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**BBC Newshour**

**5th Plenum (19th CPC)**

**China and the World**

**COVID-19 Control**

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn**

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**BBC HOST: When the Chinese Communist Party sits for its [5th Plenum of the] 19th Congress on Monday, it will be much to celebrate. Despite having been at the center of the coronavirus outbreak, China seems to have emerged as the first major country on a path towards economic recovery. The country has managed to keep the virus under control, while other major economies, such as the US and the European Union, are obviously still struggling. And while there's criticism of China for allegedly trying to cover up the initial outbreak of the virus, it seems to be an issue that did not become an economic or political deal breaker around the world.**

**BBC HOST: Robert Lawrence Kuhn is a commentator and author on China based in the US. He has advised and worked with China's leaders in Beijing for more than 25 years. I asked him if there was a sense in China that the country had now turned the corner.**

**ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN: I’d say there's cautious optimism. There is a recognition that the world is complex. They say it's changing more now than it has in the last hundred years. There is concern that there is decreasing demand for Chinese goods in terms of the international market and there's increasing sensitivities to China's rise.**

**And so this plenum — it's called a plenum —which is held approximately a little more than one a year between party congresses — is really important in terms of looking into China's future. And so there is confidence that they have controlled — but not eradicated — COVID-19, and a cautious look at the world and a recognition that China has to become more self-sufficient.**

**BBC HOST: Do you think party leaders will be aware that a certain amount of resentment will be aimed at China at the moment, as some see it, for having unleashed this disease on the world and now are in a much more comfortable position than the rest of the world, it seems?**

**KUHN: I think the resentment in the world has been catalyzed by the origination of the virus, but it also embeds a whole host of other kinds of issues, from Xinjiang and Hong Kong to the South China Sea, Taiwan, economic concerns that for a long period of time the playing field has been uneven. That’s a feeling not just in the United States, but in the EU and UK as well. So it is broader than that [COVID-19] and there is recognition in China that that resentment is the case.**

**BBC HOST: And what aspects of self-sufficient Chinese industry do you think the government will want to concentrate on?**

**KUHN: Well, there's no question that they will start with semiconductor chips, with the significant and fierce rivalry with the United States. There's no question the design and manufacturing of chips, which undergird all the frontier technologies: artificial intelligence (AI), 5G, supercomputing, quantum computing, even smartphones for the future — and certainly renewables, material science, new energy vehicles, biotechnology and healthcare, even space science.**

**So while semiconductor chips are the core of all the technologies that will be looking forward — and the country will be investing a huge amount of money, a trillion dollars or even more over time in building this area — there is recognition that this huge amount of money by the government is causing problems and there needs to be caution, because a whole host of companies have now jumped into semiconductors and there have been significant failures and wastes. And therefore, the National Reform and Development Commission has come out with a very specific statement that they will not countenance this, that they want to stop the waste. So they're saying that companies with no experience, no technology, no talent should stop blindingly rushing into the industry.**

**So when you have a plan, there's a lot of benefits to it in terms of government [leadership]. But there are also liabilities because companies will follow the money and therefore not let market forces work.**

**BBC HOST: You stress the party’s caution, I know, but do you think Beijing will be celebrating the fact that autocratic rule seems to have been a key factor in its having largely curbed the pandemic, instructing people what to do and getting compliance?**

**KUHN: It's a complex question because the system in China is unquestionably more successful in getting compliance, as you said, from making it a draconian lockdown, a harsh lockdown, where police were stationed in front of apartment buildings — and if you didn't have a certificate to go out twice a week to get food for your family, you could be put in jail. If you weren't wearing a mask, you could be fined significantly or detained. So, the authoritarian system that has worked for this type of event.**

**However, there is recognition, not publicly but privately, that the same system, the same autocratic system that enabled the control of the virus was also, at least in part, responsible for a delay in information reaching Beijing and being able to stop it at its early stages.**

**BBC HOST: That was [Robert] Lawrence Kuhn, a commentator and a leading authority on China in the US. This is the BBC World Service.**

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**Starting at ~10:00**