



By: TA | AP Insight

UK puts Chagos Islands handover deal on hold



Britain's agreement to hand Mauritius the **Chagos Islands** that are home to a strategic U.K.-American military base is on indefinite hold because U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has **withdrawn its support** for the deal.

The British government acknowledged Saturday that legislation to ratify the agreement for the islands in the Indian Ocean has run out of time in Parliament.

It's the latest fallout from **souring relations** between Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government and the Trump administration.

Trump initially backed the deal, but changed his mind in January, calling a deal to transfer sovereignty of the islands, home to the joint military base on Diego Garcia, "an act of GREAT STUPIDITY" in a social media post.

The U.K. put the bill's progress on hold, and the government now concedes it will run out of time to become law before the current session of Parliament ends in the next few weeks.

It is not expected to be included in the list of bills announced by King Charles III for the next session of Parliament, which begins May 13.

Despite British frustration with the U.S. change of stance, officials still hope the deal can be revived.

"Diego Garcia is a key strategic military asset for both the U.K. and the U.S.," the British government said in a statement. "Ensuring its long-term operational security is and will continue to be our priority – it is the entire reason for the deal."

"We continue to believe the agreement is the best way to protect the long-term future of the base, but we have always said we would only proceed with the deal if it has U.S. support. We are continuing to engage with the U.S. and Mauritius."

Simon McDonald, who was head of Britain's Foreign Office until 2020, said the government

"had no other choice" except to put the deal on ice.

"When the president of the United States is openly hostile, the government has to rethink. So this agreement, this treaty will go into the deep freeze for the time being," he told the BBC.

The strategic military base in focus

The remote chain of more than 60 islands off the tip of India, south of the Maldives, has been under British control since 1814.



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A military base on Diego Garcia, one of the islands, has supported U.S. military operations from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan and as a base for American bombers in the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

Starmer initially blocked American planes from using British air bases for attacks on Iran. He later agreed to let the United States use bases in England and on Diego Garcia to strike Iran's missile sites, but not other targets.

Trump has disparaged the United States' NATO allies for their reluctance to join the war. He derided Starmer last month as "not Winston Churchill" and mocked the Royal Navy.

Risk of interference by China

and Russia

Under the agreement struck between the U.K. and Mauritius after years of negotiation, Britain would lease back the Diego Garcia base for at least 99 years.

Starmer's government says the deal protects the base from international legal challenge. In recent years, the United Nations and its top court have urged Britain to **return the islands to Mauritius**.

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Britain's opposition Conservative Party and Reform U.K. opposed the agreement, saying giving up the islands puts them at risk of interference by China and Russia. They have pushed the Trump administration to rescind its support.

Islanders who were displaced from Diego Garcia in the 1960s and 1970s to make way for the base say they weren't consulted and worry the deal will make it harder for them to go home.

An estimated 10,000 displaced Chagossians and their descendants now live primarily in Britain, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Some have fought unsuccessfully in U.K. courts for many years for the right to go home.