

# Greenland, Ukraine and all that

by GWYNNE DYER

Last Wednesday the Danish foreign minister, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, summoned the top US diplomat in Copenhagen to his office to complain that the United States is running a covert operation in Greenland, a semi-autonomous part of the Danish kingdom.

According to DR, Denmark's public broadcaster, the goal of the operation is to infiltrate Greenland's society and promote the island's secession from Denmark to the US. It's straight out of the Russian playbook in 2014, when Vladimir Putin was subverting the Russian-speaking Donbas in the eastern part of the Ukraine and funding a separatist movement there.

There's nothing particularly original about getting some dissident or sold-out minority to call on a great power to intervene in order to provide political cover for what is really an invasion. The old Soviet Union did it to Czechoslovakia in 1968 and to Afghanistan in 1979.

At peak arrogance, when the US was the sole superpower, it didn't bother with such niceties. It just sent in the troops: Dominican Republic 1965, Grenada 1983, Libya 1986, Panama 1989, Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003. Now it needs a bit more cover, especially when invading the territory of a long-standing ally, so let's find or buy some amenable Greenlanders.

To be fair, the attempt to recruit a few 'pro-American' Greenlanders to front the operation suggests that the Trump regime prefers a non-violent conquest if at all possible. On the other hand, it also indicates that at least some of the planners in Washington have been instructed to start preparing the ground for an American takeover. (Canadians take note.)

Would the Danes fight if such an invasion took place? Almost certainly not. Resistance would be futile, and anyway it's not really their island. 90 per cent of the population are Greenlanders (i.e. Inuit/Eskimo) who can vote for independence whenever they want. They're just waiting because they still need the massive subsidies that Denmark currently provides.

Would the Greenlanders themselves fight? A few of them might, just to put down a marker showing that they really want independence, not American citizenship. But it would probably not be a big fight or a very long one.

Would NATO survive? Not really: the basic rule of alliance-making is that members refrain from invading other members. However, most of NATO's other 31 members have depended on American military guarantees, particularly about nuclear weapons, for eighty years. It will take them at least five years to fill the gaps if they create a similar alliance without the US..

That is not an impossible gap to span, because half the Russian army is currently tied down in Ukraine and it would take a while to rebuild it afterwards whatever the outcome in that beleaguered country. Europe's best bet is to keep Ukraine in the war as long as possible (the US won't help) while frantically modernizing and expanding its own military capacity.

It's extremely disagreeable to have to make these calculations when democracy is in retreat and the real emergency is global warming. Those should be our priorities, but we are where we are and Donald Trump is who he is.

Russia is already a fascist state and America may end up as its closest ally if Trump survives. So who is left to defend the rule of law, and above all to protect the fundamental international rule that nobody may change borders by force?

That was the law, written in 1945 by the survivors of the greatest war in history, that has saved us from far worse wars for the past eighty years. Indeed, there have been no wars even one-tenth as bad as 1939-45 in all this time. Fear of nuclear war forced us to be reasonable, but 'no territorial changes by force' was how we turned that into a policy.

Now Russia has moved outside that law, and the United States is heading the same way. So who's left?

Well, actually, almost everybody else. China's obsession with Taiwan is regrettable, but it is rooted in a civil war between rival Chinese governments. On every other matter, it is a devout defender of the territorial status quo.

The European Union's members will strive to uphold the rule about no border changes by force, as will almost all the democracies of Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Africa's devotion to the rule that borders must not be changed by force is unshakable.

Together, Russia and the United States have about half a billion people ? one-sixteenth of the world's people. Yes, they have most of the nukes, but they are really unusable.

Almost everybody else lives in countries whose governments still uphold the key law about borders, regardless of their domestic political arrangements. We are not alone. We are the great majority of the world.