

US planes flood UK bases in preparation for attack on Iran

Robert Stevens
22 February 2026

The United States is using UK bases to prepare for an attack on Iran, despite an earlier fallout over permission to use Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands and Fairford, England.

According to an assessment by *The i Paper* published Saturday, since last Tuesday, “at least 28 US military flights have used airbases in the UK and Cyprus to carry out one of the largest build-ups of US military strength in the Middle East for decades.”

Based on analysis of open-source flight-tracking data, it found that “flights have taken off and landed from US air force facilities based in the UK, including RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath, where the Pentagon has long-standing access to airfields through a lease agreement.”

Moreover, “Strategic American aircraft, capable of transporting heavy weaponry and troops, were tracked using US airbases at Prestwick, Scotland—a key transatlantic fuelling station for deployments towards the Middle East.”

What *The i* describes as a “staggering volume of military aircraft” being deployed takes place despite, as reported by the *Times* last week, the Starmer government’s refusal to grant the US permission to use the military base on Diego Garcia or the Royal Air Force Base in Fairford, England—to carry out its planned assault on Iran.

The *Times* report appeared just hours after US President Donald Trump posted February 18 on his *Truth Social* account that “Should Iran decide not to make a Deal... it may be necessary for the United States to use Diego Garcia, and the Airfield located in Fairford, in order to eradicate a potential attack by a highly unstable and dangerous Regime”.

The Fairford base is home to Washington’s fleet of heavy bombers in Europe.

Allowing use of both bases was necessary to halt “an

attack that would potentially be made on the United Kingdom, as well as other friendly countries”, said Trump, adding, “We will always be ready, willing, and able to fight for the UK, but they have to remain strong in the face of Wokeism, and other problems put before them.”

In a same post, he warned Britain: “DO NOT GIVE AWAY DIEGO GARCIA!” accusing Starmer of “losing control” of the strategically vital base.

Trump’s rant was one and several U-turns over Britain’s May 2025 deal, under which Britain would lease back Diego Garcia to Mauritius for 99 years at a cost of billions.

Trump initially backed the agreement, then condemned it as an “act of stupidity” (January 2026) and “total weakness,” (this month), before appearing to endorse it again. But White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told Britain to beware, as the president’s latest social media post “should be taken as the policy of the Trump administration.”

The crisis over the Chagos deal highlights the political costs of maintaining the UK as the premier military ally of the US. The Islands occupy a strategic location in the Indian Ocean, halfway between India and East Africa. US imperialism, enabled by successive British government, has long used Diego Garcia to support its criminal operations from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the late 1980s, Diego Garcia, which hosts between two and five thousand US military personnel, had become one of the leading overseas military bases of the US and the main base available to Britain in the area. The base has facilities to accommodate nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers and large airplanes, and playing a key role in US intelligence-gathering serves as a surveillance centre for the Middle East. Diego Garcia has provided a “dark site” where the CIA detained and tortured people and refuelled “extraordinary rendition” flights.

The *Times* reported that Starmer had blocked “a request for the UK to allow American planes to use British bases to attack Iran, telling him that it would be in breach of international law.” It added, “Under the terms of long-standing agreements with Washington, these bases can only be used for military operations against third countries that have been agreed in advance with the government.”

The Foreign Office insisted that the Chagos agreement is “the only way to guarantee the long-term future of this vital military base”, while ministers emphasised that the deal is “crucial to the security of the UK and our key allies”.

The decision was made six years after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion in 2019, noting that “the process of decolonization of Mauritius was not lawfully completed” and that the UK had violated United Nations resolutions prohibiting the breaking up of colonies before granting independence.

As the WSWS noted, “With its customary imperial arrogance, the British government ignored this and similar rulings. But there was another much more important [2021] opinion by the United Nations International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) that the British government could not ignore, despite its protestations at the time. ITLOS had ruled that the UK had no sovereignty over the Chagos Islands and thus it considered all the seas and therefore airspace around the Chagos islands as belonging to Mauritius.”

The problem facing the UK—and by extension the US—was that this opinion could be made binding in law, meaning that “Mauritius could take legal action against Washington and London or any company supplying their operations for invading its air or sea space if they had done so without permission from Mauritius. Furthermore, Mauritius would be entitled to open up the Islands to Chinese or Russian bases. This was a risk the US and UK governments were not prepared to take.”

Yet senior officials privately admit that the arrangement cannot proceed without American approval.

The fact that US planes continue to flood other UK bases confirms that Starmer was doing nothing more than covering his government from openly colluding in a war crime.

While the US was forced to endorse the Chagos deal at the time, waging war against Iran, like the attack on Venezuela, the threatened seizure of Greenland and the Panama Canal, is essential to realising Trump’s “America First” strategy to control the world’s critical resources

and China.

Located some 2,400 miles from Iran’s southern coastline, well within striking range, Diego Garcia is a crucial platform for US aerial power, with long runways capable of hosting heavy bombers and a deepwater port that can accommodate aircraft carriers. Prior to last June’s Operation Midnight Hammer strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities by the US and Israel, a squadron of B-2 bombers was readied on the island.

Starmer’s hesitation over the use of Diego Garcia and Fairford reflects fear in British ruling circles over direct legal and military entanglement in a war crime. The BBC noted that under international law there is “no distinction between a state carrying out the attack and those which have supported that state, if the latter has ‘knowledge of the circumstances of the internationally wrongful act’”.

But London has made repeated statements endorsing US threats against Iran, while stating its preferred outcome is the US disarming Iran via a negotiated settlement.

The *Guardian* reported that Starmer’s government is doing all it can to repair the damage to US relations, saying, “The hope in No 10 is that Trump will again change his mind. The bill setting out the Chagos agreement is due to return to the House of Lords soon.”

On Thursday, the Ministry of Defence refused to comment on the *Times*’ revelation, with Reuters reporting the department’s reiteration of policy not to comment “on operational matters and that Britain supported the ongoing political process between the U.S. and Iran.”

On Friday, Foreign Minister Yvette Cooper met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington to discuss the crisis. The short statement released by the State Department following their talks referred to the Russia-Ukraine war; “Phase Two of the President’s Gaza peace plan” and “securing a humanitarian truce in Sudan”, but pointedly not the rift over the use of Diego Garcia.



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