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## **PRES OBAMA on Fareed Zakaria GPS**

CNN's FAREED ZAKARIA GPS features a wide-ranging interview with President Barack Obama in New Delhi as the President concluded his state visit to India. Topics included the impact of the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah on the fragile Middle Eastern region, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's upcoming speech to Congress on President Obama's Iran policy, the need for drone use regulations, China's apparent distress over the burgeoning Obama-Modi friendship, Russia's failing economy and its success in de-stabilizing Ukraine, and the legacy of his administration. Videos and a full transcript of the interview are below.

### **VIDEOS**

**[President Obama on the need for regulations regarding the use of drones](#)**

**[President Obama on the passing of King Abdullah](#)**

**[President Obama on U.S.-Israeli relationship](#)**

**[President Obama on Russia](#)**

**[President Obama on China and India](#)**

**[President Obama on terrorism](#)**

**[President Obama on radical Islam](#)**

**[President Obama on authoritarian allies in the Middle East](#)**

**[President Obama on Phil Klay's Redeployment](#)**

Full transcript after the jump.

### **FULL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

FAREED ZAKARIA, HOST: Mr. President, honor to have you.

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Good to see you, Fareed.

ZAKARIA: Lindsey Graham says that he's bothered by the fact that you won't admit that we're in a religious war. There are others who say that the White House takes pains to avoid using the term "Islamic terrorists."

So my question to you is are we at - are we in a war with radical Islam?

OBAMA: You know, I think that the way to understand this is there is an element growing out of Muslim communities in certain parts of the world that have perverted the religion, have embraced a nihilistic, violent, almost medieval interpretation of Islam.

And they're doing damage in a lot of countries around the world.

But it is absolutely true that I reject a notion that somehow that creates a religious war because the overwhelming majority of Muslims reject that interpretation of Islam. They don't even recognize it as being Islam.

And I think that for us to be successful in fighting this scourge, it's very important for us to align ourselves with the 99.9 percent of Muslims who are looking for the same thing we're looking for - order, peace, prosperity - and so I don't quibble with labels. I think we all recognize that this is a particular problem that has roots in Muslim communities, and that the Middle East and South Asia are sort of ground zero for us needing to win back hearts and minds, particularly when it comes to young people.

But I think we do ourselves a disservice in this fight if we are not taking into account the fact that the overwhelming majority of Muslims reject this ideology.

ZAKARIA: Others say that you downplay the importance of terrorism. You want to downgrade it as a threat to the United States.

OBAMA: Look, I have to talk to the families of those who are killed by terrorists. I have to talk to the families of soldiers of ours who fought to make sure that Al Qaeda in the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] couldn't carry out attacks against us again.

So I think I'm pretty mindful of the terrible costs of terrorism around the world.

What I do insist on is that we maintain a proper perspective and that we do not provide a victory to these terrorist networks by overinflating their importance and suggesting in some fashion that they are an existential threat to the United States or the world order.

You know, the truth of the matter is that they can do harm. But we have the capacity to control how we respond in ways that do not undercut what's, you know, what's the essence of who we are. That means that we don't torture, for example, and thereby undermine our values and credibility around the world.

It means that we don't approach this with a strategy of sending out occupying armies and playing whack-a-mole wherever a terrorist group appears, because that drains our economic strength and it puts enormous burdens on our military.

What's required is a surgical, precise response to a very specific problem. And if we do that effectively, then ultimately these terrorist organizations will be defeated because they don't have a vision that appeals to ordinary people. It is - it really is, as it has been described in some cases, a death cult or a entirely backward-looking fantasy that can't function in the world. When you look at ISIL, it has no governing strategy. It can talk about setting up the new caliphate, but nobody is under any illusions that they can actually in a sustained way feed people or educate people or organize a society that would work.

And so we can't give them the victory of overinflating what they do and not - and we can't make the mistake of being reactive to them. We have to have a very precise strategy in terms of how to defeat

them.

ZAKARIA: Americans have been very interested to hear about this drone that landed in the White House - your back yard, where you and your family lives.

Are you confident that you understand how you would prevent the next one from being armed?

OBAMA: Well, this is a broader problem. I'll leave the Secret Service to talk about this particular event.

But I've actually asked the FAA and a number of agencies to examine how are we managing this new technology, because the drone that landed in the White House you buy at Radio Shack.

You know that there are companies like Amazon that are talking about using small drones to deliver packages. This - there are incredibly useful functions that these drones can play in terms of farmers who are managing crops and conservationists who want to take stock of wildlife. So there are a whole range of things we can do with it, but we don't really have any kind of regulatory structure at all for it.

So I've assigned some of the relevant agencies to start talking to stakeholders and figure out how we're going to put an architecture in place that makes sure that these things aren't dangerous and that they're not violating people's privacy. And you know, in some ways, Fareed, this is similar to what's happened in cyberspace. These technologies that we're developing had the capacity to empower individuals in ways that we couldn't even imagine ten, fifteen years ago.

But we don't yet have the legal structures and the architecture both globally and within individual countries to manage them the way that we need to. And part of my job over the past several years and over the next couple of years that I'm still in office is seeing if we can start providing some sort of framework that ensures that we get the good and minimize the bad.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

ZAKARIA: The relationship between President Obama and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can be described as tense, at best. That was ratcheted up even more when it was announced last week that the Speaker of the House John Boehner had invited the Prime Minister to speak directly to Congress about a potential Iran nuclear deal.

Obama's administration has been working feverishly to strike a deal with Iran ever since November 2013, when such an accord first seemed possible.

So what was the President's reaction to the Prime Minister's plans? Listen in.

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ZAKARIA: Last week it was announced that the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was going to come to Washington and do a joint session of Congress at the invitation of the Republican Speaker of the House.

Many people are saying this is a rebuttal of your arguments about negotiations with Iran - the possible deal with Iran.

Do you think it's appropriate for him to come in this manner, at this time, to Washington?

OBAMA: Well, I'll let Mr. Boehner answer that and Mr. Netanyahu. I speak with Prime Minister Netanyahu all the time. We're declining to meet with him; I'm declining to meet with him simply because our general policy is we don't meet with any world leader two weeks before their election.

I think that's inappropriate, and that's true with some of our closest allies.

David Cameron, who's got an election coming up, recently came to visit because we insisted that if he wants to come and it was a very important meeting, he needs to be far away enough from the election that it doesn't look like in some ways we're meddling or putting our thumbs on the scale.

To the broader issue, Fareed, I don't think there's been any rebuttal of my argument. I haven't heard a persuasive rebuttal of my argument that we crafted very effective sanctions against Iran specifically to bring them to the negotiations table, to see if we could resolve the Iranian nuclear issue through diplomatic means.

By all accounts, including the accounts of Israeli intelligence, Iran has abided by the terms of this interim agreement. They have not advanced their nuclear program. They have actually rolled back their stockpiles of highly enriched uranium. And so we have lost nothing during this period of negotiations.

Iran's program has not advanced. And we had the chance of providing a mechanism where we can verify that Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon and Iran has the ability over time to reenter the community of nations as a responsible player.

Now I don't know that we're going to be able to get that done. But my argument is, for the United States Congress to insist on imposing new sanctions that all our partners, as well as the Iranians, can interpret as a violation of the interim agreement - for us to undermine diplomacy at this critical time - for no good reason is a mistake, and that what we need to do is to finish up this round of negotiations, put the pressure on Iran to say yes to what the international community is calling for. And what's been remarkable is the unity we've been able to maintain in the P5+1, even with Russia, given all the strains that we have with them, China, which obviously has a great hunger for Iranian oil, we've still been able to maintain that unity, which shows how effective our diplomats have been - and if in fact we don't get a deal, make sure that it's the Iranians' fault because they couldn't say yes to a reasonable deal.

And so I haven't heard a good counter argument yet. I will veto legislation if it comes up that imposes additional sanctions. And by the way, what I've said to members of Congress and what I've said to the Israelis is the day after Iran walks away from a reasonable deal, the easiest thing for me to do in Congress is pass additional sanctions against Iran.

It would take about two days for me to be able to sign a bill like that. So we have the ability to exert additional pressure. But it's important for us to show that we've exhausted every possible avenue of diplomatic resolution.

ZAKARIA: But if you listen to what people are saying in Congress about the prospective deal - and I think everyone knows where it is, somewhere in the range of five to six thousand centrifuges - it

seems almost any deal you're going to bring to this Republican Senate, they're not going to go for it so -

OBAMA: Well -

ZAKARIA: - doesn't it doom the negotiations?

OBAMA: - I think it's important for us to actually have a deal in place and then make an argument for what the deal is. I've said before that we will take no deal over a bad deal.

But if I can prove that the deal we've put in place assures us through indisputable verification mechanisms that Iran cannot achieve breakout capacity, if I've got a bunch of scientists and nuclear experts saying this assures us that Iran is not on the brink of being a nuclear weapons power, then that's a public debate we should have. And I will then ask every member of Congress to ask why would we reject that deal and prefer a potential military option that would be less effective in constraining Iran's nuclear program and would have extraordinary ramifications at a time when we've already got too many conflicts in the Middle East.

And I'm pretty confident I can win that argument.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

ZAKARIA: The United States must fight terrorists. But in doing so, does it have to ally with dictatorships and absolute monarchies?

I asked President Obama to explain what looked like a shift in his views and his policy.

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ZAKARIA: In 2011, during the Arab Spring, you said that authoritarian regimes offer the illusion of stability, but they actually produce a lot of problems - in fact, breed terrorism.

Now Secretary of State Kerry praises General Sisi of Egypt, you're going - you affirm the relationship with Saudi Arabia, the administration works with dictatorships in Central Asia, absolute monarchies in the Middle East.

Is the theory of authoritarian stability back?

OBAMA: Well, no, I don't think so. I think that if you look at all my statements, what I've always said is that in applying U.S. foreign policy, we can never operate as if the world as it is doesn't exist. We've got friends and allies who help us with strategic interests, who also engage in practices that don't meet our test of human rights or democracy.

And what we can do is to encourage them to move in a new direction but, you know, oftentimes we're going to have to make decisions based on the here and now and our strategic interests.

What I continue to believe is that an authoritarian model, in this day and age, is going to be less and less sustainable. And I think we've seen evidence of that around the world. Part of it is just the flow of information. Authoritarian to some degree depends on the ignorance of people, and the Internet and social media means people have access to information.

Authoritarian regimes rely to a large extent on tamping down people's expectations. People's expectations are constantly rising today, especially among young people. And so a government model that does not rely ultimately on legitimacy and consent but rather relies on force is not ultimately going to be effective.

ZAKARIA: Let me ask you about this trip. It's been striking, it's clearly gone very well.

But already the Chinese government has twice in three days criticized both the United States and India. Is this the start of a kind of a new geopolitics of Asia?

OBAMA: You know, I was surprised when I heard that the Chinese government had put out these statements. I visited China just a while back and had some very successful meetings with President Xi.

China doesn't need to be threatened because we have good relations with India. You know, my belief is that in this moment in history, there is an opportunity to create a win-win formula in which all countries are abiding by a common set of rules and standards, and we're focused on lifting up prosperity for our people, not at the expense of others, but together with each other, and that's what my discussions with Prime Minister Modi have focused on.

You know, I've continually emphasized that it is very much in America's interest to see China continue with its peaceful rise. What's dangerous for us is a destabilized and impoverished and disintegrating China. It's much better for us if China is doing well.

But what we've said, since the start of my term in office, is China's growth shouldn't be at the expense of other folks. It shouldn't bully small countries like Vietnam or the Philippines around maritime issues, but try to resolve those peacefully, in accordance with international law. It shouldn't manipulate its currency to give itself trading advantages that others don't have.

And you know, sometimes, we've been successful in getting a response from China on those issues, sometimes less so. But I care deeply about China's success, and you know, I want to make sure that we continue to maintain a constructive relationship.

There's no doubt that there are aspects of India that make us closer to India. Specifically it's a democracy, and reflects the values and aspirations as well as some of the warts of our own country, in a way that China could not. And so I think there's an affinity there that I feel personally and I think the American people feel as well.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

ZAKARIA: Next month will mark a year since Russia annexed Crimea. And despite ever-tightening sanctions, and an ever-worsening Russian economy, Moscow continues to send arms, supplies and, by some accounts, troops into Eastern Ukraine.

I asked President Obama how he thought this situation would ever get resolved.

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ZAKARIA: Would it be fair to say that with regard to Russia, your policy has been pretty effective

in imposing real costs on the Russian economy, but it has not deterred Vladimir Putin from creating instability in Ukraine. Conflict seems to have even escalated in the last few weeks.

OBAMA: I think that's entirely fair. And I think that is a testament to the bad decisions that Mr. Putin is making on behalf of his country. You know, you think about where we've been in terms of U.S.-Russian relations; when I came into office, we talked about reset, and I established, I think, an effective working relationship with Mr. Medvedev.

And as a consequence, Russia's economy was growing, they had to the opportunity to begin diversifying their economy, their relations across Europe and around the world were sound, they joined the WTO with assistance from us. And since Mr. Putin made this decision around Crimea and Ukraine - not because of some grand strategy, but essentially because he was caught off-balance by the protests in the Maidan and Yanukovych then fleeing after we had brokered a deal to transition power in Ukraine - since that time, this improvisation that he's been doing has getting - has gotten him deeper and deeper into a situation that is a violation of international law, that violates the integrity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, has isolated Russia diplomatically, has made Europe wary of doing business with Russia, has allowed the imposition of sanctions that are crippling Russia's economy at a time when their oil revenues are dropping.

There's no formula in which this ends up being good for Russia.

The annexation of Crimea is a cost, not a benefit, to Russia. The days in which conquest of land somehow was a formula for great nation status is over. The power of countries today is measured by your knowledge, your skills, your ability to export goods, to invent new products and new services, your influence, and...

ZAKARIA: Do you...

OBAMA: - none of those things are provided by his strategy. Now but what is absolutely true is that if you have a leader who continually drives past the off ramps that we've provided, given the size of the Russian military, given the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO country and so as a consequence there, you know, there are clear limits in terms of what we would do militarily, you know, Mr. Putin has not been stopped so far.

To those who would suggest that we need to do more, you know, what I've said to them is that we can exact higher and higher costs, and that's exactly what we're doing, and we can bring diplomatic pressure to bear. I don't think that it would be wise for the United States or the world to see a actual military conflict between the United States and Russia.

What we are doing is reinforcing those border states who are members of NATO -

ZAKARIA: But you haven't...

OBAMA: - and making very clear that that line is one that cannot be crossed because we would have to take military action to protect our allies. That's part of what Article V's all about.

ZAKARIA: But you've seen no indication that Putin is ready for a deal in recent months, weeks?

OBAMA: You know, so far, what we've seen is a lot of talk in public - with Chancellor Merkel and

President [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and ourselves - in which he will say one thing but his actions tell another tale. And what we've consistently seen is that the separatists are Russian financed, Russian trained; their strategy comes from Russia; Russian troops support them. And so we have not yet seen a recognition on the part of the Kremlin that it is in Russia's interests to resolve this issue over the long term.

So in addition to continuing to exact costs on Russia, one of the most important things we can do is to continue to support the Ukrainian economy and the reform efforts that are coming out of Kiev. And to their credit, President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk have initiated significant reforms there that are making a difference if they're given a chance.

And so we're going to keep on these dual tracks - putting more pressure on Russia, bolstering Ukraine, delivering a message to Mr. Putin that these off ramps and diplomatic resolutions remain available.

I'm not wildly optimistic at this point that his orientation changes, partly because the one thing that's been very successful for Mr. Putin is his politics. I think he's been able to create, in part because of state-sponsored media and Russian TV, and all the mechanisms he has to quell dissent inside his country, and then tapping into, you know, sort of the strong nationalism that exists inside of Russia, what he has been able to do is to keep his poll numbers up.

And in fact, a lot of his turn away from reengagement with the West was when he decided to start running for reelection and his popularity wasn't as high as he was accustomed to. And you'll recall there were protests in Moscow that started numbering in the thousands, and you started then seeing a ramp-up of this anti-Western, anti-U.S. rhetoric, which is, you know, out of the old Soviet playbook.

So he's looking backwards, not forwards, and perhaps, over time, he changes his mind. In the meantime, we just have to make sure that we're firm in protecting our allies and supporting the principles that have maintained peace in Europe for the entire post-war period.

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