

## Trump's Bully Pulpit Diplomacy

*Editoriale*

[Donald Trump](#) has always enjoyed talking real estate, but these days instead of hotels or condos his acquisition targets are sovereign nations and territories. At a press conference Tuesday, the President-elect made news for remarks on adding Canada, Panama and Greenland to the U.S. property portfolio. The trick is figuring out when Mr. Trump is trolling and when he means it.

One journalist at Mar-a-Lago asked the President-elect if he is “considering military force to annex and acquire Canada.” Mr. Trump: “No. Economic force. Because Canada and the United States, that would really be something. You get rid of that artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like . . . ”

This is pure trolling. Mr. Trump likes to taunt Canada's progressive Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, belittling him as “Governor” of a soon-to-be 51st state. Mr. Trump has a point that Canada doesn't pull its weight in NATO, having recently pledged to hit the alliance's spending target, 2% of GDP, by 2032. But Canadians don't want to join the U.S., and the country's political culture is that of a European welfare state. What would it do to Mr. Trump's GOP majority to acquire another California?

Mr. Trudeau has presided over national decline, and the polls say that Pierre Poilievre and his Conservative Party are in good position for the coming election. Yet the more Mr. Trump tweaks Canada by calling it America's next real-estate purchase, the more he'll force Mr. Poilievre to push back as a nationalist to win. Mr. Trump seems never to notice the downside of making fun of allies.

On Panama, it's a muddle. “The Panama Canal is vital to our country,” Mr. Trump said. “It's being operated by China—China. And we gave the Panama Canal to Panama, we didn't give it to China.” He argued that the U.S. handover of the canal, in a treaty that was ratified by the Senate in 1978, was “a big mistake” and “why Jimmy

Carter lost the election.” Mr. Trump also said he wouldn’t commit not to using military force.

If he means that, he’s asking for trouble. It would turn an ally in the Western Hemisphere into an adversary. Does he want a forever guerrilla war?

More likely, Mr. Trump’s bluster is aimed at some deal on canal fees or maybe the Panamanian ports managed by a Hong Kong entity. But he’s simply making it up that Chinese soldiers are running the canal.

The bigger threat to the region is the Cuba-Venezuela axis, which has caused millions of refugees to flee, including into the U.S. How about working on that?

Greenland, however, is intriguing. “We need Greenland for national-security purposes,” Mr. Trump said. “People have been talking about it for a long time.” He’s right there.

Secretary of State William Seward thought about buying the island, around the time he negotiated the 1867 purchase of Alaska. Harry Truman’s Administration made an unsuccessful offer in 1946. The U.S. already has military forces in Greenland, and the old colonial power, Denmark, can’t defend it from Chinese or Russian designs.

Mr. Trump might be serious on this one. Yet flying in Trump Force One this week for Don Jr. to tour Greenland isn’t exactly diplomatic finesse. “We’re going to treat you well,” the President-elect told locals on a speakerphone. Then at Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump told the media he wouldn’t rule out military action. Such stuff is less likely to woo Greenlanders than to pique them, perhaps into wanting independence and an alliance with bad actors.

One possible option might be a defense free association compact with Greenland, similar to U.S. arrangements with Pacific island states. The subtle art of persuasion would be required. Mr. Trump often prefers to talk tough, but using the bully pulpit to bully America’s friends is no help against the real bad guys.