

## Re-colonization in the Indian Ocean: Chagos and Mayotte

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The 1960 UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 stated that “any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity or the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the [UN] Charter”. As a rule, colonial boundaries were subsequently respected in continental Africa. In the Indian Ocean, however, breaches led to tensions.

From perspectives of international law and conflict prevention, this paper discusses the cases of Chagos and Mayotte, respectively dismembered from Mauritius and Comoros.

When Mauritius in 1968 gained independence, Chagos was by the UK incorporated into a British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Viewed by the UN and the AU as part of Mauritius, in July 2010 the latter called upon the UK to “expeditiously put an end to its continued, unlawful occupation”.

One of the most strategic US military bases is on the Chagos island of Diego Garcia, leased by the UK. Between 1968 and 1973, its inhabitants were forcefully removed. Their case seemed closed when in October 2010 the UK declared Chagos a Protected Marine Area. Revealed as a move to prevent claims against the UK, in December 2010 Mauritius took the case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. A ruling is expected in April 2011.

In December 1974, France organized a referendum on the independence of Comoros. With an outcome of 95% in favour, the island of Mayotte, however, voted for France. When Comoros in November 1975 was admitted to the UN, the General Assembly underlined that Mayotte was an integral part. Later stating that “the occupation by France [...] constitutes a flagrant encroachment on the national unity”, the assembly condemned “any other form of referendum or consultation which may hereafter be organized”, as well as “any foreign legislation purporting to legalize any French colonial presence”.

France, however, proceeded towards re-colonization. In October 1976, Mayotte became a *Collectivité Territoriale Française*; in April 1995 French visa requirements were introduced; and in June 2000 the island was declared a *Collectivité Départementale Française*. In November 2010, finally, the French parliament established Mayotte as the country’s 101<sup>st</sup> department, effective from March 2011. As such, Mayotte would become an Ultra-Periferic EU Region and a thorny question vis-à-vis both the AU and the UN.