

# Polis – Panic in Portugal

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 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2007/05/08/panic-in-portugal/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2007/05/08/panic-in-portugal/)

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It seems the British media camped out in Portugal for the hunt for missing three year-old [Madeleine McCann](#) are getting impatient with the local police. British TV and press [reports](#) are increasingly critical of alleged Portuguese police blunders in the wake of the abduction. I have no idea whether the Algarve detectives have made mistakes but I do know that they have mishandled the media. Having covered major crime stories such as the [Soham](#) murders I have seen

at first hand the British crime reporting pack at work. It is a blood-thirsty ravenous beast that needs constant feeding by police press conferences, leaks and witness accounts. British police forces now understand this and immediately set up a structure to handle the journalists. Detectives are given the media liason role but are kept separate from the actual investigation so that it is simply impossible to make police spokespeople reveal more than they should. A careful strategy is always put in place to drip information out in a steady stream to keep the media happy and thus the public interested. It seems to me that the Portuguese police failed to realise the gravity of the McCann case. They also (understandably perhaps) did not prioritise a missing toddler over all their other work just because she happens to be cute, blonde and British. Their spokesman is obviously a humane, intelligent and eloquent officer. He will need to be all those things and more if this is not to turn in to very nasty media/police spat that can only do more harm to the poor family at the centre of this horrible case.

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