The Greenland Critical Minerals Fantasy and the Military Reality.

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Greenland is not the new Saudi Arabia of rare earths. It is, in Jack Lifton's bracing phrase, "a military objective for the United States" – and almost everything else you're hearing about its mineral bonanza, he suggests, is "so silly that it's beyond nonsense."

In an interview with InvestorNews.com host Tracy Hughes, Lifton, Co-Chair of the Critical Minerals Institute (CMI) and a veteran of half a century in the metals business, doesn't hedge. Asked about the much-hyped rare earth riches of the Arctic island, he answers with the kind of finality that leaves no room for promotional spin: "If they are there, they're going to stay there, Tracy, for the rest of time."

The numbers alone tell you why. Greenland is the largest island in the world, roughly a quarter the landmass of the continental United States, with about 56,000 people scattered almost entirely along its ice-free southwestern coast. More than 80% of its surface is buried under deep ice sheets – "deep glaciers," as Lifton puts it. The population is overwhelmingly Inuit, with about 10,000 residents of European descent. In Lifton's dry formulation, the country's true density is "0.067 people per square mile."

Mining, in his world, is not a fantasy about dots on a map. It is roads, ports, "constant electric power, fresh water – and drum roll please – skilled personnel." On all of those fronts, Greenland is starting from almost zero. The terrain is harsh,

the distances staggering, the infrastructure skeletal. Recent reporting underscores the point: Greenland today has only a tiny handful of operating mines despite years of global excitement about its resources, and investors routinely balk at the cost and risk of building projects in such an unforgiving environment.

Then there is the ore itself. The best-known rare earth prospects in southern Greenland are dominated by eudialyte, an attractive mineral on paper and a metallurgical headache in practice. Lifton is blunt: “The deposits we know of – rare earths in Greenland – are primarily the mineral eudialyte, which no one has ever been able to economically work as a source of rare earths.” Decades of research back up his skepticism. Even optimistic laboratory studies describe eudialyte as technologically challenging, plagued by silica gel formation and complex processing requirements that have yet to translate into simple, bankable flowsheets at commercial scale.

Meanwhile, the human question looms. “Who, who had not been drafted into the U.S. military, would voluntarily go to live in Greenland?” Lifton asks. “Answer: no one.” He hastens to clarify that he has “no comment on the Inuit people,” but he doubts many are trained “mining engineers, electrical engineers, road-building engineers, or civil engineers – i.e., the people who keep the water and sewage systems running.” To get a modern rare earth mine up and running in such a place would require not just capital and machinery but an imported workforce willing to build and maintain an entire industrial ecosystem in Arctic darkness.

So why is Greenland once again splashed across headlines, especially when Donald Trump revives the idea of “buying” it? Hughes puts the question directly: “Trump’s at it again. Greenland is all over the headlines… What about the rare earths in Greenland?” Lifton’s answer doesn’t start with geology or

markets. It starts with radar.

“Greenland is a military objective for the United States,” he says. Not an adversary, but “a place where we would like to have bases and have the ability to detect Russian or Chinese enemies coming in over the Arctic — that would be missiles.” He recalls a friend stationed in Thule, Greenland in the early Cold War, manning the Distant Early Warning Line, or DEW Line — a chain of radar sites strung across the Arctic to spot Soviet bombers and missiles. “That was 60-some-odd — maybe 65 — years ago,” Lifton notes. “So it’s nothing new.” His friends, he adds, “were delighted never to go back there again.”

The strategic logic has only intensified. The U.S. still maintains a major installation at Thule, now rebranded Pituffik Space Base, and NATO planners fret about Russian submarines and Chinese ambitions in newly opening Arctic sea lanes. In that context, talk of rare earths can sound less like an economic plan and more like political camouflage. “I suspect the rest of it is just a cover for the military purpose,” Lifton says.

Hughes presses him on Trump’s rhetoric about “securing” Greenland outright. Lifton responds with a civics lesson: “Greenland is a part of Denmark — it’s effectively a territory of Denmark. The United States can’t simply acquire it or annex it without declaring war on Denmark, which would destroy NATO.” For him, the very notion that Washington might “buy” an inhabited Arctic territory from a close ally is absurd on its face. “This whole thing is like a comedy,” he says. “I’d expect to see this on Broadway as a comedy.”

The comedy, in his telling, lies in the mismatch between the political theater and the physical reality. On the one hand, foreign governments and investors talk of critical minerals, energy security, and “the next Saudi Arabia” of rare earths. On

the other, there is an island where “there’s no access… no infrastructure, and it would take an enormous amount of money, time – and drum roll again – skilled people to do it.” The known rare earth deposits are technically stubborn; the uranium-bearing ones are politically contentious; and the ice sheet still covers four-fifths of the terrain whose subsurface geology remains guesswork.

Lifton’s skepticism doesn’t deny that minerals exist under the ice. It is a challenge to the assumption that they matter on the time scales politicians like to invoke. “Are there rare earths in Greenland? Perhaps,” he concedes. But, he adds, “No one has ever gone under a mile-thick glacier to see what rocks are under there. So we don’t know what’s there.” In the parts that are accessible, exploration has indeed outlined deposits containing uranium, rare earths and other elements. “Okay, great,” he says – and then returns to the same refrain: the lack of roads, ports, grid power, and people to make any of it real.

What he sees, instead, is a familiar pattern: geopolitical anxiety dressed up in the language of resource opportunity. “Why would anybody want to acquire this?” Lifton asks, rhetorically, about an island of 56,000 people that is “25% the land size of the United States, and 80% covered by ice.” His answer is as unsentimental as his opening line. “I have no idea what’s going on here other than the military objective. I believe all the rest of this is just cover.”

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