Briefing Note

"Nothing about us without us": What we can learn from Greenland's new 'Arctic Strategy' 2024-2033

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In February 2024, Greenland published a strategy on foreign, security, and defense policy. The strategy had been eagerly awaited for several years. The novel strategy aims to secure a stable foreign policy direction for Greenland for a decade and signal intents to multiple audiences. The Kingdom of Denmark had to delay their common strategy (or, policy) for the entire realm until the Greenlandic strategy was published, while other Arctic states have been curious on the priorities of the strategy. In this briefing note, we outline the historical and (geo)political context of the strategy. We then move on to discuss some of the main items of the strategy by emphasizing the relative of weight of certain areas over others (US and North American Arctic over EU and Denmark), security and defense policy, and climate policy, and, thirdly, sketch out the implications of these priorities for Greenland's (geo)political aspirations and diplomatic relations.

Introduction

In February 2024, Greenland published its foreign policy strategy titled *Greenland in the World - Nothing about us without us. Greenland's Foreign, Security and Defense Policy 2024-2033 – an Arctic Strategy.*[1] Within a Greenlandic context, the strategy marks an important milestone. Since the formation of the first Greenlandic political parties in the late 1970's, Greenlandic politics has frequently been articulated in opposition to Denmark and been evolving around a twin process of getting more control over domestic policies and room for maneuver in international and Arctic regional affairs. Moreover, even though Greenland also published a foreign policy strategy in 2011, with the new strategy, we see, for the first time, a comprehensive strategic description of Greenland's aspiration within the domain of security and defense policy.

On the one hand, the strategy had been eagerly awaited by multiple audiences, and on the other, the strategy should be read as a signal to these multiple audiences, i.e. domestically, within the Kingdom of Denmark (KoD), and abroad. The strategy aims to secure a stable foreign policy direction of Greenland, and to this end, the government has secured a broad parliamentary backing. All political parties but one (*Naleraq*) have put their signature to the strategy and thus, in principle,

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declared themselves in consensus. That is, frontloading the future if, for example, the incumbent government coalition over time should change. Within the Greenlandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the strategy should aid the small number of civil servants to handle foreign and defence policy issues on a day-to-day basis without prior political consultation. From outside, the increasing number of actors interested in the Arctic have likewise been eager to get to know the priorities and aspirations of Greenland. And finally Denmark, where there is a strong wish to renew the KoD's Arctic Strategy, which expired in 2020, and set the course for a common Arctic policy.

The key message of the strategy is in the title 'Nothing about us without us'. This has in recent years become established as the key term of Greenland's engagement with the outside world, including Denmark and within the KoD.[2] This motto stresses how discussions and decisions made about Greenlandic and Arctic affairs can no longer be ventured without prior consultation with Nuuk, i.e. that Greenland is insisting on a seat at the negotiation table. This motto is written as the guiding principle for 11 policy areas outlined in the strategy.

In addition, the strategy signals a credible commitment to be part of and contribute to international agreements and negotiations. This is expressed as a willingness to take international responsibility and be party to international commitments like the Paris Agreement. In a larger picture, the strategy follows a slow-motion evolution for half a century of becoming an international and regional actor in its own right, and, thus, sets the tone for an ever more outwards looking Greenland and a stronger international commitment.[3]

In this briefing note, we present key dimensions of the Arctic Strategy and provide historical and (geo)political contextualization in order to provide a guide for understanding the wider ramifications, as well as limitations of the strategy. While much of the strategy is in line with (geo)political signals emanating from Nuuk over the last decade, there are at least three issue areas deserving more attention that emerge from such a reading: First, the apparent importance ascribed to the EU and North America respectively, where the prioritization of North America flies in the face of the historically economic significance of the EU.

Second, we highlight a fairly substantial shift in the political attitudes towards military presence and Greenlandic engagement within defense policy, although dual-use aspects of potential investments and developments to include economic and civilian benefits to the Greenlandic society and local actors is stressed. Third, as alluded to above, there is a stronger willingness to take on international responsibility, especially in regional Arctic fora and in the context of climate policies despite the complexities of Greenlandic infrastructure and development potential.

In what follows, we discuss the context, content, and implications of the novel Greenlandic strategy. We begin with an outline of the historical and political context of the strategy, including both domestic and KoD dynamics. We then move on to discuss the content of the strategy by primarily zooming in on the abovementioned three items, and finally, discuss some key aspects of the strategy in more detail and sketch out the implications of these priorities for Greenland's (geo)political aspirations and diplomatic relations. In our choice of highlighting certain aspects of the strategy over others, we compare the prioritization of space given to various sections in the strategy with both the political and economic importance of certain foreign relations over others as well as the current political debates in Greenland.

Context

Even though the new Arctic strategy has been described by some pundits as Greenland's first foreign policy strategy,[4] there is prior work to this end which is worth mentioning. Even if largely unknown, Greenland published a foreign policy strategy and explanatory statement memorandum in 2011, which also makes it possible to make temporal comparisons between the content and priorities over time.[5] It described visions for how Greenland should evolve towards 2050 but was intended 'just' to be a ten-year strategy. The 2011 strategy came in furtherance of several official documents since the late 1990's and committees' work paving the way for chapter 4 concerning foreign affairs in the Self-Rule Act of 2009.[6] The point of departure of the current strategy was, then, partially that the former strategy of 2011 had reached its expiry date.

The initial drafting of the new strategy started in early 2020, after an internal MFA-seminar in 2019. While Covid19 at that time was very disruptive for Greenlandic diplomacy, including the projected strategy work, it also served as a point of departure for the drafting of the strategy in the early phase – later, also because of lengthy quarantines in e.g. the new Greenlandic representation in Beijing, China – as it freed up time. Afterwards, it primarily swapped hands between a few diplomats in Nuuk and at the Greenlandic representations abroad, and was also transferred to some deliberative phases between the government and the political parties.[7]

From early on, the strategy was thus intended to not just be a civil servant document of the MFA in Nuuk, but have broad political legitimacy in *Inatsisartut*, the Greenlandic parliament, and it thus went back and forth in the drafting period between the MFA and the political parties. The strategy was delayed several times, and this had ramifications on several levels (e.g. domestically and within the KoD), but to a large extent follows earlier signals from Greenland where, for example, a westwards looking focus has emerged as a key component, i.e. the US and Canada, as well as fellow Inuit in the North American Arctic.

Quite a few times, at least from spring 2022, the Premier or the Minster of Foreign Affairs were quoted in the media that the strategy was almost ready to be published. The reason for the iterative delays and stop-'n'-go process is not mono-causal. For one, the coalition of the government changed in April 2022, seeing a noteworthy coalition of the two largest political parties: The social democratic *Siumut* and the slightly more left-leaning *Inuit Ataqatigiit*. Henceforth the designated Minister of Foreign Affairs was chosen from the former main opposition party, *Siumut*.

This change in government meant some time to align on the process and content and came at a time when Ministers of Foreign Affairs had changed quite often in the years preceding the call for and drafting of the strategy. Likewise, a shuffle of the top diplomats in May 2021 between the MFA in Nuuk and the different representations abroad, akin to small embassies, had similar minor effects.

Second, while political settlements are utilized in Greenlandic politics, rather than discussed mainly in a committee or drafted within a closed circle in the ministry, there is not a strong political tradition for this way of deliberating a strategy of this sort. Here, the party leaders (or, in a few cases, main spokespersons) were consulted over time. And there was strong insistence in *Inatsisartut* that they should be involved in the process. Outside parliamentary sessions in the assembly in Nuuk, it can be difficult to gather politicians who live far away from the capital, and this prolonged the process.

Third and arguably far more significantly, the MFA was often short on staff during the 4-year process or other important issues were being prioritized, although it is at times difficult to decipher if temporal delays were mainly for bureaucratic or political reasons, etc.

In contrast to the abovementioned strategy from 2011, security and/or defense was mentioned by Greenlandic diplomats from early in the writing phase of the new strategy, as it was expected to be added to the foreign policy aspects of the former strategy. In the end, the title includes them all, even though security and defense policy are formally the prerogative of Denmark, as will be elaborated below. Discussions whether it should be coined an Arctic Strategy or if Greenland should draft one in general had been floating for several years, with some arguing that Greenland should have its own Arctic Strategy whereas others arguing that it is redundant as all politics in Greenland per definition is Arctic, or that Greenland inherently is an Arctic nation.

In the foreword to the strategy, *Naalakkersuisoq* (Minister) of Foreign Affairs, Vivian Motzfeldt, muses about the middle-of-the-road solution, that it "addresses the needs and concerns of an Arctic nation and an Arctic people. Not surprisingly, these issues are crosscutting for us in Greenland, which means that this can also be called an Arctic strategy." Hence, it's partially an Arctic Strategy, but also not just that.

As such, the strategy provides key insights to the long-term political goals of Greenland, as well as the current dynamics within the Kingdom of Denmark and Arctic governance in general. There is a very strong desire in Greenlandic foreign relations to be treated as an equal, but this desire sometimes – or quite often – fly in the face of the legal constitutional framework that posit Greenland as a subordinate part of the Kingdom. Next, we therefore devote a subsection to a brief run through of the formal framework vis-à-vis practical developments in regard to foreign policy within the KoD.

The Kingdom of Denmark

The fact that Greenland, and the Faroe Islands as well, issue their own Arctic Strategies could appear at a first glance to be incompatible with the formal constitutional framework of the KoD where foreign policy remains the prerogative of Denmark, as stipulated by §19 of the Danish constitution of 1953 (see below). However, the development of independent Faroese and Greenlandic strategies falls in line with the political practice of the last decades within the kingdom.

The insistence on "nothing about us…" should, of course, also be read within a history of Danish foreign and security policy decisions being taken and implemented – often under the auspices of US security concerns and interests – without prior and proper involvement of Greenland. In the efforts to challenge and gain influence over the Arctic voice of Danish foreign policy, Greenland has insisted that the Arctic-ness of the KoD solely rests with Greenland. Bluntly put by previous Greenlandic Minister of Foreign Affairs (2014-2017) Vittus Qujaukitsoq: "Several countries and states have come up with arctic strategies, which is a typical characteristic of non-Arctic countries […] For an Arctic country like Greenland, our Foreign Policy Strategy is an Arctic strategy. We are the Arctic. We are the epitome of the Arctic."[8]

This policy of monopolising the Arctic-ness of the Kingdom, has been successful to the extent that Denmark now accepts not to make any public decisions on the Arctic or Greenland without Greenland. In effect, the KoD had to delay the ambition of a common strategy for the entire realm after the previous Arctic Strategy from 2011-20 expired until Greenland published its own strategy.

A key disagreement in the foreign policy tango between Denmark and Greenland revolves around the status of §19 of the Danish constitution, which states that "the king acts on behalf of the kingdom in international affairs." In practice, this means that the Danish government takes care of foreign policy for the entire kingdom, and thus there can be only one external voice of the unitary Kingdom. Greenland became part of the KoD in 1953 in a process whose legitimacy is now much disputed.[9] The Greenlandic push for a stronger independent voice in international relations was kindled by the European Communities (EC) membership in 1973 where Greenland became part of it despite a huge majority against membership at home. This led to Greenland's departure of the EC (now European Union) in 1985.

Fast forward to 2005, Greenland (and the Faroe Islands) obtained the formal right to conduct foreign policy through the so-called "authorization arrangement." This arrangement gives Greenland the right to conduct foreign policy and enter agreements *on behalf of the Kingdom* on matters of exclusive concerns to Greenland. These powers shall not, however, "limit the Danish authorities' constitutional responsibility and powers in international affairs, as foreign and security policy matters are affairs of the Realm."[10]

In short, the Danish constitution is often seen as a straitjacket limiting Greenland's desire to act independently to the extent that the Greenlandic permanent secretary Mininnguaq Kleist – in a public debate with then Danish Arctic Ambassador, Thomas Winkler, during the large business conference Future Greenland in Nuuk in May 2022 – openly said that: "I will always challenge the constitution. Always. […] We are pushing the framework of the constitution. This is how we make progress. I am not creating a crisis in the community of the realm (*Rigsfællesskabet*). I create development together with my colleagues."[11]

In this light, we should not be surprised that the Arctic Strategy devotes very little space to the KoD. Within the KoD, Denmark proper had to wait to negotiate and polish a common Arctic strategy, even if that writing process before and during the early phase of Covid19 had produced a somewhat lengthy draft that was in hearing among different institutions, but the KoD Arctic strategy is to this day still on hold. Moreover, as mentioned, it took substantially longer than initially expected for the Greenlandic strategy to materialize.[12]

In sum, the strategy should be read as Greenland's desire to perform an own voice alluding more independent international agency than what can be derived from the legal and constitutional framework of the KoD. Having discussed some contextual aspects, we now turn our attention to the content of the new strategy, zooming in primarily on three items laid out in the introduction and elaborated below.

Content

The English version, which came out a few weeks later than the Greenlandic and Danish versions, is 48 pages including pictures and graphics, and consists of a foreword, an introduction, some closing remarks and 11 sections in between on key topics including the Arctic Council, the climate and the ocean, relations with neighboring countries (the United States, Iceland and Canada), trade, connectivity, East Asia, multilateral cooperation, and security and defense policy. It is based on values that underpin Greenland's approach to relations with other countries, which are:

- Democracy and human rights are at the core of all relations.
- Greenland and the Arctic is an area of low tension.

- Improving the lives and livelihoods of the Greenlandic people is of key importance.
- All relations are based on the premise that Greenland and the Greenlandic people constitute an independent people and nation.
- All relations must be solution oriented.
- [Greenland] stand[s] in solidarity and work hand in hand with other Arctic communities.

The first section after the foreword and introduction is devoted to the Arctic Council, which testifies that this is a key priority, and despite the current "difficult times, there is still a need to look ahead to the long-term development of the Arctic Council." The phrase 'difficult times' is not elaborated and Russia is not explicitly mentioned, but early on after the (re-)invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Greenland both backed the pause of the Council and its working groups and argued that in the long term some cooperation with all member state, implicitly including Russia, must be resumed: "The role of the Arctic Council must be safeguarded with long-term participation of the entire Arctic region, and its mandate should continue to exclude matters related to hard security."[13] In the short term, there is a strong focus on the upcoming chairship of the Arctic Council, which KoD will convene from spring 2025 to 2027, and Greenland is adamant that it will play a key role during the chairship.

Overall, the strategy follows political priorities established over the last decades in Greenland's foreign policy. This includes focus on iteratively highlighting the governance aspect of being a regional Arctic actor, expanding trade, a strong focus on Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, including Indigenous and local knowledge, and the re-affirmation that Greenland envisions a cooperative and low-tension Arctic.

However, there are also a number of issues that are worth paying attention to because of their novelty and/or the attention they are given in the strategy or the wording in which they are depicted.[14] Subsequently, we will go through three specific items: first, the emphasis on connectivity and the positioning of North America vis-à-vis the European Union; second, the weights ascribed to security and defence policies; and third, the strong commitment to international climate politics.

Connectivity, North America & the EU

The first passage that we wish to highlight is one that has not drawn a lot of attention, but nevertheless is interesting. This is the section on "connectivity" (*Attaveqaateqarneq* in Greenlandic). While this is not a typical term in political strategic parlance, it is interesting because it draws our attention towards questions of Greenland's broader connections to the outside world. It should be understood as trade policy, transport links, representative relations, communication, infrastructure and so on.

At the same time, connectivity is about increasing opportunities, minimizing vulnerability (e.g. diversifying supply chains) to the benefit of Greenland's society. Yet, at the same this should also reduce its dependence on Denmark. In this light, it is interesting to note the desire to be at the head of a new Arctic North American forum.[15] It is supposed to strengthen cooperation between Greenland and the North American states and territories that are home to the Arctic Indigenous peoples – on a substate level.

More concretely, the wish is to establish cooperation between governments and parliaments in Alaska (USA), Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik (Canada) and Greenland. While

this part of the strategy is less tangible in terms of how it may be implemented compared to most of the other sections, this relates to the general focus on the North American Arctic and enhanced cooperation with fellow Inuit. In this context, it is important to remember that Nunavut and Greenland signed an MoU in August 2022 in recognition of the "interest and aspiration to bolster cooperation" between the two.[16]

Not only can North America be seen as a westward and Inuit-oriented alternative to Scandinavian cooperation in, for example, the Nordic Council which Greenland has recently been highly critical about for not being inclusive of the semi-autonomous polities (Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Aaland), it would also provide a transnational forum where Greenland could play a leading and agenda-setting role.[17]

Compared to North America, the EU appears as a surprisingly low priority in the strategy.[18] First, the description of the EU does not take up nearly as much space as the USA or Canada, respectively. Secondly, the description of the EU partnership has a somewhat distanced character. The recent opening of the EU Commission's office in Nuuk as of spring 2024, for example, is described as something that the EU needs and not something that arose from a mutual desire: "the EU now also needs a presence in Greenland."[19]

This is surprising in light of how important the EU is, and has been for half a century, for Greenland – at least in financial terms. Under the fisheries and partnership agreements, Greenland has duty-free access to the European market and educational cooperation. Greenland also receives far more EU funding in Danish kroner per capita than any other Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT). Historically, cooperation with the EC/EU were in many respects a catalyst for Greenlandic foreign policy thinking and learning the craft of diplomacy, and since the beginning of the 1990's, Greenland has had a representation in Brussels where most Greenlandic diplomats have had shorter or longer working periods. A recent third pillar of cooperation was added related to green energy, including potential mining and hydropower, and the European Commission finally opened an office in Nuuk in spring 2024 which had been in the pipeline for roughly five years.

So why does the EU now occupy so little space in the strategy? A friendly reading might be that most things actually work well, and fits within the continuation of decades-old negotiating frameworks. By implication, there is thus no significant reason to reinvent the wheel when EU cooperation is mostly running on rails. A more critical reading would suggest that the otherwise economically important partnership with Europe would appear as a barrier to the North American agenda; the importance of the EU could be seen as a somewhat inconvenient obstacle to the wish of putting more weight and resources behind further integration with North America.

On top of this, the EU has traditionally been seen as a large and distant bureaucratic apparatus, especially by the general population who do not work with fisheries or education agreements with the EU on a daily basis, let alone notice the financial contributions to the national treasury. In terms of actual trade and economic structural funding, one should arguably assume the EU to have a more prominent role in the strategy than building trade from almost scratch with the US, whereas the westward lean makes more sense in a cultural and (geo)political exchange with North America. Compared to the abovementioned Greenlandic 2011 strategy, the focus on the US and the EU has swapped places in terms of how much they are prioritized.

Regardless of how one interprets the description of Nordic and EU cooperation, there is a very clear line in the strategy seeking to diversify Greenland's trade, cultural, administrative and economic relations with North America over those of Europe and the Nordic countries. These priorities could be seen to reflect both a colonial legacy tying Greenland to the KoD and Europe while there is a strong sense of also being a North American people seeking kinship across the Baffin Bay and Davis Strait.

Defense and Security

An area that had been foreseen with great anticipation is defense and security policies for at least two reasons. First, it has long remained a central political field of contention between Greenland and Denmark – often with the United States' security interests and presence adding to secrecy and complexity in the unfolding of these policies. Second, it is an area where the Government of Greenland has made significant changes to its position over a very short period of time.

Greenlandic policy on security has traditionally followed a fairly pacifist line emphasizing the need for cooperation and a general belief that disarmament and the absence of military capabilities would provide the best recipe for peace. The 2011-strategy did mention security concerns, but only in relation to how détente was best safeguarded through the work of the Arctic Council and the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008. This also corresponds in broad terms with earlier statements by the Inuit Circumpolar Council on a peaceful Arctic since the 1970's.[20] And to the extent there is military activity and presence, this should benefit Greenland beyond security concerns. That is, tax money, education, local societal developments in settlements in proximity to military activity and bases, etc.

Aligned with this tradition, the 2021 coalition agreement emphasized that Greenland was against any increase in military presence, even causing some translation confusion about whether this meant demilitarizing or simply a stance against further militarization of the Arctic. This position came under much scrutiny when the Danish Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced its so-called Arctic Capability package in early 2021, where they announced significant investments especially in surveillance capacity in the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The problem was that the MoD had not secured the approval of either the Faroese or Greenlandic governments. As a result, the initial initiative was rejected in both places (cf. also the next section on the 'filibuster'-strategy).

These disagreements were overtaken by the Russian (re-)invasion of Ukraine and a new security rhetoric in Europe and North America. Greenland was surprisingly quick and staunch in their support of sanctions and condemnation of Russia despite its losses on the fish export. Disagreements on defence policy might have been a factor leading to a new coalition government in 2022, as mentioned above. Whether this is true or not, the Greenlandic government has seemingly followed a more defense accommodating line since then. In Summer 2022, a new agreement for the implementation of the Arctic Capability package was signed by the Danish Minister of Defence and the Greenlandic minister Vivian Motzfeldt. In early 2023 she told the public: "So, yes, Greenland must be prepared to host further military activity."[21]

What is new in the strategy in this regard is first an explicit commitment to the Western security architecture and that "Greenland will continue to cooperate with the defense authorities of Denmark and the United States, partially in the most beneficial way to maintain a military presence and installations in Greenland."[22] That is, also, to continue the focus on how to make military

presence benefit Greenlandic society. Second, and this is new, an explicit wish and ambition to play a larger role in the sovereignty enforcement in Greenland. This wish is articulated on many levels: 1) In 2023, a Greenlandic diplomat was sent to the NATO headquarters in Brussels within the Danish permanent representation; formally, a part of the Danish diplomatic delegation, but seconded and partially funded by *Naalakkersuisut*; 2) an expressed desire to have a liaison, or administrative, unit at Pituffik Space Base (formerly known as Thule Air Base); and 3) on a more practical or operational level, wishes to explore possibilities of establishing a military or civilian national service in Greenland.

More concrete suggestions are to 'civilize' and take over the Coast Guard (today these are 'grey' ships run by the Danish Defense), have a closer and mutual learning interaction with the Joint Arctic Command, seek active involvement in the Sirius patrol of Northeastern Greenland, and eventually contribute the surveillance of the GIUK gap; the latter a key priority for the North Atlantic members of NATO. While the latter ambition seems far off at a time where Denmark has very little to chip in to the GIUK gap surveillance, the tone of the strategy follows the general pattern of being more involved and taking greater responsibility.

Climate Change

While it is no surprise to include climate change in a foreign policy strategy, this one represents and signals a noteworthy change on Greenland's position on international climate policy. In Chapter 3, *The Climate and the Ocean* – second in order only to the abovementioned Arctic Council priority – the strategy highlights the impact of climate change on the Arctic region and the potential hazards for Greenland in terms of biodiversity and changing ecosystems possibly affecting hunting and fishing. The fishing industry remains the single most important economic sector. The section then moves on to affirm that: "We all have a responsibility to take action." [23] This responsibility is then differentiated based on the premise that emissions mainly have come from the industrialized countries – among which Greenland has not traditionally considered itself within these debates.

This has meant that Greenland has sought to stay clear of international commitments to combat climate change with reference to its need to develop economically and the special infrastructural and demographic situation, as mentioned in the Greenlandic foreign policy strategy of 2011, which makes green solutions complicated to say the least. Arguments like these had also been put forward as a reason why Greenland should not be part to the Paris Treaty – that is, opt for a territorial exception from Denmark's participation. This notion that Greenland was not yet in a position to take responsibility for climate change changed with the election in 2021 where *Inuit Ataqatigiit* became the government forming party. They declared already in 2021 that they would abandon its territorial exception.

With a new coalition in 2022, implying power sharing with traditional power holder *Siumut*, the process of acceding was delayed because *Siumut* demanded a proper impact assessment of the consequences. They have traditionally been against this for the reasons outlined above. In light of a compromise between the traditionally two biggest parties in Greenlandic politics, the strategy is surprisingly firm in stating Greenland's commitment to shared responsibility, especially the ambition to play a central role for the development in the Arctic, even if this is done with "due consideration for Greenland's economic development needs."

With Self-Rule in 2009, Greenland also obtained ownership of the underground and mineral resources. At the height of the Arctic hype, there was much hope (and some controversy) tied up with offshore oil and gas deposits. This oil adventure, however, never materialized and in part to bolster their green profile, the 2021 government made the decision to suspend oil and gas exploration and in turn seek economic advances within the green and renewable energy. In this process, the government owned company Nunaoil was re-defined and re-named as NunaGreen, now seeking to expand a green economy. There is a real hope that the abundance of critical minerals for the green transition, alongside large hydropower potential, will turn Greenland towards being a contributor to the global green transition while also benefitting economically from being green.

Implications and concluding remarks

Having zoomed in on three important items, we close this briefing note with a discussion on some of the implications and some analytically interesting aspects of the Greenlandic strategy. Most of the items of the strategy are well-known priorities developed over time, whereas others are less developed and tangible. For example, the abovementioned Arctic North American Forum is merely an idea to perhaps be implemented in the future, which is also the case in relation to a suggestion to establish a Peace Center, with inspiration especially from Japan.

One could argue that publishing an intended decade long strategy is cumbersome in a period of a volatile, more conflictual geopolitical Arctic for the better part of the decade so far, but the strategy can be updated as needed and is "essentially an expression of a Greenland that, in cooperation with others, is progressing toward more or eventually full independence"[24] in line with the preamble of the Self Rule Act from 2009 regarding the right to self-determination.

Equally important, the strategy should be read in line with the long-term evolution of Greenland enhancing its role as an international actor, currently with a strong focus on the North American Arctic, which is why we highlighted connectivity in our discussion of the strategy. Connectivity is conceptually related to network theories highlighting the importance of the connections between things, organizations and peoples rather than these entities by themselves. Connectivity is almost an intuitive concept, but sometimes we forget that a specific location does not mean anything in and by itself without understanding its connections – in terms of infrastructure, transport, supply chains, communication, trade and political connections. Hence, connectivity should both draw attention to the fact that Greenland's geostrategic significance is not static, but rather a result of how Greenland is connected to the outside world.

Moreover, as alluded to in the introduction, it is worth stressing that it has multiple designated audiences and playing fields. Arctic strategies are frequently being drafted and updated by numerous actors. Some of the comparative scholarly work on Arctic strategies shows that, in general, they habitually have an internal and external audience: "Towards the outside world [Arctic strategies] offer transparency, signals of determination and possibly more specific promises, inspirations or warnings," whereas internally, a strategy aligns priorities as well as "mobilize, steer, and coordinate the national or multi-state communities that they cover."[25]

Hence, a strategy conveys the government's awareness and resolve designed to promote consensus and to mobilize actors for specific ends. Internally, in the Greenlandic strategy under scrutiny, having made an effort to achieve domestic political legitimacy, as described above, the expectation is that the strategy does not become a dead-letter document when/if the government changes over

time. It makes it easier for civil servants to navigate their work in a coordinated manner, especially in the MFA but also in other departments/ministries.

Externally, it helps Greenlandic diplomats explaining to foreign counterparts how much leeway they actually have in terms of international relations and showcases what the near- and longer-term priorities are. Before, the Self-Rule act was often brought to meetings with actors who were not experts on Greenland, or the often confusing quasi-federal and historical complicated dynamics of KoD, to show the status of Greenlandic foreign policy possibilities. Now, a more comprehensive document can be forwarded in advance of meetings, deliberations and negotiations. However, this also has a lock-in effect of the priorities of, say, North American Arctic over Denmark, the EU, and Nordic (Scandinavian) cooperation, which can cause issues in the longer run when negotiating the next EU multiannual financial framework (MFF).

Domestically, a future Greenlandic *Naalakkersuisut* (government) might have other preferences in terms of preferred international partners, or in regard to ratifying specific agreements. For example, no later than spring 2025, there will be an impending parliamentary election in Greenland. The stance on climate policy could be an interesting test case for the solidity of the broad parliamentary backing of the strategy. Will Greenland remain within the Paris agreement if another coalition gains power? A new climate strategy is currently being drafted by *Naalakkersuisut*, but is still at an early stage.

Other Greenlandic political actors might question the resources designated to foreign affairs and whether it is wise to spend the resources required to live up the strategy at a time where the social, educational, and energy supply sector are all under immense pressure for funding and maintenance. Moreover, it is not set in stone how several items of the policies addressed in the strategy are going to be implemented, let alone funded.

Another vital audience is within the KoD, where the strategy can iteratively be revisited if the Danish counterparts deviate from what are now explicitly stated Greenlandic preferences. Specifically in relation to the KoD strategy, the Greenlandic strategy signals that a common Arctic *policy* (not a *strategy*) can be supported, but would be a more scaled downed document. This can be seen as a bargaining chip in line with earlier signals regarding the KoD strategy, namely that Greenland is not just ratifying any common Arctic strategy, by arguing that the KoD strategy from 2011 in many ways actually made Greenland worse off than prior to its publication. Not least because a common strategy could be seen as giving Denmark a *carte blanche* to take policy initiatives on areas that Greenland wishes to maintain a firm grip on.

It is also, and more likely, however, a signal that a KoD Arctic policy, regarded as less comprehensive than a strategy, is what Greenland is willing to coordinate for now. Although this semantic change is arguably symbolic, it should be understood in the context of other somewhat similar, sometime heated, iterative discussions between Nuuk and Copenhagen, such as issues regarding the Arctic Ambassador title, SAO, and the upcoming chairship of the Arctic Council in spring 2025.

While the strategy took longer than initially expected to prepare, it was generally received as a coherent and well-designed strategy by most pundits, the other political parties bar one, and the Danish government, although Danish politicians were less vocal about the content but seemed rather relieved that it was finally published.

As mentioned, KoD had to delay the common strategy for the entire realm after the previous Arctic Strategy from 2011-20 expired because of Greenland using the drafting of its own strategy as a 'filibuster' vis-à-vis the KoD strategy. A filibuster is commonly known in US politics as a means to delay decisions and laws; in this case, it refers to Greenland's early signal that it would not negotiate with Copenhagen until Greenland's own was published, and, thus, could iteratively postpone the KoD strategy.[26] Another example of a filibuster is how Greenland delayed an Arctic capacity package of Danish 1.5 billion Danish kroner in funding for upgrading, *inter alia*, surveillance in the North Atlantic and especially in and around Greenland. Whereas, formally, the prerogative of foreign and security policy *de jure* rest in Copenhagen, this showcases that Greenland also has an emerging *de facto* say in security and defense policy.

In sum, the Greenlandic strategy published earlier this year provides an interesting insight into the priorities of Greenlandic foreign policy anno 2024 with the publication of *Greenland in the World - Nothing about us without us. Greenland's Foreign, Security and Defense Policy 2024-2033 – an Arctic Strategy*. The title of the document in itself is interesting, as it stipulates the (geo)political tensions and possibilities in several policy dimensions and spaces, including security and defense, a willingness to partake in solving the climate and Arctic governance crises, and the content and how the chapters are weighted respectively shows the main priorities of Greenland for the next decade.

We have highlighted the context of the strategy, including how it came about and the political and constitutional dynamics of its raison d'être, then zoomed in on connectivity and especially the strong focus on North America, security and defense policy, and the signal to fight climate change in international governance fora. There are many other aspects of the strategy, which we have briefly touch upon or not discussed, at all (e.g. China and East Asia).

Hence, future research could, and arguably should, unfold other aspects of comparative inquiries, trade relations and supply chains, or revisit the implementation and practical use of the strategy over time. Whether the strategy under scrutiny in this briefing note will be mostly forgotten in 2033 when it expires, like the previous strategy from 2011 arguably was, only time will tell.

Notes

1. The strategy is available in Greenlandic, Danish, and English at: https://naalakkersuisut.gl/Departementer/Dep_for_Udenrigsanliggender_Selvstaendighed/Publikationer?sc_lang=kl-GL. A direct link to the English version is available here: https://paartoq.gl/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Greenlands_Foreign_-Security_and_Defense_Policy_2024_2033.pdf
2. It was even written into the coalition agreement of the current Danish government: "The government's guideline will be that nothing about the Faroe Islands and Greenland must be decided without the Faroe Islands and Greenland" (our translation from Regeringen (2022). *Ansvar for Danmark Det politiske grundlag for Danmarks regering. København,* p. 53. The 'nothing about us without us' phrase is hardly a specific Greenlandic motto but can be detected e.g. across Inuit communities in Canada and Alaska as a principle of participation and inclusion, as well.

3. Cf. Nielsen, R. L. (2021). Global Greenlanders: Evolutionen af en grønlandsk udenrigspolitik i et foranderligt Arktis. In Rydstrøm-Poulsen, A., Reimer G. A. & Lauritsen (red), *Tro og samfund i 300-året for Hans Egedes ankomst til Grønland* (315-330). Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

4. For example, by long time observer of Greenlandic and Arctic Affairs, journalist Martin Breum; see Breum M. (2024). Greenland's first security strategy looks west as the Arctic heats up, *Arctic Today,* 27 February 2024 https://www.arctictoday.com/greenland-looks-west-as-the-arctic-heats-up/ (also available at: https://www.martinbreum.dk/greenlands-first-security-strategy-looks-west-as-the-arctic-heats-up/).

5. The 2011 strategy can be consulted here: https://ina.gl/media/szqh2hb1/pkt14_em2011_udenrigspolitisk_strategi_rg_gr.pdf (in Greenlandic); https://ina.gl/media/q5rp2zqt/pkt14_em2011_udenrigspolitisk_strategi_rg_dk.pdf (in Danish)

6. E.g. the Anorak-report from 1999 was a critical juncture in terms of defining a scope for Greenlandic foreign policy. The Home Rule Act of 1979 was rather vague in this sense, and several documents through the 2000's addressed this in writing. In 2011, an Arctic strategy for the KoD was also published, which should not be conflicted with the Greenlandic foreign policy strategy of 2011; see e.g. Nielsen, R. L. (2021) *up cite* end note 3.

7. This assessment and several other arguments in the article are partially based on interviews and informal talks with Greenlandic diplomats and politicians over several years. Being locally based researchers in Nuuk provides some comparative advantages to understand some of the contextual developments, but any flaws in these readings of the process remains ours.

8. Cited by Jacobsen, M. (2020). Greenland's Arctic advantage: Articulations, acts and appearances of sovereignty games. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 55(2), 170-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719882476

9. See e.g. Gad, U. P. (2020). Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark: Unity or Community? In P. M. Christiansen, J. Elklit & P. Nedergaard (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Danish politics*. Oxford University Press, 28–45. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198833598.013.3.

10. An English version of the Self Rule Act of 2009 is available here: https://english.stm.dk/media/10522/gl-selvstyrelov-uk.pdf

11. Cited in Andreas Krogh (2022). Grønlandsk topembedsmand: Vi presser grundlovens grænser**.** *Altinget***,** 19 May 2022. https://www.altinget.dk/embedsvaerk/artikel/groenlandsk-topembedsmand-vi-presser-grundlovens-graenser.

12. See e.g. https://www.ft.dk/ripdf/samling/20222/redegoerelse/R5/20222_R5.pdf (in Danish). The sentiment that Denmark could not do anything but patiently wait was clear from several interviews and informal talks we have had over several years with Danish

diplomats and SAOs. One of this article's authors, Rasmus Leander Nielsen, was part of the hearing process on behalf of Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) of the halted KoD draft of a common Arctic strategy.

13. Both citations about the Arctic Council are quoted from page 13 of the strategy, *up cite* endnote 1

14. On top of several media outlets articles after the publication of the strategy, a few scholarly commentaries have discussed the strategy from e.g. KoD and Canadian perspectives, see respectively Jacobsen, M. & Rahbek-Clemmensen, J. (2024). Greenland stakes a Course within Defense and Diplomacy. *The Arctic Institute*, 27 February 2024, https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/greenland-stakes-course-defense-diplomacy/ (Danish perspective) and Lanteigne M. (2024). Greenland's Widening Arctic Strategies How Canada Can Respond, *North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network - NAADSN Quick Impact Brief:* *https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/24jun7-greenlandFP-ML.pdf* (Canadian Perspective). From a Greenlandic perspective, the senior diplomat Kenneth Høegh has discussed the strategy in a historical perspective in Høegh, K. (2024). 'Greenland's Foreign Policy, Past and Present: From the Merchants' Message to Bilateral Agreements', *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal*, Vol. 29, No 2, pp. 181-196; see also his interview with the Wilson Center focusing primarily on an US angle: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/microsite/7/node/118894

15. Høegh, K. (2024). 'Greenland's Foreign Policy, Past and Present: From the Merchants' Message to Bilateral Agreements', *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal*, Vol. 29, No 2, pp. 181-196.

16. Cf. the press release from the Government of Nunavut: https://www.premier.gov.nu.ca/en/new-greenland-nunavut-agreement-signed

17. In regard to the Nordic Council, see https://www.wilsoncenter.org/microsite/7/node/118894. In relation to the Arctic Council, see Nielsen, Rasmus Leander (forthcoming, spring 2025) in *Internasjonal Politikk*

18. This argument has earlier been forwarded by the authors in Strandsbjerg J. & Nielsen R. L. (2024). 'Det kan undre, at EU ikke fylder mere i grønlandsk politik – og omvendt', *Altinget Arktis*, 15 March 2024, https://www.altinget.dk/eu/artikel/lektorer-det-er-egentlig-underligt-at-von-der-leyen-foerst-besoeger-nuuk-i-dag (in Danish)

19. There is a noteworthy variation in language between the English and Danish version. The English version just talks about presence whereas the Danish texts specifically mentions that the EU needs an office (p. 39 and 35 respectively).

20. See for example, Inuit Circumpolar Counil (no date). *Inuit Arctic Policy,* pp. 16-20.

21. Cited in Altinget Arktis: https://www.altinget.dk/forsvar/artikel/forskere-ruslands-invasion-har-gjort-det-vigtigste-samarbejdsorgan-for-groenland-impotent

22. See page page 43 of the strategy, *up cite* end note 1

23. For all quotes from the chapter 3 on climate in this subsection, see page 15 of the strategy, *up cite* end note 1

24. See page 47 of the strategy; cf. Høegh, Kenneth (2024) up cite end note 1 and 15.

25. Quotes from Bailes, A. J. K. (2009). *Does a small state need a strategy?* Occasional Paper 2-2009, Centre For Small State Studies, University of Iceland, p. 9: https://rafhladan.is/bitstream/handle/10802/5099/Bailes_Final%20wh.pdf?sequence=1 (externally) and Bailes, A. J. K. & Heininen L. (2012). *Strategy Papers on the Arctic or High North: A comparative study and analysis*. Centre for Small State Studies Institute of International Affairs, University of Iceland, p. 21: https://www.rha.is/static/files/NRF/Publications/arcticstrats.pdf (internally).

26. The third polity of KoD, the Faroe Islands, also had to finish its own renewed Arctic strategy, but that was concluded in fall 2022; the Faroe Islands has twice produced Arctic strategies.