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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sovereignty as a Bargaining Chip: Organized Hypocrisy in The Modernization of Pituffik Space Base

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**Abstract:** This study analyzed the strategic modernization of Pituffik Space Base within the context of deteriorating Arctic geopolitics and the emergence of hypersonic threats. Utilizing Stephen Krasner's framework of Organized Hypocrisy, the study examined the contradiction between the formal recognition of Danish sovereignty and the actual strategic behavior of the United States between 2020-2026. A qualitative analysis of defense agreements, diplomatic documents, and infrastructure projects was conducted to identify discrepancies between stated norms and operational realities. The results demonstrated that the United States maintained de jure sovereignty through symbolic acts, such as renaming the facility, while simultaneously executing unilateral military expansion and political intervention. The findings indicated that this decoupling allowed for a sovereignty of permissions, where the host nation retained legal title while the external power secured total operational access. The study then concluded that this arrangement minimized transaction costs for the great power while preserving the diplomatic legitimacy of the semi-sovereign territory.

**Keywords:** Greenland, Arctic Security, Organized Hypocrisy, Pituffik Space Base, Golden Dome

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Arctic was defined by the diplomatic principle of High North, Low Tension. The existence of this principle emerged through the Arctic Council and was reaffirmed by the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration (Dodds, 2013). Through this mechanism, Arctic states agreed to prioritize environmental and scientific cooperation, establishing the region as a zone of peace. However, the region's geopolitical landscape underwent a severe deterioration since 2020 (Nilsson & Christensen, 2019). During this period, the post-Cold War consensus known as "arctic exceptionalism" definitively collapsed (Devyatkin, 2023). Consequently, it was replaced by a resurgence of great power competition reminiscent of the 20th century.

However, the stability afforded by the High North, Low Tension was fragile, as it relied on deliberately sidelining military concerns. Once regional military activities began to escalate, this underlying vulnerability was fully exposed. The turning point was Russia's push to rebuild its defense infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route, most notably by reactivating the Nagurskoye Air Base in Alexandra Land (Kjellén, 2022; Staun, 2020). This shifting landscape was further complicated by China's action to officially declaring itself as a "near-Arctic state" to secure a foothold in the region (Bennett, 2015; Bermudez Jr et al., 2020; McKenzie et al.,



2024) This increase in accessibility and military activity subsequently challenged the United States doctrine of Homeland Defense.

Historically the United States defense strategy relied on the concept of strategic depth which assumes that the harsh geographical conditions and vast distances of the Arctic function as a natural buffer to delay enemy intrusions. A senior official of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) General Glen VanHerck explicitly confirmed this vulnerability. He acknowledged that the North Warning System (NWS) infrastructure is no longer adequate to detect modern asymmetric threats such as cruise and hypersonic missiles capable of exploiting these geographical gaps (Roza, 2023).

This concern is grounded in the technical reality that the concentration of NWS radar infrastructure primarily in Alaska and Canada leaves a significant surveillance gap in the eastern Arctic sector (The Economist, 2021). Consequently strategic urgency shifted toward Greenland. As an autonomous territory under Denmark that geographically spans the transpolar transit route (Kočí & Baar, 2021), Greenland serves as an ideal location to complete the regional defense system. The imperative to restore these detection capabilities compelled the United States to review its strategic calculations (Olsvig, 2024). Ultimately this shift positioned Pituffik Space Base formerly known as Thule Air Base once again as a critical installation for United States defense.

Hence, the strategic reorientation toward Greenland found its political momentum in May 2019 in Rovaniemi when then United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo openly deconstructed the narrative of Arctic Exceptionalism (Saxena, 2020). In his speech Pompeo redefined the Arctic as an arena of power where China and Russia activities were no longer considered purely scientific cooperation but rather threats of aggression (BBC, 2019). This rhetorical shift was exacerbated by an escalating security dilemma in the region. Increased Russian submarine patrols were met with NATO surveillance modernization which Moscow subsequently perceived as preparations for a first strike capability (Piechowicz, 2025).

Consequently Greenland transitioned from a buffer zone into a vital defense asset. This reorientation was driven by a defense capability gap against asymmetric technologies primarily the Russian 3M22 Zircon hypersonic missile. Unlike ballistic missiles with parabolic trajectories the Zircon is capable of maneuvering within the atmosphere at Mach 9 thereby significantly reducing early warning time (Kaushal, 2023). The serious response of the United States is evident in its defense budget allocations including a \$25 million modernization of Pituffik Space Base to ensure the operability of its detection systems for the next decade (Khomenko, 2026).

The urgency driving this specific infrastructure modernization is rooted in the technical limitations of conventional radar systems designed to track the high parabolic trajectories of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. These legacy radars possess a blind spot against low flying hypersonic missiles because they are obstructed by the curvature of the earth. To overcome this physical constraint the United States required sensors capable of monitoring transpolar threats from their initial phases. In this context Pituffik Space Base located approximately 1200 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle plays a critical role (AP News, 2025). This geographical positioning allows radar sensors to detect objects during the midcourse phase and provide precision tracking data before the threat enters the North American continental defense perimeter.

To realize these precision detection capabilities the United States launched defense upgrades actualized through the Golden Dome modernization initiative through Executive Order 14186 signed on January 27, 2025. This program marks a technological transformation for the Pituffik installation which previously relied solely on AN/FPS-132 radar for ballistic targets (Davis, 2026). The executive order identifies advanced aerial assaults, including ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles, as the most severe danger currently facing the nation (Congressional Research Service, 2025). It notes that this threat landscape has grown



increasingly complex as peer and near-peer adversaries develop next-generation delivery mechanisms alongside their own integrated air and missile defense networks.

Strategically, E.O. 14186 establishes a comprehensive posture aimed at actively deterring and defending domestic citizens and critical infrastructure against all foreign aerial attacks. This approach marks a distinct policy shift from the Department of Defense 2019 and 2022 Missile Defense Reviews (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Su & Huntington, 2023). Through the integration of a new sensor mesh and directed energy infrastructure this system is specifically designed to track low observable hypersonic missiles and facilitate precision interception by defense commands. With a transmission power of 870 kW on each face the radar is capable of covering a 240-degree azimuth region that encompasses all approach corridors in the Arctic territory (Buckley Space Force Base, 2020).

This technological transformation redefines the operational mandate of the primary task force manning the base. Historically the duties of the 12th Space Warning Squadron (12 SWS) at Pituffik were limited to providing binary tactical warning signals to NORAD merely indicating the presence or absence of a missile launch (Buckley Space Force Base, 2020). However this basic detection function is no longer adequate against the complexity of modern threats. Consequently the installation transitioned from functioning merely as a passive sensor into an active node within an integrated system designed to close the security gap against extreme speed threats exceeding Mach 20 (GovDash, 2026)

The transition of the installation into an active defense node carried profound implications for the bilateral partnership. Fundamentally, these technical upgrades directly exposed a massive material asymmetry between the two allied nations. Based on Global Firepower military capability metrics, the United States operates as a global hegemon with an annual defense budget that exceeding \$831 billion. Furthermore, this massive financial power is supported by unparalleled aerospace and integrated missile defense capabilities. In stark contrast, Denmark's defense posture is significantly constrained. Specifically, the Danish armed forces operate with an annual defense budget of approximately \$5.4 billion (Global Fire Power, 2026). Consequently, Copenhagen's limited fiscal capacity to construct independent surveillance infrastructure in the Arctic was evaluated as a structural security gap by Washington.

To maximize the utility of this space sensor integration within the Joint All Domain Command and Control architecture Pituffik now functions strategically as an Edge Computing Node. This designation indicates that Pituffik Space Base no longer serves merely as a conduit for raw data to headquarters in the United States. Instead it processes threat data directly and accelerates decision making by utilizing local artificial intelligence algorithms to fuse precision radar data with tracking information from the HBTSS. The output of this sensor fusion is subsequently processed into fire control solutions transmitted directly to interceptor systems via the Joint Fires Network (The Watch, 2023). This innovation reduces the detection to engagement cycle from minutes to mere seconds.

However, the elevation of these operational capabilities entails infrastructure consequences specifically a surge in energy demand that introduces the option of micro nuclear reactor technology. This potential energy solution creates a direct conflict with the Zero Tolerance policy of Greenland regarding the prohibition of radioactive materials (Nuttall, 2013; Thorsson, 2025). This regulatory friction becomes complex because it involves the distinct political status of the territory. Although Greenland was integrated into Denmark in 1953 (Jerris, 2024) and currently operates under a Self-Government framework (Kuokkanen, 2017).

One must note that this situation not only tests the consultation mechanisms within the 2004 Igaliku Treaty but also exposes a structural gap in the division of authority between Nuuk and Copenhagen. Constitutionally, Denmark holds full sovereignty over high politics such as defense and foreign security. Conversely, Greenland possesses autonomy over domestic politics including environmental governance and natural resources (Gad, 2014). The problem



emerges because the modernization of the base falls into a jurisdictional overlap. Regarding its military function, the installation operates under Danish defense authority yet operationally its environmental impact and potential nuclear usage place it under the domestic purview of Greenland.

To understand the full scope of this dual approach one must examine the material reality on the ground. Conversely the dominance of military control that ignores local anti-nuclear regulations demonstrates that United States actions are dictated entirely by material calculations. This institutionalized discrepancy between symbolic respect and operational violation is precisely what Stephen D. Krasner defines as Organized Hypocrisy. The implementation of this theoretical framework is directly tied to the escalating security environment. The decision of the United States to pursue this Organized Hypocrisy did not occur without reason but was driven by a level of threat urgency that compelled them to take immediate steps.

The strategic utility of this newly mandated defense shield relies fundamentally on geographic positioning. Within this defense architecture Pituffik Space Base occupies a central position. This urgency is dictated by the reality of military geography since the installation is located directly on the transpolar transit path. This trajectory represents the shortest flight route for intercontinental ballistic missiles and hypersonic weapons belonging to Russia and China to reach the American mainland (Leicester & Associated Press, 2026). The necessity of securing this vulnerable transit path directly dictated the subsequent political actions of the administration.

Consequently the strategic calculation of the United States to institutionalize organized hypocrisy was fundamentally driven by a critical security deficit that mandated an immediate doctrinal response. Given the velocity of these modern weapons systems failing to detect and intercept these threats over the Arctic would eliminate the reaction time required for United States defense commands to protect primary urban centers.

This imperative to respond to threats within seconds necessitates a comprehensive physical overhaul of the installation. This modernization extends beyond simply replacing radar antennas and involves the construction of extensive support infrastructure including large scale data centres and high capacity power generation facilities. This physical hardware is strictly necessary to operationalize the Golden Dome system which functions as an artificial intelligence based battle management network designed to process satellite data instantaneously and coordinate the simultaneous launch of interceptor missiles.

While these infrastructure upgrades fulfilled operational requirements they simultaneously destabilized the diplomatic consensus. Although the technical integration at Pituffik accelerated the political foundation supporting the United States presence in Greenland experienced a fracture in early 2026. This situation originated from the attempt by the United States administration to purchase the territory citing core national security interests related to the Golden Dome (FitzGerald, 2026). The rejection from Copenhagen and Nuuk triggered a shift in United States strategy toward economic coercion through the threat of import tariffs ranging from 10 percent to 25 percent against Denmark and other NATO allies (Delaney, 2026; Gabbat et al., 2026)

Concurrently the European response emerged in a unified manner through Operation Arctic Endurance. Denmark with the support of special forces from France, the United Kingdom and Germany mobilized military assets to the Nuuk and Kangerlussuaq regions as a demonstration of opposition against the commodification of sovereign territory (Conesa et al., 2026). This sequence of events culminated at the World Economic Forum in Davos where through negotiations the United States suspended the threats of tariffs and territorial intervention (Aratani, 2026; Magee et al., 2026).

The diplomatic maneuvers of early 2026 did not end the underlying structural friction. Instead, they pushed the region into a new and highly volatile phase. Because of this complex

intersection of asymmetric threats and sovereign vulnerabilities, a critical gap in understanding remains. Therefore, this research aims to fill that analytical gap by explicitly answering one primary question. Specifically, how does the United States implement the practice of Organized Hypocrisy to navigate the jurisdictional overlap between Denmark and Greenland?

To explore this dynamic, this article utilizes Stephen D. Krasner's theoretical framework to explain the hidden mechanics behind the Pituffik Space Base modernization and the massive Golden Dome initiative. Furthermore, the ensuing analysis will dissect the deliberate decoupling of diplomatic rhetoric from strategic reality. By tracing the intense collision between the Logic of Appropriateness and the Logic of Consequences, this research sets out to reveal how a global hegemon uses the very concept of sovereign recognition as a high stakes bargaining chip in the modern Arctic.

## 2. Literature Review

The transformation of the Arctic from a zone of low tension into a strategic competition has generated valuable academic research regarding sovereignty and great power defense imperatives. Existing literature has provided a foundational understanding by focusing on the domestic political strategies of the Government of Greenland. For example, studies such as Gad et al. (2024) highlight how political elites in Nuuk manage their asymmetrical relationship with Denmark through a strategy of desecuritization. Instead of responding to defense issues militarily, local politicians attempt to shift the discourse toward economic and infrastructure matters to seize control from Copenhagen. By utilizing the narrative of the Inuit as a peaceful people, Greenland essentially relieves itself of the financial burden of defense, practically outsourcing its security affairs to the United States to focus on economic independence.

However, recent studies reveal that this local push for desecuritization is increasingly at odds with the actions of great powers. Specifically, Falco et al. (2024) argue that Arctic satellite ground stations have become critical dual-use assets and strategic vulnerabilities in global geopolitical competition. For instance, China often labels its ground stations in Svalbard and Greenland as scientific outposts for climate research, even though the data collected has clear dual-use applications for military surveillance (Falco et al., 2024). Similarly, the United States actively integrates commercial providers for defense purposes, such as using the OneWeb satellite network in Nuuk to provide military connectivity at the Pituffik Space Base.

Furthermore, this militarization is echoed by other nations: Russia is modernizing Soviet-era bases with electronic warfare capabilities to disrupt foreign satellites, while NATO allies like Norway, Sweden, and Canada are heavily integrating their space and radar infrastructure into broader defense operations. Consequently, the literature establishes that the Arctic is no longer a peaceful buffer zone, as proliferating satellite infrastructure now serves vital military functions beneath a commercial or scientific facade.

While existing literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex intersection between local peaceful narratives and the deployment of dual-use military infrastructure by great powers, a significant analytical gap remains. Although these shifts in jurisdictional authority have been widely acknowledged, there is a lack of empirical research systematically analyzing how this mechanism operates in practice, particularly concerning the modernization of the Pituffik Space Base from 2020- 2026. Consequently, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring how the United States navigates these multifaceted narratives. Utilizing Stephen D. Krasner's analytical framework of Organized Hypocrisy, this study endeavors to understand the delicate balance between local sovereignty claims and broader strategic security imperatives.

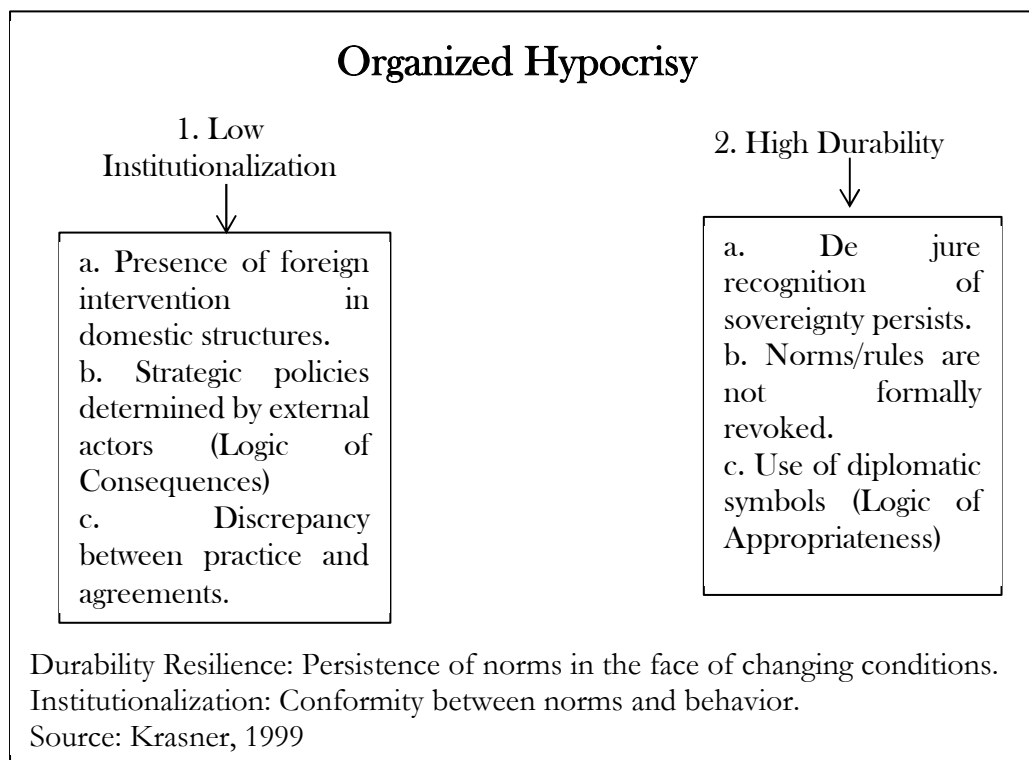
### 2.1. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this article relies on Stephen D. Krasner's concept of Organized Hypocrisy (Krasner, 1999). In his publication, Krasner questions the traditional definition of sovereignty. Krasner argues that it is not a rigid set of rules but rather a flexible



collection of norms that are frequently modified. Specifically, organized hypocrisy describes the institutionalized practice where states separate their actual behavior from their stated values to satisfy conflicting demands. In the international system, decision-makers navigate between two competing motivations. The first is the Logic of Appropriateness, which involves adhering to norms like non-intervention to maintain legitimacy. The second is the Logic of Consequences, which involves bypassing norms to secure power and survival. When these logics conflict, organized hypocrisy allows a state to support a norm verbally while acting differently in practice. Crucially, Krasner argues that this is not a system failure. Rather, it is a functional feature that enables international relations to endure despite imbalances in power.

Hence, to strengthen the conceptualization, Krasner identifies three distinct factors that explain why Organized Hypocrisy occurs. First, regarding normative conflict, international norms such as the principle of non-intervention are not static. At any given moment, they may be mutually reinforcing, while at other times, they may directly contradict or compete with one another. Second, in terms of domestic responsiveness, political leaders are inherently more responsive to internal domestic dynamics than to international pressure, meaning that domestic political survival often dictates foreign policy decisions. Finally, when facing critical decisions, states generally prioritize the Logic of Consequences, calculating strategic outcomes, over the Logic of Appropriateness, which involves adhering to ethical standards or propriety.



**Figure 1.** Operationalization of Organized Hypocrisy  
Source: Processed by author based on Krasner (1999)

According to Stephen D. Krasner (1999), the phenomenon of Organized Hypocrisy is operationally defined through the intersection of two distinct analytical variables: institutionalization and durability. Institutionalization refers to the degree to which actual state behavior conforms to established principles; when this is high, norms are taken for granted and regarded as fixed constraints, whereas low institutionalization implies that norms exist but exert limited influence on behavior, often receiving only lip service.

The variable of Low Institutionalization is operationally defined by the presence of foreign intervention in domestic structures. Theoretically, the norm of Westphalian sovereignty mandates the total exclusion of external actors from a state's internal affairs. However, in cases of low institutionalization, actual state behavior deviates from this principle. Consequently, the violation of the non-intervention rule manifests tangibly as the intrusion of foreign entities into local governance. As Krasner notes that Westphalian sovereignty is violated when external actors influence or determine domestic authority structures, making such intervention the primary indicator of a weakly institutionalized norm.

Building on this definition, the determination of strategic policies by external actors is directly justified by Krasner's assertion regarding the violation of domestic authority structures. This implies that in a state of Organized Hypocrisy, critical decisions regarding security and defense are commandeered by foreign powers rather than domestic authorities. Second, the indicator regarding the discrepancy between practice and agreements is grounded in the concept of "decoupling", Krasner asserts that within Organized Hypocrisy, talk and action do not coincide, which implies that state behavior on the ground is frequently inconsistent with the formal commitments they have established. Therefore, the systemic divergence between diplomatic rhetoric (talk) and operational reality (action) serves as a definitive metric for measuring the lack of institutional adherence.

Conversely, durability measures the resilience of these norms against changing external circumstances and shifting power dynamics. Within this framework, Organized Hypocrisy uniquely occupies the condition of high durability but low institutionalization, creating a paradox where institutional norms are enduring and widely recognized yet frequently transgressed in practice. This systemic inconsistency arises because state actors are simultaneously driven by two competing imperatives: the Logic of Appropriateness, which compels them to rhetorically honor norms (such as sovereignty) to secure legitimacy, and the Logic of Consequences, which dictates pragmatic actions to secure power and resources.

Faced with these conflicting pressures and the absence of an authoritative international legal arbiter, states resort to decoupling, a strategic mechanism where the norm of autonomy is separated from actual practice. Consequently, talk and action do not coincide; rulers maintain the formal recognition of sovereignty to satisfy political constituents while systematically violating it to address strategic necessities, allowing durable norms to persist alongside contradictory behaviors. To operationalize this resilience, the variable of high durability is measured through three distinct indicators derived directly from Krasner's theoretical distinctions. The first indicator is the persistence of *de jure* recognition. Krasner posits that international legal sovereignty and Westphalian sovereignty are distinct, arguing that a state can retain its international legal recognition even while completely lacking Westphalian autonomy.

In the context of organized hypocrisy, the durability of the norm is evidenced by the fact that the external violator continues to formally recognize the legal status of the host state, never challenging its existence on paper despite undermining its authority in practice. This leads to the second indicator: that norms and rules are not formally revoked. Because Organized Hypocrisy is defined by the presence of longstanding norms that are frequently violated, the survival of the hypocrisy depends on the rules remaining in force. As Krasner notes, these norms are durable but often transgressed; thus, the fact that foundational frameworks, such as defense treaties, are not annulled but remain the legal basis of relations proves that the system is one of hypocrisy rather than a complete systemic change.

Finally, the durability of the norm is reinforced through the use of diplomatic symbols, an indicator driven by the Logic of Appropriateness. Since, in this framework, talk and action do not coincide, rulers are compelled to honor, perhaps only in talk, certain norms even while simultaneously acting in ways that violate them. This honor in talk manifests empirically as the use of diplomatic activities, such as ceremonial renaming or flag protocols. These symbols serve as a necessary mask, satisfying the social requirement to appear compliant with

international standards. By maintaining these symbolic gestures, states prevent their actions from being perceived as raw aggression, thereby ensuring the norm remains durable in the eyes of the public and the international community, even as it is hollowed out by strategic realities.

### 3. Research Method and Materials

This study employs a qualitative research design. Specifically this research utilizes a single-case study approach to collect and analyze non-numeric data (Lamont, 2022). Furthermore the temporal scope of this investigation is bounded between 2020-2026. The data collection technique relies on archival and document-based research categorized into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources in this study refer to documents published directly by state institutions.

To supplement the primary data this research utilizes secondary sources derived from corporate news archives and international media. Following media and secondary source collection are utilized to construct situational context and verify the chronology of events not detailed in official documents. This process involves cross-referencing the normative claims articulated in diplomatic documents with material evidence reported by independent sources on the ground. This triangulation aims to mitigate informational bias and ensure that the analysis of the decoupling between state rhetoric and practice is grounded in converging evidence.

The data analysis utilizes a pattern matching technique to bridge theoretical concepts with field data. The objective of this analysis is to identify a meaning overlap between theoretical predictions and practical realities. This process is executed through three stages (Vargas-Bianchi, 2025). First the analysis establishes Stephen D. Krasner's concept of Organized Hypocrisy as the reference pattern. During this stage the theoretical variables specifically the decoupling between diplomatic rhetoric and action are operationalized to interpret the data. Following this the research compiles relevant evidences. This data is then structured into an empirical pattern that reflects the actual behavior of the state actors. Finally the researcher analyzes both patterns to evaluate their degree of alignment.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This section examines the application of organized hypocrisy in the modernization of Pituffik Space Base, analyzing the persistent tension between diplomatic rhetoric and strategic reality. As the only U.S. military base in Greenland and a critical early-warning site for missile threats, the installation has undergone significant transformation since its Cold War-era designation as Thule Air Base. Historically, the integration of this installation into the broader United States missile defense shield became a prominent parliamentary agenda item during the Clinton administration. Most recently, following its official transfer to the United States Space Force and its subsequent renaming to Pituffik Space base in 2023, the Pentagon initiated a comprehensive \$25 million infrastructure modernization program designed to sustain its advanced operational readiness (Slayton, 2026).

This modernization effort involves extensive physical and logistical expansions to support the approximately 150 U.S. and allied service members stationed at the facility. Key upgrades include essential runway repairs, the installation of new aircraft landing lighting systems, the construction of a river bridge, and the modernization of navigation markers, generators, and primary facilities such as the dining hall (Slayton, 2026). Furthermore, the strategic footprint of the base is expanding into the maritime domain, evidenced by the Pentagon's procurement of a specialized Danish-built vessel designed to patrol a 53-kilometer stretch of coastline and manage port operations and potential environmental incidents (Khomeenko, 2026; Thorsson, 2025).

While these material investments fulfill vital U.S. defense imperatives, they fundamentally alter the strategic landscape of the territory. Using Stephen D. Krasner's theoretical

framework, the ensuing analysis dissects this dynamic across three key dimensions. First, the Presence of Foreign Intervention highlights how the physical expansion of the base and corresponding U.S. political interference infringe upon Greenland's domestic autonomy. Second, Strategic Policies Determined by External Actors discusses how U.S. defense doctrines dictate Greenland's geopolitical future, often disregarding local aspirations. Third, the Discrepancy Between Practice and Agreements exposes the contradictions within economic contracts and diplomatic symbolism that ultimately serve to mask underlying U.S. operational dominance.

#### 4.1. *Presence of Foreign Intervention*

The principle of non-intervention is the corner of the Westphalian sovereign state model. It dictates that domestic political and infrastructure decisions are the exclusive domain of the territorial state. However, Krasner observes that this norm is frequently violated through invitations or coercion when it serves the interests of powerful actors (Krasner, 1999). In the case of Greenland, the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement, originally an invitation for protection, mutated into a license for profound intervention. The U.S. government, prioritizing the logic of consequences inherent in global missile defense, systematically dismantled the buffers that protected Greenlandic autonomy.

To understand the depth of the intervention, one must analyze the technological shift Golden Dome represented. Prior to 2025, the primary mission of the 12th Space Warning Squadron (12 SWS) at Pituffik was operating the Upgraded Early Warning Radar (UEWR), an AN/FPS-132 solid-state phased-array system designed to detect ballistic missile launches and track objects in low-earth orbit (Buckley Space Force Base, 2020). It was a defensive posture compatible with the "High North, Low Tension" diplomatic framework maintained by Denmark.

Golden Dome then involved the construction of a new, multi-layered sensor mesh and directed-energy support infrastructure that went far beyond the scope of the 1951 Agreement's provisions for meteorological and communications facilities (Erwin, 2026). The project required the hardening of the defense area, the importation of thousands of specialized U.S. contractors, and the installation of energy-intensive systems that necessitated a dedicated, U.S. controlled micro-nuclear power generation capability, bypassing Greenland's strict environmental regulations regarding nuclear energy (Leicester, 2026; Stone, 2025). The intervention lay not just in what was built, but how it was authorized. The 2004 Igaliku Agreement, which updated the 1951 treaty, mandates that significant changes to the U.S. military presence be subject to consultation with the Greenlandic and Danish governments (Colgan, 2018). It established a framework intended to respect the equal partner status of Greenland.

This structural divergence between formal agreements and operational reality is not a recent development. It aligns with a historical pattern established during the 1950s. At that time, the official policy of the Danish government prohibited the stationing of nuclear weapons its territory during peacetime. However, Copenhagen simultaneously permitted United States forces to store nuclear armaments in Greenland and conduct classified bomber patrols armed with nuclear payloads in the region. This contradiction between the public diplomatic policy and covert military practice became public knowledge in 1968 following the crash of an American B-52 bomber carrying four hydrogen bombs near Thule (former name of Pituffik) (Rahbek-Clemmensen & Nielsen, 2020).

Just as the 1968 incident exposed the hollow nature of Denmark's stance towards nuclear, the modern deployment of micro-nuclear reactors for the Golden Dome contravenes Greenland's Zero Tolerance policy. Reinstated in 2021, the cornerstone of domestic sovereignty prohibits the exploration, mining, and presence of radioactive elements (Reuters, 2021; Schwartz & Baskaran, 2026). Consequently, the introduction of nuclear power generation for the base was perceived as a fundamental violation of this non-nuclear legal framework.



This strategic ambition sparked significant diplomatic friction regarding the method of acquisition. When the U.S. administration floated the idea of purchasing the island to secure total control over the Golden Dome, Copenhagen and Nuuk firmly rejected the notion, emphasizing that Greenland's sovereignty is non-negotiable. In response, Prime Ministers Mette Frederiksen and Múte B. Egede presented a unified front, clarifying that although Greenland is open to international business and defense partnerships, it is fundamentally not a commodity to be sold (Dodds, 2013; Metlenga, 2025).

This is an example of Krasner's organized hypocrisy: the U.S. adhered to the form of the treaty (operating within the designated area) while violating its substance (fundamentally altering the strategic balance without consent). The U.S. Congress has approved initial funding of \$23 billion, for the 2026 fiscal year to launch the Golden Dome (Erwin, 2026). Once contracts were signed and materials shipped, the cost of halting the project became prohibitive for the Danish government, which lacked the political capital to oppose a U.S. administration increasingly hostile to NATO norms. The infrastructure itself became a form of sovereignty; the concrete and steel of Golden Dome physically occupied the space of decision-making, leaving no room for Danish vetoes.

In addition, the firing of Colonel Susannah Meyers in April 2025 represented the intervention of U.S. political movement. This incident demonstrated that the internal political convulsions of the United States, specifically the anti-woke purges of the military, had extraterritorial reach, effectively nullifying the diplomatic immunity of the base's internal governance. Historically, the commander of Thule/Pituffik Space Base served a dual role: military officer and de facto diplomat. Commanders were expected to navigate the complex sensibilities of the host nation, maintaining good neighbour policy essential for the base's survival in a semi-autonomous territory. They acted as a buffer, translating U.S. directives into actions palatable to Greenlandic locals and Danish officials.

The events of March 28, 2025, shattered this buffer. Vice President J.D. Vance, accompanied by Second Lady Usha Vance, visited Pituffik Space Base. During the visit, Vance engaged in highly undiplomatic rhetoric, criticizing the Danish government for underinvesting in the security architecture and claiming Copenhagen had not done a good job by the people of Greenland. These comments were a direct challenge to Danish sovereignty, echoing the expansionist rhetoric of the administration's purchase ambitions. Colonel Meyers, attempting to preserve the fragile local relationships essential for the base's daily operation (which relies on Greenlandic labor and goodwill), issued an email to base personnel distancing the installation from the Vice President's remarks. She wrote: "I do not presume to understand current politics, but what I do know is the concerns of the U.S. administration discussed by Vice President Vance on Friday are not reflective of Pituffik Space Base" (Murray, 2025)

In a high-institutionalized alliance, such an action would be seen as a prudent measure to maintain local stability. In the low-institutionalized environment of 2025, it was treated as insubordination against the sovereign will of the American executive. Within days of the email, Colonel Meyers was relieved of command by Col. Kenneth Klock for loss of confidence (Edvardsen & Hansen, 2025). Since high-ranking figures such as Vice Admiral Shoshana Chatfield, the representative to NATO, and the head of the NSA had already been removed, the specific significance of Meyers' removal lay in its unique location and context.

By extending this domestic political cleansing to a commander stationed on foreign soil who was essentially performing a sensitive diplomatic function, the United States effectively dissolved the distinction between the continental U.S. and the leased territory of Pituffik. This move signalled that U.S. domestic would be enforced with the same rigor in Greenland as in Washington, demonstrating that the Logic of Consequences regarding strict loyalty to the administration had superseded the Logic of Appropriateness required to maintain stability with host nations.

Consequently, the U.S. appeared willing to risk diplomatic friction with Denmark to make an example of a dissenting officer by replacing a locally attuned commander with one



presumably more aligned with the America First agenda. This shift signalled to Nuuk and Copenhagen that the base leadership would no longer act as a mediator but rather as an unyielding enforcer of U.S. policy.

Ultimately, the intervention was total because just as the physical space of the base was expanded against local wishes, the human leadership was purged to ensure absolute alignment with an external political ideology. This left Greenlandic and Danish authorities without an interlocutor capable of independent judgment and further eroded their ability to influence base operations.

#### *4.2. Strategic Policies Determined by External Actors*

This analysis observes a clear shift in policy direction over the 2020-2026 period, while the era began with diplomatic stability, it rapidly evolved into aggressive strategic competition by 2024. Krasner's framework posits that sovereignty is violated when a state's strategic policies; its alliances, its threat perceptions, its economic orientation, are determined not by its own institutions but by external actors. In the Westphalian ideal, Greenland (via Denmark) would determine its own security posture in the Arctic. However, between 2024-2026, Greenland's strategic destiny was almost entirely written in Washington, D.C.

The 2024 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy marked a significant shift in regional governance, explicitly designating the Arctic as a venue for strategic competition. This policy reorientation prioritized the modernization of missile warning infrastructure at Pituffik Space Base as a critical component of U.S. homeland defense, establishing operational imperatives driven by Washington's security interests rather than Nuuk's domestic agenda. By integrating Pituffik deeply into the U.S. nuclear command and control architecture, the strategy effectively prioritizes U.S. survival interests, dictated by the Logic of Consequences, over the standard exercise of Danish sovereignty.

Furthermore, the projected implementation of an active defense posture under the Golden Dome fundamentally alters Greenland's security dilemma. The transition from passive radar surveillance to active interception capabilities risks transforming the territory from a strategic observer into a high-priority target for preemptive strikes by adversaries. Consequently, the securitization of the Arctic imposes a high-risk strategic environment upon Greenland, significantly limiting the capacity of local authorities to contest decisions that directly impact their territorial security.

Furthermore, the 2026 Tariff was the coercive economic instrument. This event marked the final transition from influence to direct dictation. In January 2026, following his return to office, President Trump escalated his long-standing ambition to acquire Greenland (Drollette, 2025). When diplomatic overtures were rebuffed, he announced a tariff targeting eight European NATO allies: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Finland (Mackintosh, 2026). The threat was specific and escalating: a 10% tariff on "any and all good" from these nations, effective February 1, 2026, rising to 25% by June 1 (Jaramillo et al., 2026).

This action relied on Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, which grants the President authority to restrict imports that threaten national security (Library Congress, 2025). The administration's legal rationale was a tautology of the Logic of Consequences that Control of the Arctic is vital to U.S. national security. Denmark lacks the financial and military capacity to secure Greenland against China and Russia (e.g., it cannot fund projects such as Golden Dome). Therefore, Danish sovereignty over Greenland is a weakening of internal economy and a security threat that must be remedied by U.S. acquisition.

While the 2026 tariffs served as a blunt economic weapon, the U.S. secured the final diplomatic settlement known as the Davos resolution through information warfare. This agreement was not a triumph of diplomacy but a result of surveillance following the modus operandi of the real-world Dunhammer Operation exposed in 2020 and 2021 (BBC, 2021). Just as the NSA previously tapped Danish cables to spy on European allies, the U.S. likely



used these same tools to monitor Greenland's internal debates regarding the Pituffik renewal. By intercepting Naalakkersuisut's private red lines and political rifts beforehand, the U.S. violated the sovereign right to private counsel.

#### 4.3. *Discrepancy Between Practice and Agreements*

In the wake of the diplomatic fallout resulting from the initial 2019 purchase attempt (LaFortune & Landriault, 2024; Lindbjerg & Jacobsen, 2024), the U.S. State Department launched a focused initiative to repair the bilateral relationship through normative reassurance. This effort culminated in the October 2020 signing of the Common Plan for U.S.-Greenland Cooperation in Support of Our Understanding for Pituffik. Rooted in a Logic of Appropriateness, the document sought to restore diplomatic stability by affirming a commitment to a strong, forward-looking partnership based on mutual respect. Additionally, the agreement outlined explicit promises to increase benefits for the people of Greenland through expanded trade, investment, and educational opportunities. Finally, it reaffirmed the role of the Joint Committee statement, which was established in 2024, as the primary mechanism for consultation and dispute resolution.

These commitments were designed to signal that the U.S. respected Greenland's status within the Kingdom of Denmark and viewed it as a partner, not a possession. This logic was visibly enacted on April 6, 2023, when Thule Air Base was formally renamed Pituffik Space Base (U.S. Mission Denmark, 2023). The ceremony was a high-water mark of performative sovereignty. Chief of Space Operations Gen.

Chance Saltzman and U.S. Ambassador Alan Leventhal stood alongside Greenlandic ministers, declaring that the new name would recognize Greenlandic cultural heritage and pay homage to its ties to the Greenlandic people (Hadley, 2023). This momentum is essential to organized hypocrisy. The renaming cost the U.S. nothing in strategic terms, the radars remained, the mission continued, but it purchased a significant amount of diplomatic goodwill, buying time for the expansion that was to follow.

Beyond the diplomatic surface, the Logic of Consequences shaped the practical realities within the domain of defense contracting. The administration of the base, specifically the Base Maintenance Contract (BMC), valued at approximately \$3.95 billion over 12 years, served as a primary indicator of the United States commitment to facilitating Greenlandic economic benefits. In 2022, the United States Air Force officially awarded this comprehensive maintenance contract to Inuksuk A/S. Structurally, the decision fulfilled the Logic of Appropriateness, as Inuksuk A/S was formally established as a Greenlandic-registered entity.

However, a closer examination of the company's composition illustrates a highly sophisticated institutional adaptation designed to align with broader strategic parameters. The enterprise was formed as a joint venture in February 2022, shortly before the contract allocation, with a 51% majority ownership held by the Greenlandic firm Permagreen Grønland A/S, alongside a 49% stake held by the American corporation Vectrus Services, presently known as V2X (U.S. Mission Denmark, 2022).

While this joint venture successfully fulfilled the legal and diplomatic requirements for local majority ownership, inquiries raised before the Government Accountability Office (GAO) explored the complex distribution of operational responsibilities. These proceedings noted that the United States partner provided the essential technical expertise, past performance credentials, and key operational inputs required for the mission.

Furthermore, financial disclosures illustrate the depth of this bilateral integration; V2X's SEC filings explicitly state that the company accounts for Inuksuk using the equity method, thereby formally acknowledging its significant influence and substantial financial participation in the project. Within the theoretical lens of Organized Hypocrisy, this arrangement meticulously honors the diplomatic necessity of Greenlandic ownership while

simultaneously ensuring that the critical technical operations and financial architectures remain closely aligned with the established capabilities of the American defense industry.

Even though the diplomatic and corporate maneuvers over maintenance contracts are negotiated at the highest institutional levels, the lived reality and political aspirations of the Greenland population expose a stark contrast in perspective. For the United States, control of the region is openly viewed as an absolute necessity for global strategic posture, regardless of local sentiment. This zero-sum approach was made evident when President Trump, addressing energy executives at the White House, stated, “we’re not going to have Russia or China occupy Greenland. That’s what they’re going to do if we don’t. So we’re going to be doing something with Greenland, either the nice way or the more difficult way (Yang, 2026).” In stark contrast to being treated as a passive geopolitical commodity, Greenland’s leadership views these actions as profound intrusions into their sovereignty.

Reacting directly to this external pressure, former Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen articulated the local societal stance, “We don’t want to be Americans, we don’t want to be Danish, we want to be Greenlanders.” This statement, backed by a coalition of political figures including Múte B Egede, Pele Broberg, Aleqa Hammond, and Aqqalu C. Jerimiassen, demonstrates that the local population does not perceive these economic and military arrangements as a victory for autonomy (Ferguson, 2026; Keldorff, 2026). Thus, the friction is not merely an elite diplomatic dispute over contract terms, but a profound clash between Washington’s logic of strategic consequences and a local population fighting for the fundamental logic of self-determination.

#### *4.4. De Jure Recognition of Sovereignty Persist*

The survival of the Westphalian state system often depends less on the rigid enforcement of borders and more on the flexible accommodation of power within those borders. Although the formal recognition of Danish sovereignty was maintained throughout the entire 2020-2026 timeframe, the events of early 2026 served as the ultimate test for this diplomatic arrangement. The resolution of this crisis, achieved in the corridors of the World Economic Forum in Davos, illustrates that de jure recognition of sovereignty is not merely a legal nicety but a strategic asset that great powers preserve to lower the transaction costs of their global footprint.

Although the coercive tariff crisis of January 2026 threatened to fracture the alliance, its resolution serves as the ultimate test for the durability of de jure sovereignty. The resolution to this standoff, achieved on January 21, 2026, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, provides an example of organized hypocrisy. The mechanism of resolution required a decoupling of the rhetoric of ownership from the reality of control.

The specific mention of the Golden Dome in the context of the Davos Resolution highlights the depth of the de facto/de jure split. The Golden Dome is described as an integrated air and missile defence system for the US. Deploying such a system in Greenland requires significant land use, spectrum rights, and military personnel presence, attributes typically associated with sovereign control. During his address at Davos, President Trump publicly reversed his position on the use of force, stating, “People thought I would use force, but I don’t have to use force” (Melimopoulos, 2026).

He simultaneously called for immediate negotiations to discuss acquisition, maintaining the performative aspect of his domestic political stance. However, the substantive breakthrough occurred in a bilateral meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. Following this very productive meeting, Trump announced the suspension of the threatened tariffs and proclaimed that they had formed the framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and the entire Arctic Region (Debusmann Jr, 2026). This arrangement illustrates a pragmatic bifurcation of sovereignty. Denmark and Greenland retain full de jure sovereignty, preserving the political integrity of the Kingdom and allowing Prime Minister Frederiksen to project a diplomatic defense of national autonomy.

Simultaneously, the United States secures de facto strategic utility, effectively integrating the territory into its defense architecture without the administrative burdens of annexation. Theoretically, this outcome serves as a potent contemporary case study of Stephen Krasner's concept of organized hypocrisy. The resolution demonstrates how state actors reconcile the conflicting imperatives of the Logic of Consequences and the Logic of Appropriateness. By institutionalizing U.S. strategic access within an existing alliance framework, the agreement satisfies the hegemon's material requirements while strictly adhering to the normative rituals of Westphalian sovereignty, thereby preventing intra-alliance fracture.

By agreeing to discuss this under the framework, Denmark and Greenland are effectively leasing their sovereignty. They provide the territorial container for U.S. security architecture. In return, the U.S. refrains from challenging the legal container of the Danish Realm. This arrangement is more durable than annexation because it diffuses responsibility. If the U.S. owned Greenland, it would be solely responsible for its social welfare, infrastructure, and climate adaptation. By maintaining the fiction of Danish sovereignty, the U.S. extracts the security rent (Golden Dome, Pituffik) while Denmark and Nuuk retain the administrative burden.

The Davos Resolution shows that in the high stakes of Arctic security, the sovereignty of small states is respected precisely to the extent that it serves the strategic interests of great powers. It is a sovereignty of permission, not of denial. Denmark cannot deny US access (as evidenced by the tariff threat), but it is permitted to retain the symbols and legal title of sovereignty as long as that access is granted.

#### *4.5. Norms & Rules are Not Formally Revoked*

The second pillar of high durability lies in the handling of norms and rules. In a system of organized hypocrisy, actors rarely formally revoke norms that become inconvenient; instead, they create complex rule structures that allow for the violation of the norm in practice while upholding it in principle. The controversy and subsequent resolution regarding the Thule Air Base maintenance contract, culminating in the creation of Inuuk A/S, serves as the definitive economic manifestation of this phenomenon. Rather than formally revoking the real and genuine clause which mandates local benefits, the U.S. and Greenland restored organized hypocrisy through the 2020 Common Plan. The durability of the U.S.-Greenland relationship required a restoration of the organized hypocrisy. This was achieved through the 2020 Common Plan for U.S.-Greenland Cooperation, signed to strengthen the partnership and explicitly address the contract dispute.

The Common Plan did not revoke the rule that the U.S. military gets best-value services, nor did it revoke the norm that Greenland benefits. Instead, it created a new mechanism to satisfy both. The contract dispute and its resolution highlight a critical aspect of the US-Greenland relationship: the transition from free access to transactional access. Historically, the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement provided the U.S. with rent-free use of the land (Petersen, 1998). The Inuuk contract acts as a shadow rent mechanism. By engaging a Greenlandic partner, the US effectively transfers wealth to the Greenlandic economy. This is essential for the persistence of sovereign fictions. If the U.S. were to occupy the land without compensation while also excluding local businesses (as in 2014), the fiction of a mutually beneficial alliance would collapse, which leading to political instability (Bye, 2022).

#### *4.6. Use of Diplomatic Symbols*

The third pillar of durable sovereignty is the strategic use of diplomatic symbols. In Krasner's framework, when the gap between the Logic of Appropriateness (sovereignty) and the Logic of Consequences (control) becomes too wide, actors use symbols to bridge the divide. Within the broader context of the 2020-2026 modernization efforts, symbolic acts such as the 2023 renaming played a crucial role in maintaining political stability amidst growing military expansion.



The renaming of the US military installation from Thule Air Base to Pituffik Space Base on April 6, 2023, is the preeminent example of this symbolic management. For over seventy years, the name Thule symbolized American cold war power. The base was established in 1951 following the forced relocation of the local Inuit population to Qaanaaq, an event that remains a scar on the collective memory of the nation (Dragsdahl, 2001; Slimak, 2026). The name itself, drawn from Greek mythology (Ultima Thule), was a colonial imposition, erasing the local name: Pituffik.

The ceremony in April 2023 was a carefully choreographed diplomatic action designed to align the symbolic status of the territory with the narrative of Greenlandic sovereignty, even as the physical status of the territory remained firmly under US military command. The speeches delivered at the renaming ceremony by Greenlandic, Danish, and American officials reveal the mechanics of this symbolic adjustment. Vivian Motzfeldt, Greenland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Business, and Trade, framed the renaming as a restoration of cultural dignity. She stated, "With the decision to re-name, the U.S. has demonstrated its respect to the friendship between us, recognizing cultural heritage, and the history of the base". She further expressed hope that the name Pituffik Space Base will become a symbol of cooperation and the stability of this amazing part of the world that is so vital for all survival in the Arctic (Dillon & Brady, 2023)

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the modernization of Pituffik Space Base explain that the relationship between the United States and Greenland has fundamentally shifted from a partnership based on diplomatic consultation to a strategic arrangement defined by Stephen Krasner's concept of Organized Hypocrisy. Our findings demonstrate that while the United States has maintained the de jure sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark through symbolic gestures, such as the 2023 renaming of the base and the 2020 Common Plan, it has systematically violated that sovereignty in practice to secure de facto control.

If Arctic tensions between the U.S., Russia, and China continue to escalate, the dynamics of this Organized Hypocrisy will likely intensify. As global competition over the region's transit routes and mineral resources accelerates, Greenland's geographic position will transition from being merely a defensive buffer to becoming a primary place of offensive strategic posturing. In such a high-stakes environment, Greenland's value as a bargaining chip will become even more central to all parties involved. For the United States, maintaining the Danish/Greenlandic sovereignty will become increasingly difficult as military necessities, such as potential preemptive deployments or expanded micro-nuclear footprints, clash directly with domestic laws.

Conversely, for Greenland, escalating geopolitical friction could empower local leaders to extract significantly higher economic and political concessions in exchange for continued U.S. access. However, this increased leverage carries existential risks. If a direct great-power conflict appears imminent, Washington's adherence to the Logic of Appropriateness may evaporate entirely, prompting a transition from sovereignty of permission to outright strategic occupation, thus collapsing the hypocritical arrangement entirely. Hence, future research should explore whether escalating multi-polar threats fracture this fragile diplomatic equilibrium or force the institutionalization of an entirely new form of neo-colonial military control in the High North.

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