

The Greenland Option: Inside Silicon Valley’s Arctic “Freedom City”

Tracing the rise of Greenland as a strategic crossroads for AI, capital, and power

Giulio Strumia

January 27, 2026

1. Introduction

Greenland has long been a geopolitical outlier, a vast Arctic territory of 836,000 square miles sitting between North America and Europe, tied to Denmark but moving gradually toward greater autonomy. Its strategic value has risen with melting sea routes, the discovery of rich deposits of natural resources, including oil, gas and rare earth minerals, and renewed military interest in the High North.

U.S. interest in Greenland stretches back to the 19th century. After purchasing Alaska from Russia in 1867, Secretary of State William H. Seward briefly entertained the idea of acquiring Greenland and Iceland from Denmark. No formal offer to Denmark was made, but Washington continued to view Greenland as strategically significant, even exploring, in 1910, the possibility of trading the Philippine island of Mindanao, then a US territory, in exchange for Greenland. American attention resurfaced during World War II, when, after the Nazi occupation of Denmark, the United States assumed responsibility for Greenland’s defense, establishing a military presence on the island. In 1946, President Harry Truman made a formal attempt to buy the island, offering Denmark \$100 million in gold: the Cold War was beginning, and the US viewed Greenland as essential to its national security, given its strategic position as a possible base from which to launch an air counteroffensive over the Arctic. US authorities even proposed swapping oil-rich land in Alaska for parts of Greenland. Copenhagen declined the offer, however, it allowed the US to maintain a military presence and operate the bases on the island. In 1979, a referendum granted Greenland its own system of home rule and, effectively, greater autonomy from Denmark.

Leading up to the present, Trump publicly revived the idea of acquiring Greenland in 2019 during his first term, describing it as a sort of major real-estate opportunity. The proposal was swiftly dismissed by both Greenlandic and Danish officials, who reiterated that the island was not on the market. In Trump’s second term, something has clearly changed. Let’s look at what shifted, and, above all, why.

2. Why Greenland?

To understand Trump's interest in Greenland, you have to look at what makes the island uniquely valuable, and it can be summed up in two words: minerals and ice. Greenland ranks among the world's most resource-rich regions, with large mineral deposits that remain mostly untouched. As the ice recedes due to climate change, many of these resources are becoming increasingly accessible. China currently dominates the global rare-minerals mining sector, accounting for over 60% of worldwide production. This gives Beijing significant control over international supply chains and the ability to slow, or even to stop, US technological progress through export restrictions. Last October, China introduced export limits that underscored this leverage, before agreeing to suspend the measures for a year following a meeting between Xi Jinping and Trump.

Modern AI systems depend on large-scale computing infrastructure built with materials such as neodymium and dysprosium, which are essential for cooling, insulation, and overall hardware resilience. Any disruption in access would drive up costs, slow deployment timelines, and reduce the efficiency of AI facilities. That, in turn, would weaken the competitive position of American AI firms, the same companies in which Silicon Valley investors have poured hundreds of billions of dollars. The US has been working to reinforce supply chains with trusted partners as it seeks to reduce its dependence on China, a priority that has only grown as tensions between the two powers have intensified. In the era of AI, cutting that reliance matters more than ever.

3. Networks of Influence: Trump, Tech Capital, and the Arctic

For tech investors, the idea that Greenland could offer a steadier, long-term supply of the materials needed to compete in the AI race is especially compelling. Several of them have already begun exploring opportunities across the Arctic territory. A closer look at the investors involved, their ties to the president, the timing of their ventures, and the political support they provided, both financial and communicative, offers meaningful clues as to why Greenland has risen to the forefront of Trump's priorities.

KoBold Metals is a mineral exploration company that uses advanced geoscience, AI, machine learning, and advanced data science to identify new deposits of critical minerals. The firm has become especially active in Greenland, where it is pursuing AI-driven exploration projects aimed at unlocking the island's significant rare-earth and battery-metal potential. Reports first linked Bezos, Gates, and Bloomberg to KoBold in early 2019, when the company completed its Series A round, only a few months after Trump began exploring the idea of "purchasing" Greenland. The investments were routed through Breakthrough Energy, a fund led by Gates whose stated mission is to speed up innovation in clean energy and support the creation of next-generation industries. Breakthrough Energy would later join KoBold's Series C raise in December 2024, a round that brought in \$537 million and placed the company's valuation just under \$3 billion, according to its press release. Altman followed in 2022, contributing to KoBold's \$192.5 million Series B through his VC firm Apollo Projects. A recent SEC filing indicates that KoBold is now seeking additional capital, suggesting the firm may return to these same high-profile investors. None of the billionaires named responded to Forbes' requests for comment, and KoBold declined to discuss any Greenland-related matters on the record.

In January 2025, following Trump's return to the White House, both Sam Altman and Jeff Bezos appeared in the front row at the Inauguration Day ceremony, each having contributed \$1 million to the inaugural fund, Altman through a personal donation and Bezos via Amazon.

But it's worth going deeper. According to what John Bolton, Trump's former national secu-

rity adviser during his first term, told Forbes, Trump's interest in acquiring Greenland dates back to 2018, following a suggestion from Ronald Lauder. The ties between Ronald Lauder and Donald Trump run deep, rooted in a long-standing personal and political relationship. Lauder, an American billionaire whose wealth originates from the Estée Lauder cosmetics empire founded by his parents, met Trump at the Wharton School of Business, which they attended at the same time. After working for the family cosmetics business, Lauder served under Ronald Reagan at the Pentagon. Lauder has been a longtime funder of conservative candidates and causes: after Trump's 2016 victory, Lauder contributed \$100,000 to the Trump Victory committee. And when questions about Trump's mental fitness surfaced in 2018, Lauder publicly defended him, describing Trump as "a man of incredible insight and intelligence". In March of last year, Lauder gave \$5 million to MAGA Inc., a super PAC (Political Action Committee) that supports Trump, according to data from the Federal Election Commission. Trump's fixation with Greenland persisted, and so did Lauder's.

In February, shortly after Trump returned to the White House, Lauder again stepped forward to defend him when the president openly floated the possibility of a military intervention to seize the world's largest island. "Trump's Greenland concept was never absurd - it was strategic." Lauder wrote in the *New York Post*. He continued: "Beneath its ice and rock lies a treasure trove of rare-earth elements essential for AI, advanced weaponry and modern technology. As ice recedes, new maritime routes are emerging, reshaping global trade and security." With Greenland positioned at "the epicentre of great-power competition", Lauder argued that the United States should pursue a "strategic partnership". He emphasized his own long-standing engagement on the island, adding: "I have worked closely with Greenland's business and government leaders for years to develop strategic investments there." The cosmetics billionaire appears to have channeled significant sums of his own capital into the Arctic territory. According to *Politiken*, the 81-year-old has invested in a local freshwater bottling company and is also involved in efforts to develop a hydroelectric power station at Greenland's largest lake. The project is being advanced through Greenland Development Partners, a Delaware-based consortium that holds a stake in Greenland Investment Group, chaired by former U.S. deputy secretary of state Josette Sheeran.

Lauder's investments are unlikely to have "any economic substance" says Arctic security expert Marc Jacobsen, an associate professor at the Royal Danish Defence College. "What is important here is the close link to Greenlandic decision makers. This is about strategy and gaining control." Jacobsen told Forbes he has observed a noticeable rise in American activity in Greenland in recent years, helped in part by new direct flights between New York and Nuuk. "There are more Americans in Greenland than ever before. . . it can be difficult to know if they're only tourists or if they also have an interest in "strategic investments".

4. The Freedom City

Yet the links between tech elites, the Trump administration, and Greenland extend even further. Another piece of this puzzle can be traced back to Trump's choice of U.S. ambassador to Denmark in his second term: Ken Howery. Ken Howery is a Silicon Valley venture capitalist and entrepreneur best known as one of the original co-founders of PayPal, which he launched in 1998 alongside Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Max Levchin, and Luke Nosek, the group later dubbed the "PayPal Mafia." After serving as PayPal's first CFO, he co-founded Founders Fund in 2005 with Thiel and Nosek, a venture capital firm that went on to back major tech companies including Facebook, SpaceX, and Airbnb. His connection to Thiel dates back to their time at Stanford, where Howery served as managing editor of *The Stanford Review*, the newspaper Thiel had founded. Over the years he has remained closely linked to both Thiel and Musk: he helped source early investments in companies like Facebook and has long moved within the same tight network of technologists, investors, and political influencers.

Trump's choice of Ken Howery for the Denmark post offers an early clue about the kind of project technocratic circles envision for Greenland, positioning a venture capitalist with deep roots in Silicon Valley at the heart of Arctic diplomacy, a signal that becomes even more telling once one considers Howery's long-standing partnership with Peter Thiel, and the political triangle linking the latter to Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

Before going any further, let's recap who Thiel is and how he is connected to American politics, in fact, if Howery's appointment hints at the influence of Silicon Valley's old guard, Peter Thiel represents its most fully realized expression. Having built his career at the center of the same tight-knit network that produced figures like Ken Howery and Elon Musk, Thiel has long occupied a singular position in the tech world: part venture capitalist, part political strategist, part ideological outlier. After the PayPal years, he emerged as one of the Valley's most consequential investors, backing companies such as Facebook and co-founding Palantir, the data-analytics giant whose footprint inside US government programs has expanded dramatically. But Thiel's role extends far beyond finance. He was one of the only major tech leaders to openly support Donald Trump in 2016, even addressing the Republican National Convention that year, and he remained a key figure in Trump-aligned political circles throughout the following decade. His influence is perhaps most clearly visible in the rise of JD Vance, whom Thiel hired early in his venture capital career and later backed with a \$15 million injection into Vance's 2022 Senate campaign, support that is widely seen as having launched Vance (who visited Greenland with his wife Usha shortly after Trump took office at the White House) into national politics and, eventually, onto Trump's 2024 ticket. Thiel's worldview has always set him apart from mainstream Silicon Valley: his writings and public statements reflect a deep skepticism toward democratic governance, a fascination with post-national political models, and a belief that technological "founders" should wield extraordinary authority, ideas influenced by works like *The Sovereign Individual* and articulated in essays such as *The Education of a Libertarian*. This ideological framework, combined with his cultivation of protégés and political allies, has made Thiel a central architect of the emerging alignment between the tech elite and the Trump-Vance project. In this constellation of actors (Howery in Copenhagen, Vance in Washington, and Thiel at the strategic center) the outlines of a coherent technocratic vision begin to emerge, one whose ambitions increasingly stretch toward Greenland. And all these threads converge toward an even bolder idea taking shape in the background: the creation of a techno-libertarian "Freedom City" in Greenland.

The vision for Greenland might involve creating a center for artificial intelligence, self-driving vehicles, space launch operations, compact nuclear reactors, and high-speed rail systems, highlighting a long-running effort in Silicon Valley to develop cities with minimal regulation around the world, including within the United States, an idea Trump himself endorsed in a 2023 campaign video. Supporters refer to the concept with various terms, such as startup cities or charter cities, but they all share the aim of boosting innovation through broad regulatory exemptions. Greenland's frigid Arctic environment, together with its immense expanses of uninhabited land, could also help solve an increasingly common issue: cooling the data centers and servers that keep AI systems running. In fact, high-performance AI and cloud servers processing massive amounts of data consume enormous energy, generating significant heat that conventional air-cooling systems often struggle to disperse effectively. Inside data centers, rows of densely packed servers run continuously, drawing power and warming up, and as they heat up, they need constant cooling. "The chips that are in those data centers need to stay within certain temperatures, otherwise they either malfunction or they turn off", said Daniel Mewton, a partner in the infrastructure, energy and natural resources practice at law firm Slaughter and May.

However, let's take a closer look at how this vision is beginning to take shape in practical terms: Dryden Brown, co-founder of Praxis, a proposed startup-built 'network nation-city-state' that aims to create a new city with pro-technology governance, reduced regulation, and a community centered around shared cultural and economic ideals and, as its core mission, aiming to "restore Western Civilization", posted on X that "he went to Greenland to

buy it”, just a week after Trump won reelection on November 2024. Brown is part of a group of unconventional, hyper-online figures who are striving to build futuristic cities, backed by crypto-driven funding, venture capital circles, and libertarian-leaning billionaires. He began promoting Greenland as a possible base for his envisioned project as early as 2019, just after Trump first raised the idea of “acquiring” the island, a moment that encouraged him to seriously explore the Arctic territory as a potential host for Praxis’s ambitions. This is where Thiel, who, it’s worth remembering, wrote in 2009 that he no longer considered democracy compatible with freedom and has advocated escaping politics by colonizing outer space or seasteading, building communities in ungoverned oceans, enters the picture once again. Within the ecosystem surrounding Praxis he stands out as the most influential figure shaping the intellectual and strategic network behind the project. His influence flows through Pronomos Capital, an investment fund dedicated to developing experimental jurisdictions such as charter cities and seasteading projects, and known for backing initiatives that explore new governance models and pro-innovation regulatory environments backed by Thiel, which has become one of the central VC hubs supporting initiatives like Praxis. Through Pronomos, Thiel’s broader ideological and financial network provides both legitimacy and momentum to Brown’s ambitions, connecting Praxis to a constellation of investors, crypto capital, and pro-innovation governance advocates. Pronomos Capital was founded by Patri Friedman, Milton Friedman’s grandson, with seed funding from Peter Thiel. The fund has a portfolio of city projects across multiple countries from Palau to Nigeria. Among its projects, the most prominent is Próspera, built on the island of Roatán in Honduras. Designed as a Zone for Employment and Economic Development (ZEDE), it operates with a high degree of autonomy and its own legal framework. Próspera stands out in the landscape of “future city” experiments largely because, unlike many theoretical projects, it actually exists and is already functioning. Another project backed by Pronomos is Itana (previously known as Talent City) which is being developed in Nigeria, about 50 miles east of Lagos. It follows a model comparable to Próspera and is moving forward with backing from the Nigerian government. Each of these cities blends elements of laissez-faire governance, techno-optimist ideology, and ambitions for a crypto-enabled economic system. According to their designers, lighter taxation and streamlined regulations would attract innovation and global capital. Praxis pushes this idea even further, describing itself as ‘the world’s first Network State,’ drawing on a concept introduced by tech entrepreneur, and former Coinbase CTO, Balaji Srinivasan. In his vision, such a state would first build a global community and then ‘crowdfund’ parcels of land across different regions, eventually seeking formal recognition from existing nations.

Going back to Praxis, their latest financing round, announced in late October, amounted to up to \$525 million, structured to be released in stages as progress is made toward developing ‘the next great city.’ The investor group includes Lonsdale; a fund created by, again, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and his brothers; and Shervin Pishevar, co-founder of Hyperloop One, the now-defunct venture that attempted to commercialize a Musk-backed transportation concept. Additional participants in the round include Arch Lending, which specializes in crypto-backed loans, GEM Digital, focused on digital-asset investments, and Manifold Trading, a firm centered on cryptocurrency trading. That’s a significant leap from their 2021 funding round, which totaled \$4.2 million, as reported by The New York Times. In that announcement, Praxis thanked Pronomos Capital, the fund backed by Peter Thiel, as one of its early supporters and investors.

To add another layer, among the other investors of Promonos Capital we found Marc Andreessen, a fellow venture capitalist and informal advisor to Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) part of a tech-investor consortium seeking to build a city on grazing land outside San Francisco, who, with Thiel, is among those supportive of a Greenland outpost. After his visit to Greenland last year, Brown advocated for building a city there in part because its harsh environment could provide a test site for colonizing Mars, one of Musk’s highest ambitions: “We must build a prototype of Terminus on Earth before departing for Mars”, Brown posted on X in November, using Musk’s term for a red-planet settlement. “I believe Greenland is the place, @elonmusk.”

5. A Constellation of Interests

Stepping back, the picture that emerges is less a linear plot than a constellation: a dense overlap of people, capital, and ideas converging on Greenland from different directions. What initially appeared as isolated moves now reads as a coordinated alignment between Silicon Valley investors, Trump-era political power, and a shared vision of the Arctic as a strategic frontier.

On the investment side, familiar names recur. Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Sam Altman, and Michael Bloomberg surface not as a bloc, but as parallel actors placing capital into projects tied to critical minerals, energy transition, and AI-adjacent infrastructure. Vehicles like KoBold Metals illustrate how this capital is being deployed: advanced data-driven exploration, long-term resource positioning, and an explicit focus on materials central to next-generation technologies. These investments predate much of the recent political rhetoric, yet align closely with it.

Running alongside the money is a web of personal and ideological connections. Ronald Lauder represents an older strand of influence, wealth rooted in legacy industry, translated into political access and long-standing relationships with Trump, and paired with direct commercial activity in Greenland itself. His interventions, public and private, helped push the island from a peripheral interest to a recurring strategic theme. From Silicon Valley's inner circle, the PayPal lineage provides another connective tissue. Ken Howery's move from venture capital to ambassadorial power placed a trusted insider at the diplomatic chokepoint between Washington, Copenhagen, and Nuuk. Peter Thiel, long positioned at the center of that network, looms larger still, not just as an investor, but as a patron of political talent and a proponent of post-liberal, technocratic governance models. His support for Trump, and later for JD Vance, illustrates how capital, ideology, and personnel flow together.

What binds these figures is not a single deal or formal alliance, but a shared set of assumptions: that technological dominance requires secure access to resources, that AI and energy infrastructure benefit from cold climates and regulatory flexibility, and that traditional governance frameworks are too slow or constraining for the scale of ambition envisioned. Greenland, sparsely populated yet strategically located, becomes the ideal testing ground for these beliefs. By the time diplomatic appointments, political donations, exploratory investments, and public rhetoric are viewed together, the pattern is hard to dismiss. The island is no longer just a strategic asset in the abstract, nor merely a mining opportunity. It is increasingly framed as a platform, a place where technology, capital, and power might be recombined in new ways.

This convergence sets the stage for the final and most radical element of the story: the attempt to move beyond extraction and infrastructure toward something more systemic: the idea of building an entirely new kind of city, designed from the outset around technological sovereignty and bespoke governance.

6. Conclusions

In the aftermath of the latest World Economic Forum in Davos, an edition marked by unusually sharp rhetoric, the geopolitical spotlight has once again shifted toward Greenland. During the WEF in Davos, US President Donald Trump announced that he had reached a "framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland," a declaration that arrived unexpectedly after weeks of escalating tensions, including earlier threats to use military force to seize the Danish autonomous territory, as well as the prospect of new tariffs targeting European countries that had signalled firm opposition to any US bid for Greenland. As said

before, the island, long perceived as a remote frontier, has rapidly become a focal point of global strategic competition, catalyzed not only by its mineral wealth but also by the growing presence of major technology companies and venture capital funds investing in ventures such as KoBold Metals and speculative urban projects like Praxis. These developments have added new layers of complexity to an already delicate diplomatic landscape.

Recent discussions between Washington, Nuuk, Copenhagen (and, so, EU) often presented as steps toward closer cooperation on security and resource development, have done little to clarify the United States' long-term intentions. Official statements emphasize stability, international security, and the safeguarding of critical supply chains. Yet the convergence of private capital, technological ambition, and political interest inevitably raises questions about what is driving the renewed American focus on the island.

It remains impossible to determine with certainty how much influence Silicon Valley investors and venture capital lobbying have exerted on the White House's posture. Analysts note that the alignment between the strategic priorities of tech conglomerates and the geopolitical narrative emerging from Washington is striking, even if not explicitly acknowledged. Whether this reflects a coordinated effort or a coincidental convergence of interests is a matter of ongoing debate.

Equally debated is the true nature of President Trump's motivations. Some observers interpret the administration's assertiveness as a straightforward national security calculation, consistent with long-standing concerns about Arctic militarization and foreign encroachment. Others point to the President's well-documented penchant for symbolic gestures and historic firsts, suggesting that the allure of expanding U.S. territory, an act without precedent in modern American history, may carry its own political and personal appeal. In this reading, the idea of transforming Greenland into the fifty-first state, however improbable, becomes part of a broader narrative of presidential legacy and ambition. This interpretation gains further traction when viewed against the backdrop of the recent controversy surrounding Trump's pursuit of a Nobel Prize, a saga that has highlighted, once again, his fixation on international recognition and on securing accolades that reinforce a sense of historic stature.

In the end, Greenland has become a mirror reflecting a real shifting balance of global power: a territory where economic appetite, political calculation, and strategic anxiety converge, and a landscape defined by unclear forces, competing actors, and opaque motivations. Greenland's role in the international system is being rewritten in real time by forces far larger than the island itself.

References

- BURGIS, T. (2026), How a billionaire with interests in Greenland encouraged Trump to acquire the territory, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/15/ronald-lauder-billionaire-donor-donald-trump-ukraine-greenland>
- DI LICOSA, M. (2026), These Billionaires Bet Big On Greenland—After Trump Took Interest, *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/martinadicosa/2026/01/09/these-billionaires-bet-big-on-greenland-after-trump-took-interest/>
- HARVEY, L. (2026), The US has tried to acquire Greenland before – and failed, *CNN*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/07/politics/us-greenland-trump-denmark-history-hnk>
- HODGSON, L., & WOODMAN, A. (2026), Why Greenland’s future is important to Silicon Valley, *PitchBook*, <https://pitchbook.com/news/articles/why-greenlands-future-is-important-to-silicon-valley>
- KIM, J., & ALLYN, B. (2024), Tech moguls Altman, Bezos and Zuckerberg donate to Trump’s inauguration fund, *npr*, <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/13/nx-s1-5227874/trump-bezos-zuckerberg-amazon-facebook-open-ai-meta-inauguration-fund>
- KOLA, P. (2026), What we know about Trump’s ‘framework of future deal’ over Greenland, *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c86vvjxe9z7o>
- LEVY, R., & ULMER, A. (2025), Greenland ‘Freedom City’? Rich donors push Trump for a tech hub up north, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greenland-freedom-city-rich-donors-push-trump-tech-hub-up-north-2025-04-10/>
- MUKHERJEE, S., & RAITANO, L. (2025), Keeping cool: heat a key challenge for data centers and AI, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/business/keeping-cool-heat-key-challenge-data-centers-ai-2025-11-28/>
- MUNN, L. (2025), Libertarian tech titan Peter Thiel helped make JD Vance. The Republican kingmaker’s influence is growing, *The University of Queensland*, <https://news.uq.edu.au/2025-08-libertarian-tech-titan-peter-thiel-helped-make-jd-vance-republican-kingmakers-influence-growing>
- VASOYAN, A. (2025), A Startup Linked to Peter Thiel Wants to Build the “Next Great City” in Greenland, *InsideHook*, <https://www.insidehook.com/internet/peter-thiel-praxis-next-great-city-greenland>
- PRAXIS NATION website, <https://www.praxisnation.com/>
- DRYDEN BROWN’s X, <https://x.com/drydenwtbrown>