

The Obama-Medvedev turbo shuffle

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The President Barack Obama administration urgently needs to do a couple of things: learn to play chess; and watch the DVD of the Godfather saga, especially larger-than-life parts I and II.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev didn't even have to be a good chess player to figure out he was not exactly being presented by Obama with a famous "offer he can't refuse".

In a secret Obama letter, hand-delivered to Medvedev three weeks ago, as the New York Times revealed and the administration confirmed, the US "non-proposal proposal" essentially broke down to this: if you help us get rid of non-existent Iranian nuclear weapons, we'll get rid of our missile shield which we don't know if it's any good anyway.

Kremlin spokesperson Natalya Timakova reacted as dry as a good martini: the letter had "no concrete proposals and no mutually binding initiatives". In fact, Obama took no less than three months to simply reply to a letter Medvedev sent him shortly after his election on November 4, 2008.

Then the virtual shuffle went turbo. At a news conference following a meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Zapatero, Medvedev himself diplomatically judged "not constructive" to link the US missile shield with the Iranian nuclear program. Instead, Medvedev is in favor of a "common" missile shield to face "global threats". Next Friday, when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has dinner with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in [Geneva](#), she can always work her charm and be more specific.

Certainly aware of Medvedev's response, Obama was forced to issue a "non-denial denial". After meeting British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the White House, Obama said, "The report that was in The New York Times didn't accurately characterize the letter." And then he toed the Bush administration line: "The missile defense that we have talked about deploying is directed toward, not Russia, but Iran."

Everyone familiar with the new great game in Eurasia knows that Washington's move to deploy 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar in the [Czech Republic](#) by 2013 amounts, in Moscow's point of view, to a serious threat to Russian national security. According to the former Bush administration - and the Pentagon's - rationale, this move is essential to deter future strikes from "rogue state" Iran. Moscow sees right through it.

As reported by RIA Novosti, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov stressed again on Tuesday, "If the deployment [of a US missile shield] is suspended, we will not start the retaliatory measures we planned." The "measures" mean Moscow deploying Iskander-M missiles to Kaliningrad, right at the border of Poland and [Lithuania](#), both North Atlantic

Treaty Organization members.

That the Obama presidency's strategy boils down to luring Russia to the anti-Iran [train](#) is no secret to anyone. The State Department duly leaked what Clinton has just told United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan in her current Middle East [trip](#): "We're under no illusions. Our eyes are wide open on Iran."

Among Obama's neo-liberal realist gang at least Pentagon supremo Robert Gates is trying to exhibit a voice of reason: he told NBC television that Iran is "not close to a stockpile, they're not close to a weapon at this point, and so there is some time".

Obama and Medvedev will finally meet in person for the first time on April 2, in [London](#), on the sidelines of what will certainly be a tumultuous Group of 20 meeting discussing the global financial crisis. Russian media have reported that Medvedev has invited Obama to visit Moscow. The date may be announced in London. Obama will have plenty of time to brush up on his Godfather flicks. He'd better leave the gun in Washington and take the cannoli to Moscow.

Pepe Escobar is the author of [Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War](#) (Nimble Books, 2007) and [Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge](#). His new book, just out, is [Obama does Globalistan](#) (Nimble Books, 2009).

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