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TRANSCRIPT

The Asia Chessboard Podcast

“Hidden Moves: Countering Russian and Chinese Influence Activities on the Chessboard”

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- Andrew Schwartz: Welcome to the Asia Chessboard, a podcast that examines geopolitical dynamics in Asia and takes an inside look at the making of grand strategy. I'm Andrew Schwartz at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Hannah Fodale: Russian and Chinese interference is becoming an increasingly important part of the strategic chessboard in the Asia-Pacific. This week, Mike is joined by Amy Searight, Senior Associate for Asia at CSIS and Heather Conley, Senior Vice President for Europe at CSIS, to discuss their new report on countering Russian and Chinese influence activities.
- Mike Green: Welcome back to the Asia Chessboard. I'm going to be joined today by two CSIS colleagues, Heather Conley, Senior Vice President, who covers our Eurasia, Europe and Russian and also Arctic strategic issues and Amy Searight, Senior Associate and a leader in a lot of the work we do on Australia, on Southeast Asia. And together, Heather and Amy have produced an important new report that's on the website, Countering Russian and Chinese Interference Activities. And it's one of these issues that is increasingly part of the competition in Asia. It's not new, it's very old. Early NSC documents in the 1950s and 60s were full of principles-level discussions about how we stop communist or Soviet or Chinese interference in an effort to neutralize countries, to weaken our alliances, to sow dissent. It's a very old tactic, but it's increasingly part of the strategic chessboard in Asia. And one that really kind of unites American alliances in Europe, which is Heather's expertise and in Asia, which is Amy's. We'll come back to all that.
- Mike Green: Before I ask Heather to tell us about the report and begin the discussion, since Amy's new on this podcast, one of the things we try to do is understand how you got here, your experiences. And Amy, we've known each other a long time, but in your case you have an interesting career, because you are an academic, you're a political scientist and a Japan expert and you have leveraged that regional expertise into jobs on Asia in, I don't know how many parts of the US government, State, USAID Defense. So maybe tell us first a little bit about what it's like as an academic going into government, but especially how do you do that, turning your regional expertise into a series of regional jobs on very different functional issues? What are the pros? What are the cons? What's your advice?
- Amy Searight: Well, to start with, I think when you talk to other academics or people from sort of different backgrounds that go into government, there's no one clear path. And for me it wasn't necessarily easy to get into government. But I started on a Council on Foreign Relations fellowship in the State Department in 2003=2004, working on regional economic policy towards Asia, regional economic and multilateral policy, when I was still an assistant professor at Northwestern. And I just loved it. I loved being part of a team. That's one of the big differences, at least in political science, a social science field like political science, you tend to do work in a very solitary way. Writing your own books and articles for the most part. And being in a team environment where we were sort of working together on coming up with recommendations and analysis for policy was just tremendously fun and exciting.

- Amy Searight: I went back into my academic career and thought it would just be a great year of knowledge, of insight into how policy is really made that would enrich my teaching, enrich my research. But actually I just really came to realize that I was much more suited for that kind of work environment where you're collaborative, you're kind of working on concrete things in the real world. I took a very deep interest in US foreign policy in Asia. Felt like there was a lot we could be doing that we weren't doing. I really wanted to migrate back in and I migrated to DC for a different job at George Washington University, but it wasn't easy for me to figure out an entree back into government at a reasonable level. There's not a lot of just open jobs for regional experts, PhDs, very, very few jobs like that. I basically lucked out because I signed up for the Obama Asia Advisory Team in the early days of the campaign, in 2007, I guess it was.
- Mike Green: Well he was not the presumptive nominee, so early on.
- Amy Searight: Correct. I sort of bucked the trend from a lot of people going to Hillary Clinton's campaign at the time who seemed the definite favorite. But I got in with the Obama team and that led eventually, not right away, but after the election, when Obama won, it led me into two positions in the Obama administration. First for the US Agency for International Development and then at the Pentagon where I worked at a couple of different positions. I really loved it. It's a lot of fun to be part of an administration that as we were doing the pivot or the rebalance and there was a lot of focus on the regional, a lot of room for creativity and energy.
- Amy Searight: But it's very different being an academic versus a policy maker. Your expertise certainly comes in handy and your ability to sort of abstract from problems and try to think very sort of theoretically about sort of causes and effects I found was actually a skill that as academics, we take it for granted is what we do every day, but when you're with groups of very smart and very informed people, you still realize kind of it's a skill that not everyone has immediately. It really does give you ability to sort of analyze policy and developments in a way that I think does have value. But you are making decisions or recommendations on such a different kind of timescale. You have very short time, very limited resources to inform your decisions and so you're always as an academic aware of how limited the approach is in terms of really doing a full bore examination and study of what the right output should be.
- Mike Green: Yeah. Being in government is humbling if you're an academic, because you realize how hard the choices are. And I always tell academic friends of mine, because like you, I've been in both universities, think tanks and also in government of course. I tell them the biggest difference, the thing you have to remember is, if you're an assistant professor, it's expected that you're going to prove you're the smartest person in the room, but in government, that is death. In government you get ahead by, as people put it, by letting other people think it was their idea. That's a hard transition.

- Amy Searight: That's exactly right. You have to be very generous to your colleagues, otherwise people aren't going to want to collaborate and work with you. You're absolutely right. Coming out of academia, especially as an assistant professor when you're thinking about tenure and all of your incentives and what your advisors tell you is make sure that you are coming up with your own theory and talking about the Searight view of this or that or the other thing. And then in government it's, you don't get to put your name on it. You don't get to go around saying, "That was my idea."
- Mike Green: Right. Right. Unless you're Joe Nye or somebody like that, then you get to. The other thing, since you're being modest, the through line I see is, because we knew each other since I think we were PhD students, your work as a PhD candidate was on MITI, the Japanese trade ministry's role in regional and global architecture in the post WTO world. And that was about institutions and trade and of course that's what you worked on in policy planning in the Bush administration on your IF. And then I assume that that gave you a lot of insights into partnerships and rulemaking, which was a natural transition to AID, to advise them. DOD was a little more of a stretch, but ultimately that part of the Pentagon, which what's now called, ABSA, the Asia office, it's largely about partnerships.
- Amy Searight: Absolutely. It's now called IPSA, because they changed it to Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, used to be Asia Pacific. But yeah, I think more at the Pentagon than anywhere else, you realize how much of everything we do is about alliances or partnerships, but building really strong partnerships, especially in Asia. Everything we do is geared towards that. And any outcome we want is pretty much impossible to achieve without working with and through our allies and partners. And so all the work that I did in the Pentagon, in particular in USAID, we certainly help countries in a variety of ways. The mandate is a little more development is supposed to have strategic ends as well, but we don't think, it's not framed quite as much in terms of working together to achieve outcomes through strong partnerships and alliances. But definitely in the Pentagon that's all that we do.
- Mike Green: That's an excellent segue to Heather because the report is on countering Russian and Chinese interference activities. We have a problem. The solution is largely about alliances and partnerships, which we'll come back to, but let's get, if we could, Heather, tell us the top line. Well, tell us a bit where the report came from, why you did it, but also of course, the main recommendations and conclusions.
- Heather Conley: Well, thanks Mike. This is a very ambitious project. This is a project that was supported by the State Department's Global Engagement Center. It was through the Information Access Fund and we received administrative support through the DT Institute. There are lots of people to thank for this effort. But I think this is a really unusual report because it brought examination of two different great powers and how they use what we call their "influence activities." And we'll talk a little bit about definitions. We looked at how China uses its influence activities

in Australia and Japan. And Amy did the case study in Australia. At the same time, we looked at how Russia uses its influence activities in Germany and the United Kingdom. And so we had four individual case study authors dive deeply into looking at how, and again, it's not just the study of Russian and Chinese tactics. That's pretty well known.

Heather Conley: But really where we concentrated on is how did those four countries, how did they interact with these influence activities? What was successful? What wasn't successful? How were these governments and these societies resilient to, or were they susceptible to these influence activities? It was a very ambitious project and I'm so proud of it because really for the first time it brought the Russian and the Chinese activities together in one area where we could examine how they're similar, how they're different, how they're learning from each other. And of course, when the pandemic broke out, we basically saw Russian and Chinese interference activities go on double time in all four case study countries. We were able to capture a little of that.

Heather Conley: Great, great ambitious project. We used a framework of former Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull's, we call it a three C's. In these influence activities, we looked at what is covert, what is coercive and what is corrupting. That was our framework. And as we examined the four case study countries, we circled around a couple of areas where Chinese and Russian influence activities really concentrated. Number one, it was definitely a focus on how to separate the United States from its closest allies in the Indo-Pacific: Japan and Australia. In Europe, the UK, and in Germany. It really worked or it didn't work depending on how much cohesion there was in the society.

Heather Conley: In a super polarized society, such as the UK—Brexit, of course, being an incredibly divisive issue—those interference activities, influence activities, really work well. In a society that has a strong cohesion like Japan, the Chinese activities didn't work so well. We looked at diaspora communities and how Russia and China used those as again, a way to divide society. We looked at of course, economic coercion, which is so important, the tool for China in Belt and Road. It's also an important tool for Russia. We looked at elite capture and how particular politicians could be caught up in that. And then we looked at campaign financing, the media landscape. We saw a lot of similar tactics. And so we examined this and really brought it together in one place to understand how these two powers are trying to separate these countries from the United States.

Mike Green: What's the biggest difference between them, Heather? We'll look at Australia in a minute with Amy, but broadly speaking, what do you see as the biggest difference between Russia and China's approach?

Heather Conley: You're quite right. Soviet active measures and what we're seeing the Russians, this is military doctrine for the Russians. It's called “new generation warfare.” This is an advanced toolkit of everything from corruption to disinformation to hybrid activities using malicious to overturn governments and to create coups.

It's the whole spectrum. China, and now this is a segue really to Amy. China looks not to be that divisive and that disruptive. It really looks to use its economic coercion to help minimize all criticism about the regime, but also to be able to create a more, in my words, a more malleable regime to keep accepting Chinese policy approaches with approval and not disapproval and to be able to increase its economic strength over that country. But I may not have captured that the way Amy would.

Mike Green: No, I think that's probably right. The Chinese approach is an extension of United Front activities: isolate your critics and reward your friends. Because Russia's really trying to destabilize societies. But there may be some similarities. Amy, you did Australia. First of all, tell us, Japan is a hard target and this point that you have in the report that more unified political societies like Japan are much more impervious. And the Chinese interference activities in Japan really failed because there's so much more unity around the challenge of China. But Australia was a surprise, Australians themselves we're surprised at how vulnerable they were. What were their vulnerabilities? How did it happen?

Amy Searight: Well, just a couple things first. China certainly has been targeting Australia with a lot of energy and effort over the past several years or in some cases in some lines of effort going back quite a while. But a lot of the activities really came to light a few years ago through some investigative reporting from the Australian media and an intelligence investigation from the Turnbull government that kind of merged into kind of revelations of so much kind of influence buying and elite capture that was going on. And that sparked a national debate, which then led to a very interesting response, but why did China target Australia is an interesting question. Heather mentioned the fact that Australia is one of United States' most important alliances in Asia and that's certainly part of it. But I would say that it's not the only reason.

Amy Searight: I think one difference between China and Russia it seems is that China does really try to tailor its approach to different countries based on the mix of strategic objectives and vulnerabilities that it sees that it wants to exploit. And in the case of Australia, I think it was very tantalized by some of Australia's vulnerabilities. Initially it seemed quite open to influence because, primarily number one, it's very economically dependent on China. Probably among advanced industrial democracies Australia trades more with China than anyone else and is very reliant on China for tourists and university students. The university sector in Australia is incredibly financially dependent, much more so than any other country among advanced democracies, on overseas Chinese students and the revenue that they pay in tuition. That gives China tremendous leverage. And as you know, Mike, the strategic debate in Australia for many years has been around, how can we maintain this partnership with China, which is so vital to our economic health while remaining an ally with the United States?

Amy Searight: There's been a lot of debate around that issue. I think China saw that as a real way to kind of get in and wedge among strategic elites and among the broader

public. And, initially, I think using very subtle tactics of reminding various groups about the leverage that China has economically. But there are a couple of other vulnerabilities as well. One is, as Heather mentioned, diaspora communities. Australia has a relatively large Chinese diaspora, overseas ethnic Chinese community and United Front activities have been going on there for decades co-opting and taking over hundreds of community organizations, business, patriotic, civic organizations and buying up or again co-opting, gaining control in various ways of Chinese-language media.

Amy Searight: So, very active in terms of trying to get these overseas Chinese in Australia to see Beijing in patriotic terms, basically, to see Beijing as something that they are part of and should support. And another vulnerability is that Australia, rare among advanced democracies at the time, had a big loophole in their political system where foreigners could donate to political campaigns. They've subsequently closed that loophole specifically because of all the revelations around the Chinese Communist Party linkages to major ethnic Chinese donors in Australia.

Mike Green: I'm told that, ironically, that loophole existed in part because the conservative party in Australia historically in the past has gotten donations from Lord Haw-Haw in the UK. It's sort of a residual imperial quirk that is no longer the case. But very, very shocking for Australians to realize, and Americans to realize, that China was directly contributing to campaigns.

Amy Searight: Basically yeah.

Mike Green: It raises a question about elite capture, which for those who haven't figured it out, means bribery and recruitment. It raises the question, how much of this was demand signals from within Australian politics or these other countries? Is this sort of Chinese agents descending on an innocent political system? Or were there demands signals coming from some of these people saying, "Corrupt us?"

Amy Searight: It was certainly supply and demand in Australia. The other thing to note about the Australian political system, which is very different from ours, is it is money politics in Australia is pretty, it's a low threshold. Australian campaigns do not cost a lot of money. They don't spend a lot of money.

Mike Green: Yeah, you or I could afford to run.

Amy Searight: A little bit of money goes a long way. But the parties and individual politicians do actively seek fundraising. And so they're going to definitely be looking in places where they can actively fundraise. And when there are very wealthy Chinese businessmen who were either are Australian citizens or Australian residents, perhaps Chinese citizens, but long-term residents in Australia, they both knock on their door, but the businessmen are coming to the politicians as well. It was certainly a big loophole and made Australian politics very open to that kind of behavior.

- Amy Searight: However, two big buts here. One is there was a lot of other activity going on that has subsequently been revealed that was more or less directed or guided or in various ways kind of coming from Beijing, not just in the federal politics, but in all kinds of other spheres and levels. It wasn't just about the political system. And number two to Australia's great credit and here's where democratic norms really come into play. All of China's attempts to, through these CCP linkages of major ethic donors that were trying to bribe Australian politicians to change their party's position on the South China Sea or on an extradition treaty that China really wanted, or more recently to try to cow Prime Minister Morrison from backing down from his proposal for an independent inquiry into the origins of coronavirus. All of those have failed. Whether it was labor politician leaders or liberals, whenever there was a real attempt to threaten or bribe or in other ways induce politicians to take more pro-Beijing stances, they actually rebuffed the Chinese.
- Mike Green: Now is that because of the point Heather made earlier that at the end of the day, compared to the UK under Brexit or even us in some ways, that Australians are actually not that divided over questions of national security?
- Amy Searight: Well, I think the Chinese just really, even though in some ways the Chinese are so sophisticated in terms of really trying to tailor their techniques to specific vulnerabilities and they play a long game and they're very careful, they're very consistent, but they're also very ham-fisted in many ways. And I think the Chinese really misread Australia. They were reading the same debates that you and I are quite familiar with in Australia about whether there should be more autonomy from the United States because of the importance economically of Beijing. And because of many strategists in Australia see China as the rising ascendant power and they think that Australia would be better off sort of finding a way to, if not align with China, certainly have a real condominium or really work as in partnership with China on strategic issues, as well as economic issues.
- Mike Green: That's a minority view though, don't you think? In the Australian economy.
- Amy Searight: Yes, but that was a big live debate in Australia. Beijing saw that and thought that it could enter into that debate with a little bit of inducements and tweaking and narrative shaping in other ways it could push Australia more towards Beijing and away from the United States. I think they overplayed their hand and they misread how easy that would be to do.
- Mike Green: That issue of narratives is a really interesting contrast between Russia and China, because the Chinese are ham-fisted when they try to shape political debates with narratives.
- Amy Searight: But they're not trying to shape the domestic political debate so much for the Chinese and this is a big difference between Moscow and Beijing. For Moscow, they're very opportunistic. They are looking for debate. They're looking for issues that have resonance within target countries that will exacerbate the

social cleavages or the political divides. It could be migration. It could be Brexit. It could be something else. They are looking for issues that not necessarily Moscow cares about, but they think will drive wedges, will de-legitimize institutions, will disrupt societies.

Amy Searight: The Chinese aren't trying to do that. They're not playing this disruptive game. They are trying to build pro-Beijing narratives, the only thing they're trying to disrupt is the ability of critics to express their views and be heard. They're trying to stifle dissent and shape narratives. And basically they're trying to marginalize the legitimate space, civic and political space where you could really question the motives and the behavior of Beijing. It's very much about shaping narratives and not about kind of creating false narratives, except for trying to whitewash some of what Beijing does and what China doesn't.

Mike Green: If you watch RT, the Russian TV, it's so much more diabolically sophisticated than anything China has done. The Chinese take out paid advertisements in the Washington Post that no one reads. They know how to hit the raw nerves. They know how to hit the divisions in society. It's an old KGB playbook in a way. I remember I ran our radio station in college in the 1980s. I used to get the weekly world news from Moscow every week. And we thought it was funny, but it was mostly about divisions in our society. It was not praising Russia. They're a lot more sophisticated about it now. And it's backfiring for China in a way, because they don't know national narratives well. The Russians are good at it.

Mike Green: I want to turn back to Heather because one of the big questions in all of this is how much is China taking from the Russian playbook. And there are arguments evolving if you follow this, that the Chinese are beginning to follow the Russian playbook much more closely. And Exhibit A is Taiwan, which was not in your study. When the Chinese realized that Tsai Ing-wen was going to win the Taiwanese presidential election, they shifted towards Russian-style discrediting of democracy. And I personally think the evidence is still incomplete. I personally think it's likely—and you guys may disagree—it's likely that the Chinese are increasingly going to try to follow the Russian playbook. I want to go back to Heather because your cases in Europe show what that playbook is and are there things in them that Asian democracies, Asian societies, might find happening to them when you looked at, well, tell us the countries you looked at and some of the tools and the Russian toolkit that Asia hands should be worried about.

Heather Conley: Right. Well, we looked at the UK and Germany. Again, in some ways there was sort of Japan, Australia similarities, meaning there's really two key elements here as far as the demand side: trust and transparency. If there is societal trust in the media, in its institutions, its government, it's a fairly cohesive society, anything the Russians attempts to do and they are masters of disinformation, what we call flooding the zone. Meaning, if something happens, there's a 1,000 reasons, and it's always supposed to discredit the government and always meant to make sure that blame cannot be clearly assigned to Moscow for any incident. And they are truly creating incidences like in Germany, the “Lisa case,”

which is a fictional story of an ethnic Russian, a young woman who was reportedly raped. We talk about that. It created 600 people in Berlin, it created a demonstration. It was to incite violence in society.

Heather Conley: That we don't see China doing per se. But although the study ended before the whole pandemic had its own life cycle here, what we saw was that China was using the disinformation, very similar to how Russia did. Russia was blaming the pandemic on US biological weapons labs. This goes right back to the eighties. This is the playbook from the HIV AIDS that blames the US and the biological weapons community. China began using that exact same blame game on the origins of the COVID-19. We saw a little bit of similarity there. And again, if the Chinese start creating disinformation and sowing that confusion and to try to be disruptive, I think then you're starting to see a playbook that they're following from the Russians.

Heather Conley: What I was interested in as sort of a follow on story, particularly in Spain and Italy, they were getting it from both sides. They were getting Russian and Chinese influence activity simultaneously during the pandemic. And how does a country manage a double whammy? And so that I think deserves a little bit more analysis and study. But what we're watching is China observing what is working, what is not working, tailoring it to Chinese behaviors and patterns. But there is a whole lot of learning going on. And I think we have to be very mindful of China taking on much more aggressive approaches that the Russians have demonstrated.

Mike Green: The American biological warfare unit started COVID-19 story, goes back to the Korean War, really, when the Soviets and the Chinese and the North Koreans actively propagated the idea that the US Army and Imperial Japanese chemical warfare and biological warfare experts created this, dropped spiders from B29s onto the Chinese and North Korean troops and civilians. And that is still showing up in textbooks in parts of China. And it's still a part of narratives in Russia and is very much part of the North Korean propaganda. In that sense, joint Chinese-Russian operations, misinformation operations go back 70-some years.

Mike Green: The common denominator in your report clearly is they both want to break or neutralize US alliances and that's an old Cold War playbook strategy. The big difference between them is that at the end of the day, China still, despite revisionist behavior in Asia or more coercion, China still needs the global order that the US and its allies built to thrive and for the party to survive. Whereas Russia has a much, it seems to me, Putin has a much higher risk tolerance and is willing to go a lot further. The story now about Russian bounties to the Taliban, for the Chinese to go that far, it's another world because they do have different risk tolerances right now. Did that come out in your study at all? Did you find that the Chinese pulled punches in ways the Russians wouldn't?

Amy Searight: Well, the Russians are playing a different game than the Chinese, although that could be shifting. That is something we definitely want to keep an eye on. And the "Wolf Warrior" tactics of Beijing diplomats in the midst of the pandemic

certainly point to a sharper kind of approach. But still going back to what we were saying earlier, I think the Chinese are not looking to really fundamentally disrupt societies and they don't need to take those kinds of really high risks. I think there was a mix of motives for the Chinese in Australia and other cases too perhaps of Chinese influence. What I came away with is there are certainly reasons to think that some officials in Beijing thought it was possible or worth trying to try to create some distance in the US-Australia alliance. But they saw that really as a stretch goal.

Amy Searight:

I don't think they went in there thinking, hey, we got a really good shot here if we just keep this up. But creating some distance maybe, but there's also a really interesting, compelling idea that John Fitzgerald, a Sinologist in Australia has put forward and explained to us, which is that this might be a lot more about Beijing and politics within China then about politics within Australia. Because what Xi Jinping and CCP officials seem really determined to do is to create narratives about countries like Australia having respect for China. People like Bob Carr or other previous prime ministers saying wonderful things about Xi Jinping.

Amy Searight:

This labor politician that was just investigated, that was writing essays, talking about Xi Jinping's leadership in tackling coronavirus. There's a lot that suggests that what they're really interested in is having the Chinese public see that the rest of the world respects China, respects Xi Jinping. It's all about legitimacy, which is very similar in some ways to the domestic political game that Xi Jinping, the Communist Party has to play at home. I put in my case study that, this might be more about making the world safe for the CCP than about really trying to drive a wedge between Australia and the United States

Mike Green:

That goes back even further than Soviet KGB white activity. That goes back to the celestial emperor being told the barbarians worship you after coming back from trade missions. But it's also a real vulnerability, a real node that we can counter. Easier in some ways than Russia. Let's turn to the, what do we do about our part? Let me go to you, Heather, what are some of the recommendations that would apply to both the cases in Europe and Asia?

Heather Conley:

Yeah. Go back to that transparency and trust. And it's really, it's about democratic societies and institutions getting healthy. That's how these efforts back, because if we have a transparent campaign financing system, if you have transparency in how funding is going to political parties or individuals, if you have a very active investigative journalism media landscape, which is shining light on perhaps things that again, the covert part that they don't want to see, you can beat this back. And as I said, it's really reestablishing trust between government and institutions and civil society. When a society in Germany is a case in point, it's a very consensus-driven society. Russia has penetrated it economically, certainly. There is clearly influence, but when Russia does things to try to shake narratives, it doesn't work because there's pretty much a trust in the government, there's trust in the media.

- Heather Conley: Now, again, that has its own pitfalls sometimes. The media is not as active in rooting out where there is the influence activities, but that's what works. In some ways, this is where it's sort of, this whole report seems to be so clear and simple. And you're like, why did it take hundreds of pages of report to say this? But it's about making sure that the democracies itself sees itself as its national security. How we beat back interference and influence is we are strong ourselves. And then their narratives don't work. Their efforts don't work.
- Heather Conley: Just Mike, on your question about sort of the difference between China and Russia. It is all about timelines to be honest with you. Russia has a much shorter timeline because it is in stagnation-slash-decline. You have a regime that is absolutely willing to take risk, look for tactical opportunities, anything to seize because its health. China sees itself in the ascendancy; it has the time. The win-win approach allows everyone to feel like it's okay to allow this ascendancy to occur. I just think you have two different actors with two different timetables. But to the legitimacy question, Mr. Putin is also seeking legitimacy. He is seeking recognition that his system, even though he tries to parody democracy, his system, his kleptocracy is a preferred model to democracy. Lots going on there.
- Mike Green: I think the core part of that trust is bipartisanship. Australia was able to do this because members of the opposition like Penny Wong and others spoke up and you look at countries like Mongolia, you look at Taiwan, you look at the US and if one party says there's corruption, coercion, covert activities, the other party says you're just making a tax on our leaders. That's hampered us, let's be honest. And when I traveled in Mongolia and to Taiwan, that's the difficulty that parties there have. The bipartisanship matters. Amy, what else would you put on the list of to do's?
- Amy Searight: Well, I agree with everything Heather said. I think it's the real paradox of democracies when they face this authoritarian foreign influence is the things that make democracies vulnerable are the openness. The openness of the societies, of media landscapes, of political debate, fluid political debate, all of that make them real targets for manipulation. And it's a real asymmetric warfare because of course, all of this openness that democracies have are precisely what is not open, is completely closed back in China and Russia. And so, they're really targeting democracies in this asymmetric way. However, at the same time, the things that make democracies resilient to countering this kind of influence are also rooted in this openness and democratic norms. It's the transparency that Heather talked about. It's the free press, which was critically important to certainly the Australia case, but the other cases as well. It's rule of law, it's democratic norms and pride in democracy, pride if you're a politician in not being bought and sold by a foreign government telling you what to do.
- Amy Searight: And it's also pluralism. It's a pluralistic societies that are proud of multiculturalism, have social integration so that there aren't alienated, resentful groups that again are targets for manipulation. The strengths of democracies are also kind of the vulnerabilities. And so it is very much a heal thyself kind of set of recommendations. And that's what Australia has done in response. It's

closed its loopholes. It's toughened its laws. The parties to their credit have taken a very bipartisan approach and not tried to make political hay out of, could be very easy to just try to score political points from the opposition party about China policy and they haven't. They for the most part, really kind of formed a consensus and have been high-minded about this.

Amy Searight: And they've put together an approach, a strategy with a bureaucratic mechanism that is very whole of government and does not just look at investigations and prosecutions for espionage and other kinds of things, but also looks at really engaging various sectors in society, ethnic communities, universities, others to really have this dialogue about how to increase resilience. It sounds easy to just say, "Well, strengthen yourself, strengthened democracies and we'll be fine." There's still a challenge because these things are covert. They're hard to identify. They're hard to see. They're hard to prosecute. They're hard to root out sometimes. They're not always very visible or very easy to really go after.

Mike Green: The traditional counterintelligence mindset in the West is that you follow, roundup, recruit, turn agents of influence. This is a bit different because it's aimed at the entire society. It's not aimed at stealing information. It seems to me that this is a case where a free press may or may not catch these things, parliamentary committees may not catch these things. This may be an intelligence problem or a counterintelligence problem, to be precise, where the goal should be outing this information, getting parliaments and press to know about it. Don't hide the information. And it also seems to me, heal thyself, but not by thyself.

Mike Green: Australia has demonstrated how vulnerable countries can be at best practices. And I can imagine the importance of your report in terms of policy, ultimately, may be that this is a discussion that not only parliamentarians and civil society scholars, but counterintelligence officers, justice ministries, foreign ministries should be having. This is a strategy that open democratic societies need to develop together. And your report really paints the landscape in a way that shows how that can be done. Really, really interesting stuff. Thank you. This is not the last we will hear on this subject I am sure because there is zero evidence, zero evidence that either China or Russia are backing off, if anything, they're doubling down. I'm sure we'll hear more about it. Thank you both. Terrific work.

Amy Searight: Thanks Mike.

Heather Conley: Thanks Mike.

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.