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.

Ben Rimland: Mike sits down with Will Inboden, associate professor of public policy and director of the Clements Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Will is also a former senior NSC official for strategic planning. Mike and Will unpack popular misconceptions about the application of history to grand strategy and discuss the critical place of values in American foreign policy. They also preview Will’s forthcoming book on the Reagan administration.

Mike Green: So Will, I've learned more from you on the NSC staff when we worked together for George W. Bush and as a scholar since about how to use history and statecraft and you're really making that a core theme of your career and training a new generation at UT Austin at the Clements Center, which we'll get to, but tell me how you got into this whole foreign policy business and interested in strategy.

Will Inboden: It was a bit of a circuitous route. I mean, so growing up as a kid in Tucson, Arizona, I loved reading military history, histories of World War II, loved visiting the Pima Air Museum, the world's largest outdoor air museum to see the old World War II and Cold War aircraft there. Then when I was in college at Stanford, I was majoring in history and IR, but decided I had a calling to go into the ministry. And so I gave up my interest in politics and policy and instead wanted to go to seminary to be a pastor. And my junior year at Stanford, I arranged an internship with the chaplain of the Senate thinking if you can learn how to do ministry with politicians, you can learn how to do ministry with anybody. And a week before I was supposed to travel to Washington to do the internship, the Senate chaplain staff notified me that he had to take a medical leave of absence from the job. He was in poor health and shortly thereafter died actually. And so I had this one way ticket to DC and my internship totally fell through. So I talked to a couple of friends from DC and they helped line up an internship for me with then Senator Dan Coats who is on the Armed Services Committee. And that three month internship totally got me re-engaged again on foreign and defense policy. It then led to my first job after graduation, working for Senator Sam Nunn, of course, here with the CSIS Board, and then in turn a career in foreign policy. So it all goes back to maybe the hand of God intervening and moving me in a different direction back into policy.

Mike Green: I'm discovering a Sam Nunn foreign policy peculiarity because John Hamre, who was his principal staffer on the Senate Armed Services Committee, also went to divinity school.

Will Inboden: Yes, yes. I know John and I-

Mike Green: And trained for the ministry.

Will Inboden: Yeah.
Mike Green: What’d you take away from that in terms of strategy?

Will Inboden: This was in the mid ’90s. It was towards the end of Senator Nunn’s time in the Senate and was a fascinating time as a young person to be working on American foreign policy, of course we’re dealing with the aftermath of the Cold War. He and Dick Lugar had teamed up on the Nunn-Lugar Coop Threat Program Reduction. We are working with the Clinton administration on some of the Balkans interventions trying to reinvigorate some parts of American human rights and democracy promotion, now that there’s a new window. And for me it was a lot of fun. It was somewhat unprecedented. We now look back and see the unipolar moment, but it also has raised a lot of bigger questions. How does all this fit together? What does all this mean? Are we just making up policy on the fly here in this uncharted territory? Are there any historical continuities or discontinuities? And so that’s what actually prompted me to go back to grad school and do my PhD at Yale, then studying the grand strategy program there.

Mike Green: A lot of self-proclaimed grand strategists in the post-war era argue, and even in the pre-war era in the United States, argue, like one of my professors at Johns Hopkins, Bob Osgood, that grand strategy’s about getting rid of all your idealism and focusing on your so-called self-interests as Osgood put it. And so when you went to Yale, when you started grand strategy, you wrote about Reinhold Niebuhr, right? And-

Will Inboden: Yes. Yeah.

Mike Green: So what’s your answer to this question or this proposition that a lot of grand strategists put forward that to be like Metternich, to be like Castlereagh, to be a real grand strategist, you have to be realpolitik, you have to get rid of idealism, get rid of values and focus on pure power. I’m sure you don’t agree with that, but what’s your take on it? And how’d you fight against that?

Will Inboden: I don’t. I think that’s a rather desiccated view of strategy and national power. I start on a principle of grand strategy as doing an inventory of what are all of your national resources and assets and one of America’s great assets is our values, is our rather singular values and how those had been rather inspiring to so many in the rest of the world. And so particularly in the early Cold War when I was looking at Niebuhr’s influence on Truman and on Eisenhower, so it’s the interaction of some of the religious principles there, but also our early efforts to develop the Cold War grand strategy. You really saw for them there was not that sharp divide between interests and values, but rather America’s values were a strong asset to help shape our interests and gave us some asymmetric advantages, especially when you saw the Iron Curtain going up in this new model of Soviet totalitarianism. We realized our values provide a pretty dramatic and inspiring contrast to that.

Mike Green: Let’s talk about that for a minute and we’ll get into Asia and history and statecraft and other dimensions. But how important is the morality of our own foreign policy and our own society in our foreign policy? People are
now looking back at George Kennan’s Long Telegram and it ends with the warning that if we can’t be a model of democratic values ourselves, we’re not going to win the Cold War. And as we gear up for new strategic competition with China, Walter Russell Mead, John Hamre, others are looking back at Kennan. How important is it that we be perceived as a morally upright nation to be effective in strategy?

Will Inboden: I think it’s supremely important. And again some important caveats here, politics and grand strategy does involve the art of compromise, the art of prudence, the art of making difficult choices and so even if we may have some certain principles as our lodestars there can be different ways of advancing them, right? So that’s where prudence comes in. But again, I think Kennan was exactly right that one of the keys to America’s long-term success in the Cold War was staying true to who we are, even if the implementation varied at times. But this is where ... Kennan himself was deeply influenced by Niebuhr. I certainly am as well and one of Niebuhr’s principles is order precedes justice. Okay. So being cognizant of power realities, being cognizant of the need to preserve basic order and stability, those are not amoral. There’s a moral good in preserving order and stability, as long as you don’t stop there because again, for Niebuhr order precedes justice and creates the conditions, the opportunities for justice to eventually be realized, at least in a proximate sense.

Mike Green: You drafted much of the second national security strategy for President Bush. I had the privilege of working with you on it and reading the first draft. I remember that the president loved the content, but it sounded like Thomas Jefferson. So you had to use the exact same concepts, make it sound like George W. Bush. The president used to say to me, and I’m sure to you, the key is to be a realist in the short term, but an idealist in the long term and always try to bend the arc of history towards a more just international society, but there are tough calls in foreign policy. Like if you look at Asia right now, we have the weaker situation. We have the million people in the streets in Hong Kong. Where do you apply American power to advance those short-term challenges to human rights and democracy?

Will Inboden: Yeah, I want to come to that, but first, because you mentioned President Bush and the national security strategy, a funny anecdote from that. Yeah. When Peter Feaver and I sat down with him to go over sort of the first initial draft of the document, I’ll never forget, he said to us, he says, "Guys, all right, you’re off to a decent start here, but this reads like a couple of professors wrote it." And he didn’t mean that as praise. He said, "I want you to write a strategy that the men on the street in Lubbock, Texas can understand. At first, I was a little taken aback but then I realized there’s actually quite a bit of wisdom in that, partly because we wanted the strategy to be somewhat accessible to the American people but also academics are prone to obfuscating and hiding behind big words and dense ponderous language when clarity of prose can also bring, I think, clarity of strategic concept so-
Mike Green: And it came out, I thought, very, very well and you artfully took this sort of enlightenment prose and turn it into Lubbock prose without losing a thing. You know, in my book I found Thomas Jefferson, Commodore Perry Opening to Japan, some of the most important and ambitious thinkers on Asia realized we had a stake in justly governed republics that would resist imperialism. There’s a realpolitik power dimension. It sort of aligns with how President Bush talked to us about idealism in the long term. But in the short term you do face moral challenges in foreign policy, like the Uighur situation in Xinjiang and I’m focusing on Asia, of course, the Rohingya and the Rakhine state in Myanmar, Hong Kong. How do you deal with the short-term crises?

Will Inboden: Yeah, I think this is where, again, prudence and good judgment come in. So you always want to keep in mind the long-term goal of more free, open, tolerant societies that are not brutalizing their own people. Because of course we see a pretty strong empirical connection between ones that are brutalizing their own people are often more aggressive externally and don’t uphold international order. But I mean I was just in China and Hong Kong last week and yeah, the signs are very troubling right now. We happened to be in China on June 4th, the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square, and one could not find any mention of it anywhere. You know, the way that not only has the Chinese government gotten away with that brutal massacre 30 years later, but they’ve now squelched all awareness of it. While I’m generally supportive of the current administration’s more assertive posture towards China, I do worry that our relative silence on the democracy and human rights front, is ... It’s actually not smart politics. It’s giving up an important tool in our toolkit. Again, an asymmetric advantage we’d have over Beijing. I mean it’s perhaps a little trite to say it, but I think Xi Jinping fears his own people more than he fears the United States. And if we can be more sophisticated but still principled in our support for the democracy and human rights and religious freedom dissidence in China, certainly speaking out on behalf of the Uighurs, especially speaking out and doing more to support the protestors in Hong Kong because I think a Rubicon really is being crossed there, I think that would actually strengthen our hand also in our negotiations with China on the economic front and the security front and elsewhere. It opens up a new dimension if you want the relationship where the United States and our allies and our values would give us more of an advantage.

Mike Green: So much of official Washington and wonkish policy of Washington has become so skeptical of the proposition you’re now articulate ... explaining, which I agree with. We did surveys as you know, at CSIS of elites in 10 countries in Asia and the United States and we asked in the future integration of Asia how important are certain principles and we included things like human rights and democracy. And outside of China support for those norms was incredibly high. When we did the last survey in 2015 it was an aggregate, it was higher but in one country it did drop precipitously, the United States of America. U.S. experts were skeptical that these democratic norms were right or worked. There’s a real sort of lack of confidence in our own value proposition, if you will. National Public Radio had a fascinating
man on the street interview in a second-tier city in China and asked, what do you think of when you think of the United States? And the first few answers were from random people, democracy, freedom, and we forget sometimes how powerful this is as an asset. Tell us a little bit about the Clements Center and how you teach and think about using history and statecraft and then we’ll apply some of those ideas to Asia.

Will Inboden: Yeah. When we started the Clements Center for National Security at University of Texas at Austin six years ago, the idea was to create an academic teaching and research center, also policy engagement, focused on this intersection of applying the insights of history to current national security challenges. There are many excellent security studies programs and centers at a lot of leading universities in the country and I value all of them. But we found at least at the time that there were very few, if any, that had that particular focus on the history. So many others were dominated by political science and quantitative methodology. Again, which can be very insightful, but it’s missing the historical part. And of course I knew from my experience as a policymaker that almost all senior national security policy makers in their very limited spare time like to read history. It’s the discipline that’s most accessible to them. They most naturally gravitate to it. Partly because it’s often constituted as a narrative. There’s a story that they can get their minds around. Partly because it deals so much with real life flesh and blood individuals and again that’s often who they’re dealing with in their statecraft rather than abstract concepts of balance of power in national institutions. Those are two but at the end of the day it really is about those personal interactions and history brings that alive. So we’re trying to do a program of teaching and training our students to think historically not just for its own sake but as preparation for careers in national security policy.

Mike Green: You invited me down to the Lonestar Seminar, which I guess the UT system does collectively?

Will Inboden: Yeah, in partnership with Texas A&M and SMU too.

Mike Green: Yeah, and to present on a chapter from my book on the history of U.S. strategy in Asia and it was-

Will Inboden: An excellent book I should add.

Mike Green: Thank you very much.

Will Inboden: In case we needed any more prompts for it.

Mike Green: And to my staff, don’t edit that part out. I had a wonderful time. And the format is: one historian, one political scientist, and one hybrid. And I guess I was a hybrid, but my favorite part was the dinner where a historian and a political scientist had a smackdown contest to see who could insult the other the most. And it ended with the political scientist saying, "What you guys, what you historians do we call trivia." And then the historian said, "What
you political scientists do, reducing things to two variables, that’s what we call talking to small children." And it was wonderful. But the best work really often is a hybrid, I think. And political scientists worked in the Bush NSC, Connie Rice, Peter Feaver, Victor Cha, myself.

Will Inboden: Steve Krasner.

Mike Green: Steve Krasner. Most of us came out and wrote history.

Will Inboden: Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Green: So you've written some really interesting pieces on how to think about history and how to misuse history. So how do you use history in statecraft? What's a simple guide for people listening?

Will Inboden: Well I will try to keep it simple. But whenever you ask a professor who's written a lot on this you have to keep it simple. I mean, so the first is understanding history is so much more than just analogies, right? I mean that's often when it's misused, is if we grab one cheap analogy and try to cram it into something. So this new situation as another Vietnam or another Iraq or another Munich or something, you know, those are ones that are most misused. But rather, part of it is thinking about history as a way of learning vicarious lessons. So perhaps looking at different mistakes or things that others have done in the past where we can take away the lessons from that without having to bear the costs. Part of it is looking at history as a laboratory of ideas. There's very little new under the sun as Solomon says in the good book. I remember when we were on the Bush NSC staff thinking about ways to try to do the war of ideas with jihadist ideology, spent a lot of time looking at, how did we wage the war of ideas in the Cold War and what were some of the institutions and instruments that we used there? So that was a way of using history as a laboratory for ideas. History is often most important for understanding other states, our counterparties, right? I mean, so while I don't pretend to be an expert on North Korea, I do know that we can't understand the current situation in North Korea without understanding North Korea's own history, how the Kim regime dynasty views itself and its history similarly with Xi Jinping or Putin or any others. So it’s not just about looking at past American ... the history of American actions, looking at the history of others. And then we've got this one, especially from President Bush when I talked to him about this shortly after he had left office, he said, history is so important for policy makers to take the long view, the long perspective because if you're only driven by polls or headlines that may make one particular policy choice more appealing than others. But if we're thinking about, how will this be remembered in history, how will this look in history, that can give you strength and resolve to sometimes make tougher choices that may not be so popular at the time. One example he used from Asia is he said, look, as much as Truman was incredibly unpopular as president over the Korean War and ends obviously in a stalemate and he leaves office with some of the lowest approval ratings ever in early 1953 because Truman had had the resolve at least sort of stay
the course and protect South Korea’s sovereignty and leave American forces behind, over time that obviously became a key linchpin to our security architecture in Asia, our alliance system, South Korea’s eventual transition in the 1980s to a democracy and earlier transition to a market economy. So Bush talked about that in the context of ... That’s partly where he got the moral resolve and strength to make the Iraq surge decision, which again was tremendously unpopular at the time. But he was thinking not just about what will this do for my poll ratings or relations with Congress tomorrow, but how will this look in history just as Truman made some of those tough calls with South Korea, you know, 70-some years earlier.

Mike Green: John Lewis Gaddis was your-

Will Inboden: He was my advisor. Yeah.

Mike Green: And in his new book, which is a smorgasbord of history and classics and popular culture-

Will Inboden: Augustine as grand strategist.

Mike Green: Yes. Where he comes out in my view is it teaches you humility and it teaches you contingency and as you said, vicarious ... Either you can experience other’s mistakes. Do you buy the idea that you can think in time as Neustadt and others have said, that you can sort of understand a problem if you understand how it has evolved?

Will Inboden: Yeah. Dick Neustadt and Ernie May and their classic thinking in time on the use of history for policy have that wonderful analogy of thinking of history as a stream, right? And so we enter the stream at a particular juncture but we know that there are headwaters that have come before us, there are events and people and things that have flown before us. So we’re not, you know, a tabula rasa, not a blank slate. And then we also know that there will be downstream consequences of our actions so we can shape and steer the stream in particular ways, but again should have the humility to recognize what has come before us and also a certain amount of deference and beholdenness to our successors in ways that we are going to be steering the stream as well. So I think it’s a really powerful analogy. And again, yeah, history teaching humility is definitely another one of the important commandments of it.

Mike Green: Yeah. I mean the other key insight from Gaddis’s book is that the essence of good grand strategy is understanding that there are some unsolvable tensions between your national objectives. If there weren’t these tensions, strategy would be easy.

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: And hard grand strategy is understanding there are these tensions. You understand that best if you understand the history of an issue.
Will Inboden: As I often tell my students, policymaking is not about choosing between a bad and a good option. It’s about choosing between a bad option, a really bad option, and a terrible option, and your job is to pick the bad option.

Mike Green: That’s right. There’s nothing like working in the White House for five years to teach you humility. So let’s apply some of these historical frameworks to thinking about the Asia chessboard strategy in Asia and start with one important historical legacy issue, which is the Vietnam War, which frames so much of how we think about American society, American foreign and military policy, but also our relations in Asia. What is your short takeaway on the lesson of Vietnam? How would you-

Will Inboden: Well, I start with this observation, which is, just about every American would agree that the United States needs to learn the lessons of Vietnam. And yet hardly anyone can agree on what those lessons are because they are so abundant and so conflicting and can go different ways. My own, I’ll just highlight a few takeaways I think from Vietnam. The first is the awareness of limits, right? I mean, it’s the first war in our nation’s history that we actually definitively lose, the first major expeditionary foreign policy operation that was a true debacle. And it was an important chastening for the United States, of realizing that as powerful and as successful as we’ve been as a country, there are some profound limits on what we can accomplish. And that of course explains quite a bit of our reluctance and some succeed … you know, particularly in the next couple of decades after Vietnam to do any other interventions. The second big one is the need to align our use of force with our policy objectives. Again, without being too much of a simplistic armchair quarterback on Vietnam, I think a pretty fair critique is that very consistently throughout the war, there was a real misalignment between the way we were trying to use the force and what our ultimate policy objectives were. And that’s why of course that then, as you know I’m currently writing a book on Reagan administration foreign and defense policy, and this is what directly shapes the Weinberger Doctrine, right? Which I think is actually an imperfect doctrine. I don’t subscribe to everything about it, but I appreciate … it was at least an effort to bring the use of force much more in alignment with overall strategy and goals. Another takeaway from Vietnam, which we see especially with the Reagan doctrine, was a much greater reliance on proxy forces. So Reagan realized, okay, instead of sending 500, 600,000 American ground troops somewhere, let’s supply the Mujahideen in Afghanistan with weapons. Let’s supply the Contras with weapons. Let’s supply the UNITA rebels in Angola with weapons, let’s supply the anti-Vietnamese forces in Cambodia with weapons. Sometimes that succeeds. Sometimes it doesn’t. Not easy, but I think that’s a very direct takeaway from Vietnam and actually expanded the American toolkit a bit. The final big takeaway for me on Vietnam is the need to preserve and sometimes restore American credibility because it was such a tremendous blow to our credibility. This explained some of the tactics that Nixon and Kissinger are trying to use towards the end, you know, rather controversial, but I understand what they’re getting at. They’re trying to find a way to extricate us from that conflict that still preserves our credibility elsewhere in the
world, which I do think is a very important but underappreciated part of the national security toolkit.

Mike Green: Rich Armitage was on the podcast just before you and of course was on the ground and at sea in Vietnam, got the South Vietnamese Navy out of Vietnam, and then worked on Asia policy the whole rest of his career. I asked him about his experience and what it meant to him the rest of his career. And one of the most important things he said was the importance of American commitment and the price you pay when you can’t live up to the commitment. And it made him a real champion of the U.S.-Japan alliance and other forward presence in Asia.

Will Inboden: When I talked to Rich for my Reagan book, because of course he was so key on U.S.-Asia relations in the Reagan administration, and asked when and how did he first become appreciative of the importance of Japan as a strategic partner, he says, "Oh, when I was going to Vietnam, and I was transiting through Japan countless times, and I realized, yeah, this is a pretty large unsinkable aircraft carrier in a strategic part of the world."

Mike Green: Yeah, he said that on the podcast with us as well. And I think one of the other lessons I’d add to your excellent list is Vietnam forced us to return to our Mahanian roots, which is offshore balancing the first island chain and the Guam Doctrine under Nixon was about pulling back to the first island chain. Land wars in Asia, not a good idea if you can avoid them at all. I also think we probably learned something about regional strategy. So much of what we did in Vietnam was based on how we thought it would be perceived in Europe and not the rest of Asia. And then I can tell you as an Asian guy, one other takeaway is the Vietnamese are pretty damn tough.

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: The good news is they’re kind of sort of on our side this time.

Will Inboden: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Again, one of … and that’s another thing that history can teach us actually, particularly in Asia, is how possible it is for adversaries to become allies. I mean look at just incredible transformation in the U.S.-Japan relationship from the end of the war in ’45 to the peace treaty in ’51 and then as now being our most important ally in the region, or again Vietnam, who would have thought as recent as a couple of decades ago that they’d be an emerging important strategic partner for us.

Mike Green: You’ll recall that President Bush on the campaign stump in 2004 used to talk about how his best friend among world leaders or one of his best friends was the Japanese prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, and his dad had fought against the Japanese and he just particularly in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan found that kind of remarkable and inspiring.

Will Inboden: His dad had been, yeah, shot down by the Japanese.
Mike Green: Shot down and held no ill will at all, but it played well with the crowds, at least Republican crowds he was talking to.

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: Let me ask you about Reagan and George.

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: In my book, I reckon that George Shultz was probably the best Secretary of State we had on Asia, but how do you assess Reagan? You’re doing a new book on his foreign policy. How do you look at Reagan overall as a strategist? People like George Schultz?

Will Inboden: Yeah. Well first let me say, I actually, I’ll go you one further on George Shultz. I think he was our finest Secretary of State of the 20th century, full stop, not just on Asia. So, and I know there’s some tough competition there. Jim Baker, Henry Kissinger, Dean Acheson, and I have great reverence for all of them. But I actually, I’ll go even one further. I mean, Shultz is going to come out very, very positively in my book and I think the historical record bears that out. So a couple of big takeaways thus far to give a sneak preview of the book, which is still a couple of years from actually appearing on the shelves, on the role of history and strategy in the Reagan administration. The first is Reagan brought a much more acute historical sensibility to his strategy towards the Soviets than I’d earlier appreciated. But this also applies to Asia. And there were some very formative historical episodes for Reagan, some from his own life, some from his reading. The first is he was deeply shaped by World War II, and World War II for him was not first and foremost a great power contest, but was rather a battle of ideas between the free world and totalitarianism. So also with the Cold War, even though the detente framework from the ’70s had treated the Cold War as primarily a great power contest with ideology off on the side. For Reagan, it’s first and foremost a battle of ideas between these two rival systems that just happens to have a great power dimension to it. He was drawing that very much from World War II, and so his takeaways there were the importance of fighting that battle of ideas, of de-legitimating Soviet communism, of maintaining strong allies among the Free World. Another big Reagan takeaway, and this applies especially to Asia, is from the 1930s, he was deeply averse to protectionism because he saw that protectionism not only had spread global poverty, but also had led to militarism and the rise of World War II. And so this is why in the U.S.-Japan relationship, he was so focused on transforming the U.S.-Japan relationship from primarily economic rivalry to strategic partnership and strongly resisted demands from the American people, from Congress, from a lot of the media to get into a real trade war Japan and to put severe tariffs on them. Yeah, they had to deal with monetary policy in the Plaza Accord. They had to deal with some voluntary export restraints. It’s not like he wasn’t doing anything on that, but for Reagan over and over again, he has given speeches, making the case to the American people, protectionism is the wrong way to go with a U.S.-Japan relationship or U.S.-
Taiwan or any others. One of the historical insights that he actually got from his reading, particularly with the Soviets, is he read a book by Suzanne Massie called *Land of the Firebird*, which was a history ... like a thousand-year history of Russia up until 1917, so it's Russia before the Soviet Union. And that gave Reagan a real appreciation for the Russian people and Russian culture and enabled him to distinguish the Russian people from the Soviet system. So that's why he's constantly engaged in outreach directly to the Russian people, trying to support Russian dissidents, trying to appeal to the best of Russian culture, his hostility was not to Russia or to Russians, it was to Soviet communism, which he saw as this kind of alien imposition, this parasite on this historic civilization and tradition. And so he got that from his own reading of history.

**Mike Green:** Did you get to interview Shultz for the book?

**Will Inboden:** So I did, yeah.

**Mike Green:** In San Francisco?

**Will Inboden:** Yeah.

**Mike Green:** In his apartment?

**Will Inboden:** No, it was actually in his office at Stanford.

**Mike Green:** I interviewed him in his apartment for my book, and he welcomed me at the door, and he said, "You like the Pacific?" And I said, "Yes, Mr. Secretary." He says, "Come with me and walk me to the balcony," at the back of his apartment, which overlooked San Francisco Bay. And he points and he says, "There it is." And he gave me this history of how he got interested in the Pacific and how committed he was. But the reality was Shultz and Weinberger fought like cats and dogs in the Administration, not about Asia, but about arms control, about the Soviet Union. Isn't that a bit of a black mark on Reagan's leadership in foreign policy, that they had these huge fights or is that just unavoidable in any administration?

**Will Inboden:** It certainly is. And I’ll even go one further again, even though my book will be positive overall on the Reagan administration, I will pull no punches on the organizational chaos and dysfunction, and exemplifying that of course was the bad relations between Shultz and Weinberger in State and DoD. But also, you know, Reagan goes through six national security advisors in eight years. A couple of them get indicted, one attempts suicide, a couple others get fired. The NSC was a, until Frank Carlucci came out along in ‘87, pretty chaotic mess. And when you look at some of the Reagan administration’s policy failures, those pretty directly stem from the organizational failures. So the Beirut mission, ‘83, the Marine Barracks Bombing, that was ... it was a tragedy. Iran was behind it. But it was also driven by the fact that there was this paralysis between State and DoD over what the Marines’ mission was and what our strategic goals were there. And because Reagan hadn’t
resolved it, disaster ensued. Iran–Contra's another one. Yeah, there were some bad policy ideas behind Iran–Contra but at its core, it was a classic case of organizational dysfunction, lack of accountability, and NSC getting too operational. And so the question is, how did the Reagan administration succeed despite some of these things? I think there's a couple of keys. One, when Reagan himself had a clear strategic vision, especially as he did with the Soviets, and got on board, he was able to neutralize those fights, put his thumb on the scale, set the agenda, be decisive. The second was frankly, when he and Shultz forged a really close partnership and just started to kind of marginalize some of the dissenters, and a committed president and a committed Secretary of State working in tandem is a very, very powerful, potent partnership. We saw it with Truman and Acheson. We saw it with Nixon and Kissinger at their best. We saw it with Bush and Baker. We certainly saw it with Reagan and Shultz.

Mike Green: The beginning of the Reagan administration was an organizational dumpster fire.

Will Inboden: Yes.

Mike Green: As the term is sometimes applied to President Trump, especially on Asia. He had Al Haig, who was out of the Kissinger view that China is a future for the U.S. and Asia. Pretty negative on Japan but he had George Shultz who was very pro-Japan.

Will Inboden: And Haig tossed Taiwan under the bus too.

Mike Green: Huge chaos. You read the headlines in the newspapers from 1981 and it's pretty chaotic, very chaotic.

Will Inboden: And part of that too is Reagan himself wasn't paying a lot of attention to foreign policy in '81. He had three priorities in '81: the economy, the economy, and the economy. And he was all about getting his tax package through and getting inflation down and then creating the resources of course for a defense budget increase and other things. This is not to excuse the organizational chaos and the foreign policy inepitude during that year, but it's the beginning of '82 when he turns and starts focusing on foreign policy that you start ... of course he gets rid of Al Haig a few months later, brings Shultz in, that you start to see some progress.

Mike Green: Is it '82 when the NSC document comes out? NSC, I forgot the number, to actually roll back Soviet communism?

Will Inboden: Yes-

Mike Green: Because from basically Nixon on maybe even Johnson on and especially during Carter, U.S. strategy was extremely retrenched and cautious and status quo oriented. Reagan wants to rollback. It's around '82.
Will Inboden: Yeah. So in January of '82 Bill Clark becomes National Security Advisor. He's not been treated well by history, but I think he deserves a better shake than that. And he oversees the drafting of two key strategy documents, NSDD 32, which is the overall national security strategy, and that comes out in '82 and that starts laying out the rollback principles. And then in '83, first drafted by Dick Pipes and then by Jack Matlock NSDD 75, and that's the more direct strategy towards the Soviet Union. And those two documents read very well in light of history.

Mike Green: And here's the thing, I'm interested in this podcast in regional strategy, but effective regional strategy is impossible unless you have a coherent overall strategy. And those two documents framed an approach in Asia that guided the Pacific Command, the State Department. We shored up our alliance with Japan, we used the Japanese archipelago, which Armitage was a key part of this, instituted the maritime strategy. At the end of the Carter administration, Soviet boomers, nuclear subs were with ease going to the West Coast to the U.S., threatening us. By 1983, '84 they were afraid to leave the Sea of Okhotsk, and it was a measurable and successful strategy and would not have been possible without that larger global frame.

Will Inboden: Yeah, and one of the key concepts in my book is going to be how the Reagan ... Reagan and Shultz pretty deftly integrated force and diplomacy, which is using the American defense buildup not to launch a bunch of wars, but rather to strengthen our diplomatic hand and rollback Soviet adventurism and in turn bolster the confidence of our allies and their defense spending too.

Mike Green: So fans of the current president say he's Reagan-esque because he's bold and sports a strong defense, I think on defense spending, that's probably fair, but he's protectionist compared to Reagan and he's pretty tough on allies. What do you think? Is there a parallel at all between Trump and Reagan, but more to the point, is there a way the Reagan lesson might actually be convincing to President Trump, that he might actually take ... there are aspects he might take on board that could fit with his world view or is it just too different?

Will Inboden: I would hope President Trump would pay more attention, pay more heed to the Reagan example. From what I've seen thus far, President Trump could not be more dissimilar to Reagan. I mean, so again, Reagan deeply committed to allies, as initially had been the case with Trump. Reagan deeply committed to free trade, hasn't been the case with Trump. Reagan deeply committed to values, especially after '82 to democracy and human rights promotion, which is why we see some of the successful democratic transitions in Asia, Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea. But that said, yeah, my word to President Trump, if he happens to be listening to this podcast or any of his staff, is, looking at some of their concerns about our allies who are free riding and underfunding their defense, the Reagan administration had those same concerns. But again, as you know very well in the case with Japan, Reagan persuaded Nakasone to over time almost triple Japan's defense budget as well as of course extend Japan's defense perimeter out at a
thousand kilometers. And he did it not through publicly shaming and scolding Nakasone, but through hugging him closely and quiet diplomacy and assuring him of America’s commitment to Japan. And that I think created both the political space and the confidence for Japan to increase its defense spending. Again, we’ve already mentioned, human rights, democracy, but tremendous asymmetric advantages the United States has, which Reagan wielded very effectively. I would encourage the Trump administration to do the same. And of course Reagan and Shultz knew that over time, free trade, economic liberty are much better for America and much better for the world than protectionism.

Mike Green: That Reagan world view, I think is still pretty much the sweet spot for members of Congress and the Republican Party and a lot of the president’s own administration. So what’s you’re saying should resonate.

Will Inboden: Yeah. Part of a small briefing with Senator Romney yesterday and he was quoting Reagan at length and clearly takes Reagan as his lodestars do, many ... Senator Ben Sasse, Senator Cornyn, many other Republican senators.

Mike Green: So Gaddis’s book, which I read about five times in grad school, was called Strategies of Containment, plural. We’re now clearly embarked on a new chapter in U.S.-China relations marked by rivalry, geopolitical rivalry, competition, the national security strategy, the national defense strategy. Say it, Hank Paulson, former Treasury Secretary even says it, but I always come back to Gaddis’s argument. There were strategies, plural, of containment. What are the lessons from the Cold War for how we approach China? What does victory look like in this new strategy or will there be multiple strategies?

Will Inboden: Yeah, I do think, I mean, so much of strategy is context-dependent and I don’t want to take that as a punt on it, but I’m ... the two traps we can fall into with strategies is one is just pure platitudes and bromides and the other is trying to have a very rigid template that one size fits all. So with the U.S.-China relationship right now, parts of it are coming to look similar to the Cold War. Certainly, for one, the competition is global now. It’s not just directly between U.S. and China, but it’s playing out in the Middle East and Latin America and Africa. There is somewhat of an ideological component to it, as far as China pushing its authoritarian capitalist model and trying to support other authoritarians and both nuclear powers and we want to desperately avoid a nuclear exchange. I think at hand there’s a number of dissimilarities. The biggest one is the economic interdependence between the U.S. and China right now. And I know we’re trying to partially unwind some of that, but the U.S. and Soviet Union just never had anywhere near that degree of economic interdependence. In a lot of ways, it’s been good for the U.S. and China, in other ways, it’s been very bad for the U.S. and of course China has taken advantage of that, but that’s the biggest area where the Cold War analogy breaks down. So strategic principles, I mean, from the Cold War, we need to double down and reinforce our allies in Asia, our existing alliance alliances, Japan, South Korea, Australia especially, but also our
emerging partners who may not yet be formal allies. India would be a primary one.

Mike Green: Reagan in 1982 issued a national presidential directive, they called them then, saying that regardless of whether it’s aligned with the U.S. or not, the rise of India is in our strategic interests.

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: Very prescient.

Will Inboden: Yeah, exactly. Very prescient. So you look back, so much of our world today was envisioned in the 1980s by Reagan and Schultz.

Mike Green: Your Reagan book is going to be great. I can’t wait, but I’ll have to, so when are we going to get it?

Will Inboden: Yeah, well, it’s due to the publisher next December and so hopefully it’ll appear probably summer of 2021.

Mike Green: Great. And Will Inboden, we can see your good work in the meantime at the Clements Center?

Will Inboden: Yes.

Mike Green: At UT Austin. And you’re also of course, responsible for the National Security Review, the Texas National Security Review-

Will Inboden: The Texas National Security Review, yeah that’s right.

Mike Green: ... and War on the Rocks is also a partner of yours-

Will Inboden: Yeah.

Mike Green: ... so there’ll be plenty of things people can look at to breathe history and think about the Asia chessboard using the past, using statecraft lessons from not only Reagan but other American administrations thinking about values and democracy in our foreign policy. It’s been a joy having you. Good luck with the book.

Will Inboden: Thanks so much. It’s been a pleasure.

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.