



By: TA | AP Brief

Rubio begins three-nation NATO tour in Iceland



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has begun a three-nation tour of NATO allies with a stop Tuesday in Iceland, where **unease persists** about the Trump administration's Arctic intentions even after a deal was reached to ease the president's designs on neighboring **Greenland**.

Rubio called Iceland "a good friend" and offered no hint of tensions with the island that is a NATO member but has no army.

Before the **Greenland deal** was signed last month, Iceland was an occasional feature of Trump's comments and social media complaints about NATO allies not doing enough to support the U.S.

Rubio, who also will visit Greece and Portugal before returning to Washington on Thursday, has often been called upon to mollify and reassure U.S. partners and allies after undiplomatic comments by Trump, including him referring multiple times to Canada as the 51st state and threatening to take over Greenland, a self-governing territory of NATO ally Denmark.

In remarks to reporters Monday before leaving Washington, Rubio gave no indication that his mission was to clean up or clarify the administration's strategy when it comes to the Arctic, NATO or Europe more broadly.

But he did call all three of the countries he will visit "strong allies" that are important for protecting U.S. national interests.

Rubio said on social media that his visit to Iceland was meant to "advance our shared priorities: a secure Arctic, stronger commercial and energy ties, and closer defense cooperation."

Last month, however, Trump alarmed Icelanders when he posted a map showing the colors of the U.S. flag sprawling across all of North America and extending to Greenland and Iceland.

In response, Iceland Foreign Secretary Thorgerdur Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, whom Rubio

will meet on Tuesday, summoned U.S. Ambassador Billy Long to a meeting and said she made it clear that the post was unacceptable.

Iceland, which is just 180 miles (290 kilometers) away from Greenland, had already been on edge after **Trump mistakenly named** the country four times while speaking about Greenland.

Long, a colorful former Missouri congressman, IRS commissioner and professional auctioneer, also has made waves in Iceland.

Before he took up his post in August, thousands of Icelanders signed a petition urging the prime minister to reject him after he made a crack earlier this year about Iceland becoming the 52nd U.S. state and making him governor. He has since apologized for the quip.

Long is not the first Trump ambassador to Iceland to have raised concerns with the host government.

In Trump's first term, Ambassador Jeffrey Ross Gunter left locals in relatively crime-free Reykjavik aghast over his request to hire armed bodyguards, which prompted complaints.

Ambassador controversy

At Rubio's next stop in Athens, he may be dealing with another ambassador controversy.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, a New York Democrat who is the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said last week that he would investigate allegations of misconduct and impropriety by the U.S. ambassador to Greece, Kimberly Guilfoyle.

In a letter to Rubio, Meeks said he wanted answers following the allegations **reported by The Wall Street Journal** last month and that he would call for Guilfoyle's dismissal if the behavior outlined in the news report was true.

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The Journal reported that Guilfoyle told guests at a reception that the U.S. could undermine the Greek government if it chose to, promoted the business interests of one particular Greek construction and energy company, and allowed its lobbyist into private diplomatic meetings.

Some Greek opposition parties have called for an inquiry into the allegations, but it isn't clear if they will proceed.

Guilfoyle, a former Fox News host and California prosecutor who was once engaged to Trump's son Donald Jr., has denied any wrongdoing and Rubio has defended her before.

Guilfoyle, Rubio said after the Journal story appeared, "has been an incredible advocate for the president's agenda in Greece and across Europe." Rubio said he and Trump greatly value the ambassador's "pivotal work and leadership," notably on energy issues.

The Trump administration sees Greece as key to advancing the promotion and export of U.S.-produced liquefied natural gas to southeastern and central Europe.