



For Immediate Release

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GAO Finds Russia Lacks Plan for Destruction of Poison Gas Stockpile

Washington, DC – April 27, 2004 – Russia has no credible plan for destroying the remainder of its nerve gas stockpile, a newly released government report reveals. Conducted by the General Accounting Office at the request of the House Armed Services Committee, the review shows that Russia was not able to uphold its end of a 2003 agreement to produce a workable chemical weapon destruction plan by March 2004.

The report also cites both U.S. and Russian doubts that Russia will fulfill its promise to use the Shchuch'ye destruction facility to complete the elimination of its remaining nerve agent—over 50 percent of Russia's total chemical weapon stockpile. The Department of Defense is spending roughly \$1 billion on the plant with the understanding that it will be used to neutralize nerve agent from several different locations. However, GAO warns, Russian officials may soon backtrack, preferring instead separate facilities for each major site.

“Moscow sees our assistance in destroying its chemical weapons as a jobs program for Russian contractors,” said House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA). “The facility we built them is sufficient to destroy their entire nerve gas stockpile. Instead, they look at the large number of jobs it created and want U.S. taxpayers to duplicate the plant elsewhere around Russia.”

“Russia's failure further reveals a general unwillingness to carry its own weight in securing and dismantling Soviet-era weapons of mass destruction,” said Hunter. “Without a realistic destruction plan, the United States could end up throwing millions of taxpayer dollars down another black hole.” Last year, the House Armed Services Committee held a hearing on a pair of failed disarmament projects in Russia that together wasted some \$250 million in Department of Defense funds.

Since 1993 Russia has invested just \$95 million in chemical weapon destruction, GAO found. “In that eleven-year period,” Chairman Hunter estimated, “Russia has spent billions more on new long-range missiles, advanced nuclear warheads, ballistic missile submarines and massive underground bunkers as well as secret biological and chemical weapon programs—all proof of backward spending priorities in the Kremlin.”

According to the director-general of the Russian Munitions Agency, Moscow's 2004 federal budget provides for less than 47 percent of the funds planned under Russia's chemical weapon destruction program; it allocated only 45 percent of the planned amount in 2003. Russia's total defense budget and defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has been on the upswing since at least 1998, research shows.

The report is available on the committee website: <http://armedservices.house.gov>

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