



If Spain wants Gibraltar, when it it planning to give up Olivença?

Posted By: [Daniel Hannan](#) at Mar 13, 2009 at 00:12:21 [[General](#)]
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What if it had been the other way around? What if Spain had helped itself to a slice of someone else's territory, forced the defeated nation to cede it in a subsequent treaty, and hung on to it? Would Madrid behave as it wants Britain to behave over Gibraltar? *iNi pensarlo!*

How can I be so sure? Because there is precisely such a case. In 1801, France and Spain, then allies, demanded that Portugal abandon her ancient friendship with England and close her ports to British ships. The Portuguese staunchly refused, whereupon Bonaparte and his Spanish confederates marched on the little kingdom. Portugal was overrun and, by the Treaty of Badajoz, forced to give up the town of Olivença, on the left bank of the Guadiana.

When Boney was eventually defeated, the European powers met at the Congress of Vienna to produce a comprehensive settlement of Europe's borders. The ensuing treaty urged a return to the pre-1801 Hispano-Portuguese (or, if you prefer, Luso-Spanish) frontier. Spain, after some hesitation, eventually signed up in 1817. But it made no move to return Olivença. On the contrary, it worked vigorously to extirpate Portuguese culture in the province, first prohibiting teaching in Portuguese, then banning the language outright.

Portugal has never dropped its claim to Olivença, though it has made no move to force the issue (it toyed with the idea of snatching the town during the Spanish Civil War, but eventually backed off). Although Portuguese maps continue to show an undemarcated frontier at Olivença, the dispute has not been allowed to stand in the way of excellent relations between Lisbon and Madrid.

Now let's consider the parallels with Gib. Gibraltar was ceded to Great Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), just as Olivença was ceded to Spain by the Treaty of Badajoz (1801). In both cases, the defeated power might reasonably claim that it signed under duress, but this is what happens in all peace settlements.

Spain complains that some of the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht have been violated: that Britain has extended the frontier beyond that originally laid down; that it has bestowed a measure of self-government on Gibraltar incompatible with the outright British jurisdiction specified by the Treaty; and (although this point is rarely pressed) that it has failed to prevent Jewish and Muslim settlement on the Rock. With how much more force, though, might Portugal argue that the Treaty of Badajoz has been abrogated. It was annulled in 1807 when, in violation of its terms, French and Spanish troops marched on Portugal in the Peninsular War. A few years later, it was superseded by the Treaty of Vienna.

Of course, the Spanish might reasonably retort that, whatever the legal niceties, the population of Olivença is loyal to the Spanish Crown. While the issue has never been tested in a referendum, it certainly seems that most residents are happy as they are. The Portuguese language has all but died out except among the very elderly. The town (Olivenza in Spanish) hosts one of the most important bullfighting ferias of the season, attracting breeds and matadors beyond the dreams of any similarly sized pueblo. Portuguese rule would mean an end to Spanish-style bullfighting, and a return to provincial obscurity.

I'm sure you can see where this is going. This blog has always made the cause of [national self-determination](#) its own cause. Spain's claim to Olivença (and Ceuta and Melilla) rests on the knock-down argument that the people living there want to be Spanish. But the same principle surely

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applies to Gibraltar, whose inhabitants, in 2002, voted by 17,900 to 187 to remain under British sovereignty.

Britain, by the way, has every right to link the two issues. The only reason the Portuguese lost Olivença is that they were honouring the terms of their league with us. They are our oldest and most reliable allies, having fought alongside us for 700 years - most recently, and at terrible cost, when they joined the First World War for our sake. Our 1810 treaty of alliance and friendship explicitly commits Britain to work for the restoration of Olivença to Portugal.

My real point, though, is that these issues ought not to prejudice good relations between the rival claimants. While Portugal has no intention of renouncing its formal claim to Olivença, it accepts that, as long as the people there want to remain Spanish, there is no point in pushing the issue. It is surely not too much to expect Spain to take a similar line *vis-à-vis* Gibraltar.

Since this post is likely to attract some crotchety comments from Spaniards, I ought to place on the record that you're not likely to find a more convinced Hispanophile than me. I like everything about your country: its people, [its festivals](#), its cuisine, [its music](#), its literature, its [fiesta nacional](#). Tomorrow night, you will find me in Sadler's Wells, transported to a nobler and more sublime place by the voice of Estrella Morente. Believe me, *señores*, it's nothing personal: it's just that you can't have it both ways.

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Hamish McGlobbie

Well, I've been to Gibraltar, and they certainly don't want to be ruled by Spain. A new era of colonialism by the Spanish really isn't appropriate.

March 13, 2009
11:00 AM GMT

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Junius

Perhaps if the Spanish were so keen on ownership of Gibraltar they should have done a better job of defending the rock in 1704, during the War of the Spanish Succession. The governor had a garrison of thirty men fit for fighting and pleas for reinforcements went unheeded. When Byng's fleet turned up and bombarded the fort the garrison sensibly fled. Most of the British casualties incurred when sailors with lighted gun-matches entered the magazine which promptly exploded. Gibraltar was nigh on impregnable if defended properly, as the British demonstrated in subsequent attempts first by the Spanish and then the Franco-Spanish to seize it back.

Before the Battle of Passaro in 1718, the British were so anxious to sue for peace with Spain that they offered to give up Gibraltar as the price. Cardinal Alberoni, the power behind the Spanish throne, foolishly refused. Moral: never look a gift rock in the mouth...

March 13, 2009
11:20 AM GMT

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Bry:

"I don't see anywhere in my post where I 'told you what to do'. I merely asked if the the banners were needed."

Stephen Jenner

And I never accused you of being a fascist, but what you were actually doing by making a point of highlighting to the moderators, my and many other commenter's use of little bits of html, was that you were looking to a higher authority to clamp down on people's behaviour that YOU disagree with.

I merely pointed out that this is the way authoritarians everywhere behave, and since authoritarians are always in bed with corporatists, they are textbook fascists. It was your behaviour that I was calling a bit fascist, not you; I would have thought that you would have been grateful that I had pointed out to you, that if you were not careful you might morph into muleskinner.

Anyway, thank you for your initial observation, which I actually agree with, as I said. My somewhat childish sense of humour (of which there are countless examples here) has quite obviously got in the way of the serious points that I made in my two previous posts. Namely, that local direct democracy has the effect of determining how people actually want to manage their affairs, and that allowing politicians free reign, usually results in them repeating the same mistakes, despite the lessons of history.

P.S. "Please note. If you call 'fascist' again I will come round and kick your f***** head in !!" Ha-ha very funny... Is this your childish sense of humour making an escape attempt?

March 13, 2009
11:21 AM GMT

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Cheeky Boy

Gibraltar is ours...If the Spanish don't like it tough. What are they going to do? Zapatero has already claimed the Spanish to be pacifists, so no chance of a ruck, a la Falklands. Have we still got a claim on Calais?

March 13, 2009
11:21 AM GMT

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John

'Olivenza was reconquered by the king of Leon and grabbed by the Portuguese in 1297. That's why Spain reclaimed the city in 1801.'

So the intervening 504 years are of no importance then ?

On that basis, it's about time we took Calais back from the French, who have only been there since 1558.

Re Hong Kong, only the New Territories were leased in 1898 for 99 years; Hong Kong Island and Kowloon were British in perpetuity and we were under no obligation to return them to China (a fact the FCO continually sought to suppress).

March 13, 2009
11:45 AM GMT

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DominicJ...

"Gibraltar was given to the UK forever, on the understanding that if we ever abandoned it, it would return to the Spanish.

So... and the Gibraltarians? What about them and their consistent (in at least 3 Referendums) and democratically expressed wishes to have nothing to do with Spain??

In today's free and democratic society, that the European Union is supposed to be, you'll still say... bugger Gibraltar's

Cybernest

I shall reiterate... The Treaty of Utrecht is an anachronistic bit of paper.. that should be consigned to the dustbin of history and no longer has any validity in the 21st century!

Gibraltar belongs to the People of Gibraltar! It is neither Spain's to claim nor Britain's to give away!

March 13, 2009
12:40 PM GMT

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Bry.St Ives
@Stephen

If you choose, altho' having read your two further posts I doubt you will, you should, on rereading my earlier post, discover my appeal regarding the use of banners is directed to the DT posters for their opinions. Why you should think I was in someway appealing to the moderators is beyond me unless, of course, this idea comes from how you personally act to get your own way and thereby believing everyone must act the same way.

That said, as, since my original post on the subject, no other poster has commented on the use of banners it would appear they, the banners, are of no import/consequence/ or cause no irritation to others...so banner away.

March 13, 2009
01:19 PM GMT

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sb1

"If you call 'fascist' again I will come round and kick your f***** head in !!"

A fascist head? But why the asterisks?

March 13, 2009
01:23 PM GMT

REPORT THIS



DominicJ
Cybernest

I was simply explaining the difference between Hong Kong and Gibraltar.

March 13, 2009
02:00 PM GMT

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@Bry:

DominicJ said:

"You should be able to get rid of them by turning off some of your functionality, but its an all or nothing trade off."

So it is likely that he thinks it is not really worth mentioning, but if one is worked up about it, then turn off some of the functionality of your browser.

I made my opinion clear, that I felt that it was actually a bit of a distraction.

Cybernest obviously does not, his latest post makes use of html (for italics and bold).

So there you go, you have three opinions.

How you arrive at the conclusion that I want posters to behave in a particular way, is beyond me.

Stephen Jenner

March 13, 2009
02:14 PM GMT

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Nuno

Brilliant!

Very well informed.

Regardless of the Spanish rhetoric, proof of Olivença is visible in its Portuguese imprint. Both monumental and vernacular architecture is Portuguese. The food, names and social customs are typical of this region of Southern Portugal - the Alentejo. Much more reserved, less bashful and constrained than Spain.

The language was banished, its history rewritten, many had to leave due to persecution (especially the upper and middle classes, now living in other parts of Portugal). Speak with the locals in private and you will find part of their roots remains, and sometimes the language surges(outlawed in public until 1977, and still officially banished from all signage and literature).

As for propaganda regarding Spain's reintegration of Olivença, look at the bare facts:

1. Olivença was founded by the Portuguese Knights Templar in the 12th century;
2. The only country in Europe which didn't persecute the Knight's Templar at that time was Portugal. These were integrated into the armed forces, which still display the Holy Cross as the national defence insignia. Supposedly King Dinis was a Templar himself! Leon and Castile had no templars, and weren't very successful expanding in the Olivença area.
3. Spain was established 400 years after Portugal (and some 300 after Olivença was founded).
4. The first border treaty between Portugal and Castile & Leon (Treaty of Alcanices, 1297) rightfully claims Portuguese lands as Portuguese. Olivença having been founded by Portugal could therefore never belonged to Spain, it simply didn't exist at that time.
6. Spain's moral ground is extremely shaky: Arguments of reintegration or historical "corrections" can also be used to revert the South to the moors (along with Ceuta -once Portuguese- and Mellila), and independence to Navarre (and the Basques), Catalonia, and Galicia & Leon.
7. As an integral part of Portugal, the Olivença problem will be solved when convenient to the interests of Olivença and of Portugal.

March 13, 2009
02:19 PM GMT

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Cybernest

Nuno... the question is are the people of Olivença happy with what they are today?

To my mind, ancient historical claims to land, having no regard for the democratically expressed wishes of a people, have no place in a supposedly enlightened 21st century Europe!

Posters here may be interested in reading the blog post I've made this morning, in the light of renewed claims in the Spanish Congress yesterday, over the sovereignty of Gibraltar. You can read my thoughts (where I quote Daniel's excellent post here) here:

Gibraltar sovereignty once more demanded in Spain
March 13, 2009
03:04 PM GMT

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Paul Giles

Cybernest said: "...the question is are the people of Olivença happy with what they are today?...ancient historical claims to land, having no regard for the democratically expressed wishes of a people, have no place in a supposedly enlightened 21st century Europe!"

Yes, political identity can only validly be determined by democratic means. But - it's a big 'but' - we need to first agree a mechanism for any such democratic process. Otherwise you end up with either (a) big nations out-voting and extinguishing smaller nations or (b) individual households forming separate polities.

March 13, 2009
04:05 PM GMT

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Bry.St Ives

Yaawnn...@Stephen

If you read my last post, slowly, you will discover your sentence..

'How you arrive at the conclusion that I want posters to behave in a particular way, is beyond me.'

should have read..How you arrive at the conclusion that I want the moderators to behave in a particular way, is beyond me.

So to do italics and bold requires html..see, one learns something new on these blogs everyday.

March 13, 2009
04:59 PM GMT

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Al Hamilton

Stephen Henner

"So, presumably all of Europe belongs to the crocodiles and the cockroaches!" Apparently the latter in Brussels think so.

March 13, 2009
06:42 PM GMT

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carlosluna

I must say Olivença came to Portugal in 1297, with Campo Maior, Ouguela, and Almeida and a few small villages around this last town, IN EXCHANGE of Herrera de Alcántara, Valéncia de Alcántara, Esparragal, Aroche, Ayamonte, Aracene and some other small villages. So, dear Brithon, it was not "grabbed" by the Portuguese. Even during 1580-1640, when spaniards rule Portugal, Olivença was part of Portuguese Crown, and the spanish Kings never tried to unite it to Spain. Spanish History always says Olivença was a disputed territory. THAT´S NOT TRUE. And... in 1977, european treaties accepted frontiers where they were, but that ment, for Portugal, to accept it were it was BY INTERNATIONAL LAW. N.A.T.O. can not have troops in Olivença because of that.

You have to study History (British, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian), but NEVER STUdT JUST ONE COUNTRY´ HISTORY (or then, read OTHER Histories, in the same country, not only the oficial one)...

March 13, 2009
11:48 PM GMT

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Brithon

To Carlos

You are right : never study history from just one side. By a matter of fact, I mainly know the Spanish version of the dispute (very well summarised here : www.dip-badajoz.es/munici...). The Portuguese may have a few good points. Olivenza still arouses controversy (little in fact), because there is a long and complex history behind. Otherwise, who would care ? In Europe those kind of old problem should be solved at local level, building new links between both sides of the border. I noticed, for instance, that Olivenza organised just last month a conference about the Portuguese language spoken there. Guillermo Fernandez Vara, the president of the regional government, insisted on the interest to protect and develop the use of the Portuguese in Olivenza. It's a step in the right direction. Further European integration may help solve other problems, like Elsass, a German speaking region in France, Flanders split between three countries, Catalonia, the Basque provinces, etc.

March 14, 2009
07:10 AM GMT

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THIS