

Russia to Attend NATO Conference in Chicago

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A small NATO flag is focused in the foreground with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen seen in the background. **Denis Grishkin**

Moscow will send a high-ranking official to the NATO conference in Chicago, Kommersant reported Monday, citing a high-placed Foreign Ministry source.

Zamir Kabulov, the presidential envoy to Afghanistan who also heads a Foreign Ministry department, will most likely be Russia's pick for the conference, the source said, though the information has not been officially confirmed.

An ongoing spat over missile defense and other questions have cast doubt on Moscow's participation in the NATO meeting May 20 and 21, where the alliance is set to launch the first phase of a missile shield system that Moscow strongly opposes.

In April, Lavrov warned that he might not accept an invitation to send a representative to Chicago because the alliance won't let Moscow attend all meetings of nations contributing to ISAF, NATO's Afghanistan mission.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Russia was invited to attend an ISAF-contributor meeting at the sidelines of the Chicago summit.

President Vladimir Putin had earlier agreed with Rasmussen that he would not attend the event himself, officially because the event was so soon after his inauguration and during a busy domestic political season.

The news comes days after Putin unexpectedly told U.S. President Barack Obama in a telephone conversation he would not attend the G8 summit to be held at Camp David just before the NATO conference. Earlier reports said Obama moved the G8 summit to Camp David in a goodwill gesture to avoid potentially putting Putin in an awkward position, though the White House officially denied that being the reason.

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