# UK-Mauritius Chagos deal sparks debate over sovereignty, military strategy and displaced islanders



The recent agreement between the United Kingdom and Mauritius regarding the Chagos Islands has stirred considerable controversy and debate. When Donald Trump ascended to the presidency, many assumed he would oppose the accord forged under the leadership of Keir Starmer, especially given the historical complexities surrounding the archipelago. Surprisingly, the Trump administration lent its support, aligning with the UK’s direction to sign the deal.

The controversial accord grants Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos Islands while allowing the UK to retain control of Diego Garcia, a pivotal military base used by both the UK and the U.S. This base has been instrumental in various military operations, ranging from the War in Afghanistan to recent deployments in Yemen and Gaza. The agreement, involving a projected payment of £101 million annually to lease the base for 99 years, resulted from intensified international pressure following a ruling by the UN’s International Court of Justice that deemed Britain's detachment of the islands from Mauritius in 1965 unlawful.

In Britain, the deal is often viewed through the lens of Starmer’s commitment to human rights and international law, a standpoint shaped significantly by counsel from Philippe Sands, a prominent human rights barrister and author. Sands has been vocal about the need for countries to honour international legal standards, a view that has resonated within press and political circles. Critics, however, argue that this commitment to international law overlooks the historical injustices faced by the displaced Chagossians, who were forcibly removed from their homeland to establish the military base.

The ramifications of this agreement extend beyond fiscal arrangements; they reignite a complex history steeped in colonialism and displacement. The Chagossians, displaced during the 1960s and 70s, have long fought for their right to return. The recent accord remains silent on guarantees for their resettlement, a point of anguish for many islanders who feel abandoned in the discussions. Human rights advocates echo these sentiments, decrying the ongoing displacement as a continuation of colonial injustices that have not been adequately addressed by either government.

Moreover, the political backdrop in Mauritius has also influenced the approval of the agreement. The country recently experienced a change in leadership, with the new Prime Minister expressing concerns about the lack of consultation with the citizens regarding the deal. Within Mauritius, questions loom about the national interest and whether the terms truly reflect the will of the people. This dissent underscores an ongoing tension between diplomatic agreements and the need to honour historical grievances.

While some have commended the deal for reinforcing UK-U.S. military cooperation in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape—especially given rising concerns about China's influence in the region—the criticisms from opposition parties in the UK spotlight a growing unease regarding national sovereignty and the prioritization of international relations over domestic concerns. Notably, figures from the UK’s Conservative Party have labelled the agreement a detrimental concession, warning that it may impose financial burdens on taxpayers while potentially compromising national security.

As the agreement awaits parliamentary approval, the perspectives of displaced Chagossians continue to be a poignant reminder of the legacies of colonialism. Their voices are critical to understanding the broader implications of such diplomatic negotiations. As they advocate for recognition of their cultural identity and rights, the past remains inextricably linked to the present, making the quest for justice and acknowledgement an ongoing challenge.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.reaction.life/p/why-trump-and-the-us-backed-the-chagos), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/5808b0ac-0610-41ad-b794-77575d359037)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.reaction.life/p/why-trump-and-the-us-backed-the-chagos), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/97e1acb6d1accbb0fb65d08357595e08)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/97e1acb6d1accbb0fb65d08357595e08)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/5808b0ac-0610-41ad-b794-77575d359037), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/97e1acb6d1accbb0fb65d08357595e08)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.reaction.life/p/why-trump-and-the-us-backed-the-chagos> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <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. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/?utm_source=openai))
3. <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. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/5808b0ac-0610-41ad-b794-77575d359037?utm_source=openai))
4. <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. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0> - This episode of the Financial Times' Political Fix podcast, hosted by George Parker, discusses two major foreign policy issues under UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. First, it covers Starmer’s new Brexit-era agreement with the EU. The deal includes aspects such as defense and security partnerships, electricity market integration, and a veterinary agreement to ease food trade. A key sticking point was fisheries, with a 12-year access arrangement for EU boats into UK waters, balanced by UK access to EU markets for fish products. The agreement entails “dynamic alignment” with EU rules, sparking limited political backlash, with critics like Kemi Badenoch labelling it a surrender, although public reaction has been muted. The second focus is on the UK's decision to return sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius in exchange for a long-term lease for the Diego Garcia military base and £101 million annually. Despite a legal hiccup just before signing, the deal proceeded with U.S. and Indian backing. The podcast highlights how Starmer is proving diplomatically effective, though domestic challenges—such as justice policy changes and fiscal pressures—loom large and may ultimately define his premiership. Panelists also critique Starmer’s tactical rather than strategic domestic decision-making. The episode concludes with stock picks reflecting political performances, notably favoring Angela Rayner and critiquing Kemi Badenoch. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://apnews.com/article/97e1acb6d1accbb0fb65d08357595e08> - 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 Chagos islanders 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. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/97e1acb6d1accbb0fb65d08357595e08?utm_source=openai))