



STAR WARS AND THULE

– Bringing the Cold War Back to Greenland



The issue of upgrading the early warning radar at the US base in Thule (Pituffik) in North-West Greenland as part of the US missile defense system is the most important foreign policy issue in Greenland and Denmark for many years. In order for the Bush administration to push ahead with Star Wars, the use of radar facilities at Thule in Greenland as well as at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill in the UK is required. The Danish government, which administers the foreign and defense policies of Greenland, therefore has the power to stop or seriously

delay Star Wars, which threatens to ignite a new nuclear arms race and jeopardize key arms control agreements.

So far, however, the Danish government has declined to adopt a clear stance on the issue, saying they are waiting for a formal request from the US administration to upgrade the Thule radar. Denmark has made it clear, though, that the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty – which bans national missile defense – must be respected or revised with Russian consent, and that the Greenland Home Rule will be informed and consulted before any decision is taken.

The former Danish foreign minister, Mogens Lykketoft, has repeatedly stated that a US missile defense system “*may in no way become the beginning of a new arms race*”,¹ and that finding an understanding with Russia and China is very important.² Mr. Lykketoft has also warned the US against unilaterally withdrawing from the ABM treaty, saying such a move “*might create global distrust and destabilization*”.³

“It is regrettable that the USA has unilaterally withdrawn from the ABM Treaty and is moving ahead with its plans for a missile defence. This development risks leading to a new arms race” Swedish statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Wednesday 13 February 2002

Another former foreign minister told the Danish parliament on 15 August 2000 that a 1987 parliamentary motion (‘motiveret dagsorden’) on ABM systems on Thule still forms the basis of Danish government policy on the issue.⁴ The 1987 motion states that the Thule facilities may not be used offensively and “*may not be applied in connection with SDI or ABM systems*”.⁵

Most foreign and defense policy experts in Denmark have expressed strong criticism of the Star Wars missile defense plans, e.g. professor Ole Wæver, University of Copenhagen: “*If Denmark takes a clear stand against, then the Americans will perhaps understand that they are all alone. The rest of the World thinks that the plans are insane.*”⁶

In December 2001 the American President unilaterally withdrew from the ABM-treaty with 6-month notice. Many governments⁷ have regretted this decision, but despite the clear Danish support of the ABM-treaty, the Danish government has kept quiet.

¹ Jyllands-Posten, 10 May 2001.

² Berlingske Tidende, 8 January 2001.

³ Reuters, 3 May 2001.

⁴ Folketing records, S 1457.

⁵ Folketing records, F21 – D 36, 1987.

⁶ Jyllands-Posten, 23 August 2000.

⁷ Especially the Swedish, Russian and Chinese

GREENLAND CONCERNS

The question of the Thule Air base and the US wish to include the base in Star Wars is very controversial in Greenland. Since November 1999, the position of the Greenland home rule government has been that a US missile defense system must not contravene international arms controls agreements or destabilize global security, and Jonathan Motzfeldt, the Greenland premier, has declared that “*personally I am clearly against NMD*”.⁸

The mayor of Qaanaaq, just north of the base, has said that the people of his village are scared and are unanimous in their opposition to the NMD, and the Vice-President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), Uusaqqak Qujaukitsoq, a hunter from the Thule region, has stated that “*in the event of a conflict, we will surely be the first target*”.⁹

In addition, ICC President Aqqaluk Lynge has noted that “*[the] existing military infrastructure in our Inuit homeland was installed during the Cold War without consulting Inuit because both former superpowers treated the Arctic as an uninhabited wasteland, and without recognizing that we actively use and occupy this land*”, expressing concern that Star Wars is another, albeit post-Cold War, example of ignoring the inhabitants of the Arctic.¹⁰

“*The Greenland Home Rule cannot support the plans for upgrading the Thule radar, if it contravenes the provisions of the ABM treaty. Moreover, an upgrade of the Thule radar must in no way contribute negatively to the existing World peace.*”

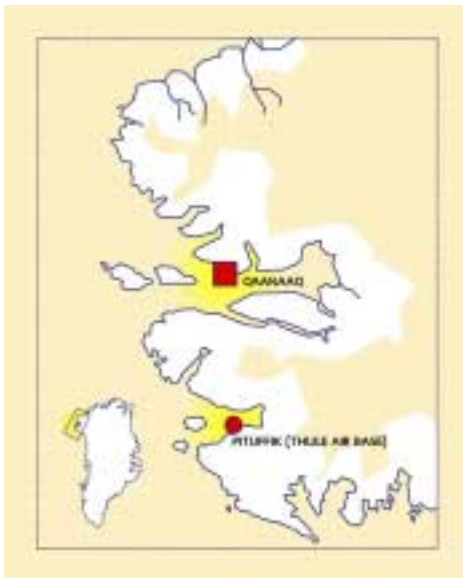
– **Greenland Home Rule** press statement, 8 December 2000.

“*We have enough problems with the current [used and disused] US bases here. They have severe negative impacts on the environment.*”

– **Greenland premier Jonathan Motzfeldt**, Ekstra Bladet, 20. May 2001.

“*I believe [NMD] reflects American schizophrenia. [...] Globally it's not a good direction, so personally I'm against it.*”

– **MP Hans Pavia Rosing**, elected on Greenland, Ritzau, 9 August 2000.



FACTS ON GREENLAND

The Viking, Eric-the-Red, discovered and named Greenland over 1000 years ago, although Inuit communities had lived in Greenland for hundreds of years before that. Denmark claimed Greenland in 1605 and attempted to make it into a productive colony. Greenland retained colony status until 1953, and in 1979 the Greenlanders were granted limited Home Rule.

Greenland covers app. 2.175.000 km², and is approximately 86% covered with ice up to 3 km thick. The population totals app. 56.000, and some 12.000 inhabitants live in the capital Nuuk.

Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and while the 1979 Home Rule agreement accords autonomy to Greenland, the Danish government still runs Greenland foreign and defense policy matters from Copenhagen.

The Home Rule consists of a 31 seat parliament (Landstinget) and a seven person government (Landsstyret). Greenland is a member of the Nordic Council and the Arctic Council.

Due to the strategic importance of Greenland during the Cold War, Greenlanders have again and again experienced that decisions affecting their lives were taken in Washington and Copenhagen without even consulting them. The next page provides some examples.

⁸ Reuters, 11 January 2001.

⁹ ICC press statement, 6 August 2000.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The 1953 Forced Resettlement of Thule Inughuit Community

During 1951-53 a US-Danish weather station and air strip located at Pituffik in Greenland was turned into the large US Thule Air Force base. In order to make room for building defenses for the base, the local Inughuit (Polar Eskimo) community was forced to move away from their ancient hunting grounds. In May 1953, with only a few days notice, 27 Inughuit families were ordered to move and to resettle in Qaanaaq, north of Thule, and only on 20 August 1999 did a Danish court (Østre Landsret) award compensation to the Inughuits. The verdict did not fully recognize the Inughuit claim of the land at Thule Air Base, however, and *Hingitaaq 53*, the group representing the Thule Inughuits in the trial, has appealed the ruling to the Danish Supreme Court. The chairman of *Hingitaaq 53*, Uusaqqak Qujaukitsoq, argues that Denmark cannot legally make decisions regarding the future use of Thule until the Supreme Court has spoken (expected in 2002), asserting the land belongs to the Inughuits.¹¹

The Radioactive Legacy of the B-52 Accident in 1968

On 21 January 1968 a B-52 Stratofortress carrying four nuclear weapons crashed on the ice in Bylot Sound near Thule. The impact triggered conventional explosives, which led to fragmentation of the nuclear weapons on board, and the plutonium spread over the ice. Clean-up crews, including Greenlanders, Danes and Americans, removed the debris from the crash and the upper layer of contaminated snow. However, it was agreed that not all the plutonium was recovered (one bomb basically missing), and some unknown amount fell to the bottom of Bylot Sound. Subsequent environmental studies have concluded that approximately half a kilogram of plutonium sank to the underlying sediments,¹² while other experts believe the missing amount of plutonium from the accident is closer to two kilograms. Those involved in the clean-up after the accident were not aware of the possible health effects of their sinister work. In 1988 a group representing workers involved in the clean-up was formed after reports of increased cancer occurrences, early deaths and mysterious illnesses, and in 1995 the Greenlanders and Danes involved in the clean-up were each granted a 50.000 DKK compensation from the Danish state.

Nuclear Weapons at Thule Air Force Base During the Cold War

While the official Danish policy since the 1950s has been 'no nuclear weapons on Danish territory', American nuclear weapons were placed on the Thule Air Force base during the Cold War. According to a letter from defense secretary William Perry to the Danish government, leaked to a Danish researcher, United States had stationed four airborne Mk-36 hydrogen bombs at Thule in eight months of 1958, and another 48 nuclear air defense missiles (W31/Nike Hercules Sam and W54/Falcon/GAR-11) were stationed at Thule from 1959 to 1965.¹³ In addition, B-52 planes carrying nuclear bombs have regularly over flown and landed in Thule as exemplified by the 1968 crash. The presence of nuclear weapons on Danish territory apparently took place with the secret consent of the Danish prime minister at the time, but neither the Danish parliament nor Greenland authorities were informed.

Negative Environmental Impacts of the US Military Presence in Greenland

The US military presence in Greenland has left future generations in Greenland with a legacy of unsolved environmental problems. Tens of thousands of empty fuel barrels, scrap metals and chemical substances "stored" at disused military installations continue to pollute the environment. Sporadic agreements have been made between Greenland and USA to clean up some of the waste since the Home Rule took over environmental matters from Copenhagen. Tri-party negotiations between USA, Denmark and Greenland are underway to return the historical important Dundas mountain and another area adjacent to the Thule Air base to Greenland. One of the remaining obstacles is what to do with the US dump sites on these lands. No inventory has yet been made, but PCB's and heavy metals are certainly among the wastes buried in the old missile silos and open dump sites.

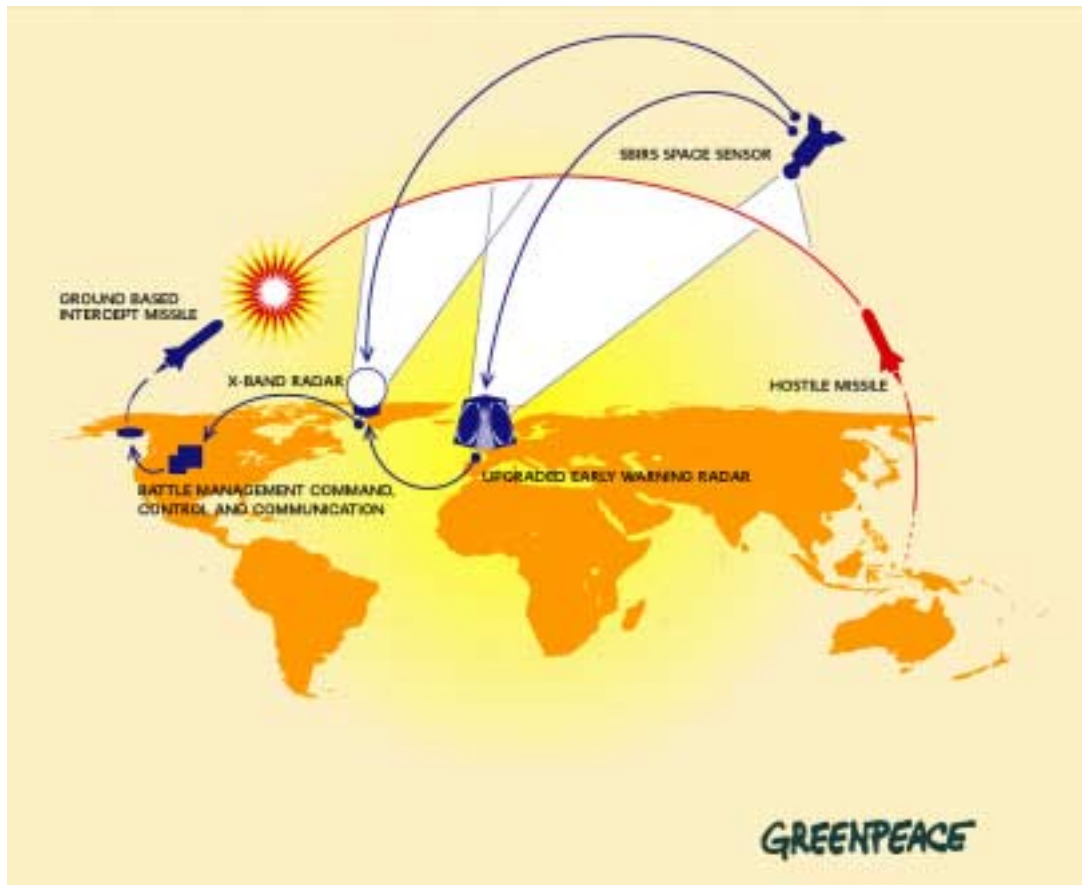
¹¹ Aktuelt, 10 August 2000; Ritzau, 17 August 2000.

¹² AMAP: "Arctic Pollution Issues – A State of the Arctic Environment Report".

¹³ Information, 21 October 1999.

THE ROLE OF THULE IN STAR WARS

For Star Wars to be effective, the existing early warning radar at Thule would need to be upgraded, and a new, more accurate, x-band radar would need to be built at the site. These radars would detect and track incoming enemy missiles and all require upgrading to enhance their tracking capability and enable them to provide better data so intercept points can be calculated and incoming missiles destroyed. The simplified model below explains the basic idea with mid-course interception of long-range ballistic missiles.



The US Under Secretary Of State For Political Affairs, Robert Lucas Fischer, left no doubt that use of Thule Air base would be needed for Star Wars, when he spoke at a Danish parliamentary hearing in Copenhagen on 25 April 2001. Mr. Fischer said that he would be “surprised if Thule would not be part of a US anti-ballistic missile defense system”, since the location of Thule makes the base an asset of “critical importance”.¹⁴

Besides the Thule radar, four other early warning radars need to be upgraded: Fylingdales in United Kingdom, Beale in California, Clear in Alaska and Cape Cod in Massachusetts. New x-band radars are planned at Thule, Fylingdales and Clear as well as one new site, Shemya in the Aleutian Islands. Two recently built radar domes at the RAF Menwith Hill spy base in the UK will be used as a ground relay station for information on hostile missile launches and trajectories between the special SBIRS satellites and the battle command center in the US.

The UK and Danish governments are therefore in a unique position to stop Star Wars, and Greenpeace urges these two governments to do so without delay.

For additional information, please visit our campaign web-site at www.stopstarwars.org

¹⁴ Politiken, 25 April 2001; Information, 26 April 2001.