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Submarine problems

On 12 May there was a serious reactor accident on HMS Tireless in the Mediterranean. The submarine is in Gibraltar and will remain there for several months. It has not yet been repaired.

In September the MoD announced that they had discovered a serious reactor problem on HMS Sceptre. As a result the submarine is still in Rosyth dockyard although its refit should have ended in July 2000. The MoD also disclosed that this problem affected HMS Sovereign and HMS Superb which are based at Faslane.

In October the MoD announced that all 12 hunter-killer submarines were withdrawn from service as a result of the problem on HMS Tireless. This is a separate problem from that on HMS Sceptre. The Tireless problem has been found on HMS Torbay, HMS Turbulent, HMS Trenchant, HMS Talent, HMS Superb and HMS Splendid. The only one of the 12 submarines which has returned to service is HMS Triumph. However shortly after it sailed from Devonport in November it collided with the seabed in international water off the West coast of Scotland and had to return to Devonport. It may have since returned to sea.

The Trident submarine HMS Vigilant is currently at sea on a nuclear armed patrol. HMS Vanguard and HMS Vengeance are both at Faslane and HMS Victorious is currently at sea on trials.

The MoD deny that the Tireless problem affects Trident, but this may be disputed. It is clear that in the case of the hunter-killer HMS Triumph that operational demands overruled safety considerations. Technical details on the affect of the defect on Trident is not in the public domain.

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