ANDREW MARR:
After weeks of wrangling, America’s politicians have finally agreed they will end the
government shutdown and will borrow billions more, raising the vast national debt
still further. President Obama said he hoped it meant the end of government by crisis,
but it’s a stopgap deal. The deal lasts only until January. The new US Ambassador to
the United Kingdom Matthew Barzun is here for his first major television interview.
Welcome, Ambassador. Nice to have you on the show.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
Thank you for having me.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I return to the event of the last 48 hours or so?

MATTHEW BARZUN:
Sure.
It was right at the last minute this deal was done - and it is only till January, there’s another crisis in February when you hit the debt ceiling again. For a lot of the rest of the world, it looks to them as if Washington is in gridlock, the system is dysfunctional, and the entire world economy is going to be affected by this.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
Andrew, there is no doubt that what we saw over the seventeen days of shutdown, which was the first issue; and then the second issue, as you mentioned - this coming up …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) To the debt ceiling.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
… to the edge of the debt ceiling - was - how do I put this diplomatically? - not our finest hour.

ANDREW MARR:
Right.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
The President himself put it quite bluntly, if I may say. He said look, it encouraged our enemies, it emboldened our competitors, and it depressed our friends.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
Now he feels, and I would reiterate, that this is not the way we should behave going forward. That is not how our democracy works. And one point of clarification as I’ve talked to many friends here in the UK who were watching, as you said, with great concern: that gridlock, which is the word you used, in some sense is built into our system. And that’s a good thing. It’s different from your system, but it works for us. What we saw here with those twin crises was not gridlock - that was something
different - and that habit of management by crisis needs to stop.

ANDREW MARR:
We saw utter ideological confrontation really between the Tea Party and the presidential group. The Tea Party point out, however, that I think every week the US Treasury spends, every day the US Treasury spends 2.5 million more dollars than it takes in. This can’t continue for very long. You’re heading towards a 17 trillion dollar deficit, so they’ve got a point.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
There are many legitimate points to be made about how we get our fiscal house in order and the President is passionate about having that debate and having that discussion, but that is not what we saw in the shutdown. This was taking an ideological position about what is called Obamacare and making that position, holding the budget and the Government hostage as it were. And I’m hesitant to use metaphors - you can get into trouble with that - but in a way that is what was going on.

ANDREW MARR:
Are we …

MATTHEW BARZUN:
And so the budget debate, Andrew, is a really important one - one that I hope we’ll see the Congress get to by mid-December. Let’s have this discussion about growth, about jobs and about long-term fiscal responsibility. We can do that.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you think we’re seeing what has been the world’s greatest democracy, the world’s greatest country during the 20th century, reaching a tipping point where the Chinese, for instance, are downgrading America, its borrowing status?

MATTHEW BARZUN:
I don’t. And I think despite how unfortunate these last few weeks are, that is not
America. America remains the bedrock of the world economy and we are a vibrant, a vibrant democracy, and one that I hope in the coming months we will see us back to our previous form.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Because a further period of confrontation like this could knock the British revival, economic revival for six, as well as everybody else’s, I guess?

**MATTHEW BARZUN:**
Yes, I mean look we … I mean that’s why, as I said, friends here in the UK were talking to me. They were watching with great concern. This was a big deal, this was not our finest hour. But it is behind us. In the end we did see Democrats and Republicans come together, albeit it at the eleventh hour, to do the right thing, to get the Government back, to pay our bills.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes. Can I turn to the other great controversy at the moment, which is the Snowden revelations …

**MATTHEW BARZUN:**
(over) Sure.

**ANDREW MARR:**
… the leaks and so on? Do you think the Government has acted wisely when it comes to Snowden? You’ve made him a martyr and it appears to a lot of people around the world that you’re using a huge stick to crush a rather small nut and that’s given Snowden credibility and support in this country.

**MATTHEW BARZUN:**
I wouldn’t characterise it that way. I would say that President Obama has been very clear and I think it’s worth pointing out, Andrew, that he actually called for a vigorous domestic debate about these issues …

**ANDREW MARR:**
MATTHEW BARZUN:
… before the Snowden stuff came out. Remember in his big defence speech …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Sure.

MATTHEW BARZUN:
… where he covered drones and other important topics. And he said look, we have to balance the legitimate security concerns of not only our citizens but of our allies and balance those with the privacy concerns shared by all people. And that is the balance that he is seeking to protect.

ANDREW MARR:
The Guardian newspaper here, like other newspapers around the world, has come in for a lot of criticism from secret service people for seriously compromising British and American security by publicising these revelations. Do you agree with that?

MATTHEW BARZUN:
I would focus more, as I said, about what debate … And I go back to what the President said, which is the importance of having this debate about what the tradeoffs are between security and privacy, between transparency and secrecy, and to do so in a way that protects whistleblowers - which is different by the way from wholesale releasing of information, hundreds of thousands of documents. Whistleblowers - the President, President Obama put in specific measures to protect whistleblowers if they see something illegal or unethical; that that’s an important part of the balance.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But it’s the wholesale nature …??

MATTHEW BARZUN:
And freedom of the press - which is something important here, crucially important back home in America - and to make sure that whatever we do doesn’t have a chilling
effect on the press. So the President has been clear about that.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) It’s very interesting that phrase, “a chilling effect on the press”. Is America watching closely our big debate on press regulation and is there some unease about state controls of the press coming to the world’s oldest democracy?

MATTHEW BARZUN:

We watch the UK with great interest. I mean your previous debate is a good example, one that we watch quietly and (in the case of that one) don’t comment. That is an internal issue for the UK to deal with. But of course we watch. We are greatly interested. I mean you are, the UK is our closest ally and so we watch with great interest.

ANDREW MARR:

Alright Ambassador, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

MATTHEW BARZUN:

Thank you, Andrew.

INTERVIEW ENDS