

Nuclear subs 'collide in ocean'

A Royal Navy nuclear submarine was involved in a collision with a French nuclear submarine in the middle of the Atlantic. Britain's HMS Vanguard and France's Le Triomphant were both damaged in the crash in the early hours of 4 February, but there were no reports of damage to the nuclear parts.

France's defence ministry said on 6 February that Le Triomphant, a ballistic nuclear submarine, was damaged when it hit an object under water.

It did not identify the object.

The British sub has now been towed to its Faslane base in western Scotland for repair.

The two submarines are equipped with sonar to detect other vessels.

Both vessels, between them carrying about 250 sailors, were reportedly submerged and on separate missions when they crashed.

Britain's Ministry of Defence refuses to comment on submarine operations but a spokesman said: 'The UK's deterrent capability has remained unaffected at all times and there has been no compromise to nuclear safety'.

France's defence ministry said on 6 February that no-one was injured and there was no security threat from the incident it acknowledged.

Le Triomphant, one of France's four nuclear-armed submarines, hit the object, said at the time to be probably a container, while submerging, and immediately returned to base at Ile-Longue, near Brest in northwest France.

Each vessel is 150 metres long and 13 metres in diameter, and can carry up to 48 nuclear warheads on a maximum of 16 missiles.

France and Britain are two of the world's five declared nuclear powers, along with the United States, China and Russia. France has maintained a sea-based nuclear deterrent force since 1971.

Britain is planning to renew its Trident submarine nuclear missile system, at a cost of about £20bn.

Source: RTÉ News