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Kalashnikov Repented Over AK-47 Deaths to Patriarch, Report Says

By Oleg Sukhov

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Kalashnikov, center, standing with a group of officials in April 2007. **Denis Grishkin**

Mikhail Kalashnikov, the late designer of the AK-47 assault rifle, said in a letter to Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill that he felt sorry for the fact that millions of people had been killed by the weapon he created, a news report said Monday.

"My spiritual pain is unbearable," Kalashnikov wrote, Izvestia reported, citing a copy of the letter. "There's one insoluble issue: since my rifle killed people, am I ... an Orthodox Christian, responsible for the deaths of people, even if they are enemies?"

The AK-47, designed in 1947, has become the world's most popular assault rifle and is used by governments, rebels, terrorists and civilians. According to the World Bank, out of the 500 million total firearms available worldwide, 100 million come from the Kalashnikov family, and 75 million are AK-47s.

Another issue that Kalashnikov said deeply troubled him was the Soviet Union's military fiasco in the war with Nazi Germany in 1941, when he was a tank commander.

"My spiritual wound of 1941 haunts me day and night," he said. "Why, living in such a great power with a massive defense industry and a strong gun design school, couldn't I and my fellow soldiers defend ourselves?"

Commenting on the Cold War, Kalashnikov, who died in December, said that he had considered Americans to be "friends" despite tense relations between the two countries.

Some commentators questioned the authenticity of the letter, drawing parallels with a message allegedly written by exiled tycoon Boris Berezovsky to President Vladimir Putin before his death last March, which some believe to be a fake.

But Kirill's spokesman Alexander Volkov confirmed that Patriarch Kirill received the letter, in which the gun designer praised him, and wrote a reply, thanking Kalashnikov for his "patriotism." He added that the letter was "very relevant amid attacks against the Church."

The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill have come under fire in recent years for alleged corruption and close ties with the Kremlin.

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