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## **RUSSIA SNUBS NUCLEAR SECURITY MEETING**

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No delegation from Moscow at planning session for 2016 summit on preventing terrorists gaining weapons-grade material

Russia failed to show up at meeting planning a 2016 nuclear security summit, US and European officials said on Monday, leaving unclear Moscow's intentions for future participation in talks.

The officials were unsure whether Russia meant to boycott the summit itself or was staging a temporary show of displeasure over western condemnation and sanctions for its role in the unrest in Ukraine.

Three or four planning meetings are scheduled before the spring of 2016 when the summit is tentatively set to open. With Russia one of the world's five formally recognised nuclear powers, its input is crucial to setting an agenda.

In 2010 Barack Obama initiated a series of summits aimed at preventing terrorists from getting their hands on weapons-grade nuclear material. Since then the number of countries thought to have enough material to build a nuclear weapon has fallen from 39 to 25.

At the last summit this year in The Hague 35 countries pledged to turn international guidelines on nuclear security into national laws and allow independent scrutiny of their procedures for protecting their nuclear installations. The summit also featured new reduction commitments, with Japan, Italy and Belgium agreeing to cut their stocks of highly enriched uranium and plutonium.

At the same time there were setbacks. Russia was notably absent from the 35-nation agreement, along with China, India and Pakistan – all nations with nuclear weapons.

Officials said that with the exception of Russia, all of the 54 countries that participated in this year's March summit attended the preparatory meeting in Washington.

Patrick Ventrell, a spokesman for the National Security Council at the White House, said the US regretted the Russian absence. As far as the US is concerned the door remains open to their joining future such meetings, he said.

Nuclear analyst Kenneth Luongo said that even if Moscow did show up in 2016 its boycott of planning meetings reflects horribly on the Russian priorities.

The Russians, besides the United States, are the biggest possessor of nuclear material so if they are not involved in this, it sends a terrible signal about their prioritisation, he said. And it sends a terrible signal about the 20-plus year co-operation between the United States and Russia on this agenda.

Luongo, a former senior nonproliferation official in the US government, said a chance to diminish the likelihood of nuclear terrorism was too important to be used as a political football.

Besides having a huge stockpile of nuclear material, Russias southern border is honeycombed with Islamic radicals, he said. So this is not the issue on which to play petty politics.

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