Sarah Mackie
Hello and welcome to Northern Lights, the Harvard Arctic Initiative Student Podcast. In this episode we are going to explore the issues surrounding Greenland’s foreign and security policy. Jonas Bredal Juul, a student at the University of Copenhagen, asks whether Greenland can ever fully govern its foreign and security policies itself – and what the consequences of this would be?

This is Jonas Bredal Juul with ‘Greenland: Independence and Foreign and Security Policy’.

Jonas Juul
On top of the north American continent, deep into the arctic, you find Greenland. The world’s biggest island. A place of about 56,000 inhabitants governed by extensive self-rule – though still a part of the Danish Kingdom together with Denmark and the Faroe Islands under what is known as the Unity of the Realm. Two of the major policy areas which are controlled from Denmark are the security and foreign policies. Greenland does, however, have its own Government, a few representations abroad and many Greenlanders aspire for independence in the future. In this podcast I’ll talk to 3 experts to try to understand if it is even possible for Greenland to ever fully govern the foreign and security policies by itself – and what the
consequences of this would be. I started by talking to Martin Breum who is one of the most engaged Danish journalists in this field.

**Martin Breum**

Obviously 56,000 people with a very limited economy will never be able to defend their own country or even just have any form of presence at their maritime or land borders without the assistance of somebody. The question of course is whether that somebody for eternity needs to be Denmark. What they talk about very much in Greenland these days is the case of Iceland which is simply speaking a country that became independent from Denmark in 1944 and which has since had no defense of its own. But is still protected by NATO forces in a combined effort by all the other NATO members who have come together and decided, yes, we will provide defense for Iceland since it does not have its own capacity to do so. Iceland is member of NATO and in Greenland there is much talk about remaining part of NATO, becoming independent from Denmark and rely on others to provide the military and defense. And that other does not necessarily have to be Denmark.

**Jonas Juul**

Later in the interview he further elaborated on how Iceland went from being part of the Danish Kingdom to being fully independent.

**Martin Breum**

1917, more than a hundred years ago, Iceland became a sovereign nation after having been part of the Danish kingdom for a very long time. And when they became a sovereign state it was with a 25-year agreement with Copenhagen that the Danish king, meaning the army and foreign services of Denmark at the time, would still be let’s say protective part of the Icelandic reality. So, they had a long period of time where they could develop their economy, their fisheries, their welfare state before they became also a hundred percent controllers of their own security and foreign policy. The Danish embassies abroad were simply also Iceland’s embassies and so forth.

**Jonas Juul**

He did however also point why it is a hard comparison to make.

**Martin Breum**
There is some very, very necessary comments to make here to understand the complexity. Iceland is much, much smaller than Greenland. So, for simple physical reasons, geographical reasons, the question of whether NATO would provide the same kind of protection of Greenland’s airspace, landmass and maritime areas, the oceans around Greenland, as they do in Iceland is a complete unanswered question at this stage.

**Jonas Juul**
I later interviewed Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen who is an associate professor at the Royal Danish Defense College where he is affiliated with the Center for Arctic Security Studies. He also found it relevant to touch upon the case of Iceland.

**Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen**
An independent Greenland would have to have someone who guarantees its security. And that could be via NATO. But even if it gets its security via NATO like Iceland does today, it would still need to have a coastguard, and it would still need to have vessels sailing around Greenland and in the Greenlandic airspace to demonstrate its own sovereignty. And therefore, it could not only just have NATO membership. It would have to have some sort of foreign partner which could either be a nation or a private military company. To basically provide those capabilities that are necessary to be an independent state. And that why when you talk about Greenlandic independence, then it’s not in the same way as many European nations or modern nations are independent. It would always be in some sort of collaboration with some sort of an external party. Be it a foreign nation, most likely Denmark or the United States, or a private company that provides those capabilities.

**Jonas Juul**
Finally, I had the chance to talk to Aaja Chemnitz Larsen who is one of the two Greenlandic MP’s represented in the Danish Parliament where she is Vice Chair of the Greenland committee and a member of both the defense and foreign policy committees. I asked her how she believe the cooperation is working today.

**Aaja Chemnitz Larsen**
I have seen a positive development when it comes to a closer collaboration between Copenhagen and Nuuk. And I find that very reassuring actually. That we are better at finding
each other and finding good solutions because there has always been tensions between Greenland and Denmark.

**Jonas Juul**

Can it be a security risk if other parties such as Russia, China or even the US as an ally, eyes an opportunity to get in between Denmark and Greenland?

**Aaja Chemnitz Larsen**

Yes, definitely. And I think that’s the reason why I talk so much about these tensions. We need to relieve these tensions. Because otherwise it will just be easier for someone like China, or the US or Russia to come in between Greenland and Denmark. And I think even from a Greenlandic perspective that would be very bad.

**Jonas Juul**

To the same question Martin Breum refers to how the US has gained a lot of attention in recent years.

**Martin Breum**

If you ask the politicians in the Danish parliament, this is certainly a very present risk. And they are not looking at the moment at Russia or China. The challenge at the moment is the United States of America.

**Jonas Juul**

The security analyst Jon Rahbek also highlights the US.

**Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen**

When you hear how the Danish policy makers talk about the US today and if you compare it to a couple of years ago, they have become much more mistrustful. At least as long as Trump is president, they don’t trust that the United States has their interests in mind. They fear that United States is out to undermine the Kingdom of Denmark. Even though that would probably be a foolish thing for the US to do. Because basically, the US is getting all the advantages of having a presence in Greenland today. Without having to pay for running an Arctic welfare state.
Jonas Juul
Martin does however point the official position of Denmark towards the US is different.

Martin Breum
The government would not say this publicly of course. This is not public policy. Public policy by the government of Denmark is a warm welcome and full acceptance that the US intentions in Greenland is simply to assist the development of Greenland’s economy and this is very, very welcome.

Jonas Juul
According to Martin, the people of Greenland does have an interest in somehow strengthened cooperation with the US.

Martin Breum
There is no interest in actual integration into the US but this other type of cooperation where you look at economic cooperation, civil cooperation, cultural exchanges, scholarships etc. That is providing much welcomed input in Greenland.

Jonas Juul
After having talked about defense and security I asked Jon about the possibility of Greenlandic independence within the foreign policy.

Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen
To some extent Greenland already has an independent foreign policy today. You know Greenland has a small foreign ministry. It has 3 representations, but which are de facto Greenlandic embassies, in Reykjavik, Washington and Brussels. I could imagine that they could just scale that up if they were fully independent. Whether it’s the best solution for Greenland, I am not sure that is the case. Because I actually think that Denmark in many ways provides a lot of diplomatic services for Greenland, that would be very difficult for Greenland to provide themselves. But it would not be impossible. And if Greenland really, really wants to be fully independent, I do not think the need for diplomatic core in of itself would prevent it from becoming independent.

Jonas Juul
In the interview Martin Breum brought along a very practical example of how things are being changed in the cooperation between Nuuk and Copenhagen.

**Martin Breum**
The coordination is being strengthened as we speak on many practical levels. For instance, a matter that has been very complex, the question of secure communications. There is no link between the government in Copenhagen and the Government in Nuuk that is secure. Meaning they cannot transfer confidential messages, confidential papers electronically between Nuuk and Copenhagen, as far as I am informed. This is a matter of course of national defense so this is to a certain degree secret. But I know for a fact that when president Trump tried to buy Greenland, he wanted to buy Greenland, of course he was a pretty urgent need for secure communications between Copenhagen and Nuuk that was hopefully not listened into by any foreign intelligence services. The actors in Nuuk had to walk, or take a car, transport themselves a few kilometers down the road from their offices in central Nuuk to the headquarters of the Danish defense forces, from where there is a secure communications channel directly to Copenhagen. So, this is one of the very practical issues involved. But these secure communications channels are being established as we speak. And on many other small subjects, this type of coordination, this integration of Greenlandic civil servants, politicians, government members into the decision-making process of the foreign policy, the security policy process of Copenhagen is being arranged. And I think there is great satisfaction. I have just come back from Nuuk actually, talking to several people up there about these things. And there is much satisfaction in Greenland that the present government in Copenhagen seems to take this very seriously.

**Jonas Juul**
I asked Aaja how Greenlandic Foreign Policy interests are different to the Kingdom as a whole?

**Aaja Chemnitz Larsen**
I think Greenland has a different perspective when it comes to collaboration with different countries outside of the realm. We are part of the Arctic and for us it is very important that the peoples of the Arctic they are the first priority. And this is including making sure there will be workplaces for people living in the Arctic. This is the fact that we would like to see that Greenland, and the Greenlandic government, is the one primarily responsible for what goes on in the Arctic. And that nothing happens without the voice of Greenland.
**Jonas Juul**

Do you have any short term hopes for things will develop within these areas within the coming years?

**Aaja Chemnitz Larsen**

Yes, I hope there will be a lot of more foreign investment in Greenland. I hope there will be more workplaces in Greenland. I hope there will be more people in Greenland as well. And more education. I think these four pillars are the most important to focus on when it comes to the development of Greenland. And you know there is 70 percent of the population, they would like to see Greenland being independent. But only, unless, we are able to provide for the welfare that we have already today and maybe even make it better than what it is today. So, I think there is a lot of work for us politicians in the coming years, but there is also an interest and a focus on the Arctic that I have never seen in my years in the Danish parliament. And its increasing also in the coming years, as I foresee it.

**Jonas Juul**

As to the question of whether Greenland can gain independence within the foreign and security policies, I will let it be up for you to interpret the answers given by the 3 guests. I hope it provided you with some new perspectives.

Thank you for listening in.

**Sarah Mackie**

Today’s episode was written and produced by Jonas Bredal Juul. We would like to thank Martin Breum, Arctic expert, journalist and writer; Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Defence College and Aaja Chemnitz Larsen, one of the Greenlandic members of the Danish Parliament. This podcast was created as part of the Harvard Kennedy School’s Arctic Initiative Podcast Project, led by Dr Sarah Mackie.