

GIBRALTAR, A PIECE OF BRITISH LAND AT THE HEART OF MAJOR GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC RELATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Résumé

Depuis sa découverte en 711 de notre ère, Gibraltar, ce minuscule morceau de terre d'Iberie perdu aux confins de la méditerranée est au centre de convoitises de puissances rivales dont celles européennes. Son contrôle par l'Angleterre en 1704 à la faveur du traité d'Utrecht est apparu comme une véritable aubaine qui allait booster le réveil, voire la renaissance internationale du pays de William Shakespeare. L'Espagne qui n'a jamais digéré la perte d'un si précieux morceau de terre, n'a jamais abandonné sa volonté de le contrôler. Ses échecs militaires n'ayant pas émoussé sa volonté, l'Espagne a même tenté de passer par les négociations du BREXIT pour reposer la question de Gibraltar sur la table, en vain.

Mots-clés: *Grande-Bretagne, méditerranée, géostratégique, géopolitique, Brexit*

Abstract

Since its discovery in 711 AD, Gibraltar, this tiny piece of land in Iberia lost on the borders of the Mediterranean, has been at the center of the desires of rival powers, including those of Europe. Its control by England in 1704 through the Treaty of Utrecht appeared to be a real boon that would boost the awakening, even the international renaissance of the country of William Shakespeare. Spain, which never digested the loss of such a precious piece of land, never gave up its will to control it. Its military failures having not dulled its will, Spain even tried to go through the BREXIT negotiations to put the question of Gibraltar back on the table, in vain.

Key-words: *Great-Britain, Mediterranean, geostrategic, geopolitical, Brexit*

Introduction

Discovered in 711, Gibraltar's strategic interest is revealed by the different attempts of conquests it underwent from Moors, Arabs, Castilians, Spaniards, English... The reason for this military fervour over the small rock comes from the unique strategic position and advantage it

gives owners in a relation that is detrimental to any rival power if not enemies. When most people tend to see Gibraltar's importance essentially in the area of transport with its highly interesting maritime connection as it links Africa, Europe and Asia, the rock also plays an extremely important military role for hosting a military and intelligence base for British and US armies in one of the most important geostrategic areas of the world.

This accounts for the interest of this work which explores the geopolitical and geostrategic interest of the rock of Gibraltar controlled by Britain since 1704 to the detriment of rival Spain which has never stopped initiatives - both military and diplomatic - to extend its lost sovereignty over a rock that seems to have chosen to remain British since 1714, after the Treaty of Utrecht was signed. With the prospects of Brexit, Spain hopes to bounce back but Britain's reaction to this will determine the future of international relations in such an important area located in the heart of the Mediterranean.

Our methodological approach being historical, is based on data analysis including strategic and diplomatic sources of utmost importance. The interest of such an approach is the possibility it gives to have a direct contact with the relevant elements pertaining to the issue of Gibraltar. The strategic and diplomatic information prove to be the ideal target to make the objectives of the present work easily achievable thanks to a well-adapted outline in three sections that appears exactly as the lines below display it.

We will first attempt to highlight the way the ambitions of Britain have been boosted by the control of a small rock named Gibraltar. This will be followed by the exploration of Gibraltar with regards to its strategic position unique for Britain. The third and last item to be developed is linked with the Brexit issues which prompted the old geostrategic and geopolitical issue of Gibraltar into re-emerging with Spain trying to push again for the matter to be included in the agenda of the Brexit negotiations.

1-Gibraltar, A Small Rock For A Big Ambition Drawn by The UK

Through the lines and pages of this essay, we discover the heights of a rock majestically erected by nature. It forms the junction between different civilizations around the Mediterranean area. This rock fascinates rival powers, shapes the destinies of nations with great

ambitions and impacts in one way or another, international relations in the Mediterranean area, but also beyond. It arouses covetousness between rival nations and civilizations and at the same time inflates the most incredible geopolitical and geostrategic interests. Africa, Asia and Europe meet there and look at each other. In this area conducive to both crusades and cruises, an essential transmission belt undoubtedly remains Gibraltar from the Arabic *jab al-tariq*¹, as it is considered the gateway to the Mediterranean.

How else to understand that an island of only five-point one kilometer long, two-point one km wide and thirty-two thousand inhabitants (Orcier / CNES, 2019: 16) lost in the confines of the Mediterranean, can be the place of all desires that she has known and continues to know since the distant fourteenth century? From the top of its four hundred and twenty-six meters - its highest point - Gibraltar, not to name it, is therefore this small island with enormous and multiple stakes which surveys almost the entire Mediterranean while even allowing an opening in the direction of the Indian Ocean, not to mention the Atlantic Ocean.

Gibraltar also facilitates the connection between Western Europe and North America with each year around one hundred thousand ships crossing its strait called a "world-class lock" because of its highly strategic nature in terms of transit (5). It is all this that makes Gibraltar scrutinized with great interest by all the Mediterranean states, eager to own it, to control it and make it an advanced sentinel post, ideally placed in a kind of crossroads of the Mediterranean. She gives the image of a young woman with several suitors, each dreaming of getting married with her.

In full international renaissance since its "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, and especially since 1689 (Marx, 1967: 230), England was not long in seeing and then enjoying the fruits of its international investment, especially on the European scene from 1689 to 1713. This has resulted in very striking victories obtained especially under the command of the Duke of Marlborough, a very competent army general who had the favors and trust of Queen Anne. The latter had made Marlborough the most powerful man in the kingdom in part so that he could protect his beloved bride to whom the Queen cared much about.

¹ Literally Mount Tariq, named after its Arab discoverer Tariq

The duke was also very powerful for the other European generals on the continent over whom he had won wars when he crushed the Bavarians and the French at Blenheim in 1704 (Maurois, 1937: 337). That same year, more precisely on August 4, the Rock of Gibraltar fell into the hands of England, two hundred and forty years after its conquest by Spain at the expense of the Moors. Three years after the fall of Gibraltar which became English at the same time, the kingdom of England was strengthening, because three years later, the Act of Union came to seal the union between England and Scotland, giving rise to in the United Kingdom of Great Britain (Seydi, 2018: 152 a). The country will be as if it were doped and galvanized in its desire to conquer. The rest is confirmed by the size of the empire Britons founded.

The capture of Gibraltar, England certainly owes it to the bravery and courage of the 2,000 marines deployed as well as to the undeniable competence of their commanding strategists including Lord Nelson², the pride of an entire nation, but it is also and above all to a comfortable advance over the other European nations, including the great Dutch naval power: it is a question of the control of the sea. Spain and its ally France were, in this respect, well behind the "perfidious Albion" whose naval supremacy was no longer disputed on the European scene after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

Obviously, on the domestic scene, the liberal opposition embodied by the Whigs were very critical of this treaty which they considered bad for the kingdom, and very advantageous for France, but time and history have proven the contrary. The reason is that the Treaty of Utrecht almost deprived the very nostalgic Emperor of Spain of patching up imperial pieces of Charles V. At the same time, it made it almost impossible for the King of France, Louis XIV, the very one who wanted to impose himself in the collective imagination as an infinitely powerful king (Delporte, 2011: 30), to federate the French and Spanish Crowns, in this sense that such a political alliance could get the better of England's temerity. It was only natural that this gave England - now Great Britain³ - a very large boulevard which she could walk without too much fear of her rivals and reign almost as absolute master in Europe.

² British Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson at the head of the fleet that defeated the Spanish at Gibraltar was unfortunately hit by a deadly bullet during that battle, but he remains one of the most honoured figures in the United Kingdom for his valour and courage. A legendary square in London bears his name.

³ After the Act of Union of the two Crowns, the country became Great Britain in 1707

England's greatness, power and influence were already beginning to overtake Europe with a presence in virtually every sea of the world thanks to undisputed naval know-how. By force of circumstances and its military genius and especially its naval skills with the influence that goes with it, "this small country became the referee of the world" (Maurois, 1937: 338). It is perhaps important to remember that in ancient accounts, a very ancient people who even preceded the Romans and Celts, had occupied England.

This people about whom history seems to have retained only a few things, is Spanish from the description and the conclusion that the accounts of the ancients have drawn up: "... the swarthy faces of the Silures, the tendency of their hair to curl and the fact that Spain lies opposite, all lead one to believe that Spaniards crossed in ancient times and occupied the land" (Tacitus, 1948: 61). It also means that contacts between Spain and the British Isles are old and Gibraltar is one of the more recent cases.

We also remember that Spain under Philip II had inclinations to control the Channel in order to be able, in a final step, to invade England. His surprise invasion launched by the Duke of Medina Sidonia with a Spanish army which was deemed "invincible" against England in May 1588 had ended in a stinging defeat inflicted, again by a queen⁴ as in 1704 during the conquest of Gibraltar with Queen Anne. Even if this English victory is accompanied by a tenacious myth that it is God who decided in favor of the English side by sending a strong storm (Mares 9) which facilitated the defeat of the Spanish army, the project of invasion initiated by Spain, very quickly turned into a fiasco. Spain wanted to take England by surprise, but she was the one surprised by the response of the English fleet, by the storm and by the defeat.

2- A Highly Strategic Rock

On the European scene, the great advance of Great Britain was undoubtedly related to the above, but the highly strategic position of the rock of Gibraltar also has something to do with it. The island is Spanish, but was taken by the British in 1704: why and to do what? Why is it so important to Britain which was not a Mediterranean nation, but became one by force of conquest outside its geographic area? Why does

⁴ Queen Elizabeth Ist

it continue to interest Spain which has lost it for more than three centuries after having interested other Mediterranean peoples such as the Moors, Arabs, Berbers etc.?

Spain immediately launched the counteroffensive to reclaim Gibraltar and never stopped. His desire to reclaim the rock from the English has never wavered, but still clashes with the determination of His Majesty's Marines to keep their "stone", a very precious stone. The acquisition of such an outpost from 1704, will begin to trace the contours of an even greater ambition with an even greater imperial dream, especially on the economic and even diplomatic level. England could thus continue to dream big, for now that was the world open to her. This gave more expression to its merchant navy and, in turn, more oxygen to its business for the greater good of its economy.

It is worth remembering that, as in 1704 during the capture of Gibraltar when the British had to face both the Spanish and French fleets under the rule of the Sun King as part of an alliance, a hundred and one years later, the same pattern was reproduced. The France of Napoleon Bonaparte, who wanted to control Europe and assert its supremacy, sought at all costs to extend its influence over England in the context of an invasion. Napoleon needed a fleet to live up to the declared ambition, because without a fleet, no landing is possible and without landing, there is no possible invasion. He also needed allies. It was therefore Spain which, again in October 1805, would mobilize a fleet of fifteen vessels alongside that of eighteen French vessels to engage in the Battle of Trafalgar against the British army.

The Battle of Trafalgar which gave some hope for Spain to eventually recover behind Gibraltar should the Napoleonic and Iberian armies win over the British, saw a rout of two fleets with an almost easy victory for the British army. Indeed, the French Vice-Admiral Villeneuve at the controls of the Franco-Spanish fleet was unable to take advantage of his superiority both in human and logistical terms with 33 vessels against 27 for the British. It was British Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson who took the upper hand by crushing his opponent taken prisoner after destroying 22 of his 33 ships and killing 4,400 when he lost no ships and lamented only 400 soldiers killed. The only black spot of the Battle of Trafalgar for the British is that the hero of this battle, Horatio Nelson was killed after being shot dead.

Thus, from Gibraltar to Waterloo, via Trafalgar, the superiority of the British was imposed on the French enemy and

especially on the very ambitious Napoleon who could only see damage in front of a rival always victorious before him. These military victories have greatly contributed to increasing the confidence capital of the British nation. We can see it through the following lines: "... the growing self-confidence of the British "nation" was boosted by the heady wine of victory, from Trafalgar to Waterloo" (Powell, 2002: 1).

Just as the hopes of Louis XIV were shattered in 1704 with the capture of Gibraltar by the English, history often repeating itself, Napoleon's will to invade Britain was also buried in Trafalgar, since the English maritime superiority which has been recognized for almost a century is here confirmed in a beautiful and unequivocal manner. His ambition to rule Europe, which first had to go through the invasion of Great Britain, has come to a halt. The highly strategic position of the Rock of Gibraltar located a few cables away is confirmed here.

It is already a kind of ideal rear base for the English fleet in the area and has allowed the English to consolidate their position. We want to say that it is the same providence that kept the hero of Robinson Crusoe in his desert island after his shipwreck which also extended its arms over the English in Gibraltar. Despite the often highly improbable adventurous situations, Robinson, moreover very heroic, kept the faith that sooner or later he would be rescued (Defoe, 1980: 336). The English fought with determination the battle and then resisted with the same faith as the character of Daniel Defoe to the repeated assaults of Spain and its allies to keep the rock of Gibraltar that Spain had to recover at all costs because of its importance to her. But the British made the conservation of Gibraltar a matter of life and death.

They had good reason to do so as keeping Gibraltar to themselves is like having a considerable strategic lead over rivals and holding onto it by any means possible. They are therefore not going to let go of this rock for trifles. They are there. They will stay there. They are certainly right to stay there, because Gibraltar is not only a small ledge of land suitable for certain stopovers, be they pleasure, trade or military. Gibraltar, across its eponymous strait, forms the junction between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Strategically speaking, such a crossroads for any nation with great ambitions is of vital interest. From that moment on, things are therefore clear for England. Gibraltar is not to let go, but rather to be retained, no matter what rivals like Spain, which is still not recovering from the loss of a point as strategic as its famous rock.

Gibraltar is therefore a rock which one must cling to without ever letting go and preventing others from hanging on to it, otherwise one commits a sin whose absolution will not be found in any confession. Spain, England, all the other nations of the Mediterranean rim and even beyond, have understood it well, hence their appetite for this rock, but it is England that seems to have understood it well earlier than all, including Spain to which it belongs. The proof is in this recall of 1620 where, within the framework of a good understanding, Spain facilitated and made possible, not to say aided one of the fleets of England in military operations against the Barbary corsairs in the zone, to rest on the rock of Gibraltar.

Spain, as we can see, gave *carte blanche* to the English fleet to make the port of Gibraltar a real rear base for its military operations. It was the very first incursion of British forces. A presence in Gibraltar which will end with the end of the English military operations against the corsairs mentioned above, since the English will leave the rock just after. They had been there. They saw. They got it all. Gibraltar was not to be just a port for them. He could have other objectives much more important to them for their supranational actions. Now, they no longer ask questions. They are just waiting for the right moment so that like a good tiger, they can pounce on the beautiful prey of Gibraltar and revel in it.

Despite their departure, this presence of English military forces, however brief it may be in Gibraltar, gave ideas to Her Majesty's strategists. The country in the midst of the revolutionary century (1603-1688), would, once the internal dissensions and problems were resolved, seek to assert itself more on the European and world stage under the Stuart dynasty. For a small country like England, naturally cut off from the continent for around 8,000 (Lane, 2011: 1), this will necessarily require securing strategic footholds to facilitate both surveillance and projection capacity.

It is precisely in the name of an expansionist aim, even of a very aggressive imperialist policy that England took advantage of the war of Spanish succession to very quickly tear away from it the rock of Gibraltar and make it a real oversea territory, eighty-four years after having stayed there militarily with the approval of the Iberian authorities to fight the corsairs, even if it must be remembered that, the traditional enemy of Great Britain was rather France (Kinealy, 1999: 82). It is therefore clear that by allowing the English to settle even temporarily in

Gibraltar for military operations, Spain has unconsciously opened up the eyes of the "treacherous Albion" on the interest and importance of Gibraltar.

Indeed, by accepting that an English fleet settle in the port of Gibraltar, it gave without imagining the long-term consequences, the clearest ideas to the English military strategists as to the highly strategic importance of this small corner of land that has grown in the confluence of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to give immense natural means to those who control it to climb to the top of the heights of the said rock and watch over all their enemies. When you can see in advance your enemies coming, you always have a considerable and comfortable lead over them.

The great and very historic Franco-English rivalry on both the European and international scene, especially at the geostrategic level, has been partly played out on the control of these "pieces" of stone extremely important for the different national fleets involved in struggles for territorial conquest or control of certain maritime trade routes. In addition, the British imperial thrust has relied well on these small islands to further extend the borders of His Majesty's country in that they have facilitated the military work that goes with it. All this leads to "the cultural and artistic influence of a nation which, after having conquered an empire spanning five continents, still occupies an important place in Europe and in the world today" (Halimi 1994).

There is thus no longer any room for doubt regarding the multiple interests of the Rock of Gibraltar. It is neither the British nor the Spaniards who will display their skepticism about the advantages of having such a strategic point. He has been decisive on several occasions. The most recent is undoubtedly the period of the Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocs ruled by the former USSR and the United States of America, respectively.

The Second World War, which is not too distant a memory in the collective memory of mankind, was also another opportunity to bear witness to and highlight the decisive role of Gibraltar, since it not only serves as a stopover for the supply of the mobilized troops, but also to repair the damage and other types of problems of the nuclear submarines and the surface ships of the Western troops, mainly the Anglo-Saxon sailors (American and British). Thanks to Gibraltar, there is no need to return to the British Isles or the United States for certain repairs on military devices. What a windfall this rock has for His Majesty!

What's more, the rock is even more important because of the naval and air bases Her Majesty's Army has established there. This, on the military level, saves a lot of time and avoids the armies losing time, in particular on refueling stops, on certain strategic withdrawals or even on certain military operations far from the metropolis such as for example operations in the near and middle eastern area and even beyond. The Persian Gulf petroleum products, for the most part destined for Western Europe, including the United Kingdom itself, find Gibraltar, a veritable transit zone that we can't do without.

Today, the massive migratory waves from sub-Saharan Africa and even from Asia, coupled with questions related to terrorism, especially Islamist terrorist movements, make Gibraltar even more important than ever for the British Crown which can use this outpost, piece of its territory since its conquest in the eighteenth century, to fight against these increasingly urgent issues. In this respect, Gibraltar offers greater efficiency to the actions of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force by doing what may be called function overflow, i.e. going beyond the limits of what one was expected to do.

Above all, it gives Britain more than just a vital presence in a crossroads as important and strategic as that of the Mediterranean, the gateway to Europe, Africa and Asia while also allowing an opening on the Atlantic. However, far from abandoning or moving away from those classic military activities that have punctuated the life of the rock of Gibraltar since its conquest, it should be noted that today, with the sophistication noted in the field of technologies and a performance of increasingly enhanced spy and counter-espionage techniques, Gibraltar has also become a real hunting ground for the MI5⁵ and the NSA⁶ as a listening base for these British and American secret services. Clearly, its strategic position means that it can be given such a mission, "But it serves above all today as an electronic and telecommunications wiretapping and espionage base for the British services and the NSA" (Orcier, 2019: 17)

For all these geostrategic advantages and all these geopolitical assets coupled with the question of sovereignty that goes with it, giving up Gibraltar would be a bitter pill that was impossible for Spain to take since 1704. It is for this host of reasons that the Iberian authorities have

⁵ MI5 or Military Intelligence 5 refers to the powerful British secret services

⁶ NSA or National Security Agency is the American intelligence agency, the very one which was accused by its ex-agent Edward Snowden of phone surveillance against European leaders including Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor. The revelation of these taps by the NSA created a great scandal accompanied by a huge outcry and offended many personalities.

never given up. For their part, the British cannot imagine for a single second loosening their grip on Gibraltar. The repeated assaults by Spain at the start of the conquest will do nothing. The diplomatic ground which was also invested by Spain will not make it recover what it lost by the Treaty of Utrecht for the benefit of Her Majesty Queen Anne of England. However, many things have happened in the meantime including Brexit that could give new ideas to Spain pawing with impatience for having lost its beloved strategic rock for more than three hundred years and seeks to recover it by all means possible in vain, at least so far.

3- When Brexit Issues Push the Top of the Rock into Re-emergence

It is common knowledge that Madrid has made several attempts to regain control of Gibraltar. They have so far been unsuccessful. Military attempts have led to stinging failures. On the political front, the self-determination referenda produced Soviet-style results, all for Gibraltar to stay in the United Kingdom, just as was the case with the Falkland Island conquered by the British at the expense of Argentina, which claims its sovereignty over the disputed Island. The diplomatic front, meanwhile, is active but the results are not good for the land of Cervantes desperately trying to bring the disputed rock back to its sovereignty. Spain still can't see the "end of the tunnel". What did I say? The end of the rock, that of Gibraltar. In the meantime, the British people, comfortably installed on "their" rock with heavy investments on the infrastructural plan, are trying to move forward.

But after its difficult membership which finally took place in 1973, the United Kingdom left the European Union through the well-known BREXIT recorded since the referendum of June 2016, an exit due according to the most nationalist minds to the monolithic bureaucracy of Brussels, deaf and blind to any cultural difference as well as to questions related to the local sovereignty (Meek, 2019: 13). Will this exit from the EU revive the Gibraltar issue in Spain's eyes? Will she reshuffle the cards and restore hope to Spain? Nothing is less sure.

However, one thing remains at least certain, it is that despite an agreement not to include the question of Gibraltar in the Brexit negotiations, Spain has never given up on this small piece of land on which it wants to resume its sovereignty swept away for three hundred

and seventeen years now. In June 2016, 52% of Britons voted to leave the EU in the referendum (Seydi 2018: 405b). However, Gibraltar, which no longer has the status of a colony but that of British Overseas Territory since the adoption of the 1969 constitution in response to Franco's vague desire of annexation, voted at 96% to stay in the European Union (Touteleurope, 2018: 1).

It might make Spain smile, but it doesn't solve the problem. On the contrary, a possible independence of Gibraltar will make the problem of Spain more complex, for the independence of Gibraltar will only be possible if all 27 member-states, including Spain, agree. Which would be a certain absurdity knowing that Spain, since 1704 seeks to regain its sovereignty over that territory, it will therefore not be able to validate its entry into the EU, because this will amount to recognizing *de facto* its existence as a sovereign state. BREXIT, despite the contrasting results of the referendum, in particular the Gibraltarian intentions of rejecting leaving the EU, is not the occasion for Spain to hope, at all, as to the return to its fold of the rock facing its largest port, that of Algeiras.

The accession of the United Kingdom in 1973 to the European Union project brought about a *de facto* adhesion of its overseas territory of Gibraltar. However, it should be noted that the rock has a specific status within the EU, given that Community rules do not fully apply to it, as can be seen here: "Gibraltar is notably excluded from the EU. Customs union, the obligation to invoice value added tax (VAT), the common commercial policy, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy⁷" (Touteleurope, 2018: 4-5). It therefore has a special legal status which distinguishes it and is very likely to cause concern for the Union in its desire to combat all forms of trafficking and non-transparent processes, particularly in the financial markets; so many questions brought up to date after the subprime crisis which subsequently turned into a financial and economic crisis because of certain practices that were not very virtuous in the eyes of the supranational organization and the values it embodies or tries to embody in the world.

It is somewhere in the interest of the EU that Gibraltar becomes Spanish again to avoid concerns of the kind previously raised, but the rock being subject to international law, the rule of self-

⁷ Translation is mine and the original text is «Gibraltar est notamment exclu de l'Union douanière, de l'obligation de facturer la taxe sur la valeur ajoutée (TVA), de la politique commerciale commune, de la politique agricole commune et de la politique commune de la pêche.

determination will always be there to allow it to express itself as a “people”. We remember that in the face of many pressures from Madrid wanting co-sovereignty of the United Kingdom and Spain, failing to have exclusive management of Gibraltar, the latter held a referendum on the issue. The result was without appeal with ninety-nine percent wanting their territory to remain British. This was another cold shower for the Iberian authorities who, in this case, seem to have knocked down all their cards.

So, it’s not Brexit that will give them another one, on the contrary. Moreover, the former Conservative Prime Minister from 2011 to 2018, overthrown by the Socialists of Pedro Sanchez, understood the trap he might have into accepting to distinguish Gibraltar from the rest of the United Kingdom in the negotiations on BREXIT, especially that his country is, at the same time, grappling with the Catalan independentists in the north of the country. Gibraltar was therefore not to be the subject of separate negotiations. It will be bound by any agreements the EU concludes with the UK. Spain will be satisfied with a right of veto for a particular status that the rock could have thereafter. In fact, even this right granted to it by the EU is met with gnashing of teeth on the Gibraltar side, where there is no hesitation in criticizing the intimidating actions of the big neighbor called Spain.

If Spain is still keen to regain control of its rock, conquered by Admiral George Rooke in 1704, it is undoubtedly for several reasons, one of which is strategic with the possibility of installing an ideally placed military base there. But the military and even geostrategic advantage in no way hides the real economic interests with enormous potential for such a small space. The Andalusia area in southern Spain has poor regions with high unemployment.

It is precisely this unemployment, a consequence of the poverty of these regions that pushes thousands of Spaniards to cross the border every day into the British territory of Gibraltar, where they work. The stakes are therefore not only military, geopolitical, geostrategic. They are also and above all economic for both parts of the Verja⁸. The unemployed Spaniards of the Andalusian regions need employment in Gibraltar where the unemployment rate is only one percent when it was already touching the forty-two percent in 2015 (Cuzin, 2015: 3) in the

⁸ Name given by Spaniards to their border with Gibraltar

extreme south of the Iberian territory even if the situation is starting to improve slightly in Spain (DG Trésor, 2021: 5).

There is therefore a real need for them. But just as the Spaniards need Gibraltar for jobs, Gibraltar too needs its closest neighbors to run its island economy dependent on a workforce within reach of the rock. So, Spain and the UK need each other and should instead put forward a mutually beneficial model of cooperation.

Brexit can be a great opportunity to make it possible, especially within the framework of the post-Brexit project of “Global Britain” of Boris Johnson's conservatives, a project consisting in repositioning the United Kingdom on the world stage where it will forge commercial links with the rest of the world free of any constraints and in complete freedom for profitable partnerships. It is, in a way, a project which signals the return of the kingdom to the foreground, the famous very Churchillian “a Britain resurgent” (Wilding, 2017: 38) which Margaret Thatcher tried to rekindle when she took control of the Conservative Party. and the country from 1979.

The “Global Britain” project which should be set in motion to restore the United Kingdom to its former grandeur in a world that has changed a lot, requires political power and international influence from him, but this can only be based on a solid economy (Porter, 1987: 141) which will provide it with the necessary subsidies. For this, it needs close partners such as European partners. Spain is one of them. The two states had no common borders until 1704. By the force of circumstances and of history, they became neighboring countries thanks to the Rock of Gibraltar. On both sides of the border, they need each other. Cross-border economic interdependence is a reality between Gibraltar and Spain (Orcier /CNES, 2019: 16).

Conclusion

The rock of Gibraltar since its conquest in 1704 has been a real windfall for Britain due to its geostrategic position in the heart of the Mediterranean area ideally located between Africa, Europe and Asia. We can clearly understand why it matters most for Her Majesty's nation involved in an extremely important transition after the Glorious revolution of 1688 giving strength to the will of counting and weighing on the international scene. The control of such a strategic rock as Gibraltar came at the best of times for Britain with imperial attitudes

being deployed steadily and surely. The rock's being part and parcel of Britain gives an actual impetus to the global ambitions of the country which now can seize all the opportunities attached to such a possession. With Brexit and the conservative government's "Global Britain" project, the rock of Gibraltar is expected to play a very important role for being central to important geostrategic and geopolitical issues which feature in international relations.

The UK and Spain therefore need to build rock-based relations and the issue of the Rock of Gibraltar can contribute to this through negotiations for an Anglo-Iberian cooperation that works both ways of the Verja or that slides on the waters by opening up to both the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the rest of the world thanks to the gateway that Gibraltar constitutes by erasing the flaws of a dilettante relationship for a real understanding. Brexit can help to make up for the backlog in the Gibraltar case, and it won't be too late.

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