Confrontation over Gibraltar

What is the issue?

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Spain and the United Kingdom headed towards a confrontation over Gibraltar.

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Where is Gibralter?

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- The Rock of Gibraltar is at the entry to the Mediterranean with a population of 30,000 people.
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- It is one of the last remnants of the British Empire.
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- The point is that Gibraltar's very existence depends upon Spanish co-operation.
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- It is kept running by 10,000 Spanish workers who cross the border daily.
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- It speaks an odd English-Spanish hybrid called **"Yanito".**
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- Gibraltar itself is so tiny that many of its residents have to live outside its borders — and most of their supermarkets are outside, too.
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What is the importance of Gibraltar?

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- Whoever controls it can also exercise pretty thorough control of shipping going into and out of the Mediterranean from the Atlantic.
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- That is why, for many years, the British valued it as a major naval outpost. But the Royal Navy now has only a small presence, and a massive NATO

base.
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How did it become British?

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- The seizure of Gibraltar by a joint **Dutch-British force in 1704** came as Britain took over from Spain as Europe’s strongest imperial nation.
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- Possession was sealed in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.
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- Gibraltar had only belonged to Spain 250 years before that, so it has spent more time under the British flag than the Spanish one.
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- Previously, it was in the hands of Islamic kingdoms for seven centuries.
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Claim of Spain:

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- Spain has not given up claiming sovereignty over the Rock, however.
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- In 1969, dictator General Franco closed the frontier entirely, turning a generation of Gibraltarians against Spain.
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- Regular squabbles are had over fishing rights, territorial waters, the airport and land access to Gibraltar – where some 4,000 local Spaniards work in a booming economy that is home to part of **Europe’s online gambling industry**.
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- In **2002, a shared sovereignty** deal was nearly reached, but both the conservative Spanish prime minister José María Aznar and the 30,000-strong population of Gibraltar – who voted 98% against – walked away from it.
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What has changed?

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- In June 2016, British voters decided at a referendum to leave the European Union.
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- Gibraltarians were also allowed to vote.
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- Realising that departure from the EU would leave them exposed to Spanish demands for sovereignty, they **voted 96% in favour of staying. But when the UK leaves, Gibraltar must leave, too.**
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What are the recent developments?

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- When British Prime Minister Theresa May began the formal process to withdraw from the European Union recently — "invoking Article 50" — she forgot to mention Gibraltar in her official notification.
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- But Brussels did not.
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- Buried in the EU's response was a reminder that, after the UK's exit, Gibraltar's existing treaty status would no longer be valid.
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- And in the future, the decision would no longer be Europe's, but that of the Kingdom of Spain — which has, since it first ceded Gibraltar to the might of the Royal Navy in the early years of the 18th century, wants it back.
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What is the way ahead?

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- One is for Gibraltar to **remain entirely British**, run all future EU deals past Spain and accept the risk of these being blocked – with potentially devastating effects on the local economy.
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- Another is **shared sovereignty**.

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- That would allow Gibraltarians to stay in the EU and enjoy joint British and Spanish nationality.
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- They would remain EU citizens, with all the rights that come from that, while keeping their current institutions and legislation.
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- If Spain closes its borders, then Gibraltar goes back to the isolated, poor 1960s, in which it had to be resupplied by air because Britain and the Franco regime in Madrid were in a constant state of confrontation.
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Source: Business Standard, The Guardian

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