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Xi Jinping and the New Politburo Standing Committee Robert Lawrence Kuhn October 25, 2017

HOST: Earlier I spoke with Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a long-term advisor to the Chinese government. He started by telling me how President Xi Jinping has been securing his grip on power.

RLK: President Xi Jinping is the most powerful leader of China since Mao Zedong. That his various titles as general secretary of the party, president of the country, general of the military commission, has been amplified substantially in the last year. A year ago he was pronounced “Core” – c-o-r-e - of the Party which is a very important designation. But the most important event occurred yesterday, actually, when his thought, called “Xi Jinping Thought On Socialism With Chinese Characteristics For A New Era” - that whole phrase - was enshrined into the Party Constitution.





RLK: And both being in the Constitution and being “Core” sets him way above the other senior leaders. Whereas in the past, he was first among equals as general secretary. Now, that is now no longer the case.

HOST: I just want to discuss this point of not having a potential heir there in the lineup. Some analysts are saying that Xi is throwing out the rule book and ensuring that he will stay in power after 2022. What’s your response to that

RLK: This is a very important question because the point really becomes moot, which is what a lot of analysts don’t get. By his name being in the Party Constitution, it doesn’t matter who the titular leader is in the future. He could step down; he could appoint another general secretary - but for the rest of his sentient life he will likely be the arbiter of political thought and decisions, because his name is in the constitution. This is very significant. And now whether he maintains the position as general secretary in 2022 for another term is an open question. But there’s no open question in terms of his overarching authority that will continue.





HOST: Robert, as you say, Xi is now the most powerful leader in China for decades... You know him, you have sat down with him. What does he plan to do with all of that power, domestically and internationally?

RLK: There were fourteen points that are the core of his political thought. I can break it down into maybe four bigger categories. First, is people orientation which is domestic, improve the lives of the people. Second, is the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation to make China a major world power. He talks about China coming to the center stage of the world. It's a long-term process, it's in two stages: 2020 to 2035, and then 2035 to 2050, but the trajectory is there.

RLK: Third, the critical importance of comprehensive reform, which affects everything. It enables China to continue to develop, now stressing quality growth. And the forth, is the overarching importance of the Party in running China. And the importance of renewing the Party with his anti-corruption campaign. So those four elements are the central elements of Xi Jinping's philosophical thinking. There are challenges. China has challenges internally. President Xi talks about that, he doesn't shy away from China's problems - in terms of pollution; in terms of social imbalances; in terms of industrial overcapacity; financial risks in the system, due to off balanced assets – many, many things that are problems they have to deal with. But now it's on Xi. I mean there's no looking to someone else, I mean he's the boss. He has all of the authority.

