



**HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057**

PRESS RELEASE

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British Airways flight delayed by Spanish military aircraft

On Friday 31 October, British Airways flight BA490 from London Heathrow had to veer off its landing approach to Gibraltar, while 10-15 miles out, as a result of the presence of a Spanish military P3 aircraft which was operating in the area.

The Lockheed P3 Orion is a four engine anti-submarine and marine surveillance aircraft which is operated by the Spanish air force.

The avoiding instructions to the BA flight were issued by Gibraltar Air Traffic Control (ATC) on account of the need to maintain a safe distance between the two aircraft. The issue is believed to have arisen when the Spanish aircraft, which was transiting ahead of the BA flight through the Straits and so reported by Seville ATC, suddenly reversed its direction and took another course. This would have infringed safety parameters had the BA flight not moved under instructions from Gibraltar ATC.

The Government understands that the Spanish aircraft contacted Gibraltar ATC and clarified its intentions after which the BA flight was given clearance to land. The Government has been informed that safe separation between the two aircraft was maintained throughout.

A full report on the incident is currently awaited by the Government which will point out whether or not the Spanish military aircraft entered the airspace above British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.