# Britain faces political backlash over Chagos Islands deal leaving security fears unresolved



Britain's negotiation of a contentious agreement regarding the Chagos Islands has ignited significant political backlash and raised serious national security concerns. Under the terms established by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's government, the UK will transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. In return, Britain will secure a 99-year lease for continued military access to the strategically crucial Diego Garcia base, a facility used in various military operations since its establishment.

The agreement, marked by a financial commitment of £30 billion, includes a clause that mandates Britain to inform Mauritius of any military action initiated from the Chagos Islands. This stipulation has drawn sharp criticism from former military leaders and MPs, who label it a dangerous concession. Sir Grant Shapps, a former defence secretary, condemned the clause as a "grotesque surrender of both sovereignty and responsibility," arguing that it risks compromising Britain's strategic interests. Similarly, Sir Gavin Williamson highlighted the potential for sensitive information to be relayed to adversaries, particularly China, should this information reach Mauritius, which has been strengthening ties with Beijing.

Defence Minister Luke Pollard, in defending the agreement, hailed it as "good value," asserting that the operational expenses for the base will be borne mostly by American resources. However, critics argue this financial rationale is undermined by the admission that retaining control over Diego Garcia requires significant annual payments, estimated to total £10 billion over the lifetime of the lease.

This situation is further complicated by the historical backdrop against which the deal is set. The UK’s sovereignty over the Chagos Islands has been contentious since the forced displacement of nearly 2,000 Chagossians in the 1960s to facilitate the establishment of the military base. In recent years, the International Court of Justice ruled Britain’s occupation unlawful, increasing pressure on the government to negotiate a resolution. After a period of stalled discussions under the previous Conservative administration, Labour revived these talks and advanced towards a final agreement.

While Starmer and his supporters maintain the deal is a necessary step towards compliance with international law, critics see it as a capitulation of British territorial integrity. Conservative party leaders have rallied against the arrangement, framing it as an erosion of national security. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson characterised the decision to divest control as an overreaction to contemporary diplomatic pressures, cautioning against what he perceives as a misguided impulse to appease historical grievances.

The approval process for this treaty remains pending, requiring ratification from both houses of Parliament. As discussions continue, the opposition has sharpened its critique, with claims that the deal prioritises foreign relations over the welfare of British citizens. Indeed, the potential for long-lasting repercussions on UK defence capabilities and foreign policy underscores the high stakes involved in this contentious negotiation.

In the broader context, the deal reflects shifting geopolitical currents, particularly concerning the increasing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region. Mauritius, once a close ally of the UK, is navigating complex relationships with various international powers, and the ramifications of this deal may extend beyond bilateral relations, potentially altering the strategic landscape in the region.

As the debate rages on, it remains to be seen how this agreement will shape Britain's foreign policy and military posture in a rapidly evolving global context. The consequences of relinquishing control over the Chagos Islands could reverberate for decades to come, affecting not only the UK’s strategic interests but also its standing in international diplomatic circles.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744665/Chagos-outrage-Extraordinary-pledge-help-enemies-buried-smallprint-30billion-surrender-deal.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/5808b0ac-0610-41ad-b794-77575d359037)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744665/Chagos-outrage-Extraordinary-pledge-help-enemies-buried-smallprint-30billion-surrender-deal.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/04/starmer-defends-uk-giving-up-control-of-chagos-islands-amid-tory-criticism)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/starmer-urgest-mauritius-to-make-deal-that-protects-chagos-islands-from-malign-influence), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk05lgyevo)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744665/Chagos-outrage-Extraordinary-pledge-help-enemies-buried-smallprint-30billion-surrender-deal.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5808b0ac-0610-41ad-b794-77575d359037> - The UK is poised to finalize a pivotal and contentious agreement to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, potentially as early as Thursday. The deal includes a multibillion-pound payment, enabling the UK and US to retain joint access to the strategically vital Diego Garcia military base under a 99-year lease. The agreement has sparked political backlash, especially from the opposition Conservative party, with Shadow Foreign Secretary Priti Patel condemning it as a loss of sovereign territory and a financial burden on taxpayers. Critics accuse Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer of prioritizing international relations over national interests. However, Labour officials maintain that the negotiations originated under the previous Conservative government and are necessary for compliance with international law. Though US concerns over the deal initially existed, President Donald Trump has expressed support, assuring continued military cooperation. The agreement marks another major policy step following the UK’s post-Brexit diplomatic reset with the European Union. Labour has noted parliamentary ratification is still required before the deal is finalized.
3. <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.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/starmer-urgest-mauritius-to-make-deal-that-protects-chagos-islands-from-malign-influence> - Keir Starmer has urged Mauritius to ensure the deal for the Chagos Islands keeps them free from “malign influence”, amid concern in Mauritius and the US about the terms of the deal. The prime minister spoke to his counterpart, Navin Ramgoolam, for the first time on Friday afternoon to discuss the agreement to hand over control of the islands, which was signed last year but has attracted criticism from people close to the new US president, Donald Trump. Starmer told Ramgoolam he wanted “strong protections” for the UK-US military base on the island chain. The deal would see the UK cede its final African colony while keeping control of the military base on the island of Diego Garcia for at least 99 years. British officials say it was signed with the support of the US government but allies of Trump have since criticised it, warning that Mauritius’ alliance with China posed a risk to US national security. Downing Street said on Friday: “The prime minister spoke to the prime minister of Mauritius, Navin Ramgoolam, this afternoon. The leaders began by reflecting on their first months in office and discussed the strong relationship between the UK and Mauritius, which they looked forward to expanding.” A spokesperson added: “The prime minister underlined the need for a deal to secure the military base on Diego Garcia that ensures strong protections, including from malign influence, and that will allow the base to continue to operate. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to a deal, and they looked forward to speaking again soon.” Since 2022, when the Conservatives were in power, the UK has been negotiating a deal with Mauritius to hand over control of the Chagos archipelago.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/04/starmer-defends-uk-giving-up-control-of-chagos-islands-amid-tory-criticism> - Keir Starmer has defended giving up UK control of the Chagos Islands, as the decision has descended into a political blame game among Conservative leadership candidates. The prime minister said the agreement with Mauritius over the islands would secure the long-term future of a joint US-UK military base on Diego Garcia, which he deemed as the “single most important thing”. Critics of the deal have said it could allow China to gain a military foothold in the Indian Ocean and concerns were raised about the future of other British overseas territories. While Labour signed off on the final decision, it was the Conservatives who first indicated that the UK was open to negotiations with Mauritius, the discussions having been launched under Liz Truss. The then foreign secretary and now Conservative leadership candidate James Cleverly opened the talks saying he had hoped to have them concluded by the end of 2023. Labour’s decision appears to have created a split within Cleverly’s leadership campaign, with the former MP Grant Shapps, who is Cleverly’s campaign chair, noting he blocked the deal. Shapps said on X: “As defence secretary I was so concerned about the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands that I blocked the deal from proceeding. Today, this government has announced it’s abandoned our sovereignty of the archipelago, including the militarily essential Diego Garcia.” The former Tory prime minister Boris Johnson said it was “crazy” to give up control of the Chagos Islands. He told GB News: “Why are we doing this? Sheer political correctness, desire to look like the good guys, desire to look as though we’re unbundling the last relics of our empire.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk05lgyevo> - Sir Keir Starmer has come under fire at PMQs after Mauritius said the UK had agreed to change payment terms in its deal to hand it control of the Chagos Islands. It comes after Mauritian PM Navin Ramgoolam claimed the UK had now agreed to front-load the payments and change how they are calculated. The Conservative and Reform UK leaders both attacked Sir Keir over the cost of the deal, at a time when winter fuel payments to pensioners are being scaled back. But Sir Keir insisted it was required to secure the future of a UK-US military airbase on the largest island, Diego Garcia, which the UK is due to keep on a 99-year lease. UK's Chagos deal on hold to allow Trump review Trump team hostile to Chagos deal, claims Farage Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch told MPs: "Yesterday, we heard the government offered £18bn for Mauritius to take our territory in the Chagos Islands." In response, the PM said: "This is a military base that is vital to our national security."