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President Xi Jinping, China, Term Limits Robert Lawrence Kuhn – March 12, 2018

HOST: Let's talk about President Xi Jinping with our guest, Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a longtime advisor to the Chinese government, the author of *How China's Leaders Think*, and the host of *Closer to China with R.L. Kuhn* on the China Global Television Network. Thanks for being with us.

RLK: Hi Natalie. Interesting day we're having.

HOST: Isn't it, though? So, I guess the first question would be to follow up on your book title, how China's leaders think. What is Xi Jinping thinking with this move?





RLK: First of all, we have to understand it in context. There are twenty-one different clauses in this Constitutional Amendment, and the whole point of it is to strengthen the governance system of China. Now China is a party-state system where the party controls the state. Everyone is focusing on the abolition of term limits, and it is important, but we need to understand the context within this party-state system. In October of 2016, Xi Jinping was made “Core” of the Party, which meant the collective leadership of the past was no longer operative; that X was, in essence, for the Party, the decision maker. Then just this last October at the 19th CPC National Congress, his name was put into the Party Constitution as “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,”... it’s a big phrase.



RLK: But what it means is that Xi is the arbiter of Marxism and party theory. That means in terms of being the Core of the Party and the interpreter of Marxism that gives him ultimate power. He doesn’t even need a formal position when has those two and the Party continues to run the country.

HOST: Is that a good thing? How can it be a good thing for the country when one person has the ultimate power?

RLK: There are two issues. One is how it happened: Now the abolition of presidential term limits coordinates with the Party and military, together the three largest positions. So they’re now coordinated because he already had that power in the Party and the military.





RLK: The other provisions of the Amendment strengthen the party dramatically. And now the question is OK to what ends, what is the result? Now that's a question only history can resolve, but I can only tell you what is being said here in Beijing. There are two general categories. One is that China is in this so-called "New Era", looking forward to the mid-century, 2050, when China is going to move on the center stage of the world, and the vision is for China to be prosperous, strong, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful. A large vision - and the people say only a very strong person can bring this about - so we need that. Second problem is short term. The next three years they talk about three major battles: controlling financial risk, reducing pollution, and ending extreme poverty.



RLK: And because there are interest groups that are opposing the reforms, particularly in state-owned enterprises and the financial sector, etcetera, you need tremendous power. So, with this abolition of term limits, in addition to Xi's Party powers, Xi has continuing power for the foreseeable future, so that people have to realize they either get on the program to reform and to promote rule of law and the things that Xi Jinping wants to do - because they can't outwit or outwait Xi Jinping.

HOST: Right so I understand you explain the interworking's of the Chinese system. But the bottom line is he just now created a dictatorship - and is this good or not good considering he can rule forever? Is this good or not good for the people of China?





RLK: I would say a large majority of the people think it's good to have stable, consistent leadership. Only history will be the final judge, but there are substantial problems when you have one-man rule. I mean it's clear, you're dependent upon the man's physical health. You're hostage to fortune of an individual. You're making this system below them less robust and so if something happens there could be more political turmoil after that. So, look, there are trade-offs. Every system of government has trade-offs. China is going big-time for individual control, consistency, not just for five years or ten years, but now into the foreseeable future. They're setting dates: 2035, maybe as sort of an intermediary date to 2050, with people are looking to achieve.



RLK: And during this time China is putting its fortune on the shoulders of one individual. There's no question about that. And hopefully the people around him will be loyal enough and have enough vision to tell him the truth even if he doesn't like to hear certain things.

HOST: All right. Yes, he certainly has pushed out critics and it will be interesting to see though if this can really be something for the country when you think back to the legend of Mao, etcetera. But we really appreciate you breaking it down for us. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, thank you so much.

RLK: A pleasure.

