

An Arctic ‘cold rush’? Understanding Greenland’s (in)dependence question

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ABSTRACT. Over the last decade claims that an Arctic ‘cold rush’ is taking place have intensified. Proponents of the argument contend that the unprecedented effects of climate change plus strong global demand for the region’s natural resources are creating the conditions for a future economic boom. In both of these respects, Greenland merits particular attention. Some recent predictions suggest great riches accruing to Greenland, on account of its abundance of oil, gas and mineral deposits; as a consequence, some further argue, Greenlandic independence from Denmark is assured. In response, this article contests these arguments. For now, the natural and mineral resource sector in Greenland is tiny, and thus it is still much too soon to know whether it will even deliver the dazzling economic outcome forecast – let alone whether or not this outcome will benefit Greenland. In addition, the question of Greenlandic independence does not simply boil down to economics, but also raises various social, political, legal and strategic issues which are not easily resolvable. Consequently, Greenland’s independence from Denmark is not simply a matter of time, but remains very much an open question.

Introduction

Within the latest wave of Arctic politics literature, perhaps no other topic has captured more imaginations than the prospect of a rich, independent Greenland. Various commentators, politicians and pundits argue that Greenland is on the cusp of a ‘cold rush’ – that is, the combination of Greenland’s abundant supply of lucrative natural resources used to fuel the world economy, plus warmer temperatures in the region due to climate change now make feasible a drilling and mining bonanza on the island (Borsma & Foley, 2014; Chatham House, 2013; Macalister, 2011; Mazo, 2010; Shoumatoff, 2008; Stephens, 2013). In light of relentless international demand for oil, gas, iron ore, zinc, gold, diamonds, rubies and rare earth elements, this development has led many to forecast great wealth on Greenland’s horizon. Some have gone even further, linking Greenland’s future economic security and stability to formal independence from Denmark (Rasmussen, 2013). Once a thriving natural resources industry emerges, so the ‘cold rush’ thinking goes, Greenland’s new-found riches will make independence inevitable.

This article challenges each of these arguments. While Greenland is resource-rich and climate change is making parts of the country more accessible, it is still too early to say whether the exploitation of natural resources will deliver substantial economic gains to Greenland. It may be that a more multidimensional economic strategy leveraging current strengths proves more beneficial. Even assuming Greenland does raise its income and secures its economic future, independence is by no means a foregone conclusion. Although economics is an important factor, significant social, legal, political and strategic barriers to independence remain. These cannot be easily resolved with more money. Thus, the topic of Greenlandic independence is far more complex and nuanced than popularly portrayed. Contrary to widespread opinion, Greenlandic

independence is not simply a matter of time, but remains very much an open question.

A Greenlandic ‘cold rush’ ...

Predictions of a ‘cold rush’ in Greenland – that is, a climate change-driven boom in natural resource exploitation, which results in economic prosperity and political independence for Greenland – date at least as early as 2007. In that year, a US embassy cable reported:

Greenland is on a clear track toward independence, which could come more quickly than most outside the Kingdom of Denmark realize... Significant oil, gas and mineral resources – forecast by experts but not yet proven – could propel the Greenlanders after [the 2009 Self-Government Agreement (SGA)] to ultimately sever their formal ties to Denmark (Embassy of the United States, 2007).

From this time onwards, the prevalence of ‘cold rush’ thinking has become evident both inside and outside Greenland. Again in 2007, Minister for Finance and Foreign Affairs Aleqa Hammond (*Siumut*) pointed out:

If Greenland becomes economically self-sufficient, then independence becomes a practical possibility. We know that we have gold and diamonds and oil and great masses of the cleanest water in the world... It may be closer than we think (as cited in Woodard, 2007).

In 2013, after Hammond became Prime Minister, she described Greenland’s decision to lift its 25-year-old uranium mining ban as ‘a great step towards independence’ and claimed that mining revenue could replace Denmark’s annual block grant to Greenland ‘easily within my lifetime’ (as cited in Milne, 2013). Under the 2009 SGA, Copenhagen pays the Greenlandic Self-Government an annual block grant of DKK3,439.6 million (calculated at 2009 price levels) in support of its activities (see Folketing, 2009, s. 5). This amount is adjusted for Danish inflation,

although inflation in Greenland tends to be higher. It is thus expected that the real value of the grant will decrease over time. Subsequently, Hammond publicly and unequivocally declared independence to be Greenland's 'long-term political goal' (Hammond, 2014).

Across party lines, other high-ranking Greenlandic politicians have echoed these sentiments. Thus, in 2009, Minister for Finance and Foreign Affairs Per Berthelsen (*Demokraatit*) stated:

For Greenland, taking advantage of what nature has provided us when it comes to non-living resources has become closely related to our political quest for more economic self-sufficiency as well as the opportunity to someday establish our own nation-state (Bertelsen, 2009).

Similarly, in 2010, Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist (*Inuit Ataqatigiit*) ambitiously announced that:

[I]ndependence is something we need to prepare for, and we've set up an oil fund so we can be like Norway when it comes (as cited in Saunders, 2010).

As an unnamed official source put it more recently,

[T]here is the goal where we all want to become independent. Throughout the whole political spectrum, you don't talk about Greenlandic independence like something that might happen, or if it happens. It is a question of when (as cited in Steinberg, Tasch, & Gerhardt, 2015, p. 70).

In other words, Greenland 'aspires to be the first Inuit state in the world' (Ackrén, 2014, p. 57).

These statements have been backed by Danish legislation designed to facilitate the economic aspect of the 'cold rush'. The 2009 SGA established the principle that any mineral resource revenue generated in Greenland belongs to the Greenlandic authorities. However, once Greenland earns a certain level of revenue from such activities, the SGA sets down a scale according to which Denmark's annual block grant to Greenland will be reduced (Folketing, 2009, s. 8). Via this process, if the annual block grant is reduced to zero, then negotiations on future economic relations between Copenhagen and Nuuk shall commence (Folketing, 2009, s. 10). In 2013, the annual block grant from Denmark amounted to US\$660 million – a very large chunk of Greenland's total budget.

The Naalakkersuisut/Government of Greenland (GoG) has also taken steps to assist the 'cold rush'. In addition to its abolition of the ban on uranium mining in 2013, a year earlier the GoG passed the Large Scale Projects Act, which established the framework for the employment of foreign workers in mining and exploration projects in Greenland (Ringstrom, Vahl, & Fraende, 2012). Also, in 2012, it signalled its intention to develop the raw materials sectors in order to 'contribute significantly to Greenland becoming more economically self-supporting' (GoG, 2012, p. 25). In 2014, the GoG released its Oil and Minerals Strategy, estimating a tax revenue of more than \$4.4 billion in 15 years on the assumption that it achieves its goal – namely 'that there

are always five to ten active mines in Greenland in the long term' (GoG, 2014, p. 8).

'Cold rush' aspirations are not simply a chronic case of domestic wishful thinking. Pro-mining, pro-independence local views have reinforced and perpetuated international 'cold rush' forecasts – and *vice versa*. Borgerson has argued that simply displacing Denmark's annual block grant with Greenland-generated income 'could enable Greenland to demand political independence' and that 'Greenland might well become the first country born of climate change' (Borgerson, 2013). It has become commonplace to claim that mining and drilling are 'the country's ticket to freedom' (Emmerson, 2010, p. 265); the key to Greenland developing 'the financial clout to go it alone' (*The Economist*, 2015). From this perspective, Greenland has the makings of an 'Inuit petro-state' (Steinberg et al., 2015, p. 79). For Rasmussen (2013), Greenland's natural resources play not just a deciding role in terms of its status in the world but also a romantic one:

Greenland's minerals constitute a symbolic as well as economic bridge between Greenland of the past and a future independent nation. Any discussion about the island's mineral wealth is therefore by its very nature (geo)political... As a milder climate and global demand on resources make extracting Greenland's abundant natural resources more feasible, the geopolitics of mining defines the political future of Greenland and its eventual independence from the Kingdom of Denmark (pp. 3–4).

...But in reality?

However, today in Greenland, there is little hard evidence to support these frenzied 'cold rush' predictions. At the time of writing, there is just one active mine in Greenland; it opened operations in May 2017, with an expected nine year lifespan. Another mine is presently being built (J. Hollis, personal communication, 25 August 2015 and 18 July 2017). For now, no projects related to the other four mineral exploitation licences granted by the GoG are going ahead. Of the 50 mineral exploration licences currently on foot, just six have drilling activities planned this field season (A. Varga-Vass, personal communication, 21 July 2017).

As regards hydrocarbons, the situation is even more rudimentary. There are presently no exploitation activities taking place at all in Greenland, and in terms of exploratory work, none of the current licence holders have done any drilling yet. Of the 16 hydrocarbons licences granted by the GoG, nine are in the process of being relinquished, while the rest have no near-term drilling plans (GoG, 2017, pp. 14–15; J. Hollis, personal communication, 18 July 2017).

There are various reasons why the pace of mining and drilling activities in Greenland remains sluggish. Low commodity prices following the global financial crisis have left companies struggling to secure the necessary investment to progress their exploration and exploitation

projects. Thus, many of them have been put on hold, both in Greenland and worldwide. Small companies that tend to drive exploration in ‘greenfield’ sites – namely, those areas with a limited exploration history and only patchy geoscientific data – are particularly vulnerable in this difficult investment climate. Most of the areas in Greenland of interest to oil and mining companies are ‘greenfield’ sites. Finally, the higher cost of working in the Arctic comparative to other locations has also slowed exploration and exploitation activities.

Even assuming commodity prices make a major recovery over the longer term, Greenland remains a very challenging environment for natural resource exploitation. The population size is small – only 56,000 people – and, amongst those, training and education levels tend to be low. Drop-out rates in training and education in Greenland are high. For example, in the higher education sector between 2008 and 2012, while the numbers of starter students each year ranged from 142 to 214, the number of students completing their studies in each of these years fell in the range of 45 to 78. A similar trend is discernible in the vocational sector (Statistics Greenland, 2014, p. 25). In terms of infrastructure, land transport is very limited, with no roads between towns and villages. Hence, nearly everything – from people and equipment, to food and fuel – is moved by boat or air. While the warmer temperatures produced by climate change are increasing the levels of ice melt and accelerating glacier movement, for now around 80% of Greenland remains covered by thick ice (NASA, n.d.). The rest of Greenland’s terrain mainly consists of bedrock, and weather conditions are often brutal, frequently causing transport delays. It is not just the unavoidably high economic costs incurred as a consequence of these factors, but also the niche expertise and experience needed to work in rugged Arctic conditions, which suggest that the total number of oil and mining companies active in Greenland is likely to remain low.

Exacerbating this state of affairs is Greenland’s economic performance. In the lead-up to the election held in November 2014, figures released by the Finance Minister revealed a public deficit of €33.6 million (Dollerup-Scheibel, 2014, p. 5). This figure, and the slow development of the natural resources industry, demonstrate that replacing the annual block grant with sources of Greenlandic income is by no means easy and remains a very distant dream.

As a consequence, academic experts with an in-depth knowledge of Greenlandic affairs have started to question ‘cold rush’ logic. Even if a ‘cold rush’ was taking place in Greenland – a conclusion which is difficult to sustain in light of the above observations – it does not necessarily mean that the revenue produced by a booming natural resources industry would actually benefit Greenland. A report conducted by a panel of 13 specialists from the Universities of Copenhagen and Greenland suggested that there is a ‘high risk’ that the economic benefits of a prosperous oil and minerals sector would in reality accrue

to foreign workers recruited for their industry experience not to local residents (Committee for Greenlandic Mineral Resources to the Benefit of Society, 2014, p. 23). The report also highlighted the risk of Greenlanders becoming a minority in their own country if the oil and minerals sector grows large enough to fund Greenlandic independence ‘within 20 or 30 years’ (Committee for Greenlandic Mineral Resources to the Benefit of Society, 2014, p. 23). The report concluded:

In a scenario involving independence, it may be necessary to take another approach rather than following scenarios based solely on the extraction of natural resources in order to generate sufficient economic but also demographic resources to achieve this. Based on the information currently available, a scenario of independence can very well lead to a massive decline in living standards in Greenland and requires extensive economic reforms with major consequences for the financial situation of the average resident (Committee for Greenlandic Mineral Resources to the Benefit of Society, 2014, p. 23).

Others have also underscored that a ‘gung-ho’ approach to mining projects, without plans for reforming the wider Greenlandic economy, could leave Greenland in an even worse position once the minerals run out (Hviid, 2015, p. 10). Another consideration that is often overlooked is the likely negative impact of extensive drilling and mining activities on other potential and actual sources of income, such as tourism and fishing. For these reasons, Poppel (2014) has argued for a ‘more diverse and multifaceted economic development strategy’ for Greenland, which plays to its existing strengths. He suggests focusing on areas such as tourism, hydropower, cultural activities and expanding the processing and refining of marine products to achieve a more balanced economic plan. In an interview in January 2017, Greenland’s Prime Minister Kim Kielsen identified four priority areas for Greenland’s economic future: fishing, tourism, mining and education (as cited in McGwin, 2017). To date, fishing remains the most important source of income (McGwin, 2017). Against this backdrop, it is evident that ‘cold rush’ predictions are very premature at best, and wildly optimistic at worst.

Economic independence = political independence?

Fantastic economic forecasts aside, the fundamental flaw of ‘cold rush’ thinking is its equation of economic prosperity with formal political independence, as if the latter was an inevitable result of the former. While a strong economic base is an important foundation for independence, it is far from the whole story when it comes to deciding whether Greenland *can* or *should* become a nation-state. This is clear from the SGA itself. Chapter 8 provides (Folketing, 2009):

Chapter 8. Greenland’s Access to Independence

- (1) Decision regarding Greenland’s independence shall be taken by the people of Greenland.

- (2) If decision is taken pursuant to subsection (1), negotiations shall commence between the Government [of Denmark] and [the GoG] with a view to the introduction of independence for Greenland.
- (3) An agreement between [the GoG] and the Government [of Denmark] regarding the introduction of independence for Greenland shall be concluded with the consent of Inatsisartut [the Parliament of Greenland] and shall be endorsed by a referendum in Greenland. The agreement, shall, furthermore, be concluded with the consent of the Folketing [the Parliament of Denmark].
- (4) **Independence for Greenland shall imply that Greenland assumes sovereignty over the Greenland territory** [emphasis added].

Thus, both Greenland and Denmark accept that the details of independence are subject to an agreement by *both* sides and that any such agreement must be passed by the Folketing. Furthermore, both sides also accept that independence presupposes Greenland's *willingness* and *ability* not merely to enjoy the exercise of sovereign rights over Greenlandic territory but also to take sovereign responsibility for it. Nowhere in the SGA is 'sovereignty' further defined. Hence, it is sovereignty over territory – not economics *per se* – which remains the key hurdle to Greenlandic independence.

This understanding of sovereignty largely tallies with Bull's notion of sovereignty: for him, state sovereignty exists at both normative and factual levels (2012, p. 8). Therefore it is as important for a statehood-seeking political community to 'actually exercise' sovereignty 'in practice' as it is to assert sovereignty claims. According to Bull, a claimed right to sovereignty – even if supported by others – does not make a state 'properly so-called', unless it is accompanied by the ability to 'assert this right in practice' (2012, p. 8). However, the wording of the SGA – which refers to Greenland *assuming* sovereignty, rather than *asserting* it – implies that a more generous standard of sovereignty than that defined by Bull might be applied in the case of Greenlandic independence. 'Assuming' sovereignty leaves open the possibility that either Greenland demonstrates its capacity for fulfilling sovereign functions (that is, Bull's standard) or, at the very least, Greenland puts solid arrangements in place that address its sovereignty responsibilities.

To date, efforts by Greenland to tackle the sovereignty obstacle have been rather one-sided. So far, the focus has been on Greenland's *external* sovereignty – namely, 'its independence of outside authorities' (Bull, 2012, p. 8). In 2003, Greenland's Commission on Self-Governance produced a report outlining six future political options (GoG, 2003, para 1.3):

- (1) Independence;
- (2) Union with another state (for example, the union between Denmark and Iceland 1918–1944);

- (3) Free association (for example, the present association between the US on the one hand and Palau, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands on the other; or between New Zealand and the Cook Islands);
- (4) Federation;
- (5) Greater self-government; and
- (6) Full integration into another state.

The first three options require Greenland to become a nation-state in its own right. In a 2008 referendum, Greenlanders voted 75% in favour of greater self-governance. Since this time, Greenland's external sovereignty has been boosted by various provisions of the SGA, which explicitly recognise: (1) Greenlanders as a 'people pursuant to international law with the right of self-determination' (Folketing, 2009, preamble); (2) the GoG's standing to negotiate and conclude international agreements 'on behalf of the Realm' in areas 'which exclusively concern Greenland and entirely relate to fields of responsibility taken over [by the GoG]' (Folketing, 2009, s. 12(1)); and (3) the Greenlandic language being recognised as the sole official language of Greenland (Folketing, 2009, s. 20). The posting of Greenlandic representation to Copenhagen, Washington and Brussels, plus the participation of the GoG's Department of Foreign Affairs in international activities, including Arctic cooperation, the UN, the Continental Shelf Project and Nordic cooperation (<http://naalakkersuisut.gl/en>) have also bolstered Greenland's external sovereignty.

By contrast, the major question of Greenland's *internal* sovereignty – defined as 'supremacy over all other authorities within the territory and population' (Bull, 2012, p.8), and including enforcement powers not just decision-making (Evans, 1998, p. 504) – has received comparatively little domestic attention. Yet this aspect of sovereignty presents an even greater challenge. Whatever its economic destiny, there are good reasons to believe that Greenland will struggle to maintain its internal sovereignty entirely unaided. Some of these reasons have already been alluded to – limited human resources (in terms of both numbers and education levels); limited infrastructure; limited Arctic-capable assets; a large, inhospitable land mass; and one of the world's longest coastlines. As climate change generates increasingly navigable waters, the resource requirements for sovereignty enforcement are only likely to rise. In reality, overcoming these internal sovereignty gaps – which are currently plugged by Denmark – in order to clear the path towards independence means the adoption of political, legal and military/policing arrangements that are acceptable to both the GoG and the Danish Government. A way forward may be possible whereby Greenland *assumes* sovereignty for the purposes of the SGA, while authorising others, on its behalf, to *exercise* certain sovereign responsibilities in relation to its territory.

To this end, there have been a few suggested models for addressing Greenland's sovereignty gaps with a view to

making independence possible in practice. However, these models are not without their own problems. For example, one proposal for Greenland is an Icelandic-style model, where coastguard and law enforcement are run locally, within a wider system of security guarantees provided by the US and NATO (Wang & Degeorges, 2014, pp. 9–11). Yet given Greenland's demographic and territorial constraints, it is not at all clear that an Iceland-inspired model is a viable option. Unlike Greenland, Iceland has a small territory and coastline; a more moderate climate; a population roughly six times that of Greenland, with 60% of young people expected to graduate from university at some point in their lives (OECD, 2014); advanced infrastructure and prolonged, direct experience of the wider international security sphere through its founding membership of NATO. Although Greenland has been covered by NATO's collective defence guarantee via Denmark's membership of the organisation since 1949 – the full details of which were spelled out in the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement between the US and Denmark – Greenlanders' direct experience of NATO has been very limited. It was only in the Igaliku Agreement of 2004 that a role for Greenlandic authorities as regards the American base at Thule was formally recognised (see Government of the United States of America and Government of Denmark, 2004). Without the abovementioned advantages enjoyed by Iceland, Greenland's prospects of assuming even this level of sovereign responsibility remain highly aspirational at best.

Drawing on the 2003 work of the Greenlandic Commission on Self-Governance, another proposal is that Greenland's sovereignty enforcement duties are carried out directly by the US and/or Canada, pursuant to a partnership agreement or free association. However, the US has been criticised recently over the adequacy and effectiveness of its capabilities in its *own* Arctic waters and territories, let alone elsewhere (Conley, 2012; Le Miere & Mazo, 2013, pp. 102–105). In Canada, a recent government audit highlighted the absence of a cross-department, coordinated strategy for marine transportation in Canadian Arctic waters, as well as the fact that only an estimated 1% of these waters have been surveyed to modern standards (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2014, para. 3.17). Moreover, politically, it is difficult to imagine circumstances in which it would be in North American interests for a long-standing close ally, Denmark, to be divested of its Arctic power status, or for Greenland to follow its own path without input from Denmark. Alternatively, a free association with Denmark itself is yet another proposal. This possibility is expressly recognised in the 2008 report. The latter relied on the 2003 report of the Greenlandic Commission on Self-Government, and prepared the way for the 2008 Greenlandic referendum on self-government (see Greenlandic–Danish Self-Government Commission, 2008; see Ostergaard, 2017 for a very recent discussion of the issues requiring resolution in pursuit of a free association agreement between Denmark and Greenland). Hence, it is Greenland's own lack of

ability to exercise full-spectrum sovereign responsibilities over its territory, plus its lack of alternatives to a capable Denmark fulfilling such responsibilities, which prove the real sticking point on the question of Greenlandic independence.

By way of counterargument, it might be contended that if Greenland succeeds economically – that is, by generating sufficient income, at minimum, to replace Denmark's block grant – it would be in a position to abandon the SGA, thereby overcoming the 'sovereignty' precondition of independence specified by that Act. This, presumably, would then clear the way legally for a unilateral declaration of independence by Greenland, based on its right of self-determination under international law – a right already acknowledged in the SGA's preamble. While technically possible, this argument ultimately misses the point. Finding a way around the SGA's Chapter 8 is not the same as finding a practical solution to the very real sovereignty gaps the prospect of an independent Greenland presents. In the words of Finn Lynge, a former Member of the European Parliament representing Greenland, when questioned about Aleqa Hammond's notion of an independent Greenland:

I have no idea what she is talking about. Independence from what? The dollar exchange rate? What is she talking about? Will that mean that the Danish navy will withdraw its fleet? Who's going to enforce our territorial sovereignty at sea or keep foreign fishing boats out of our waters? It just doesn't make any sense... (as cited in Breum, 2015, p. 75).

In addition, these sovereignty gaps are not easily overcome by more money. In a tiny population on the world's biggest island, building the technical and professional capacity needed in support of national sovereignty requires strategic and creative thinking, plus strong and wide agreement on future political priorities and organisation. It is not exclusively, or even primarily, an economic exercise. Whether or not Greenland chooses the path to independence prescribed by the SGA, independence on its own terms or some other political arrangement altogether it must have some practical solution to the question of how to address its sovereignty gaps. Without this, the idea of an independent Greenland is chimerical. As a partial response to this challenge, the idea of introducing military conscription in Greenland has occasionally been raised (GoG, 2003, para 4.4). However, in the 14 years since this report, no further steps in this direction have been taken.

Resolution of these types of issues requires careful reflection on Greenland's political, legal and strategic position; its future security needs; and its domestic and international goals, as well as the best way of achieving them. This level of serious and prolonged consideration about the details, timing, and costs and benefits of independence vis-à-vis other political systems has not yet taken place in Greenlandic political discourse, either at the elite or public level. Since the 2003 report by the Greenlandic Commission on Self-Governance, there have

been no further attempts to flesh out such details – all of which are prerequisites for even the most basic evaluation of the independence issue. Despite their pro-independence rhetoric, no Greenlandic political party has elaborated their own model of independence for consideration and debate. On the contrary, as Breum and Chemnitz (2013) have reported:

Ask any politician in Nuuk when independence should come – as we have done repeatedly – and the answer will be vague, long and hinting at perhaps 40 to 50 years from now.

However, this may be about to change. At the end of 2016, Prime Minister Kielsen's new supermajority government established a Ministry of Independence, and the GoG was authorised to establish a constitutional commission in 2017 (McGwin, 2016a; Østergaard, 2017, p. 2). A poll conducted at the end of 2016 by Greenlandic newspaper *Sermitsiaq* found that 64% of respondents considered it either 'very important' or 'somewhat important' that Greenland become an independent state, though amongst the 18–29 years age bracket this majority fell to 56% (as cited in McGwin, 2016b). Widespread support for the cause of independence in theory is one thing; an answer to the practical question of Greenland's internal political organisation in the post-independence period is quite another.

Instead, for now, talk of independence in Greenland by local politicians and others remains largely that – talk. While domestic political aspirations are important – and, in Greenland, there is no doubt that independence is a very popular one – they are not the equal of a strong consensus around a well-considered, concrete plan to achieve the same. Thus, in present-day Greenlandic politics, support for 'independence' signals endorsement of perceived virtues, such as self-sufficiency, preservation of cultural norms and identity, and national pride, rather than the groundswell of overwhelming political intent needed to make formal political independence happen. Like 'human rights' and 'freedom', 'independence' is a value that attracts wide-ranging support within and across borders, and yet in terms of content and implementation, very real differences of perspective can and do emerge. With respect to Greenland, this observation is supported by a statement made in 2015 by then-Environment Minister Kim Kielsen (as cited in Breum, 2015, p. 79):

We're all passionate about independence... We should be able to decide over ourselves in Greenland, but we have different points of view internally in our party. I would like to see the next generation get better education so that they can decide for themselves if they are ready for independence or not.

As the debate about Greenlandic independence matures and deepens over time, the emergence of some divisions over specific details is to be expected.

Despite the 'cold rush' hype, Greenland is in no hurry to sever its formal and constitutional ties with Denmark. Since the election of Kim Kielsen as Prime Minister, there has been a noticeable, political shift of focus towards the

day-to-day, practical business of improving Greenland's economic and social welfare, rather than talking up grand visions of wealth and Greenlandic statehood. According to Kielsen (as cited in Molgaard, 2014), Greenland is not a new Klondike, but a 'country under construction'. This strongly pragmatic, results-oriented approach informs Kielsen's own notion of what 'independence' means in Greenlandic context, which stands in stark contrast with earlier, loftier ideas associated with 'cold rush' thinking. This is apparent from a recent interview he gave:

We must improve the education level of the population in order to reach a state of independence ... education provides freedom for the individual, and provides opportunities for personal development (as cited in McGwin, 2017).

The final proof is reflected in the status of the SGA itself. The SGA remains an Act passed by the Folketing; in the eight years since its enactment, it has not been accompanied by any mirroring legislation in the Inatsisartut. In practical terms then, from a constitutional perspective, the authority of the GoG continues to be derived solely from the authority of Danish law. Given that the SGA contains no special provisions concerning its repeal, it would appear that the Folketing could treat the SGA just like any other of its Acts – for example, repealing it at will, thus leaving the GoG on legally shaky ground. While politically this outcome is highly unlikely – not least because the SGA's preamble acknowledges its foundations in an agreement between the GoG and Government of Denmark 'as equal partners' – the fact that *legally* it remains possible is telling. Greenland's lack of mirroring legislation to date – plus the acceptance of ultimate Danish authority over Greenland that such an absence implies – suggests that in reality, Greenland is still more comfortable with its current political status than the 'cold rush' proponents assume.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that the issue of Greenlandic independence is far more complicated than popularly conveyed, both domestically in Greenland and abroad. Despite Greenland's untapped natural resources and climate change, an examination of facts on the ground revealed that Greenland is not presently experiencing a 'cold rush', contrary to various predictions over the last decade. Natural resource exploitation in Greenland remains at a very early stage of development. In light of this, the GoG's aim of five to ten consistently open mines generating billions of dollars in tax revenue in 15 years appears extremely ambitious, if not fanciful. Furthermore, even if five to ten mines are established in the given timeframe, outstanding questions remain as to whether or not this development would represent a net benefit to Greenland itself. The need to import and pay foreign labourers, plus the negative effects of natural resource exploitation on other economic sectors and on

Greenland's cultural life all suggest that the financial gains of drilling and mining may be much less than forecast, and may come at a high cost. Consequently, it was argued that a more balanced economic strategy based on present strengths rather than 'cold rush' assumptions would be more favourable to Greenland's interests.

Most importantly, the article severs the purported link frequently made by 'cold rush' enthusiasts between Greenland's economic independence and political independence. While acknowledging that economic factors are relevant, the article refutes the idea that economics – and in particular, the natural resources sector – is decisive on the question of Greenland's independence. A wealthy Greenland does not make a Greenlandic state inevitable. Formidable non-economic barriers to Greenlandic independence remain – such as the 'sovereignty' precondition under the SGA; the material lack of viable alternatives to Denmark's sovereignty enforcement role in Greenland; and a lack of informed political debate about the purpose and details of an independent Greenland. For these reasons, 'independence' in the context of Greenlandic political discourse should not be understood as the final, inevitable act of political separation brought on by an Arctic 'cold rush', but rather as a timeless ideal which accurately and profoundly captures the philosophical outlook of the Greenlanders. Thus, in Greenland – for now – the notion of independence remains more a collective moral value than a defined political manifesto.

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