Trip to check radiation after 1989 sinking of Russian sub

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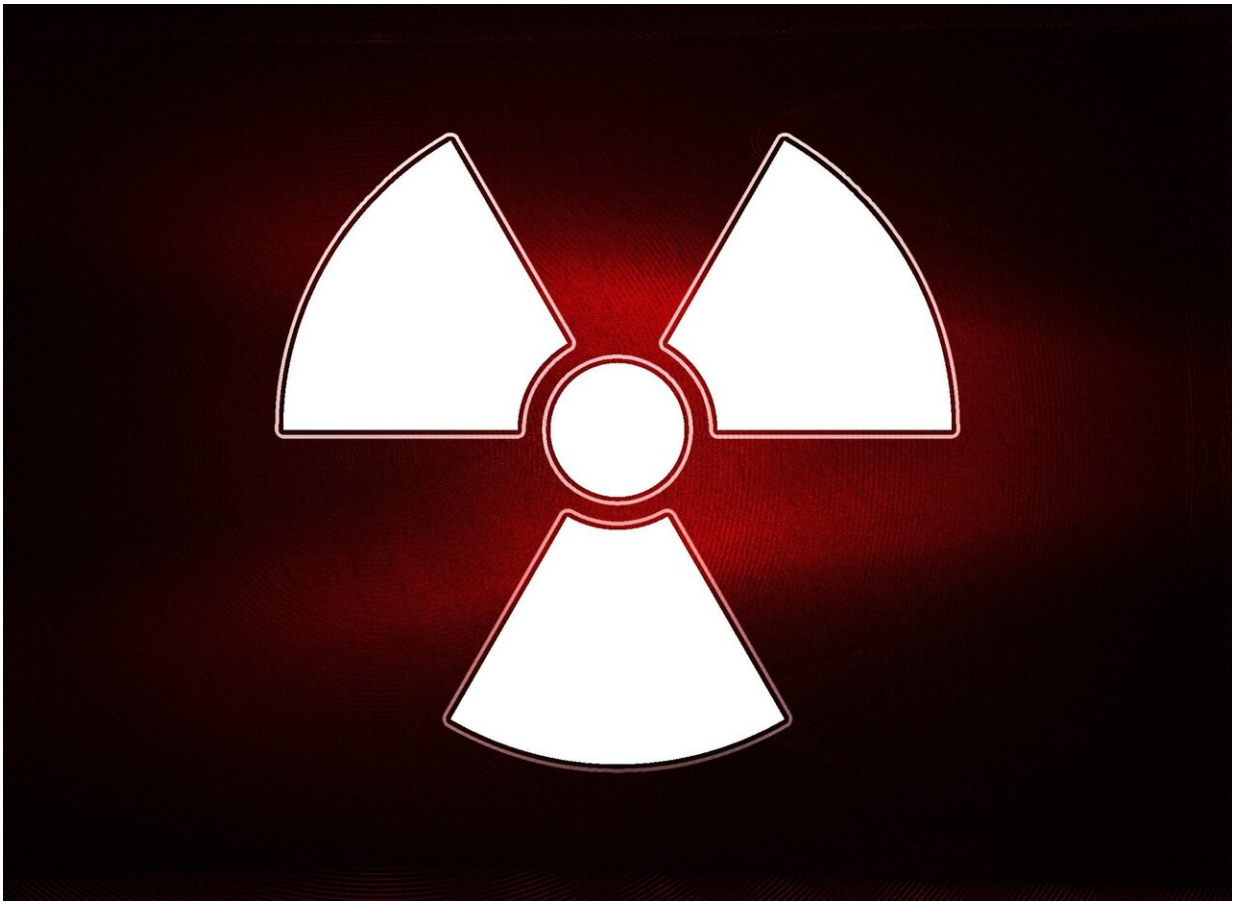

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A joint Norwegian-Russian expedition will assess whether a Russian submarine that sank 30 years ago is leaking radioactive material,

Norwegian authorities said Friday.

The Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority say Norwegian research vessel G.O. Sars will set off Saturday from Tromsoe, northern Norway, to the Arctic Barents Sea where the Komsomolets submarine sank in 1989. Forty-two of the 69 crewmen died in a fire, and the submarine's nuclear reactor and two nuclear warheads are still on board.

The agency said a Norwegian-built remote-controlled submersible would be used and the work "would be demanding" as the submarine "lies deep" at about 1,700 meters (5,610 feet).

Norway found elevated concentrations of the radioactive substance cesium-137 around the wreck in the period 1991-1993 but said the levels were barely detectable and presented no danger. But there are no traces of such leaks around the submarine after that.

Hilde Elise Heldal of the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research said that monitoring the pollution around the submarine was "important" and would "help to ensure consumer confidence in the Norwegian fish industry."

The Komsomolets was based at the Kola Peninsula near Norway's border.