



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 27, 2012

## Obama to Medvedev: “After the Election, I’ll Have More Flexibility.”

President Obama has once again gotten caught speaking into a microphone, unaware that it was still on and recording his every word. This time he was conversing with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul on Monday, advising him that it would be best to hold off on NATO missile defense system discussions until after the U.S. elections in November, at which point he will have more flexibility.



Obama told his Russian counterpart, “This is my last election. After my election, I’ll have more flexibility.”

“I understand,” Medvedev responded. “I will transmit this information to Vladimir.”

Obama’s statement makes two underlying and significant points. First, the President is apparently beyond confident that the election victory is his. *Forbes* [observes](#), “Well, he wouldn’t have any ability to act on U.S. foreign policy if he wasn’t an elected official, so it seems fair to reason that the president is feeling positive about November.”

Second, the President seemed to be acknowledging in so many words that when he is reelected, the gloves are truly coming off: Answering to either Congress or the American people will hold no importance for him in a second term.

Still, despite Obama’s brazen statement, *Bloomberg* [contends](#) that there should be minimal shock among the citizenry:

Anyone who believes electoral politics don’t play a big role in driving foreign policy has been leading a very secluded life. Campaign-year outrage from Obama’s rivals over the remarks is probably inevitable, but it would also be disingenuous because we all know better. Besides, nuclear missile defense is a slow-burning fuse — talks can wait until after November without any consequence.

But *Bloomberg* does note cause for concern in the President’s assertion:

Yet, there was something a little worrisome in this overheard conversation: Just how flexible does Obama plan to be with [Russia](#) on the missile defense, which he redesigned once already to take account of Russian concerns?

The missile defense system in question dates back to the George W. Bush administration. In 2003, Bush withdrew from the Cold War Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which restricted U.S. and Soviet missile defense programs. In 2007, the United States began preparations for a missile defense system, likely for defense against an Iranian attack. *Bloomberg* explains, “The forward radar for the system was to be in the Czech Republic, and Poland would host the missiles that would shoot down any long-range



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ballistic missiles Iran might let fly. Russia, however, saw the shield as a naked Cold War power play by the U.S. and was mad as hell.”

According to *Bloomberg*, the anger was justifiable, as a U.S. radar system in the Czech Republic would cover most of European Russia along with Iran. And the plan is said to be a humiliation to Russia as it challenges that country’s strategic position in the region. Bloomberg notes, “The Soviet Union may have agreed in its final years to dissolve the Warsaw Pact and give up control of its central and Eastern European satellites, but replacing Russian tanks with U.S. missile systems in those countries was never part of the deal.”

President Obama developed a plan to remedy relations with Russia, a major component of which was the redesign of the missile defense plan, beginning in 2009. That system, called the European Phased Adaptive Approach, was made into a NATO program. The new system was reportedly more “pragmatic” than the original because it was smaller and less expensive, and used technology already in existence in order to address Iranian capabilities in the immediate future. The idea was that the plan would eventually acquire new technologies and be capable of shooting down long-range missiles by the year 2020.

The early stages of that plan did not include Poland or the Czech Republic, but would eventually involve those nations by the fourth and final stage.

Still, Russia, unhappy because it did not have an equal role in the arrangement, demanded that the United States provide a legal guarantee that the missile defense system would not turn against Russia’s nuclear arsenal. Congress refused to make such an agreement.

Several analysts have suggested how to work around the stalemate. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory physicist Dean Wilkening, for instance, recommends building a joint U.S.-Russia radar complex in central Russia using American technology.

But most observers agree that Russia’s demands are all or nothing. In fact, Medvedev and current Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have already issued threats to build missiles that would penetrate U.S. defenses, at any expense, if NATO follows through with its plans. And Putin’s opposition to the missile shield was a major theme of his presidential campaign, which some believe is the prime reason he was reelected.

Expectedly, a media storm followed Obama’s slip-up in Seoul, compelling the President to publicly chide reporters for their coverage of the incident. “And frankly, the current environment is not conducive to those kinds of thoughtful consultations. I think the stories you guys have been writing over the last 24 hours is probably pretty good evidence of that. I think we’ll do better in 2013,” said Obama.

According to [Fox News](#), “President Obama owes a lot of his political problems to having run for office on vague promises of hope and change. After offering Americans a chance at something completely different, Obama has delivered large doses of the same old stuff.”

The President’s overheard statement feeds directly into Mitt Romney’s campaign, which has argued that Obama in a second term would be entirely “unrestrained.”

House Speaker John Boehner remarked, “We look forward” to hearing just what the President meant by “more flexibility” when he returns from South Korea.

Some experts believe that the United States may actually show the Russians classified data to prove that the system is truly meant for Iranian and not Russian missiles. Still, most observers say that such a



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move would not be enough to ease Russian concerns.

According to John Bolton, Ambassador to the United Nations under George W. Bush, the President's comments are a "fire bell in the night," indicating that he will not only scale back missile defense but that he also might be planning to give ground on a variety of national security priorities.

"There's huge cause for concern here," asserted Bolton, pointing out that Obama is too much of "a politician to entirely show his hand in the first term, but it would be open season" if he is reelected.

By yesterday afternoon, the Republican National Committee had put out a video entitled, "What Obama tells world leaders when he thinks you weren't listening."

Obama's aides have attempted to defend the President by asserting he is still "deeply invested" in the missile defense system. Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes claimed that Obama was merely assuaging Russia's objections by indicating it would be best to discuss missile defense talks when the political climate is less tense.

This is not the first time President Obama has been caught inadvertently speaking into an open microphone. Last year, he and French President Nicolas Sarkozy were overheard bad-mouthing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after a G20 meeting in Cannes.

*Photo: U.S. President Barack Obama, left, shakes hands with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, right, following the conclusion of their bilateral meeting at the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea, March, 26, 2012: AP Images*



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