

AFRICA DIGEST

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United Kingdom and Mauritius' landmark agreement on the transfer of sovereignty over Chagos Archipelago

On October 3 2024, United Kingdom and Mauritius released a [joint statement](#) detailing a historic agreement via which sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, will be transferred to Mauritius. This is a significant development which will legitimize American use of the critically important military facility on Diego Garcia. This decades-long sovereignty dispute had a detrimental effect on the U.S. Indian Ocean presence and its relations with littoral island nations and multilateral institutions. The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which was established in November 1965 aimed to facilitate a joint U.K.-U.S. military facility on Diego Garcia. Initially, the idea was to set up a communications station but throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it evolved into a military base, with the United States being the primary benefactor. Diego Garcia quickly became a lynchpin for U.S. power projection in the Indian Ocean, East Africa, Middle East, and South Asia. The BIOT was created by separating Mauritius and Seychelles prior to their independence from British rule in 1967 and 1976 respectively. Although the Seychelles' islands were returned in 1976, Mauritius continued to agitate for the return of the Chagos Archipelago since 1980s, but to no avail.

Persistent efforts from Mauritius resulted in a landmark 2019 [International Court of Justice opinion](#) which found that Britain's retention of Chagos Archipelago was illegal under international law. Between 2022 and 2024, numerous rounds of negotiations took place, but the

Conservative governments of Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak were unable to break the deadlock. The responsibility for a resolution fell on Keir Starmer's new Labor government. Under the October 3, 2024, deal, described as "seminal", "the United Kingdom will agree that Mauritius is sovereign over Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia". Both nations are now expected to commence treaty negotiations which will ensure the military base in Diego Garcia will continue uninterrupted for a 99-year period.

However, certain uncertainties about the agreement remain. The agreement is lacking on providing a specific timeframe for the transfer of sovereignty to Mauritius. Because the deal is subject to the finalization of the treaty, the negotiation process could unfortunately become protracted. Moreover, no details are given as to the payment Mauritius expects in exchange for renting Diego Garcia to the British, and by extension to the Americans. Although the joint statement mentions that Britain will provide Mauritius a "package of financial support", the dollar figure and whether the Americans will contribute, is less clear.

With the treaty negotiations likely to commence now, Mauritius, the U.S. and the U.K. need to conduct detailed consultations regarding military use of the Diego Garcia base. Additionally, Mauritius is also a signatory to the [African Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone Treaty](#) (Pelindaba Treaty) which prohibits the development, stockpiling and possession of nuclear explosive devices. When Mauritius gains sovereignty, it would need to allow some sort of exemption for the United States to continue its deployment of nuclear-capable bomber and nuclear-fuelled naval assets. Also, the

questions surrounding the return of Chagossians which has historically been opposed by the Americans and the British need to be resolved. So, resettlement on the islands of Chagos Archipelago, other than Diego Garcia which has modern facilities by virtue of the military base, could prove to be counterproductive.

Trilateral Summit in Asmara: A New Strategic Alignment Against Ethiopia

The leaders of Eritrea, Somalia, and Egypt gathered for a trilateral summit in Asmara on October 10, 2024 signalling a strategic realignment amid escalating tensions with Ethiopia. Hosted by Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, the summit included Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The ensuing [joint statement](#) emphasized resisting external interference and pledged to strengthen Somali institutions, secure borders, and bolster the country's counterterrorism efforts.

This meeting took place in the context of Ethiopia's [contentious](#) memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland, signed in January 2024. The agreement, which hinted at conditional recognition of Somaliland's independence in exchange for Ethiopia leasing coastal territory for a naval base, provoked sharp opposition from Somalia, which considers Somaliland as an integral part of its sovereign territory. Egypt has leveraged this rift to escalate pressure on Ethiopia, with whom it remains in dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, a project which Egypt views as a threat to its water security.

Egypt has recently deepened military cooperation with Somalia, formalising a defense agreement in August 2024 and

delivering two arms [shipments](#) to Mogadishu. There are also discussions about deploying Egyptian forces to replace Ethiopian troops currently stationed in Somalia. Consequently, Somalia warned that Ethiopian troops may be expelled by the end of the year unless the Somaliland agreement is reversed, further straining bilateral ties.

Eritrea, though aligned with Ethiopia during the Tigray conflict, has grown increasingly distant from Addis Ababa. Afwerki reportedly [opposed](#) the peace agreement signed in November 2022 between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Eritrea now fears that Ethiopia's leadership harbours ambitions to regain access to the Red Sea through Eritrean ports, an issue that has stirred tensions since Eritrea's secession in 1993.

A potential conflict with Ethiopia looms in Eritrean strategic calculations, prompting closer coordination with Egypt and Somalia to counterbalance Addis Ababa's influence. However, immediate military confrontation seems unlikely. Somalia lacks the military capacity to engage Ethiopia directly, Egypt faces significant internal economic challenges, and Eritrea is still recovering from the Tigray war. Meanwhile, Ethiopia is preoccupied with managing multiple domestic insurgencies and political instability.

The current dynamics suggest that these developments reflect diplomatic manoeuvring rather than preparations for imminent conflict. Nonetheless, the erosion of trust between Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly following the collapse of the 2018 peace deal, has deepened regional uncertainty. Eritrea's concerns about Ethiopia's ambitions for Red Sea access,

combined with growing alliances among Ethiopia's rivals, signal that while open conflict may not be imminent, the Horn of Africa is likely to remain a zone of simmering tensions.

Indian President's visit to Algeria, Mauritania and Malawi

Indian President Droupadi Murmu [embarked](#) on a state visit to Algeria, Mauritania, and Malawi from October 13 to 19, 2024, marking a pivotal advancement in India's diplomatic relations with Africa. The visit emphasised India's commitment to strengthening partnerships across diverse regions of the continent, particularly in North, West, and Southern Africa. Upon her arrival in Algiers, [Algeria](#), on October 13, President Murmu was welcomed ceremonially by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, making this the first visit by an Indian President to Algeria. During a reception for the Indian community, she acknowledged the Indian diaspora's vital role in contributing to the Algerian economy and emphasized their contributions to enhancing India's global standing.

The following day, President Murmu began her day by honouring Algerian martyrs at the Maqam Echahid Memorial and visiting the National Museum of the Moudjahid to commemorate Algeria's struggle for independence. Later, she engaged in discussions with President Tebboune at El Mouradia Palace, focusing on elevating India-Algeria relations, particularly in trade and investment. They issued statements reaffirming India's support for Algeria and discussed expanding cooperation across sectors such as energy, construction, and pharmaceuticals. At the Algerian Indian Economic Forum, the President encouraged Indian businesses to engage with Algeria's

burgeoning economy, noting that the current trade stands at approximately \$1.7 billion. She advocated for joint initiatives in various industries and invited Algerian firms to participate in India's 'Make in India' initiative.

On October 16, President Murmu arrived in [Mauritania](#), receiving a warm welcome from President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani. The visit marked the first state visit by an Indian President to Mauritania. At a community reception, she praised the Indian diaspora for their contributions to the nation's development and appreciated the Mauritanian government's support. Following the community event, President Murmu met with President Ghazouani, during which they discussed strengthening bilateral relations. They witnessed the signing of four MOU's covering training of diplomats, cultural exchange, visa exemption, and Foreign Office consultations.

The final stop of the tour was [Malawi](#), where President Murmu received a ceremonial welcome at Kamuzu International Airport on October 17. Like Mauritania, this was also the first state visit from India to Malawi. At the India-Malawi Business meet, she highlighted Malawi's rich resources and potential for cooperation in sectors like agriculture, mining, energy, and tourism. Bilateral trade has been growing, with India emerging as Malawi's fourth-largest trading partner and a significant investor with over \$500 million across various sectors.

Overall, President Murmu's visit underscores India's commitment to enhancing its strategic ties with African nations, responding to the needs of the Global South, and solidifying its role as a vital partner in the continent's development.

The visit has been well-received, highlighting the importance of proactive Indian engagement in Africa, which is viewed as a region with significant future potential.

Félix Tshisekedi's Push for Constitutional Reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has ignited significant debate by advocating for [constitutional](#) reform. Since taking office in January 2019, he has pledged to upholding the constitution, but five years later, Tshisekedi argues that the 2006 constitution is inadequate, claiming it was drafted abroad by foreigners and fails to align with the realities of the DRC.

During a recent visit to Kisangani, he emphasized the need to address structural flaws in governance and announced plans to create a commission in 2025 tasked with drafting a new constitution. He contends that delays in government formation, conflicts between governors and provincial deputies, and limitations on executive power have hindered the smooth functioning of the state. Tshisekedi insists that the reforms are aimed at improving governance, not extending his tenure, asserting that the decision to modify presidential term limits rests with the people, not with him.

Despite his assurances, the move has stirred suspicion among [opposition](#) leaders and civil society organisations. Prominent figures such as [Moïse Katumbi](#) and Martin Fayulu have accused Tshisekedi of using constitutional reform as a strategy to extend his presidency, comparing his actions to those of former president Joseph Kabila. They argue that rather than addressing

governance challenges, the reforms could serve to consolidate power and weaken democratic norms.

[Opposition](#) to the reforms is grounded in concerns that they may jeopardize democracy and open the door to authoritarianism. Tshisekedi's critics point to historical parallels with Gabon, where President Ali Bongo used constitutional amendments to extend his rule, which eventually led to public unrest and military intervention. In both the DRC and Gabon, leaders framed reforms as necessary for national stability, but critics argue these measures served to concentrate power and weaken democratic checks and balances. International actors, including the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU), have historically viewed such amendments with caution, fearing political instability and democratic backsliding.

The timing of Tshisekedi's push for reform also raise several questions. The DRC remains in the grip of significant security and economic challenges, with conflict ongoing in the eastern provinces. The government recently approved the 84th extension of the state of siege in North and South Kivu, as fighting between M23 rebels and pro-government forces continues. Critics argue that Tshisekedi's focus on constitutional changes is a distraction from more pressing issues, such as addressing insecurity and improving economic conditions.

Ultimately, Tshisekedi's constitutional agenda will shape the future of the DRC. While supporters believe the reforms will enhance governance and promote stability, opponents fear they could erode democratic institutions and concentrate power in the presidency. Whether the reforms are seen as a genuine effort to improve governance

or a pretext for extending Tshisekedi's tenure will depend on how they are implemented and received by the Congolese people. The outcome of this political debate will determine whether the DRC moves toward greater stability or descends into deeper political unrest.

Daniel Chapo becomes Mozambique's new President amid nationwide protests

Daniel Chapo, the leader of Mozambique's ruling party FRELIMO and successor of Filipe Nyusi, won the Presidential election in a landslide victory by securing 71 percent of the vote share. His closest challenger was Venancio Mondlane who was able to secure just 20 percent of the votes. The elections were marred by political violence, widespread irregularities and restriction on freedom of expression. With Chapo's win, FRELIMO has now extended its 49-year grip on power in the resource-rich southern African nation along the Indian Ocean coast. Serious concerns about the credibility of the electoral process have been raised by internal observers, including the African Union, the European Union and the Commonwealth. Various reports have emerged indicating the use of tear gas by the police to disperse demonstrators. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), Mozambique security forces have killed 11 people and injured dozens more in post-electoral violence.

Mozambique has been in turmoil for quite some time. The principal issues for the electorate in this election included poverty, youth unemployment, widespread corruption, and the challenge of addressing insurgency and restoring stability in Cabo Delgado province. Since October 2017, the humanitarian situation in northern

Mozambique has been alarmingly deteriorating, triggered by armed Islamist insurgency led by the group Ahlu Sunnah-wa-Jama'a (ASJW), locally known as 'Al Shabbab'.

The capture of the port city Mocimboa da Praia and the 2021 attacks in Palma, which is the center of [TotalEnergies' planned US\\$ 20 billion liquified natural gas \(LNG\) project](#) on the Afungi peninsula, has raised serious concerns. Initially, Rwandan troops were deployed to secure the peninsula followed by troops from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), faced [several challenges](#) such as outdated military equipment, funding constraint, and lack of coordination with the Rwandan forces. This eventually led to the decision to withdraw the mission in July 2024.

With Daniel Chapo taking office, his administration will have to deal with two issues simultaneously. He will need to work with Mozambique's LNG investors and partners and combat the scourge of terrorism in Cabo Delgado province. There have been various speculations regarding whether major extractive contracts will be revised, which has spooked investors. Despite the setback, it seems the project is set for resumption. The head of TotalEnergies [stated](#) that "nearly 80 percent of the \$14 billion financial package underpinning the project has been confirmed by the lenders". In terms of dealing with the security situation, only time will tell if Daniel Chapo's new administration demonstrates continuity in its approach to addressing security challenges or make any noteworthy changes.