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TRANSCRIPT

The Asia Chessboard Podcast

“The Opening Move with Mike Green”

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Andrew Schwartz: Welcome to the Asia Chessboard, the podcast that examines geopolitical dynamics in Asia and takes an inside look at the making of grand strategy. I'm Andrew Schwartz. In this first episode, I spoke with Dr. Michael J. Green, who is the Head of Asia Programs at CSIS. Mike will be a constant through all of the Asia Chessboard podcasts. Mike's both a practitioner and a scholar of U.S. grand strategy. In addition to his work at CSIS, he teaches at Georgetown University. Prior to CSIS, Mike was Senior Director for Asia on the National Security Council during the presidency of George W. Bush. I asked Mike about U.S. Asia Strategy and where it's headed. But first, I asked him how he got into grand strategy in the first place.

Andrew Schwartz: Mike, this is a podcast about grand strategy. And it's about grand strategy specifically in Asia. You're a grand strategist, and you've been a grand strategist your whole life. You've been training for this. I want to talk about how you got into this. How did you prepare yourself for the career that you got into, and what you're doing now?

Dr. Mike Green: Well, I had no idea that I'd actually be working on Asia.

Andrew Schwartz: It wasn't Asia for you right away?

Dr. Mike Green: No, no. It wasn't Asia right away, and it wasn't clear that I'd be getting a PhD, working in the White House, working at CSIS.

Andrew Schwartz: You didn't envision that when you were 12, 13 years old?

Dr. Mike Green: Well, my brothers would tell you that when I was eight, nine, ten years old, and we'd line up all our toy soldiers. And before I'd let them launch their marbles at the other guy's toy soldiers, I'd say, "Wait, we need to negotiate." And I'd take one to a soldier and rush him towards the other lines. My brothers would tell you I've been doing this since I was a little kid.

Andrew Schwartz: Well, and your dad had a military background.

Dr. Mike Green: Right, my dad was a marine, and a lawyer, and a specialist on the law of war, *jus in bello*, the Geneva Convention, ethics of war. My mom was in the Italy, Rome Embassy before I was born. So I'm from the swamp, I'm from the blob. I grew up in DC surrounded by this. My friends and I, as kids, played games like Risk and Diplomacy. So I was always interested in that, majored in history.

Andrew Schwartz: I mean, you're a Bethesda guy, you're like-

Dr. Mike Green: I'm like Chevy Chase and then Bethesda guy, yeah. Part of the swamp.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah.

Dr. Mike Green: The Asia thing came to me after college, actually. I dabbled in karate in college, I passed the Foreign Service Exam, the written part, my senior year. I

knew it would take some time, so I wanted to go do something different. And went to Japan, to teach in rural Japan, learned Japanese and studied martial arts. I came out of that thinking, when I went to SAIS for grad school, to Johns Hopkins, thinking this is the chess board. This is the place where, if you're interested in history, and foreign policy, and strategy, this is where the action is. It's Asia in the future. And this was in the mid '80s, so, overwhelmingly, U.S. foreign policy, U.S. graduate schools, were focused on Europe. On the Fulda Gap and NATO, and that was the center of grand strategy. Asia was always the secondary theater. But I had a sense, and I think I'm right, that during my career and in my lifetime, the center of gravity, the chess board was going to shift to Asia.

Andrew Schwartz: Well you and others, you and Dr. Hamre at CSIS, John Hamre, our CEO, Kurt Campbell, our former Senior VP, and others have certainly tilted our focus here at CSIS towards Asia and grand strategy. Who were some of your influences back then before you came to CSIS, before you worked in the White House, while in those formulative years while you were in grad school?

Dr. Mike Green: So one of the most important was Rich Armitage, actually, who I met when I was in Japan. I translated for him when he came as a visitor.

Andrew Schwartz: Hold on. Backup. What were you doing in Japan?

Dr. Mike Green: I went back to Japan after getting my master's on a Fulbright and studied international relations at Tokyo University.

Andrew Schwartz: So master's at Hopkins?

Dr. Mike Green: Right.

Andrew Schwartz: And then over to Japan?

Dr. Mike Green: On a Fulbright. And while I was studying at Tokyo University, I worked for a member of the Japanese Parliament, the Diet, who was kind of the Sam Nunn, John McCain of Japanese politics. He was the foreign policy strategy guy.

Andrew Schwartz: Got it.

Dr. Mike Green: And he was very close, this is the late Reagan administration, early George Herbert Walker Bush. He was very close to people like Rich Armitage, Mike Armacost, other big names in Asia policy. So I was junior fly boy who spoke Japanese. I would take care of them when they came to Tokyo.

Andrew Schwartz: What made you decide to learn how to speak Japanese in the first place, and when did you learn it?

Dr. Mike Green: I learned it on the plane on the way to Japan after college.

Andrew Schwartz: Are you serious?

Dr. Mike Green: With a Berlitz book.

Andrew Schwartz: Are you serious?

Dr. Mike Green: *Ichi, ni, san.* One, two, three.

Andrew Schwartz: Really?

Dr. Mike Green: I got plopped down, because I had French and Latin. I was a Europeanist. I was an Atlanticist. I thought I was going to work on Europe. And then I had to learn it to eat and survive.

Andrew Schwartz: Got it, not a lot of people speaking English in Japan back then.

Dr. Mike Green: Not in those days, not where I was.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah, no.

Dr. Mike Green: So Armitage was a big influence from the very beginning when I met him. He had a, we're going to interview him for this podcast next, but larger than life.

Andrew Schwartz: Secretary Armitage is an influential guy. Anyone who meets him will tell you that.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right, both sides of the aisle. Came out of, we'll talk to him about it, but came out of the Vietnam War. Basically, they got the entire South Vietnamese Navy out in 1975, rescued them. And got picked up later by President Reagan to run Asia at the Pentagon, as Reagan turned to Asia and bottled up the Soviets using the U.S.-Japan alliance. And Rich was a big part of that. And that fascinated me.

Andrew Schwartz: That was the first Asia pivot, post-Kissinger, going to opening up China.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right, and it worked. The Soviets in the Carter administration were sending submarines, ballistic submarines to Hawaii, popping up and laughing at the Pacific Fleet, which had everything in the Atlantic, and then shooting towards San Diego. By the end of the Reagan administration, and Rich was a big part of this, the Soviet submarines wouldn't leave the Sea of Okhotsk, totally bottled up by the U.S. and Japanese fleets. So that's the kind of guy who had a big influence on me, and a lot of Democrats who do Asia, like Kurt Campbell. Another one's, Joe Nye, who I met fairly early on, a prominent Democrat. Both of these guys are members of the CSIS board.

Andrew Schwartz: Joe Nye, Harvard professor, author of, architect of soft power, legendary thinker on political science issues and policy. Scores of students all over Washington and internationally.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right. And he and Rich of course are good friends and have coauthored strategic reports together that I've worked on. They're different. I mean they both believe in alliances, trade, forward engagement, institutions. With Rich Armitage, you get a little more stick, with Joe you get a little more soft power. But they're both part of what makes successful strategy in Asia.

Andrew Schwartz: And that's when we at CSIS brought them together to co-chair our Smart Power Commission. So that's how we fused hard power and soft power to make smart power.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right. Rich Armitage doesn't do soft. So we had to come up with something smart. But those guys were big influences. I've benefited from a lot of ... Kurt Campbell I worked for, and in the Clinton years, in the Pentagon. But other people who weren't necessarily Asia hands, but were very strategic thinkers, I got to work with, like Steve Hadley and Condi Rice in the Bush administration.

Dr. Mike Green: One of the things I tried to emphasize in the book I published recently on the history of U.S. strategy is how much the most successful statecraft practitioners of strategy in various administrations had a sense of inheritance of humility, because they'd been trained, had inherited unresolved problems. Part of grand strategy is recognizing you never solve problems. It's perpetual, and you position yourself to protect your interests for the long haul. And these were all people that I mentioned who thought in those terms.

Andrew Schwartz: And one of the things that all of them have in common is a bipartisanship. There's ... all those people you mentioned come from both sides of the aisle and have worked across the aisle. And there's a continuum in foreign policy amongst those people on moving our country's Asia policy forward.

Dr. Mike Green: There is, and there's a lot of respect across the aisle. And there are fights, and it used to be that the Asia fights were big. In the '80s for example, the Reagan and Bush administrations got clobbered by Democrats for coddling Japan on trade in order to compete with the Soviet Union. Jimmy Carter, when he was president, got clobbered by Republicans for being soft on China for betraying Taiwan. Some of the most intense, intense partisan fights in the Cold War were over Asia. Going right back to Truman, and who lost China.

Andrew Schwartz: And Republicans stronger on defense-

Dr. Mike Green: And trade.

Andrew Schwartz: ... and trade. And Democrats seeming to be put into a corner and felt softer on defense. And Kurt famously wrote a book about ... Democrats weren't soft on defense, which changed the way people thought about Democrats, actually.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right. And I mean, and the Democrats tended to come into power, after Vietnam for example, when the Republicans used too much hard power. But in the post-Cold War world, since the mid '90s in many respects, the partisanship around Asia policy has largely gone away. And I think part of the reason is that Republicans and Democrats recognize that China is a challenge. A major challenge. And there were assumptions both sides had, in various ways, about how opening to China would change China before China changed the world. Increasingly, there's a recognition, no, China's changing the world, and we're not changing China. And that has sharpened thinking, and sharpened the consensus around things like alliances, free trade, a forward defense posture ... until Donald Trump. And so now we are in the world where the swamp and the blob, as he calls us, well Obama called us the blob, and Donald Trump called us a swamp, which is technically more accurate because Washington was a swamp.

Andrew Schwartz: But basically, them labeling it the same thing.

Dr. Mike Green: They're both outsiders in their own way, attacking Washington. So the irony is as there's increasing consensus among Republicans and Democrats about the need for a robust response to China with trade and allies and other things. We have an antiestablishment anti-Washington administration, which attacks alliances, which attacks trade, which doesn't support institutions, which kind of, at least in the person of Donald Trump, runs against everything that this consensus has built. But that doesn't mean that what you see with Donald Trump is all bad. And it doesn't mean that that's now American strategy. I think this is going to continue to evolve.

Andrew Schwartz: It also doesn't mean that you can't work with it, and you can't try to work with it.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right.

Andrew Schwartz: And we do work with it here at CSIS.

Dr. Mike Green: We do at CSIS, allies have to do it, Congress. I'd say the strengths in the Trump administration's approach are number one, that the administration and the national security strategy and the national defense strategy said, "We are in strategic competition with China." Every administration does these national security strategies, and in the post-Cold War era from George Herbert Walker Bush all the way through Obama, nobody said, "We're in strategic competition with China." They all said, "We'll work with China on climate change. We'll work with China on terrorism." So, points to the current administration for saying what's been obvious for a while, we're in a competition with China.

Dr. Mike Green: And then the signature phrase, or framework for this administration, is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. Which basically says we're going to deal with China by working with big maritime allies like Japan and India, Australia. We're going to address the balance of power. The problem, and it's

a big problem, is that the president doesn't actually seem to follow either of these strategies. Is day-to-day sort of tactically making calls based on, I guess what he sees in the morning, what he Tweets.

Dr. Mike Green: And the strategies aren't backed up by some pretty important things like a coherent trade policy, staffing, I mean the State Department, the Pentagon, woefully understaffed on Asia, and most parts of the world. And not clear what we stand for. Do we stand for democracy? So these are all themes we'll get into in this podcast, but this is not a complete wasteland when it comes to strategic approaches to Asia. There is a broad consensus, at least below the level of the president, and this administration, that we're in a period of competition, and we need to get our act together.

Andrew Schwartz: Not to mention that the United States has 60 or more alliances around the world, and China has one alliance, and that alliance, North Korea, may not be a good alliance for them, so-

Dr. Mike Green: Yeah, exactly. Go team go.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah, so what are we going to do with our 60 alliances is one of the subjects we'll talk about on this podcast.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right.

Andrew Schwartz: But I want to back up for a second to your career. So you got into policy and then you were really playing the game of Risk. You are in it. What happened when you started working at the White House and the Bush administration? What was that like for you?

Dr. Mike Green: It's one of the most intense and rewarding jobs you can possibly have in government. Most of the National Security Council staff is fairly young, because it's a very hard job. Long hours, lots of physical stress running up and down the steps, running across the West Executive Avenue to the West Wing-

Andrew Schwartz: It's not a calm job.

Dr. Mike Green: It's not a calm job. The best people at it, like Steve Hadley, are preternaturally calm, they're always calm. Because so many of the young staff, like I was, are running around. You come in, as Henry Kissinger said, and you spend all your knowledge quickly. And Kissinger said you don't learn, you just expand knowledge. You don't have time to learn. That's not really true, it felt like every week was a PhD. And when you're in those jobs, you have access to the entire Intelligence Community. And if you are so inclined, the State Department, the Pentagon, Commerce Department, all the embassies, several screens at your desk with cable traffic, intelligence reports, think tank reports, you don't have time to digest it all. And so, you'll learn a lot on the job, but you need to come in to do those jobs well with a pretty clear sense of what your mission is, and what your objectives are. And

strategy is something that ... very rarely do you sit down and plan a policy and unveil it and it goes according to plan. A lot of the big strategic plays are in the midst of crises.

Andrew Schwartz: You're calling an audible.

Dr. Mike Green: You're calling an audible. North Korea cheats on the previous agreement with the Clinton administration, we go to Pyongyang, I was there. They admit it, what do we do? Six party talks. Asia is under-institutionalized. We need institutions that pull the big powers together working on problems. So we just did that in the midst of a crisis, the 2004, 2005 tsunami. We initially didn't know how bad that was, the day after Christmas 2004. Then we got satellite images showing that whole parts of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka had been wiped out, like a nuclear blast had happened. We had information that the terrorist organizations were trying to get in there first to deliver material to the victims, and discredit the governments, but we got in first. How did we get in first? 7th Fleet, the Australians, the Japanese, the Indians created something called the Quad. And we helicoptered in all the supplies to rescue them.

Andrew Schwartz: This was a policy that you guys came up with.

Dr. Mike Green: 48 hours. Most of the U.S. government was on Christmas vacation. 48 hours, got on the phone with Canberra, Tokyo, and Delhi. The U.S. Navy Commander at the time of the 7th Fleet, the two-star, knew them. He'd gone to staff college with his counterparts in India, Japan, and Australia. We put it together in a crisis, but it was something we've come back to since, this Quad idea. Why? Because U.S. alliances in Asia were made during the Korean War. They were bilateral alliances, not like NATO, purely bilateral. China is taking advantage of that, trying to work the seams among these alliances. This was an opportunity to demonstrate that the big maritime democracies are the ones that provide public goods.

Dr. Mike Green: When the ... Who are you going to call? You're not going to call the PLA, you're going to call the U.S. 7th Fleet. And to show that like-minded democracies have the wherewithal, the military capability, and the values to work together in a crisis. So it was a kind of a proto collective security in a way, that was in the back of our minds. Someday we may need this again for other things. It wasn't aimed at China in the sense that we invited China to participate, but the fact these four big maritime democracies came together, showed that our bilateral alliances in a crisis can come together and work collectively. Really important precedent as we look at how we're going to deal with the rise of China.

Dr. Mike Green: So a lot of strategy I've found is done in the breach, if you know what you're after. I had the pen on a major, the major strategic document for the Bush administration on Asia strategy. Huge interagency process, months, and months, and months, approved by the president. We were going to roll it out in November 2004 in Australia in the parliament. At the last minute,

President Bush and his advisors and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, and his advisor, decided, we want to talk about Iraq. Because both Bush and Howard were being attacked by candidates on the left for going into Iraq, and they knew the public was with them. So they made a political call to make the speech half about Iraq. And I sat in the VIP section of parliament next to remember Crocodile Guy?

Andrew Schwartz: Crocodile Dundee.

Dr. Mike Green: Not Crocodile Dundee, but the other, I've forgotten his name.

Andrew Schwartz: Oh, Steve Irwin.

Dr. Mike Green: Steve Irwin. Sat next to him, he was in a Bush hat and shorts. I'm all excited, about to hear the speech that I spent almost a year pulling the U.S. government together for. And, you know, parts of it were in there, but at the last minute, political decision, focused on Iraq. Politically, it worked, Bush and Howard got reelected by standing firm on a rock, whatever you think of the actual strategy in the war. But we got clobbered for being tone deaf in Asia. So, in a democratic political system, deliberate grand strategy rolled out carefully can go all a cropper, because of politics. While on the other hand, if you know what you're after, in the middle of a crisis, the nuclear crisis with North Korea, the tsunami in 2004, if you know what you're after, you move. There's a cliché that the words for crisis in Chinese, the characters are crisis and opportunity. So, you know, the cliché is ... every crisis is an opportunity. So grand strategy is not about seminars, and endless seminars. A lot of it is knowing your interests, knowing your instruments of power, levers you could pull, allies you can trust, and seizing crises to turn them into opportunities.

Andrew Schwartz: And I remember when you finally left the Bush administration towards the very end, you came to CSIS and the first thing you did was you grew a beard. And that was sort of like an unwinding for you after many years of being in this intense mode of constant strategy, constant action, constant movement, constant gaming things out, and constant working across alliances. So, when you got here, you were ready to decompress a little bit, but grew the beard. And then you started off right away working exactly on the issues that you'd been working on and more.

Dr. Mike Green: Yeah, when I left the administration in the very end of 2005, I had a long exit interview with Condi Rice, the Secretary of State, and with Steve Hadley at the NSC.

Andrew Schwartz: Who was your boss then.

Dr. Mike Green: Who was my boss at the NSC. Condi was Secretary of State, had been my first boss. They gave me well over an hour each to talk through life, and they were sincerely hoping that I would be able to tackle at CSIS some of the things that we had been struggling with. One was, and we'll talk about this in

the podcast, how do you build institutions in Asia? Europe has lots of institutions, although they're unraveling a bit with Brexit. How do you institutionalize Asia? How do you do it without weakening your alliances, without overscheduling the president? What do you do about trade? North Korea?

Dr. Mike Green: So, the nice thing about being in a think tank is you get to think. And you may not come up with the perfect answer, but you can sit down, and, with other people who've been in government, and the nice thing about CSIS is, on both sides of the aisle. And start thinking through some options to deal with some of these problems. And maybe 90% doesn't make it into the policy process, but the best ideas really shape how strategic thinkers in the administration approach the problems that you weren't able to solve when you were in government.

Andrew Schwartz: And some of the things that you've been able to do here have been incredibly important. One of the most famous is that you've called attention to what's going on in the South China Sea. Your program, and the work that you've done here, really exposed the island building activities. So the Chinese and other entities in the South China Sea, when nobody across the world knew that was going on, except for very few people within the U.S. Intelligence Community, within other governments, and their most senior people. And we were able to show through satellite ... commercially available satellite imagery, working with my team in the iDeas Lab, to show what exactly China and other nations were doing in the South China Sea. Why it was so contentious. And it actually allowed, at the time, the Obama administration to confront the Chinese, and for other countries to start talking amongst each other. So, it's not exactly like you came here and you put your feet up. You grew a beard, but you really started thinking in a very deep entrepreneurial way, and you took on very big strategic issues. And you took them on in a way where you now were the National Security Advisory. You were the executive. You weren't the senior director for Asia policy, now you were the principal. What was that shift like?

Dr. Mike Green: Kind of like playing ultimate frisbee after playing football. Nobody keeps score, you get to do what you want. You have the luxury of testing ideas. That particular-

Andrew Schwartz: You maybe don't get clobbered as much.

Dr. Mike Green: You don't get clobbered as much, that's for sure. That particular effort, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative was originally our boss, John Hamre's idea. Because he realized there was a debate about China, but nobody knew what was happening. And then we pulled together the program, Mira Rapp-Hooper was the first director. We pulled in satellite images, and that changed the debate. It really did. I mean *Financial Times* and others, on the front page, said as much.

Andrew Schwartz: *New York Times*.

Dr. Mike Green: We should give them all credit, *Wall Street Journal*, *WaPost*, all of them covered it. It was, I think, important to help us transition towards a new strategic debate. When we started all this, which would have been what, 2012, 13. There was ... the Obama administration, and the think tanks, and the expert community was divided. There were senior military officers on background saying, "We're not going to fight a war over a bunch of rocks. Why do we care about this?" There were people, storied China experts, saying, look, China has no strategy. This is just Japan, or the Philippines, or Vietnam poking them with a stick. We've got to be patient."

Dr. Mike Green: There were others on the other side who were very alarmist about it. Maybe too much so. What I think we did with MTI was get a common picture of what was happening. Everyone could see those satellite images of China building runways that can take their entire PLA air force inventory, not backing down, and then deploy military weapons. And what that one set of images told you was, Houston, we have a problem. This is not just China reacting. This is a strategy of-

Andrew Schwartz: For deployment.

Dr. Mike Green: For deployment, of coercion, of not kinetic, not attacking the Philippines, or Vietnam-

Andrew Schwartz: But it's a real provocation.

Dr. Mike Green: But changing the facts on the ground with overwhelming military force that only the United States, and perhaps the U.S. with Japan, Australia can counter. And it was indicative of a larger Chinese strategy that then we saw in Belt and Road and elsewhere, of coercion. And it doesn't mean everything that China does is a threat to us, but it really, I think, sharpened people's thinking. And the other thing it told you was the response to this is not just going to be military.

Andrew Schwartz: Right.

Dr. Mike Green: We're going to need to be in the game diplomatically, economically, a lot of ways.

Andrew Schwartz: Right, because China can't challenge our supremacy in the air or on the sea. They have one ... well they now are working on their third carrier, which we've just shown through satellite imagery as well, with our China Power Project run by Bonnie Glaser. But, the islands that they started building that were tiny piles of rocks coming out of sand in the ocean, now contain entire hangers for squadrons, and points for surface-to-air missiles. And they have all kinds of runways where planes can land and take off. It's really quite something. If you look at the photos that we've assembled over time, it tells a visual story that is, you don't have to write it down in a report. You can look at it and it tells the story quite clearly.

Dr. Mike Green: And what we'll try to do in this podcast is look at the larger geopolitical significance, and the tools that we have as a matter of state craft. Beyond the one that everyone talks about, which is, do a Freedom of Navigation Operation, send a U.S. destroyer in there to show them we won't be intimidated. That's a necessary, but hardly sufficient element in a successful strategy. The broader grand strategy has to consider, first of all, what's at stake for us. And the answer, I think, is a free and open Indo-Pacific. And a region that is not going to be dominated by China based on breaking institutions ... rule of law, coercion. It means we need to be in the game economically. TPP may not seem related to Chinese island building, but it is, because it is about rulemaking and institution building.

Andrew Schwartz: The Transpacific Partnership.

Dr. Mike Green: The Transpacific Partnership, which the administration has pulled out of. We need to think about our alliances. What are China's goals? That's a critical part of this chess game. China's goals are complex. China does grand strategy, but, though they're not burdened by divided government, and all these other things that make it harder in a democracy, ultimately, in the long-run, more successful, but harder in the short-term. China nevertheless has public opinion. China has competitions, and factions, and so forth. But you can start to lay out what China's after. They clearly want the South China Sea to be a bastion for the Chinese military.

Dr. Mike Green: When I was in the Pentagon working for Joe Nye and Kurt Campbell, 20-some years ago, we had a crisis with Taiwan. The U.S. sent two carrier battle groups through those same waters, lollygagging, taking our time to show we could. Can't do that so easily now. And the Chinese in turn are going to use the South China Sea as a bastion to start surging out towards Guam and even Hawaii. So, we have to think through what this does to our military strategy, but also what is China after? China's after that military advantage, but they're also after a dominant position in Asia. Well, if they do these things, there are going to be other countries like India, and Japan, and Australia that are going to react.

Dr. Mike Green: So how do we harness that? How do we build a larger chess game that imposes a cost on China, where their goal is undermined? We'll try to get into, with our guests on this show, who have been at high levels of government, how do they think about that chess board? And how do you move the pieces when you're in government, and you're dealing with Congress, you're dealing with the media, you've got allies who aren't always there with you. We'll try and get some of the practitioner's view, because grand strategy is not a seminar where you come up with a perfect plan and announce it, and then the world does what you want. It's ugly and messy, it's sausage making.

Andrew Schwartz: What makes you think, given all you know, given your experience, that grand strategy is now possible in the United States?

Dr. Mike Green: Well, the word strategy is from the Greek *strategos*, which means “from the commander.” So, effective grand strategies have to come from the top. And Donald Trump is not strategic, in the sense that a Thucydides, or a Castlereagh, or other great strategic thinkers would expect. Meaning disciplined, works with allies, use this trade, et cetera. He’s mercurial and that’s his ... that’s the essence of his approach to the world is: be unpredictable. So that really raises the question whether grand strategy is possible. I think, as I said earlier, at the level below the president, there’s a broad consensus now that we’re in competition with China, that we need our allies, that we’re not going to get some grand bargain. We’re not going to accommodate China with a so-called G2, the U.S. and China, or a new model of great power relations, which Chinese leader, Xi Jinping proposed.

Dr. Mike Green: It’s going to take hard work with our allies to convince China that they’re not going to coerce their way into leadership in Asia. I’m not sure the president’s all about that, I’m not sure he cares about our position in Asia. But I think his cabinet does. It’s a very Republican cabinet in some ways. In some ways, perhaps too focused on military tools, not enough on diplomacy, and trade, and soft power. That’s a huge problem, but statecraft is possible. The Congress, which usually is sort of a variable, you can’t predict in strategy, is on a bipartisan basis, pushing the administration hard to get their act together. So it’s possible. The one way you can answer the question, is it possible, is looking at history. For over two centuries strategic thinkers have argued the U.S. is too dysfunctional as a democracy.

Dr. Mike Green: De Tocqueville, in the early 19th century, traveled around the United States and said, “This is not a country, this is not a system, that can do strategy,” as he knew it in Europe. But the fact is, over our history in Asia, we’ve stared down the British, we’ve stared down the Germans, we’ve stared down and had to fight Japan, we stared down the Soviets, now we’re looking at China. So, we’ve got a pretty good track record despite all of our idiosyncrasies, our divided government, of organizing ourselves to maintain a favorable balance of power, protect our values, expand trade. We’re not doing great right now, but often in these earlier cases I mentioned, we messed up a lot. As Winston Churchill was reported to have said, it wasn’t actually Churchill, “You can count on the Americans to do all the wrong things before they do the right thing.” But we usually do, we usually get it right. Will we this time? I think so. Our politics are very, very dysfunctional right now. But we certainly have a consensus and a recognition that we have a challenge in Asia, and that we need to organize around it.

Andrew Schwartz: So it’s not too late in the game for this administration is what you’re saying?

Dr. Mike Green: Well, people generally argue this president’s not going to change. And he’s added a mercurial dimension to our Asia policy. Our trade policy’s confusing for everyone.

Andrew Schwartz: That’s why we have the Trade Guys, by the way.

Dr. Mike Green: And that's why we have the Trade Guys, who we will have on this show to compare notes. The administration's done pretty well on the military side. They've increased defense spending. They've done things that the Obama administration sometimes deliberated about too long, like Freedom of Navigation Operations, and missile defense. But we'll have to see, Congress will impose some of this on the president. And we'll talk to members of Congress if we can on this podcast, because they've stepped in to make sure that we are reliable and that we don't do things like suddenly pull troops out of Asia.

Andrew Schwartz: Does Congress have any grand strategists?

Dr. Mike Green: Yeah, I think so. I mean, it's not a place that's famous for grand strategy, but ... because the House has elections every two years, and the Senate's almost always in reelection campaign themselves-

Andrew Schwartz: They're focused on their constituents.

Dr. Mike Green: But the important thing is their constituents export to Asia. So it's really interesting that, for example, Republican senators who are most active, who go to the region the most, who ask the most questions in the Senate Armed Services Committee, are people like Joni Ernst and Dan Sullivan on the Sask, or Cory Gardner. They're from states that export soybeans, and wheat, and natural gas, and salmon, manufactured goods and services to Asia. And so public opinion polls show that the American public thinks Asia's the most important region in the world, and is in favor of trade and in favor of strong alliances. And when asked, "Should we defend Japan or Korea if they get attacked?" highest numbers ever say, "Yes." So I think in the heartland, if you will, there's a recognition that we can't opt out of getting Asia right. So members hear that, they may not hear it in a kind of crystal clear foreign policy sense, but they know their constituents care about trade, and care about the future of the Pacific. They know where their soybeans are going. They know the Japanese and Koreans are building factories in their districts.

Andrew Schwartz: And we're talking to them as well.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right. So the Congress gets that. And the other thing is ... younger members on national security, the ones who want to be the next Sam Nunn or John McCain, they're not doing the Middle East, they're doing Asia. They're thinking over their 20-, 30-, 40-year careers in the Senate or the House-

Andrew Schwartz: Ben Sasse, people like that.

Dr. Mike Green: Exactly. That's where the big decisions are going to be made. That's where the big tectonic plates are going to be shifting. That's what's going to have the most impact on their constituents, growth, and wellbeing, and prosperity, and the security of the United States of America. So, I think that's

going to be a very positive influence at a time when the president himself just is all over the map.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah, I mean you think about it in the House side, you've got Democrats like Seth Moulton now running for president, but before, that's another Ben Sasse type like person who is thinking broader grand strategy. And you could name scores of people, both the House and the Senate, who are thinking about these issues. So, yeah.

Dr. Mike Green: That's right. I'm a professor at Georgetown, at the School of Foreign Service. We have young captains in the Army and the Marine Corps, Navy lieutenants and stuff coming back with a GI bill, they're studying Asia. They've served in Iraq and Afghanistan honorably. One of the things we need to think about, I mean in grand strategy, is how do we rebalance or pivot? It seems to me you can't just leave the Middle East. American staying power in Asia is judged by not only what we do in Asia, but what we do in the Middle East. Our allies ... we may be largely energy independent. That's not true for Japan, Korea, Singapore, they care about the Middle East, so we can't just exit. We have to think about how we rebalance. But you can see in the faces of these young combat decorated O3s who are coming back to grad school. They served honorably, they'll care about the Middle East, but their promotions, their future, a lot of it's going to be about Asia. You can see that that's how they're thinking.

Andrew Schwartz: Mike, thanks very much. And we're looking forward to having an outstanding grand strategy, Grand Chessboard, podcast on Asia.

Dr. Mike Green: Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Schwartz: Thanks for listening. For more on strategy and the Asia Program's work, visit the CSIS website at csis.org, and click on the Asia Program page.