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Subs taken out of service after cracks found

All 12 of Britain's hunter-killer nuclear submarines are to be taken out of service for inspection following the discovery of a fault in one of the vessels.

The decision follows an inspection of HMS Tireless, which limped into Gibraltar in May with a leak in pipework leading from the nuclear reactor system.

Armed forces minister John Spellar told the BBC: "The first thing I want to do is to reassure people regarding the safety of these submarines. We had very minor leaks on HMS Tireless. There weren't leaks on the other ships, otherwise we would have detected them earlier."

Only two nuclear hunter-killer submarines are on operation overseas, and they are expected back in the UK within the next two or three days.

The rest of the fleet is either already undergoing refitting exercises or has been ordered to stay in port while the extent of the problem is assessed.

The four strategic deterrent Vanguard class submarines, which carry Trident ballistic missiles, are not affected as they are of a different design. They will remain fully operational.

Mr Spellar said the repair work would be done as quickly as possible, but he could not provide a snap estimate of how long



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the submarines would be out of service.

"We originally thought we were dealing with cracks of about two millimetres, now we are talking of cracks of a few centimetres, as I understand it," he said.

Mr Spellar added: "Nobody is saying that actually this is any more dangerous. What they are saying is, this is a more difficult job in the repair than originally anticipated."

Last updated: 08:33 Saturday 21st October 2000.

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