# Calls for Sir Keir Starmer to apologise intensify over Chagos Islands and China remarks



Demands for an apology from Sir Keir Starmer, the leader of the Labour Party, have intensified following controversial remarks concerning the UK’s decision to hand over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. This move, framed by some Conservative figures as a capitulation to Chinese influence in the region, elicited sharp criticism and accusations of “deeply offensive and ill-judged” comments directed towards Starmer. The Shadow Defence Secretary, James Cartlidge, has formally requested a retraction from Number 10, arguing that Starmer's assertion—which implied that China was opposed to the agreement—misrepresents the simple context. Cartlidge's criticism came soon after the Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius publicly thanked China for its unwavering support in this diplomatic endeavour.

On May 22, Starmer announced the deal, which involves the UK paying at least £120 million annually for the next 99 years to maintain operational control of the strategic Diego Garcia base, a key asset for the United States and the UK alike. Over 25 years, the total financial commitment to Mauritius could exceed £30 billion, making this a significant geopolitical investment. Starmer remarked that the agreement has garnered support from key allies, namely the US, NATO, and the Five Eyes, while juxtaposing this with opposition from Russia, Iran, and others—including, he argued, elements within his own party.

The reaction from Mauritius has highlighted the complexity of international dynamics at play. Chinese diplomats hailed the agreement as a “historical achievement” for Mauritius, while a recent statement to the International Court of Justice indicated China's support for Mauritius' claim, rooted in the decolonization debate surrounding the Chagos Islands. These elements amplify concerns among some policymakers in the UK regarding the geopolitical ramifications of a closer Mauritius-China relationship, particularly in the Indian Ocean, a region of strategic military interest.

Critics have also pointed to the historical context in which the current discussions are set. The Chagos Islands were forcibly removed from Mauritius by the UK in 1965, displacing nearly 2,000 Chagossians to make way for military operations, a move that has been condemned by various international bodies. The current agreement is seen by some as an attempt to rectify these historical injustices whilst ensuring continued access to Diego Garcia for military purposes. However, the path forward remains fraught with challenges, particularly the right of return for the displaced Chagossians and broader implications for regional security.

Political analysts are divided on the impact of this agreement on Starmer’s leadership and Labour’s position within UK politics. Some observers argue that Starmer’s diplomatic efforts present an opportunity for a resurgence of Labour's image on the global stage, particularly against a backdrop of a Conservative Party facing internal tensions and electoral challenges. Yet, the ongoing discussions about reparations for the Chagossians and the future of UK-Mauritius relations point to the potential for continuing tensions domestically, as critics, including some within the Conservative Party itself, seek to leverage the agreement as a politically contentious issue.

As the situation evolves, the complexity of the Chagos Islands dispute and the involvement of global powers like China will likely continue to shape the narrative around the Labour leadership and its strategic decisions. The mix of historical grievances and contemporary geopolitics paints a nuanced picture of a transition that seeks to address past wrongs while maintaining critical military alliances in a changing world order.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2061828/fury-china-praises-keir-starmers> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0> - In this Financial Times podcast episode, host George Parker and guests analyse the implications of Labour leader Keir Starmer's recent post-Brexit deal with the EU. The agreement includes a non-binding security and defence partnership, trade components like electricity market coupling, and a veterinary agreement to ease food checks. Critics, including Kemi Badenoch, labelled the deal a 'sellout' due to Britain's dynamic alignment with EU regulations without voting input, while supporters argue it pragmatically boosts economic cooperation. The discussion also covers the controversial 12-year fisheries access agreement and a new commitment to a youth mobility scheme. Public reaction has been muted, suggesting Brexit fatigue, while domestic political impact appears limited. Additionally, the podcast explores Starmer’s diplomatic success in reaching a sovereignty deal with Mauritius on the Chagos Islands, securing continued US/UK operation of the Diego Garcia base. Despite Conservative criticism, international support bolsters the move's legitimacy. The episode concludes with reflections on Starmer’s growing stature on the world stage, contrasting with ongoing domestic policy challenges including prison reform and fiscal constraints. Panelists evaluate key political performances and make weekly stock picks on political figures.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/ee637c3a-42f4-418d-a8f6-753f77128ec8> - As the UK prepares to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, marking a significant moment in the sunset of the British Empire, debates surge over the implications. An agreement grants the US and UK a 99-year lease on the military base at Diego Garcia. US leaders have welcomed the deal, while Tory figures like James Cleverly and others accuse it of betraying British interests and yielding to China’s influence. Labour historically dispossessed the Chagossians, with Conservative administrations later seeking restitution. Current Tory criticism appears politically motivated, aiming to deflect blame and undermining internal rivals. The continuity of this deal with past Conservative policies contrasts with Labour's contentious history in the region. Simultaneously, the article highlights upcoming major political moves, including potential pension tax raids, a free vote on assisted dying, and significant investments in carbon capture and storage.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/2f6032c4-4c53-4b7c-97bc-46a93a3c0bd5> - The UK's Labour government is facing backlash over its plan to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, following international pressure and a UN advisory ruling. Critics warn this move could jeopardize the UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, potentially facilitating Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean. A delay in finalizing the deal aims to secure approval from the UK's key allies and fix some issues. Historically, the Chagos Islands' inhabitants were forcibly displaced in the 1960s without proper compensation. Mauritius has challenged the UK's sovereignty over the islands since its independence, leading to the recent agreement to grant Mauritius sovereignty while allowing Chagossians the right of return. Nonetheless, concerns persist over Mauritius potentially terminating the Diego Garcia lease in favour of China. The Labour government likely rushed the deal before the potential US administration change, with a new pause providing an opportunity to address critical lease and consultation issues.
5. <https://theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained> - The Chagos Deal is a controversial agreement through which Britain will transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while securing a long-term lease on Diego Garcia for continued US-UK military use. The Chagos archipelago, ceded to Britain by France in 1814, was separated from Mauritius in 1965 and leased to the US, leading to the forced removal of over 2,000 Chagossians. Mauritius has long contested Britain's control, with UN rulings and General Assembly votes supporting its claim. The deal, reportedly worth £90 million annually for 99 years, aims to rectify colonial injustices and maintain strategic military assets. However, it has sparked political backlash in the UK due to its high cost and perceived betrayal of British Chagossians, many of whom oppose Mauritian governance due to historical mistreatment. Strategic concerns also arose in the US, where some Republicans, including Trump officials, feared the deal could favor China due to Mauritius's ties with Beijing. Despite these concerns, the deal has been endorsed by allies like the US and India. Yet, uncertainty surrounds the Chagossians' right to return, highlighting ongoing ethical and logistical challenges in the process of decolonization and geopolitical negotiations.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/> - The UK is set to sign a multi-billion dollar agreement with Mauritius regarding the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, following the overturning of a last-minute legal injunction. The Chagos Archipelago, comprising over 600 islands in the Indian Ocean, has been a source of contention since Britain forcibly displaced nearly 2,000 Chagossians in the 1960s and 70s to establish a U.S.-UK military base on Diego Garcia. The new deal, initially agreed in October, involves Britain transferring sovereignty to Mauritius in exchange for a $4 billion payment, while retaining control of Diego Garcia through a 99-year lease. The base holds strategic military importance for both the UK and the U.S., hosting operations from the War in Afghanistan to recent deployments in Yemen and Gaza. The UN’s International Court of Justice declared Britain’s 1965 detachment of the islands from Mauritius unlawful, increasing international pressure. However, the agreement has drawn criticism from displaced Chagossians, UK opposition leaders, and the new Mauritian Prime Minister for lack of consultation and national interest concerns. The deal proceeds with U.S. support, despite warnings from Secretary of State Marco Rubio about regional security threats, especially from China’s influence.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mauritius-welcomes-prospect-trump-examining-chagos-deal-2025-02-04/> - Mauritius has expressed support for U.S. President Donald Trump to review the deal concerning the Chagos Islands' sovereignty, reached between Britain and Mauritius in October. The agreement entails Britain ceding sovereignty of the islands to Mauritius while retaining a 99-year lease on the U.S.-British military base on Diego Garcia. Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, elected in November, has questioned the deal made by his predecessor, which has yet to be ratified. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has expressed concerns regarding the deal's impact on U.S. security. Britain is awaiting the new U.S. administration's review of the agreement. The Chagos Islands' sovereignty has been a contentious issue since Mauritius' independence in the 1960s when London forcibly displaced around 2,000 Chagossians to establish the military base. Some Chagossians oppose the deal, as they were not part of the negotiations and plan to protest against it.