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TRANSCRIPT

The Asia Chessboard Podcast

"A New Game? Domestic Political Change and U.S. Strategy"

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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 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Hannah Fodale: This week, Mike is joined by Tom Wright of the Brookings Institute to discuss how domestic politics impacts US grand strategy. The two go into detail about how both Democrats and Republicans currently view US strategy in Asia, and where both parties converge and diverge when it comes to the China challenge. Now that there will be a transfer of power in the White House, what does the recent 2020 US Election tell us about the US role in the world and in Asia, specifically?

Mike Green: Welcome back to the Asia Chessboard. I am joined by one of the most perceptive minds in Washington on the national zeitgeist on foreign policy, in particular thinking in the Democratic and Republican administrations about China and about Asia. Tom Wright at the Brookings Institution, Georgetown PhD, and author of All Measures Short of War, which when it came out in around 2017 was really the first definitive strategic framework for what we now consider our new world, which is strategic competition with revisionist powers, China first and foremost, but Russia and Europe and Iran in the Middle East. Tom, terrific having you on board. Welcome.

Tom Wright: Thanks Mike. It's great to be here. I listen all the time. So it's a real pleasure to be on the podcast.

Mike Green: Well, you have a lot to tell us about what this election meant, but let's start with you first. People were always interested. As they say in Texas, you don't sound like you're from around here. So tell us your background. How'd you get into the foreign policy world and the focus on Asia?

Tom Wright: Yeah. I was born and grew up in Dublin in Ireland, and went to college there. Did history and politics as an undergrad. Was always really interested in international affairs. Then when I was 22, I guess I went to Cambridge to do a one year master's in international studies, which really got me into the field for the first time. And then after a couple of years back home, I came over to the US to Georgetown University when I was 25 to start a PhD. That was four weeks before 9/11 in August of '01. And so I've been here ever since. And at Georgetown, I was really fortunate to work with a lot of really terrific people, but really worked closely with people like John Ikenberry, who was there at that point. Charlie Kupchan and others who sort of worked at that nexus of international relations theory and grand strategy.

Tom Wright: And so I was always, I think, as a PhD student, quite interested in those strategy questions. And bounced around a little bit at different P-docs and post-docs, and ended up working at Princeton for Anne-Marie Slaughter on a project on grand strategy at the time, multi-year bi-partisan project that I was the drafter of a report for that, again, was pretty useful in getting to know just the general debates and discussions. And after that, when I finished my PhD and finished

the post-doc, I was at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs for a few years and then made it back down to Washington to Brookings. So that's short version.

Mike Green: You obviously worked your way up the food chain from Trinity to Cambridge to Georgetown. Although, unfortunately it was before I was at Georgetown. I was at SAIS at the time. But tell me, you've worked a lot on grand strategy and you worked with people like John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter. For a long time, the grand strategy name was owned by hyper-realist Republicans, people in the Henry Kissinger strategy. What does Anne-Marie Slaughter, John Ikenberry, Tom Wright grand strategy concept look like? It's different, I assume, from what we think of as the Kissinger, Hans Morgenthau hyper-realist grand strategy when you're talking about liberal institutionalists like Anne-Marie and John Ikenberry.

Tom Wright: Yeah. Anne-Marie and John obviously are two exceptional theorists and writers and strategists. I learned a lot from them. I do think they're fairly different. I think I would be different, again, from them. But what I think that debate that took place in the 2000s was really on the nature of American power and the nature of unipolarity, and the opportunity the US had to shape that world. And people went off in different directions about how they would do that. John, I think was very focused on the institutionalization piece and how the US could reassure other countries and the allies by nesting its own power in these institutional restraints, whereas Anne-Marie was more focused on network cooperation at the sub-state level. I think my interest in it really was initially on the absence of balancing against the US. Why we weren't seeing the normal historical trends and the benefits of that liberal international order.

Tom Wright: But then from the mid-late 2000s on, it was really this rise of illiberal alternatives, particularly in China and then increasingly from 2011 on in Russia, and whether or not that was compatible with that liberal order. And then the Liberals basically split on that issue, I think. Some remained, until quite recently, pretty optimistic that China would become a responsible stakeholder and would be part of it. Others saw that illiberal element and worried about what it would mean and wanted to go back to more of the core group than to have a universal group. So the liberal internationalism stuff is often described externally as a bit of a monolith. They all want to intervene everywhere or they have similar notions about American power. I think that's definitely an over-simplification.

Tom Wright: I think different strands were interesting in their own right. But to me, I was always more of a bit of a fusion, I guess, of some of the liberal ideas about the US being able to shape an affirmative vision of international order, plus some realism concerned about great power competition and that fundamentally this is based on power rather than the world having normatively evolved into a different place maybe than where it was before.

Mike Green: So the focus of your work and your book, All Measures Short of War, that stands out to me is that it is a grand strategy for opposing regional revisionists. So ultimately it requires regional strategies, both a global sense of order and norms

and institutions, but the fight, so to speak, and by that I mean the fight is statecraft coercion, gray zone coercion, all means short of war, the fight is region by region. And I think you were one of the early people in that line of thinking to really point to that. But it now seems, at least looking at the people who advise Joe Biden, whether they're Brookings or Carnegie or elsewhere, it seems like that is now widely accepted as what we're facing in Asia, a regional revisionist competitor in China. Is that a fair characterization? It seems to me the field has moved in your direction because you called it right.

Tom Wright: Yeah. I think to me, when I started on that regional route, it was really trying to respond to those who would say that we shouldn't worry about China because it's not a global power, it's a regional power. It only wants to revise the status quo in its region. It doesn't have an alternative to the UN or to the WTO or to the Bretton Woods Institutions or anything else. And my point, which I know we agree on, is that international order, world order to the extent it exists, is based on healthy regional orders. It was the fact after World War II that the US basically got Asia right and basically got Europe right that allowed for global cooperation. And Kennan understood that, lots of people understood that back then, if those regional orders collapsed, particularly in Europe and Asia, then the global institutions would follow. The global institutions are based on regional stability, and not the other way around. Five years ago it was pretty commonplace for people to think that the most important thing was the international institutions, the global norms, the global institutions.

Tom Wright: So I think it is regional. I think what happens in Asia is profoundly important not just for Asia and the US but for the entire world. I think what's happened since too, though, and one place where I've slightly not changed my view, but it's just evolved a bit, is I didn't fully understand, when I was writing the book in 2016 or finishing it then, just the global nature of China's power as well in the normative side with Belt and Road with some of the ideological stuff, that they're trying to universalize their censorship laws or put pressure on other countries to make domestic choices to their liking as far away as Europe and elsewhere. And so I think it's both global and regional. But I still think that the core of it is regional. We have to get that regional piece right.

Mike Green: The historical pattern is that rising powers, whether they're democracies or not, are not revisionists globally first, they're revisionists regionally and they free ride globally. It's what the Germans did with the British in the 19th century under Bismarck. It's what the Japanese did with the British in the early 20th century. It's what we did in the 19th century. We were revisionist regionally. Ask Mexico. Don't ask Canada, because we weren't very successful on that front. Or if you're Asian, ask Korea. Or ask this Schleswig or Holstein about German revisionism. But it was regional for these rising powers. And it seems to me that's primarily what China's doing. But you're right, in the last year or two with Belt and Road, with Common Destiny, with some of Xi Jinping's rhetoric about the multilateral order, China is at least playing a normative game. I'm not sure, though, at the end of the day China's that different. It's still primarily a regional

revisionist game. It's the neighborhood where they feel threatened and where they feel they're owed some hegemony, I would say.

Tom Wright: Exactly. And I think the other piece of it that we often miss is that revisionism, if done right, is actually a highly effective strategy just in terms of its prospects and success, because what a revisionist power does is it basically covets territories or places that are fairly peripheral to the major power, that it doesn't care as much about as they do. And then it is able to say, "Do you want to hold our entire relationship at risk for this island or this little chunk of land?"

Tom Wright: And today, obviously, that's Crimea in Europe, it's the South China Sea and elsewhere in Asia. But back in previous eras, they were also obscure places of which people knew very little and didn't even know the names of. And it was exactly the same debate. And so I think revisionism is a hugely thorny problem. It's not an easy, "Let's just be strong," because it actually has a clever insight at its core, which is if you chip away and there is this overall relationship which is pretty valuable to the status quo power, that you can exploit quite a lot of that and make quite a lot of gains and then accrue them over time.

Mike Green: I agree with that. And I think the problem with the traditional liberal institutionalist approach to the world, and especially to Asia, was the instinct, as China began to have more friction with us, was to seek institutions to stabilize the US-China relationship, like the new model of great power relations, like the strategic and economic dialogue in the Obama administration. And to be fair, like the strategic economic dialogue Hank Paulson started at the end of the Bush administration. There are liberal institutionalists on the Republican side too. And the initial evolution from unipolarity to a regional liberal institutional approach following the same logic was, "Let's stabilize bilateral, bipolar relations with China," which played right into the Chinese revisionist argument by marginalizing the Japans and the Indonesias and the Australias and the Indias. And now in public opinion, polls, it seems like people get that the way to deal with a revisionist China is with our allies and partners.

Mike Green: And certainly if you saw the CSIS survey we did, over 80% of thought leaders, not just foreign policy but agriculture, business, 81% said the way to deal with China is strengthen alliances and partnerships. That's our center of gravity. That's what China's revisionism is aimed at witling away. And it seems like from Brookings to CSIS to Carnegie to Heritage to the Center for American Progress, you have to go pretty far to the left or the right to find someone who now dissents.

Mike Green: But let me turn to the election result. Does this election result in 2020, does it tell us that we're going to have a little more clarity about that, do you think, about the strategic approach the US should take in Asia and the world? Or do you think the result with a possibly a Republican-controlled Senate, Trump continuing to attack from, I guess, outside of the White House in 2021 and on, Biden dealing with the left of his own party. Is this a muddied result in terms of American role in the world and Asia, or do you think there's some messages in

here that connect to what we were just talking about, to more of a coherent strategy to the region?

Tom Wright: Yeah. My sense of it, and you probably have a better insight into it than me, but my sense of it is that the Asian allies are actually pretty delighted with the result because that long... There was always this question with Trump, even though he was quite tough on China, there were two concerns about him. One was that they didn't know if he was really in the competition for the long term or if he could flip, if he would have different advisers in the second term, maybe he would strike a deal with Xi Jinping, like the January deal but on steroids, and begin to pull out. And he always had this anti-Japan element in his thinking. And with Prime Minister Abe gone and the new prime minister, there was just lots of uncertainty there. And then the second thing was that the very Manichaean nature of the way in which the administration, particularly Secretary of State Pompeo talks about China, I think was also a little bit discomforting to some of the allies in Asia who wanted this more nuanced relationship with China, even though they wanted to balance against it.

Tom Wright: So they got rid of that by getting Biden, but they also, with having the Republican Senate, have a check on those elements of Democratic party foreign policy that they have concerns with. So I think from their point of view, it wasn't a bad result. Now, whether or not that's true, I guess we can debate and discuss some we'll know over time. I just mean in terms of how the Australians, maybe the Japanese and others, Taiwan, look at this, the mixed outcome is not a bad outcome.

Mike Green: Yeah. I think that's probably right. That the survey we did at CSIS certainly shows that for the most part. Donald Trump was a little bit like Sigourney Weaver in Alien. You never knew when he was going to suddenly pop out and horrify and terrify your government. And that was true for even close allies like Japan and Australia. This Trumpism was so wildly unpredictable, and you probably saw Prime Minister Abe let it slip in an on the record moment that he was exhausted managing Donald Trump. So I think that most of our allies prefer centrists, and Joe Biden's a man of the center. And our allies really depend on multilateral engagement and steadiness. And if we see Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan and Michele Flournoy and people like that, that's a very steady team, a very reliable team.

Mike Green: There is nervousness among the allies that perhaps parts of a Biden administration might go back to the old,new model of great power relations, trying to cozy up to China too much. I thought it was interesting in his early statements, President-elect Biden has used the word Indo-Pacific. He's not using free and open, which I think will be reassuring for Japan and Australia and India that there's going to be a continuation, at least there appears to be a continuation of this kind of maritime strategy, this Mahanian focus on maritime allies that I would say Trump, not himself because he never understood it, but people in the Trump administration should get some credit for. And you can't expect the Biden folks to use the same label, but by using not free and open but

Indo-Pacific, it seems like there's a continuity. I don't know if you see the continuity. There are other voices, of course.

Tom Wright: Yeah. I think that's fair. Yeah. And I think, like you said, the reported early appointments I think will be very reassuring. All of those figures have deep histories in alliance relationships in the region and have visited many times, I think. I think in the broader Democratic foreign policy establishment, there still is a debate on China. And you still have a little bit of those elements that might want to explore a new strategic and economic dialogue and to say, "Well look, we understand that China's partly responsible for this current state of affairs, but we need to cooperate on COVID and on climate change and other things." And then there are those who of course think cooperation is required, a mutual interest, but are skeptical of what it would produce and if there are limits to it and the overall relationship is pretty competitive.

Tom Wright: My view has always been that even if that is mixed in the early stages, reality will sort it out over the course of the first year or two because to me, most of this is driven by Beijing. And so as that becomes apparent, it will definitely shape Biden's foreign policy in that direction. But I have to say, I'm very encouraged by the early signs. I think that they're on the right track. They may not need to go through a lengthy evolution on it. I think they're on the right track and setting the right tone.

Mike Green: And the politics are smarter if you start with allies and don't rush to a G2 with China. That's where this Republican Senate, assuming we have one after January, it kind of looks that way, but even if it's close, a close Senate can still complicate things. And it's smart politics to do allies. Why would Joe Biden use his political capital on a high-profile condominium with China that's not going to go anywhere? So I think politics at home, if not foreign policy strategy, will guide this. But an early cue will be the sequencing. Does he do things with allies first?

Tom Wright: I think one thing that's worth looking at, and that I've been looking at a fair bit recently, is the case for a more China-focused strategy really is about transnational challenges. And it's really about climate, about COVID, and other issues and saying, "Look, we need to cooperate with China." So one thing I've done recently is gone back and looked at the global health diplomacy over the last 15 years. And it's quite interesting. China after 2003 and SARS, put in place these reforms to prevent a more secretive, uncooperative approach to pandemics. The US and Europe engaged a lot with China, built capacity in China, in Chinese labs including Wuhan. Really worked that internally. It seemed like it worked and was quite effective as late as the summer of 2019, and then it all melted away in December '19 when COVID hit and we went back to the worst days of SARS or even worse than that.

Tom Wright: And I think, to me, there's a lesson there, which is, yes, we need to cooperate with China, but the nature of its regime means there are real limits to what that cooperation can produce. And there is much greater potential for cooperation yielding real improvements by working with allies, other free and open societies

to get that common position, common standards on everything from global public health to climate to economics. And then definitely try to work with China as well after doing all of that. But let's just learn the lessons correctly, I think, of the last decade and a half. So I think that's an important issue to engage, because the more G2-esque view is just that you can't do any of this without working with Beijing, which I think overstates the case.

Mike Green: Which, early in the Obama administration, people were saying. They were positioning the US, I think, as the demandeur in the relationship with China. We really need China for climate change. We really... No. China needs to deal with climate change so that the Chinese people can breathe. It's in their interests. And I think all signs that they will. If the Biden team comes in not seeking China's help as the demandeur but because we both have interests in this, and if they make it clear that the pace setter is not China, actually, it's Taiwan and Korea. It's our allies and partners who are doing the best. I think that the script for them almost writes itself. What about just, turning back the Democratic party, we'll psychoanalyze the Republicans in a second. I don't see a whole lot of evidence of the Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders wings on foreign policy or defense. It seems like they're saving their ammunition to deal with financial regulations and things like that. But what do you make of that wing of the Democratic party as it pertains to Asia and security and diplomacy?

Tom Wright: Yeah. I followed that quite closely in the primary and it was quite interesting. Warren carved out a view which was that the US is fighting against this kleptocratic, corrupt, authoritarian network internationally, which has Russia and China and other countries including maybe Hungry and Brazil increasingly while under Bolsonaro is part of it. And then elements within the US as well, those Trumpian elements. And that she wanted the US to push back against that economically, diplomatically, politically, and really to lead a fairly ideological struggle against it to try to ensure that liberal democracy prevailed. So in a lot of ways... And Bernie Sanders talked a bit about that, but less about China and much more about Russia. He brought China in a little bit later on but he was mainly going after Putin.

Tom Wright: And so it was a little bit of an unusual route for the progressives to take because one might have thought they might be more, "Let's pull back from the world and do less."

Mike Green: Sounds like John McCain.

Tom Wright: Yeah. They were making the case to push out. Now, the one thing I think that they pulled back from was on defense spending. They wanted pretty dramatic cuts, starting out with a 12% cut, which I think they just threw out there. They looked at the overseas contingency operations budget, which is about 12%, and said, "Let's cut that," even though that includes a lot of pretty important things in it, including NATO funds and Bahrain and other things. So they had this contradiction, which was they wanted to compete but they also didn't want to compete geopolitically and on defense policy.

Tom Wright: And I think that the concern in the region when you were about January, February, when it looked like Warren could win or Sanders could win, that's what they were really worried about. You can't be credible if you're dramatically cutting the defense budget and pulling back militarily. Since then, they really have, I think, just focused more on domestic policy and the foreign economic policy, which is what really concerns them, and less so on the geopolitical side. I think Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan both played a pretty big role after the primary in talking to Progressives.

Tom Wright: And one thing you hear from Progressives is that they really appreciated that. So I think that both of those people are pretty well placed to listen. I think listening is important, but I don't think they're going to have a lot of pressure in terms of Asia policy. And I think, Mike, the way the Senate turned out made major defense cuts a dead ladder immediately. So that would've been the one place they would've put pressure on. That's very unlikely to happen now. Maybe some nominal or very modest cuts, but nothing in the realm of 10%, 12%, 15%. So I think that also makes it a little less salient as a fissure in the Democratic party.

Mike Green: What about trade, though? You look at the transition teams, and the USGR transition team has a lot of Progressives. And it may be that that's where the Progressives get their points, is keeping us out of CPTPP, perhaps. What do you think?

Tom Wright: I think that the TPP, I think if it happens it will happen in year three. Maybe late two, three, four. Not immediately. I think they want to send a message that they're doing this differently. They'll probably try to have more focused agreements organized around responding to China, and less on regulatory alignment in specific sectors and more on those big macro issues. And particularly about Europe, they're going to want to talk about tax and data and tech. But I think in the Asia context, the tech piece especially. But anything, really, that is trying to respond to China's rise, which I know TPP was doing. But it may be more bilateral or many-lateral. And then if it adds up in the aggregate to allowing entry into TPP at some point in the future, I think they'll do that. But they're going to avoid big multilaterals at the early stage.

Tom Wright: And I think that's just politically inevitable, and I don't think it's all that concerning as long as they are very active. The other thing just to keep in mind is the Progressive, Centrist divide on this is less, I think, about protectionism and more about the type of issues that they want to discuss. So the Progressives' point will be, "Why is foreign economic policy only FTAs? Why doesn't it also include these larger issues in the global economy that people in both parties are upset with, which is why they're voting for these populists? So can we try to address some of those?" So if that's where the energy is, I think that's not necessarily a bad thing. That could be a good thing in terms of addressing some of the concerns people have.

Mike Green: So the technology piece, there is a natural progression from the US-Canada-Mexico Agreement, USMCA, and the US-Japan Agreement, digital trade chapters to a TPP... Not TPP, but certain TPP members doing a digital trade or tech agreement, for example. And I think the TPP broader piece, we're going to have to do them differently. Half of trade agreements don't have a gender inclusion chapter. There's going to be an expectation for more on labor, more on the environment. So it's going to take some time to get to that broad TPP thing. I think I agree with you. But there are some early moves they could make and framing it around competition with China that would play well with key allies. What about Trumpism, the Republicans? I think the Ronald Reagan, McCain, George W. Bush Republican thinking about the world and Asia is alive and well in the Senate with the exception of a handful of members. But Trumpism will also be alive, because he'll still be out there. How does that either shape or mess up what we're talking about?

Tom Wright: Yeah. I think when you're talking about China and Asia, it's really important to distinguish between Trumpism minus Trump and Trumpism with Trump, because there are lots of people who are trying to define Trumpism, and they see themselves at the helm of it, whether it's Ted Cruz or Tom Cotton or Josh Hawley or Nikki Haley, whoever it is. And they, I think, will try to redefine Republican internationalism to be about containment of China. Bit more poplist on the economic side, but broadly they'll want to keep that frame, and they'll probably see Europe and other alliances as part of that as well and try to package all that together and make a fairly assertive argument on China. So that I think is probably what they will try to do. The problem they have is if Trump himself runs again in 2024 or if it's a member of the family who's a nominee, or Tucker Carlson who's the nominee, then it could take on a totally different hue.

Tom Wright: It could be actually isolationist. It could be, "Let's pull out of US-Japan or US-Korea or NATO." So there is a wildcard there. So as long as Trump... I'm always someone, I worked a lot on Trump as an individual and what he believed about the world because I always thought that yes, he was a symptom, but he was also a cause. He was a cause. If Ted Cruz had caught lightning in a bottle in 2016 and become president, I'm sure I would've disagreed with them on like 95% of things, but he would have not responded the same way Trump did on COVID. He would not have basically denied that it existed and told people not to wear a mask. He would not have threatened to pull out of NATO. So there is an element Trumpism unique to him. So this is a long way of answering your question to say, as long as he's around, I think it's a big wildcard about the future US role in the world, because there's not a guarantee that, Berlusconi-like, he won't come back in 2025.

Mike Green: Yeah. You say wildcard. The metaphor that comes to mind for me is, lit match in a powder magazine, because consistently in polls about 20% of Americans say, "We don't want to deal with the world." That isolationist sentiment in the public is probably about 1/5, probably about 20%. And in Congress it's even lower. CSIS has surveyed members of Congress, and it's even lower. But you get maybe a Tucker Carlson or a Donald Trump Jr. or a Trump himself coming back on an

isolationist, like a real 1930s “America First agenda”, pulling out of NATO and Korea, maybe even Japan. That could become the cause for the Trump movement. That could suddenly go from 20% to 40%. So it worries me, actually. And that's where the Lindsey Grahams and the Republican members of Congress who are internationalists are really going to have to make a call, at considerable risk to themselves if that happens. I'm not predicting it, but it's a little dangerous.

Tom Wright: Yeah. Leadership is so important because, firstly, a lot of people will have their impulses shaped and directed by what the leader is saying. They may be isolationists, but they're unlikely to be chomping at the bit to get out of NATO unless one of their leaders says, "This is what we should do," and then that person may also get others. And the other piece, which I have to say I got wrong from the very beginning, was just I thought that Republicans in the Senate would be more outspoken for where they disagreed with Trump on things. And increasingly they've done a little bit of that on key issues beneath the radar, but for the most part they've gone along, and that I don't think will change either.

Mike Green: The one area where I might disagree with you, Tom, I think that's, depressingly true on domestic policy, on the election, on Trump and his allies' just outright lies about fraud in the election so forth. I think on defense policy, the Republicans have done a lot on the Hill. They blocked any moves to withdraw from Korea. Every year, OMB zeroed out funding for democracy and governance, and every year Republicans put it back in. So in stuff that's not Tweetable, they've done a lot. But the line seems to be, once Donald Trump starts Tweeting at you, you risk being primary [crosstalk 00:32:16]. And Trump's been very inconsistent on these four deployments, and no one's really triggered his anger on those issues. But if it becomes the thing for Trumpism, then that's worrisome. I guess that's what I'm getting at. Will these Republicans continue to do what they've done, I think pretty effectively, blocking Trump legislatively from isolationism? Will they keep doing it when he's Tweeting about it?

Tom Wright: One thing I'd like to see, which I think is a way of capitalizing on that feeling amongst Republicans on alliance and defense issues during a Biden administration is, why not try to introduce legislation to require congressional approval for particularly controversial moves by a commander in chief in the future? So if you want to get out of NATO, you have to have a congressional resolution. If you want to pull out of US-Japan, you'd need congressional authorization. To make it quite explicit, because I think one of the things that surprised people was that Trump had all of this leeway because it was just assumed that people were generally supportive of alliances. Couldn't really conceive of a president who would be the opposite. In the NATO context, there's virtually no... The provision for withdrawing from NATO in the treaty is that the country that wants to withdraw has to inform the American president a year in advance, not the NATO secretary general, because it's assumed that the American president is...

Mike Green: Yeah, exactly.

Tom Wright: So maybe there are things we can do in the next four years to codify into legislation certain internationalisms so one person can't just do it without congressional approval,

Mike Green: Like the War Powers Act, but for treaties. And actually that's fascinating. You could actually pull that off because Republicans would be happy to tie Joe Biden's hands and say that's what they're doing when in fact they're controlling their own party. I don't want to sound too pessimistic. I'm generally confident that the internationalists, especially in the Senate, will draw the line on defense and foreign policy in a way you didn't see them do, for example, on the election results. It won't just be Mitt Romney. But it could be a hell of a fight in the Republican party. We'll have to see. Last thing I want ask you, Tom. This has been fascinating. I'm sure there are a lot of people listening who are contemplating PhDs, doing PhDs, deciding whether to go to think tanks, government, academia. You got your PhD, you went for policy work. Any advice before we finish on how people should think about careers? You've done academia, you've done think tanks. It's hard, as you know, to do political science or history and straddle both the policy and academic worlds, but you've done it. So any parting words of wisdom?

Tom Wright: Yeah, just a few general pointers. One is, doing a PhD is a huge commitment and I think it's not for everyone. I think you really want to be sure you want to do it before you do it. And it doesn't really prepare you for policy because it's increasingly methodological and theoretical, and it's an excellent training, but I think think tanks, when they're doing recruiting, probably have some questions about whether someone's focused on policy enough. So my first bit of advice would be, if you're doing a PhD and you want to go into policy, try to have two tracks, almost two resumes that you produce over six years. And one resume is focused on that academic track that you can present and has your journal articles up front and center and the teaching and all of that.

Tom Wright: And the other might be stuff you were doing at the same time in parallel, which is building connections in think tanks and elsewhere. I always actually use the example to people, I say if you're working on Japan, I say people like you, Mike, should be aware of their work if they're going out into the job market before they do it. And there's lots of ways they can bring it to your attention in their fifth, sixth year of a PhD. By publishing it in certain journals or asking you to a conference or others. So I think that those two tracks, I think, are very important. And then the other piece I think is, if you want to go into a think tank, think about what the think tanks are looking for. And I always advise people, if you're applying for a job as a junior scholar or fellow, produce a two-pager with a few projects you want to work on and that fit into the funding model of that think tank and into their research interests and to show what you would do in the job before you get the job.

Tom Wright: Because at least that shows you're thinking along the business lines that research institutions have, which is, "We're project oriented, we're concerned about where our funding will come from, and we're trying to figure out the next

best…the new question that will really make an impact on policy." So to be sort of practical like that.

Mike Green: That's good advice. And we have a pretty good audience, probably a small fraction are actually contemplating PhDs but the same logic can be applied for people in the Military or in the State Department. In a way, what you're saying is have a split personality, or keep one eye on the policy you're working on and one eye on the bigger questions, whether it's strategy or academic methodology. You kind of have to do two things at once, in a way.

Tom Wright: Yeah. I'm a strong advocate that we as a community need to fix or totally reform our recruiting practices. Right now, if you wanted to go from anywhere, really, into a think tank, there's no path to do that. There's no jobs fair involved. There's nothing like that. Everyone has their own story. This is what makes your questions at the beginning of your podcast so interesting. How did you end up where you are? And everyone has their own circuitous route usually to where they are. And I think we need, as a sector, to be much more systematic in saying, "If you want to do this, here are the steps you can follow, and this is the way to apply." And we try to do a little bit of that at Brookings. I'm sure at CSIS and elsewhere as well. But we have a lot more to do. But until we actually fix that, I think it is important to try to build a portfolio of policy-relevant work while doing your other day job, whether it's a PhD or the Military or whatever it is at that moment in time.

Mike Green: I totally agree with that. And we're struggling a bit at CSIS, trying to find the answer to that question. I think it's important for the future of think tanks in terms of credibility too. If their recruitment is a little too opaque, a little too rarefied, a little too much of the Illuminati, that used to be what's fun about think tanks, but I think in the post-Brexit world we live in, we've got to be smarter about making it clear that recruitment and ideas are more inclusive. More on that. Tom, you're one of the best minds in Washington on this stuff, so it's been a real treat having you. Thank you.

Tom Wright: Mike, thanks so much. This is great. Thank you.

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.