

The Chagos Deal: A Strategic Surrender or Diplomatic Reset?

23 May 2025

□ What Really Happened: The Chagos Timeline

□ 1. Colonial History

The Chagos Archipelago was uninhabited until the French colonised it in the 18th century, administering it as a dependency of Mauritius. In 1814, both territories were ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Paris.

□ 2. UN Resolution 1514 (1960)

This landmark resolution called for full decolonisation and declared that the territorial integrity of colonies should be preserved. It was not legally binding but laid the groundwork for customary international law.

□ 3. Carve-Up Before Independence (1965)

Before granting Mauritius independence in 1968, the UK separated the Chagos Islands to form the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), facilitating a lease of Diego Garcia to the United States.

□ 4. Forced Deportation (1967-1973)

The UK forcibly removed the Chagossians to Mauritius and Seychelles, enabling military operations to proceed without a resident population.

□ 5. Legal and Diplomatic Pressure Mounts

From the 2000s onwards, legal challenges and UN motions increased. In 2019, the ICJ issued an advisory opinion declaring the UK's administration of the Chagos Islands unlawful, which the UN General Assembly supported.

□ 6. The Deal is Signed (May 2025)

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer signs an agreement to transfer sovereignty to Mauritius. The UK will retain a 99-year lease on Diego Garcia but will pay Mauritius £101 million annually, potentially totalling over £30 billion. Chagossians were not consulted and many expressed their wish to remain under UK sovereignty.

□ The UK's Options: What Else Could Have Been Done?

□ Option A: Ignore the ICJ and UN

- Maintain full sovereignty.
- Assert that the 1965 detachment predated binding decolonisation norms.
- Continue to support US military interests directly.

Pros: Sovereignty intact, no financial obligation, strong precedent for Falklands/Gibraltar.

Cons: International condemnation, diplomatic isolation, loss of soft power.

□ Option B: Sovereignty Transfer With Firm Guarantees

- Retain military access via lease.
- Secure Chagossian rights, UK citizenship, and compensation.
- Condition transfer on long-term strategic assurances.

Pros: Balanced diplomacy, retains defence posture, honours moral obligations.

Cons: Risk of future instability or reversal by Mauritius.

□ The Risks of the Current Deal

□ 1. Loss of Strategic Control

The UK is no longer sovereign — it leases Diego Garcia. Future Mauritian governments could challenge the lease terms.

□ 2. Geopolitical Drift

Mauritius could open its territory to Chinese or Indian naval cooperation, diluting Western influence.

□ 3. Undermining Other UK Territories

Ceding Chagos under pressure sets a precedent that may embolden sovereignty challenges in the Falklands, Gibraltar, or elsewhere.

↓ 4. Diminished Voice for Chagossians

Their desire to remain British was ignored. Their future is now tied to a state they do not identify with.

□ 5. Huge Financial Cost

£101 million a year, for 99 years — more than £30 billion in taxpayer funds. This could have been avoided had the UK held firm.

□ Closing Thoughts

While Prime Minister Starmer's deal may win short-term diplomatic praise, it raises long-term questions about **sovereignty, precedent, and cost**. The UK was under **no legal obligation** to hand over the territory — it chose to do so in the hope of a strategic reset. But with Chagossians left behind, taxpayers footing a

vast bill, and sovereignty now diluted, many will wonder: **was this a necessary step forward or a self-inflicted wound?**