# UK’s Chagos deal under fire for risking military secrets amid sovereignty handover to Mauritius



Britain's complicated legacy regarding the Chagos Islands has taken a new turn with the recent agreement to transfer sovereignty to Mauritius. This controversial deal, part of Sir Keir Starmer's broader strategy, asserts that the UK must inform Mauritius about any military operations emanating from the islands, threatening to undermine British strategic interests. Critics, including former military chiefs and MPs, have expressed alarm over what they label a "grotesque surrender" of sovereignty, fearing that sensitive information could ultimately benefit hostile nations like China.

The accord, which commits the UK to paying £101 million annually for access to the military base on Diego Garcia over a span of 99 years, has raised eyebrows not just for its financial implications but also for the responsibilities it imposes. According to the treaty's terms, Britain is bound to communicate to Mauritius any military actions that may arise from its territory, thus potentially entangling the UK in geopolitical tensions beyond its immediate control. Former Defence Secretary Sir Grant Shapps described the situation as a "bankrolling of our own strategic retreat," voicing concerns that such a surrender of autonomy could compromise national security.

The tension is compounded by Mauritius's growing ties with China and Iran, making the prospect of sharing military intelligence particularly fraught. Critics argue that every communication to Mauritius may become a double-edged sword; intelligence shared with an ally could easily find its way to adversaries. Sir Gavin Williamson, also a former Defence Secretary, highlighted the risk of giving China insight into the UK's military objectives, which he deemed "very dangerous."

While the UK government maintains that the development does not obligate them to provide detailed information on military operations, the vagueness of the treaty’s language leaves room for interpretation, thereby raising valid concerns about the government's transparency and the implications for national defence.

Historically, the fate of the Chagossians, who were forcibly removed from the islands for the establishment of the US military base in the 1960s, adds another layer of complexity. The International Court of Justice declared the UK's claim over the archipelago unlawful in 2019, mandating a reevaluation of Britain's presence there. Critically, many displaced islanders feel sidelined in negotiations that not only impact their right to return but also further entrench historical injustices.

The agreement marks a significant milestone in the long-standing dispute over the Chagos Islands. Despite being hailed as a pragmatic move to shift diplomatic ties post-Brexit, the deal has drawn ire for its implications on national security and the sovereignty of the UK. While the government argues that the arrangement allows continued access to a strategically critical military base, it ignites fears that Britain may be inadvertently empowering adversaries amid a backdrop of fluctuating international relations.

The political ramifications are equally pressing. Already, there are fractures within the Labour Party regarding the deal, as members balance international obligations against domestic strategic interests. Starmer's approach has been viewed critically, with opponents like Tory leader Kemi Badenoch suggesting that the arrangement constitutes a "surrender" that undermines the UK's negotiating power. The Labour leader's struggle to reassure both local constituents and international partners highlights a growing friction at a time when the UK must navigate its post-Brexit identity and geopolitical role.

As the agreement awaits ratification by Parliament, the implications for both national security and the future of the Chagossian population remain laden with uncertainty, echoing the long-standing grievances that continue to shape the narrative of British colonial legacy in the Indian Ocean.

## 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://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)
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* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/mauritius-pm-queries-duration-lease-deal-chagos-military-base-2025-01-18/)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/mauritius-pm-queries-duration-lease-deal-chagos-military-base-2025-01-18/), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/2f6032c4-4c53-4b7c-97bc-46a93a3c0bd5)

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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/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. In a parallel development, Starmer finalized the Chagos Islands sovereignty transfer to Mauritius, securing the UK-US military base access for 99 years in return for £101 million annually. Though criticized by Badenoch, the agreement garnered international support, aligning Britain with allies and countering strategic threats. Domestically, Starmer faces challenges, including prison policy reform and economic pressures. While his global diplomacy, backed by advisors like Jonathan Powell, strengthens his international standing, thin domestic strategy and weak communication risk political vulnerability. Analysts speculate on future party positions regarding EU relations, customs unions, and further alignment, with electoral dynamics and public sentiment influencing long-term directions.
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://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.
5. <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.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/mauritius-pm-queries-duration-lease-deal-chagos-military-base-2025-01-18/> - Mauritius Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam has raised concerns about the duration and terms of a lease on a U.S.-British military base on Diego Garcia, part of the Chagos Islands. The UK agreed in October to cede the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the base under a 99-year lease, pending ratification. Ramgoolam, who won a recent election, criticized this agreement negotiated by the previous government, calling it a 'sell out' and suggesting the lease should account for inflation and exchange rates. He emphasized the importance of recognizing Mauritius' sovereignty over the islands, which may impact the UK's ability to unilaterally renew the lease. Ramgoolam also highlighted U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's urgency to finalize the agreement before Donald Trump's inauguration and addressed concerns raised by Marco Rubio, Trump's Secretary of State pick, regarding potential security threats. Additionally, some Chagossians have opposed the deal as they were not included in the negotiations and plan to protest.
7. <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 favor 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.