

# Britain Cedes Control of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius While Maintaining Pentagon Base

After nearly six decades, the right to self-determination and independence is still being denied to the indigenous people as the United States prepares for expanding imperialist wars in Asia and Africa

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*People living in the Chagos Islands archipelago were forcefully removed from their homeland during the late 1960s and early 1970s to make way for a United States military base on one of the territories known as Diego Garcia.*

During the first week of October, the British government announced that it was ceding control of the islands, with the exception of Diego Garcia, to the government of Mauritius, a member of the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This decision by the UK government came after a decades-long campaign on the part of the people of the Chagos Islands to return to their homeland. The advocates for Chagossians emphasized in their comments in the aftermath of the decision to place them under the Mauritian government that they had not been consulted.

Over the years Chagossians have held demonstrations along with initiating legal actions to win the right of return. Although the UK courts have recognized that their removal was illegal, there has never been a mandate for them to return as an independent people.

Maxell Evenor, who is of Chagossian ancestry, was briefly interviewed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on October 4 where he criticized the announcement of the agreement between London and the Mauritian government. Mauritius was granted independence in 1968 from the UK and has advanced its claim to the Chagos islands in recent years.

Evenor recounted how his grandmother exiled to Britain was negatively impacted by the illegal separation from her homeland. Within Britain, the Chagossians like other peoples of African and Asian descent are suffering from national discrimination and institutional racism.

Nonetheless, if what the British government says is true regarding the turning over control of the islands to Mauritius with the understanding that the largest territory which houses a joint U.S.-UK military base will remain in the control of these two imperialist states, illustrates clearly that the decision taken was not in the interests of the people of the Chagos Islands. This decision as well is not in the interest of Mauritius either since it preserves the presence of U.S. and British troops in these Indian Ocean areas where they will be utilized to continue hostile military actions against various geo-political regions within

Africa and Asia.

## **A Colonial Pattern Continues**

The plight of the people of this islands-nation is indicative of the process of forced removals and the appropriation of land. This is not a practice which is alien to the history of the U.S. and all European imperialist states.

Looking at the historical development of Britain and other imperialist states, the control over oppressed peoples and their resources provides enormous wealth for the colonizers. With specific reference to the African continent, millions were kidnapped and taken to the Western Hemisphere between the 16th and 19th centuries where they were enslaved and colonized.

In Asia many territories were taken over by the British and various Western European governments where the majority of the indigenous people were subjected to forced labor, land seizures and taxation. The ruling class of these European nations amassed tremendous amounts of wealth which fueled the growth of many of the industries which continue to dominate the world system today such as shipping, mass production and international finance.

Adding to the motivation for such a foreign policy is the expansion of the military-industrial-complex which attempts to ensure that the exploitative and oppressive system perpetuates itself. Therefore, imperialism must conceal the true nature of its crimes while also justifying its existence by claiming they are the purveyor of democracy and progress on a global scale.

The [United Nations News Agency wrote](#) on the situation involving the Chagos Islands saying:

“In splitting the islands from Mauritius, the UK expelled between 1,500 and 2,000 islanders so that it could lease Diego Garcia, the largest of the Chagos islands, to the United States for military use which the two allies have since operated jointly. According to news reports, the UK falsely declared that Chagos had no permanent population so that it would not have to report its colonial rule to the UN. In reality, the Chagossian community had lived on Chagos for centuries. The UK and US governments forcibly displaced the Chagossian population between 1967 and 1973 not only reportedly on Diego Garcia, but also Peros Banhos and Salomon.”

This time frame for the forced removals of the Chagossians coincided with the U.S. war in Southeast Asia and the efforts to defeat the armed struggles of the African people living then under Portuguese colonial rule and the settler colonial regimes of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), South-West Africa (Namibia) and South Africa. Despite the theft of these islands and the bombings and occupations in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the forces for national liberation were ultimately victorious.

Britain and the U.S. have refused to take responsibility for these actions which continue to have grave implications five decades later. The Chagossians are entitled to not only return to their homeland they are owed reparations for the pain and suffering associated with displacement and the nature of colonial rule.

Many have vowed to press on with their demands for repatriation, self-determination and

reparations. Several years ago, many of the Chagossians were granted citizenship by the UK although their principal goal is winning the right of return.

Another section of the article cited above noted that military considerations were paramount in the decision to maintain control over Diego Garcia:

“The UK Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, said the UK government had secured the future of the military base ‘as well as guaranteeing our long-term relationship with Mauritius, a close Commonwealth partner’. However, many Chagossians are still frustrated by the UK government’s lack of consultation with them before Thursday’s announcement, according to news reports. Chagossian Voices, a community organization for Chagossians based in the UK and several other countries where islanders have settled, deplored ‘the exclusion of the Chagossian community from the negotiations’, leaving them ‘powerless and voiceless in determining our own future and the future of our homeland. The view of Chagossians, the Indigenous inhabitants of the islands, have been consistently and deliberately ignored and we demand full inclusion in the drafting of the treaty,’ they added.”

Even though the leading imperialist states such as the U.S., Britain and France foster the notion that the era of colonial rule has ended, the situation prevailing among the Chagossians has proved otherwise. Having been dispersed to other areas in the Indian Ocean including Mauritius and the Seychelles along with Britain, the Chagossians remain a people without a home.

## **Military Outpost for Western Imperialism**

There are numerous reports of Diego Garcia being utilized for the purpose of detaining purported enemies of the U.S. for extraordinary renditions since the beginning of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Having cleared the island of its inhabitants who had worked on plantations for the British, the territory in recent decades has become an indispensable resource for the expansion of U.S. military influence.

Mauritius’ relations with the People’s Republic of China have become notable since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1972. In recent years Mauritius and China have signed documents establishing a Free Trade Agreement. See [this](#).

Yet the exclusion of Diego Garcia from the other Chagos Islands is a clear indication of its important role within U.S. military strategy in the Indian Ocean. Visits to the island are not allowed as the level of secrecy and monitoring are designed to even keep out journalists.

One BBC journalist, Alice Cuddy, wrote an extensive report during September after being allowed on the island to cover a trial for Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum. Cuddy observed the atmosphere on the island which is occupied only by Pentagon personnel and British administrators. Any effort to gain admission to Diego Garcia requires the approval of U.S. military authorities.

### [According to Cuddy:](#)

“To enter the island you need a permit, only granted to people with connections to the military facility or the British authority that runs the territory. Journalists have historically been barred.

UK government lawyers brought a legal challenge to try to block the BBC from attending the hearing, and even when permission was granted following a ruling by the territory's Supreme Court, the U.S. later objected, saying it would not provide food, transport or accommodation to all those attempting to reach the island for the case - including the judge and barristers."

These developments on the Chagos Islands in recent months could very well be reflective of the U.S. preparations for a renewed war effort in the Asian and African continents. The Israeli genocide perpetuated against the Palestinians in Gaza and the widening of this same military campaign into Lebanon opens the way for the deployment greater numbers of Pentagon troops in West Asia and other geo-political regions.

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*Featured image: B-2 bomber take off, B-52 bombers on tarmac on Diego Garcia in 2003 (From the Public Domain)*

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