# British HMS Astute docks in Gibraltar amid renewed sovereignty tensions with Spain



A British attack submarine has docked in Gibraltar amidst renewed tensions surrounding the territory's sovereignty, following recent comments from a senior Spanish official. The nuclear-powered HMS Astute arrived in Gibraltar, known for its strategic importance to the Royal Navy, to restock and resupply. The visit comes just days after Spain’s Foreign Minister, José Manuel Albares, reignited discussions over Gibraltar’s status, asserting that the issue remains unresolved. Speaking to BBC Newsnight, Albares expressed a desire for a resolution to the sovereignty debate, linking it to a broader UK-EU defence deal. He emphasised the necessity of a comprehensive relationship that encompasses various matters, including Gibraltar.

Historically, Gibraltar has been a point of contention between Spain and the UK since it was ceded to Britain in 1713. The territory's current population largely supports remaining a British Overseas Territory, displaying strong national ties to the UK. Recent comments from Albares have drawn sharp criticism from British politicians, including Shadow Foreign Secretary Dame Priti Patel, who accused the government of projecting weakness on this matter. She stated emphatically, “Gibraltar is British, end of, and we will remind the government exactly where the sovereignty of Gibraltar lies.” The UK government has reaffirmed its commitment to Gibraltar, stating unequivocally that it will not concede sovereignty to another nation.

The visit of HMS Astute underscores the Royal Navy’s ongoing engagement with Gibraltar, a regular port for its submarines due to their critical operational relevance. This Astute-class submarine is part of a fleet designed to enhance the UK’s military prowess, featuring cutting-edge technology such as Tomahawk missiles and a capability for prolonged deployment without the need for refuelling. The strategic significance of Gibraltar in naval operations remains paramount, as confirmed by earlier visits from other Astute-class submarines, like HMS Anson, which docked in Gibraltar earlier this year.

Gibraltar’s socio-economic landscape is marked by complex dynamics, particularly following Brexit. With over 14,000 active companies primarily in sectors such as gambling and fintech, Gibraltar has established a unique economic identity. However, it faces challenges, including an inflated housing market and reliance on Spanish workers from nearby La Línea. Chief Minister Fabian Picardo has stressed the necessity of safeguarding Gibraltar’s autonomy and prosperity in light of these evolving circumstances.

Moreover, discussions surrounding Gibraltar touch upon wider issues of territorial rights and self-determination. Experts, including Professor Jaime Trinidad of the Lauterpacht Centre, have argued that Spain's claims, particularly concerning territorial waters, lack a robust legal foundation. Trinidad suggests that the ongoing dispute reflects deeper socio-political complexities that could be addressed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Furthermore, local leaders such as Juan Carlos Ruiz Boix, the mayor of San Roque, are advocating for bold negotiations to resolve these longstanding tensions. He has proposed innovative solutions to facilitate relations between Spain and Gibraltar, including the potential relocation of border controls to streamline movements and enhance cooperation.

As discussions continue amidst a backdrop of military presence and historical claims, the future of Gibraltar remains a focal point for both domestic and international dialogue, with implications that stretch beyond its rocky shores. The resilience of Gibraltarians, their insistence on self-determination, and the broader geopolitical context continue to shape the ongoing narrative surrounding this contested territory.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: 1, 2
2. Paragraph 2: 1, 3
3. Paragraph 3: 1, 2
4. Paragraph 4: 2, 3
5. Paragraph 5: 3, 4
6. Paragraph 6: 5, 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2056911/royal-navy-submarine-docks-gibraltar> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2025/02/03/nuclear-submarine-docks-in-gibraltar-british-vessel-is-part-of-cutting-edge-fleet/> - In February 2025, the UK nuclear submarine HMS Anson, part of the Astute class, docked in Gibraltar. The Astute class includes submarines like HMS Astute, Ambush, Artful, and Audacious. These submarines are regular visitors to Gibraltar, underscoring the territory's strategic importance to the Royal Navy. The Astute fleet aims to comprise seven vessels, with two still under construction. The HMS Anson represents the cutting edge of the UK's military capabilities, equipped with advanced technology and weaponry, including Tomahawk long-range land attack missiles and Spearfish heavy torpedoes. Its nuclear reactor allows for extended operational periods without refueling, and it can produce oxygen and drinking water for its crew, enabling global circumnavigation without resurfacing, provided food supplies are sufficient. The submarine underwent extensive trials in the United States and the Caribbean Sea before joining the Royal Navy's operations. The visit to Gibraltar highlights the ongoing military cooperation and the strategic significance of the territory in the UK's defense strategy.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/a4f3a6b9-d344-4655-93fe-d11fbb858574> - An article from the Financial Times provides an in-depth analysis of Gibraltar's complex socio-economic and political circumstances. The author describes arriving in mid-June to find a vibrant yet tension-filled environment, marked by issues such as an inflated housing market, a post-Brexit economic landscape, and an ongoing struggle over Gibraltar's sovereignty. The territory hosts more than 14,000 active companies, largely in gambling and fintech, but faces challenges like scarce housing and dependency on Spanish labor from La Linea. Gibraltarians maintain strong ties to the UK, resisting Spanish sovereignty. Brexit has reintroduced old tensions and complicated daily border crossings, affecting both Gibraltar and La Linea's economies. Negotiations between Spain, the UK, and the EU remain difficult, with no deal yet reached. The Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, emphasizes their delicate position and commitment to maintaining Gibraltar's autonomy and prosperity amidst these challenges. Despite uncertainties, there remains a resilient, unique cultural identity in Gibraltar.
4. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/altura-betun-gibraltar-disputa-penon-profe-gibraltar-rp.html> - Professor Jaime Trinidad, an expert in international law and member of the Lauterpacht Centre, delivered an inaugural lecture at the University of Gibraltar, where he was named Beacon Professor. In his discourse, Trinidad detailed his research on territorial disputes, self-determination, and human rights, focusing on the dispute over the Rock of Gibraltar. He criticized Spain's stance on territorial waters as based on sociological and psychological foundations from the 1960s. Trinidad argued that Spain's position is legally weak and that it could eventually formally recognize Gibraltar's right to have its own territorial waters in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, although the dispute would center on the extent of these waters.
5. <https://as.com/actualidad/politica/el-bloque-de-hormigon-sustraido-por-ortega-smith-gibraltar-exige-a-espana-su-devolucion-n/> - The Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Fabian Picardo, has demanded the return of a concrete block that was removed from the artificial reef in Gibraltar's waters in 2014 by Javier Ortega Smith, the spokesperson for Vox Madrid. During Gibraltar's National Day, Picardo reiterated the claim, emphasizing that Gibraltar will never surrender its sovereignty and will recover the stolen block. Since 2014, Gibraltar had issued an arrest warrant for Ortega Smith, applicable only within its territory. The block was later displayed by Vox leaders, such as Santiago Abascal in 2016. This claim occurs within the context of post-Brexit negotiations to define Gibraltar's future.
6. <https://cadenaser.com/andalucia/2024/12/23/el-alcalde-de-san-roque-insiste-en-actuar-con-valentia-en-las-negociaciones-con-gibraltar-radio-algeciras/> - The mayor of San Roque, Juan Carlos Ruiz Boix, has urged to 'act with courage' in negotiations over Gibraltar, highlighting that these should be the final months of dialogue following the 2016 Brexit agreement. Ruiz Boix considers it crucial to resolve issues in relations between Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as between the Campo de Gibraltar and Gibraltar. Proposing to dismantle the Verja (border fence), he suggests relocating the border to points like the airport and port, so that Spain controls the application of Schengen. Additionally, he mentions the possible participation of Frontex agents to facilitate the agreement, ensuring that the Civil Guard and National Police should not face obstacles in their security work.
7. <https://elpais.com/diario/2009/07/26/espana/1248559206_850215.html> - In July 2009, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, and Gibraltar's Chief Minister Peter Caruana appeared after a meeting of the Tripartite Forum, which experienced delays due to the translation of agreements into Spanish. Moratinos' statement made it clear that Spain would not renounce Gibraltar, and a British grandson replied that 'Gibraltar is Spain'. The forum, which promotes bilingualism, aims to improve Gibraltar's relationship with Spain, allowing Gibraltarians to study in Spanish universities. Despite Gibraltarians' previous rejection of Spanish sovereignty, a policy seeking to win their 'hearts and minds' has lifted restrictions, improving daily life in the Rock. Economically, Gibraltar has a per capita income higher than Spain's, benefiting from its port, tourism, and construction. Moratinos' visit to Gibraltar was part of a diplomatic strategy initiated in 2004, and according to him, it was not considered inappropriate by any parliamentary group.