



CNN International

Xi Jinping and the 19th CPC National Congress

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October 25, 2017

HOST: My guest is the author of *How China's Leaders Think: The Inside Story of China's Past, Current and Future Leaders*. Robert Lawrence Kuhn is also a longtime advisor to the Chinese government. He comes to us from Beijing, a man who knows this story well. What has Xi Jinping manages to achieve in this congress, and getting his name in the constitution? It's a five-yearly event, but you've said that he has framed the agenda for the next thirty years.

RLK: There's no question about it. This is the most significant political event in decades in China and to understand why, one has to appreciate the significance of political philosophy in China, because it's the foundation of the Party and the Party leads the country.





HOST: And that actually becomes part of the constitution. Is he the world's most powerful leader?

RLK: One can make that argument today. And then the next question is, what is Xi going to do with that power. And it was all laid out in a sixty-five page, thirty-two-thousand character report, which was quite fascinating for those of us who like to follow China. So there's a lot there. People will be analyzing it for some time. There are certainly a lot of problems in China. Xi Jinping knows that; he talks about it. He certainly doesn't downplay it. There are what they call "contradictions" (in their Marxist dialectical materialism). Particularly now, the new principal contradiction is a disparity between what the people need in a broad sense (not just material things) and what they call imbalanced and inadequate development. This means not just pure GDP growth. This means providing for people's wellbeing - from getting rid of pollution to eliminating the lines at major hospitals.

HOST: When you've got so much power in the hands of one man, and there must be risks that come along with that. You know, sure, if you're criticizing him you're criticizing the party, but aren't there risks in having an essentially untouchable leader and the risks to him - pushback perhaps against his corruption purge, having assumed control over all of this domestic and foreign policy, he could find himself the scapegoat if it goes badly at home or abroad.





RLK: Look, those are all relevant factors. No political system in the world is perfect, but certainly the Chinese system for the developmental process has worked well. I would say in the corruption area, which is exceedingly important for Xi Jinping, anti-corruption as well as anti-poverty are major signature policies of his. The risk for him in attacking corruption was more in the past. The consolidation of power would be above the army and the party now is pretty strong that the risk to him from corruption [blowback] is less. But you're right, the ball is in Xi's court: he's the coach and he's the main player. And so what happens to the economy, China's place in the world, its relationship with the U.S., territorial disputes – these are all now on Xi's watch.

HOST: We'll know more when the standing committee members are named - coming up in a few hours. But what if he's not grooming a successor. An analysis by Willy Lam says that Xi and his aids are making plans for him to remain in power, perhaps until 2027. He could revive the position of party chairman. Might Xi be around longer than five years?

RLK: The way I read into it, the overall vision has two goals. One is to 2020, a moderately prosperous society, which obviously takes place within the term of the 19th Party Congress. The second goes to 2050, a modernized, socialist nation, but it's divided into two stages: the first stage is from 2020 to 2035, which basically finishes modernization; the second stage brings common prosperity for all and China's powerful role in the world. By having his name enshrined in the Party Constitution, and being 'Core' of the Party, Xi Jinping will be the leader of China for the rest of his sentient life, irrespective of what title he holds, which may well take us to 2035, to accomplish basic modernization, and even beyond.

