

Greenlanders object to Star Wars

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Our role in the American plans for a missile defence has been the subject of a thorough debate in Greenland in recent times. The reason for this is the American military presence in Thule/Pituffik in Northernmost Greenland, and the ballistic missile early warning radar system there, which is intended to have a very important role in the development of the missile defence system – just like the radar at Fylingdales in Britain.

Throughout the entire twentieth century, Thule has attracted Denmark's attention and that of the wider world. At the beginning of that century, it was the destination of Danish and other polar explorers who undertook dangerous expeditions in the harsh Arctic climate with the assistance of local inhabitants. Thus, the American polar explorer, Robert E. Peary, only reached the North Pole with the help of the Inuit people of Thule.

After World War Two, most people associate Thule with military installations. This is due to the extensive American military activities in the area, primarily at Thule Air Base. In 1953, my compatriots in Thule and the area's inhabitants (Inuit) were expelled and forcibly removed. This was because one of the United States military's most important bases and radar warning systems in the Arctic region was to be developed from an ordinary airbase into what it is today: a ballistic missile early warning system. The shortest and most important routes between the nuclear powers, that is the air routes of intercontinental missiles, run straight across Greenland, the North Pole region, and the Arctic Sea. This is because the earth is not flat but round as a snowball, as is well known!

Since 1953, Greenland has been a part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Since 1979, we have enjoyed Home Rule with separate legislative competence and responsibility in all policy issues except for justice, currency, and foreign and security policy. However, during the last few years, the popularly elected assembly of

Greenland has actually achieved a greater latitude in foreign, security, and defence policy of particular interest to Greenland. Thus, the role of Greenland in foreign affairs, and in the security and defence policy of the Danish state, has been increasing gradually. Today, in the Greenlandic Parliament (*Landstinget*) foreign affairs issues and security issues are debated in the same manner as all other political issues, even though in theory – and according to the way the Home Rule Act is constructed – this should not be possible.

The Greenlandic *Landstinget* has 31 parliamentarians. My party (*Inuit Ataqatigiit*) has seven Members of Parliament, and we are participating in a coalition government with the *Siumut* party, which has 12 MPs.

Regarding the American plans for the development of a missile defence, the Danish government has repeatedly and unequivocally assured Greenland's population and the Greenlandic *Landstinget* that Denmark will not take any decision on missile defence without consulting Greenland and the political authorities. So, during the summer of 1999, our party has pressed in the coalition government with *Siumut* for a statement of Greenland's position on missile defence. On 18 November 1999, the Greenland government (*Landsstyret*) stated:

‘Provided that the National Missile Defence plans imply:

- that the provisions of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 are violated, and/or
- the Americans unilaterally insist on their plans, then the *Landsstyret* of Greenland cannot support an upgrade of the Thule radar.

If the upgrade of the Thule radar is on the agenda, *Landsstyret* expects to participate directly in these discussions, and *Landsstyret* is of the opinion that a possible upgrade of the Thule radar must by no means serve to undermine existing world peace.’

I want to underscore that my party *Inuit Ataqatigiit* is a very strong opponent of missile defence. Since last year's party conference, we have a clear decision that Greenland must not participate in any form of horse-trading or deal with the United States to further their wish to upgrade the Thule radar. At the party conference on 29 May 2000, we stated:

‘Due to our position at the centre of the dispute between the world's leading military powers, we have an obligation to participate in the efforts to create a life of peace and understanding.

For that reason we cannot accept the USA's plans for deployment of national missile defence (the so-called NMD), including usage of the radar in Pituffik/Thule Air Base.

We are worried that NMD will cause a new power rivalry between the military powers and lead to a new arms race. Furthermore, it is our opinion that the United States attempts to exploit NMD for isolationist purposes by disregarding the interests of other nations and states.

Therefore, it is our opinion that it is necessary to declare the Arctic a demilitarised, weapon-free zone, and that it obtains such a status under the auspices of the United Nations.’

Besides the risk of a new arms race, our opposition to missile defence also rests on other circumstances that worry us in Greenland. In our internal debates in the party, we have posed ourselves a series of questions. Will this project accelerate and stabilise world peace, or will the opposite happen? Is any potentially increased security with regard to attacks from rogue states in reasonable proportion to the new security risks that the missile defence project may foster? Is this so-called threat from rogue states not exaggerated, and hence overestimated in relation to the risk of new global instability, and can it not lead to world strife? Will the existing radar and the other installations in Thule and the planned upgrade of the radar increase the security of the Greenlandic society, of the Arctic people and of the world community – and, not least, of the inhabitants of Thule? We do not believe so, because world history has taught us clearly on several occasions that the inner and inveterate logic of military thought is that if the defensive capabilities are increased, then the offensive capabilities will be increased proportionally! Thus, what worries us in *Inuit Ataqtigiiit* and, in particular, the inhabitants of Thule who live next door to the military base, is that Thule Air Base will become a much coveted target for hostile missiles (to the extent that it is not such a target already) when and if missile defence materialises. We definitely think that Greenland is a target for hostile attacks due to the American military presence, and that the risk will increase accordingly when the Thule radar is upgraded as part of the missile defence plans.

This is inherent in the insane logic of every war. The enemies of the United States will feel a stronger temptation to paralyse and destroy its retaliatory capability, for instance, by targeting Thule Air Base and radar. Furthermore, these enemies of the United States will regard the missile defence installations which manage and control a conflict as being as important as the nuclear weapons in their own right. And, last but not least, the enemies of the United States will do anything to re-establish the balance of power between the nuclear powers by attempting to render the missile defence useless.

This is why my party, *Inuit Ataqtigiiit*, is so deeply opposed to missile defence. Firstly, and primarily, because the risk of an arms race, and thus of new global instability, will become imminent. Secondly, because Greenland should not share the responsibility for this development, which in reality is controlled by the lobbying and lust for profits of the American weapons industry. Thirdly, because the risk that Greenland will become a target for hostile attack will be the greater. And fourthly, because Greenland and, in particular, the inhabitants of Thule have already suffered enough from the rivalry of the military powers.

By way of introduction I noted that my compatriots in Thule were expelled from their settlements due to the American base and radar there. I will conclude by saying a little about the wrongs and offences to which the United States and Denmark have subjected the inhabitants of Thule. This is relevant to the missile defence project.

A case is pending in the Danish Supreme Court about the right of the population of Thule to return to its settlement and the surrounding hunting and

trapping areas which are vital to its existence. These to a substantial extent have been absorbed into the American base. In its verdict given in Copenhagen on 20 August 1999, the Danish High Court stated that, in 1953, the Thule population was expelled illegally and against its will from the settlement and the surrounding hunting and trapping areas, and that the Thule population, in its capacity as an indigenous people, is protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Amongst other things, the Supreme Court must consider the right of the Thule-population to return to its settlement close to the military base, and to sufficient of the territory surrounding the settlement to enable the population to continue to exist as an indigenous people.

The population of Thule currently live in Qaanaaq, to where they were forcibly removed in 1953. They have no access to the hunting and trapping areas which on their continuing existence as one of the least numerous peoples in the world depends.

If the Danish Supreme Court rules that the Thule population has the right to return to its settlement and the surrounding industrial area, then questions arise. Can or will the Danish state expropriate the land in accordance with the Danish constitution, which also applies in Greenland? Must the American base be moved to another location without settlements and hunting and trapping areas?

We in *Inuit Ataqatigiit* regard the case of the Thule Population at the Danish Supreme Court as of major significance for the entire population of Greenland. We have therefore sent open letters, dated 12 February 2001, to the Danish Government in the person of Foreign Minister Mogens Lykketoft, and to the United States of America. These request them to await the verdict of the Danish Supreme Court before proceeding with the missile defence plans, which at worst will imply an extensive enlargement of the Thule base. In other words, we believe that the missile defence plans should be put on hold until the Danish Supreme Court has reached a verdict.

In a democratic state, and in any community founded on the rule of law, it is a fundamental principle that governments and legislators respect and recognise the right of the courts to try cases brought before them for a final verdict. At the time of the hearing, my party had not received an answer from the Danish Foreign Minister. *Inuit Ataqatigiit* urgently appeals to the European Parliament to play its part in stopping this insane missile defence project.