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## **NATO: Russia resisting efforts to secure WMD**

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MOSCOW -- Russia's reluctance to allow the U.S. access to nuclear and biological weapons sites severely hinders efforts to secure weapons-grade nuclear material and biological pathogens from terrorists and rogue states, according to a new report released by NATO.

The U.S. and other Western governments have poured billions of dollars into safeguarding Russia's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons stockpiles from terrorists and corrupt insiders.

The effort has met with some success; more than 6,500 Russian strategic nuclear warheads have been secured, the country's first chemical-weapons disposal site is working, and three others are under construction, wrote NATO General Rapporteur Pierre Claude Nolin in his report to the organization's Parliamentary Assembly.

'Cold War mind-sets'

However, the Russian government continues to deny U.S. officials access to many nuclear warhead stockpiles, weapons-grade nuclear material storage sites and biological facilities, preventing the U.S. from devising security upgrades, according to the report, released last week.

"Russia's reluctance to allow full access to a number of facilities can only be explained as a relic of Cold War mind-sets," Nolin wrote.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. and Russia have been working together to safeguard Russia's stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the topic at their summit in the Slovakian capital, Bratislava, in February, pledging to "bear a special responsibility for the security of nuclear weapons and fissile material, in order to ensure that there is no possibility such weapons or materials would fall into terrorist hands."

But the summit failed to address Russia's reluctance to grant U.S. inspectors access to sites where nuclear weapons, weapons-grade nuclear material and biological weapons are stored. During the summit, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov flatly stated that "inspections are out of the question."

As a result, security at Russian military sites where plutonium and weapons-grade uranium is stored has yet to be evaluated by American inspection teams, Nolin said.

Of the estimated 185 tons of plutonium and 1,100 tons of weapons-grade uranium stored in Russia, only half have received security upgrades.

Defense analysts say weapons-grade nuclear material is highly coveted by terrorists and criminal groups, because amounts as small as 17 pounds of plutonium or 55 pounds of weapons-grade uranium can be used to build a nuclear bomb.

Russian authorities also have been reluctant to allow U.S. inspectors to size up security at many of the country's research laboratories once part of the Soviet Union's vast biological weapons complex, Nolin wrote. At its peak, the program employed more than 60,000 workers at 55 sites that produced a range of weaponized pathogens that cause diseases, including anthrax, smallpox, brucellosis and glanders.

Aware of how lax security is at many former biological weapons sites, Russian authorities worry that U.S. inspections of those sites could produce information leaks that ultimately could help terrorists target those locations, said Vladimir Orlov, a nuclear security expert with the PIR Center, a Moscow think tank.

"The Russian government feels uncertain and vulnerable about its biological complex facilities," Orlov said. "But the [NATO] report is right in saying that Russian authorities haven't put a high enough priority on securing biological sites."

The U.S., Russia and other members of the Group of 8 leading industrialized countries have fared better when it comes to destruction of Russia's stockpile of 40,000 metric tons of chemical weapons--the world's largest. Work has started at a disposal plant in the south-central city of Gorny to destroy mustard gas and lewisite, both blistering agents.

Construction at three other disposal plants has begun, including a facility at Shchuchye that will destroy Russia's vast nerve-gas stockpile. Russia has 32,500 metric tons of sarin, VX and soman nerve gas stored in shells, rockets and bombs at five sites across the country. This disposal plant is expected to go into operation in 2008.

#### Worrisome question

However, Russia the U.S. and other Western governments have not tackled the question of tactical nuclear weapons, which are worrisome because of their small size and portability, according to the report.

"Tactical nuclear weapons could cause destruction far more severe than the Sept. 11, 2001, assault," Nolin wrote.

Nolin quoted estimates from the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists that put the number of tactical nuclear warheads at 3,400, with several thousand more warehoused in reserved or retired status. Last year, Russian authorities said they had destroyed more than half their tactical nuclear weapons but they have not provided any concrete data on the reductions or on numbers of existing tactical nuclear arms, Nolin said. Likewise, the U.S. has not formally declared the number and location of its tactical nuclear weapons.

"Both sides should exchange data on the number of tactical nuclear weapons and the places they are deployed," said Vladimir Dvorkin, a nuclear security expert at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Center for International Security.

Nolin suggested that Russia might be more willing to cooperate if the U.S. and European governments ratcheted up Moscow's involvement in the creation and planning of nuclear security initiatives. In turn, Russia could help its case by assuming a larger share of the cost of nuclear security, he said.

Dvorkin agreed, adding that Russian authorities should devote a portion of windfall oil profits to securing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons sites.

"Russia is acting like a patient, with a lot of doctors hustling around it," Dvorkin said. "The government's decision to allocate \$200 million a year is virtually nothing compared to the billions of dollars allocated by the Global Partnership [a G8 coalition aimed at improving nuclear security]. One cannot call this situation a real partnership."