TRANSCRIPT

The Asia Chessboard Podcast

“Key Square: Taiwan on the Chessboard with Bonny Lin”

RECORDING DATE

Tuesday June 29, 2021

SPEAKERS:

Bonny Lin

Director, China Power Project and Senior Fellow, Asian Security, CSIS

HOST:

Mike Green

Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS
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.

This week. Mike sits down with Bonny Lin, senior fellow for Asian Security and the new director of the China power project at CSIS to talk about one of the hottest topics on the chess board, the Taiwan Strait. Bonny and Mike assess if China and Taiwan are truly on the brink of war. Dive into China's overall strategy towards Taiwan and discuss what US commitment to Taiwan security means for allies and partners in the region.

Welcome back to the Asia of Chessboard. I'm delighted to have with us, Dr. Bonny Lin, who is not only joining us on the Asia Chessboard, but has joined CSIS our new senior fellow for Asian security and the director of the China Power Project, which Bonnie Glaser started. She's moved on to the German Marshall Fund, where you can follow her work and Bonny's picking up and moving in some new directions, that project to measure Chinese power and its impact and work on security issues as they touch on greater China, if you will, including importantly, the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, and so forth.

So Bonny, welcome to CSIS and welcome to the Asia Chessboard. We always start asking how you got here. And so how'd you get interested in Asian security? What were the key milestones along the way?

Thank you very much, Mike. It's really great to be here and to have joined CSIS this month. So my path towards working on China and Taiwan foreign policy issues was not necessarily a straightforward one. I started off in undergraduate thinking that I actually wanted to become a medical doctor because I wanted to contribute to something good, positive, and maybe help save some lives.

Somewhere between undergraduate and graduate school. My switch focus to US, China relations. And I was most interested in understanding how the two countries could, if possible, work together. And if cooperation was not possible, I was most interested in understanding how the two countries could find ways to avoid war. I think part of what drove my switch to foreign policy, were the discussions that were occurring at that time when I was in college about the Iraq war in 2003 and the implications of use of military force. I also remember back then that Taiwan president Chen Shui-bian's referendum in 2004, and all of the discussions about future cross relations and how the building back and forth between China and Taiwan had the raised potential of a China, Taiwan conflict in which the United States could be involved.
Bonny Lin: So given my interest in US China relations, I then took a somewhat unconventional path in terms of focusing on China. I focused on China for a master's degree, but I did not focus on it for my PhD dissertation. My master's advisor at that time, Professor Kenneth Lieberthal at the University of Michigan had advised me that there are many experts who understand China, but not all of these experts who understand China actually understand US foreign policy. So he recommended, I try to combine both for my research. So as a result, my dissertation was more broadly focused on US foreign policy during the Cold War. So I was incredibly fortunate to be able to continue to go back to working on China after I graduated from my PhD.

Mike Green: You're not the first social scientist, working on international security, who thought at one point they were going to be a doctor and go to med school and then encountered anatomy and advanced biology courses, and also got inspired by theories of impact and change in international relations. Your PhD was not on China specifically though, right?

Bonny Lin: No, it was not. It was more broadly on unused non-proliferation policy.

Mike Green: And you did that at Yale?

Bonny Lin: Yes, I did.

Mike Green: And so, how did you end up, Did you go right to RAND from there?

Bonny Lin: I did. Yeah. So even though I didn't focus on China as my dissertation, I was still doing some work related to China on the side for different courses in my studies. And I went to RAND right afterwards. And because they saw that I could combine the analysis on China as well as an analysis on broader nuclear security issues, as well as general foreign policy.

Mike Green: And a lot of your work at RAND focused on Taiwan Straits and security hotspots, right?

Bonny Lin: Yeah. It focused on Taiwan, focused on South China Sea, East China Sea, generally on Chinese foreign policy and the range of issues that China dealt with in it's neighborhood.

Mike Green: So let's go right to the topic that's at the center of everyone's thinking right now on US China relations in terms of hotspots. I mean, people talk about the south China Sea, but the one that is in some ways closer to being existential for both China and perhaps the US is the Taiwan Strait. And we've had a variety of sort of unprecedented statements by Indo-Pacom commander as US officials suggesting, "We're potentially on the brink of war. No, we're not. We can handle it." Where do you put the danger meter on cross straits attention right now? Are we on the brink of war?
Bonny Lin: So I think that's a super important question. I personally don't think that we are that close to the brink of war, but I can understand how some would perceive that given the dynamics there. So what is happening is that China is continuing to increase coercion against Taiwan. China has increased a number of incursions in Taiwan's air space. China is also increasing it's military activities near or around Taiwan.

Bonny Lin: At the same time, right? The Chinese media is also increasing its disinformation and psychological warfare against Taiwan, which includes sounding the drum bells which folks have been picking up on. And also warning that China could use military force against Taiwan. Chinese experts also portray the PLA as being strong and capable of defeating Taiwan, including also defeating the United States should the United States intervene. So I think when people put this together, it's easy to come with the perception that China is on the brink of war.

Bonny Lin: But I think when we look at whether there is a high risk of conflict in the Taiwan Straits or not, we have to take into consideration how China might be thinking about Taiwan within it's larger foreign policy goals. And China has a number of foreign policy goals, including development, including becoming much more powerful, both regionally in the Pacific and globally. And depending on who you talk to, China experts may believe that China wants to be a, if not the global leader. All of these global goals could be upset by a invasion or a war with Taiwan, because China still depends on a number of countries for economic resources. It would create an atmosphere that would be quite detrimental to the overall goals that China could have.

Bonny Lin: And when China looks at the needs it currently has against Taiwan, China has a pretty, I would say, a relatively successful combination of carrots and sticks that China has used over the years against Taiwan. And it's not clear from the Chinese perspective that the Chinese policy of using the combination of incentives and coercion against Taiwan has failed.

Mike Green: It hasn't failed you're saying?

Bonny Lin: I don't think so.

Mike Green: You mentioned that, I mean, when you look at the, for example, public opinion polls on Taiwan, the support for unification has just evaporated because of the coercion against Taiwan, but also because of what happened in Hong Kong. So a lot of people say that the Chinese policy has failed, and that's why they're moving towards force. You're saying no, no. Within Beijing, they will not necessarily have concluded this isn't working. That we don't like it, but it's not war, the gray zone coercion, the pressure, and some carrots, not many. And do you think that the weight of opinion in Zhongnanhai in China is that, "No, this is still working. We can still make this work?"
Bonny Lin: I think the weight of opinion is they haven't assessed it has failed completely. So for example, when you're looking at the overall dynamics, right? When you're looking at whether the military cross straight balance, China has a significant military advantage. If you're looking at the economic dynamics, Taiwan's economy as a portion of China's is significantly much lower than say, 20 or 30 years ago.

Bonny Lin: And from Beijing's perspective, it believes it has a lot of tools to impact Taiwan domestically, including inserting itself into Taiwan domestic politics, whether that is supporting opposition parties or sound discord among Taiwan's democracy. It's not clear from Beijing's perspective that with all the tools that China has and the fact that China is becoming more and more powerful, vis-à-vis Taiwan that moving forward at some point a time when people recognize their future is better when they're linked to China, versus if Taiwan seeks to maintain a status quo or move towards independence.

Mike Green: So, what would it take, do you think for the weight of opinion in Zhongnanhai to shift towards the conclusion it's not working? Would it be, I mean, obviously de jure independence by Taiwan, is a trigger. I mean, that's now codified in the anti-succession law of 2005. We know that, but would, for example, a succession of DPP victories in presidential elections, do that, do you think? What would shift the opinion in Beijing towards concluding that the current approach of sticks and carrots, many more sticks than carrots these days, but is working and don't need to use force.

Bonny Lin: Mike, I think that's a really good question and I'm not sure I necessarily have the answer to that, but I can speculate some of-

Mike Green: Yeah, you're at a think tank now. You're not at a federally funded research development center, so you're allowed to speculate freely.

Bonny Lin: So I think one possibility could be exactly like you mentioned, you have successive victories of a DPP candidates or candidates that take more and more pro-independence positions. So it's clear from Beijing that even after President Tsai leaves office, that there will not be another party that wants to unify with China or believes in a one China policy.

Bonny Lin: The other possibility is that if Taiwan becomes much more powerful, whether that's economically or politically, such that Taiwan provides an alternative vision to China of which that is attracting a lot more international attention and support. So I could see in the first case that you outlined with Taiwan, China, seeing that its policies on Taiwan is failing because it's pushing the island away. And the second case I could see China believing that it's fall policies on Taiwan failed because Taiwan's become more powerful and China's viewing particularly Xi Jinping as viewing it. It's impossible, for example, to have a national rejuvenation, when you have this Taiwan that is presenting a different narrative and a much stronger one to compete against China.
Mike Green: Let me as you to speculate on another variable, to test a little bit the robustness of this consensus you think there is in Zhongnanhai that the strategy is working. They've clearly cranked up the pressure, but they're not attacking and not using force yet. And you mentioned earlier that part of it is China has other goals, development, global leadership, regional leadership, legitimacy at home and of course, ineffective use of force would undermine legitimate. So very high costs to using force against Taiwan.

Mike Green: As a thought exercise, if those costs were not there, if the US commitment was not there to Taiwan, if we were backing away, if Taiwan could be taken with force without jeopardizing Beijing’s global goals, do you think that Xi Jinping would go for it? In other words, how important are the international barriers to the use of force and the cost of China's position, economically, diplomatically, regionally and globally?

Mike Green: For example, I'm thinking of Hong Kong where China has gone a lot further than anyone, not anyone but most anticipated, not anyone, but most, because it could, because it had the presence in Hong Kong. It had the tools of coercion had PLA on the ground. It had control of the Hong Kong police. If the barriers were about the same as Hong Kong, don’t you think that China would be tempted to use force? Or do you think that that’s still different enough from Hong Kong it's still risky enough?

Bonny Lin: I think China would be definitely more attempted to use force, but I guess the other consideration to have with the understanding of the current Chinese military capabilities to invade the island and use force against Taiwan. And I think if you take out the US intervention factor, that military operation becomes a lot less complex because the PLA would not have to deal with an intervening United States, as well as where the United States might be operating in.

Bonny Lin: But that doesn't mean that the operation would be costless. It would still be quite damaging on the PLA. It also could, impose significant costs on an island. It could mean depending on how the operation occurs, significant destruction of Taiwan in the process, as well as parts of coastal China, which could have quite a bit of impact on how China functions internally and public opinion in China about the cost of such a conflict in Taiwan.

Bonny Lin: So I think it's a little different from Hong Kong where Hong Kong didn't exactly have a independent military or government that was able to stand up against China the same way. So I do think if there was no prospect of US intervention, there would be more temptation on China's part, but I don't think it would be the same degree of which it would be as easy for China to sort of roll into Taiwan in the same way that it has been able to exert influence over Hong Kong.

Mike Green: A really important distinction. Taiwan can impose pain on the mainland in a way that Hong Kong couldn’t. I mean, the democracy activists tried and Apple Daily News tried, and we know what’s happened. So that's a very important distinction, but Hong Kong also shows us that there is a much higher risk
tolerance in Beijing. And they care less what the international community thinks, which has direct implications for how we think about security in Taiwan and Chinese intention. Evan Maduros and I argued this in a foreign affairs piece about six months ago.

**Mike Green:** So then the other costs and arguably the most important cost that China would face of course, would be the cost of a conflict with the US, which of course could escalate to God knows how far. And we've seen over the last years and months, a number of scholars say that in war games, Graham Alison always uses this in his writings, in war games, the US loses most of the fights with China over Taiwan and Oriana Mastro recently implied the same in her foreign affairs piece.

**Mike Green:** I, having been in many war games, sort of wonder how some scholars claim to know what happens in all the word games, but also you've done a lot of war gaming at RAND. How should we think about these scenarios? Should there be US-China conflict over the Taiwan question?

**Bonny Lin:** Thank you Mike. I think that's a really important question because a lot of war games, including war games from RAND are used by folks to justify their perception that the United States is not able to defeat China in a Taiwan conflict, or that China will win over the United States in Taiwan scenarios.

**Bonny Lin:** So my personal experience of working on war games is there's a lot of assumptions built into the war game about how capable the Chinese military is, including assuming that the Chinese military, which has not been in a high-end conflict against a peer for decades, would be able to function the way that they intend to and would be able to incorporate all the advanced capabilities that it has now brought into its arsenal. I think that is still very much a question mark.

**Bonny Lin:** So a lot of war games portray China, as a much more powerful and much more men and cast it into a future. So not necessarily, they're not necessarily, I'm trying to understand how China would necessarily invade Taiwan tomorrow, but in the future hypothetical scenario, how might China necessarily act. Part of this is because war games are designed to help the United States be able to plan our capabilities. So they're not designed to be easy on the United States. They're design to challenging us, is to help us improve. So in that sense, I think it would be somewhat misleading to take the results of these war games and say, either the United States won, or the United States lost.

**Mike Green:** And the bottom line is in my experience. And there are many different kinds of games. There are political military games. There are games that test the war plan. There are games that test specific variables like missile defense or political willpower. Very few of these games are designed to be predictive. They're designed to make you think about variables, stress your capabilities, and so forth. So I'm glad we had this little detour because I think it's important to put that in context.
Mike Green: However, that said, I think it's safe to assume that the US war plan, whatever state it's in is a heck of a lot harder to execute today than it was five years ago or 10 years ago. So the problem is clearly harder for us. What do you think the US needs to do to make sure that if we don't have dominance, we have at least effective deterrence vis-a-vis China and the Taiwan Strait.

Bonny Lin: Right. So I think the United States needs to do a number of things. Number one is making sure that we're investing in the right capabilities in order to counter China in the Taiwan Strait. And I would put in the number two after that, or maybe joining number two and three would be helping Taiwan invest in capabilities that it needs for itself, because we want a capable partner that we're helping. And we want to also make Taiwan responsible for its own defenses so that when we're coming in, we can work very effectively with Taiwan in the case that we do need to intervene in a China-Taiwan contingency.

Bonny Lin: And closely related to that is we need to be able to be working with our close allies and like-minded states to come to Taiwan's defense. So for the United States to be able to operate effectively in a China-Taiwan, conflict, we, for example, need access to military bases in Japan. Ideally we would also want Japan to contribute to such a fight. So I would put those three items as probably the most important. First United States has to invest ourselves, helping Taiwan and then working, getting support from our key allies and partners in the region.

Mike Green: You may have seen a few weeks ago in the Nikkei Shimbun in Japan, 74% of Japanese said that Japan should play a role, or has that stake in the security of the Taiwan Strait. And the Japanese parliamentary defense vice minister gave a speech recently at Hudson where he said, "Taiwan and Japan are not just friends we're," I think he said, "We're brothers."

Mike Green: And the defense guidelines that were reviewed and revised between the US and Japan about six years ago, and the new Japanese interpretation of article nine, allowing collective defense, all of that political regulatory policy, constitutional variable is, is more permissive now for Japan to do more with us. At the end of the day, I don't see Japan going anywhere near us in terms of having a Taiwan relations act or an explicit commandment, but the use of force, the successful use of force against Taiwan or the absorption of Taiwan by China would be, if not existential, it certainly would hit vital entry for Japan's sea lanes a hundred miles from Japan's territory, the effective use of force in the first island chain, possibly the control of TSMC and major technology hubs that are so crucial to Japan.

Mike Green: But of course, that's all true for the US too. And one of the challenges we have, I think in the US is convincing Beijing that the security of Taiwan is as important to us as it is to China. Or put differently, the Chinese narrative is that it's existential for national unification is the highest order importance for China, whereas Taiwan as far away from the US.
Mike Green: But when you think about the future of Asia, when you think about the importance of the first island chain, when you think about Japan, which arguably in the 21st century is our most important ally in the 20th century, perhaps it was Britain. You think about all these things. I don't know whether you'd call it vital or existential. Well, I'd say it's vital, and we need to communicate that in our narratives. And I think that Biden administration and Congress are doing that pretty well. I think it's pretty clear, don't you? I mean, do you think that Beijing has any doubt now? Maybe they did a few years ago, but a doubt about the American willpower on this?

Bonny Lin: I don't think so. Chinese military planning has taken into account that the United States is likely to intervene in such a scenario and it's part of their training. It's part of their investments in military capabilities. And I would add to your point about sort of the importance of Taiwan by pointing out that even though we do not have a clear security defense commitment to Taiwan, we are Taiwan's primary defense partner, and it would be widely perceived by the region that if we do not come to Taiwan's aid, that we are not as involved in the region. And we are to some extent ceding our influence to China.

Bonny Lin: So I think despite the fact that we don't have the treaty or not, it is perceived and there will be an emotional reaction from countries in the region that the United States is not standing up to our general commitments, as well as standing up to Chinese coercion in the region if we don't come to Taiwan's defense.

Mike Green: In addition to that Nikkei Shimbun poll, I mentioned where 74% of Japanese agreed they have an important stake in the Taiwan Strait, which is really remarkable actually, because most of post-war Japanese history was about avoiding that mission, if you will. And now I think there's broad support for Japan playing a supporting mission. Again, not out of a defense commitment to Taiwan, but because force against the first island chain is pretty vital or existential in terms of Japan's national interests and therefore very high on ours.

Mike Green: My sense is the Chinese probably plan Japan in now too, in a way they didn't before. And maybe Australia. Although Australia's geographic distance, logistical role is more distant than Japan's, but my guess, and this is, of course we're speaking based on entirely not classified, guesswork on our part, but my guess would be the PLA assumes Australia will play some role. Maybe not in the Taiwan Strait, but in securing the Southern flank.

Mike Green: The interesting question is, in some ways, Europe, I don't suspect that the PLA expects to fight the QE2 or the Charles de Gaulle, but that the European piece is really important in terms of broader accosting position on the economic and geopolitical side. What's your sense of how China reads Europe? I mean, the usual narrative in open source Chinese literature is that there's a multipolar world and the US and European poles are different. They discount the Transatlantic Alliance, but Biden's trip to Europe, though not perfect, sure was
interesting in that context. I mean, Taiwan got mentioned for the first time in these summits. What's your sense of how China's viewing this right now?

Bonny Lin: So I think China is quite concerned in the direction that EU, NATO and G7 are moving. We actually just had a panel yesterday on how the EU and US are viewing China and the China challenge. And what was interesting from that panel is that we're now closer to Europe in terms of thinking about China challenge than we were say five years ago. And China definitely is seeing this and tracking it. But I agree with you. I don't think China assumes that Europe would necessarily be involved militarily. Right now, a lot of the European concerns on China are more on the softer security side, but as you mentioned, there has been a recent statement about the need for sort of peace in the Taiwan Straits.

Bonny Lin: So I think China will be closely following that, to see if that is been backed by military activities from individual European countries and what that means in terms of their own planning.

Mike Green: And I have to say, and I think you'd agree. This is all possible, this stronger Japanese, US, and in a different way, European support for Taiwan. It's possible because Tsai Ing-wen is steady. And though she's not agreed as China's demanded that the so-called Singapore in 1992 consensus is the basis for cross straits dialogue and nor should she, by way in my view. So she's fallen short of Beijing's expectations in that regard.

Mike Green: Nevertheless, she's been very steady and very disciplined and a real contrast, frankly, to the president she worked for who I knew and interacted with Chen Shui-bian, who was just a little bit like Donald Trump in the sense that he used unpredictability as a political tool. But it made the US and Japan and other countries very suspicious of where he was taking us in this wild ride back in 2003, 2004 and 2005 and Tsai Ing-wen saw that. She was the MAC chairwoman head of the Mainland Affairs Council. I interacted with her quite a bit when I was in the NSC about Taiwan's intentions, with respect to the referendum they did at the time and so forth.

Mike Green: But one thing I learned about Tsai Ing-wen is she's a lawyer, a trade lawyer. She's incredibly smart, and she can read the situation extremely well. And I think she's realized and successfully demonstrated that the most important thing she can do for Taiwan in some ways is be reliable and predictable. And that's part of why this alignment is happening internationally I think to her credit.

Mike Green: I want to circle back to what you said at the beginning, though, if I understood correctly, you said that the consensus is that in Beijing, in the central military commission in Zhongnanhai, or whatever we call it, the current strategy hasn't failed. And then when I said, what would tell China failed? You mentioned success of the DPP and sort of modularization of the deep blue pro unification
forces, which is happening and increasing international alignment and support of Taiwan, which is happening.

Mike Green: So I'm afraid to ask you this, but is there a danger we'll be the victims of our own success that we'll be so successful in dissuading China from using gray zone coercion that maybe force gets more attractive?

Bonny Lin: I do think there is a danger of when we look at, for example, US or in international communities, engagements and interactions with Taiwan, we do see that when we do show significant support to Taiwan, China does feel the need to respond. So for example, when R. Sanders visited Taiwan and provided Taiwan with the vaccine, China responded relatively quickly, a couple of days afterwards with a massive show of military airplanes in Taiwan's airspace, right? So we do see a track record that our actions do lead to Chinese reactions.

Bonny Lin: But I think for China to be able to, or at least Chinese leadership, to see that it's Taiwan strategy as failed, I think it requires that Taiwan to sort of reverse the trend that we've seen recently, which is that China's growth, it does not have significantly overshadow that of Taiwan, whether that's economic growth or political power influence. And I think right now, even if, for example, we're providing more support to Taiwan. When you look at overall China's power versus Taiwan's power China's power is significantly much more relative to Taiwan's. I think it would be difficult for us to, for example, increase Taiwan's power to the extent that China would feel that it is very much threatened by where Taiwan is heading right now.

Mike Green: So we're okay. We're okay.

Bonny Lin: I think so.

Mike Green: We're not in danger of France and Germany, increasing diplomatic relations back to Taipei and somehow causing the conflict. So that's reassuring. And I think when Xi Jinping sees a problem, he grabs a hammer. And I don't see Xi Jinping softening his stance towards Taiwan in the next, I'd say three to five years would be my guesstimate.

Mike Green: But I do think there's a possibility of bending the arc of history a little bit of convincing leaders in Beijing, that coercion is not working. They won't give it up. They'll never give it up, but that they're better off going towards confidence building or economic cooperation or winning hearts and minds. But we have a lot of work to do to convince them of that. And I think there are three key pieces we have to have. We have to have a steady Taipei and Tsai Ing-wen's good, but we don't know what comes next. So that's a little bit of an uncertainty. That's why Bonnie Glaser and a number of us were skeptical about getting rid of strategic ambiguity about making a clear security commitment like we do with Japan or Korea because we don't know what comes next after Tsai Ing-wen, when who's been critical to the stability that we've achieved.
Mike Green: I think the second factor is the deterrence and that's about US modernizing capabilities, but Taiwan too. It's so critical Taiwan get the right kit and have the right defense doctrine. And then the third piece is international support to show that there wouldn't be a geopolitical cost and Beijing will not give up the course of option. But it may be less prominent in how they approach cross straits. I think that's a long-term game.

Bonny Lin: So I think in addition to the course of element, I think there's also the whole effort that China is doing in terms of disinformation and the subversive effort within Taiwan domestically. So I could see, for example maybe China putting a pause on grabbing Taiwan's allies which China has done over the years, but increasing its efforts to increase disinformation. Taiwan becoming more involved in supporting local proxy actors in Taiwan. So I think in addition to thinking about what we need to do to prevent China from externally coercing Taiwan, we also need to be able to help increase the resilience of Taiwan society to counter the use of fake news or foreign actors acting within Taiwan to disrupt Taiwan's elections, or to disrupt Taiwan's domestic discussions on certain issues or topics.

Mike Green: And China's been very aggressive on that front, going into the election, Tsai Ing-wen won, and then after the election in trying to undermine confidence in her government and democracy. But I've been very impressed with Taipei. I mean, I think the way they have handled this has been really gold standard in terms of highlighting these use of bots and disinformation campaigns countering it. I don't know. What do you think, is it working for China, or they'll just get smarter and the game will continue?

Bonny Lin: So I think it definitely is a back and forth in terms of Taiwan coming up with effective countermeasures and China, increasing it's different tactics, using different approaches. So I think like for example, Taiwan's governance pairing up with civil society organizations to establish facts checking centers are excellent in trying to be able to filter the information that's being circulated to Taiwan society.

Bonny Lin: But if you're looking at what's happening recently, in terms of Chinese, disinformation efforts related to the COVID-19 vaccine. I was reading a news article today. There's some questioning of whether China has been relatively successful in portraying Taiwan's COVID vaccines as contributing to the death of elders to have caused Taiwan's vaccination efforts to hit some difficulties internally. So, so I think Taiwan has done a lot, but I think there's also more to do because Chinese tactics are shifting. China basically tries to use whichever methods they can to insert itself into Taiwan society.

Mike Green: People debate this, but my sense is that Taiwan is the central front and the pay center for Beijing's disinformation strategies. And you're seeing some of the same tactics show up in Australia and New Zealand, although we know about it because they pass legislation to counter it. Less well known, I think you see it in places like Mongolia and the Pacific islands. And I think Taipei has a lot to teach
these other democracies about how to defend themselves. It doesn't require diplomatic relations for those lessons to be conveyed. And I think there's been some of that and hope there's more.

Bonny Lin: Very much so. I definitely agree with that.

Mike Green: So let's shift to your CSIS role. So you're obviously going to work on these issues, but also China power. What should we be looking for and what can people tune in to?

Bonny Lin: Yeah, thanks for asking Mike. So in terms of my general broad research interests, I'm broadly interested in Chinese foreign policy, as well as Taiwan foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region and at large. I would group my research interests into, I guess, three large buckets. The first is of course, China power and issues related to basically building off of what Bonnie Glaser has already set up, a very successful site and a very successful model.

Bonny Lin: So where I see China power, or I guess, how I'm calling it 2.0 is basically taking what Bonnie had done, the very successful analysis of Chinese power across different elements of Chinese power and then putting it together into cross-cutting analysis. So an example of a cross-cutting analysis could be looking at how Chinese power has shifted after a major event or how Chinese power has changed as China's thinking about either achieving a particular goal or how China seeks to influence a particular country or nation for that respect.

Bonny Lin: A second research area that I have in addition to China power is looking more broadly at exactly what the issues that we were talking about. How China uses coercion and gray zone tactics against key allies and partners in Indo-Pacific. So Taiwan, as we mentioned is obviously on the top of the list of Chinese targets, but Japan is also a target, India, Philippines. Basically all of China's neighbors in the Indo-Pacific and beyond are a target of Chinese gray zone pressure.

Bonny Lin: And the third major bucket that I'm interested in is looking at, how can we as a competition with China is heating up, how can we basically install some guard rails in the US-China relationship, such that the dynamics do not escalate in a way that is uncontrollable either from our end or from Beijing's end. So I'm very interested in, for example, establishing crisis deconfliction measures, or looking in ways in which we can try to identify ways to manage escalation between the United States and China.

Mike Green: That sounds great. And people can find it on the CSIS.org website. And will you do a podcast of your own now?

Bonny Lin: Yes. So I will be continuing the podcast that Bonnie Glaser started and we hope to have a podcast every two weeks or so. We're still trying to line up speakers for the next podcast. Hopefully it will be a new podcast will be available in the next two weeks or so.
Mike Green: Excellent. And it sounds like China power 2.0, China power 1.0, had really compelling assessments of Chinese power as means, as instruments. It sounds like China 2.0 is going to look a little bit more at the efficacy of those, the ways that those means are used and what it tells us a bit about the actual. It tells us a bit about intentions, of course, but it tells us about the actual utility of those tools, which is sort of the next logical step in the project.

Mike Green: And gray zones are really important. We did a massive study Zack Cooper, Cath Hicks, John Schultz and myself, and to begin Zack did the heavy lifting of what gray zone coercion looked like when you looked at the major maritime cases. And this was about five, six years ago. I think it's still the longest sort of unclassified assessment of how China used gray zone tactics. But we're due for a refresh because Beijing has established itself in the South China Sea in new ways and is doing things that you were just describing in Taipei and elsewhere. What some people call sharp power that are new.

Mike Green: But also Taiwan, Australia, other countries are getting smarter about defending their democratic institutions. And there's more of an international pushback, even if it's still quite broad against some of... China's paying the cost itself in other words, for some of its success. So we'll look forward to all that Bonny. It's outstanding that you're with us, and I encourage people to follow your podcast and check out the research as you get started on the website and look forward to working with you. Thanks very much for joining us.

Bonny Lin: Thank you very much, Mike. It was my pleasure to join you today.

Hannah Fodale: Thank you for listening to the Asia Chessboard. We will be going on a summer break and will return in August.

Andrew Schwartz: For more on strategy and the Asia Programs work, visit the CSIS website at csis.org and click on the Asia Program page.