# Keir Starmer faces backlash over £9bn deal transferring Chagos Islands sovereignty to Mauritius



Sir Keir Starmer is preparing to formalise a questionable transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius in a "virtual signing ceremony" set for tomorrow. The Chagos Islands, crucial to Britain's strategic interests in the British Indian Ocean Territory, have long been mired in controversy, especially following the forced displacement of the Chagossian people in the 1960s when the islands were ceded to the United States for military purposes—the base on Diego Garcia being a prime example.

This proposed agreement, born from international legal pressures and historical claims, is framed as a step toward rectifying colonial wrongs. However, the reality is that it compromises Britain’s military access to Diego Garcia for both UK and US forces under a contentious 99-year lease. Detractors are raising serious concerns regarding the deal's financial implications and security guarantees, with some estimates suggesting a staggering £9 billion cost to taxpayers, including substantial upfront payments and ongoing rental fees for the continued use of the base. This is nothing short of a betrayal of British national interests.

Critics, including Priti Patel, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, have denounced this initiative as an egregious exploitation of taxpayer money that overlooks the historical grievances of the Chagossians, many of whom are understandably sceptical of Mauritian governance given their past mistreatment. Adding to the complexity are fears about national security amidst rising Chinese influence in the region, a situation that the Labour government seems oblivious to as it furthers this deal.

While some US officials appear to support the arrangement, seeing it as beneficial for regional stability, the endorsement from former President Trump, during a meeting with Starmer, raises further questions about the UK’s sovereignty. The Labour government insists that the agreement complies with international law and is contingent upon parliamentary approval, a claim that carries little weight given the overwhelming opposition from various quarters regarding the management of national interests.

Moreover, the historical context of the Chagossian displacement is essential. Originally separated from Mauritius in 1965, the forced exile of local inhabitants cannot simply be brushed aside. Though the deal allows some displaced individuals a chance to return, community leaders express their frustration over being sidelined during negotiations. The proposal for a “Chagos fund” aimed at funding development projects in Mauritius claims to address historical wrongs, but it rings hollow when the primary concern should be the rights and dignity of the Chagossian people.

As these negotiations unfold, the UK faces heightened scrutiny regarding its strategic priorities and ethical obligations. With international tribunal rulings backing Mauritius's claim and a growing global push for decolonisation, this deal marks a significant misstep in managing Britain’s colonial legacy. Concerns remain not only about the rights of the Chagossians but also about the shifting geopolitical landscape, particularly if Mauritius chooses to align more closely with China in response to perceived slights from the UK.

This deal exposes the inherent conflicts between colonial history, international law, and contemporary geopolitical maneuvering. It starkly highlights the precarious position the UK finds itself in, torn between calls for restitution and the ongoing necessity of maintaining military alliances in an increasingly complex post-colonial world.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2058534/keir-starmer-chagos-cost> - 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 sign a contentious agreement with Mauritius to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands while retaining military access to Diego Garcia through a multibillion-pound arrangement. The deal, expected to be finalized imminently, grants the UK and the US a 99-year lease to continue operations on the strategically vital military base. Although launched under the previous Conservative government, the agreement is now being implemented under Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's Labour leadership, drawing sharp criticism from the opposition. Shadow Foreign Secretary Priti Patel condemned the deal as a betrayal of national interests and taxpayer exploitation. Despite domestic backlash, the deal has received muted criticism from the US, with President Donald Trump endorsing the agreement during a February meeting with Starmer. This support marks a significant diplomatic win for the UK, especially amid concerns previously voiced by Trump administration officials. Labour insists the deal adheres to international legal obligations and requires parliamentary ratification before finalization.
3. <https://www.theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained> - The Chagos Deal is a controversial agreement through which Britain will transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while securing a long-term lease on Diego Garcia for continued US-UK military use. The Chagos archipelago, ceded to Britain by France in 1814, was separated from Mauritius in 1965 and leased to the US, leading to the forced removal of over 2,000 Chagossians. Mauritius has long contested Britain's control, with UN rulings and General Assembly votes supporting its claim. The deal, reportedly worth £90 million annually for 99 years, aims to rectify colonial injustices and maintain strategic military assets. However, it has sparked political backlash in the UK due to its high cost and perceived betrayal of British Chagossians, many of whom oppose Mauritian governance due to historical mistreatment. Strategic concerns also arose in the US, where some Republicans, including Trump officials, feared the deal could favor China due to Mauritius's ties with Beijing. Despite these concerns, the deal has been endorsed by allies like the US and India. Yet, uncertainty surrounds the Chagossians' right to return, highlighting ongoing ethical and logistical challenges in the process of decolonization and geopolitical negotiations.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/dd0b174c-b624-4b70-a483-45d0c3d34ec1> - The UK has accused Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam of presenting a 'factually inaccurate' version of a proposed deal regarding the Chagos Islands. British officials disputed claims made by Ramgoolam, including statements about the deal not accounting for inflation. This controversy arose as Britain seeks approval from the US for the revised terms of the lease for Diego Garcia, a critical UK-US military base. Ramgoolam had criticized the previous agreement made by his predecessor, claiming it was based on a fixed US dollar exchange rate for 99 years, leading to misinformation about the deal's cost. The issue has led to diplomatic tensions, with both nations awaiting the US administration's decision on the deal.
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/10/06/with-the-handover-of-the-chagos-islands-the-uk-cedes-part-of-its-colonial-past-in-the-indian-ocean_6728380_4.html> - On October 3, 2024, the United Kingdom transferred sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, concluding a long-standing colonial dispute. Mauritius, which had claimed the archipelago for over 50 years, committed to maintaining the military base on Diego Garcia leased to the US, essential for global security and preventing illegal migration. The decision followed international tribunal rulings between 2019 and 2021 favoring Mauritius, prompting the UK government to negotiate the return of the islands. The agreement allows the Chagossians, displaced during the base's establishment in the 1960s, to return and ensures environmental protection. While some UK conservatives criticized the handover, The Republic of Mauritius and its legal advisors hailed it as a positive precedent for international law and conflict resolution.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/37d13bf54f9769f3621bd41d08a448f8> - The British government agreed to transfer sovereignty of the disputed Chagos Islands archipelago to Mauritius, ensuring the continuity of the strategic UK-US military base on Diego Garcia. David Lammy, the British Foreign Secretary, highlighted that this agreement would protect the military base, providing global security and maintaining long-term relations with Mauritius. Although the move would eventually allow some displaced inhabitants to return, the community expressed dissatisfaction for not being included in the negotiations. The Diego Garcia base will remain under British sovereignty for 99 years, with the UK paying rent to Mauritius. US President Joe Biden and Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth praised the agreement, while some UK Conservative lawmakers criticized it.
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.