

CNN's *AC360*

10/13/25

8:37:35 p.m.

8 minutes and 49 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Developments; Former Pres. Obama: Americans “Being Tested” by Trump’s Policies]

JOHN BERMAN: Former President Barack Obama is the guest on the final episode of comedian Marc Maron’s long-running podcast, *WTF*, which was pre-taped before today’s big events in the Middle East. And he did not hold back on criticizing the policies of the Trump administration. He said Americans are being tested right now, and that the institutional guardrails of our democracy that we had long taken for granted have been deliberately weakened. The former President also takes issue with President Trump’s attempts to send National Guard troops into U.S. cities by suggesting that ordinary street crime is an insurrection or terrorism.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Developments; Former Pres. Obama: When Militaries Can Use Force Against Their Own People That Is “Inherently Corrupting”]

BARACK OBAMA: When you have military that can direct force against their own people, that is inherently corrupting. When you have what looks like a deliberate end run around not just a concept, but a law that’s been around for a long time, Posse Comitatus, that says, you know, you don’t use our military on domestic soil. That is a genuine effort to weaken how we have understood democracy.

BERMAN: Former President had a lot to say. Here now, former Trump campaign adviser David Urban and South Carolina State Representative Bakari Sellers. Bakari, let me start with you here. You know, the former president said that we took the institutional guardrails for democracy for granted. How significant is that message?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Developments; Barack Obama: Americans “Are Right to Be Concerned”]

BAKARI SELLERS: I mean, I think it’s significant. And I think the fact is that there are a lot of people who realize since 2016 that democracy is extremely fragile. And I think that’s what the 44th President of the United States was reiterating, the fact that she is extremely fragile. When you’re looking and juxtaposing what we have now, when you have our military on the streets of American cities, yes, that should be jarring.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Developments; Former President Obama Discusses the State of Democracy Under Trump in Final “WTF Podcast” Episode]

When you have the infringement on our pillar of journalism, yes, that should be jarring. When you have someone using the Department of Justice by fiat or even worse by tweet, yes, that should be jarring and so, I think that Barack Obama — and the question that people will have for

Barack Obama, because I agree with everything that he says is, one, the forcefulness. I mean, it's very hard for a former president to come out and criticize a current president. And two, the timeliness, because there were a lot of issues he brought up in this interview that people will question, particularly law firms or mega companies that are bowing to the knee of Donald Trump. People will question, where was this when it actually happened? Because Donald Trump, unfortunately, is changing democracy at a blistering pace. And I think that it's very fearful for a lot of people in this country.

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BERMAN: David Urban, so who do you think is listening to this and to what end?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Developments; Former President Obama Discusses the State of Democracy Under Trump in Final "WTF Podcast" Episode]

DAVID URBAN: Yeah, John. Listen, I — with all due respect to my good friend Bakari, I disagree with him on a lot of points. And John, to your point, look, this was taped earlier, right? This podcast was taped earlier, but it didn't have to be — you know, Barack Obama's first tweet this morning wasn't saying, hey, congratulations, Donald Trump, incredible thing that you just accomplished. Great for the Palestinian people, peace in the Middle East breaking out. He puts out a self-congratulatory tweet about some, you know, a podcast with a guy that half of America's never heard of. So who gives a s— right about it? Like, maybe emulate Bill Maher. You may not like the guy. You may not have voted for the guy, but game should respect game. Our network, look, we're — this network today has done nothing but great journalism of showing end to end all the great things that this administration has been able to accomplish today. The freed hostages, Palestinians returning home, the prospect of a durable and lasting Middle East peace. The people in Sharm El Sheikh, all these leaders gathering because of why? Because Donald Trump's force of personality being there. So, to Barack — to Bakari's point, like, why now? It seems a little — if you've got this in the can, maybe ask him to hold it for a day. Maybe don't tweet that out the first thing. Maybe tweet out something like congratulations, Mr. President. I've been in your shoes. I know how hard this is. Congratulations on getting it done.

BERMAN: This was taped, obviously, before today. And I don't think that the former President have much to say —

URBAN: Yeah, but John, he could have tweeted out this morning. He could have —

BERMAN: I mean —

URBAN: — he didn't tweet out — check his Twitter feed, there's no congratulations Donald Trump anywhere. It's a little — it looks a little small to me.

BERMAN: Okay. Bakari, the former President also had criticism for Democrats here. I want to

play some of that.

OBAMA: The vulnerability, I think, comes in and saying, right, I've got some core convictions. I've got beliefs that I'm not going to compromise, but I'm also not going to assert that I am so righteous and so pure. I think this was a fault of some progressive language was almost asserting a holier-than-thou superiority.

BERMAN: So, Bakari, what do you think about that message? You also went on to say that you can't lecture people without acknowledging that you've got some blind spots to —

SELLERS: No, I mean, he — this is how Barack Obama talks to many people in leadership, and he's absolutely correct. I mean, you have Hakeem Jeffries and Chuck Schumer who are speaking in these paragraphs on Twitter when people want in a thirsting for just this authenticity, which many times has just been cast aside for poll tested, what are the people and the advisers in Washington, D.C. talking about. And so, Barack Obama was really on message and speaking to the American public. But I want to — I do have to go back to something that David said. And I think that David's framing a lot is the reason that people are not necessarily having the conversation that David wants us to have and the reason being is because David's initial thought, the same thing with Donald Trump and Jared Kushner is let's praise Donald Trump. And that's not the framing of this. In fact — I'm not finish. In fact, I think that a lot of people, particularly those in this country who believe Israel has a right to exist, are very happy that these final hostages came home. They're very happy that there's peace in the Middle East. They're grateful for this. I think that there's a statement that you made that said Palestinians can return to their homes. Well, David, their homes are shattered. They have to rebuild their livelihoods, but that's what happens in war. I completely understand that. But we also have to have an empathetic eye to those men, women and children, for example, who did not deserve to die in this battle. What I will say, though, going forward is that we need to make sure that Israel has a right to exist and Hamas is no more. We have to be able to say both of those things with a straight face. And if Donald Trump is on that path, he gets credit, but I will tell you this, that a lot of people are waiting with bated breath to see what happens tomorrow. So, thank God all of these hostages came home. I hope all of the remains of the hostages are found. And I hope one day we can actually say something that George Bush wanted us to say a long time ago, which is that we have peace in the Middle East.

BERMAN: David, we got about 20 seconds left.

URBAN: So Bakari, real quickly. Bakari, if it's not Donald Trump and the Trump administration to thank today, who would you thank? Listen, half the world showed up in Sharm El-Sheikh today to thank Donald Trump —

SELLERS: Man, I —

URBAN: — and this administration and acknowledge, but for Donald Trump, this would not have occurred, so who would you thank —

SELLERS: — I mean, on a day when —

URBAN: — if you wouldn't thank Trump —

SELLERS: — on a — on a day with — on a day when people are returned home to their families, on a day after two years where individuals were gone, we're not talking about the swap that was made. We're not talking about the Hamas soldiers who were kidnapping babies and that's the swap that was made. I'm not talking about the fact that Joe Biden actually had more hostages released during his deal. But what I am saying is that it's very — it's very — it reeks of something when you're not able to simply say, thank God these hostages are home without having to bow a bended knee —

BERMAN: Okay.

SELLERS: — or delay somebody.

URBAN: Bakari — there's a 20 —

BERMAN: We're going to go.

URBAN: — listen, John Berman —

BERMAN: David, no, no.

URBAN: — John Berman, you —

BERMAN: David, Bakari, we had the discussion —

URBAN: — there's a 20-point plan.

BERMAN: — right, and we're on —

URBAN: There's a 20-point plan where to place —

BERMAN: — we will see where it goes.

URBAN: — that's going to be executed upon.

BERMAN: We will see where it goes —

URBAN: Yeah.

BERMAN: — in the days ahead.

URBAN: But Bakari, be honest.

BERMAN: David Urban, Bakari Sellers —

URBAN: Don't be — just be honest. Say — say great job, Donald Trump. It's okay to do, Bakari. You're not going to melt.

BERMAN: We'll take this offline.

URBAN: You're not going to melt.

BERMAN: Gentlemen, thank you for being with us. We will —

SELLERS: Great job, Donald Trump.

BERMAN: — take this offline. Thank you all for being here.