

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY BRIAN CLOUGHLEY

22.02.2021

Britain's Double Standards in International Affairs



Building of the International Criminal Court. Photograph Source: OSeveno – [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

On February 12 it was announced by the UN that a British lawyer had been elected as chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court. No matter what one might think of the ICC, it is taking steps to investigate war crimes in Afghanistan and Yemen, so it can't be all bad. But a major point in this international development is that the person involved, Karim Khan, a brilliant advocate, was expected to be chosen by consensus but as noted by the UK's *Guardian* newspaper, there was a last-minute objection by the Indian Ocean island state of Mauritius which "focused less on Karim as an individual, but that he was nominated by the British government. Mauritius had been infuriated that UK ministers had for a second time said they had no need to abide by rulings of international UN courts in the dispute over its sovereignty of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean.

This is one example of the British government flouting international law when it considers such codes to be awkward, and an illustration of its inconsistent and even hypocritical approach to world developments.

Hong Kong used to be a British colony and reverted to China in 1997. Since then there have been disagreements between Britain and China concerning governance of the region, and the British government has poked its nose where it has no right to dictate the conduct of affairs. It claims to have a “moral commitment” regarding a security law applicable to Hong Kong, and in a speech about the region on January 29 the British prime minister, the egregious Boris Johnson, declared that he and his government “stand up for freedom and autonomy.”

It so happens that on the same day as Johnson was preaching about his love of freedom the United Nation’s maritime court in Hamburg announced that Britain has no sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. As the UK *Guardian* reported, the Court “criticized London for its failure to hand the territory back to Mauritius and follows the international court of justice announcement last year that the UK’s ongoing administration of the islands was ‘unlawful’.”

Britain’s treatment of the former inhabitants of the Chagos Islands has been disgraceful and entirely at variance with its self-righteous criticism of other countries for their supposed denial of human rights.

The Chagos chain of some sixty islets is in the middle of the Indian Ocean and used to be a paradise for the inhabitants but, as noted by the BBC, “Between 1968 and 1974, Britain forcibly removed thousands of Chagossians from their homelands and sent them more than 1,000 miles away to Mauritius and the Seychelles, where they faced extreme poverty and discrimination.” There are some 3,000 reluctantly resident in Britain and many of the younger ones, born in exile, have been denied British citizenship and live in fear of being expelled.

As I have written in Counterpunch in the past, the Chagos Archipelago was “depopulated” in the 1960s and 70s because Britain had agreed that there should be a US military airfield on the main island, Diego Garcia. As revealed in 2004, the bureaucrats of Britain’s Colonial Office had written that “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. Unfortunately along with the Birds go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully wished on to Mauritius etc.”

The sneering condescension of that racist bigotry is repulsive, but the attitude remains, and the Chagos Islanders will continue to be victims of that mentality. By various subterfuges, the people of the Archipelago were expelled, in the course of which the colonial governor Sir Bruce Greatbatch “ordered all pet dogs on Diego Garcia to be killed. Almost 1,000 pets were rounded up and gassed, using the exhaust fumes from American military vehicles.” As one evicted Islander, Lizette Tallatte, said in a 2004 documentary, “when their dogs were taken

away in front of them, our children screamed and cried,” and then the remaining islanders “were loaded on to ships, allowed to take only one suitcase. They left behind their homes and furniture, and their lives.”

The islands had been a French colony and were handed over to Britain in 1814 by the Treaty of Paris which officially ended the Napoleonic Wars. They formed part of the colony of Mauritius, the much larger island group some 2000 kilometers to the south east.

Then, as *Law World records*, “In 1965, the UK and Mauritius signed the Lancaster House Agreement, whereby the Chagos Islands were detached from Mauritius and included in a new territory called the British Indian Ocean Territory. Mauritius later alleged that this detachment was forced, especially due to its vulnerable position as a former British colony. Due to the geographically strategic position of Chagos – equally situated between Indonesia, Australia, Iraq and eastern Africa – the UK and the United States had long been considering it for the installation of a military base. In 1966, the UK and the US signed a deal for the implementation of such a base on the island of Diego Garcia for an indefinite period . . .”

So the “Tarzans and Man Fridays”, as the inhabitants were regarded by the bigoted smirking Brits, were sacrificed on Washington’s altar of domination which added another military base to the 800 around the globe. In 2016, the lease for the base was extended until 2036. No mention was made of the islanders who had been forcibly evicted from their home.

On 22 May 2019, the UN General Assembly voted 116 to 6 in favor of a resolution demanding that the United Kingdom withdraw “its colonial administration unconditionally from the Chagos Archipelago” within six months. Only the U.S., Hungary, Israel, Australia and the Maldives backed the UK, but although the result was indicative of world opinion and deeply condemnatory of the US and Britain the resolution is non-binding and will be ignored by those most directly involved — and the islanders will stay poverty-ridden in exile. They are, after all, mere “Tarzans and Man Fridays” and it is no doubt hoped that soon they will all die off and cease to be a problem.

The people who deny the Islanders their human rights are poisonous filth, as made clear in a British 2009 diplomatic cable revealed by Wikileaks (no wonder the Brit establishment detests Julian Assange and is treating him so disgustingly) which stated that the government “would like to establish a ‘marine park’ or ‘reserve’ providing comprehensive environmental protection to the reefs and waters of the British Indian Ocean Territory [BIOT] . . . [which] would in no way impinge on US use of the BIOT, including Diego Garcia, for military purposes . . . [and ensure] that former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve.”

The inhabitants of Hong Kong, on the other hand, are more highly regarded in London, and on January 29 the British government announced satisfaction about “the UK’s historic and moral commitment to the people of Hong Kong who have had their rights and

freedoms restricted.” The UK has, after all, declared it wishes to “defend human rights across the globe.”

In November 2016 the *Financial Times* reported extension of the lease for the US base on Diego Garcia for another twenty years and noted that “the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said that the Chagossians would not be allowed to return “on the grounds of feasibility, defense and security interests, and cost to the British taxpayer”. It was also announced that the evicted Islanders would receive 40 million pounds in compensation.

But on January 31 it was revealed that *less than £12,000* of that forty million has been directed to helping the exiled islanders and their families. Henry Smith, the UK Member of Parliament in whose constituency many Chagossians now exist, stated bluntly that “it’s outrageous that next to none of this funding has actually been utilized . . . [it is] another failure of Foreign Office promises over half a century to the Chagossian community.”

The “defense of human rights” by the government of Boris Johnson is a charade, and the treatment of the Chagos Islanders is indefensibly cruel and loathsome. But the government and their little helpers in London think it’s such an unimportant matter that it will simply fade away. Like the islanders.

Alas, they are probably right. And we will see yet another victory for duplicity over morality, illustrating Britain’s double standards in international affairs.

FEBRUARY 19, 2021

Brian Cloughley writes about foreign policy and military affairs. He lives in Voutenay sur Cure, France.