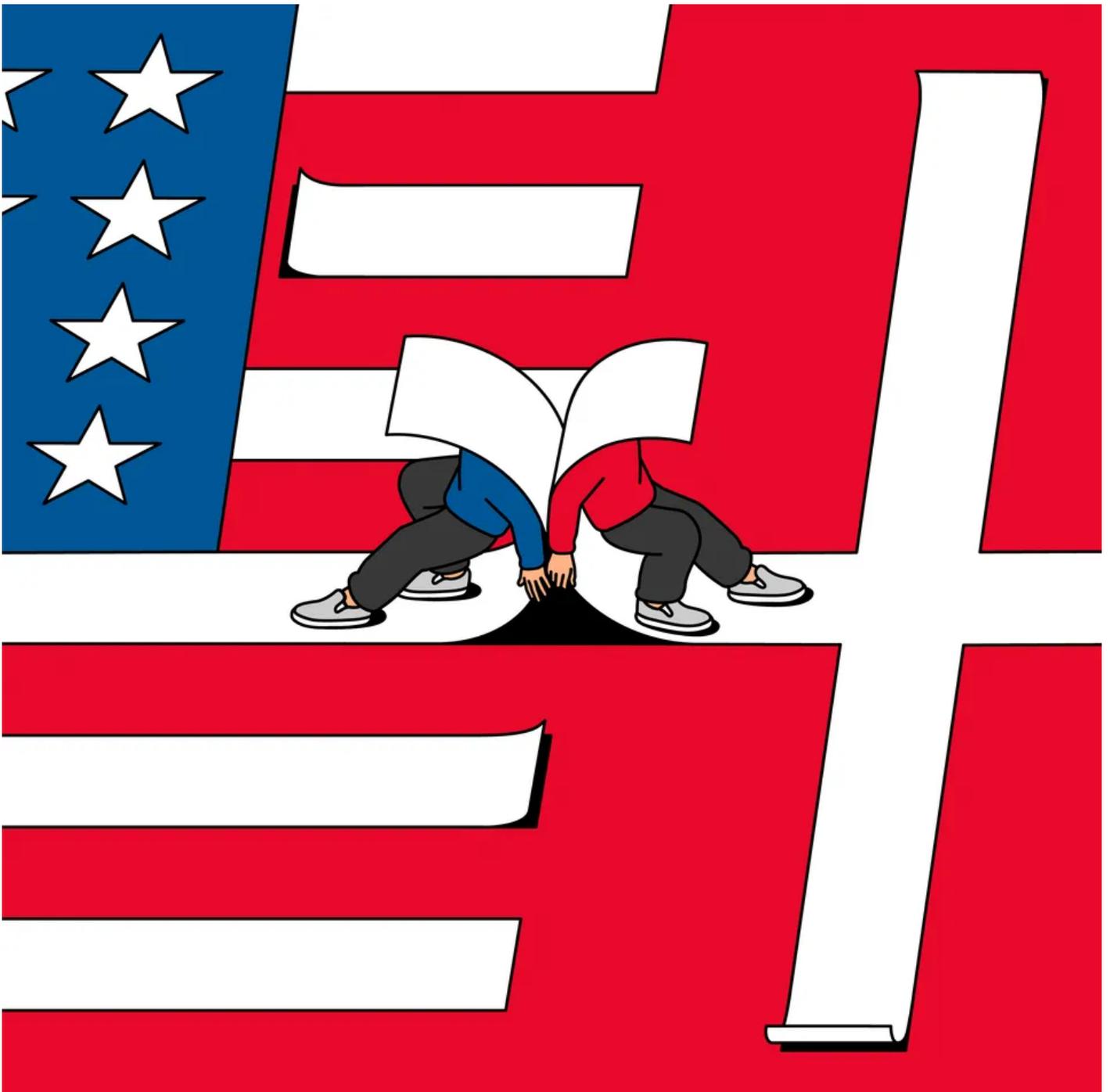


DENMARK IS SICK OF BEING BULLIED BY TRUMP

The U.S., once Denmark's closest ally, is threatening to steal Greenland and attacking the country's wind-power industry. Is this a permanent breakup?

By Margaret Talbot

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Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, a political scientist at the University of Copenhagen, says Danes used to believe that “the U.S. had some kind of recipe for making the world a better place.” Now, he says, “it’s hard to overestimate the sense of betrayal.” Illustration by Rob en Robin

Once upon a time—before the U.S. began threatening to take over Greenland and treating European democracies as enemies—the Danish politician Ida Auken was a deep admirer of America. Hanging on the wall of her office at the Folketing, the Danish parliament, where she has served since 2007, are framed photographs of two U.S. Presidents, John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, both seated in gently curving Danish-modern chairs. The images stand out in a setting that otherwise resembles a Scandinavian mood board: a boldly striped black-and-white couch, modular bookshelves stocked with texts on climate change, red snow boots standing sentinel in a corner.

Auken, a gregarious forty-seven-year-old, visited America for the first time as a teen-ager, attending school for a semester in Charlotte, North Carolina, while living with a local family. Over the years, and especially when she served as her country's environment minister, between 2011 and 2014, Auken regularly travelled to the U.S., and she counts Republicans and Democrats, evangelicals and environmentalists among her many American friends. She even became fond of quoting Ronald Reagan's invocation of the U.S. as a shining city upon a hill. Now, though, some of her constituents were telling her that they were more afraid of the U.S. than of Russia. For Auken, the photographs of J.F.K. and Obama had become reminders "of the United States I *used* to look up to." Wistfully, she called them "my old friends."

Ever since President Donald Trump began his second term, he has resuscitated American imperialism while giddily alienating allies. Canadians have been so infuriated by his tariffs, and by his glib pronouncements about making their country the fifty-first state, that they've embraced a vigorous new patriotism: maple-leaf flags everywhere, boycotts of U.S. goods. Throughout Europe, Trump's upending of trade and climate-change agreements has stoked anger and sowed distrust in American global leadership.

Still, Denmark presents a special case. Rasmus Grand Berthelsen, a prominent political consultant in Copenhagen, told me that “Denmark has probably been the most American-friendly country in the E.U.” Since 9/11, Denmark has adhered to so-called Super-Atlanticism, which makes alignment with the U.S. its foreign-policy priority. The country sent thousands of troops to serve in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Fifty-two Danish soldiers died in those operations—significant losses in a country with a population of only six million. Among NATO allies, Denmark maintained the highest level of popular support for the mission in Afghanistan, even though it sustained the highest number of fatalities per capita. Because of Denmark’s unusually close coöperation with U.S. foreign policy, Berthelsen said, it has been “shocking” to see how “serious the U.S. now is about ignoring our territorial integrity.”

Trump’s ambition to wrest away Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory within the Danish kingdom, has been a weirdly persistent keynote of his second term (though he floated it in his first). And he talks as if acquiring the Arctic island—which has its own parliament but receives an annual block grant of some six hundred million dollars from Denmark—is an inevitability. In speeches and interviews, and on Truth Social, Trump has offered variations on the lines “We have to have it” and “One way or another, we’re going to get it.” To justify this expansionist rhetoric, he has cited both national security—the island abuts a naval choke point between the Arctic and the Atlantic Oceans—and a need for unfettered access to Greenland’s mineral bounty. (It has deposits of oil, gas, diamonds, and rare-earth minerals, though many caches are trapped beneath glaciers.) Perhaps Trump is simply tantalized by its bigness, as he might put it. The territory looks disproportionately large in the Mercator projection, but we probably can’t count on Trump’s knowing that.

In May, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the U.S. had increased clandestine intelligence gathering in Greenland. The Danish public broadcaster DR subsequently revealed that at least three unnamed Americans tied to Trump were conducting covert “influence operations” there, such as identifying

residents who might join a secession movement. Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Denmark's foreign minister, summoned a top official from the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen to discuss the allegations, denouncing "any attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the kingdom." In December, Trump appointed Louisiana's governor, Jeff Landry, as a special envoy to Greenland. On X, Landry described his mandate bluntly: "To make Greenland a part of the U.S." (Denmark has refused to accredit Landry's role as legitimate.)

A day after the Trump Administration bombed Venezuela and kidnapped its President, Nicolás Maduro, Trump teased what might be next, declaring on Air Force One, "We need Greenland." Katie Miller, a former Administration spokesperson and the wife of Stephen Miller, the deputy White House chief of staff for policy, posted on X a map in which Greenland's interior was covered by an American flag. Stephen Miller then joined the fray himself, saying on CNN that "nobody's going to fight the United States militarily over the future of Greenland," and that the world is governed not by "international niceties" but by "strength" and "force." That day, Secretary of State Marco Rubio told lawmakers not to fret overmuch—Trump's goal was merely to *buy*, not to attack, the island. This reassurance was somewhat undercut by a White House statement on Greenland which noted that "the U.S. military is always an option at the commander-in-chief's disposal."

The Prime Minister of Denmark, the no-nonsense Social Democrat Mette Frederiksen, and the Prime Minister of Greenland, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, have repeatedly insisted that the island will never be for sale and cannot be forcibly annexed—and that territorial integrity is a principle to be respected, especially among allies. On January 5th, Frederiksen told DR, "Unfortunately, I think the American President should be taken seriously when he says he wants Greenland," adding, "I have made it very clear where the Kingdom of Denmark stands." Frederiksen then observed, "If the United States attacks another NATO country, everything stops." This defiance has rallied Danes behind her, though critics have questioned her ability to defend the homeland. On January 5th, the conservative-leaning newspaper *Berlingske* demanded to

know how Danish defense forces would respond to American aggression, asking, “How should Greenlanders react if one day armed marines walk the streets of Nuuk, and government offices are occupied by Trump’s henchmen?” Kenneth Øhlenschläger Buhl, an international-law expert and a former naval officer who served for forty years in the Danish military, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, told me that, according to a Danish decree from 1952, a foreign attack would require the country’s “military forces to respond to the fullest extent.” He noted that any specific defense plans would be kept secret so as not to “prompt Trump to act immediately,” adding, “That’s what I’d be afraid of.”

Although Greenlanders have had a sometimes fraught post-colonial relationship with Denmark—in 1953, the island became a part of the Danish kingdom, rather than its colony, and it has gradually adopted more home rule since then—few of them seem eager to be subsumed by a chaotic superpower intent on reviving McKinley-era colonialism. Responding to Katie Miller’s Stars-and-Stripes-stamped map of Greenland, Nielsen called it a “disrespectful” image. According to a 2025 poll, only six per cent of Greenlanders want to become part of the United States. Aaja Chemnitz, one of Greenland’s two members in the Danish parliament, told me that the talk of annexation made her constituents “quite anxious.” She now keeps in her parliamentary office a MAGA-style red baseball cap. Its one-word slogan, “NAAGGA,” means “no” in Greenlandic.

The Trump Administration has also been undermining Denmark economically, launching a sustained attack on wind-power technology, one of the country’s major exports. In August, the Administration ordered work stopped on Revolution Wind, an offshore wind farm in New England which is eighty-seven-per-cent complete, according to its co-developer, the partly state-owned Danish energy company Ørsted. Revolution Wind, which began construction in 2023, was expected to power some three hundred and fifty thousand homes in Connecticut and Rhode Island, to reduce carbon emissions by eleven million metric tons, and to create about a thousand unionized jobs. After the project was halted, Ørsted’s stock fell to an all-time

low, and the company, which announced that it had spent five billion dollars on the project, sued the Trump Administration. In October, Ørsted revealed that it would be cutting a quarter of its workforce in the next two years.

Danes feel proud of Ørsted, which has succeeded financially while combatting climate change, a national priority. Gernot Wagner, a climate economist at the Columbia Business School who has co-written a case study on Ørsted, told me that wind power can generate up to a hundred and forty per cent of Denmark's electricity demand. Ørsted, formerly a state-owned fossil-fuel company, underwent a corporate conversion experience about a decade ago, renaming itself and becoming the world's largest developer of offshore wind power. Berthelsen, the Danish political consultant, told me, "We think of ourselves as having developed this energy and spread it across the world." Wagner warned that the abrupt reversal on Revolution Wind would have knock-on effects for the U.S. "What European company's board is going to sign off on a billion-dollar investment in the U.S. right now?"

Provocatively, the Trump Administration's stop-work order cited "national security" reasons for cancelling Revolution Wind. On CNN, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum offered this rationale: "People with, you know, bad ulterior motives to the United States would launch a swarm drone attack through a wind farm." This struck many experts as silly. Wind farms *can* interfere with radar-detection systems, but the wind industry has developed effective methods for countering that interference. James Rogers, an expert on drone warfare at Cornell University, told me, "The industry works closely with ministries of defense and with those responsible for air and coastal defense to make sure mitigation measures are in place." The Pentagon approved the Revolution Wind project in 2023.

The far likelier reason for quashing the project is Trump's aversion to green energy in general, and to wind in particular. (In 2011, he failed to shut down an offshore wind farm that, he thought, marred the view from a golf course he owns in Scotland.) Over the years, he's offered, without evidence, a motley array of objections to wind power—that it's increasing cancer rates in humans,

that it's driving whales "loco."

The Trump Administration, again citing national security, also initiated a federal investigation of foreign-made wind turbines. The argument was that, because most turbine components are manufactured abroad, America could be held hostage by nations seeking to "weaponize their control over supplies of wind turbines and their parts." The investigation could produce a recommendation for heavy tariffs on foreign turbine equipment, of which Denmark is a major supplier.

André Ken Jakobsson, a professor at the University of Southern Denmark, is a scholar of "hybrid warfare," in which a country uses economic punishment, cyberattacks, and other aggressive means to harm another country, sometimes in concert with military operations. He told me, "The U.S. has been using all of its means short of conventional war in its campaign to try to get Greenland. We're uncertain—and that is how hybrid warfare works—how to interpret some of the actions." He mentioned Trump's successful demand that the Danish pharmaceutical firm Novo Nordisk lower the prices of its popular GLP-1 drugs (or "fat shots," as Trump calls them) by thirty per cent. Novo Nordisk has been another major driver of Denmark's economy, which has been robust in recent years. So far, despite the Trump-led trade wars that *Berlingske* called "a frontal attack on the foundations of the Danish economy," Denmark has proved resilient. Yet many of its citizens feel both whiplashed and confused. As Jakobsson put it to me, "Do Trump's trade actions and criticism serve a tactical purpose with regard to Greenland? Or is this just what he wants trade-wise?"

In September, a U.S. federal judge ruled in Ørsted's favor, saying that work on Revolution Wind could resume. But in December the project was blocked again when the Trump Administration froze leases that the Biden Administration had granted to five wind farms off the East Coast, including Revolution Wind. To Wagner, all the back-and-forth looked "erratic and vindictive." Today, every country's economy is tied to others, but a small nation that's as historically dependent on trade as Denmark seems particularly

vulnerable to Trump's caprices.

Auken, the member of parliament, is, like many Danes, bullish on wind energy. In 2019, when the possibility of luring Trump away from his fossil-fuel fetish seemed more plausible, she posted a playful video in which she addressed him directly, arguing that renewable energy offers a better economic deal. She sat next to a model of a wind turbine, wearing a pretty floral top, and good-naturedly urged Trump to “listen to science, listen to your wallet, and make a new deal. It's gonna be great.” Now, Auken admitted, it was futile to try to turn Trump green. But she clearly found his views illogical. She said, “Think about China. The most strategically governed country on the planet has chosen to invest in solar and wind, which is by far the cheapest form of energy and the fastest to deploy—*not* volatile, like fossil fuel. China isn't doing this to be Goody Two-shoes. It's an economic choice.”

Auken had other reasons to be disappointed in the shining city upon the hill, including the growing contrast in America between “poverty and extreme wealth” and the unchecked power of Silicon Valley's tech culture. But Trump's posturing about Greenland and his contempt for clean energy, she said, had given shape to an unfamiliar feeling. “In a very short period of time, we went through disbelief and then almost like mourning,” Auken said. “It's like we were *grieving* our relationship with the United States.”

Auken has never seen herself as a contentious politician—by Danish standards, she's more of a centrist, both tactical and conciliatory. In her office, she was casually dressed in jeans and a black cardigan, with a small gold cross around her neck. (She has a degree in theology and previously worked as a Lutheran chaplain.) She showed me her knuckles, which were skinned from a karate class she takes with other parliament members, including someone from the party she “most disagrees with.”

But now, Auken said, she was eager to stand up to the Trump Administration's bullying. The Danes, she noted, had given the Americans “access to many things,” from personal data to surveillance technology. “All of that has to be

reconsidered,” she said, including “what kinds of weapons or tech to buy.”

Auken was particularly vexed by the statements of Vice-President J. D. Vance when he and his wife, Usha, made an awkward three-hour trip to Greenland, in March. (The Vances cancelled plans to attend a dogsled race and other events after it became clear that protesters would besiege them.) Vance told Fox News that Denmark had failed to adequately secure the territory from potential Russian and Chinese encroachment, and was therefore “not being a good ally” to the United States. In a speech before U.S. military personnel at Pituffik Space Base, in Greenland, an American installation, he declared, “Denmark hasn’t done a good job of keeping Greenland safe.”

In Denmark, Vance’s fault-finding rankled in part because it was the U.S. that had chosen to pull back militarily from Greenland, winnowing the thirteen bases it maintained at the height of the Cold War down to one, Pituffik, by 2004. Berthelsen, the political consultant, said, “Since 1951, we’ve had this agreement with the U.S. that is a cornerstone of Danish foreign policy—we’ve allowed the U.S. military in Greenland. If they want to expand their presence there, they are more than welcome to do that. They don’t need to invade the country in order to do so.” As Buhl, the former Danish Navy officer, put it, under Trump the U.S. has been “kicking in an open door.”

The Danish government’s unwavering Super-Atlanticism sometimes got it into trouble with other European countries, and even with its own voters. In 2021, reports surfaced that, between 2012 and 2014, Denmark’s military-intelligence agency had helped the U.S.’s National Security Agency tap the phones of European officials in Norway, Sweden, France, and Germany, including the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. (The Danes had to make extensive outreach to European allies to repair relations.) In 2023, under the Biden Administration, Prime Minister Frederiksen signed an agreement allowing the U.S. to station military personnel at three bases in Denmark for at least ten years. The agreement was relatively uncontroversial then, but when the time rolled around for the Danish parliament to officially ratify the treaty, this past June, Danes were feeling a lot more skeptical. Welcoming the U.S.

military presence suddenly seemed like making good on an invitation you wished you'd never extended to a friend you'd since soured on. Parliament felt that it had no choice but to approve the agreement, because Frederiksen had already signed it, but polls showed that voters were unhappy about it.

Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, a political scientist at the University of Copenhagen, told me, “Our relationship with the U.S., after the end of the Cold War, at least, has been based on the idea that, even with the difference in size and influence in the world, we share some common values—and that the U.S. had some kind of recipe for making the world a better place.” He added, “It’s hard to overestimate the sense of betrayal.” In a speech in March to Danish student activists, Auken wondered how Vance’s claim that Denmark hadn’t been a “good ally” sounded to “Danish mothers and fathers who have lost their children in the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

A prominently placed monument on the grounds of a seventeenth-century fortress in Copenhagen lists the names of Danish soldiers who have joined the U.S. in NATO operations. The memorial’s official title, the Monument for Denmark’s International Effort Since 1948, emphasizes a very Danish message: that peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid are just as important as military action. (Danish casualties of nonmilitary efforts are etched into the monument, too.) The memorial’s designer, Finn Reinbothe, explained to me that the monument was “not about ‘glory and honor,’ or a Great Nation, but human beings, where the single member of society represents the highest value, and these values are not for sale.”

In May, newspapers reported the results of a global opinion study, the Democracy Perception Index, which assessed the attitudes of more than a hundred thousand people in a hundred countries toward other nations, including China, Russia, and the U.S. The net popularity of the U.S. had fallen from twenty-two points in 2024 to minus five; in Denmark, it had fallen to minus forty-five. Nico Jaspers, whose firm, Nira Data, helped conduct the polling, told me he’d been “super surprised” that regard for the U.S. had fallen “so much so fast.”

In a poll for *Berlingske*, ninety-two per cent of Danes said they agreed, or mostly agreed, that Denmark should look to Europe more than to the U.S. to guarantee its security. Forty-one per cent called the U.S. a threat to Denmark. This year's annual threat assessment from the Danish military-intelligence service seemed to concur. For the first time, it cited the U.S., along with Russia, China, and terrorist groups, as a risk to Danish security. The U.S., the report noted, was no longer ruling out "the possibility of employing military force—even against allies."

One breezy morning in Copenhagen, I met with Mikkel Hørlyck, a thirty-five-year-old who served in the Danish military and has since become a photojournalist chronicling wars, famines, and refugee crises in such places as Somalia and Ukraine. We talked in a lakeside café filled with spectators taking a break from cheering on runners at the annual Copenhagen Marathon. En route, I'd passed a troupe of blond Danes playing Japanese taiko drums and a couple of cafés where—startlingly, for an American—babies slept in carriages parked outside while their parents ate inside. (Danes are big believers in the benefits of fresh air, and the city is quite safe.) Hørlyck is tall, with shaggy blond hair, elaborately tattooed forearms, and a warm, friendly manner. "I haven't been to a place lately where Trump doesn't come up in conversation right away," he told me. "They're angry." Hørlyck, like Auken, had seen himself as someone who "really loves America." He described a trip he made to New York a few years ago, to accept a photography prize for work he'd done in Moldova, as "an American Dream experience for me." (He'd been thrilled to cross paths with Annie Leibovitz, who was also receiving an award at the ceremony.) Because of the human misery he documented in his work, Hørlyck said, he was particularly upset about the U.S.'s cuts to humanitarian assistance around the world—the gutting of U.S.A.I.D., for instance. In the past, he said ruefully, he'd thought of the U.S. as a kind of "guardian angel."

How should a Danish civilian respond to all this? Some have been boycotting American-made products. A Danish-language Facebook group that offers tips on avoiding or replacing everything from Kellogg's Corn Flakes to HP printers

has gathered nearly a hundred thousand members. “At the risk of sounding heretical, I miss raisins, God help me,” one poster wrote. In early 2025, the Danish tech entrepreneur Martin Thorborg told a business newspaper that he was avoiding American goods and selling off stock in U.S. firms, even though it felt “a bit like breaking up with someone.”

In February, the Danish supermarket conglomerate Salling Group started placing black stars on products made by European-owned companies. Salling said that it would not stop stocking American goods, but that it was addressing “a number of inquiries from customers who want to buy groceries from European brands.”

Some items have been easier than others to swear off. In recent years, Teslas had become extremely popular in eco-conscious Denmark. That was before Elon Musk, the company’s C.E.O., spent several chaotic months in the Trump Administration, crudely slashing government programs. In December, Reuters reported that, in 2025, Tesla sales fell by more than forty per cent in Denmark.

Although Denmark is known for the hyper-local, precisely assembled cuisine of its famed restaurant Noma—foraged herbs tweezered onto a plate—Danes are also surprisingly partial to Oreos, Heinz ketchup, and Coke. One night in Copenhagen, I had dinner with a documentary filmmaker who, when the talk turned to boycotts, confessed to having indulged in a Coke that day in his workshop. He mimed sneaking a drink, adding impishly, “It’s more contraband than reefer!” He’d decided to allow himself the occasional nip after learning that the Coke sold in Denmark was bottled in a local factory owned by the Carlsberg company. A plunge in sales, therefore, might cost Danish jobs.

Alexander Josiassen, a professor at Copenhagen Business School who researches consumer behavior, told me that Danish consumers are unusually attentive to “ecological sustainability and helping the less fortunate.” Moreover, most Danish citizens can afford to think about their purchases in this way: “The social safety net here is such that Danes feel life itself can

hardly go wrong. If everything fails, they still have a house, a decent life, so they really have the freedom to look at other things—to act on their values.”

In May, Reuters reported that travel to the U.S. from Denmark had fallen by nineteen per cent. (The trade group Tourism Economics has calculated that the U.S. will lose \$8.2 billion in spending by foreign tourists in 2025, noting that “policy-related concerns” and “harsh rhetoric” had contributed to a “negative global travel sentiment” about America.) Danes had been alarmed by media accounts of European tourists being held in immigrant-detention centers. Two young Danish women had reported being taken into federal custody in Hawaii because they’d mistakenly obtained the wrong visa for volunteer work they were intending to do on organic farms. The Danish foreign ministry, like that of many European countries, issued warnings saying that travellers to the U.S., especially transgender people, might face risks to their safety.

Last spring, Dominique Routhier, an art theorist at Roskilde University, turned down a Fulbright fellowship he’d been awarded for a research sabbatical at New York University. In an essay he wrote for the newspaper *Politiken*, Routhier noted that, “as a white man with his papers in order,” he knew that he would “run a limited risk” by entering the U.S. His goal was to show solidarity with “thousands of so-called ‘illegal immigrants,’ ‘criminals,’ or political opponents wrongly labelled as terrorists” in Trump’s America. Routhier told me that, although he hadn’t seen anyone else “publicly decline offers like I did,” the response to his article had been overwhelmingly positive. He’d been interviewed on Danish national TV and radio, and had accepted an offer to teach at the University of Toronto instead.

Meanwhile, Denmark, like other countries in Europe, was attempting to recruit American scientists and academics who’d suddenly lost their jobs or

research funding, or who felt targeted by the Trump Administration because they worked on subjects that it disdained, such as climate change or gender. In an Instagram post in English, the chief executive of the Danish Chamber of Commerce, Brian Mikkelsen, addressed “all the brilliant researchers in the U.S. feeling uncertain right now,” and told them, “There is an alternative. In Denmark, we value science. We believe in facts.”

Last January, Prime Minister Frederiksen visited Brussels, Berlin, and Paris, in what was seen as an effort to enlist support from other European leaders in resisting Trump’s designs on Greenland. In June, France’s President, Emmanuel Macron, flew to Nuuk, the island’s capital; Frederiksen joined him there. “Greenland is clearly a wake-up call for all Europeans,” Macron said. “You are not alone.”

Frederiksen has also received support from the Danish royal family, whose long-standing popularity in Greenland has come in handy of late. The fifty-seven-year-old king, Frederik X, appears to be genuinely fond of Greenland’s icy expanses, its culture, and its people. In 2000, when Frederik was still the crown prince, he volunteered for a four-month dogsled trek with members of the Sirius Patrol, a Danish Navy unit that monitors the island’s northern and eastern edges. His two youngest children, the twins Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine, have Greenlandic middle names—Minik and Ivalo, respectively. Even some of the most independence-minded Greenlanders retain a soft spot for the royals, finding it touching, rather than cringe-inducing, when the family dons traditional Inuit garb on state visits to the territory. Nina Sikkersøq Kristoffersen, a Greenlandic activist in Copenhagen, feels that for too long Danes have expected Greenlanders to be grateful for their benevolence while minimizing the ways Denmark benefitted from the island’s natural resources. But the royals, she said, “have this not at all racist view on Greenland. Frederik talks very respectfully about it and has been there so many times.”

When the King visited Greenland in April—looking jaunty and at ease while cruising on a fjord with the Prime Minister, and taking a coffee-and-cake

break with locals at a cultural center in Nuuk—the contrast with Vance’s gloomy trip couldn’t have been starker. Shortly before the royal visit, the King had issued an updated coat of arms for the Kingdom of Denmark in which the symbols for Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the other Danish territory, take up more space. In the new flag, it’s easier to see that Greenland’s polar bear is roaring.

Denmark recently pledged to give Greenlanders an additional quarter of a billion dollars in health-care and infrastructure investments. Trump’s nakedly imperialistic rhetoric has also prompted Danish leaders to look more honestly at their own role as a colonial power. In August, for example, Frederiksen issued an official apology for a program, started in the nineteen-sixties and continued for decades, in which Danish doctors fitted thousands of Indigenous Greenlandic women and girls with intrauterine birth-control devices, often without their consent or full knowledge.

Such reckonings are overdue. In 2021, Anne Kirstine Hermann, a Danish journalist, published a pioneering book, “Children of the Empire,” in which she chronicled how little say Greenlanders had in Denmark’s decision to incorporate the former colony into its kingdom, rather than granting it independence. Hermann told me, “Danes aren’t used to being the villain—we’re do-gooders. But Greenland has a whole different experience.”

Pernille Benjaminsen, a human-rights lawyer in Nuuk, said that Danes have always compared themselves, favorably, “to what happened in North America—putting Indigenous people in reservations, killing them.” But, she noted, “a lot of bad things also happened in Greenland—we had segregation between white Danish and Greenlandic people, we had eras when we were asked to leave stores when Danish people wanted to enter.” She added, “We need to kill the narrative that there can be a ‘good’ colonizer.”

Benjaminsen credited Prime Minister Frederiksen for being more forthright about the colonial past. Around the time that Trump returned to office, Frederiksen posted online that Danes and Greenlanders “have some dark

chapters in our history together, which we, from the Danish side, must confront.”

Some people in Copenhagen told me that, for younger Danes, the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S. had spurred soul-searching about their own country’s racism toward Inuit Greenlanders. But Denmark’s sudden attentiveness to Greenland was also an inadvertent gift from Trump. Hørlyck, the photographer, told me, “He has activated Danish people’s connection to Greenland.” Danes of his generation were asking themselves, in a way they hadn’t before, “What do I really know about Greenland? Have I really *talked* to Greenlanders?” He went on, “It’s quite funny that the strategy over there from Trump opens up something positive here.”

Trumpp’s antagonism toward Greenland has also changed Danish views about European unity. In the past, Danes had been soft Euroskeptics. They joined the E.U. in the nineteen-seventies, but they kept their own currency, the krone, and in 1992 they voted against the Maastricht Treaty, which tightened European conformity regarding security, citizenship, and other matters. When Frederiksen recently called for more defense spending, she acknowledged, “European coöperation has never really been a favorite of many Danes.” They’d grumbled, she said, about everything from “crooked cucumbers and banning plastic straws” to open immigration policies, which Frederiksen’s government had rejected.

Ole Wæver, a professor of international relations at the University of Copenhagen, told me that Danes have long had a “kind of anti-E.U. sentiment, with a lot of the same arguments that you saw in Brexit—‘Oh, it’s big bureaucracy,’ ‘Brussels is far away,’ ‘It’s taking away our democracy.’” Such attitudes, Wæver said, had helped to make Denmark “go overboard” in its allegiance to America. Elisabet Svane, a columnist for *Politiken*, told me, “Our Prime Minister used to say, ‘You cannot put a piece of paper between me and the U.S., I’m so transatlantic.’ She’s still transatlantic, but I think you can put a little book in between now.”

In December, Frederiksen completed her turn in the six-month rotating presidency of the European Council. During her tenure, she successfully pushed for the goal of European defense independence by 2030. Speaking before the Danish parliament in June, she called Europe “a phoenix shaking the ashes from its wings.” As Svane wrote of her then, Frederiksen worked with “the most powerful European leaders, both inside and outside the E.U., helping to forge a European response to Putin’s Russia and Trump’s U.S.A.” (*Politico* recently named Frederiksen the second most powerful person in Europe—after Trump.)

When I returned from Denmark, I kept checking in with Auken. I once caught her on Zoom as she biked home from work on a Friday afternoon, along with seemingly half the population of Copenhagen. (She chatted as she rode.) On the weekend of Trump’s Venezuela incursion and Katie Miller’s flag post, Auken sent me an e-mail with the subject line “The sentiment in DK.” Her message included a forwarded social-media post of the Danish flag superimposed on a map of the U.S. The comments below it were full of gallows humor along the lines of “Vikings were there first, time to reclaim it, LOL.” Auken told me that Trump’s threats and insults had been useful in the sense that they had prompted “Europe to get its act together”—to focus on its own defense and even pay for it independently.

But, Auken added, “it’s also a matter of recognizing that there are things we can affect and things we can’t”—including the anti-democratic direction of the United States. “Right now, it’s better and easier for us to build up Europe,” she said. Still, when Auken reached for a quote that summed up her feelings about Trump’s antagonism toward Denmark, it was from one of the most American figures imaginable. She asked, “What’s that Dolly Parton quote about the wind?” We laughed. It was this: “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.” ♦

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