



**Greenland-EU Security:  
Harnessing the OCT and CFSP Frameworks**

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## Executive summary

The Trump administration's threats to consider annexing Greenland and its stance on potentially withdrawing from NATO commitments have had a significant impact on the Arctic security landscape, revealing a strategic crisis for both Greenland and the EU. Greenland, as an Overseas Country and Territory (OCT) connected to the EU through Denmark, has historically depended on U.S. security assurances via Denmark's NATO membership. However, the Trump administration's America-First isolationist policy has eroded confidence in alliances, exposing Greenland and the EU to new security challenges. Concurrently, the EU acknowledges the increasing strategic significance of OCTs like Greenland but lacks the operational mechanisms necessary to incorporate them into its security framework. This discrepancy between recognition and action creates a significant vulnerability in European and Greenlandic security, particularly as geopolitical competition continues to intensify.

This policy paper recommends the European External Action Service (EEAS) to integrate OCT Greenland into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) framework. Implementation should include Greenlandic representatives in CFSP meetings, processes, budgetary allocation, and policymaking to strengthen EU-Greenland security cooperation. This approach leverages the momentum created by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which has fundamentally transformed EU security thinking and opened opportunities to rethink CFSP architecture. The timing is favourable, as there are indications that Greenland is becoming more receptive to fostering a new relationship with the EU.

Integrating Greenland into the CFSP framework addresses multiple security and strategic objectives simultaneously. For Greenland, it reduces U.S.-related security uncertainty by enabling greater independence under a European security umbrella that shares Greenlandic democratic values. For the EU, this integration deepens ties beyond existing economic and environmental partnerships, establishing a stronger Arctic position with accompanying security and strategic benefits. This approach also creates a replicable model for engaging other strategically located OCTs in the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions.

In conclusion, the international security environment is undergoing rapid change, making it essential to act immediately in this new and uncertain world. However, OCTs currently do not receive the recognition and strategic importance they deserve within the European security framework. Our policy recommendation is an essential initial step toward enhancing the EU's and Greenland's capabilities to address contemporary security challenges in an uncertain world.

## Greenland, facing an uncertain world

Greenland operates as a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Despite acting as a self-governing entity, Denmark is still responsible for Greenland's defence, foreign affairs and internal security. Through its relationship with Denmark, Greenland is designated an OCT status linked to the EU (European Commission, n.d.-a). Before its status as an Overseas Country and Territory (OCT), Greenland



functioned as an Outermost Region (OR) within the European Union until 1985 (Balas, 2024, p. 235). The EU maintains a range of formal connections with Greenland, including fishery agreements, educational programs and, more recently, a partnership focused on raw materials (European Commission, n.d.-a.; European Commission, 2023). The most recent development in this relationship is the establishment of an office of the European Commission in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, which was inaugurated on May 15, 2024. However, this office has come about to strengthen the environment and economic partnership, and not security cooperation per se (European Commission, 2024).

Greenland's foreign security policy focus has for the last decades been on partnering with the U.S. and further integration into NATO (Bye, 2025; Government of Greenland, 2024, p. 43). The U.S.'s soft power diplomacy worked well for remaining Greenland's preferred partner while keeping China at bay. Greenland remained enthusiastic to forge closer ties between the U.S. and Greenland which was reflected in the official rhetoric in Greenland's foreign security documents (Bye, 2025; Government of Greenland, 2024, p. 17).

In the 2024 Greenland Arctic security and defense policy paper, Greenland identified several key security threats (Government of Greenland, 2024, pp. 41-43). These threats include malicious cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, covert operations targeting civilian communications systems, the potential militarization of the Arctic by non-Arctic nations, foreign ownership of essential infrastructure, and the erosion of the international order. Greenland's Arctic security strategy emphasizes its current integration into NATO through Denmark's membership

However, this approach is becoming increasingly problematic due to uncertainty surrounding transatlantic arrangements under Trump's presidency. This has generated considerable doubt about NATO's role as the Western primary collective defense mechanism. Additionally, Trump's repeated statements regarding the potential annexation of Greenland by the U.S. have led to heightened tensions, which have further complicated Greenland's reliance on NATO for their security and its preference for closer ties between the U.S. and Greenland (Bergmann, 2025; Bye, 2025). For Greenland, high importance is placed on the norms and values underpinning the current western world order (Government of Greenland, 2024, p. 41):

*"Greenland is firmly committed to the principles of democracy, human rights, respect for international law and the right of people to self-determination. In a changing world, we must uphold international law, peace and order within the global community. In light of this, we and other like-minded nations will, for security and defense policy reasons, have limitations in our cooperation with certain countries".*

This reinforces the uncertainty surrounding an exclusive focus on further NATO integration for Greenland. The U.S. as the prime supporter and powerhouse of NATO under Trump currently does not align well with the above provided paragraph. Trump undermines democracy, the rules-based international order, human rights and above



all wants to militarize the arctic through the annexation of Greenland (Amnesty International, 2025; Bye, 2025; Nye, 2025; Riccardi, 2025). For Greenland this means that for its security and defense partner they would need to reconsider its U.S. security cooperation.

Currently, Greenland remains dependent on Denmark for defense, foreign affairs, and internal security. While there is a desire among Greenlanders for independence, achieving it would transfer these responsibilities to the government of Greenland, necessitating the need for a security partner. However, Greenland does not desire a new colonizer like the U.S., as it seeks to maintain its independence. Hence, it is likely to look eastwards again towards the EU to support its independence and economic development (Bye, 2025). This shift has reignited discussions about the possibility of rejoining the EU. Recent polls in 2024 show that 60% of Greenlanders would vote to rejoin the EU, compared to 40% in 2021, demonstrating a shifting perspective on EU membership (Nielsen & Ackrén, 2024). In addition, Danish MEP Morten Løkkegaard argues that Greenland should reconsider rejoining the EU for protection, contending that in an increasingly uncertain world, strong alliance connections are essential, and he argues that the EU represents the best alliance to join (Starcevic, 2025). All of this points to favorable momentum for the EU to step in, with the best approach being through the EU's security and territorial frameworks of CFSP and the OCT.

### **The EU security framework**

The CFSP is an intergovernmental framework through which EU member states discuss, coordinate and implement foreign and security policies, with the aim to “preserve peace and strengthen international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter” (European External Action Service, n.d.). The CFSP was created in 1993 through the Treaty of Maastricht to give the EU a stronger foreign and security posture, based on the principle that by combining forces, member states could form a more powerful bloc in international relations (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017, pp. 3-4). The CFSP is a distinctive framework within the EU structure, as it represents an area where member states jointly formulate policies under the guidance and leadership of the High Representative, who heads the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017, p. 1). The EEAS is the diplomatic service responsible for carrying out the EU's CFSP and maintaining diplomatic relations with countries. The CFSP includes several mechanisms to give body to the security framework, such as the European Security and Defence Policy, sanctions, EU Special Representatives, non-proliferation and disarmament projects, and the European Peace Facility (European External Action Service, n.d.).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had an enormous impact on the CFSP. As Fabbrini (2024, p. 615) argues, in response to the Russian invasion, the CFSP has changed more in the “last 30 months than in the prior 30 years”. These changes include actions like providing military support to a country at war and planning to integrate Ukraine's defence industries with those of the EU (Genini, 2025,

p. 125). The Russia-Ukraine crisis has provided momentum for strategically rethinking the CFSP architecture, examining how it can be utilized and with which tools (p. 140).

### **OCT and strategic thinking**

Several EU member states maintain overseas territories that extend their sovereignty and are thereby linked to the EU. Due to rising geopolitical pressures, these territories are becoming increasingly strategically important (Balas, 2024, p. 217-218). The EU distinguishes between OR and OCT. Where the OR's are an integral part of the respective member state, the OCTs are territories which have a special link to a member state. A clear distinction is that the EU OR's are fully integrated into EU territory and policymaking, with the entire *acquis communautaire* applied just as it would be in any other EU area. In contrast, OCT holds a unique position. They are technically outside the European Union but are part of EU member states. This makes OCTs the closest possible association with the EU without actual membership (Balas, 2024, p. 218). This distinctive arrangement creates a complex governance challenge for EU foreign security policy. While the Union exercises some direct authority over OR's, it lacks similar control over OCTs and must instead persuade both parent countries and OCT administrations to align with broader European geopolitical interests. Despite the strategic importance of these territories, a coordinated European geopolitical approach to OCTs remains undeveloped as of now (p. 221).

Balas (2024) identifies a notable absence of OCT references to geopolitics and security in EU strategic policy documents. Although, recently changes are visible primarily in EU-OCT forum ministerial conclusions. These EU-OCT forums serve as the highest-level annual dialogue platform between EU institutions and OCT authorities, providing strategic orientation and political direction for the partnership (European Commission, n.d.-b). While the OCTA 2021-2027 strategy prioritizes cooperation in strategic areas by focusing "specifically on OCTs niche areas, needs and priorities, aligning them with one of the European Commission's current geopolitical priorities, the Green Deal" (Overseas Countries and Territories Association, 2021, p. 1). The 2024 EU-OCT Forum marked a significant shift by confirming that "OCTs are part of the EU's geostrategic agenda" and are viewed as "outposts of Europe" representing "strategic assets for the EU's external action to promote our values and advance our interests throughout the four corners of the globe: in the North Atlantic and the Arctic, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean", with recognition that "rising geopolitical competition" necessitates capitalizing "more on the political dimension of our long-standing partnership" (House of Representatives of the Netherlands, 2024). Despite this rhetorical acknowledgment of OCTs as part of the EU family, a coherent policy linkage between OCTs and the CFSP framework remains absent, creating a significant gap between recognition and operational integration of these territories.



## Conclusion

Greenland holds the status of an OCT, meaning that the island has the closest association to the EU without actual membership. The EU lacks control over OCTs and instead must persuade both Greenland and Denmark to align with European interests. Currently, Greenland and Europe face uncertainty from the Trump administration in the security realm. Both the EU and Greenland are heavily reliant on the U.S. security umbrella but this is becoming increasingly problematic due to uncertainty surrounding NATO commitment under Trump's presidency. Greenland has for the last decades been forging closer ties with the U.S., but after Trump's comments of annexing Greenland a shift can be seen in the public opinion. Greenlanders are now in favour of closer ties to the EU and an expectation and momentum is present that Greenland will focus more eastwards towards the EU for security orientation.

The CFSP serves as the EU's primary framework for foreign and security policy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 created a crisis that transformed EU foreign security policy and opened opportunities to fundamentally rethink the CFSP. Such a rethinking must be broadening the CFSP to incorporate Greenland, an OCT, into this security framework. While the EU increasingly recognizes Greenland's strategic importance, operational integration remains lacking. Therefore, this policy paper argues that the CFSP and OCT frameworks must be integral to the rethinking of European security. This integration would address Greenland's security challenges while also establishing EU strategic positioning in the Arctic.

Hence we strongly recommend the European External Action Service to consider the following policy recommendation: *incorporate OCT Greenland into the CFSP framework*. Implementation should include Greenlandic representatives in CFSP meetings, processes, budgetary allocation and policymaking, strengthening EU-Greenland security cooperation. This reduces Greenland's U.S.-related uncertainty by enabling independence under a European security umbrella that shares Greenlandic values. For Europe, this deepens ties beyond the economic and environmental realm. As Greenland continues their wish of independence, the EU alliance presents itself as the most suitable partnership, aligned with shared values. This Greenlandic integration could also serve as inspiration for engaging other strategically located OCTs in the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean.

For the EU, this integration deepens ties beyond existing economic and environmental partnerships, establishing a stronger Arctic position with accompanying security and strategic benefits. This approach also creates a replicable model for engaging other strategically located OCTs in the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions.

However, success requires full coherence and genuine partnership. As Greenland's latest security paper states: "nothing about us without us" (Government of Greenland, 2024). This principle must guide the EU's approach as both parties work toward a shared Arctic security future built on mutual respect and common interests.



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