic. In addition to the United States and the Russian Federation, other states, including China, are increasingly interested in the Arctic. China's Arctic strategy is primarily based on economic presence and infrastructure investments. Canada has a particular interest in regulating the Northwest Passage, which further complicates the legal and geopolitical framework of the Arctic region. The combination of Greenland's geostrategic position, resource potential, and climate change makes it a unique space in contemporary geopolitics. For this reason, the island is becoming an important focal point of contemporary geopolitical competition and is increasingly viewed as a micro-arena of great power rivalry (Leclerc 2025, 2).

GREENLAND AND GREAT POWER RIVALRY

The contemporary geopolitics of the Arctic is increasingly shaped by the rivalry of great powers that seek to strengthen their political, economic, and security influence in the region. In this context, Greenland

becomes an area where the interests of different international actors intertwine. The geographical location of the island, its resource potential, and specific political status contribute to Greenland gaining increasing importance in the strategic calculations of the great powers (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 12–13).

The United States

The United States is the most important security actor in Greenland's geopolitics. American interest in the island dates back to the Second World War. During the Cold War, the U.S. military presence in Greenland was part of a broader strategy to deter the Soviet Union and protect the North Atlantic region (Morrison and Nuttall 2019, 2). The Thule Air Base constituted a key component of the ballistic missile early warning system and enabled surveillance of Arctic airspace (Morrison and Nuttall 2019, 2–3). Today, this base continues to play an important role in the U.S. missile defence system and strategic monitoring. Contemporary U.S. security strategies still view Greenland as an important element of North Atlantic security infrastructure. The increased interest in the island in recent years can be linked to the growing rivalry among great powers and the rising importance of the Arctic in global strategic calculations (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 13–14).

One of the most significant events that clearly demonstrated the U.S. government's primary interest in this part of the Arctic was the 2019 proposal by the American administration to purchase the island from Denmark. This proposal was met with negative reactions from Danish and Greenlandic authorities. The intention of the U.S. president, Donald Trump, following his statement that the United States "must have" Greenland, became a clearly articulated foreign policy and strategic objective of this great power (*Al Jazeera Balkans* 2025). According to Trump's statements, Greenland is strategically important to the United States, a "necessity" for its security. He argued that if the United States does not establish dominance in this region, Russia and China will do so (*Al Jazeera Balkans* 2025). Another idea considered by the U.S. administration was the purchase of Greenland, a concept that dates back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to this idea, Greenland would be purchased directly from its inhabitants, with a certain amount paid to each of approximately 60,000 residents.

In January 2026, pressure on Denmark and the European Union intensified with threats to raise tariffs on goods from European countries if Denmark did not agree to “hand over” or “sell” Greenland. Trump stated: “For years, we have subsidised Denmark, as well as all European Union countries and others, by not charging them tariffs or any other form of compensation. Now, after centuries, the time has come for Denmark to reciprocate – the world’s peace is at stake. China and Russia want Greenland, and there is nothing Denmark can do about it. Therefore, in order to protect global peace and security, strong measures must be taken to quickly and decisively resolve this potentially disastrous situation. Starting February 1, 2026, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Finland will face a 10% tariff on all goods sent to the United States. From June 1, this tariff will increase to 25%. These tariffs will remain in place until a final agreement on Greenland is reached” (Čevriz 2026). Such initiatives can be interpreted as an expression of realist logic, maximising security and control over strategic territories, with Greenland serving as a key point in U.S. geopolitical calculations.

In the context of the war primarily on the territory of Ukraine, as well as the most recent conflicts in the Middle East, Greenland is particularly significant for the United States in security terms due to modern weapons systems such as the “Golden Dome,” which can achieve its full efficiency and maximum protective potential only if the island becomes part of the broader U.S. defence “system.” The administrations of Greenland and Denmark, as well as those of other European countries, condemned the tendencies expressed by Trump. The response included the deployment of military forces near Greenland’s approaches, while protests took place among the island’s population. A significant escalation of geopolitical tensions could also signal the end of military cooperation within NATO, whose functioning, financing, and purpose Trump has questioned since the beginning of his first term. In the absence of an agreement, it remains uncertain whether the situation will escalate through the use of the announced measures (Leclerc 2025, 2, 6).

China

In addition to the United States, China has shown increasing interest in Greenland. China’s Arctic strategy is primarily based on

economic presence and investments in infrastructure projects (Koivurova *et al.* 2020, 25–41). In recent years, China has developed the concept of the so-called “Polar Silk Road,” which represents part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (Darie and Bălăsoiu 2025, 2). Although China does not have territorial claims against Arctic states, Chinese companies have expressed interest in mining projects in Greenland, particularly for rare earth elements. These approximately 17 chemical elements are of great importance to the modern global economy, as they are essential for the development of electronic devices, batteries, and renewable energy technologies.

Chinese companies have also shown interest in infrastructure projects on the island, including airport construction and transport development, reflecting broader Chinese interest in controlling global supply chains. These projects have the potential to influence Greenland’s economic development significantly, but they may also have wider geopolitical implications, contributing to China’s expansion of global influence. For this reason, such Chinese investments have encountered political obstacles (Berenguer, Katona Winther and Meunier 2025, 9).

One of the most prominent projects attracting Chinese interest is the mining project in the Kvanefjeld area of southern Greenland, known for its large deposits of rare minerals. Denmark has strongly opposed the intention of Chinese companies to exploit these resources, citing the significant environmental damage that such exploitation could entail (Yang 2021, 23–27). Although China’s strategy toward Greenland formally emphasises economic and scientific objectives, the presence of Chinese companies in the region enables Beijing to strengthen its political influence. This approach points to a strategy of indirect influence-building through economic and infrastructural instruments of power, confirming the hypothesis that contemporary great power rivalry in the Arctic region has a primarily geoeconomic dimension.

Denmark

Denmark plays a specific role in the contemporary geopolitics of Greenland, as Greenland is a formally autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Although Greenland enjoys a high degree of political autonomy, with its own parliament and government, issues of foreign policy and defence remain under the jurisdiction of the Danish state (Jakobsen and Larsen 2024).

The relationship between Denmark and Greenland represents a complex historical process, ranging from the colonial period through the strengthening of autonomy to contemporary debates over the island's independence. This relationship dates back to the era of European colonial expansion. Denmark established control over Greenland in the eighteenth century. After the Second World War, in the context of broader decolonisation, Denmark introduced reforms granting greater rights to Greenland's population. In 1979, Greenland obtained autonomy through the establishment of a system of home rule, which enabled local authorities to exercise greater control over internal affairs, including education, healthcare, and the local economy (Ackrén and Jakobsen 2014, 404–412). A particularly important step toward greater autonomy was achieved with the Self-Government Act of 2009. One of the most significant outcomes of this act is the right to future independence, should the people of Greenland decide so (Ackrén and Jakobsen 2014, 404–412).

For this reason, Greenland is of significant importance to Denmark. Through its territorial connection, Denmark can function as an Arctic state and an active participant in Arctic international institutions. The Danish government seeks to balance support for Greenland's political autonomy with the preservation of its own strategic interests in the region. As a member of NATO and part of the European security space, Denmark plays an important role in shaping Western policy toward the Arctic region.

At the same time, Danish policy toward Greenland includes support for the island's economic development. Greenland is heavily dependent on financial assistance from Denmark, making the development of the mining industry and the exploitation of natural resources crucial to potentially reducing this dependence. Although there are strong political forces in Greenland advocating for independence, economic dependence on Denmark remains a significant factor influencing political decisions. The Danish government reacted immediately after international media reported on U.S. interest in purchasing Greenland. Danish political leaders emphasised that Greenland is an autonomous territory with its own government and parliament, and that the question of its political future cannot be the subject of bilateral negotiations between other states. In this context, the Danish government stressed that "Greenland is not for sale," thereby clearly rejecting the possibility of any agreement involving the transfer of territorial sovereignty (Gronholt-Pedersen

2025). Statements by Donald Trump further intensified debate in Denmark over Greenland's strategic importance. Danish politicians and analysts emphasised that Greenland is an important element of Denmark's international position, particularly in Arctic geopolitics. As a state with territory in the Arctic region, Denmark participates in international institutions that govern the Arctic, including the Arctic Council.

In addition to political considerations, Denmark also has significant security interests in Greenland. The island represents a key point in the North Atlantic security structure and plays an important role in the transatlantic defence system. The U.S. military base Pituffik (formerly Thule Air Base) is located on Greenlandic territory and constitutes an important element of U.S. and NATO missile defence. This base operates under an agreement between Denmark and the United States, meaning that Denmark plays an important role in regulating the U.S. military presence on the island. Such an institutional arrangement further complicates the region's geopolitical dynamics, introducing an internal political sensitivity into broader international relations.

European Union

The European Union also demonstrates growing interest in the Arctic region. Although Greenland is not part of the European Union, the EU seeks to develop various forms of cooperation with the island, particularly in scientific research, environmental protection, and sustainable development (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 3). Greenland and the European Union maintain a specific relationship that reflects the broader interaction between European integration and territories with special constitutional status. Greenland represents a unique case in the history of European integration, as it was the first territory to withdraw from the European Economic Community (European Commission 2007, 2–4). This process, often described as the first “European exit” in 1982 – prior to Brexit – significantly shaped relations between Greenland and EU institutions.

Following its withdrawal from the European Economic Community (EEC), Greenland acquired the status of an overseas territory with privileged access to the European market for certain products, as well as the possibility of financial and developmental cooperation with European institutions. One of the most important elements of

this relationship is the Fisheries Agreement between Greenland and the European Union (EP, P10_TA(2025)0143), under which European fleets are granted access to Greenlandic waters in exchange for financial support from EU institutions to Greenland's economy. In EU strategic documents, the Arctic is increasingly viewed as a region of particular geopolitical and economic importance. European institutions seek, through various cooperation programs, to contribute to the stability and sustainable development of the region (*Beyond the Horizon* 2026).

Overall, great power rivalry in Greenland does not manifest in open military conflict but primarily in political and economic competition. Investments in infrastructure, control over resource exploitation, and the development of political relations with local authorities represent key elements of contemporary geopolitical competition in the region. Statements by former U.S. President Donald Trump about the possibility of acquiring Greenland sparked strong reactions in European political circles. The European Union responded by offering political support to Denmark and emphasising the principles of territorial sovereignty and international law. For European institutions, the issue of Greenland represents not only a bilateral matter between the United States and Denmark, but also a broader question of the stability of the international order. In this sense, the European Union acts as a normative actor seeking to preserve regional stability through institutional and legal mechanisms, representing an alternative to classical geopolitical strategies of great powers (*Beyond the Horizon* 2026).

Russian Federation

Russia represents one of the most important states in the geopolitics of the Arctic region, as it possesses the longest Arctic coastline in the world. Its geopolitical, economic, and military significance is strategically important for international relations in this part of the world. The Arctic occupies a central place in Russian foreign policy and security strategy, particularly regarding energy, natural resources, and transport routes. Within this strategy, Russia closely monitors developments – economic, security, and political – across the entire Arctic region, with particular attention to Greenland (President of the Russian Federation 2020).

Russia seeks to develop this transport network through investments in infrastructure, ports, and its icebreaker fleet. Russia's nuclear icebreaker fleet is the largest of its kind in the world and enables

navigation through Arctic waters for much of the year (Bukharin 2006, 25–31). As part of this strategy, Russia is also modernising its military infrastructure in the north. Numerous Soviet-era military bases have been restored or modernised, and the Russian armed forces are developing new systems for operations in Arctic conditions. Russian analysts argue that U.S. military infrastructure in Greenland could affect the strategic balance among great powers. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of radar systems and infrastructure for tracking missile systems.

In this context, the Russian state closely monitors the development of U.S. military capabilities in Greenland. The modernisation of American military infrastructure and the development of new missile defence technologies are important factors in Russian security analyses. At the same time, Russia seeks to preserve the balance of power in the Arctic region by strengthening its own military presence. This policy is based on the idea that regional stability depends on a strategic balance among different actors (Bukharin 2006, 25–31; Mortensgaard and Barse 2026). Russia's reaction to Donald Trump's intentions regarding Greenland has been relatively cautious. However, Russian media and analytical circles have clearly emphasised that attempts to acquire territories such as Greenland could set a precedent in international relations. The Russian Federation's position is that Greenland must remain part of Denmark, with all the rights deriving from its autonomy (Antonov 2025). Such a policy reflects the realist concept of power balancing, in which Russia seeks to limit the influence of other actors and preserve its strategic position in the Arctic.

Canada

Canada is one of the key Arctic actors, whose interests in the region are based on a combination of territorial sovereignty, security priorities, and the management of natural resources (Byers 2010, 153–155). As a state with a significant portion of Arctic territory, Canada views the Arctic as an integral part of its national identity and security strategy. Canadian Arctic policy has traditionally been oriented toward preserving sovereignty over the Northwest Passage, which Canada considers internal waters, whereas the United States views it as an international strait (Byers 2010, 153–155). This difference in interpretation indicates latent tensions even among allies within the Western security framework.

In addition to the security dimension, Canada seeks to develop the Arctic region's economic potential through resource exploitation and infrastructure development, while simultaneously emphasising environmental protection and the rights of Indigenous communities (Government of Canada 2019, 18–24). In the context of contemporary great-power rivalry, Canada occupies a specific position between cooperation and competition, balancing its national interests with the broader Western strategic framework (Lackenbauer 2021, 812–815). This approach confirms that the Arctic region is not a homogeneous field of rivalry but rather a complex space where elements of cooperation and geopolitical competition intersect. In this sense, Canada's role further supports the main hypothesis of the paper, demonstrating that contemporary great power rivalry in the Arctic unfolds through a combination of security, economic, and political instruments, where even alliances do not exclude the existence of competing interests (*Beyond the Horizon* 2026).

GREENLAND AS AN ARENA OF A “MINI COLD WAR”

Changes in the international system over recent decades have led to renewed strengthening of great-power rivalry. Although the contemporary international order does not exhibit complete structural similarity with the bipolar system that dominated during the Cold War, many authors point to the emergence of new forms of geopolitical competition (Mearsheimer 2001, 29–32). This competition often manifests in regional spaces where the interests of major powers intersect, creating specific zones of geopolitical contestation. The Arctic region represents one such space. Climate change, the opening of new maritime routes, and increasing competition for access to natural resources contribute to transforming the Arctic into a region of growing geopolitical importance (Fernández-Montesinos 2025, 14–15). In this context, Greenland occupies a particularly significant position due to its strategic location between North America and Europe and its potentially substantial mineral resources.

The concept of a “mini Cold War” describes regional forms of great-power rivalry that do not reach the level of global conflict but still have significant political and strategic implications. Unlike the classical Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, contemporary

rivalry has a more complex structure and involves a range of instruments of power (Byers 2010, 70–72). During the Cold War, Greenland played an important role in the security system of the United States and NATO. The American military base Thule, now known as Pituffik Space Base, was part of the ballistic missile early warning system. In contemporary international relations, geopolitical competition does not manifest solely through the military dimension but also encompasses the economy, technology, infrastructure, and control over resources. It is precisely in this context that Greenland represents a specific geopolitical space where the interests of multiple international actors converge. The United States seeks to maintain its strategic position in the region through military presence and security cooperation with Denmark. At the same time, China is developing a strategy to expand its economic presence in the Arctic region. Chinese companies have shown interest in exploiting mineral resources in Greenland, particularly rare earth elements.

In addition to economic and security factors, Greenland's political status further complicates the region's geopolitical dynamics. As an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, Greenland has significant self-government, but issues of foreign policy and defence remain under Danish jurisdiction (Jakobsen and Larsen 2024). Contemporary geopolitics of Greenland demonstrates that great power rivalry can take various forms that do not necessarily involve open conflict. Instead, competition often unfolds through political, economic, and infrastructural instruments of power. Investments in mining projects, the development of transport infrastructure, and political cooperation with local authorities represent key elements of this process. In this sense, Greenland can be understood as a micro-arena of contemporary geopolitical rivalry in the Arctic region. In this space, the interests of the United States, China, Denmark, Canada, and the European Union intersect, contributing to the perception of the Arctic as a region in which new geopolitical competition is emerging.

The case study of Greenland demonstrates that the contemporary international system is characterised by a complex interplay of different forms of power, in which control over resources, infrastructure, and political influence is as important as traditional military power. In this sense, Greenland serves as an empirical example of the transformation of the contemporary international system toward multipolarity, in which great-power rivalry manifests across various interconnected dimensions of power.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Arctic geopolitics shows that the Arctic has become increasingly important in contemporary international relations over the past few decades. Climate change, technological development, and the growing global demand for natural resources have transformed this region from a relatively peripheral space in international politics into a key geopolitical area of the modern world. In this context, Greenland occupies a particularly prominent place in contemporary geopolitical analyses. Its geographical position between North America and Europe makes it an important strategic point in the North Atlantic and Arctic space. At the same time, the island's potential mineral resources, particularly rare earth elements, further increase the interest of various international actors in this region.

The analysis demonstrates that Greenland's geopolitical significance stems from a combination of several factors. On the one hand, military and security aspects remain an important element of the island's geopolitics, as reflected in the presence of U.S. military infrastructure in Greenland. On the other hand, the island's economic and resource potential is becoming an increasingly significant factor in contemporary geopolitical calculations. A particular dimension of Greenland's contemporary geopolitics is the presence of multiple great powers whose interests intersect in the Arctic. The United States seeks to maintain its strategic position through military presence and security cooperation with Denmark. At the same time, China is developing a strategy of economic presence in the region through investments in mining and infrastructure projects. Denmark and the European Union seek to preserve political stability in the region and ensure the island's sustainable development, while Canada contributes to the complexity of the region's geopolitical dynamics.

This dynamic indicates the existence of a specific form of contemporary geopolitical rivalry. However, there is no direct military confrontation among great powers; competition for influence in the region manifests through various political, economic, and infrastructural instruments of power. For this reason, Greenland can be viewed as a specific micro-arena of contemporary geopolitical competition. In this sense, the concept of a "mini Cold War" serves as a useful analytical framework for understanding contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic region. Unlike the global rivalry that characterised the Cold

War period, contemporary forms of geopolitical competition often have a regional character and manifest through a combination of different instruments of power.

The case study of Greenland demonstrates that contemporary geopolitics increasingly involves a complex interaction of security, economic, and political factors. Control over resources, infrastructure, and transport routes is becoming as important as traditional military power. For this reason, the Arctic region – and Greenland in particular – will remain one of the key arenas of contemporary geopolitical rivalry in the coming decades and will play a significant role in shaping the global order.

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Сандра Божић**Београд*

ГРЕНЛАНД У НОВОЈ ГЕОПОЛИТИЦИ АРКТИКА: МИКРО-АРЕНА САВРЕМЕНОГ РИВАЛСТВА ВЕЛИКИХ СИЛА

Резиме

Рад анализира геополитички значај Гренланда у савременом међународном систему са посебним фокусом на његово позиционирање као микро-арене ривалства великих сила у арктичком региону. Полазећи од реалистичког теоријског приступа, истраживање испитује на који начин се савремена геополитичка конкуренција манифестује кроз политичке, економске и безбедносне инструменте моћи. Методолошки оквир заснива се на квалитативној анализи и студији случаја Гренланда као стратешки релевантне територије. Анализа показује да, упркос одсуству отворене војне конфронтације, ривалство великих сила у Арктику поприма комплексне и вишедимензионалне облике, чиме Гренланд добија улогу кључне микро-арене савременог геополитичког надметања. У раду се анализира став сваког од појединачних великих геополитичких играча према Гренланду (САД, Данска, Русија, Канада, Европа). Објашњавају се њихови мотиви и на основу чега они „полажу право” на Гренланд. Такође, обрађена је пажња на природна богатства Гренланда која привлаче пажњу великих сила. Закључци овог рада односе се на систематизацију досадашњих истраживања на тему Гренланда, као и представљање оригиналних закључака ауторке рада. Дају се претпоставке о будућем развоју догађаја и шта можемо очекивати у овом делу света.

Кључне речи: Гренланд, Арктик, геополитика, ривалство великих сила, међународни односи

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