Fatal Flaws in UK-Mauritius "Joint Statement" on planned Treaty on Chagos

The "Joint Statement" that Pravind Jugnauth and Keir Starmer have concocted is obviously riddled with fatal flaws for Mauritius' future. It is dangerous on all the main issues: decolonization, closing the USA's military base, the elementary right to free movement over all the land and sea for all Mauritians including Chagossians, and thus the right to return for Chagossians. It is even a blow to Mauritian sovereignty, itself. So, the Treaty must be opposed. LALIT now puts the following issue on the agenda for the general elections: Full sovereignty to be exercised democratically over Chagos, and a date for base closure and clean-up! No to militarism! No to prolonged occupation or colonization!

In fact, taken as a whole, the 3 October Joint Statement is one big booby-trap for Mauritius. It prolongs colonization of the Republic of Mauritius, it denies the right to free movement by all Mauritians, it denies the free right of return, it prolongs military occupation and even puts base closure and thus peace outside of Mauritius' democratic control in our own land, it puts sovereignty up for bilateral negotiation outside the established norms of international law. So, it must be opposed. The victory of the historic ICJ judgment of 2019 would be shattered by such a Treaty. It is a blatant move by the UK-USA imperialists to steal a good part of Mauritius.

Perfidious Albion is at it again. Doing America's dirty work. And another fawning Mauritian leader is at it again, too, this time as leader of an independent State, while being egged on, it seems, by the Modi Government. And we deplore the inability of the Mauritian opposition to oppose the military occupation

head-on as the prolonged colonization it is.

The Exact Wording

The Agreement purports to be the result of bilateral negotiation, yet the two signatories make a point of stating in the document, that they also have “the full support and assistance of our close partners, the United States of America and the Republic of India.” Now we know the real reason India’s Foreign Minister Jaishankar was here in July for a lightning visit that seemed, at the time, to be for reasons vague and ephemeral. The real reason was obviously to get Mauritius to agree to this Joint Statement. India is presumably getting its share in terms of American arms sales, use of Diego Garcia base for its navy, and cover for its secret Agalega base.

It is pitiful when big empires begin to collapse. Their moral core rots publicly. Every decision they take is the wrong one. Let us explain. The USA and UK are supposedly the closest geopolitical allies in the world. Yet circumstances pit them against each other over Diego. The UK-USA were so isolated at the UN General assembly that they only got three countries to vote with them, once Maldives withdrew its vote: Israel, Hungary and Australia’s previous right-wing government.

At the same time, Britain and the USA sound either half-witted or mad when they stand up and shriek in support of Ukraine’s right not to be occupied by Russia. The exposure of the USA’s genocide alongside Israel against the militarily occupied Palestine is also a source of mutual blaming – especially when at the ICJ the very same issues are cross-referenced in the Mauritius’ case against the UK for its colonization and military occupation and the Palestinian case (put in by Nicaragua) against Israel for the very same thing. So, the UK is in a corner, and the USA can’t get it out of the corner. And they have difficulty coming to any consensus.

And, even on what seem small things, they fall out. Yes, the USA recently went ahead and denied a British judge access to Diego Garcia when she had to be there to judge a British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT) Supreme Court case about 64 refugees being held illegally there. So, the UK state was cornered on this human rights issue that exposed its continued colonization and military occupation of Mauritius. Now, "Great" Britain's judiciary does not take kindly to this kind of thing. It is not up to Royal standards of a United "Kingdom", so to speak. So, the "special relationship" starts to fall apart. The UK Brexit vote was thoroughly tampered with by the USA's right-wing politicians like Trump's advisor Steve Bannon, and so US interference and Brexit have bankrupted the UK. As it is, the UK, like the rest of Europe, is suffering from a refugee crisis provoked by the USA. It is American wars that cause people to flee from bombed out societies and ruined infrastructure in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and also from Libya where nearly 2 million non-Libyan Africans worked. And this has led to a political crisis, in the UK. This crisis caused the Conservative Government to set up a far-fetched and illegal scheme in Rwanda to "out-source" the UK's refugee problem to another country.

The UK and USA rightly anticipated there would be a huge immigration crisis around the BIOT and the military base on Diego – just as there is on Lampedusa in Sicily and on Spain's Canary Islands, and in particular when the USA is busy sparking war against China via Taiwan. The 64 Sri Lankans were merely the early-warning signal of a "flood", to use the right-wing language, of refugees. So, in reality the American base is threatened not by China or Russia, as the UK and USA pretend it is, but by 64 poor Sri Lankans, some of them children, shipwrecked there. It shows how every bit of protest against the imperialists, when their empires start to topple, counts. And it also shows what the UK-USA empire has come to. The Rwanda scheme – already billed to cost British VAT-payers some 4 billion pounds – was shut down by the new Labour

Government for being against international law. But, the UK judiciary still had to deal with the 64 Sri Lankans without transferring them to Britain. This became the last straw.

So, dire circumstances lead to dire actions, like the UK trying to both "give" (to quote the international press) and "keep" its sovereignty over the place the USA, in fact, controls! It is this confusion that has produced this flawed "Joint Statement".

Here are the flaws of the Joint Statement, concentrating on paragraph 3:

While the Joint Statement says at paragraph 3 that "Mauritius is sovereign over Chagos, including Diego Garcia," we must remember that its first paragraph described the document as being about not "sovereignty" itself but about "the exercise of sovereignty". The wording implies there are two different things: Who "is sovereign"? The document says Mauritius is. But who has "the exercise of sovereignty"? Are they one and the same? The two expressions seem, at first view, to mean the same thing. But in the Joint Statement they definitely do not. In any case, this kind of formulation is so bizarre, especially coming from the perfidious Albion, that it ought to set off alarm bells in our heads.

Here is the first problem: the meat of the third paragraph reads, "the United Kingdom will be authorised to exercise with respect to Diego Garcia the sovereign rights … of Mauritius required to ensure the continued operation of the [US military] base". Let us deal with this in grammatical terms. In black and white, it says "the UK will be authorised to exercise … the sovereign rights … of Mauritius". So, Mauritius is sovereign, as the document has already said, but the UK is authorised to exercise this Mauritian sovereignty! What is this?

So, here we see the perfidy of the words "exercise of

sovereignty" that we mentioned from the first paragraph, which declares what the Joint Statement is about: it is about the exercise of sovereignty, not about sovereignty. Yes, believe it or not, Mauritius is not "sovereign over Chagos, including Diego Garcia" as promised earlier in paragraph three, because the UK will be authorised to exercise the sovereign rights of Mauritius, and this is what the Joint Statement is about. No less.

And, to mask all this perfidy, the formulation is intentionally clumsy in another way. Not only is this authorization for the UK to exercise Mauritius' sovereign rights supposed to be only "with respect to Diego Garcia" (pretending to spare the other outer Chagos islands, and leave them to Mauritius' sovereignty) but also, added on afterwards to include we suppose literally "anything anywhere" concerning those sovereign rights "required to ensure the continued operation of the base". This means it may be "with respect to Diego Garcia" or it may also include anything "required to ensure the continued operation of the base".

We know that the USA has always objected to Mauritius controlling not only Diego Garcia, but any of the other islands. But now, in respect to Diego Garcia, any form of sovereignty that is "required to ensure the continued operation of the base" will be exercised by the UK. Of course, what exactly this means will be decided later by … none other than the USA. Just like the USA decided to kick the British judge out of BIOT. So Mauritius has what is left of sovereignty when Britain has exercised any sovereignty "required to ensure the continued operation of the base", and the USA will decide on the meaning of the bland "with respect to Diego Garcia" en temps et lieu.

Other oddities in this paragraph must now also be looked at. Where it says, "the UK will be authorised to exercise … sovereign rights …", after the word "rights", there are the two words "and authorities". This, we can only guess, is to

ensure all the “rights” Mauritius has, as well as all the “authorities” it has, meaning all the powers it has, “powers” flowing from sovereignty, will be authorised to be exercised by the UK.

The next oddity is the frank, “For an initial period of 99 years.” Let’s deal with the word “initial”, it means that what Britain means is that its exercise of sovereignty will last for “ONE CENTURY”, but that is only to begin with. This formulation is a synonym for “forever” – unless we are talking geological time, and the first lap lasts, as it is, “… well into the next century”.

The third oddity is ensuring that Mauritius, the weak partner, will agree with the strong partner, the UK to submit to the exigencies of the really big masked partner, the USA. Read this paragraph hidden in the middle of paragraph 3: “At the same time, both our countries are committed to the need, and will agree in the treaty, to ensure the long-term, secure and effective operation of the existing base on Diego Garcia which plays a vital role in regional and global security.” Decisions about what will ensure the “secure and effective operation of the existing base” will be made presumably by the USA.

The blood money in exchange for the war machine on our land

There are two paragraphs mainly about money. They are vague and humiliating for Mauritius. “The treaty will address wrongs of the past”, the Joint Statement says. How? An apology for stealing the land? An apology for hounding out the Mauritians living there on that Mauritian land? Or are they talking about money? Who knows?

And it goes on “and demonstrate the commitment of both parties to support the welfare of Chagossians. Mauritius will now be free to implement a programme of resettlement on the islands

of the Chagos Archipelago, other than Diego Garcia, and the UK will capitalise a new trust fund, as well as separately provide other support, for the benefit of Chagossians.” No mention of free movement for anyone. No mention of all the ordinary aspects of sovereignty. Can Mauritius build ports or an airstrip? Or will this affect the “secure and effective operation of the existing base”? The wording is absurd.

“It will also herald a new era of economic, security and environmental partnership between our two nations. To enable this partnership the UK will provide a package of financial support to Mauritius. This will include an indexed annual payment for the duration of the agreement and the establishment of a transformational infrastructure partnership, underpinned by UK grant funding, to deliver strategic projects generating meaningful change for ordinary Mauritians and boosting economic development across the country.” This is the bribe. This is the blood money. This is what aims to draw the Mauritian people into moral degradation by agreement to it!

Then the Joint Statement goes on, “More broadly, the UK and Mauritius will cooperate on environmental protection, maritime security, combating illegal fishing, irregular migration and drug and people trafficking within the Chagos Archipelago, with the shared objective of securing and protecting one of the world’s most important marine environments. This will include the establishment of a Mauritian Marine Protected Area.” This is Mauritius will “cooperate” with the UK to do all this, including a “Mauritian” MPA, as opposed to Mauritius doing all this independently and in a sovereign way.

Conclusion

Let us end with a simple quote from the Mauritian Constitution. Section 1 reads “Mauritius shall be a sovereign democratic state”

and Section 111 reads,

“Mauritius includes:

“(a) The islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, Cargados Carajos, Tromelin, and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and any other island comprised in the State of Mauritius;

“(b) the territorial sea and the air space above the territorial sea and the islands mentioned in section (a);

“(c) the continental shelf; …”

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https://www.lalitmauritius.org/

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