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President Xi Jinping-NPC Closing Session

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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HOST: Well joining me now from Beijing is Dr. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, advisor to the Chinese government and author of the book *How Chinese Leaders Think*. Thanks so much for joining us here on the program. Usually the NPC is seen as sort of a choreographed event: we know what to expect. But this time it felt very different.

RLK: It certainly was different. You have to look at this year's National People's



Congress - and the so-called Two Sessions - as part of the “political season” which begins with the party congress in October and goes now to the government sessions in March. And normally there is a predictability and what happens at the National People’s Congress is not very significant.



RLK: This year is different: China talks about a “New Era” – and this is not just words, it is really the case. If we look at the vision that Xi Jinping gave at the party congress, what we see here at the National People’s Congress we see as the implementation of that vision across a very broad front.



RLK: People have focused on term limits - understandably so - but the change is only for the presidency. Xi Jinping by having been made "Core" of the Party in October 2016 - actually with that designation undermined "collective leadership" - and when Xi's name was put into the Party Constitution as the contemporary arbiter of Marxism - on which the Party is based and the Party rules the country - he then became the overarching leader, no matter what position he would hold.



HOST: But are we going backwards when he's done that. I know you say there's a lot of focus on the getting rid of the terms, but by doing that are we going backwards to a time of Mao?

RLK: Well it's a complex analysis. You have to look at the vision that Xi is putting forth and it's a grand vision for China mid-century 2050 a great modern socialist nation as they say.

HOST: But also the cracking down of dissidents. Even this discussion about terms, it was silenced on social media.

LIVE Local Time 22:06

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RLK: No question that China is definitely more restrictive on media, social media, dissident groups - certainly in recent years. And the objective is to fulfill this grand vision where China 2050 as well as deal with some very urgent critical needs of the next few years: systemic financial risk, pollution. They want to end extreme poverty in China, and to do that Xi Jinping has to break up interest groups that have been resisting reform because of their natural desire to maintain the status quo with great richness in many areas. And to do that (break up interest groups), he needs this kind of power, and he determines that - that's what the Party should be and should do - to

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lead the country and not have the dissent.

HOST: We talk about this grand vision, but is it going against modernizing China into a democratic society?

RLK: China has a different definition of "democracy" than we do in the West. They use the term "democracy", but don't mean it in terms of "one person, one vote".

RLK: They mean sort of an input into society, where people, voices are heard. But at the end of the day, the Party rules the country, and Xi Jinping rules the Party.

HOST: Robert Kuhn, on that note we'll have to leave it. Thanks so much for joining us there from Beijing.

