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## Row over 'leaking' sub fleet

BY JON CRAIG  
POLITICAL EDITOR

DEFENCE Secretary Geoff Hoon faces an onslaught from MPs this week over blunders in repairing nuclear submarines.

The Navy's entire fleet of 12 "hunter killer" subs has been recalled and will be out of action for months because of fears over faulty reactors.

The recall follows the fiasco over HMS Tireless, which limped into Gibraltar in May, as first revealed by the Sunday Express.

The submarine had a crack in pipework leading from its nuclear reactor system which nearly six months later has still not been fixed.

In the meantime, the crew ran up a £352,000 bill staying in five-star hotels on Gibraltar while their ship sat waiting to be repaired.

Yesterday Opposition MPs condemned the delays and accused Ministers of plunging the Navy into chaos by cost-cutting on repairs and maintenance.

They plan to mount an attack on Mr Hoon when he opens a full-day debate on defence procurement in the Commons on Thursday. "This is a desperate situation to be in," said Shadow Defence Secretary Iain Duncan Smith.

"The necessary decision to withdraw these submarines means we are left with only Trident submarines, which leaves a severe hole in our defensive capabilities.

"Serious questions need to be asked as to why the Government has taken so long to make a decision about this when the faults were discovered in May.

"Why has there been such a delay? Was the desire not to spend the relevant money part of the equation?" He added: "The Government's record on defence is nothing short of disastrous."

Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, said: "This is a matter of very considerable embarrassment for the United Kingdom.

Armed Forces Minister John Spellar said there was no safety threat from



Armed Forces Minister John Spellar said there was no safety threat from the nuclear faults, but could not say how long it would take to inspect the fleet and carry out repairs.

"We had very minor leaks on HMS Tireless," he said. "There weren't leaks on the other ships, otherwise we would have detected that earlier." But once we thought there was the possibility of a generic fault across the fleet in the cooling system, inevitably, especially where ships were already being re-fitted and repaired, we started to look at them."

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