# UK faces backlash over £30bn Chagos Islands deal risking security and sidelining Chagossians



Britain's recent agreement to relinquish sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius has ignited fierce criticism and uncertainty regarding national security and historical injustices. Under this new treaty, unveiled by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, the UK is set to pay a staggering £30 billion, with British forces required to inform Mauritius about any military actions launched from the strategically vital Diego Garcia base. Critics, including former military leaders and MPs, have described this clause as not only a "grotesque surrender" but also a significant risk to the UK's security interests.

The treaty's stipulation that the UK must "expeditiously inform Mauritius of any armed attack on a third State directly emanating from the Base" raises fears that sensitive military information could potentially fall into the hands of unfriendly powers like China, with whom Mauritius has been deepening ties. Armed Forces minister Luke Pollard defended the agreement, asserting that it represents good value for British taxpayers, particularly given that the US will contribute significantly more for joint operations at the base. Yet, former Defence Secretaries Grant Shapps and Gavin Williamson have underscored the emerging power dynamics; Shapps remarked, “In effect, we’re bankrolling our own strategic retreat," while Williamson warned that the deal enables China's access to classified strategies, marking a perilous shift in the geopolitical landscape.

The Chagos Islands were under British control from 1814, but the fate of the displaced Chagossians, who were forcibly evicted in the 1960s and 70s to allow for the establishment of the US military base, remains a contentious issue. Despite acknowledging the wrongful removal of over 2,000 Chagossians, the UK government's governance over the archipelago has been widely challenged in international forums. The International Court of Justice ruled in 2019 that the UK’s occupation was unlawful, contributing to the pressure for a resolution. However, the recent agreement has not secured guarantees for Chagossian resettlement, leaving many feeling sidelined in a process that directly impacts their homeland.

This recent deal has been viewed as a culmination of a protracted dispute over the islands, with a 99-year lease-back arrangement allowing the UK to maintain control over Diego Garcia while transferring sovereignty to Mauritius. Some officials have framed the treaty as a path to a mutually beneficial partnership, intended to enhance trade and security relations, while others see it as a capitulation to colonial legacies that disregards the suffering of the Chagossian people. Critics argue that the treaty risks perpetuating historical injustices, with fears that the Chagossians may never return to their homeland as the past continues to loom large over their future.

Despite some elements of the agreement being celebrated, including financial support for Mauritius and the establishment of a trust fund for the Chagossians, the vagueness surrounding the implementation of these measures raises concerns. The UK government's previous attempts to sidestep the International Court of Justice's ruling have only amplified tensions, as critics argue that the Labour government's decision is one of convenience rather than a commitment to addressing deep-seated issues.

The political ramifications of this deal extend beyond mere geography. With tensions rising and geopolitical stakes increasing in the region, the relationship between the UK, Mauritius, and international powers remains fraught with complexities. As the pact awaits ratification from Parliament, the resulting public outcry and political backlash could signal a crucial moment in the UK’s post-Brexit foreign policy landscape, teetering on the brink of surrendering not just territory, but sovereignty itself.

This unfolding narrative highlights the urgent need for dialogue and genuine efforts towards reconciliation and justice for the displaced Chagossians, whose plight remains an indelible part of the struggle for sovereignty and identity in the modern era.

## 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), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-to-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/)
* 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), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/ae6e1e5ae021a46fcc5364f288a1ef7f), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b), [[5]](https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-05-22/el-reino-unido-pone-fin-a-una-disputa-de-medio-siglo-al-entregar-a-mauricio-el-archipielago-de-chagos.html), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-between-uk-and-mauritius-3-october-2024)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/ae6e1e5ae021a46fcc5364f288a1ef7f), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-to-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-05-22/el-reino-unido-pone-fin-a-una-disputa-de-medio-siglo-al-entregar-a-mauricio-el-archipielago-de-chagos.html), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b)
* Paragraph 7 – [[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), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-to-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0)

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

## 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/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0> - The Financial Times' 'Political Fix' podcast discusses Labour leader Keir Starmer's post-Brexit EU deal and its political implications. The deal re-establishes trade and diplomatic ties, including a defense partnership and restored electricity market cooperation. A veterinary agreement easing food trade and a contentious 12-year fisheries access compromise are key elements. While Starmer markets the deal as economical and pragmatic, critics like Kemi Badenoch label it a surrender due to dynamic alignment with EU rules. Public and political response has been muted, reflecting Brexit fatigue, though concerns about sovereignty and immigration persist.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/ae6e1e5ae021a46fcc5364f288a1ef7f> - Displaced Chagossians, including Bernadette Dugasse, are expressing despair and anger following the U.K.'s announcement of a sovereignty transfer agreement for the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. Dugasse, forced to leave Diego Garcia as a toddler, represents the over 1,500 Chagossians who were evicted between the 1950s and 1970s to make way for a U.S. military base. Despite Britain's acknowledgment of the wrongful removal and granting of citizenship, return has been continuously denied, citing security and financial concerns. The recent U.K.-Mauritius deal, which includes a 99-year lease-back of the Diego Garcia base to Britain, excludes any guarantees for Chagossian resettlement. Dugasse and fellow islander Bertrice Pompe attempted legal action to block the agreement, criticizing both governments for ignoring Chagossians in negotiations. Human rights groups decry the ongoing displacement as a colonial injustice. Many Chagossians, now dispersed across the U.K., Seychelles, and Mauritius, fear they may never return to their homeland. Dugasse's visits to Diego Garcia were brief and heavily restricted, deepening her sorrow. She emphasizes the unique cultural identity of Chagossians and advocates for their right to return, fearing their heritage may vanish as elderly natives pass away.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-to-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.
5. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-05-22/el-reino-unido-pone-fin-a-una-disputa-de-medio-siglo-al-entregar-a-mauricio-el-archipielago-de-chagos.html> - El Reino Unido ha firmado un acuerdo histórico para devolver a Mauricio la soberanía del archipiélago de Chagos, poniendo fin a una disputa de más de medio siglo. A cambio, Reino Unido y Estados Unidos conservarán el control de la estratégica base militar en la isla Diego García por 99 años mediante un contrato de arrendamiento valorado en más de 4.000 millones de euros. Este enclave ha sido clave militarmente, especialmente durante las guerras de Afganistán e Irak, y sigue siendo importante para la seguridad internacional. La decisión, aunque apoyada por aliados como Canadá, Australia y Nueva Zelanda, generó críticas internas en el Reino Unido, tanto por el alto costo como por las preocupaciones sociales. Además, hubo resistencia legal por parte de algunos chagosianos, como Bertrice Pompe, que se oponen a perder su vínculo británico. Históricamente, los chagosianos fueron expulsados por Reino Unido en 1966 para permitir la instalación de la base estadounidense. La Asamblea General de la ONU y el Tribunal Internacional de Justicia ya habían instado en 2019 a la devolución del archipiélago a Mauricio, declarando ilegal su retención. A pesar de divisiones dentro de la comunidad chagosiana, la transferencia de soberanía se ha concretado.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b> - On May 22, 2025, the UK and Mauritius finalized an agreement to transfer sovereignty over the disputed Chagos Islands to Mauritius, excluding Diego Garcia, which will remain under British control due to its vital US military base. The archipelago, home to over 60 islands in the Indian Ocean, has been under British control since 1814. In the 1960s and 70s, the UK forcibly evicted about 2,000 Chagossians to allow the US to build the base, prompting international criticism and legal disputes. The deal faced delays due to political changes in Mauritius, financial disagreements over leasing Diego Garcia, and a review by the US under President Trump. Ultimately, Britain agreed to pay £101 million ($136 million) annually to lease the base for 99 years. While hailed by the Biden administration as securing strategic interests, it drew criticism from UK conservatives and US officials for potential security risks. The deal leaves questions for the displaced Chagossians, who were excluded from negotiations and uncertain about their right to return. Some claim the arrangement perpetuates historical injustices. A proposed resettlement fund for islanders outside Diego Garcia remains vague in implementation. The agreement awaits approval by the UK Parliament.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-between-uk-and-mauritius-3-october-2024> - The governments of the Republic of Mauritius and the UK gave a statement on the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland today confirm that they have reached an historic political agreement on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. Following two years of negotiation, this is a seminal moment in our relationship and a demonstration of our enduring commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the rule of law. Negotiations have been conducted in a constructive and respectful manner, as equal sovereign States, on the basis of international law, and with the intention of resolving all outstanding issues between the United Kingdom and Mauritius concerning the Chagos Archipelago, including those relating to its former inhabitants. Today’s political agreement is subject to the finalisation of a treaty and supporting legal instruments, which both sides have committed to complete as quickly as possible. Under the terms of this treaty the United Kingdom will agree that Mauritius is sovereign over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia. At the same time, both our countries are committed to the need, and will agree in the treaty, to ensure the long-term, secure and effective operation of the existing base on Diego Garcia which plays a vital role in regional and global security. For an initial period of 99 years, the United Kingdom will be authorised to exercise with respect to Diego Garcia the sovereign rights and authorities of Mauritius required to ensure the continued operation of the base well into the next century. The treaty will address wrongs of the past and demonstrate the commitment of both parties to support the welfare of Chagossians. Mauritius will now be free to implement a programme of resettlement on the islands of the Chagos Archipelago, other than Diego Garcia, and the UK will capitalise a new trust fund, as well as separately provide other support, for the benefit of Chagossians. It will also herald a new era of economic, security and environmental partnership between our two nations. To enable this partnership the UK will provide a package of financial support to Mauritius. This will include an indexed annual payment for the duration of the agreement and the establishment of a transformational infrastructure partnership, underpinned by UK grant funding, to deliver strategic projects generating meaningful change for ordinary Mauritians and boosting economic development across the country. More broadly, the UK and Mauritius will cooperate on environmental protection, maritime security, combating illegal fishing, irregular migration and drug and people trafficking within the Chagos Archipelago, with the shared objective of securing and protecting one of the world’s most important marine environments. This will include the establishment of a Mauritian Marine Protected Area. In resolving all outstanding issues between the United Kingdom and Mauritius, the treaty will open a new chapter in our shared history, one which will continue to be based on mutual respect and trust as close Commonwealth partners committed to the security and prosperity of the Indian Ocean Region. In reaching today’s political agreement, we have enjoyed the full support and assistance of our close partners, the United States of America and the Republic of India.