

Why Does Trump Want Greenland and The Panama Canal? [C1]

Pur negando il cambiamento climatico, Trump sta attuando una serie di strategie per trarre vantaggio dalle trasformazioni geopolitiche causate dai suoi effetti devastanti.

Donald Trump's desire [to seize](#) control of Greenland and the Panama Canal is being shaped in part by a force that he [has sought](#) to deny even exists – the climate crisis. Last week, Trump [ramped up](#) his demands that the United States annex both Greenland and the Panama Canal, refusing [to rule out](#) economic or even military interventions to take them and threatening "very high" [tariffs](#) upon Denmark, of which Greenland is an autonomous territory, if it opposes him. "We need them for economic security," Trump said. "The Panama Canal is vital to our country, it's being operated by China. China! We gave the Panama Canal to Panama, not China." The US president added that Greenland was required for "national security purposes" and that Denmark "should [give it up](#)." Trump's rhetoric has been denounced by other world leaders but the [rationale](#) for this expansionism is being influenced, experts say, by something affecting both Greenland and Panama — rising global temperatures caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Even though the incoming US president has called climate change a "giant [hoax](#)", his son Donald Jr. [acknowledged](#) the value of mining rare minerals in Greenland that are being uncovered as the ice rapidly retreats from the vast Arctic island. Greenland's enormous [ice sheet](#) is losing an average of 30 million tonnes of ice an hour due to the climate crisis, raising sea levels and potentially collapsing vital ocean currents. Donald Jr. said on a trip to the island last week that he wanted to "make Greenland great again," accusing Denmark of blocking its self-governing territory from developing "the great natural resources that they have, whether that's [coal](#) whether that's uranium, whether that's other rare minerals, whether that's gold or diamonds." As sea ice [dwindles](#) in the Arctic Ocean, meanwhile, new [shipping routes](#) through the far northern latitudes are becoming more viable. Robert O'Brien, Trump's former national security adviser, said that Greenland, which has had a US military base since 1941, is key to counter the threat of China and Russia but

it is also “very important to the Arctic, which is going to be the critical battleground of the future because as the climate gets warmer, the Arctic is going to be a **pathway** that maybe **cuts down** on the usage of the Panama Canal”. While global heating is causing Greenland to **shed** its ice, in Panama it has helped **spur** a severe **drought** that has **gripped** the country since 2023. This **drought** has caused the human-made Gatún Lake, which supplies the water for the canal, **to plummet** by several feet, limiting traffic through the famed shipping **thoroughfare**. Last year, shipping entering the canal **slumped** by nearly a third due to these restrictions. The US reasserting dominion over the Panama Canal, which **it handed over** to Panama via a treaty in 1999, would, like in Greenland, give it opportunistic control over resources increasingly **strained** by the climate crisis. “Greenland has lost massive amounts of ice, making it more attractive for rare earth mining and oil **drilling**, while we are already seeing more traffic through the Arctic Ocean as it becomes ice free for longer,” said Alice Hill, a former climate adviser to Barack Obama. “In Panama, climate change impacts how the canal operates and puts pressure on the US to find different routes or try to get priority over China for the canal itself. “Climate change is altering the fundamental calculus of the strategic importance of the Arctic as well as the Panama Canal,” Hill added. “It’s ironic that we now have a president who famously called climate change a **hoax** but is now expressing interest in taking over areas gaining greater importance because of climate change.” The impacts of a superheated planet are helping **refashion** geopolitics in a variety of ways, as **droughts** and storms cause people to migrate, conflicts erupt over resources such as water and borders are even redrawn between some countries as snow and ice dwindle. The US isn’t the only power attempting to capitalize upon the **upending** of a stable climate, with China **hatching** plans for a **Polar Silk Road** that will connect Chinese ports to Europe and beyond via a northern shipping route as the Arctic becomes less dominated by ice. “Climate change is shaping geopolitics even if leaders don’t want to admit it,” said Sherri Goodman, an author and expert on the polar region at the Wilson Center. “China is clear-eyed about the climate threat and they will take advantage of that in access to resources and infrastructure. We ignore this climate threat **at our peril**.” “Trump, I think, sees this **rush** for resources and climate change is making them more accessible. It’s interesting to see how

isolationist he was in his first term, now he seems almost imperialist. It's hard to know where this will end up." This scramble for resources, and the rise of nationalist leaders in several countries including the US, has stoked fears of a sort of right-wing environmentalism taking hold where wealthier countries trample over those in vulnerable nations as climate disasters escalate. Jean-Noël Barrot, France's foreign minister, warned last week: "We have entered an era that is seeing the return of the law of the strongest." Leaders in Greenland, Denmark and Panama have all rejected Trump's calls for US assimilation. It's a sentiment many people living in these places, often overlooked in the geopolitical wrangling, share. "Our country is ours — it's not for sale," said Ole Hjorth, twenty-seven-year-old air traffic controller from Nuuk, Greenland. "Trump says a lot of things that aren't very serious, but now it's become quite scary." "We don't want to be American and these threats are really pushing people in Greenland away from the Trump administration and the US," said Aaja Chemnitz Larsen, a Greenlandic politician who represents one of the two seats that Greenland has in Denmark's parliament. "It's been quite disrespectful how this has been handled." Chemnitz Larsen, a supporter of Greenlandic independence from Denmark, said there was enthusiasm for new economic opportunities, such as tourism and even rare earth mining, to diversify from traditional practices such as fishing but that the climate crisis was a stark reality in realising this. "Climate change is affecting everything in Greenland, we are seeing land becoming exposed and also new species in the sea," she said. "For us, climate change is real, there's no doubt that it's here and will become more difficult for us in time." Published in The Guardian on 13 January 2025. Reprinted with permission.

Glossary

- **cuts down** = ridurre
- **shed** = perdere
- **it handed over** = consegnare
- **has stoked** = alimentare
- **overlooked** = ignorare
- **ramped up** = intensificare
- **upending** = cambiamento radicale
- **rush** = corsa
- **scramble** = confusione
- **to seize** = appropriarsi
- **hoax** = bufala
- **pathway** = via
- **taking hold** = prendere piede
- **seats** = seggi
- **stark** = cruda
- **ice sheet** = cappa di ghiaccio
- **coal** = carbone
- **shipping routes** = rotte marittime
- **to plummet** = precipitare
- **at our peril** = a tuo rischio e pericolo
- **wrangling** = disputa
- **acknowledged** = riconoscere
- **drilling** = perforare
- **warned** = avvertire
- **has sought** = cercare
- **tariffs** = tariffe
- **rationale** = ragione
- **dwindles** = diminuire
- **drought** = siccità
- **gripped** = avvincere
- **slumped** = crollare
- **strained** = mettere sotto pressione
- **refashion** = rimodellare

- **Polar Silk Road** = Via della seta polare
- **give it up** = rinunciare
- **to rule out** = escludere
- **spur** = provocare
- **thoroughfare** = via
- **hatching** = architettare
- **trample over** = calpestare