

#1524 An Historic, World-Shaping Election, Of Sorts (China, Xi Jinping)

[00:00:00] Intro 11-8-22

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast, in which we should take a look at the life and times of China's president, Xi Jinping, and his rise to be China's first non-term-limited president, who also, not coincidentally, has a bit of an authoritarian streak.

Clips today are from *Democracy Now!*, *Today, Explained*, *Consider This*, the *PBS NewsHour* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, with additional members-only clips from *Today, Explained* and *Democracy Now!*.

And while I have your attention, please consider setting your pod-catching app to notify you every time we release a new episode so you don't miss any.

China Under Xi Jinping From Human Rights Concerns to Inter-Capitalist Competition with U.S. - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-25-22

AMY GOODMAN: We begin today's show looking at China, where Xi Jinping has begun a historic third term as head of the Chinese Communist Party. The decision came over the weekend during the Party's congress which is held every five years. There was also a major shakeup of the seven member Politburo Standing Committee, which is China's most powerful political body. China's premier, Li Keqiang, [00:01:00] longtime rival to Xi, was demoted while four Xi loyalists were promoted. The Party's top official in Shanghai, Li Qiang, appears set to become China's new premier. He is a close ally of Xi. He oversaw the harsh COVID crackdown in Shanghai that lasted months.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment of the Chinese Communist Party's Congress came when former President, Hu Jintao, was abruptly escorted out of the closing ceremony. He had been sitting right next to Xi Jinping when two men came to escort him from his seat. Some analysts speculated the move was an

assertion of Xi's dominance. Chinese state media later said it was because the former leader was not feeling well.

We turn now to look more closely at the future of China as Xi Jinping begins a third term. Under Xi, China has continued a decades-long effort to eradicate extreme poverty. Some 800 million people have been lifted out of [00:02:00] poverty over the past four decades in what UN Secretary General António Guterres has called "the greatest anti-poverty achievement in history." But Xi has also overseen a growing surveillance state to silence dissent and target ethnic minorities, including the Uyghurs. And Xi's third term comes at a time of growing tension between the U.S. and China over Taiwan and other issues.

We go now to two guests. Yaqiu Wang is Senior China Researcher at Human Rights Watch. She is in New York. And in Baltimore, Maryland, we are joined by Ho-fung Hung, Professor of Political Economy and Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. His books include *Clash of Empires: From 'Chimerica' to the 'New Cold War'* and *The China Boom: Why China Will Not Rule the World*. We welcome you both to Democracy Now! Thanks so much for joining us. Professor Ho-fung Hung, let's begin with you. Talk about the significance of what happened this [00:03:00] weekend. Talk about who Xi Jinping is and how his policies have changed over the years.

HO-FUNG HUNG: My pleasure to be here. Thank you. What happened over the weekend is very significant, though we actually expected it to come for a while, because in 2018 Xi Jinping managed to abolish the two five-year term limit of the Chinese presidents. That is a term limit that Deng Xiaoping led to impose in the Chinese Constitution in the 1980s, because after the Cultural Revolution, Deng and the Communist Party leaders think that it is not good to have lifelong leader; it is good to have check and balance within the party. Xi Jinping managed to take away this term limit, so that not like his predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang [00:04:00] Zemin, who each served two five-year terms as president of China, Xi can now theoretically serve unlimited term, until he dies, and he can be a lifelong leader of China.

This kind of abolition of the term limit as a legacy of the Deng Xiaoping era is significant. It was done in 2018 but people didn't believe that all the party elite will let him actually do it to have another, the third, five-year term, but he managed to do it. He has just proven over the weekend that he managed to do it. Not only that, but also he managed to put all of his own loyalists, absolute loyalists, in the Politburo Standing Committee. So the people from other factions, for example, some people who [inaudible] to be in the Politburo Standing Committee or the Politburo who belong to the Hu Jintao, the previous

president faction, were not there. So it seems that in the next five years at [00:05:00] least, Xi Jinping will establish his own absolute personal control of everything in China without much check and balance within the party.

AMY GOODMAN: Talk about what happened this weekend. Do you think that was deliberately staged to remove the former leader sitting next to Xi Jinping, as a message that he was consolidating his power? Or in fact do you think it is what China said, what the government said, that he wasn't feeling well?

HO-FUNG HUNG: In these kind of carefully choreographed rituals of the Communist Party, it is unimaginable that this is an accident or incident that is totally out of nowhere. Of course there is a possibility that he actually felt unwell, but now more video footage emerged from the Spanish and the Singaporean TV showing what happened [00:06:00] before former President Hu Jintao was escorted away from the Congress, and it didn't seem like he is unwell at all. It appears in the video footage that he tried to open a folder with some documents and Li Zhanshu, who is sitting next to him, tried to prevent him from looking at the document and seized the folder, and then Xi Jinping called somebody to come and take him away. Initially, he appeared to be reluctant to leave. Then the guards and the person behind Hu Jintao seems to be using some kind of force to take him away and then he eventually left the Congress reluctantly. After he decided to leave, and he walked quite fast, and then he can walk on his own, and it didn't seem to me that he is actually really feeling unwell. I don't think it is the real reason that he left.

Then, [00:07:00] why Xi Jinping called somebody to escort him or even really forcefully take him away from the Congress? I think Xi Jinping's move is carefully considered and calculated to show that he can do whatever he wants, and he can even take out a former president from the Congress in front of the camera. Of course people are speculating, and I think it is reasonable to suppose so, that Hu Jintao might not be very happy about the so-called election result of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee without any of his loyalists there, and Xi Jinping might worry that he might give a face or not raising hands or not clapping hands in the final section, so it is a possibility that Xi Jinping deliberately asked somebody to take him out to prevent this embarrassment.

**Made in China Part 1 - Today, Explained -
Air Date 10-14-22**

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: When do we start to see hints of his authoritarian tendencies?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Well, [00:08:00] it's hard to say when they began or if they were always there. But in the kind of written record, I think some of the first signs we have comes from when he moved to Fujian in southern China, the province across from Taiwan. And there he is a leader of a small town at the time when you have the Tiananmen Square protests. Students everywhere are excited about the idea of China changing.

ROGER SMITH, REPORTER: <CTV CLIP> Protesters stressed that they're not denouncing the Communist Party, but insisted they'll keep marching until officials agree on ongoing negotiations, to more open local elections, and to fair coverage of the protests in local media.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: And so at this time, Xi Jinping is dealing with the local offshoots of these protests.

WU'ER KAIXI, DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST: <CLIP> In the 80s, the whole country felt the hope and then the promises [00:09:00] by the government.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: There are some students who want to come in from a neighboring province to sort of protest at the larger city nearby. And he prevents them from doing that. You know, a lot of people are arrested. It's hard to say how many Xi Jinping was directly involved in. But certainly he would have to some extent managed the crackdown locally. He says that censorship is actually something that every country does and, to an extent, it's a good thing. And so you really get this sense that even then, even when he was a lowly official and he didn't really have any stake in it, that he was out to defend the party center.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: And is this how he goes from being a lowly official to a not so lowly official?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Right, exactly. So he proves himself a number of times. He seems to be pretty tough on corruption. He also is someone who does a reasonably good [00:10:00] job of pushing China's market reforms involved in free trade zones being set up in Fujian. You know, he's someone who manages to start to meld the economic reform with quite a stern approach to any dissent. And so that model, which we now see kind of continuing to today, it sort of runs throughout his career.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: And is there any sense when he enters office in 2012 that he could potentially be China's first ever president for life?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Well, one of the strange things about what has happened over the last decade is that when he came into power, a lot of outside observers thought he was probably going to be a reformer.

And one of the reasons they thought this is they looked at his father, who seemed to be, you know, by the standards of the time, a relative reformer. He had pushed economic reforms in southern China and Deng Xiaoping. And they looked at Xi's own [00:11:00] record. He had, you know, launched free trade zones and had encouraged private business. And they thought, okay, China is pretty open now. They just hosted the Summer Olympics. We just had this power transition that went pretty smoothly. Maybe this is a time when things will change. But pretty soon afterwards Xi Jinping showed everyone to be wrong.

Almost immediately he launches this huge anti-corruption campaign and he goes after not just kind of low level corruption, but some of the top people in the party. In fact, the most senior person who has ever been taken down falls within Xi's first couple of years in office, the former head of public security, Zhou Yongkang.

DAVID MACKENZIE, CORRESPONDENT: <CNN CLIP> At a secret trial in northeast China, Zhou was convicted for bribery, [00:12:00] abuse of power and leaking national secrets.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: And then in pretty short order, he cracks down on civil society. He begins this series of political reforms – trying, forcing people to start memorizing more kind of party jargon and slogans, these study sessions. And in 2016, he's designated the core leader of the party, which is a title that hasn't existed for about two decades.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: Is it that kind of consolidation of power that allows him to clamp down on the Uighur population in China?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: It's part of it. But for Xi Jinping really stability and unity are just absolutely key.

In Xinjiang, there have been a series of violent incidents.

SANAM SHANTYAEI, REPORTER: <FRANCE24 CLIP> First it was a deadly explosion at this train station. Then assailants slashed at arriving passengers with [00:13:00] knives.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: There have been calls for kind of greater autonomy. And he's kind of worried that this is going to start fracturing, start spiraling.

SANAM SHANTYAEI, REPORTER: <FRANCE24 CLIP> Soon after China's official broadcaster, quoting the President, blamed the country's separatists.

NEWSCASTER: We must recognize the long term, complex and acute nature of the struggle between separatism and anti-separatism in Xinjiang.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: It could be something that could spread to other regions—inner Mongolia, Tibet obviously has always been a deep concern for the party. So he kind of comes in and says, you know, Enough with this, we cannot accept this dissent, and brands it as extremism and launches, you know, reeducation campaign in Xinjiang.

What A Third Term For Xi Jinping Could Mean For China And The World - Consider This - Air Date 10-19-22

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: Ten years ago in his first speech as the leader of the world's most populous nation and second largest economy, Xi Jinping talked about the great revival of the Chinese Nation. [Address [00:14:00] in Chinese] Under his leadership, Xi said, China would stand more firmly and powerfully and make a greater contribution to mankind. Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti was paying close attention.

JEWHER ILHAM: He sounded so sad. It's like, I think it's gonna change now. Things are gonna get better.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: That's Tohti's daughter, Jewher Ilham. She says her father was optimistic that things would improve for Uyghurs, the Turkic-speaking ethnic minority living in China's western region of Xinjiang. Tohti is an outspoken activist for Uyghur rights, but his high hopes for Xi Jinping didn't last long.

JEWHER ILHAM: He was officially arrested January 15th, 2014.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: Three months later, Xi would visit Xinjiang and secretly set in motion an unprecedented crackdown on Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the name of fighting terrorism and separatism.

By some estimates, a million or more people would eventually be detained. That [00:15:00] September, Ilham Tohti was sentenced to life in prison for separatism.

JEWHER ILHAM: It's kind of sad that he was so hopeful.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: In the 10 years since Xi first came to power, China has been marked by growing authoritarianism. But Xi has also faced challenges. His tough zero COVID policy included strict lockdowns that sparked rare protests and weakened the Chinese economy. Relations with the US have deteriorated sharply, in part because of tensions over the status of Taiwan. Xi has also cultivated a close relationship with Russia's Vladimir Putin, even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine -- not a particularly popular move on the global stage. But as Chinese politics expert Joseph Torigan puts it:

JOSEPH TORIGIAN: The Chinese Communist Party is not a popularity contest.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: And even if it were, it's hard to gauge public opinion in China. Independent polling on politics is banned and speaking out against the Communist Party can get [00:16:00] you thrown in jail. Plus Xi Jinping does have a lot of support in the country from people like Lao Zhong, a retired factory worker who've seen a lot of change in China over his 72 years.

LAO ZHONG: Xi Jinping is a good man. I think he's honest and upright.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: According to Zhong, that's key in today's China. He applauds Xi for attacking corruption, tackling poverty, and trying to create more equality. And he praises him for unapologetically standing up for China on the international stage.

LAO ZHONG: We want him to stay in office and have at least one more term. He's good.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: The world got a glimpse of what a third term with Xi Jinping in power could mean for China moving forward. During a nearly two hour speech he delivered on the opening day of this year's Communist Party congress, Xi echoed his words from a decade ago, saying that now is a historical opportunity [00:17:00] for China to raise its standing and influence in the world. He once again defended his aggressive zero COVID policy, and he hinted at further pressure on unification with Taiwan, saying "We reserve the option of taking all measures necessary."

He also warned of dangerous storms facing China. Yun Sun is a senior fellow and co-director of the East Asia Program and director of the China program at the Stimson Center. She says ominous warnings like that aren't unusual for Xi Jinping.

YUN SUN: Because that's actually part of the government tactics or his leadership techniques, which is to warn the people of the dangers that China is in and then showcase to the people that "I am your best option. I can lead you out of this obstacle and I can lead you out of this difficult times." So it is more of a leadership legitimization.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: Yun Sun foresees a bolder Xi Jinping in the near future. She spoke to my colleague Elsa Chang, [00:18:00] about what a third Xi term says about his hold over the Chinese Communist Party now.

YUN SUN: It means that China has entered a new era and it's really a piece of uncharted water compared to what we have seen in the past four decades. In the past four decades per the 1982 Constitution, we knew that for sure China had a power transition plan for the leadership. So every 10 years there is going to be a new leader and there is a consensus-building process in terms of the selection of that leader.

But now by abandoning that practice and that tradition, Xi Jinping's third term means that we don't know what the future leadership transition in China will look like, or how it will be determined. And that raises a lot of potential for instability or even power struggle and elite politics competition within the Chinese Communist Party.

AILSAS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: And what's interesting is it has been a relatively politically trickier time for Xi Jinping lately, right? Like can you talk about the effect that the [00:19:00] zero COVID policy and the resulting economic slowdown in China has had on Xi's influence?

YUN SUN: Yes, indeed. 2022 has not been a good year for Xi Jinping, and especially if you consider the power transition and the third term that he has had his eyes on. 2022 is a terrible year. The Russian war in Ukraine also created a lot of uncertainty as well as embarrassment for China in terms of Xi Jinping's foreign policy. People ask questions that, how did you reach that "no limit cooperation" commitment with Putin. Did you know that Putin was going to invade Ukraine within three weeks of that joint statement?

So this year has really been hard for Xi Jinping because he has to explain, despite all these hardships and all these strategic headwinds that we have encountered this year, I still deserve a third term. My leadership is still warranted. My leadership is still the best option for the party and for the Chinese people.

The party Congress is celebrated [00:20:00] and Chinese people just hope that well, let's conclude this party Congress, so that we can move forward, we can reduce some of the COVID-related restrictions and we can resume normal economic and social activities.

AILS CHANG - HOST, CONSIDER THIS: I want to talk further about the global implications of a third term for Xi Jinping. What does his holding onto power mean specifically for US-China relations, in your mind?

YUN SUN: I think it means three things. The first one is that with Xi Jinping inking his third term at the party Congress, which means moving forward, he's not going to be distracted by this domestic political priority anymore.

In the past five years, Xi Jinping was aiming for the third term, but he had to prioritize how to convince the establishment within the party and convince the elderly leaders why it is a good idea to remove the term limit and why it is a good idea for him to violate the traditions that had been established.

So moving forward, he's no longer [00:21:00] going to be distracted by this political agenda, which is domestic primarily. So he's able to focus even more on implementing his foreign strategy and operationalizing his vision of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. That inevitably will lead to even more, I would say, contest for influence and contest for leadership, contest for superiority with the United States.

And the other two factors within the party after the 20th party Congress and Xi Jinping secures his third term, he is going to appoint his political confidants and his political loyalists to all the key positions that are related to national security

and the foreign policy, because this is actually one of the areas compared to, for example, domestic reform and domestic economic policy. This is an area that Xi Jinping is going to prevail. These people are going to operationalize his vision and his strategy with [00:22:00] even more momentum and more precision.

And that leads us to the third factor, which is dissenting views. And the people who do not believe that Xi Jinping's current, for example, policy towards the United States is a good idea. Their voices are going to be eliminated from within the bureaucracy. So there is not going to be checks and balances. There's not going to be a challenge to the assumptions and to the existing consensus within the bureaucracy. And these three factors are all going to, I believe, deepen Xi Jinping's boldness.

China Under Xi Jinping From Human Rights Concerns to Inter-Capitalist Competition with U.S. Part 2 - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-25-22

AMY GOODMAN: Professor Ho-fung Hung, Xi's human rights record, what that means and your assessment of his rule and the effect he has had on the Chinese people? And your response to the U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres talking about this what he called monumental taking on—largest anti-poverty [00:23:00] program in history?

HO-FUNG HUNG: Definitely Xi Jinping, like his predecessor Hu Jintao, is kind of a brutal repressor of human rights. It's not that human rights violations started with Xi Jinping. Actually in the Jiang Zemin era, in the Hu Jintao era, we already see a lot of crackdowns in the Han majority area and also the non-Han minority regions. But Xi just raised it to a new level as we now are very much aware of. What happened to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, it is happening under Xi Jinping's watch.

So in terms of the repression of human rights, the Communist Party, whether it is collective leadership or it is a one-man dictatorship, it has been pretty much the same. What Xi Jinping brought in something new compared to the Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin era is that he even cracked down brutally on his allies, [00:24:00] his other elite within the Communist Party. Because after Xi Jinping became the president, he launched an anti-corruption campaign. Then many elites, even senior officials and private business people, disappeared or mysteriously commit suicide or taken to jail under the name of anticorruption

campaign. Many people would see that it is not exactly anti-corruption campaign; it is more like a purge. In China nowadays, not only dissidents and minorities are afraid, but also some elites and middle-class.

Also Xi Jinping doubled down on expanding the state sectors, state companies, and making private companies and foreign companies' life more difficult in making money in China and keeping their wealth and jeopardizing their private property as well. In the next five [00:25:00] years at the very least, this kind of draconian policy that I'd call some kind of a North Koreanization of China politics and economy, is going to double down and is going to get even worse.

AMY GOODMAN: Yaqiu Wang, the significance of Li Qiang? A longtime rival to Xi, he is demoted, while his loyalist Li Qiang looks like he is about to be China's new premier. You mentioned the crackdown in Shanghai but talk about the significance of the COVID crackdown, what it actually felt and looked like in this massive city.

YAQIU WANG: It lasted from April to June, for two months that a city of 20 million people are confined to their homes. As a result, people had huge difficulties to have food delivered to them and access to hospitals. I've heard [00:26:00] stories from people whose parents had a heart attack or other emergency and they could not leave their apartment complex, or even if they managed to leave their apartment complex, they couldn't actually get into the hospital. So there are people who died as a result of the lack of access to hospital facilities. Then there were the people who had no food. Then there were the people who lost their jobs and they couldn't pay to get food delivered. So the human rights violations associated with this draconian lockdown was massive. Then it ended, and the people say Li Qiang, the Party secretary of Shanghai, is ultimately responsible for this, and now this guy was promoted. So we can see Xi is rewarding people who were loyal to his policy rather than rewarding people who are good for the public.

AMY GOODMAN: [00:27:00] Professor Ho-fung Hung, relations with China are, if not at an all-time low, extremely bad right now. I am wondering if you can comment on what is taking place. In one of the pieces you wrote, you said the dynamics of U.S.-China rivalry is an inter-imperial rivalry driven by inter-capitalist competition. Competition for the world market could soon turn into intensifying clashes of spheres of influence and even war. So you're not talking about the difference of ideologies. In fact you're talking about a similar capitalist ideology.

HO-FUNG HUNG: Yes, indeed. I myself am not quite supportive of the framing of the U.S.-China rivalry as a new Cold War. It is a catchphrase used a lot of time nowadays, indicating that the difference [00:28:00] between China and U.S. is fundamentally ideological and political. I think of course that this difference is real. It's very true; there's a large difference, but it is not a necessary and sufficient conditions that lead to this rivalry between the U.S. and China today. Because right after the 1989 massacre, human rights is already a huge concern about China in the discussion in the U.S., and many people are already very unhappy about what is going on in China with regard to human rights... and Tibet, Xinjiang. It is an old problem, but in the 1990s, U.S.-China relations get more and more harmonious regardless of this human rights difference and political system difference.

What is different now in comparison to the 1990s and 2000s is that back in the 1990s and 2000s, transnational corporations, American corporations, they are very happy making money in China. They have a good time in China, and so they don't [00:29:00] care about human rights, they don't care about labor rights, they don't care about all kind of political difference between U.S. and China. But so far as they are making big money, they are finding it very profitable in China, so they lobby the U.S. government, the U.S. Congress, to have a more amicable and harmonious relation with China. Whenever there is a concern about labor rights, human rights violation in China, in the Congress, they will lobby against those bills, in the 1990s and 2000s. So the U.S. corporations have been kind of ambassadors of the Chinese government to soften U.S. policy on China, even though geopolitically and in terms of human rights, political system, and ideology, there is already a vast difference.

What happened around 2010 is that the China economy started to lose steam. Their economic pie no longer expanded that fast. [00:30:00] Then the U.S. corporation market share in China started to stagnate or even decline, because the Chinese government is helping the Chinese state enterprise and Chinese private enterprise to expand the market share in China and around the world in the Belt and Road countries, at the expense of U.S. corporations. So it is the turning point.

U.S. corporations rarely individually voiced their concerns about this business environment in China. Of course there's also other problems like intellectual property theft and unfair competition and unfair enforcement of regulations, so on and so forth. They don't voice this concern individually but in the survey, the anonymous survey conducted by for example American Chamber of Commerce in China, and US-China Business Council and all these kinds of business associations in the U.S. all show the American business in China situation is

deteriorating. They are looking for diversifying their investment, and [00:31:00] they are no longer eager to lobby in the names of Chinese interests.

This is why the geopolitical difference between U.S. and China, human rights and political difference between U.S. and China can now prevail and influence largely the direction of U.S.-China policy. Fundamentally, it is a kind of inter-capitalist competition between U.S. corporations and China corporations in the Chinese market and in the Belt and Road and all the developing countries' markets that lead to this deterioration of U.S.-China relations.

Made in China Part 2 - Today, Explained - Air Date 10-14-22

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: When exactly is it that the world comes to know XI is not just a very powerful dude, but a human rights violator?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: It starts probably around 2015 when there's a mass crackdown on human rights lawyers.

Hundreds of people overnight are detained, arrested. Many of them later end up with lengthy prison [00:32:00] sentences.

REPORTER: <CHANNEL 4 NEWS CLIP> China put its state police on display as the show trial of its best known human rights lawyer got underway inside Beijing #2 Intermediate People's Court.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: And then after that, you just start to see that this isn't a one off. This is a trend. We have the crackdown in Xinjiang.

GULCHERA HOJA: <WSJ CLIP> Any Uighur family you can ask, have someone in the camp right now—maybe whole family.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: The crackdown in Hong Kong.

JAMES LONGMAN, REPORTER: <ABC NEWS CLIP> This morning, thousands of protesters on Hong Kong's streets clashing with riot police. Barriers torn down, rubber bullets and tear gas fired into the chaos.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: It's very clear that Xi is determined as much as possible not to let any of these grassroots movements, whether it's rights activism or distinct ethnic identity, from challenging his grip on power.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: And this essentially works, right? Nothing really stops him, because in 2018, [00:33:00] despite human rights abuses and consolidating power, China ends term limits, setting Xi up to do what he's doing right now, to become president for life, to extend his terms more than anyone has before him.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Xi Jinping has done a pretty good job of building up a base of legitimacy. So his anti-corruption campaign was helping to gather power, that dealt with a lot of the kind of petty corruption that was really impacting people's lives on an everyday basis. He also had a huge push to deal with extreme poverty, which was declared successful. He's kind of made China look strong on a global stage. He's not shied away from conflicts with the U.S. or other countries. I mean, nationalism is a great way of building your support in any country.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: <CLIP> We cannot continue to allow China to rape our country. And that's what they're doing.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: You know, he's a real populist leader. And [00:34:00] so, yes, I think people are concerned, but they don't necessarily think that he's doing a bad job.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: Until... the global pandemic, Covid-19.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: At the start of 2020, it looked like it was a big, big issue. Xi kind of disappeared for a while. And then he reappears and imposes, you know, the strictest lockdown that, at the time, you have to remember, this wasn't something that had happened globally that, you know, had ever been done before. This was a huge, huge thing. People also started to ask questions about whether or not Xi's mode of governance, where so much decision making powers in his own hands, had slowed down the response. You know, the local officials weren't acting fast enough. So it really seemed like it was going to undermine his power or at least be a black mark. But pretty quickly, China turns things around, and that's one of the kind of [00:35:00] amazing things about what Xi's been able to do as a leader, is he was able to build this narrative of, Look, we have a model that works. Yes, people made sacrifices, but ultimately those sacrifices allowed us to achieve zero-covid. So for for many, many

months, China was having basically no cases on a day to day basis. And at the same time, the rest of the world, as we all know, was struggling with, you know, huge outbreaks. So Xi was able to flip the narrative and to say, Look, we have a system that works. And, yes, maybe it stumbles occasionally, but we get it back on track.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: As Xi enters his third term, as he becomes maybe the most powerful leader in the world and certainly the most powerful leader in China since Mao Zedong, in earnest, how much does his version of, you know, [00:36:00] consolidated power look like the last time China saw it, in Mao Zedong?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: There are some similarities and I think bigger differences. So Mao Zedong was really a revolutionary leader. He came to power through political infighting and then a civil war. He then tried to keep power with these really kind of drastic steps, including launching the Cultural Revolution, which kind of handed power over to the people in a way that Xi Jinping would just never do. So Xi is much more cautious. His power has been built by centralizing the institutions of control that the party has had for a long time and making sure that he has a firm hold of the levers of power. So he is kind of working within the system. Building it around himself, whereas [00:37:00] Mao would go around it on a fairly regular basis. But in some ways they are similar because I think in the collective memory of the Party, in the way that it talks about itself, Xi Jinping is trying to kind of continue where Mao left off. So Mao founded the nation and now Xi Jinping is trying to make it great again. And so he has this phrase where China has stood up, which was what Mao said, and then it got rich, which is what Deng Xiaoping made happen with reform, and now it's getting strong. And that's the kind of new era that Xi Jinping is trying to take charge of so that he can have a legacy which is on par with Mao's.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: You know, this idea that he might be now the most powerful person in the world goes hand in hand with wanting to change the world. What do you think Xi wants to do [00:38:00] internationally with all of his power?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Well, I think the key thing he wants to do is return China to a position of being one of, if not the strongest, nations on earth and being kind of entirely safe from any form of disruption to its hold on that position.

PRESIDENT XI JINPING: <BBC CLIP> At the same time, the Chinese people will never allow any foreign forces to bully, oppress, or enslave us. Anyone who dares to try to do that will have their heads bashed bloodied against the Great Wall of Steel, forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: You know, they talk a lot in China, in the history books about a century of humiliation when China was invaded and they had the Opium Wars and you had this great downfall. [00:39:00] But then the Communist Party came and put the nation back on track. And now we are bringing about this great rejuvenation.

JOHN SUDWORTH, REPORTER: <BBC CLIP> The unmistakable hallmarks of Communist Party rule were front and center of its celebrations. The total control. The omnipotent leader. The unquestioning loyalty.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: And so to make that happen, Xi Jinping needs a world where the model, the political model, he's creating is not just accepted but kind of believed in globally by a number of partners. You know, you see the partnership with Russia. You see them building various relationships across the global south. So I think it's really trying to create a version of the global order where it's okay to be an [00:40:00] authoritarian leader like Xi Jinping.

Chinese President Xi tightens grip on authority amid fears of a return to one-man politics - PBS NewsHour - Air Date 10-14-22

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: The ride is bumpy, but the surroundings are pristine with fields brimming with crops. This is the village of Liangjiahe, considered a living shrine to China's leader. As a teenager, Xi Jinping was sent here under Mao Zedong's campaign to reeducate privileged urban youths. He spent seven years in the village, deep in rural Shaanxi province, living in caves carved out of the hills.

In one of them, a case displaying books Xi is said to have read. In another, posters of modern China's founding father.

FRANCOIS BOUGON: It was very hard time.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Francois Bougon is a former Beijing correspondent and author of *Inside The Mind of Xi Jinping*. He says Xi's time in Liangjiahe formed the foundations of his future.

FRANCOIS BOUGON: The years in Liangjiahe is used right now in his [00:41:00] political career. You can say he's a man of the people, a down to earth man, and not only the son of revolutionary red aristocrat.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Xi's father suffered as a result of Mao Zedong's purge of potential rivals and in Liangjiahe the younger Xi endured hard labor. But far from turning against China's communist party. He embraced it. In Mao, he saw a role model.

FRANCOIS BOUGON: He's the first leader since the death of Mao in 1976 to acknowledge the legacy of Mao without reservation. He follows Mao in the way he governs the party. The cult of personality, it's very Mao style.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Now as the twice-a-decade party Congress nears, Xi is expected to take a step closer to emulating his political hero. Having scrapped presidential term limits in 2018, he's paved the way for a historic third five-year term as leader. [00:42:00]

And Xi's quest for power could extend well beyond that, with many political analysts believing like Mao, he intends to rule for life.

But it comes as the country faces mounting challenges under the 69-year-old Xi Jinping's leadership. Ongoing and frequent lockdowns across the country under his signature zero COVID policy have taken a heavy toll.

The International Monetary Fund this week cut its growth forecast for China this year to 3.2%, its weakest expansion in more than four decades, excluding the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. Earlier this year, authorities warned of action against any criticism of the country's COVID policies. But there are plenty of signs of people cracking.

This COVID testing booth was spotted recently sprayed with graffiti saying, "Give me freedom or give me death."

Alfred Wu is an associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

ALFRED WU: Lots of people were locked at home for [00:43:00] months, and lots of mental health issue. Now youth unemployment rate is very, very high, almost 20%.

So basically is some sort of failure in China. But Chinese leadership, particularly under Xi Jinping, insist this is the approach he want to adopt.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: China's two term limit was established in 1982 by the reformist leader who followed Mao, Deng Xiaoping, to avoid the kind of chaos that can occur under a single authoritarian leader.

ALFRED WU: Deng Xiaoping's reform try to tackle this issue. Deng Xiaoping want more check and balance, because they knew that Mao Zedong made a lot of mistakes.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: There were more than mistakes. Tens of millions of people died as a result of Mao's failed economic policies, and his Cultural Revolution that led to brutal purges of national and horrific scale. He was China's unchallenged revolutionary leader for more than three decades.[00:44:00]

As part of the shake up of China's leadership at the Party Congress, political scientists like Wu Qiang expect Xi loyalists will replace outgoing members of China's top policy-making body, the Politburo Standing Committee, giving him a level of control unseen since the days of Mao.

WU QIANG: A drastic change is happening with CCPs ruling approach, turning from an authoritarian system of market economy and globalization that's been running since 1992 to a totalitarian system. This totalitarian system is a new change for China's future and for the world. It's a fundamental change.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Under Xi, China's relationship with the West has become particularly fraught. His declaration of no-limits partnership with Russia's Vladimir Putin just weeks before his invasion of Ukraine drew international criticism. It's raised questions also at home.

Xu Qinduo is a senior fellow at the Pangoal Institute.[00:45:00]

XU QINDUO: Chinese principle is like respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. So some of the behaviors, some of the policies of Russia is not really in line with the Chinese principle.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Rising nationalism fueled by Xi's assertive foreign policy is also strained China's image. According to Pew Research, some 82% of Americans now have a negative view of China.

WU QIANG: China's sense of insecurity and distrust towards international society results in international society's suspicions and distrust towards China. As China closes its borders, it ends up in a confrontational and contradictory relationship with the international community.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: Meanwhile, China's ambitions for national rejuvenation and, some say, global supremacy by 2049, when it marks the centenary of the People's Republic have been dealt a fresh blow after the Biden administration rolled out sweeping [00:46:00] regulations to limit Chinese access to semiconductors. It could crimp its ability to develop swathes of its economy. It's seen as the most aggressive action by President Biden yet to prevent China from developing technology that could pose a threat.

It prompted an angry response from Beijing.

MAO NING - CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON: In order to maintain the hegemony of science and technology, the United States abused export control measures and maliciously blocked and suppressed Chinese enterprises. This approach deviates from the principle of fair competition and violates international, economic and trade rules.

PATRICK FOK - CORRESPONDENT, PBS NEWSHOUR: But even without that, the upcoming political gathering has fueled debate over whether one man should dominate this massive country, and if it should turn away from the collective leadership that's transformed China into a powerhouse over the last four decades.

Xi Jinping - Last Week Tonight with John Oliver - Air Date 6-18-18

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: We reached the point of the story that you kind of knew was coming because so far everything that I've shown you is what Xi dada wants you to know about China, but [00:47:00] there is a lot of troubling stuff under the surface, for instance, uh, conveniently for Xi, some of those swept up in the corruption purge were his political rivals and those accused were often funneled into a system that's been described as a secretive extralegal process where interrogators seek to extract confessions sometimes through torture. And it's worth knowing that those term limits that he successfully eliminated were put in place for a pretty good reason, specifically to avoid another Mao, under whose regime some horrific things happened in China, from a collectivized farming attempt that was responsible for at least 45 million deaths, uh, to a cultural revolution that was estimated to have killed at least another million, to his belief that this swimsuit was flattering, which I realize now that I say out loud, really doesn't belong with the other two in that list.

The point here is Xi is actively removing the post-Mao guardrails that were put in place and while China has never exactly been known as a haven for free expression, he has clamped down noticeably on any form of dissent [00:48:00] whatsoever.

NEWSCASTER: There is dissent online and China's sensors are working hard to quash it. They temporarily ban the use of phrases such as Personality Cult and My Emperor, and also references to Winnie-the-Pooh, a character long used to mock Xi Jinping based on an apparent resemblance.

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: It's true, it's true. Apparently Xi Jinping is very sensitive about his perceived resemblance to Winnie-the-Pooh. And I'm not even sure it's that strong a resemblance to be honest, but the fact he's annoyed about it means people will never stop bringing it up.

Trust me, Xi, If your face even remotely resembles that of a beloved cartoon character, the smart move here is to lean in. And clamping down on Winnie-the-Pooh comparisons doesn't exactly project strength. It suggests a weird insecurity in him. And experts say that Xi is deeply concerned that public opinion will turn on him. China's economy is [00:49:00] already slowing and Xi is reportedly haunted by the specter of the Arab Spring and the Soviet Union's collapse and that paranoia may be why he's so anxious to micromanage Chinese daily life. The government has a list of untrustworthy people, which can restrict citizen's ability to travel, uh, buy a house, or take out loans. And over the next few years, there are plans to take things much further.

NEWSCASTER: Every Chinese citizen is being assigned a social credit score, a fluctuating rating based on a range of behaviors. It's believed that community service in buying Chinese-made products can raise your score. Fraud, tax evasion, and smoking in non-smoking areas can drop it. If a score gets too low, a person can be banned from buying plane and train tickets, real estate, cars, and even high speed internet.

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: Yeah, you could be cut off from a high speed internet, although that could actually be a huge opportunity for the finest purveyors of shitty low speed internet. I'm talking of course about AT&T, one [00:50:00] of America's least popular corporations, and also as of this week, our parent company. So, goodbye everyone. It's been fun. And look, it gets much, much darker here. In fact, Xi's cracked down on human rights. It's apparently the most intense since Tiananmen Square, and that is not good because Tiananmen Square is on the short list of places so infamous you don't even need to describe what happened like Chernobyl, or Jonestown, or that one Cheesecake Factory we can't go to anymore. And Xi has intensified government suppression of certain religions. In one province, Christians have been told to take down the image of Jesus and hang portraits of Xi instead. Something I've also done, by the way. See here? I think it really ties the room together. It's a nice accent piece.

And a Muslim population known as Uyghurs have been singled out for dystopian levels of surveillance and persecution. Here is one man talking about a form that the government had him fill out.

REPORTER: This piece of [00:51:00] paper was sent to everyone. People had to fill it out. They asked things like, if you are Uyghur, if you have a job, if you have a passport, if you pray, all these answers were turned into a scoring system. They would categorize people into safe, regular, and unsafe people.

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: Yeah, and that's pretty chilling cuz, generally speaking, whenever people are placed on lists, it's not really turned out well for anyone involved. Many of history's greatest monsters put people on lists. Nixon, the Nazis, Santa. All of these animals did that. And look, sure enough, if you are deemed unsafe for whatever reason, you're in big trouble because China has incarcerated Muslims in re-education camps with as many as 800,000 individuals in facilities which reportedly aimed to rewire the political thinking of detainees, erase their Islamic beliefs, and reshape their very identities, making uncle Xi less like your fun uncle and more like your creepy uncle who imprisons 800,000 people in his basement.

And if [00:52:00] you want to see what it looks like when Xi Jinping thought gets put into Xi Jinping practice, just take the story of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo. He was imprisoned in 2009 for writing a pro-democracy manifesto, and last summer he died in state custody and even China seemed concerned about how that might look.

NEWSCASTER: Fearing domestic backlash, government sensors went to work. Social media posts mentioning Liu's name were deleted. Online searches with his name were blocked. Even simple candle emojis were deemed illegal on some sites. CNN's signal in China has been cut by government sensors every time we mention his name.

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: Exactly. The Chinese media wouldn't allow mentions of a Nobel Peace Prize winner's name, which is a pretty intense level of censorship, but it's also my personal policy towards Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú. Do not bring her up around me. She knows what she did. You know what you did Rigoberta. You know what you did. I don't wanna hear her name on your lips. [00:53:00] That's not what this piece is about. The point is, the point is, what happened to Liu Xiaobo and his wife, who is still under house arrest, is absolutely tragic. Although to his credit, he didn't go down without taking a final swing.

NEWSCASTER: One of the last known photos of Liu was with his wife Liu Xia. At first glance, unremarkable, but notice the mugs they're holding. Yep. That's Winnie-the-Pooh on there. A final, subtle defiance.

JOHN OLIVER - HOST, LAST WEEK TONIGHT: We all know, when you need to really tell someone to go fuck themselves, why not do it with a mug? Right?

Made in China Part 3 - Today, Explained - Air Date 10-14-22

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: Well, Xi Jinping's entry into politics basically began at birth. So he is the son of two really important revolutionary figures in China, his father, Xi Zhongxun, and his mother, Qi Xin. These are [00:54:00] both people who were at the Party from very early days. They got married in a cave near Yanan, which is the revolutionary base where Mao Zedong was launching his counterattack on the ruling party at the time. And he grew up in Beijing, very close to the halls of power in one of these compounds for the children of the party elites. So he really was born into this red heritage, but that

wasn't always easy for him, because being the son of a revolutionary in Mao's China could mean that you fall out of favor, and that's exactly what happened to his father, Xi Zhongxun.

Xi Zhongxun had a fallout with Mao Zedong to an extent, largely because he rose up to become the [00:55:00] head of the propaganda department and allowed the publication of a book which was seen to be critical of Mao's version of history. So in the early 60s Xi Zhongxun gets sent away, he gets basically put into exile. And that leaves Xi to fend for himself. He doesn't get kicked out of school, so he's still in Beijing. He's still attending what is a school for the children of leaders, but he has no one who can really look after him anymore. He's bullied. He has less access to resources than he would have otherwise had. You have accounts of him going hungry. So it's a really tough time. After that goes on for a few years, he has this kind of option to get out, and the way he does that is he signs up for this program, which probably would have been forced on him anyway, of going down to [00:56:00] a small village in the northwest of the country to work as what was called a “sent down youth.”

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR: At 16 they're sent out to work and learn humility for 5 long years in the countryside. For even the brightest children, a long stretch of manual labor is the only route to university. The few who do make the return journey will have been chosen by their workmates.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: So these are educated people from the cities who Mao thought had become too removed from the circumstances of everyday China. So they went to learn from the local farmers to try and understand what the real China was like.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR: It is considered useful for leaders and cadres especially to learn the class feeling of laborers and peasants in order to overcome bureaucracy and prevent revisionism.

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: He's there for seven years. And it's pretty hard work. He has to dig wells. He has to read by candlelight, but he seems to have a go of it. After [00:57:00] a tough period, he becomes quite friendly with the villagers, according to his own accounts, and he begins to see the value of what he's doing. So he begins to turn it into a self-sacrificing narrative, and that continues all the way until his father is rehabilitated and he is able to then return to Beijing and go to university.

SEAN RAMESWARAM, HOST OF TODAY EXPLAINED: So in this trying time where Xi is basically living in poverty, his parents have been ostracized, does his faith, even as a kid, in the Chinese Communist Party, falter?

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD: It's hard to know how much he wrestled with this idea of loyalty to the Party, because most of what we rely on now are his own accounts of this time. He will talk about things like digging wells and doing manual labor at this time as being a cleansing experience. Since he's got into power, he sometimes refers back [00:58:00] to this period as why he's spent so much time focusing on alleviating poverty, which has been one of his main policy campaigns. So there was a way in which even though the Party in some senses rejected him, he kind of turned back to the Party and its overall mission as a way of trying to rehabilitate himself.

So the job he actually gets is as a very junior secretary to the Ministry of Defense. But then he takes a left turn and he goes and gets a job in a small town, not too far from Beijing, but not particularly rich. That kind of shift, it seems to be a bit of a bet that he's going to rise higher later on, because if you stay in the military and he's stuck with his current path, he could never have become a top leader. He wouldn't have had that experience that you need governing different parts of the country, [00:59:00] being a civilian leader. So he makes this shift where it seems like he already knows he wants to move up and do bigger things.

China Under Xi Jinping From Human Rights Concerns to Inter-Capitalist Competition with U.S. Part 3 - Democracy Now! - Air Date 10-25-22

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go to the flashpoint, Taiwan. During his opening address at the Communist Party Congress, Xi Jinping lauded his government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, addressed the economy, China's military and foreign policy. He also praised Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong, claiming Hong Kong shifted from chaos to governance. President Xi also addressed the issue of Taiwan, which has become this flashpoint between China and the U.S.

PRESIDENT XI JINPING: [translated] The resolution of the Taiwan issue is a matter for the Chinese ourselves to decide. We insist on striving for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and with the

greatest effort. However, we are not committed to abandoning the use of force and we reserve the option of taking all necessary measures.

AMY GOODMAN: Yaqiu Wang, your response?

YAQIU WANG: I think yes, it is [01:00:00] obvious that there's more aggressive rhetoric coming from the Chinese government on the Taiwan issue, and I know people in Taiwan are nervous. But at the same time, I see people in Taiwan, they are very protective of the freedom, of the human rights they have, and they organize themselves together and they want to maintain that freedom. They are alert of the situation and they are active in pushing back the kind of pressure coming from China. Also I'm seeing that governments around the world including the U.S. government are also doing more to support the vibrant democracy in Taiwan. So yes, China has become more aggressive, there is more hostile rhetoric, but at the same time, I also see more pushback from Taiwan and the democracies around the world.

AMY GOODMAN: Professor Ho-fung Hung, your response?

HO-FUNG HUNG: Yes, actually I think there are two sides of [01:01:00] the question. On the one hand, China is closing closer to using military force to forcefully take Taiwan, on the one hand because the Zero-COVID policy, and many things it did, that Beijing did, over Hong Kong, show that it is no longer a regime that prioritize economic growth and economic prosperity. They prioritize national security and absolute control of the Communists Party. Even when it comes to sacrificing the economy, they will do it. So on that regard, that Beijing has less restraint when it decides to attack Taiwan.

But on the other hand, I think the immediate military threat is not there yet. Because you look at, for example, Russia's military action against, invasion against Ukraine, there is a path, from the Russian foreign intervention and overseas military deployment in [01:02:00] Georgia in 2008, Syria, and also Ukraine in 2014. So these dictators' logic is that they try a smaller-scale intervention, and if they succeed, they get more confident, and then full-scale invasion.

And you look at China; if the leadership is still rational, they will look back to their military history and they will find that the last time China fought a war overseas was 1979 against Vietnam. And the last time China actually have a serious military mobilization of its military, of its army, is 1989, which is against its own people. So China has not actually used the military against any

overseas target for decades, so I don't think it will easily jump from zero to an all-out invasion of Taiwan.

But I think that Beijing might try to talk up the military rhetoric, the threat, and also might even do some limited military [01:03:00] action to take some outlying islands of Taiwan, or some South China Sea Taiwan now controlled by the Taiwan government, as a kind of a threat, or even a partial blockade of Taiwan, to create a kind of tense situation to influence the Taiwan election, to influence what Taiwan people might want to elect for. If Beijing managed to get some of its allies or even its agents elected in Taiwan through election, then the pro-Beijing government can sign agreement with Beijing and do a lot of things that U.S. cannot find a reason to intervene or to deter.

But I'm confident that the Taiwan people is very clear what is going on and they have a will and they have the capacity to defend their vibrant democracy, which is a miracle, and it is why Beijing finds that Taiwan is a thorn on its back, because it is an ethnic Chinese democracy, and a liberal society which is very [01:04:00] vibrant. It shows that actually democracy can work in Chinese society, which actually contradicts Beijing's propaganda that actually democracy is not suitable for Chinese people. So I am confident that the Taiwan people will have the will and capacity and alertness to defend itself.

Final comments on misinformation in the mirror universe

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today starting with Democracy Now! discussing the beginning of Xi Jinping's third term now with no term limits ahead, Today Explained looked at Xi's authoritarianism in action, Consider This covered the Uyghurs, Taiwan, and what this third term could mean for China-U.S. relations, Democracy Now! discussed human rights abuses in the context of international economic competition, Today Explained looked at Xi's human rights violations in the context of China's history since Mao, the PBS NewsHour reported on Xi's rise and the conflict between China's internationalism and the negative [01:05:00] views about the country rising as totalitarianism takes hold, and John Oliver on Last Week Tonight looked at the rise of Xi, thought censorship, and Winnie-the-Pooh.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from Today Explained giving more backstory on Xi's life growing up as the son of two

revolutionaries close to Mao and Democracy Now! looked at the rising tensions with Taiwan and the possibility of a Chinese invasion.

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support, or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

And now I just wanna pivot from one world-shaping election to another in yet another country that is being profoundly shaped by propaganda. As I speak today, the U.S. is casting votes in the midterms [01:06:00] and concern about election misinformation is at a high. And today in the Best of the Left backchannels, transcriptionist Brian shared that his local election office is sharing tips on Facebook about being wary of potential manipulated news, or particularly from videos that can be altered or taken out of context, that sort of thing. And at first glance, this seems bulletproof, right? Like, who could possibly oppose warning about misinformation? Wouldn't that make a person pro-misinformation, which no one could possibly be. And that is true in our universe, but not so in the mirror universe where so many of our right-wing citizens live these days. In the mirror universe, there's always a way to spin reality to fit a worldview based on unreality. In this case, it'll go like this.

So, number one, the widespread existence of manipulated media and [01:07:00] misinformation will give those in the mirror universe, or at least the propagandist actively manipulating them, cover for whenever there's legitimate news that they don't like. They can claim that it's manipulated, altered, or taken out of context, and the mirror universe followers will have all the excuse they need to dismiss the information whole cloth. Of course, this is just a continuation of the claim of fake news, right?

Number two though, here's the real brain teaser. The warning about misinformation, coming from the government, which can't be trusted according to them, is evidence of the government's plan to misinform the public. And this makes sense in the mirror universe because the kind of news that constitutes reality in the mirror universe is exactly the kind of stuff that gets labeled as misinformation, because it's not [01:08:00] true or it's manipulated or altered or taken wildly out of context. Therefore, the only conclusion that they can come to is that the warning against misinformation is itself a malicious plot preparing the public to ignore The Truth TM when The Truth TM is inevitably revealed by MAGA Truth Seekers TM. Hence, warning about misinformation actually equals an effort to misinform.

Now, of course, this doesn't make sense to most of us, and the only reason I was able to even twist my brain into that sort of pretzel to try to see things from the perspective of the mirror universe, is that over the past several weeks I have been seeing news stories pop up in my feed of right wing media about what they see as nefarious efforts by the FBI [01:09:00] and Facebook and maybe others, to work together to reduce misinformation around the election. So basically the key to understanding the whole frame of this argument is that when the media or government or any other official agency speaks about misinformation, the definition of that word as heard in the mirror universe is right-wing news we don't like. Now, of course, in our universe that's exactly how the term fake news works. If someone on the right is talking about fake news, it's much more likely that it's just something they don't want to be true rather than something that is actually false, and that is precisely how they see the term misinformation. And so a local election office putting out an incredibly, well, helpful but also innocuous warning to the general public to look out for misinformation so that they are not misled,[01:10:00] something that could and should be seen as a universally good piece of information, will inevitably be twisted to be seen as a nefarious plot with the intention to misinform. And I know this is not a hopeful analysis. I will grant you that. We are definitely in a bad situation and no one has a clear idea of how to get out of it. So I'm sorry to leave you on a down note. I have nowhere else to go with that. Um, but Happy Election Day.

As always, keep the comments coming in at 202-999-3991 or by emailing me to Jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Brian, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and [01:11:00] bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership's how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content and no ads in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. And if you want to continue the discussion, join our Best of the Left Discord community to discuss the show or the news or the election or other shows or literally anything you want. Links to join are in the show notes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, D.C., my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.