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Before joining CNAS, he was an intern and researcher with the Reconnecting Asia Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, focusing on the digital aspects of China's Belt and Road Initiative. During his time as an undergrad, he worked with former combatants of the Yugoslav war on a peace-building mission in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania, while also spending a summer in Hong Kong studying the economic and intellectual trends of 20th-century China.

Vinson is originally from Cleveland, Ohio, and he received his BA in East Asian studies along with a Mandarin proficiency certificate from Ohio University and his MA in international relations from the University of Sydney in Australia.

Vinson is also a current member of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs North Korea Cyber Working Group.