

A Footprint of Unfreedom

The Future of Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia

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For over 50 years, the United States has maintained a military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island of the Chagos Archipelago in the central Indian Ocean.¹ The United Kingdom (UK) governs Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos Islands as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), a colonial jurisdiction created in 1965 for the sole purpose of facilitating the militarization of Diego Garcia.² In February 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in an advisory opinion that the UK's occupation of the Chagos Islands is illegal under international law and that the islands rightfully belong under Mauritian sovereign control.³ The ICJ further advised that all members of the United Nations (UN) are obligated to work toward the decolonization of Chagos. Three months later, 116 states voted in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to endorse the ICJ's decision and call upon the UK government to transfer the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius. Only four states joined with the UK and United States to oppose the resolution.⁴

What do these legal and political developments mean for the future of UK sovereignty over the Chagos Islands? What are the implications for the continued use of Diego Garcia by the US military? Because London has been dedicated to governing the BIOT in a way that privileges the military interests of the United States, it has long been assumed that continued UK sovereignty over Chagos is critical to the success of Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia. In what follows, I challenge this conventional wisdom to argue that the ICJ's ruling, the UNGA vote, and other related developments show that UK control has become an unnecessary strategic liability for the United States. I argue that the historical (colonial) origins of the BIOT as a discrete administrative unit have encumbered the territory with some damaging political pathologies. These problems cannot be remedied by decision makers in London or Washington and will only worsen over time.⁵ I conclude that the United States should now back Mauritian sovereignty over the Chagos Islands—not only because supporting decolonization is the ethical and legally required thing to do (although these motivations ought to weigh heavily on US decision makers) but also because there is a hardheaded strategic rationale for preferring Port Louis over London as a landlord.

To be sure, there will be costs to the United States if Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos Islands come under Mauritian control. Namely, the archipelago

would no longer be contained within a jurisdiction purpose-built for the conduct of US military operations (as is the case with the BIOT). It will take careful diplomatic work to ensure that the transition from UK to Mauritian sovereignty does not impose new burdens upon Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia. However, as I describe below, even the UK government recognizes that Mauritius will assume control over the Chagos Islands at some point—an undertaking that is binding upon the UK under international law. There is even a nontrivial possibility that the UK could initiate a handover of sovereign authority to Mauritius without US consent. Combined with mounting international pressure for decolonization, these political uncertainties create a strong rationale for the United States to acknowledge Mauritius's claims sooner rather than later with a view toward securing an enduring say over the future of the territory. To do otherwise would be to risk being overtaken by events and perhaps losing access to Diego Garcia altogether.

Background: Political Pathologies in Britain's Last Colony

The island of Diego Garcia was first identified as the potential site of a US military base in the 1950s, in the context of the intensifying Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁶ Serious discussions over the creation of a base began in the early 1960s, with the United Kingdom and United States signing a formal agreement to open up the territory for military purposes in 1966.⁷ Construction began in March 1971, and just two years later Diego Garcia was home to a fully operational communications facility charged with monitoring Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean.⁸ Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, a series of geopolitical events—especially the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—prompted the United States to greatly expand the base. The island's lagoon was dredged to create a ship channel, turning basin, and berthing space for warships, and its runway and hangar space were expanded.⁹ By the end of the 1980s, Diego Garcia had become a vital hub for pre-positioned air and naval forces in the Indian Ocean region. The base played key roles in the First Gulf War (1990–1991), Operation Desert Fox (1998), and the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia has been a successful military base for two main reasons. Geographically, the island of Diego Garcia occupies a strategically valuable location in the center of the Indian Ocean—almost exactly equidistant between the east coast of Africa and the Indonesian island of Aceh, making it indispensable as a staging post for operations in the entire Indian Ocean region—and boasts natural features that make it capable of hosting large numbers of naval vessels and aircraft.¹⁰ Just as important as its geostrategic assets is the island's

unique political situation: the BIOT is the only fully discrete (albeit nonsovereign) territorial jurisdiction in the world to have been created for the sole and explicit purpose of housing a military base. Up until 1965, Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos Archipelago had been part of the UK-controlled Crown Colony of Mauritius. At the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference in September 1965, however, UK officials convinced a delegation of Mauritian independence leaders to allow the British Empire to retain control over the Chagos Archipelago even after Mauritius became a fully sovereign state. The UK's negotiators acknowledged that the islands would be returned to Mauritian control once they were no longer required by the United Kingdom (and, by extension, the United States) for military purposes.¹¹ Weeks later, Queen Elizabeth II approved an order in council to create the BIOT—a new jurisdiction and the last colony ever created by the British Empire.¹² Mauritius duly obtained its independence in 1968 without the Chagos Archipelago as part of its internationally recognized territory.

The reason for excising Chagos from the Crown Colony of Mauritius to form the new Crown Colony of BIOT was that both London and Washington wanted to avoid a situation where any new military base would be dependent upon a postcolonial landlord.¹³ If the archipelago had remained part of Mauritius and had thus been under the sovereign authority of Port Louis from 1968 onward, the concern among American strategists was that the territory might easily come under the sway of communist or otherwise anti-US groups. These were reasonable fears: numerous postcolonial states in Africa and Asia took anti-US positions in the Cold War era, with some, such as Iran, switching from being stalwart US allies to implacable adversaries. In the mid-1960s, nobody in London or Washington could be sure that Mauritius would remain tightly aligned with the United Kingdom and United States after it gained independence. Given these geopolitical uncertainties, keeping the Chagos Archipelago under the direct control of the UK government was viewed as a prudent way to provide the United States with guaranteed long-term access to Diego Garcia—effectively creating a legal-political umbrella beneath which the islands would be sheltered from the vicissitudes of postcolonial and anti-imperialist politics.

In the event, the BIOT's creation did not provide as clean a break with Mauritius as strategic planners in London and Washington had anticipated. In 1980, the government of Mauritius formally laid claim to Chagos on the basis that, when the BIOT was created, prevailing international law had prohibited colonizers from carving up their existing imperial possessions into new jurisdictions.¹⁴ In 1983, a select committee of Mauritian parliamentarians further concluded that their country's leaders prior to independence had been under duress when they agreed at Lancaster House to the excision of Chagos.¹⁵ From this view, the sepa-

ration of Chagos from Mauritius had been improper and should be regarded as an ongoing violation of international law—an argument subsequently endorsed by international political bodies such as the Organization for African Unity, the African Union, and the UNGA before being confirmed by the ICJ’s advisory opinion in February 2019.¹⁶ Every Mauritian leader since the early 1980s has made it clear that Chagos is an integral part of Mauritius—a commitment enshrined in the country’s constitution—placing considerable strain on Mauritius’s bilateral ties with both the United Kingdom and United States.

Archival documents show that UK diplomats in the 1960s knew full well that excising Chagos from Mauritius was in violation of international rules and, if not done carefully, would draw unwanted scrutiny from the UN’s Special Committee on Decolonization (“Committee of 24”).¹⁷ However, violating the territorial integrity of Mauritius was hardly the worst crime knowingly perpetrated by British officials as part of the creation of the BIOT. Between 1965 and 1973, around 1,500 indigenous Chagos Islanders were forcibly expelled from their homes to satisfy the needs of Diego Garcia’s new military occupants.¹⁸ The islanders were misrepresented to external audiences as migrant laborers, despite the authorities’ clear knowledge that many Chagossian families had lived on the islands for generations. The rationale for the expulsions was that the Chagos Islands had to be made rid of a permanent population if they were to play host to a US military base. As one UK official wrote: “We must surely be very tough about this. The object of the exercise is to get some rocks which will remain ours. There will be no indigenous population except seagulls who have not yet got a committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of birds).”¹⁹

The Chagossians never acquiesced in their exile. They fought back—protesting vigorously in both Mauritius and the United Kingdom.²⁰ These efforts produced some important victories: financial compensation from the UK government,²¹ recognition of UK citizenship (and thus the ability to migrate onward to the United Kingdom),²² and even—if only briefly—the technical right to return to the Chagos Islands (discussed in more detail below). In Mauritius, the left-wing political parties Lalit and Mouvement Militant Mauricien made the Chagossians’ plight part of their electoral platforms. The fate of the islanders even became an issue in US domestic politics for a brief time, with lawmakers in the House of Representatives raising the issue of the islanders’ mistreatment during a 1975 hearing on whether to expand the base on Diego Garcia.²³

In the United Kingdom, the Chagossians’ cause has never been a high-profile political issue—but neither has it been entirely buried. In the late 1970s and 1980s, left-wing members of the Labour Party such as Tam Dalyell and Robin Cook made intermittent efforts to raise the issue with government ministers. Be-

ginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a larger number of parliamentarians began to work together to support the islanders—eventually coming together to form the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Chagos Islands in 2008.²⁴ Between 2010 and 2015, the Chagossians could even count several members of the UK Cabinet as (at least nominal) supporters of their right of return—including Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. In 2015, a longtime ally of the Chagossians—Jeremy Corbyn—became leader of the Labour Party and thus leader of the official opposition in Westminster. Corbyn has continued to speak out in favor of the Chagossians since becoming the UK’s nominal prime minister in waiting.

Up until now, no amount of campaigning by Mauritius, the Chagossians, or their supporters has been enough to shake UK political control over Chagos. Officials in London admit that the expulsion of the Chagos Islanders was regrettable and even illegal in its original manner of execution but always couple their professions of contrition with the twin insistences that (1) the islands will revert to Mauritian control once they are no longer needed for military purposes but will be treated as sovereign UK territory until that time; and (2) the current ordinances preventing the islanders’ return to Chagos are legal and, in any case, resettlement of the archipelago would be prohibitively costly.²⁵

London as Landlord: Diminishing Returns, Emerging Threats

The sole purpose of the BIOT’s creation was to furnish London and Washington with a territory that could be made exclusively available for military purposes. Judged against this criterion, the BIOT has been a resounding success. The United Kingdom has ensured that there is no permanent civilian population in the Chagos Islands (thus, no representative government and no adjacent communities to accommodate), provides little meaningful oversight of US military activities, and extends few laws to the jurisdiction. As Peter H. Sand has argued, Diego Garcia is essentially a “legal black hole” in the Indian Ocean—the perfect place for a military base to exist in near-total seclusion.²⁶ Moreover, the United Kingdom does not charge rent for the base.²⁷ For all these reasons, Anglo–American cooperation over Diego Garcia can be judged to have been a worthwhile arrangement from the perspective of the United States.

Governing the BIOT in service of US interests has required the UK government to be active along two fronts: (1) to oppose Mauritius’s claims to sovereignty; and (2) to oppose the exiled Chagossians’ fight for a right to return to the islands. For a long time, Whitehall found itself busiest on the second of these fronts. As already mentioned, the Chagossian community won a High Court victory in 2000 that technically restored their right to return in UK law.²⁸ At the time, the UK foreign secretary was Robin Cook—a longtime supporter of the Chagossians since

his days as a backbench Labour MP. After losing to the islanders before the High Court, Cook undertook on behalf of the UK government to accept the ruling in full and investigate the possibility of facilitating a return to the outer Chagos Islands (that is, those islands other than Diego Garcia).²⁹ It was not until 2004, in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, that Cook's successor, Jack Straw, used new orders in council to exile the islanders afresh. These legal instruments—a form of primary legislation made by UK ministers using royal prerogative³⁰ rather than a piece of legislation promulgated by the BIOT commissioner—had to be defended in court against robust challenges from the Chagossians and their lawyers, resulting in eight years of litigation that cost the British taxpayer millions of pounds and placed a bright spotlight on the US military's activities on Diego Garcia.³¹

Fighting to keep the Chagossians in exile was a public relations disaster for the UK government. Human rights groups and news organizations have been scathing in their coverage. One of the first in-depth reports into the territory was published in 1982 by the Minority Rights Group, which excoriated the UK government for its failure to uphold the Chagossians' rights despite being willing to wage war against Argentina in defense of the Falkland Islanders.³² Two decades later, the investigative journalist John Pilger produced a TV documentary (*Stealing a Nation*) to chronicle the Chagossians' story. In 2008, activists from Greenpeace tried to land on Diego Garcia to protest the islanders' treatment.³³

Also in 2008, the UK government was forced to admit that Diego Garcia had been used by the US military for extraordinary rendition flights—despite having earlier assured Parliament that no such flights had visited the territory.³⁴ This admission fueled a string of allegations that the United Kingdom had made itself complicit in the operation of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) “black site” on Diego Garcia.³⁵ And in 2010, the news media reported that the UK government had “manipulated” the results of a 2002 feasibility study into resettlement of the Chagos Islands in an attempt to stymie the efforts of the exiled islanders to return home.³⁶ Taken together, these two developments—reports of a CIA detention facility and allegations that the UK government was using underhand methods to keep the Chagos Islanders in exile—gave rise to the impression that the Chagossians' mistreatment was entirely at the behest of a US government intent on using Diego Garcia for shadowy purposes. It did not help that, some years later, UK officials were accused of lying about the availability of flight logs pertaining to Diego Garcia.³⁷

Even withstanding this torrent of negative publicity, it still could be argued that the BIOT administration provided the United States with a relatively secure political unit within which to house its base on Diego Garcia. However, from 2010 onward, even this advantage of the BIOT framework began to unravel after Lon-

don decided to create a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Chagos Archipelago. An international coalition of conservationist organizations including Pew Environment first put forward the idea of creating an MPA in Chagos was in 2009.³⁸ The UK government, especially Foreign Secretary David Miliband, warmly welcomed the proposal, partly because politicians like Miliband wanted to secure a “green legacy” for themselves and partly because officials believed that a new layer of environmental protections in the Chagos Archipelago would constitute an additional barrier to the islanders’ return.³⁹ Mauritius and most major Chagossian organizations argued against the creation of the MPA—or at least, argued for a greater say in its formation and management. However, in April 2010 (on a day that the UK Parliament was in recess), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced that it had decided to designate an MPA in the Chagos Islands. At the time, it was the largest MPA of its kind in the world—a (green) feather in the cap of Miliband and the outgoing Labour prime minister, Gordon Brown.

The creation of a formal MPA in Chagos created new legal and political opportunities for Mauritius and the Chagossians to press their interests against the UK government. For their part, the Chagossians leveraged WikiLeaks-released diplomatic cables (which suggested that the creation of the MPA had been done cynically to thwart the islanders’ hopes of resettlement) to request a judicial review of the MPA decision.⁴⁰ This effort ultimately failed to overturn the MPA’s creation—although it went all the way to the UK Supreme Court. At the same time, Mauritius lodged formal protests with the UK government that the manner of the MPA’s creation had violated its rights pertaining to the BIOT, including certain legal rights deriving from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Finding its diplomatic overtures rebuffed by London, Port Louis opted to take its case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, which has jurisdiction to rule on disputes arising from states’ participation in the UNCLOS regime.

Contrary to the wishes of the UK government, the PCA decided to hear Mauritius’s arguments and, in 2015, an arbitral tribunal ruled in a binding decision that the manner of the MPA’s creation had indeed contravened international law.⁴¹ Among other things, the PCA held that Mauritius should have been afforded more of a say in the creation of the MPA because of its abiding interest in the governance of the territory, which stems from the repeated undertakings given by the UK government that Mauritius will, one day, be awarded sovereignty over the islands. The ruling thus established in public international law that Mauritius must be consulted on issues concerning the future governance of the islands—not just when it comes to marine conservation, but on other matters too. The UK government seems to have accepted these findings, subsequently arguing before

the UNGA that “we acknowledge Mauritius’s long-term interest in the archipelago” and “we [have] offered . . . a framework for the joint management, in environment and scientific study, of all the islands of the territory except for Diego Garcia.”⁴² In other words, the United Kingdom has accepted in light of the PCA decision that its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago is not absolute and that consultations with Mauritius are an international legal requirement going forward. This is a consequential development, which calls into question London’s ability to govern the islands without interference from Mauritius. It was also an entirely unforced error—the biggest sign yet that UK sovereignty over Chagos will not always be exercised in ways conducive to US interests.

The ICJ’s advisory opinion in February 2019 was even worse for the UK government. Having become frustrated with the UK government’s handling of its claims to Chagos in the wake of the PCA decision, the government of Mauritius decided in 2017 that it would seek an advisory opinion from the World Court on the question of sovereignty. As per UN rules, Port Louis formally requested that the UNGA refer the matter to the ICJ. In June 2017, the General Assembly approved Mauritius’s motion by an overwhelming majority. The United Kingdom lobbied hard to prevent the matter from coming before the ICJ, but, when the question of a referral came to be voted upon, London could not even count on the support of most European Union member states—a telling indictment of the United Kingdom’s declining influence in the world.⁴³ That the UK government could not stop the case being referred to the ICJ was a powerful demonstration of how little diplomatic clout London can muster in defense of UK national interests. That the United Kingdom *lost* the ensuing case just served to compound the humiliation. For even though the ICJ’s ruling was not binding, its decision was unambiguous and damning: that UK control over the Chagos Islands has been illegal under international law ever since 1965 and should be brought to a swift end.

One major implication of the ICJ ruling is that the World Court has now formally advised that every UN member, including the United States, has an obligation to decolonize Chagos. Before February 2019, the United States has been able to hide behind the fig leaf of insisting that the question of sovereignty over Chagos was a purely bilateral matter to be decided between the United Kingdom and Mauritius. This position was never entirely watertight, but it helped to shift international attention away from the base on Diego Garcia.⁴⁴ Now, however, the ICJ has articulated a powerful legal reality that, in fact, the continued colonization of the BIOT is an offense against all—including the United States. This is a difficult recommendation for the US government to dismiss altogether.

Thanks to decisions rendered by the PCA, ICJ, and UNGA, the legal and ethical reasons for decolonizing Chagos are plain to see. However, as argued here,

there is also a compelling pragmatic reason for why the United States (and its military planners in particular) should support decolonization. In short, the political and legal status quo in the BIOT is becoming unsustainable. On the one hand, the PCA's ruling concerning the Chagos MPA has made it clear that Mauritius has an actionable interest in the territory and must be consulted over major changes to the governance of the BIOT—a set of legal rights that the United Kingdom has accepted, and which could later be pressed in ways that neither London nor Washington approve of. On the other hand, the ICJ has leveraged some clear rules on decolonization to show that the United Kingdom should not be in Diego Garcia in the first place and that the BIOT should cease to exist as a jurisdiction. Meanwhile, an overwhelming majority of the world's states have expressed a view to concur with the ICJ's advisory opinion that Mauritius is the legitimate sovereign power in the Chagos Archipelago. In short, UK sovereignty is being squeezed. In the eyes of American strategists, at what point does London's stewardship of the islands start to look like a strategic liability?

In addition to these international threats to the political status quo in the BIOT, there is also a domestic threat emanating from the United Kingdom that warrants mentioning. As noted above, the current leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, is a longstanding and outspoken supporter of the Chagos Islanders.⁴⁵ He could easily become a future UK prime minister. Such a premiership would constitute an existential threat to the BIOT. In April 2019, Corbyn wrote to Prime Minister Theresa May to condemn her decision to ignore both the ICJ ruling and the UNGA resolution on the status of the BIOT.⁴⁶ The implication of Corbyn's letter was that he supported Mauritius's demands that the BIOT be decolonized—a position in keeping with his longstanding record on the issue. This suggests that, if he ever became prime minister, Corbyn might voluntarily initiate the process of ceding the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius. Other plausible options would be for Corbyn to submit the issue to a binding arbitration by the ICJ or to simply authorize the resettlement of the islands under UK supervision.⁴⁷ And as prime minister, Corbyn could implement any of these scenarios via the exercise of royal prerogative powers. He would not require any new legislation—or even the agreement of the United States.

Even if Corbyn never becomes prime minister, it must now be regarded as at least feasible that some other future leader could choose to relinquish UK sovereignty over Chagos or else initiate a resettlement over and above the objections of the United States. Indeed, a restoration of the Chagos Islanders' right of return seemed entirely possible during the 2010–2015 coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. In September 2010, the Business Secretary Vince Cable even released a letter to announce that the government had agreed to allow

resettlement to proceed.⁴⁸ The information contained within the letter turned out to be an inaccurate reflection of government policy, but the bizarre circumstances surrounding its release were nevertheless suggestive of a high level of support enjoyed by the Chagossians in the cabinet at that time.

The bottom line is that the United Kingdom can no longer be considered the reliable landlord it once was in Chagos. Its political leaders cannot be trusted to indefinitely toe the line for the United States—especially when they incur significant embarrassment from doing so but without any discernible benefits in return. How long will it be before a government in London decides that the legal, political, and ethical problems associated with the BIOT are too serious to ignore? What will happen if the United Kingdom decides to initiate the transfer of sovereign control to Mauritius before the United States has had an opportunity to plan for a change in ownership?⁴⁹ It makes strategic sense for the United States to avoid the grave uncertainties bound up with these questions by simply choosing of its own violation to opt for Mauritian sovereignty.



(US Navy photo by Ensign Victor Obando)

Figure 1. Infrastructure improvements. US Navy Seabees deployed with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 5's Detail Diego Garcia work with civilian contractors during a concrete placement that will form a pad for the foundation for a tension fabric structure in support of the US Air Force. NMCB-5 is deployed across the Indo-Pacific region, conducting high-quality construction to support US and partner nations to strengthen partnerships, deter aggression, and enable expeditionary logistics and power projection.

After Decolonization: Looking to the Future

The United States does not have a direct say over who controls the Chagos Islands—nor should it. However, Washington does have a powerful indirect say. As already discussed, the UK government's position is that it will cede the islands to Mauritius upon such a time as they are no longer needed for defense and security purposes. And because the US base on Diego Garcia is the only means by which any of the Chagos Islands are used for such purposes, it follows that the United Kingdom will relinquish sovereignty over the archipelago as soon as the United States offers its acquiescence. At least, there would be no reason for London to object to Mauritian sovereignty over Chagos if it was something that the United States supported.

I have suggested that the United States should use its leverage to bring about the transfer of sovereignty to Mauritius. The obvious objection to this proposal is that Mauritian sovereignty might prove to be more of a constraint on US military activities than the BIOT regime has been. This is a reasonable objection. It is difficult to imagine any political ordering that could be more favorable to the US military than that which has been provided by the BIOT—not even US sovereignty over the islands. However, the supposed drawbacks of full Mauritian control over Chagos can be managed if US leaders show foresight. And in any case, the BIOT is already showing signs of collapse. The jurisdiction belongs to a different era and cannot be expected to last forever. My argument is that decision makers in Washington would be best served by accepting the inevitable and shifting their focus toward working with Mauritius to forge a long-term understanding about the US presence on Diego Garcia.

How should the United States seek to shape the future of Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos Islands? There are several available options. One possibility would be to encourage London and Port Louis to agree upon a phased transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, beginning with the so-called outer Chagos Islands. After all, most of the islets in the Chagos Archipelago are more than 100 miles away from Diego Garcia. None of this land has ever been used for defense and security purposes and so, even by UK standards, it should be transferred to Mauritius.

It would not be the first time that the BIOT has been dismembered in such a way. At the time of the BIOT's creation in 1965, it comprised not just the Chagos Archipelago but also the island groups of Farquhar, Aldabra, and Desroches—each of which were excised from the then-Crown Colony of the Seychelles. The latter three sets of islands were never militarized and, as a result, were handed back to the Seychelles in 1976 upon that territory becoming an independent state.

Because the United States only uses Diego Garcia for military purposes, Washington has little interest in keeping the outer Chagos Islands under UK control. These islands could therefore be returned to Mauritius immediately, pending a final agreement on the status of Diego Garcia. While it is unlikely that Mauritius will agree to give up its territorial claim to Diego Garcia altogether, Port Louis might agree upon an extended timetable for the transfer of sovereign control over that island—one that would provide certainty for all concerned, satisfy international demands for decolonization, and give the United States and Mauritius enough time to conclude a comprehensive bilateral agreement on the future use of Diego Garcia for military purposes.

In the long-term, though, the only option for the United States is to prepare for the eventual transfer of sovereignty over Diego Garcia as well as the outer islands. This cannot be avoided for several reasons. First, from the Mauritian perspective, Diego Garcia is just as much Mauritian territory as the other Chagos Islands. Port Louis will not give up its demands for total decolonization. However, as I have argued, there are also powerful reasons of self-interest for why the United States should prefer Mauritian sovereignty over Diego Garcia. Namely, it is possible that a future UK government will decide (or be forced) to decolonize without giving much notice to the United States—whether because of unbearable international pressure or because of a domestic change in attitudes toward the alliance with the United States. It would be better for the United States to cultivate a willing and enthusiastic partner in Port Louis rather than be left in the position of having to begin talks with Mauritius once decolonization has become a *fait accompli*.

In 2016, Mauritius assured the United Kingdom and United States that it had “no objection” to the continued use of Diego Garcia for military purposes.⁵⁰ This position has been the same since the early 1980s.⁵¹ Of course, this does not mean that discussions with Mauritius will be straightforward. There will have to be a bilateral status of forces agreement, for example, and an agreement over financial compensation—items that have never had to be negotiated with the United Kingdom because of the nature of the BIOT arrangement. Such talks might prove to be somewhat burdensome for the United States. Mauritius might wish to impose limits over the storage of certain weapons, for example (especially nuclear weapons),⁵² and could insist on Diego Garcia not being used for practices such as the detention of prisoners. However, there will be silver linings: concluding a formal agreement (treaty) with the government of Mauritius would give the US base on Diego Garcia a much firmer legal footing than it currently enjoys via the United Kingdom and the BIOT.

There is always a remote possibility that Mauritius will decide against hosting a US base on Diego Garcia, whether now or in the future. This is the case with

every country that hosts a US military installation; foreign governments always have the outside option of denying the United States the right to conduct military operations on their sovereign territory. Nevertheless, the best outcome for the United States would be to convince decision makers in Port Louis that security cooperation with the United States is in their national self-interest. A self-enforcing voluntary agreement with Mauritius would be an infinitely more durable foundation for the base on Diego Garcia than continuing to rely upon the UK government's ability to justify its occupation of an illegal colony before domestic and international audiences.

Convincing Mauritius of the benefits of close security cooperation with the United States should not be difficult. Mauritius does not have a standing army of its own, instead tacitly relying upon others to guarantee its national security and a tranquil regional environment. Moreover, there is already some military cooperation between the US and Mauritian governments—especially in terms of anti-piracy operations. Hosting a US military base on Mauritian soil would allow Port Louis to upgrade its security ties with the United States to a level of a credible military partnership: cooperation over Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia would provide American leaders with an enduring stake in the military security and political independence of Mauritius—no small thing in the context of a shifting balance of power in the Indian Ocean region.

Once Mauritius assumes sovereignty over Chagos, it is likely that the archipelago will be treated as a discrete subnational jurisdiction. The model for this would be Rodrigues, which is an autonomous region of Mauritius and has its own regional assembly.⁵³ Talks should begin with Mauritius's Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands, then, to see whether there might be the potential for different laws and immigration rules to be put in place for Chagos than Mauritius proper, with a view to limiting tourism and the size of a permanent resettlement. If a new civilian administration in the Chagos Islands can borrow (as can Rodrigues) then this might even open the door to a direct financial relationship between the United States and a new autonomous government in Chagos in terms of lending, aid, and investment; the United States would have the chance to become a partner in facilitating the managed resettlement of Chagos rather than an impediment. It might even be the case that the unitary island of Diego Garcia could be organized into a discrete administrative unit, separate from both Mauritius proper *and* the outer Chagos Islands. If so, this would create additional opportunities for the base on Diego Garcia to be treated in a distinct fashion.

Talks should begin with the Chagossians, too. Mauritius has a checkered past when it comes to its treatment of the Chagossian diaspora, but, at least officially, Port Louis supports the resettlement of Chagos by the Chagossians (and, perhaps,

other Mauritians).⁵⁴ US planners must therefore assume that Mauritian sovereignty over Chagos will be accompanied by the civilian resettlement of all or some of the islands. This would naturally pose some challenges for Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia. While not all islanders have protested the base in the past,⁵⁵ some have expressed their opposition to the US military. Others have formed political alliances with leftists in Mauritius who call for the shuttering of the base. For the most part, these have been “pragmatic” alliances.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it means that the US government will face something of an uphill struggle to convince the islanders that their interests are compatible with those of the Pentagon.

There are several practical appeals that the United States could make to the islanders to ensure that resettlement need not compromise the security of the base on Diego Garcia. Indeed, it might even be the case that US leaders will have significant leverage in any conversations on resettlement. After all, the US military will have unique wherewithal to assist resettled civilians with everyday needs such as transport, communications, healthcare, and employment. If it undertakes to assist in the practicalities of resettlement, the Pentagon could secure for itself a meaningful say in the form and extent of any such efforts. If the United States continues to ignore the Chagossians, however—or if it engages with the islanders in a way that appears cynical, insincere, or insensitive—then this will only succeed in empowering those who wish to see the base closed.⁵⁷

Of course, it would be absurd to argue that the US base will be unaffected by the assumption of Mauritian sovereignty over (and resettlement of) the Chagos Islands. Without question, the base will have to change to accommodate new political realities. However, it is worth recapitulating what makes Diego Garcia so valuable to the US military in the first place: not just its political seclusion but its geographic endowments, too. And while the decolonization of the Chagos Archipelago will obviously undermine the political shelter that London has offered the US military since the BIOT’s creation in 1965, the geographic advantages offered by Diego Garcia are fixed. The goal of the United States should be to make sure that Diego Garcia can continue to be utilized to the maximum extent possible. In the current context, this means supporting Mauritian sovereignty instead of attempting to prop up the ailing colonial-era edifice that is the BIOT. The road to securing lasting access to Diego Garcia runs through Port Louis, not London.

A Crowded Ocean?

As a final note, it is worth remembering that it is not just US military strategists who have a stake in the future of Chagos. As Mauritian sovereignty over Chagos becomes more likely, other groups can be expected to fight for the ears of Mauritian politicians to shape the political situation in the islands. The exiled is-

landers are the most obvious constituency in this regard. And, as I have argued here, it is right and proper that the United States begin talks with the Chagossians to discuss ways to coexist in a post-BIOT political environment. However, the Chagossians are not the only group with an interest in Chagos. They might not even be the most powerful.

First, the international network of environmentalists who campaigned for the creation of an MPA in Chagos have a firmly vested interest in the future of the islands. After all, it was this group of campaigners who convinced the UK government to create an MPA in Chagos despite stark warnings from UK civil servants that such a move would create legal and political problems in terms of the BIOT's long-term governance (as turned out to be the case). It is prudent to expect that this same coalition of environmentalists will remain engaged in Chagos during and after any transfer of sovereignty. The conservationists themselves have never been opposed to the base on Diego Garcia, preferring to work with the UK and US authorities to facilitate scientific research and conservation work. Indeed, those environmentalists most closely associated with Chagos have viewed the base through a positive lens—celebrating the unparalleled seclusion that its existence has brought upon the rest of the Chagos Archipelago.

That said, not all environmentalist groups are at ease with large military bases. Some take a dim view of Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia in particular. It is therefore possible that conservationist organizations might lobby Mauritian leaders to pursue a green legacy of their own in Chagos rather than continue to be associated with the US military. One obvious option would be for Mauritius to seek UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition for the Great Chagos Bank—the largest coral reef structure in the world, and one that has been left in near-pristine condition except for the waters around Diego Garcia.⁵⁸ Such a proposal might be eminently attractive to politicians in Mauritius because it would provide a public relations-friendly way to accommodate the Chagossians (as custodians of the natural environment),⁵⁹ attract revenue from ecotourism, and brandish Port Louis's environmentalist credentials, while simultaneously bolstering Mauritius's geopolitical status as a so-called *large ocean state*.⁶⁰

On a more strategic level, it is also possible that Mauritius could be approached by China or India (or both) when it comes to deciding the future of the Chagos Islands.⁶¹ Beijing has made significant efforts to court Indian Ocean states over the past decade, and New Delhi has a long history of involvement in Mauritian affairs—most recently concluding an agreement to establish coastal radar stations on Mauritian territory. Of the two, China would be most eager to see American forces evicted from Diego Garcia—but it is not a stretch to imagine that either of these Indo-Pacific powers would be interested in establishing naval bases of their

own on Diego Garcia. Already, India has inked a deal with the Seychelles to establish a base on Assumption Island (the Seychelles). China, meanwhile, operates a military facility in Djibouti. Securing even limited access to Diego Garcia would be an enormous boon to either government. Guarding against the influence of America's great power rivals over Mauritius will therefore be a high priority for US diplomats in a post-BIOT world. It can be done most easily by supporting Mauritian sovereignty as soon as possible and working to ensure that the US–Mauritian relationship is strong and self-enforcing.

Conclusions

In an article published in 1982, political scientist Joel Larus wrote that the US military presence on Diego Garcia might not be quite as durable as imagined by the architects of the 1966 executive agreement to establish the base.⁶² Larus called Diego Garcia a “crucial platform for the projection of U.S. military power throughout all sectors of the Indian Ocean, including the Persian Gulf–Arabian Sea”⁶³—an analysis that many scholars of international security would agree with today. However, he feared that the United Kingdom “appear[ed] to have acquired something less than full and unrestricted sovereignty in 1965” owing to Mauritius's claims over the territory.⁶⁴ Moreover, he noted that domestic forces inside the United Kingdom—particularly on the left of the Labour Party—were hostile to US military interests and could not be regarded as reliable partners going forward. Both points seem prescient considering recent events.

Back then, Larus's preferred solution was that the United States should seek sovereignty over Diego Garcia. This would no longer be feasible. Mauritius would never agree to it, and it would provoke uproar in the international community. Today, Mauritian sovereignty is the only way to resolve the political pathologies that undermine the security of Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia. The BIOT must be jettisoned altogether. Fortunately, the decolonization of Chagos is one of those rare occasions in US foreign policy where the *realpolitik* course of action also happens to be the moral and legally required thing to do. Even if it was not always thus, it is now: America's long-term strategic interests would be best served by supporting the full decolonization of Chagos and working to make sure that Mauritian sovereignty over the islands will not jeopardize the longevity of the base on Diego Garcia. While there might be some costs associated with consigning the BIOT to history, the long-term benefits of cultivating a lasting strategic ally at the heart of the Indian Ocean are well worth it. ♣

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Notes

1. The Chagos Archipelago comprises around 60 tiny islets totaling nearly 22 square miles of land. Diego Garcia is the largest island, with a land area of around 12.5 square miles, and is the only island with a human population (the military and support personnel of Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia). The archipelago is just over 300 miles south of the Maldives and roughly equidistant between Indonesia and the east coast of Africa.

2. The British government created the BIOT in 1965 as a crown colony. In 1981, the British Nationality Act renamed the UK's crown colonies as British Dependent Territories and, in 2002, the colonies were renamed again to become British Overseas Territories, which is the current nomenclature. As of 2019, the United Kingdom has 14 Overseas Territories, all of which were crown colonies (or part of larger crown colonies) prior to 1981: Anguilla, Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory, British Virgin Islands, the BIOT, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, Saint Helena, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the Turks and Caicos.

3. For an analysis of the ICJ's ruling, see Laura Jeffery, "The International Court of Justice: Advisory Opinion on the Chagos Archipelago," *Anthropology Today* 35, no. 3 (2019): 24–27.

4. These were Australia, Hungary, Israel, and the Maldives. See Rick Gladstone, "Britain Dealt Defeat at U.N. Over Its Control of Chagos Islands," *New York Times*, 22 May 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

5. Indeed, it has been evident for decades that BIOT is a fundamentally flawed political project. See Joel Larus, "Diego Garcia: Political Clouds over a Vital U.S. Base," *Strategic Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 44–55; and Joel Larus, "Diego Garcia: The Military and Legal Limitations of America's Pivotal Base in the Indian Ocean," in *The Indian Ocean: Perspectives on a Strategic Arena*, ed. William L. Dowdy and Russell B. Trodd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985): 435–51.

6. David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 61–62; and Peter H. Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

7. Subsequent agreements were signed in 1972, 1976, 1982, 1987, and 1999. Each of these agreements were handled as *exchanges of notes*—that is, executive agreements, not treaties—and so did not require legislative approval by either the US Congress or the UK Parliament. See Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia*, 69–115.

8. Vine, *Island of Shame*, chapter 7; and Vytautas B. Bandjunis, *Diego Garcia: Creation of the Indian Ocean Base* (San Jose, CA: Writer's Showcase, 2001).

9. Sand, *United States and Britain*, 35–37; and Denis F. Doyon, "Middle East Bases: Model for the Future," in *The Sun Never Sets...: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*, ed. Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 281–82.

10. On the geostrategic importance of Diego Garcia to the United States, see Andrew S. Erickson, Walter C. Ladwig III, and Justin D. Mikolay, "Diego Garcia and the United States' Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy," *Asian Security* 6, no. 3 (2010): 214–37.

11. This was an unwritten undertaking when originally proffered at Lancaster House, but it has subsequently been made in writing and can be considered official UK policy. See Sand, *United States and Britain*, 3–4. For a recent expression of the United Kingdom's position, see the speech given to the UNGA by Matthew Rycroft, London's ambassador to the UN, in June 2017: "When we no longer need the territory for defence purposes, sovereignty will pass." Matthew Rycroft, "Questions on the British Indian Ocean Territory have long been a bilateral matter between the UK and Mauritius," 22 June 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/>.

12. In its original form, the BIOT also incorporated several island groups that had previously been part of the Colony of the Seychelles: Aldabra, Farquhar, and Desroches. These were never used for military purposes and were later returned to the Seychelles in 1976 upon the latter becoming an independent state.

13. Peter Harris, "Decolonising the Special Relationship: Diego Garcia, the Chagossians, and Anglo-American Relations," *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013), 721, citing Richard Gifford, "The Chagos Islands—The Land Where Human Rights Hardly Ever Happen," *Law, Social Justice, and Global Development* 1, no. 1 (2004), 5.

14. Today, Chapter XI, Article 111 of the Constitution of Mauritius explicitly lays claim to the Chagos Archipelago.

15. Stephen Allen, *The Chagos Islanders and International Law* (Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2014), 90–91; Laura Jeffery, *Forced Displacement and Onward Migration: Chagos Islanders in Mauritius and the UK* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2011), 45.

16. Maureen Tong, "Self-Determination in the Post-Colonial Era: Prospects for the Chagossians," in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity against Two World Powers*, ed. Sandra J.T.M. Evers and Marry Kooy (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 165–168; and Jeffery, "The International Court of Justice." For the ICJ's full decision, see <https://www.icj-cij.org/>.

17. Vine, *Island of Shame*, 101–02.

18. Richard Gifford and Richard P. Dunne, "A Dispossessed People: The Depopulation of the Chagos Archipelago 1965–1973," *Population, Space and Place* 20, no. 1 (2014): 37–49; and Vine, *Island of Shame*; Jeffery, *Forced Displacement*.

19. Sir Paul Gore-Booth, quoted in Vine, *Island of Shame*, 91. Bird is a common slang word for woman in British English.

20. Jeffery, *Forced Displacement*; and Vine and Jeffery, "Give Us Back Diego Garcia," in *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, ed. Catherine Lutz (New York: New York University Press): 191–200.

21. At the time of the Chagossians' expulsions, the United Kingdom provided Mauritius with £650,000 to help cover the costs of resettling the islanders. It is commonly agreed that this money was held up by the Mauritian government for too long to make a meaningful difference to the lives of the Chagossian refugees. In 1982, then, the UK government relented to pressure to provide an additional £4 million to the islanders. See Charles Cawley, *Colonies in Conflict: The History of the British Overseas Territories* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), 158. To this day, Chagossians who were removed to the Seychelles have received no financial compensation.

22. Jeffery, *Forced Displacement*; and Jeffery, "Unusual Immigrants," or, Chagos Islanders and their Confrontations with British Citizenship," *Anthropology in Action* 18, no. 2 (2011): 33–44.

23. Vine, *Island of Shame*, 122–25.

24. David Snoxell, "The Politics of Chagos: Part Played by Parliament and the Courts Towards Resolving the Chagos Tragedy," in *Fifty Years of the British Indian Ocean Territory: Legal Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Allen and Chris Monaghans (Cham: Springer, 2018).

25. See, for example, "Update on the British Indian Ocean Territory: Written statement," 16 November 2016, <https://www.parliament.uk/>; and Rycroft, "Questions on the British Indian Ocean Territory."

26. Sand, "Diego Garcia: British-American Legal Black Hole in the Indian Ocean?" *Journal of Environmental Law* 21, no. 1 (2009): 113–37.

27. Contrary to what is frequently reported in the news media, the United States does not have a "lease" to cover its use of Diego Garcia. There is only an executive agreement between the UK and US governments—a form of international agreement that does not require legislative underpinning in either state. The only compensation received by the UK government in return for the provision of Diego Garcia was a USD 14 million discount off the cost of Polaris missiles in the 1960s. See Sand, *United States and Britain*, 6–8.

28. In 1965, Queen Elizabeth II had vested legislative authority to one individual: the BIOT Commissioner (an official based in London). In 1971, the BIOT commissioner at the time (Bruce Galbraith) promulgated an immigration ordinance to ban all civilian habitation of the territory, providing legal underpin-

nings for the expulsion of the Chagossians and for denials of their right of return. In its 2000 decision, the High Court ruled that this legislative instrument had been illegal because it is incumbent upon UK colonial authorities to govern according to the principles of peace, order, and good governance. Ridding a territory of its entire native population cannot be construed as in keeping with these principles, the court ruled.

29. Cook could have appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, then the highest court of appeal in the UK judicial system. That he chose not to do so called into question London's willingness and ability to keep the BIOT devoid of a permanent civilian population.

30. Ronan Cormacain, "Prerogative Legislation as the Paradigm of Bad Law-Making: The Chagos Islands," *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 39, no. 3 (2013): 487–508.

31. Between 2004 and 2012, the Chagossians fought the UK government all the way to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). See Vine, "Decolonizing Britain in the 21st Century?: Chagos Islanders Challenge the Crown, House of Lords, 30 June–3 July 2008," *Anthropology Today* 24, no. 4 (2008), 26–28; Jeffery, "Chagossians Refused Right to Return Home: A Sequel to Vine (AT 24 [4])," *Anthropology Today* 25, no. 1 (2009), 24–26; and Harris, "Dead End or Crossroads? The Chagossians Fail in Strasbourg," *Anthropology Today* 29, no. 3 (2013), 26. The ECtHR ultimately declined to hear the Chagossians' case, citing their receipt of financial compensation from the UK authorities in the 1980s.

32. John Madeley, "Diego Garcia: A Contrast to the Falklands," *Minority Rights Group No. 54* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1985 [1982]).

33. Campbell, "British Campaigners Arrested at Sea in Diego Garcia Protest," *Guardian*, 12 March 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

34. *Extraordinary renditions* are defined as government-sponsored abductions and extrajudicial transfers of a person from one country to another with the intent of circumventing the former country's laws on interrogation, detention, and/or torture.

35. These allegations intensified after the publication of the US Senate's report into the CIA's use of torture in 2014. See, for example, Peter Forster, "British Gave 'Full Co-operation' for CIA Black Jail on Diego Garcia, Report Claims," *Telegraph*, 10 April 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/>.

36. Catherine Philp and Dominic Kennedy, "Study into Return of Chagos Islanders Was Manipulated, Consultant Claims," *Times*, 22 April 2010, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/>. A subsequent feasibility study conducted by the KPMG auditing firm found that resettlement was indeed possible, contrary to the findings of the government's first study.

37. Oscar Webb, "UK Government Changes Its Line on Diego Flight Logs Sought in Rendition Row – Again," *VICE News*, 12 September 2014, <https://news.vice.com/>.

38. See Laura Jeffery, "We Are the True Guardians of the Environment': Human-Environment Relations and Debates about the Future of the Chagos Archipelago," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 2 (2013): 300–18.

39. See Fred Pearce, "Chagos Marine Reserve Polluted by Politics," *New Scientist*, 24 September 2014, <https://www.newscientist.com/>; and Adam Tomkins, "Environmental Protection Versus the Right of Abode: A Case-Study in the Misuse of Power," in *Fifty Years of the British Indian Ocean Territory*, ed. Allen and Monaghan, 43–54.

40. Jeffery, "Neither Confirm nor Deny: WikiLeaks Evidence and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in the Judicial Review of the Chagos Marine Protected Area," *Anthropology Today* 30, no. 3 (2014), 9–13.

41. Harris, "Why Law and Politics Matter for Marine Conservation: The Case of the Chagos Marine Protected Area," *Environmental Policy and Law* 45, no. 5 (2015), 204–07.

42. Rycroft, "Questions on the British Indian Ocean Territory."

43. Owen Bowcott, "EU Members Abstain and as Britain Defeated in UN Vote on Chagos Islands," *Guardian*, 23 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

44. Sand, *United States and Britain*, 9.

45. See his "Perspectives of a UK Member Of Parliament: 'Chagos, Just Plain Injustice,'" in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands*, ed. Evers and Kooy, 217–18.

46. Owen Bowcott, "Corbyn Condemns May's Defiance Chagos Islands Ruling," *Guardian*, 1 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

47. Lest this be considered unlikely, it should be remembered that Robin Cook chose not to appeal the High Court's 2000 decision restoring the legal right of return. Corbyn has been far more outspoken on the issue of the Chagossians' rights than Cook ever was.

48. Sean Carey, "Government Will Drop Case against Chagos Islanders, Says Cable," *New Statesman*, 13 September 2010, <https://www.newstatesman.com/>.

49. It might even be possible that the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union ("Brexit") will lead to the break-up of the kingdom into its constituent parts. How would the United Kingdom's 14 overseas territories be distributed among the successor states of the kingdom? Will a rump United Kingdom (i.e., England and Wales) want to keep them? The political ramifications of Brexit are impossible to fully predict.

50. Snoxell, "The Politics of Chagos," 374.

51. Larus, "Diego Garcia: Political Clouds Over A Vital U.S. Base," 54.

52. Mauritius is party to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (Pelindaba) Treaty, which, among other things, bans the stockpiling, possession, or stationing of nuclear weapons.

53. The island of Rodrigues is around 400 miles east of Mauritius. Although part of Mauritius since 1968, it became an autonomous region in 2002. Unlike the Chagos Archipelago, Rodrigues does have a permanent civilian population (of over 40,000).

54. The Chagossians' right to return to Chagos formed part of Mauritius's submission to the ICJ.

55. Vine, "What If You Can't Protest the Base? The Chagossian Exile, the Struggle for Democracy, and the Military Base on Diego Garcia," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (2012): 847–56.

56. Jeffery, *Forced Displacement*, chapter 2; and Jeffery, "Victims and Patrons: Strategic Alliances and the Anti-Politics of Victimhood among Displaced Chagossians and their Supporters," *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2006): 297–312.

57. Engagement will need to be done carefully, learning from past mistakes made by the UK government. See Rebecca Rotter and Laura Jeffery, "'We No Longer Have Faith and Trust in Anyone': Misadventures in Community Consultation on the Future of the Chagos Archipelago," *International Development and Planning Review* 38, no. 4 (2016): 383–403.

58. The idea of turning the Great Chagos Bank into a UNESCO World Heritage Site is an old one. See, for example, Rodney V. Salm, "Coral Reefs in the Western Indian Ocean: A Threatened Heritage," *Ambio* 12, no. 6 (1983): 349–353.

59. Jeffery, "'We Are the True Guardians of the Environment': Human-Environment Relations and Debates about the Future of the Chagos Archipelago," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 2 (2013): 300–18.

60. The United Kingdom claims an exclusive economic zone of over 245,000 square miles around Chagos.

61. See Erickson, Ladwig, and Mikolay, "Diego Garcia: Anchoring America's Future Presence in the Indo Pacific," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2013), 25–27.

62. Larus, "Diego Garcia: Political Clouds over a Vital U.S. Base."

63. *Ibid.*, 44.

64. *Ibid.*, 53.

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