

US Secretary of State Blinken Says “No” to Greenland Real Estate. “Strategists Hoping for Easier Access to the Arctic”

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In May, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a visit to Greenland. In a rather unedifying way, he was called ‘Tony’ by his hosts, a disarming point that was bound to open the floodgates of insincerity. For all the convivial stuffing, there was a certain sting to the occasion: the previous Trump administration had revisited a fantasy long nurtured in the corridors of Washington and power crazed pundits. Greenland, went the dreamers, might someday become a part of the US imperium.

President Donald Trump, in reigniting the issue with a businessman’s bumbling delight, [noted](#) in 2019 that Denmark “essentially” owned it. “We’re very good allies with Denmark, we protect Denmark like we protect large portions of the world. So the concept came up and I said, ‘Certainly I’d be [interested in purchasing Greenland].’ Strategically it’s interesting and we’d be interested but we’ll talk to them a little bit.” The Danish response to his appraisal – that Greenland was potentially part of “a large real estate deal”, was dismissive. Trump harrumphed.

So what has happened to Trump’s ideas regarding this icy territory? The press conference began cordially enough. Blinken was welcomed by the autonomous territory’s premier Mute Egede [who reminded him](#) that celebrations would be held commemorating Kangerlussuaq’s 80-years anniversary, built by the US Air Force in 1941. “What began as a military base is now an important civilian airport for Greenland.” From a world at war, the relationship with the US had “evolved to a cooperation in science and mutual interest and understanding the health of our planet.”

This was laying it on a bit thick, but Blinken obliged with due sopiness. “I’m in Greenland because the United States deeply values our partnership and wants to make it even stronger.” The consulate in Nuuk, after a seven decade hiatus, had been reopened for that reason.

To the press members gathered, he explained how the US was willing to part with cash in

developing the island (“about \$12 million in programming in the first year, and plans for additional funding.”) This covered sustainable tourism, fishing, land management, and cooperation between universities. But then came the question: “Can you definitely say that the United States does not seek to buy Greenland?” To this question posed by John Hudson of the *Washington Post*, Blinken could only assert its accuracy.

Greenland’s Minister for Trade, Foreign Affairs and Climate, Pele Broberg, [was also clear](#) that Greenland, while significant in terms of “geo-location” and of “utmost importance for the defence of the United States”, was not part of any “real estate deal” with Washington. But Broberg’s interpretation as to what constituted real estate was curious enough. “Real estate means land with nothing on it, nobody on it.” This observation was a prelude to something less than convincing. “Secretary Blinken has made it clear that he is here for the people living in the Arctic, for the people living in Greenland.”

Over various periods of history, that grand cold expanse of Greenland has interested US prospectors of political realty. The US imperium had grown rich through a combination of purchases and predatory conquest, repudiating those warnings made by George Washington about the perils of an enlarged empire.

During the administration of Andrew Jackson, the territorially-minded expansionist William Seward [went on a bidding spree](#), pursuing that old coveted goal of acquiring Canada from the British Empire and naval assets in the Caribbean. Returns followed for the US Secretary of State. The Alaska purchase, with the Russians imprudently parting with land they thought was of little value, was truly something of a steal. In the summer of 1867, Seward also commissioned former treasury secretary Robert J. Walker to look into the issue of whether Denmark might be willing to part with both Greenland and Iceland. Walker had already made good progress in acquiring the Danish possessions of St. Thomas and St. John through treaty.

In his introduction to a [report](#) for the State Department, compiled by the superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, Benjamin Peirce, Walker is eye popping with praise for this “largest island in the world.” (The Trump vernacular is all too present.) You can sense the aggrandising inner voice: “Its area, thus elongated, would be about 1,800,000 square miles, or largely more than half the size of all Europe, but with a far greater shoreline.” He acknowledges those “vast fisheries and extensive coasts and numerous harbors, especially with abundant good coal there [which] must greatly antedate the period when the United States will command the commerce of the World.” Acquire Greenland today, and a rich tomorrow is assured.

The Truman administration, eyeing strategic advantages in its Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union, was another bidder, offering \$100 million for the island territory in 1946. As John Hickerson of the State Department [noted in a memo](#), “practically every member” of the planning and strategy committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that a purchase should take place. It was also “indispensable to the safety of the United States” while being “completely worthless to Denmark”. The Danish Foreign Minister Gustav Rasmussen [was less than impressed](#) with this imperial imposition when approached by Secretary of State James Byrnes in December 1946.

Happily for Copenhagen, the advent of NATO alleviated any pressing need to show the Danes the money. US military planners got what they wanted: a defence treaty in 1951

permitting the building of the Thule Air Base. To facilitate this agreement, the Danish government relocated the indigenous Inughuit community with assured callousness. It was all a crude demonstration of empire by concealment and obfuscation, a point [made with some force](#) by Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*.

With the Biden administration looking inwards, expressions of interest for Greenland, at least from the US, have closed. This is unlikely to be a permanent state of affairs. The ice is melting; global warming is a terror for the environment but a delicious commercial boon for strategists hoping for easier access to the Arctic. Russia is proving a more than formidable player. China, along with Russia, dream of the [Ice Silk Road](#). US officials fret that Beijing might get a military foothold on the island. This real estate story is far from over.

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