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2023 Two Sessions – President Xi Jinping

Robert Lawrence Kuhn, March 3, 2023

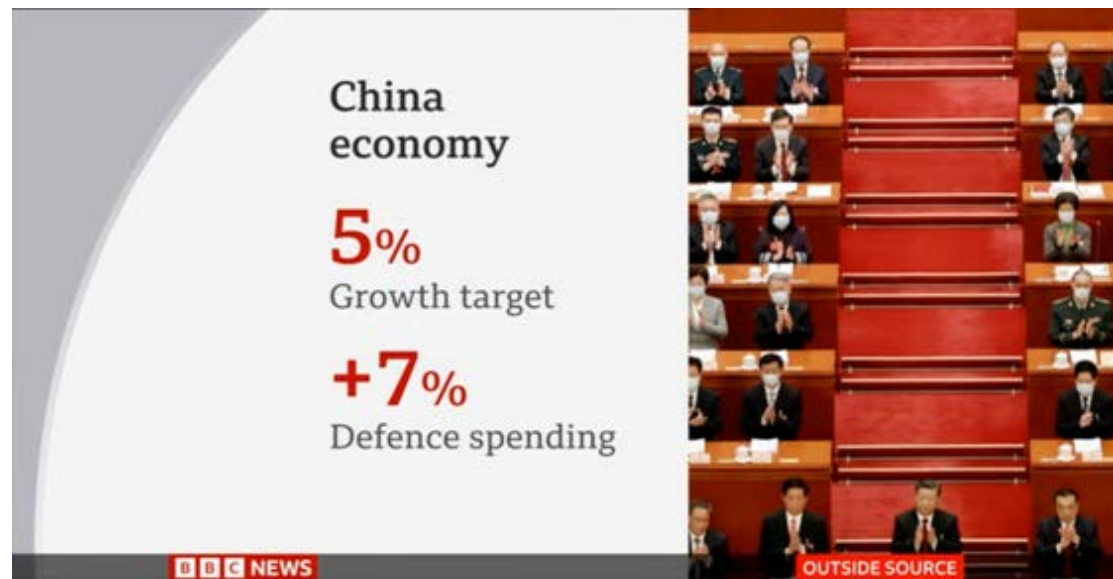


BBC WORLD NEWS HOST:
Lawmakers meet in Beijing to pass far reaching reforms. This will involve Two Sessions with representatives of the Communist Party. And the National People's Congress is expected to confirm Xi Jinping's third term as president and the appointments of his top team. Now this comes as President Xi faces domestic pressure to turn around an economy battered by his zero COVID strategy. Beijing says it will also pursue a reduced economic growth target of around 5% this year, while defense spending is to rise by more than 7% abroad. Meanwhile, Xi is navigating worsening ties with the US over the Ukraine war and the recent spy balloon saga.



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BBC HOST: Well, let's discuss all of these points with Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a China political and economics analyst. Welcome. In terms of Xi Jinping himself, it feels like that he is now in situ for the long term. In terms of just China itself—the situation he has at home—what does he need to focus in on post that rather well disastrous zero COVID policy that he implemented?



ROBERT
LAWRENCE KUHN:

First of all, President Xi's position is absolute and has been since the 20th CPC National Congress last October, which confirmed his third term as Party secretary, which is really where the power is, as well as head of the military commission. "President" is an honorary title. It's important title, but it is largely symbolic in China.



KUHN: Xi's leadership has been a long process. What has been established is called the "Two Establishments": Establishing Xi Jinping as the core of the Party, which basically means that his views outweigh everyone else's put together. The second establishment is that his theory is now the guiding ideology of the Party and becomes its fundamental basis. So, it doesn't matter what position he has—even though he does have all three top positions—he will still run the country.



KUHN: What's happening now at these Two Sessions, in National People's Congress, is the putting in of the government to implement the policies that were set by the Party at the Congress in October. Normally these sessions are annual, looking back at the previous year, looking ahead to the next year. But this time, because of the long term vision that President Xi has, it's looking ahead literally twelve years to 2035, and most important, 25 plus years to mid-century 2049, which is the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.



KUHN: So what this Two Sessions will see the team in place, the economic team, the people whom Xi has chosen, people he has worked with a long time. This is particularly true of the premier, now in waiting, who will be confirmed in a few days—Li Qiang, who is very pro business. He has run three of the most powerful economic areas of China: Zhejiang Province as governor, Party Secretary of Jiangsu province: Party Secretary of the municipality of Shanghai. The three together would constitute roughly the fifth largest country in the world in terms of GDP.



KUHN: So Xi is putting this team together. They have a Herculean task: They have the economy; they have headwinds in the economy in terms of turning it around, particularly people's expectations — people are not consuming because they're a little gun shy because of what's happened over the last three years. There's a lot of debt: local government has a lot of debt. The Two Sessions are dealing with that in terms of special purpose bonds. So, there are a lot of issues that are going on domestically and then, of course, we have all the international tensions.



BBC HOST: Such a shame — we are just out of time for all the international tensions, but Robert Lawrence Kuhn, China political and economics analyst, we're going to have to get you back on again to discuss that as well. Thank you for your expertise. So much to discuss.

