



By: *Harvey Morris*

UK faces fresh Trump pressure as he targets its 'stupid' Chagos Islands deal



President Donald Trump's threat to punish allies who dare to resist his plan to annex Greenland has generated a rare consensus among Britain's squabbling political parties.

With the UK and Nato allies in Europe facing new US trade tariffs unless they accede to Trump's Arctic takeover, British opposition leaders hastened to endorse Prime Minister Keir Starmer's verdict that the threat was "completely wrong".

At a press conference this week at which he insisted any decision about the future status of the self-governing Danish territory was a matter for its people and the Kingdom of Denmark alone, **Starmer** even went out of his way to thank his Conservative opponent Kemi Badenoch for her support.

"A terrible idea," she had posted on X. The sovereignty of Greenland should only be decided by its people, she wrote, before adding in what may well have been a first: "On this, I agree with Keir Starmer."

Her sentiments were broadly reflected, with a greater or lesser degree of enthusiasm, in statements from other party leaders reacting to a Trump threat that Starmer said had been very badly received across the UK.

But will the current consensus survive the impact of Trump's latest overnight social media bombshell in which he branded the Starmer government's deal to hand over sovereignty of the strategically important island of **Diego Garcia** as "an act of GREAT STUPIDITY"?

Trump's slapdown tests Starmer's strategy

The latest slapdown from the White House was a blow to Starmer's largely successful strategy of cultivating and even flattering Trump while acknowledging that even the closest allies might occasionally differ.

Until now, such differences did not extend to

the UK's decision to transfer Diego Garcia and the other Indian Ocean Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the region's vital UK-US military base via a 99-year lease.

Trump's secretary of state, **Marco Rubio**, welcomed the deal last May after it was reviewed by Washington and said the US looked forward to working with the UK and Mauritius in support of regional stability.

Even before the UK and Mauritius reached agreement on the terms of a handover in May, Trump himself said he was inclined to support the deal.

Signalling his own change of heart on the agreement in a Truth Social post, Trump linked the fate of Diego Garcia to that of Greenland when he wrote that the handover of the former was "another in a very long line of National Security reasons why Greenland has to be acquired".

Negotiating the future of the islands was among the unresolved issues inherited by Starmer's team when it took office a year and a half ago

His intervention came just a week after Conservative peers abandoned an attempt to block the deal in the upper House of Lords, largely on the grounds of the cost and terms of the lease.

Nigel Farage's **Reform party** has meanwhile vowed to continue its public campaign to block the deal, having appointed itself champion of the long-dispossessed Chagos islanders who were given no say on the handover.

Andrew Rosindell, the latest Conservative MP to defect to right-wing Reform, said the main reason for his decision was his opposition to the Chagos deal. Shortly before his defection, Reform accused the Conservatives of missing a key opportunity to thwart the handover.

The former shadow foreign office minister in Badenoch's team blamed both Labour and his own former party for complicity in surrendering sovereignty to a foreign power.

Opponents of the handover have portrayed Mauritius as a close ally of China and have condemned the deal as a victory for Beijing. The UK retained the islands as British territory ahead of Mauritian independence in 1968.

Negotiating the future of the islands was agreed on during the brief Conservative premiership of Liz Truss in 2022 and was among the unresolved issues inherited by Starmer's team when it took office a year and a half ago. Ministers insist the agreement it has reached secures the long-term future of the base.

Trump's new opposition to Chagos: what comes next?

So what prompted Trump's latest outburst over Diego Garcia, and who, if anyone, has been whispering in his ear? And, more crucially, how does he intend to pursue his new-found opposition to the deal?

His intervention came in the same month that the right-wing MAGA-aligned Washington-based [Heritage Foundation](#) published an appeal for him to sink what it called "Starmer's Chagos surrender deal".



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Penned by its president, Kevin D. Roberts, and the head of its Margaret Thatcher Centre for Freedom, Nile Gardiner, it pre-empted Trump's latest stance by describing the Chagos deal as a monumental folly with dangerous potential outcomes for the US.

Opposing what they termed a massive strategic coup for China, the authors wrote in an article originally published in *The Telegraph* on January 6 that the window was narrowing for Washington to sink the deal.

"President Trump still has an historic opportunity to seek a British reversal from this myopic and self-defeating decision," the authors opined, before concluding that securing the Diego Garcia base in perpetuity would guarantee US national security and deny [China](#) a major strategic victory.

How might Trump react if Starmer persists in defending the Chagos deal? Following the logic of his threatened Greenland takeover, will he now set his sights on gaining a firmer hold on an Indian Ocean territory where US forces are already based?

And how will Starmer react as yet another potential dispute looms, after his government this week finally gave the go-ahead for a Chinese super-embassy in London despite the White House's security concerns?

So far the prime minister is maintaining his non-confrontational approach towards Trump with a degree of parliamentary support, at least when it comes to Greenland.

That consensus may rapidly fade unless Starmer succeeds in softening Trump's stance, with sceptics on the left and centre already pushing for a tougher UK line.

Liberal Democrat leader [Ed Davey](#) has already urged Starmer to abandon his policy of appeasement and stand up to Trump, "like we would any other bully".

On the Chagos Islands, there is no parliamentary consensus. Labour will continue to defend its deal as the best solution for

world security, while the right, and Reform in particular, might be tempted to support more Trumpian solutions.