

## DEBATE

### **Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC**

Thank you very much. There are so many aspects. We have about nine minutes left and I suggest we take some questions. We have the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Mr. Fahmy.

### **Nabil Fahmy, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt**

Thank you. Thank you, Speaker McCarthy. You have been surprisingly precise in your responses, and I thank you for that because you have given us clarity in terms of where Trump will probably go, especially on his tactics, but also on some policy issues. However, my question to you is beyond Trump, because both Thierry and yourself repeated that you have elections every four years. In my lifetime working in America and otherwise, you have had Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden, and Trump again. Where is America going in terms of what it wants to be in the world? Thank you.

### **Kevin McCarthy, 55<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the United States House of Representatives**

You know, a couple things happen, and I get concerned about the whole world itself, because it is not just happening to America. Looking at the last two presidential elections, normally in America, presidential elections are aspirational – what is going to happen in the next four years? – and people go out and vote for the policy that they want. In the election last time and the time before, people in America did not go vote for somebody. They went to vote against somebody. And we just lived through Covid. Something like Covid only happens once a century, and something that happens in that situation is most leaders in democracy lose, not because they may have done something wrong but because it is so life-changing, and so we have a difference there.

This election was different. It was not close. The last election when Biden won, he got 82 million votes, but because we have the Electoral College in America, he only won by 42,918 votes. My number one wish in this election was that whoever won the Electoral College also won the popular vote. That transpired. Therefore, I think there is a calming inside America, but it is going to have to prove itself as we go. We have got a tight margin in the House and the Senate. In America, you have to find a compromise. In today's world we think there should not be compromise, but you cannot govern that way. Trump does not have a second term. Trump is not somebody who has risen up in the Republican Party. He was a Democrat too. He is not philosophically bent that he is just principled and would only do it this way. He can move a whole different way. Not having that second term, he does not have to worry about something. Therefore, I think there is a window here.

For the first time in Trump's history, a poll came out today that he is positive. He is plus two. He has never been in this place. America just had a poll on his cabinet. He has got a Kennedy in his cabinet. He has got Tulsi in his cabinet. Normally, a president will pick one person from the other party. That has not happened in the last couple. We have got people that were running for president as Democrats in his cabinet, so it is an opening of a window. I think the American public is kind of tired of this; impeach somebody because you disagree with them. The first six months will tell us, had us as a public learned that lesson, but having the outcome that way was very decisive and has the opportunity to do it.

**Thierry de Montbrial**

Jean-Claude Gruffat and then Daniel Shek.

**Jean-Claude Gruffat, Member of United Way Leadership Council, Board member Atlas Network, Managing Director of Weild and Co LLC New York**

Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to and I watched on TV in the US the last interview the president-elect gave on CBS, I believe, where he answered a number of questions. You addressed some of these questions. He said two things that I guess people in this room would like you to comment on. One of them, he says, "I do not trust anybody." Number two: "I expect loyalty." Would you comment on these two statements from the president-elect?

**Kevin McCarthy**

Well, you have got to think nobody has probably gone through as much as Trump has gone through. He got held for trial that nobody else has been held up for – you see that in New York – and he had to overcome that. The first time he won, they put this whole issue about some Russia thing that was not true, and so he feels as though, "I won the time before and you never let me govern. You made stuff up. Then you threw me through court." If you are sitting in the Democratic Party, they have got to remake themselves. They actually made Trump. Had they not prosecuted him, there is a chance he probably would not have been the nominee.

**Daniel Shek, Former Ambassador of Israel to France, Director of European Affairs, Spokesman of the Foreign Ministry and Consul General in San Francisco.**

Good afternoon. Thank you for that. I am Daniel Scheck from Israel. It is said that if there is one person on this planet to whom Benjamin Netanyahu cannot say no, it is Donald Trump. How do you think he would or should use this very unique tool in order to resolve a conflict that has gone on for 14 months, which has incidentally cost the lives of nearly 50 Americans and includes seven American citizens who are held hostage by Hamas, seven out of 100? Is there something he should do, maybe even before 20 January?

**Kevin McCarthy**

I think his comments about the hostages being held, they better come home before 20 January. America has lived through this before with the Iran crisis. We have also found when Americans are taken hostage and we start paying for it, more Americans are taken

hostage. This administration paid for it. Under Trump, we never paid for it. I think everything they do ahead of time to set the stage that “if you want to have a reset, you ought to clean this up before the 20<sup>th</sup> comes” instead of staying quiet and delivering that message, which I know is being delivered, I think is the greatest help that can happen. If you think about it, it has gone on for 14 months with the same players. There is a new person coming in. You are probably a little more afraid of the new person coming in, so maybe you want to do something different.

**Thierry de Montbrial**

Time is almost up.

**Kevin McCarthy**

I will give speed answers.

**Thierry de Montbrial**

I will give voice to a Japanese person.

**Hiroyuki Akita, Commentator of *Nikkei***

I am Hiroyuki Akita with *Nikkei* from Tokyo. Japanese Prime Minister Abe last time played golf four times and became good friends with Mr. Trump, but we do not have a good golf player to become prime minister again, so Japan worries about the Trump era. To be serious, I understand that Mr. Trump is a strong leader and has a lot of strength. However, no leader is perfect. My question to you is what is the possible worst scenario that you can envision and how should the allies prepare for that? Thank you.

**Kevin McCarthy**

Okay. No one is going to say Trump is perfect by any means, shape or form. Trump will not tell you that. However, what he is doing is, he is a disruptor. This is what I want to think. If you would oblige me for one moment. The world in which he is going to become president is different than the world that he had eight years ago. It is a different China and Xi Jinping is in a different position. What did he just do? He invited Xi Jinping to come to his inaugural. “Come celebrate democracy.” You may think, for everything that you think is wrong with Trump, there is also a method in setting something else up. We now have a world much like 1938 where you have this axis of evil, so you have an opportunity here that he is not perfect, but maybe he is the right person at the right time for the job. He does not need to learn on it. People do have relationships, and he had a great relationship before.

The one thing I would give advice to every world leader: call him. He loves to talk to people. It is easier for me to get Trump on the phone than to get anybody on his staff on the phone. I talk to him every two days. He loves to talk. The other thing about him is, it does not matter if he does not like the person. He is still going to talk to you if he attacked you. You look at everybody flocking down to see him that did things against him. He loves it. “Come on in.” I think that is a different mode. Now, is he going to be different than people saw before? Is he going to behave differently? Yes, but we understand that and we know that about him, and I think the other leaders who have served with him before understand that. You might not like

the tone that he delivers something in, but nine times out of 10 there is a lot of truth to what he is delivering.

**Thierry de Montbrial**

Let me ask you one last question, very different. As a very experienced politician, how do you explain that the media and the poll companies have been so systematically wrong about Trump?

**Kevin McCarthy**

Because they have Trump syndrome. They do not like him. They do not want him to win. Everybody polls, and when they poll Trump, they poll him wrong. He always performs better than what he is, and it is just a place out. However, this is the thing you have to understand. The Republican Party did not have a great election. Trump did. We lost seats in the House, and it was a good year for Republicans. If you look at the Gallup poll, for the first time in history more Americans identified as a Republican than a Democrat. That has never happened in the history of the Republican Party or the history of the American country. Therefore, it was a good time to run. Trump also brings a little populism in and, if you look at the media, the media is upside down, and this is where Trump is kind of probably the last American president who was developed by television. Like we knew Trump before he ever ran. He was a strongman brand. He was on *The Apprentice*. He fired people.

What is the timing of when you are running? We are frustrated with the government. We think somebody should be fired. We think you are not doing your job and no one ever gets fired, so we put somebody in who is willing to fire. We think the government has become too big that it tries to tell us how to raise our children, so we want somebody who is going to be a little bombastic at times. Otherwise, the nice person is not going to make a change. However, the part I will tell you is he was also smart enough instead of worrying about going on CNN and getting 400,000 viewers, he would go on Joe Rogan and get 20 million people. He would go do a TikTok or something else that would actually go to people that you had no idea who they are but had an unbelievable following through the youth. He is intuitive about people. I think simply looking at a campaign, he had less money, he had a disadvantage, and he ran a much better campaign at the end of the day. You knew what he would do. He would secure the border, he would go after inflation and he would stop the war. Kamala spent USD 1 billion and the only thing I knew she was going to do is give you a USD 25,000 bonus if you bought a house.

**Thierry de Montbrial**

I propose to end this session with one new slogan: after Trump, Kevin McCarthy for president.

**Kevin McCarthy**

Very kind.