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Russian nuclear sub crippled



A Russian nuclear submarine has broken down during exercises in the Barents Sea, and is trapped on the sea floor with 107 sailors on board.

The Oscar-class submarine was not carrying any nuclear weapons and there was no immediate danger, said the head of the Russian navy's press service, Igor Dygalo.

He said no radiation leaks had been reported.

Rescue ships are rushing to the area to assist the crippled submarine, which is in radio contact with surface vessels.

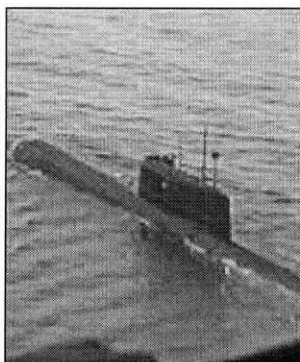
Reactor shut down

The navy did not say when the incident happened or where in the Barents Sea the submarine was located.

Mr Dygalo said the vessel's nuclear reactor had been shut down and was under control, adding that the reactor was not the source of the problem.

A submarine would normally surface in an emergency.

The Russian navy has been conducting major exercises in which the submarine was participating, Mr Dygalo said.



In 1989 42 Soviet sailors died on the Komsomolets

- ▶ **The BBC's Rob Parsons**
 "The accident is the latest in a string of incidents that have plagued Russia's submarine fleet"
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 "The servicing required to keep these sort of ships in good order just isn't there"
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The submarine, named Kursk, was built in 1994 and went into service in 1995, making it one of the newest vessels in the Russian navy.

It is a nuclear strategic missile submarine that can carry up to 24 nuclear ballistic missiles, and can stay under water for six months at a time.

String of incidents

The Kursk carries a crew of 107 personnel, including 52 officers, and weighs some 14,000 tons, according to Jane's Fighting Ships, an authoritative guide to warships.

The BBC Moscow correspondent, Robert Parsons, says the accident is the latest in a string of incidents that have plagued Russia's submarine fleet.

He says a shortage of funds has meant that vessels frequently don't get the sort of service needed to keep them seaworthy.

In one major accident in April 1989 a Soviet nuclear submarine, the Komsomolets, sank to the bottom of the Barents Sea after catching fire 210 miles north of Norway.

Forty-two of the 69 Soviet sailors aboard died in the accident.

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