

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

18/2010

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The United Kingdom, as well as robustly defending Gibraltar's three mile limit of territorial waters and pursuing the court case in the EU, should now take the next logical step and extend them to twelve miles. Only three days ago, the Foreign Office took a very clear and tough stance in defence of British sovereignty over the territorial sea around the Falkland Islands.

While the UK claims only three miles of waters for Gibraltar, London operates a 200 square mile zone around the Falkland Islands. There is now an intense diplomatic dispute between the UK and Argentina following the news that an oil platform is due to arrive north of Port Stanley in the next few days, and oil exploration is to begin in the waters around the Islands. Analysts have been quoted as saying that there could be more than 60 billion barrels of high-grade oil around the Islands and that this could make the Falklands one of the world's largest oil reserves.

Argentina is demanding that oil exploration should cease and regards these as "illegal" operations. The Foreign Office has denied this, and has said that: "We are absolutely clear this is legitimate business in Falkland Islands waters and we will continue to reiterate our position that we have no doubt about our sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and the surrounding maritime areas."

It is probably not a coincidence that this dispute about the territorial waters of the Falklands has been intensified by Argentina at the same time as Spain has also chosen to escalate its claim to the waters around Gibraltar. It is no secret that the two countries cooperate closely in the United Nations and elsewhere in pursuance of their respective claims to the sovereignty over the two British colonies. Spain and Argentina both ignore the reality that in this day and age the principle of self-determination must be the paramount consideration in the decolonisation of Gibraltar and of the Falkland Islands.

It is well known that on a proposal from Madrid, the waters around Gibraltar have been designated by the EU as if they were Spanish. There have been constant and continuous incursions by Spanish patrol boats into the territorial waters of Gibraltar ever since that designation was made. This culminated in the incursion into the Port and on the land territory of Gibraltar itself by four Civil Guards only two months ago, who were then set free within hours as if nothing had happened. Even last week Spain's Servicio de Vigilancia Aduanera (SVA) was operating in Camp Bay and at the mouth of the harbour itself.

The Opposition considers that just because the Falkland Islands may have huge oil reserves and Gibraltar does not, this does not mean that the United Kingdom should be any less forceful when it comes to defending our territorial waters. The UK is obliged to defend and uphold the sovereignty of British Gibraltar Territorial Waters within the present 3 mile limit that Gibraltar has at present and which we consider should be immediately extended to the twelve miles that Gibraltar is entitled to enjoy.

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