To the surprise of many two years ago, the global media and diplomatic community went into a frenzy after the *Wall Street Journal* published an article about then President Trump's keen interest in purchasing Greenland from Denmark, generating worldwide headlines comparable to those that greeted Secretary of State William H. Seward when word leaked out of his 1867 secret treaty with Russia to purchase its ailing Alaskan colony, a move widely ridiculed as "Seward's folly" (but which proved to be enormously prescient). News of Trump's Sewardian interest in Greenland generated an immediate critical reaction in both Greenland, where a movement for increased autonomy and a gradual, incremental evolution toward sovereign independence has had majority support for many years, as well as Denmark, leading to a brief display of diplomatic sparks between Denmark and its American ally. As Greenland's foreign minister Ane Lone Bagger put it, "We are open for business, but we're not for sale." Prudently, Greenland's leaders, while vehemently opposed to the idea floated by Trump, nonetheless embraced the immediate (and sustained) rise in attention his proposal elicited, and in the months that followed, enjoyed multiple benefits associated with America's rekindled interest in the world's largest island, including fast-tracking the re-opening of a U.S. consulate in Nuuk for the first time since 1953.

At 2.13 million square kilometers, Greenland is equal in size to the combined areas of the world's next three largest islands: New Guinea (785,753 square km), Borneo (748,168 square km) and Madagascar (587,041 square km), occupying a strategic location along the northeastern flank of North America comparable to Alaska's position in the far northwest with a comparable geostrategic importance for hemispheric security, one recognized during World War II, again in the Cold War, and now once again as the polar thaw invites increased global interest in the Arctic. While Greenland has long been a colony of Denmark, its formal governing status has evolved in recent years from outright colonial governance toward more collaborative Home-Rule governance in 1979 to, in the wake of its 2008 referendum on autonomy and independence that garnered overwhelming (75.54%) support of Greenland's electorate, to increasingly robust and meaningful Self-Rule in 2009 – with a path toward peaceful secession mutually endorsed by both colony and colonizer.

Roots of Greenlandic Autonomy: The Circumpolar Inuit Rights Movement

A key driver of this movement for increasing autonomy has been the steady empowerment of the island's majority Inuit population – part of a wider, circumpolar movement for Inuit

rights spearheaded by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), renamed the Inuit Circumpolar Council in 2006. This movement includes, and for many has been defined by, securing the protection of Inuit land rights through various mechanisms, such as the land claims process in Alaska and the Canadian Arctic which has formally transferred land title to approximately one-tenth the land in Arctic North America to the Inuit along with a variety of co-management tools to protect those lands and its recourses (in contrast to the Russian Arctic, where in the absence of gaining land title, there has instead been a more limited use of joint-venture economic development projects, occasionally augmented by the creation of national parks in the absence of a formal restoration of land title to Native ownership). In addition to regaining (and formalizing) land rights, the Inuit rights movements has sought, and successfully strengthened, the preservation and revitalization of Inuit culture and language, along with the increasing empowerment of Inuit through greater self-governing powers, with notable achievements in both Alaska and the Canadian Arctic in addition to Greenland.

The movement for autonomy in Greenland, and the collaborative path toward its eventual independence with the support of Denmark, is both part of this circumpolar movement and distinct from it, as noted by Hannes Gerhardt in 2011, and takes inspiration in part from the pioneering gains of the Arctic's evolving experience with Inuit land claims, starting with the historic Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 which jumpstarted the process of Inuit-State reconciliation, and continuing through subsequent revisions as land claims were sequentially settled across Arctic North America until 2005, over three decades later. But at the same time, the constitutional and historical context for the Inuit rights movement in Greenland is markedly different from on the mainland of Arctic North America, with a colonial system largely in place, albeit with much increased autonomy. It is this asymmetry of constitutional and historical contexts that has propelled Greenland on what Gerhardt describes as a Westphalian trajectory, toward the emergence of what would be the first truly sovereign majority-Inuit state.[1]

ANCSA was the first land claim to transform the political geography of the North, and while it had many structural flaws and imperfections, it laid a foundation from which Arctic land claims continued to evolve, with each new iteration providing the Inuit with greater powers, increasingly augmenting Inuit self-governing powers, first through the integration of co-management with a land settlement, and later with the integration of self-government

(initially via public governance models, and later – in the 2005 Labrador Inuit (Nunatsiavut) Land Claim – embracing ethnically-defined Inuit self-government.[2] Outside of Greenland, these iterations have been constitutionally subordinated to the sovereign states governing the Arctic region, with Inuit autonomy defined either municipally, regionally or territorially, but always subordinates to constitutional supremacy of the sovereign state itself. But in the case of Greenland, there is for the first time a process in which sovereign independence is a distinct possibility, as mutually recognized by both Greenlanders and the Danish state.

How this movement toward independence evolves, and the diverse constitutional forms the emergent sovereign Greenlandic state may potentially take, has generally not been discussed in great detail in the academic literature or press, apart from being the logical conclusion to the incremental approach to expanded Greenlandic autonomy that has taken place thus far, and thus with sovereignty limited to the island of Greenland itself, and not generally in any other form, expanded or diminished in geographic scope. But this does not mean that Greenland's independence will remain confined by its present geography, and that over time we won't see other manifestations of Inuit sovereignty and configurations of Inuit state extent emerge. This article presents a preliminary discussion of some of these variants, primarily sovereign or co-sovereign models that may at the present time seem highly improbable. Because the future of Greenland, and the ultimate extent of Inuit sovereignty asserted, is of such great importance to the stability of the High North Atlantic region and to North American security, it is vital that we consider all possible models and outcomes. The following paper is a preliminary effort to elucidate these possibilities.

Climate Consequences: Energizing the Inuit Rights Movement

Adding urgency to the contemporary circumpolar Inuit rights movement, with roots firmly planted in the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, has been the dramatic and volatile effects of the polar thaw, bringing global attention to a region that has, since the Cold War, been largely neglected. What was once something of a niche field understudied by international relations and strategic studies scholars has, since the polar thaw become a topic of global attention from the lay-public to the highest levels of governance, becoming front and center to not only study, but policy formulation and strategy development around the world – so much so that numerous non-Arctic states have their own Arctic policies, and non-Arctic observer states now outnumber the Arctic member states on the Arctic Council,

the post-Cold War international regime that collaboratively overseas the Arctic region on a number of non-defense and non-security issues areas. Growing global interest in the Arctic brings along new diplomatic challenges, most recently the rise of China and its assertions of a special "near-Arctic" status aligned with its "Polar Silk Road" initiative which was noted in the 2019 United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook, along with other U.S. policy papers and strategy documents, as particularly concerning.

The results of these competing interests in the near as well as more distant future are exceedingly difficult to predict, so considering a wide range of scenarios is essential. For instance, a determined China could develop regional alliances and dependencies through strategic capital infusions to the sovereign island-states of the High North Atlantic, which owing to their exceedingly small populations remain vulnerable to rapid demographic upheavals resulting from a small number of development projects staffed by overseas contractors – resulting in a potential stealth invasion of the region. Iceland, with a population around 364,000 and a long sovereign experience, far more resilient to such an external demographic threat, though were Iceland to break from NATO and pursue a non-aligned future, its vulnerability could increase. Greenland, while part of the Kingdom of Denmark, likewise remains embedded in a solid alliance architecture, but with only 56,000 people could, once it becomes independent, become highly vulnerable to external pressures, whether economic, demographic, or even military.

Similarly, with Russia resurgent and its recently illustrated appetite for foreign intervention (following its annexation of Crimea, incursion in Eastern Ukraine, and military interventions from Libya to Syria), and the renewed specter of a clash with NATO over the small Baltic states, or potentially, the non-aligned northern European states, scenarios of extreme instability in the High North Atlantic can also again be envisioned. In short, global interest in the Arctic introduces new risks which could in time threaten the hemispheric security of North America. This follows a long period that with few exceptions was marked by a steadiness and predictability; the pre-thaw Arctic region was more a strategic buffer in world politics that – even at the height of the Cold War – was defined foremost by its stability. The movement for Inuit rights emerged during this period of calm, and the incrementally increasing empowerment of the Inuit proceeded with the same stability during a half-century of policy innovation that began with ANCSA, culminated with the formation of the Nunavut Territory in 1999, and achieving its conclusion on the mainland of

Arctic North America with the passage of the Labrador Inuit (Nunatsiavut) Land Claim in 2005.

Were the strategic and geographic landscape to remain stable and largely free of uncertainty, the emergence of a sovereign and independent Greenland would likely continue the current mutually amicable autonomy process and its multi-decade incrementalism further, and not upend regional geopolitics. But because of the dynamic uncertainties of the polar thaw, and the return of Westphalian state competition to the Arctic region in recent years, the potential independence of Greenland becomes instead a strategic wildcard needing to be closely studied and pro-actively engaged to ensure a future sovereign Greenland maintains the close, collaborative and friendly relationship with the United States and the West, optimally as part of NATO, that it currently pursues as a constituent component of Denmark.[3]

Alternate Models for a Post-Denmark Greenland: 'Thinking About the Unthinkable' Once Again

While most conversations regarding Greenland's constitutional evolution, at least those prior to the Trump White House's surprise overture to purchase the island from Denmark, consider Greenland's continuing movement for increasing autonomy strictly within the context of peaceful, and negotiated, Danish constitutional politics, there is good reason to consider alternative scenarios not widely discussed – including scenarios of a broader Inuit secession from the states that now assert constitutional authority over Inuit lands catalyzed by Greenland's successes thus far.

The Inuit homeland has, in contrast to the more complex and diverse subarctic region, a cohesive ethno-political culture, and while it has until now deftly adapted its aspirations for the many different sovereign polities whose borders intersect the Inuit homeland, it is conceivable that as the prospect of formal independence grows for Greenlandic Inuit, the appetite for enhanced autonomy elsewhere, such as in neighboring Nunavut, northern Labrador (Nunatsiavut), Canada's Western Arctic (the Inuvialuit settlement region), and Alaska's North Slope, may grow in lockstep. It is imperative to thus ask: What if Nunavut and/or other Inuit regions join Greenland in a coordinated secession movement, or – in the face of successful lobbying by either party or a groundswell of support at home, Greenland

decides to change sovereigns, and join either Canada or the United States? While these scenarios may seem unlikely, prior to 1989 one did not hear comparable discussions of a collapse of the Warsaw Pact, breakup of Yugoslavia, or implosion of the Soviet empire before events rapidly spiraled out of control, radically transforming the constitutional fabric of eastern Europe. With the prospect of an Inuit state ultimately and amicably emerging from the negotiated constitutional dialogue between Greenland and Denmark, the consequential implications of this profound and catalyzing transformation must not be overlooked. As Herman Kahn reminded us during the Cold War, it is now essential to think about the unthinkable. Below are what Kahn might dub relevant "metaphors and scenarios" to consider.

Joining Canada and its Exemplary Constitutional Embrace of Indigenous Rights

Were Greenland to change sovereigns rather than seek formal independence, there is much logic to the notion of Greenland selecting Canada as its new constitutional partner – finding in the Nunavut model of territorial self-governance aligned with a land claim treaty many potential benefits well-suited to its needs, and a refreshing break from its current colonial governing structure. Joining Canada is not without precedent: the province of Newfoundland and Labrador did so as late as 1949, around the time the United States was contemplating its own acquisition of Greenland – bringing under the Canadian constitution not only the island of Newfoundland, but the northern coastal territory of Labrador, home to several thousand Inuit who serendipitously are among the most recent beneficiaries of a comprehensive land claim treaty with Ottawa – presenting a logical path for Greenland to follow. Imagining how such a scenario could unfold will require much further study, and would depend, in part, on the emergence of a transnational movement for Inuit unification that, as of now, has not taken root in either Greenland or Nunavut. Should such a movement arise, and for it to succeed, Denmark would have to agree to Greenland's departure and to Canada's expansion (as would Canada) unless it were to occur in two separate steps sufficiently paced to forestall Denmark's opposition – a scenario that may seem extremely unlikely today, but which, in a situation of war in northern Europe, might become more feasible.

Indeed, before Trump's unsolicited overture, Canada seemed the more likely alternative sovereign partner for Greenland, given the advances achieved by Canadian Inuit through

their dynamic mixture of comprehensive land claims, robust co-management, and increasingly powerful self-government processes as well as the long, close collaboration between Greenlandic and Canadian Inuit at the ICC. In recent years, Inuit leaders have expressed much dissatisfaction with Ottawa's commitment to fulfilling the promises of Nunavut, turning to the courts in frustration on multiple occasions, and in 2006 calling for the moral intervention of famed jurist Thomas Berger, to many Canadian natives the conscience of Canada. More recently, native rail blockages across Canada have re-inflamed long-simmering tensions between the indigenous and settler communities in Canada, straining recent reconciliation efforts of the Trudeau government, a situation that will likely be even further inflamed by the recent discovery of a mass grave at a residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. Amidst such circumstances, one can no longer presume that Canada, by default, would be the only logical choice for Greenlandic Inuit should they seek to change sovereigns.

Joining the USA: Not Necessarily as Illogical or Ahistorical as Many Think

Indeed, Trump's unexpected interest in Greenland may – despite the initially critical response to his surprise overture to purchase the island – provide an alternative to choosing between joining Canada or remaining part of Denmark, with Alaska's transition from territory to state serving as alternative model for Greenland's future. Such a possibility, of Greenland joining the United States in a constitutional union not unlike that of Alaska, is a scenario that has been considered at the highest levels of the U.S. Government before, particularly in the immediate aftermath of World War II, during which Greenland was an American protectorate and its strategic significance the coming Cold War was keenly appreciated. Such a tectonic shift in North America's sovereign political geography is uncommon now, and it has been a century and a half since a change of similar magnitude directly affected the United States, when, in 1867, Alaska was purchased from Russia – a move that was widely criticized at the time as a great "folly" but which, in the years since, has contributed much to American security, particularly since World War II. But it's more frequent, and recent, than many would think, with the aforementioned entry of Newfoundland and Labrador to Canada's confederation.

And while political leaders in both Greenland and Copenhagen quickly insisted that Trump's idea was without merit, and inconsistent with their own step-by-step process of

decolonization under way in addition to the very needle of history, Greenlandic officials did subsequently, and enthusiastically, embrace America's renewed diplomatic and economic interest in what had largely been an overlooked Cold War outpost rediscovered amidst the dynamic flux and strategic uncertainty of the polar thaw, and the consequent (and significant) rise in high-profile official delegations to and from Greenland including an accelerated re-opening of an American consulate in Nuuk, the first since 1953, in addition to high profile visits by leading members of America's strategic and diplomatic community, culminating in the May 14, 2021 visit by current U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken – notably via Copenhagen, and with the Kingdom's official blessing (and an in-person greeting once arrived on the island by Denmark's foreign minister and both Greenland's premier and foreign minister) in contrast to the unilateral nature of the Trump initiative.[4]

Supporters of the Trump's Greenland purchase initiative, few as they were, noted the increasing strategic importance of Greenland in a thawing Arctic, part of a wider process of Arctic integration with the world economy and its geostrategic architecture under way for many years, with roots dating back to the colonial era when Arctic furs and whale oil fueled the economies of both the New World and Old. They also understood it was a backdoor approach to recognizing the strategic implications of climate change in an administration that did not formally or publicly acknowledge global warming. Indeed, the economic integration of Arctic resources with the global economy is not only a contemporary phenomenon accelerated by climate change, but an historic one dating back centuries with deep and enduring roots. During the Gold Rush era, the mineral potential of the Far North would be equally recognized for its strategic-economic value (leading to a brief demographic imbalance in the Yukon Territory, with more Americans in the Klondike than Canadians, and Ottawa rightly concerned there could be instability and potentially a secession risk); and in the twentieth century, with the advent of air power, the strategic-military value of the region was recognized for its own sake, while its energy and mineral resources continued to be highly sought after by all of the Arctic states, driving a new wave of northern resource development.

During World War II, thousands of U.S. soldiers were stationed across the North, building the strategic Alaska-Canada (Alcan) highway, the lesser-known Canol road, a slew of air bases, and protecting the vital Northwest Staging Route ferrying Lend-Lease aircraft to the Eastern Front, where the Nazi military onslaught was, at great sacrifice by America's

Russian war-time partner, brought to a halt. At the same time, the U.S. Coast Guard's Greenland Patrol defended Greenland, which came under America's direct military protection after Denmark fell to the Germans, from becoming a North American beach head for further Nazi advances – indeed, the specter of Greenland falling, and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence becoming vulnerable to Nazi conquest, would concern war planners until the machinery of the Nazi state was decisively demolished. It wasn't long after World War II came to an end that President Truman floated the idea of purchasing Greenland from Denmark for $100 million, an idea that *Time Magazine* endorsed for its strategic wisdom the very next year, with widespread encouragement from war planners who recognized Greenland's strategic prominence for the post-war world.

During the Cold War, the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line was built across the Inuit homeland, protecting the North American continent from strategic bomber assault, the Thule air base augmented American air power in the region, and an American consulate in Nuuk helped to reinforce America's presence. The waters off both Greenland and Iceland, the famed Greenland-Iceland-UK (G-I-UK) gap, would come to play a central role during the U.S.-Soviet confrontation and in America's forward maritime strategy near the Cold War's end. Soon after the Cold War ended, columnist and foreign affairs expert Walter Russell Mead proposed in all seriousness, in his July 1992 column in the *LA Times*, to purchase Siberia from Boris Yeltsin's Russia for $1-2 trillion USD.

While the outright purchase of such a large portion of the globe is now uncommon, and due to this relative infrequency is widely perceived to be better-suited to the world of yesteryear than that of today, it wasn't all that long ago that large-scale shifts in borders were more the norm and less the exception. And in today's world, so much is in flux, and let's not forget that it was only a half-dozen years ago that Crimea quickly fell to Moscow's expansionist ambitions, experiencing a rapid annexation by a resurgent Russia – changing hands largely without bloodshed (in contrast to the subsequent contest for eastern Ukraine), suggesting that such tectonic shifts in political geography do remain possible, and in some cases, might even contribute to geopolitical stability. It is thus conceivable that in a future world, Greenland's union with the United States could again be envisioned.

It is no secret that Russian President Vladimir Putin has been fortifying his vast Arctic territories, with mothballed military bases unused since the Cold War period undergoing a

recent and ongoing strategic refurbishment on a scale comparable to Beijing's fortifications of contested islands in the South China Sea, gaining increasing strategic attention and media coverage – as both Russia and China seek to expand their global military influence and to secure their most proximate island chains.[5] There is every reason to expect the U.S. to do much the same, by strengthening its own strategic architecture and re-fortifying its own proximate island chains along its ramparts, from the Aleutian Islands guarding the Bering Strait, to the Canadian Arctic archipelago standing watch over North America's northern flank, to the islands that anchor the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap. America's rekindled interest in Greenlandic security, along with the return of U.S. forces to Iceland (now on a rotating basis), reflect this strategic re-awakening, as does its icebreaker modernization program, the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) Program. Thinking ahead to a more fluid geopolitical world, and toward the protection of the more isolated island outposts in the Far North that remain vulnerable in such a world, is a prudent exercise given the perceived risks associated with both increasing state rivalry in the Arctic, and of Arctic climate change.

Exchanging Colonial Sovereigns: An Alternative to Independence

To imagine a hypothetical world in which Greenland might become an American territory, on a path toward statehood not unlike that which Alaska followed, is to imagine a world in which North America is more secure and united than it is today. Greenlandic Inuit, who suffer from a long legacy of neglect and whose colonial experience, despite recent gains in autonomy, has not been entirely positive, particularly in the smaller and more remote villages lacking basic infrastructure and economic opportunities, could indeed stand to benefit in multiple ways.

First and foremost, the defense of Greenland in time of war would be strengthened by its constitutional integration into the U.S. polity, much the way Alaska's has been since its purchase, and this alone could deter war from ever taking place. That the legacy of Russian colonialism, which under the RAC was brutal and exploitative, could be gradually reversed in Alaska over time – where particularly since the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 and the subsequent Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, gains by Alaska natives have been notable, even if still a work in progress – is illustrative of the changes we can expect in such a hypothetical future.

While Greenland's gradual process of increasing autonomy and decolonization under Danish rule would be up-ended by such a change of sovereigns, a mutually positive outcome of a U.S. purchase could be a win-win for both Greenlanders and for America. There would have to consent to such an exchange of sovereigns, to be sure, and that would require a referendum to be held. But, once the people of Greenland make their choice, if they choose to join the United States in union, it would be an historically transformative event on a scale of the Alaska purchase, and with the same long-term potential strategic and economic benefits. It may not be likely, and at the moment is not under consideration by either the U.S., the Danes or the Greenlanders. Indeed, it may well have been just a brief flirtation, and not a long-term strategic commitment of the President's, and thus different from, say, Secretary of State William H. Seward's embrace of Alaska as a critical component of America's expansion. But it is no less a scenario worthy of study.

Because the globalized world is vastly different from the colonial world, however, it would require additional parameters be met than required for the Alaska purchase. Like with the Alaska purchase, which Russia welcomed for the financial relief it provided, as well as its reduction in strategic pressure with the century-old United States providing a much-needed buffer between the British Empire in North America and the remaining territory of mother Russia on the Eurasian side of the Bering Strait. But in addition, the people of Greenland, who are majority Inuit, would have to also welcome a change in sovereigns, and find American policies and investment, in addition to its military protection, attractive enough to forego independence. Because securing and sustaining independence with a population of 56,000 is quite a difficult challenge, a formal sovereign association with the United States might, in some circumstances, appeal to the people of Greenland. Just as the earlier-mentioned scenario of Greenland joining Canada would require Greenlanders to find merit in the Nunavut model of regional self-governance, for the scenario of Greenland becoming part of the United States, Greenlanders would have to find merit in the "Alaska model," with its combination of multi-level governance, settled land claims, still-evolving structures for co-management between the various levels of governance (federal, state, tribal, and municipal), and robust natural resource development experience.

Indeed, were Greenlanders to one day consider whether to join the United States or Canada (in lieu of pursuing independence), their choice may be between resource-development (more robust in Alaska, with its strong state government, than in Arctic Canada) vs. cultural

and environmental protections (which are more robust in Arctic Canada than Alaska, owing to the absence of a powerful state level of government, more readily enabling an alignment of indigenous and federal interests), the very same fault line that divides contemporary Alaska. Issues of future settlement by non-Inuit would also surely be an issue: Alaska today is less than 15% native (and over 85% settler), while Nunavut remains nearly 85% native (and less than 15% settler), as if an inverse mirror image of one another. Greenland is, at present, closer to 90% native, so is more aligned with Nunavut in terms of its ethnography. On the other hand, Canada, by virtue of its proximity to the United States, is largely buffered from the risks and dangers of world politics, and unlikely to face an external threat to its sovereignty. Greenland, however, is quite exposed, on the outer edge of the North American continent, and in waters that are not only increasingly strategic, but also potentially contested. It faces existential risks as a polity much the way Iceland does, perhaps more so because of its smaller demography and more expansive geography. If alliance membership alone does not guarantee its independence, perhaps a closer constitutional relationship, such as territorial status and a path toward statehood, could one day prove to be an appealing option to the people of Greenland.

Dual-Secession Models: Strength through Confederation

Often, when Greenlandic independence is considered critically, its small population and vast territorial breadth (and its even more vast EEZ offshore) is presumed to leave the island in an inevitably unviable position, particularly should its independence ever be contested by force – suggesting there is at least some strategic and economic logic to a change of sovereigns rather than a bid for a fragile sovereign independence. But a mere changing of sovereigns may fail to find domestic support among Greenlanders; even so, going it alone need not be the only path left to pursue. Indeed, Greenland may in the face of so many obstacles to sovereign viability continue to choose to remain part of the Kingdom of Denmark by mutual consent, and thus decelerate its march toward independence and continue to refine its relationship, and expand its autonomy over time, with the same incrementalism as in the past.

Alternatively, it is also possible that the movement for independence in Greenland could inspire a similar movement in Canada – particularly Nunavut, which has close historical, cultural and familial ties to Greenland (with its north settled by Canadian Inuit just over a

century ago) in addition to its close geographical proximity to Greenland, where Inuit already govern at the territorial level but face continuing implementation resistance from Ottawa – resulting in the theoretical potential for a transnational movement for dual-secession from both Canada and Denmark. While Canadian Inuit have gained much in native rights and self-governing powers, more than in any other Arctic region, their communities still remain traumatized, with multiple indicators of societal collapse including epidemic levels of suicide, substance abuse, and community violence. Should Ottawa remain unwilling or unable to fulfil the aspirations of Inuit for meaningful autonomy and the many material comforts enjoyed by southern Canadians (ranging from health security and community safety to educational opportunity), one can envision a movement emerging in Nunavut that aligns with Greenland's independence movement, where seeds for a dual-secession movement may find fertile soil.

Dual-secession would be complex to manage, posing even greater risks to the United States and its NATO partners' security, comparable in scale to the Quebec independence movement further south, which over the years has threatened to destabilize the northeast of North America, coming perilously close to a Quebec secession in 1995. While much progress has been made toward healing the enduring French-English divide in Canada, it is not inconceivable that the movement could re-intensify, and if it did, the fate of Nunavut to its north and Nunatsiavut to its east could be profoundly affected – either by overt Quebec military expansion to secure these vulnerable, majority-Inuit flanks, or covert efforts to destabilize these regions to prevent them from serving as staging grounds from which Anglo-Canada could destabilize Quebec's energy-rich north. Further, in the event Quebec one day secedes from Canada, Inuit to Quebec's north could seize the opportunity to make a similar bid for independence – and in so doing, may find many reasons to partner with Greenland in its quest. Such a scenario, while clearly improbable at the moment, remains worthy of future study, since the role Nunavut and Nunatsiavut might play in a post-Quebec Canadian confederation, and their likelihood of being caught in the whirlwind of chaos precipitated by a Quebec secession, could be of much consequence.

Joining Iceland and/or the Faroes: Dual Secession with a Twist — A Confederation of Former High North Atlantic Colonies

A similar dual-secession movement might emerge to Greenland's east, where currently

separate movements for a gradual and mutual secession from Denmark have emerged in both Greenland and the Faroe Islands, modeled in part on the successful independence movement by Iceland a century ago. If the movements for Faroese and Greenlandic independence were to merge into a single High Atlantic independence movement, once can envision the potential confederation of the Faroes, Greenland and Iceland – a union of former Danish colonies that share a colonial heritage and many post-colonial synergies. This scenario would create, in essence, a greater Icelandic sovereign entity, leveraging Iceland's diplomatic, economic, and political strengths along with its central strategic role as a strategic hub between Europe and North America within the NATO alliance. The demographic diversity of such a union, united by its shared heritage of remote subsistence marine resource harvesting communities, whether seal, whale, or cod, would lay the foundation for a fascinating polity enriched by its own regional variation and distinctiveness.

In contrast to a dual Nunavut-Greenland secession, with all its risks and complexities, such an island-confederation of former Danish colonies could offer the region much promise of stability and cohesion, since the two new secessions would be equally embraced by both island colonies as well as their mutual colonizing sovereign, and their constitutional union with Iceland would further bring solace to their mutual alliance partners concerned with the emergence of new EEZs in newly independent microstates lacking the self-defense, search and rescue, or monitoring capacity for EEZ enforcement. Reykjavik could serve as a mentor to both Greenland and the Faroes, offering independence through confederation, much the way the union of the Malay peninsula with most of northern Borneo did after World War II – harnessing the movement for independence and away from colonialism while avoiding the specter of balkanization and instability. Originally, Singapore – the economic engine of that region – was set to be part of the new Malaysian state, along with Sarawak and Sabah, and had Singapore stayed in Malaysia, its role would likely mirror that which Reykjavik could play in an Iceland-Greenland-Faroe Islands confederation, as an engine of economic growth, a model for effective, efficient and democratic self-governance, and a center for education and training.

While a constitutional union with the United States was, from the moment the Trump White House proposed it, highly controversial and widely lampooned, a confederation of former High North Atlantic colonies seems less likely to face as much criticism, even if not actively under consideration now. Iceland, independent now for over seventy-five years and

autonomous for more than a century, can thus serve as a mentor to its neighbors as they follow down the path that it earlier blazed, with the full blessing of their mutual (former) colonizer, and a close relationship with Copenhagen after independence. While Iceland's sovereign independence is universally recognized, and a fixture of the Arctic's political geography that contributes not only to the region's unique and enduring collaborative balance between East and West dating back to the Cold War, but to its dynamic balancing of the interests of small and large states, as well as between hard-power and soft-power approaches to international relations and regional security; it would not be illogical to view Iceland's independence experience as part of a sequential process of decolonization across the High North Atlantic, both inspiring and guiding the movements for independence of its neighbors – positioning Iceland as an exemplary leader on how to amicably decolonize, remain friends with the former colonizer, and emerge as a bridge between the many seeming contradictions inherent in the diverse NATO alliance, much the way Greenland (if and when it does secede from Denmark) can serve as a bridge between the indigenous and the Westphalian worlds.

So while each movement for independence in the High North Atlantic is generally viewed as *sui generis*, viewing them in tandem and in sequence raises an interesting possibility of confederation after independence. All three, once sovereign, will emerge on the world stage as relatively vulnerable microstates, with populations that would be hard pressed to secure independence in war time on their own – but whose strategic geography, despite their asymmetries in scale, infrastructure, and resource potential, positions them as important future alliance partners. With a shared security challenge and a common history of colonization, and with strong cultural, maritime, trade and diplomatic ties, there could be numerous benefits of forging a common union, one highly decentralized to ensure maximal achievement of sovereign aspirations, but not necessarily independent of one another. Just as there is a logic in Greenland uniting with the Inuit of Canada's Eastern and High Arctic, one can as logically imagine a High North Atlantic union. Whether the will for such a union ever emerges, or can overcome centrifugal forces pulling the three insular polities apart, remains to be seen, but the theoretical potential is no less intriguing.

Village Sovereignty, Multi-Village Secession, and the Return of the Polis?

There is one other secession model to consider, one more complex than these models of dual

secession contemplated above, and that is a secessionary cascade in the more isolated and remote villages which share a strong tradition of independence and survival against adversity, harsh climate, and limitations in resources and their accessibility, from both the colonial sovereigns (where they exist), and regional governments (that have gained much autonomy), and which the more remote communities often find pose a common threat to their interests, and in many cases, their survival as distinct ethnolinguistic communities. Whether that means cutting ties with both Ottawa and Iqaluit on one side of Baffin Bay, and with Copenhagen and Nuuk on the other, or just breaking free of Nuuk and Copenhagen, the result is the same: a Balkanization process in favor of localized forms of micro-sovereignty. One can even envision a restoration of a security relationship between pro-Copenhagen remote communities and Denmark even as they sever their ties to what some perceive as a neocolonial governing structure in Nuuk, no better than the more distant sovereign Nuuk aspires to replace.

Such yearnings have been felt across the Arctic and subarctic for generations and appear from time to time in different places, such as a 1992 "study" the Inupiat leadership told the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (as it was then called) they would sponsor to investigate their potential to secede from Alaska and form not an independent sovereign polity, but a "51st state" in the U.S. union, a research endeavor that catalyzed a formal response by the state of Alaska to forestall. After the Alaska land claim was enacted in 1971, standing up a new system of native corporations and in time a new generation of corporate leaders, a tribal sovereignty movement erupted across much of rural Alaska in search of a return to village autonomy, and federal protection from not only state-level governance but from the assimilating pressures of modernization and globalization. Alaska's constitution allows for the formation of municipal boroughs for Alaska's distinctive natural regions, such as on the North Slope where the Inupiat reside, providing a path for municipal governance to embody the sovereign aspirations of a unified region – but which in 1992 seemed far too limited against a state government in Alaska that opposed greater protections of Inupiat subsistence rights. Across the border, efforts to construct a Western Arctic Regional Municipality to jointly govern Inuvialuit and Gwich'in communities, shared a similar aspiration, albeit one that ultimately fell short of implementation, despite coming close more than once – for a more localized version of sovereignty and autonomy.

Justice Thomas Berger, when heading up the Alaska Native Review Commission in the

mid-1980s, called his series of hearings a "village journey" which ultimately called for a re-tribalization of Alaska lands, away from corporations and corporate values, toward governance more traditional. Not long after, in 1993, the U.S. Department of the Interior recognized the more than two hundred Alaska Native villages as tribes under federal law. It is possible that the people of Greenland, along with their counterparts in the Canadian and Alaskan Arctic, may choose to pursue a similar model, one that will lead to a new conversation about what sovereignty means, and how it can be nurtured at the local level. The fact that the city-state of Singapore, known affectionately as the "little red dot" on maps of peninsular Southeast Asia, has achieved such a vision, building a modern state with its own sovereign form at the municipal level, is proof there is no limit to what can be achieved within the city-gates, and in the Arctic region, each village is in its own way a country of its own, so why not assert a new sovereign form that embodies the strength of the village as a unit?

Seizing the Moment: Asserting a Stronger Commitment to, and Presence in, the Arctic

Given the widespread attention and curiosity that accompanied the critical response to the Trump White House's Greenland initiative, even in the absence of forward movement on the plan, the White House's renewed (and continuing) interest in the Arctic and its increasing commitment to engagement and forward presence in the region, has nonetheless been positively reinforced in the many months since – and this surely has not escaped the attention of America's principal rivals in Beijing and Moscow, nor of its friends in Greenland and across the lightly-settled and strategically vulnerable High North Atlantic.

Leveraging this moment, by extending America's Arctic presence through greater economic, diplomatic and military engagement with the region and its people, can achieve many of the very same benefits of an outright sovereign accession of Greenland, but without either its risk or controversy. As Greenland considers is many options, and continues its transformation from colony to a more autonomous and beyond toward a more formally independent sovereign status, continued engagement, and support of the people of Greenland, no matter what sovereign model they choose, will go far to ensure the High North Atlantic remains secure and free.

References

[1] Hannes Gerhardt, "The Inuit and Sovereignty: The Case of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Greenland," *Politik* 14, No. 1 (2011): 6-14.

[2] See the author's 2008 monograph, *Breaking the Ice: From Land Claims to Tribal Sovereignty in the Arctic* (Lexington Books) as well as his 2009 monograph, *On Thin Ice: The Inuit, the State and the Challenge of Arctic Sovereignty* (Lexington Books) for more details.

[3] For an overview of Arctic geopolitics in the post-Cold War era, including the era of the polar thaw, see the author's 2010 monograph, *Arctic Doom, Arctic Boom: The Geopolitics of Climate Change in the Arctic* (Praeger Books); for more on the evolution of the land claims model and its contribution to Arctic stability and security, see the author's Chapter 16 of *The Fast-Changing Arctic: Rethinking Arctic Security for a Warmer World*, "Stability and Security in a Post-Arctic World: Toward a Convergence of Indigenous, State, and Global Interests at the Top of the World." For a discussion of the complex diplomatic environment of the contemporary Arctic, see the author's "A Missed Opportunity: How China Ceded its Claims to What Is Now the Russian Far East, Leaving Japan as Asia's Pre-eminent 'Near-Arctic state'," *Intersec: The Journal of International Security*, October 2019, 26-28; "China and the 'Near-Arctic': An Opportunity Lost Over 150 Years Ago," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, September 5, 2019; and "China Lost Chance to Be 'Near-Arctic' 150 Years Ago," *Stars and Stripes*, August 8, 2019. For a discussion of Inuit involvement in Arctic diplomacy, please see the author's Spring 2010 article in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies,* "Cold Front: Hillary, Ottawa, and the Inuit: A Year after the Inuit Re-Assert their Sovereignty, Washington Takes Their Side." An earlier version of this article was presented by the author at the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA)'s Global Island Studies Webinar (GISW) on June 24, 2020, on a panel discussing the future of Greenland chaired by his colleague from the University of Akureyri's Polar Law Centre, Jonathan Wood, who is also contributing to this special issue of *NoMe*.

[4] Ned Price, "Press Statement: Secretary Blinken's Travel to Denmark, Iceland, and Greenland," U.S. Department of State, May 14, 2021, https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-travel-to-denmark-iceland-and-greenland/. As noted in the State Department's press briefing on Secretary Blinken's visit, before heading to Reykjavik for the Arctic Council ministerial, Blinken began "his trip in Copenhagen,

Kingdom of Denmark, where he [met] with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod to discuss our strong bilateral ties, commitment to combating the climate crisis, and our shared interest in strengthening the transatlantic relationship" and "then travel[ed] to Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, where [to] meet with Greenlandic Premier Múte Bourup Egede and Minister Broberg, together with Foreign Minister Kofod [to] discuss the strong partnership between the United States and Greenland and our shared commitment to increase cooperation in the Arctic."

[5] For instance, see Andrew E. Kramer, "In the Russian Arctic, the First Stirrings of a Very Cold War," *New York Times*, May 22, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/22/world/russia-us-arctic-military.html.