

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
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The Spanish Guardia Civil are being wreckless and irresponsible in their latest clashes with the Royal Navy in British or international waters around Gibraltar. The Navy have very precise rules of engagement and the Civil Guard patrol boats risk being blown out of the water if they continue to behave in this cavalier fashion.

The incident of 1 June, the details of which have only emerged now, involved a Civil Guard launch which sped towards two Royal Navy vessels that were on exercise in international waters. The Civil Guard approached the frigate HMS Somerset and the patrol boat HMS Sabre at high speed and refused to identify itself by radio when called upon to do so by the Royal Navy. It was only when the Civil Guard launch was recognised by the Gibraltar-based personnel on HMS Sabre that the situation was defused. The fear of attacks on naval vessels perpetrated by high speed launches became a reality after a United States ship was attacked some years ago. It was believed that terrorists were studying the use of the same tactics on shipping crossing the Straits of Gibraltar. In such circumstances, and against this background, the Spanish Civil Guard should have known better.

This latest incident took place in international waters, outside Gibraltar's territorial waters. The Spanish Government do not recognise Gibraltar's waters nor the international sea around them, and claims that all the waters belong to Spain. This position has no basis in international law. The United Kingdom is entitled to claim twelve miles of territorial sea around Gibraltar, where this is geographically possible. These waters, outside our present three mile limit, remain international waters until the UK decides to claim them. The Guardia Civil are simply acting in accordance with the policy of their Government in Madrid.

The Opposition understands that there was yet another incident last week when the Navy ordered another Spanish patrol boat to leave Gibraltar waters after the Civil Guard were questioning the occupants of a small boat inside British waters. This time the Civil Guard left the area after being approached by the Royal Navy.

Quite apart from the serious issues relating to sovereignty, it is obvious that the actions of the agencies of the Spanish state are becoming increasingly dangerous and that sooner or later somebody is going to get hurt. The Spanish Government should instruct their agents that they have authority only on Spanish waters. They have no authority whatsoever in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters or in the international sea that surrounds them.