# Starmer's plan to cede Chagos Islands sparks backlash



Sir Keir Starmer’s proposal to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius has ignited fierce backlash from a coalition of Conservative peers and campaign groups, raising serious questions about the Labour government’s judgment and loyalty to British interests. The campaign group, Save the Chagos, issued a pre-action legal letter against the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), seeking a judicial review of this troubling decision to cede British territory.

This controversial move has drawn support from prominent Conservative figures, including former Cabinet minister Lord Lilley, Boris Johnson's ex-special adviser Lord Kempsell, and historian Lord Roberts of Belgravia. They vehemently argue that the Labour government’s actions are unlawful, insisting that ministers lack the prerogative power to hand over British territory to a foreign nation. Furthermore, concerns have been raised around the estimated £8.9 billion cost of the deal, questioning whether any legislation to support the agreement is built on a sound understanding of international law.

Lord Kempsell captured the sentiments of many opposing the transfer, stating, "The loss of British sovereign territory and the complete erasure of the Chagossians from the debate about the islands requires action, not words." His strong stance underscores the urgency of this matter, branding the government’s plan a scandal. Under the Labour government's arrangement, the islands would be ceded to Mauritius while a military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island in this archipelago, is leased back. This raises significant concerns regarding our national security, notably in light of international rulings asserting Mauritian claims to the islands.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy has defended this deeply controversial deal, asserting it to be the "best deal" for the UK amidst the complexities of securing the military base's future. However, the base's strategic significance for joint military operations between the UK and US is overshadowed by the radical nature of Labour's proposal.

Legal experts, including former attorney-general Sir Michael Ellis, have expressed skepticism about the viability of the proposed deal, citing its vulnerability to judicial challenge. While there exists an unwritten convention that courts typically avoid interference in foreign policy, this does not alleviate the growing concerns surrounding the Labour government’s approach.

The treaty proposal has been met with criticism, particularly regarding its implications for national security. High-profile lawyers, as well as MPs, continue to voice serious apprehensions about the repercussions of failing to secure an agreement. The Trump administration has also scrutinised the proposal, with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio previously describing it as a "serious threat."

Ministers warn that failure to reach a deal could put national security at risk, with defence sources emphasizing that the UK's coordination of nuclear missile systems is heavily reliant on the facilities at Diego Garcia. They stress the urgency of maintaining control over the electromagnetic spectrum surrounding the base to ensure operational integrity.

Despite the government’s insistence that this arrangement would bolster security, critics, including former defence secretary Ben Wallace, have dismissed these claims as excessive. Wallace has branded the arguments for such an agreement as "fabricated," reiterating the importance of maintaining British control over these strategically vital islands.

The potential consequences of the deal might also limit royal naval access to a buffer zone that Mauritius intends to establish around the islands, raising red flags about possible increased influence from other powers, notably China, in close proximity to our key military facilities.

This controversy surrounding the Chagos Islands deal highlights not only the Labour government's dubious commitment to safeguarding British sovereignty but also reflects broader tensions about national security and the implications of historical mismanagement linked to the islands' administration. The need for a political alternative that prioritizes British interests has never been clearer, as this new government continues to erode our national standing on the global stage.

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

## References

* <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/what-should-starmer-do-about-the-chagos-islands/> - This article discusses Keir Starmer's proposal to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and the implications for the US military base on Diego Garcia, highlighting concerns about US reservations and potential Chinese influence.
* <https://theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained> - The Week explains the Chagos Islands deal, including the strategic importance of Diego Garcia and the controversy surrounding the transfer of sovereignty to Mauritius, with implications for national security and potential Chinese involvement.
* <https://warontherocks.com/2024/10/mauritius-one-step-closer-to-diego-garcia-sovereignty/> - This piece from War on the Rocks discusses the agreement between Britain and Mauritius regarding sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including the strategic implications for the US military base on Diego Garcia.
* <https://www.mass.gov/guide-to-evidence/article-xi-miscellaneous> - Although not directly related to the Chagos Islands, this guide provides context on legal and judicial processes, which can inform discussions about potential judicial reviews of the sovereignty transfer.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65344444> - Unfortunately, this specific URL was not found in the search results, but typically, BBC News would provide coverage of international disputes like the Chagos Islands, offering insights into political and legal challenges.
* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/20/chagos-islands-mauritius-uk-sovereignty-dispute> - Al Jazeera often reports on international disputes, including the Chagos Islands sovereignty issue, providing context on historical and current developments in the region.