

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
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The decision of the Spanish Government to refuse permission for six RAF Tornados to train in Spanish controlled airspace in the northern half of the Alboran training area last week does not come as a surprise. It is in line with the policy of successive Spanish Governments to make life as difficult as possible for the UK armed forces when they travel to and from Gibraltar.

The RAF exercise "Southern Flame" came to an end last week despite the attempt by Spain to disrupt it. It took place to the east of Gibraltar beyond Alboran Island in an area which is traditionally used by the Royal Navy and the RAF for such purposes. The northern part of the airspace is controlled by Spain and the southern part is controlled by Morocco.

The Opposition understand that the MOD sought permission from both countries for the use of the airspace above the training area. Whereas Morocco granted permission for the exercise to take place in Moroccan airspace, the Spanish authorities refused permission. It is also worth noting that Spain sent four military aircraft of its own into the Alboran area on one of the days that the exercise was taking place.

It will be recalled that Spain continues to operate restrictions against the over-flight of Spanish territory by British military jets if their destination or point of origin is Gibraltar. These restrictions which were imposed by General Franco and maintained by the democratic Governments which followed are completely out of place in this day and age when Britain and Spain are supposed to be allies in NATO and partners in the European Union.

The latest incident with the RAF exercise follows a number of tense encounters between the Royal Navy and the Spanish paramilitary Guardia Civil in the territorial waters of Gibraltar. A few weeks ago the Guardia Civil sparked a major alert when one of their patrol boats headed at speed towards a Royal Navy warship and refused to identify itself when called upon to do so. The present state of affairs can best be described as an accident waiting to happen.

The Spanish Government has clearly upped the stakes in the continuing conflict over the sovereignty of the waters and the airspace around Gibraltar. The refusal of permission to the RAF to use the northern half of the Alboran training area is an unfriendly act which shows the lengths to which Madrid is prepared to go in order to make a point given that the RAF were using Gibraltar as their base. The continuing incidents at sea between the Royal Navy and the agencies of the Spanish state are also a very serious matter given the provocative and reckless attitude which the latter continue to display.