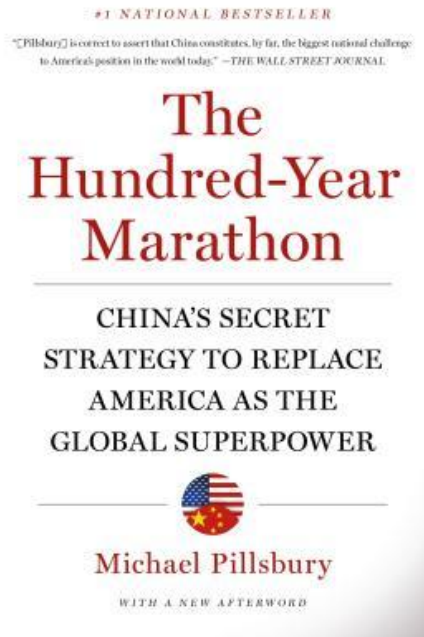




# **The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower**

*Michael Pillsbury*

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# The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower

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**The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower**  
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**One of the U.S. government's leading China experts reveals the hidden strategy fueling that country's rise – and how Americans have been seduced into helping China overtake us as the world's leading superpower.**

For more than forty years, the United States has played an indispensable role helping the Chinese government build a booming economy, develop its scientific and military capabilities, and take its place on the world stage, in the belief that China's rise will bring us cooperation, diplomacy, and free trade. But what if the "China Dream" is to replace us, just as America replaced the British Empire, without firing a shot?

Based on interviews with Chinese defectors and newly declassified, previously undisclosed national security documents, *The Hundred-Year Marathon* reveals China's secret strategy to supplant the United States as the world's dominant power, and to do so by 2049, the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Michael Pillsbury, a fluent Mandarin speaker who has served in senior national security positions in the U.S. government since the days of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, draws on his decades of contact with the "hawks" in China's military and intelligence agencies and translates their documents, speeches, and books to show how the teachings of traditional Chinese statecraft underpin their actions. He offers an inside look at how the Chinese really view America and its leaders – as barbarians who will be the architects of their own demise.

Pillsbury also explains how the U.S. government has helped – sometimes unwittingly and sometimes deliberately – to make this "China Dream" come true, and he calls for the United States to implement a new, more competitive strategy toward China as it really is, and not as we might wish it to be. *The Hundred-Year Marathon* is a wake-up call as we face the greatest national security challenge of the twenty-first century.

## The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower Details

Date : Published March 15th 2016 by St. Martin's Griffin (first published November 11th 2014)

ISBN : 9781250081346

Author : Michael Pillsbury

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Cultural, China, Politics, Nonfiction, History, Business, Asia, War, Military Fiction

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# From Reader Review The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower for online ebook

## Kian says

The book's main flaw is that it is essentially a case of the pot calling the kettle black. It is a paranoid analysis of the current Sino-American situation (or shi) by a China dove turned hawk, who is now alarmed the US is losing its grip on overwhelming geopolitical power. A person who once acted as a spy complaining about subterfuge and deception is rather self-serving. But the theme of good vs. evil allows the good side to be excused for doing the same thing because its "intention" is good. A fog of self-delusion about its goodness (i.e. moral superiority stemming from amnesia of its past bad deeds along with the Christian messiah complex) is what blinds the US from fully seeing the world as it is. In other words, the US is no different from China, except the US is in a position to do more damage.

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## Sebastian Reyn says

Pillsbury, Michael, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2015). De titel van dit boek laat aan duidelijkheid weinig te wensen over: de leiders van het communistische China, van Mao Zedong tot en met Xi Jinping, worden volgens Michael Pillsbury gedreven door de ambitie binnen honderd jaar na de communistische machtsovername in China in 1949 de plaats van de Verenigde Staten te hebben ingenomen als hegemoniale macht in de wereld. Anders dan vaak wordt verondersteld, trekken de 'haviken' in Beijing volgens hem al jaren aan de touwtjes, helemaal sinds de onderdrukking in 1989 van de hervormingsgezinde krachten en de studentenopstanden op het Tiananmen-plein.

Pillsbury moet serieus worden genomen. Hij is al sinds de jaren zestig bezig China te doorgronden, als een van de meest vooraanstaande Amerikaanse China-analisten van de CIA, het Pentagon, RAND en het Amerikaanse Congres. Hij spreekt vloeiend Mandarijn Chinees, beschikt over talloze contacten in de kringen die er in China en daarbuiten toe doen, en heeft al die jaren als weinig anderen toegang gehad tot geheim inlichtingenmateriaal. Als adviseur was hij onder meer nauw betrokken bij President Richard Nixon's historische 'opening' naar China, die volgens hem overigens vooral door China is geïnitieerd (met als oogmerk de Sovjet-Unie de loef af te steken). Pillsbury's 'harde' boodschap is des te opmerkelijker omdat hij jarenlang te boek stond als een pleitbezorger van samenwerking met Beijing, een panda hugger. In dit boek rekent hij dus ook af met zijn eigen verleden.

Volgens Pillsbury vallen de leiders van het communistische China in hun strategische denken stevast terug op axioma's uit de tijd dat China het strijdtoneel was van acht verschillende staten ('Warring States'), voorafgaand aan de uiteindelijke verovering van heel China door de Qin-dynastie in de derde eeuw voor Christus (de tijd waarin de befaamde generaal-filosoof Sun Tzu zijn tijdloze lessen over de krijgskunst optekende). Misleiding, geduld, gebruikmaking van de kracht van de tegenstander zonder dat deze er erg in heeft, het wachten op het moment dat alle krachten gunstig zijn geconfigureerd alvorens toe te slaan (shi) zijn daarin centrale noties. Deze eeuwenoude axioma's worden volgens Pillsbury nog altijd gecultiveerd in de burelen van de machthebbers in Beijing. Ook het Chinese bordspel wei qi (of 'go'), waarbij het de bedoeling is de tegenstander geleidelijk aan te omsingelen, heeft vergaande invloed op het Chinese geopolitieke denken. "The goal is always to disrupt the plans of your rival. To prevent him from seeing the true geopolitical situation. If he sees the shape of shi before you do, you cannot place your pieces well on the

wei qi board.” (133)

Volgens Pillsbury past Beijing de axioma's uit de tijd van de 'Warring States' al decennialang toe op de betrekkingen met de hegemoniale macht (ba) van deze tijd, de VS, zonder dat deze zich realiseren in welk ragfijn machtspolitiek spel zij precies verzeild zijn geraakt. “An average wei qi game consists of about three hundred moves, divided into the opening, the middle game, and the end game. [...] Beijing's leaders [...] believe they are still in the middle game, the period when China pulls ahead of the United States in GDP but not in comprehensive national power.” (211) Sinds Nixons opening hebben de VS China voortdurend sterker gemaakt zonder zich te realiseren welk einddoel China voor ogen heeft en in de – volgens Pillsbury naïeve – veronderstelling dat China op weg is een democratie te worden. De ba wordt doelbewust in slaap gesust, al is het maar om te voorkomen dat deze hardhandig ingrijpt teneinde zijn positie te verdedigen. China's 'message police', die binnen en buiten China zeer actief is, ziet erop toe dat dit spel tot in de finesses wordt gespeeld. Academics, journalisten, adviseurs en politici worden vanuit Beijing actief bewerkt (of tegengewerkt).

Na decennia van economische groei reikt de invloed van China inmiddels ver. Het heersende beeld dat China zich ontwikkelt tot een markteconomie is volgens Pillsbury echter onjuist. De spectaculaire groei van de Chinese economie, met groeicijfers van gemiddeld meer dan tien procent, was niet mogelijk geweest zonder de decennialange steun van de VS, die Pillsbury uitgebreid belicht, en de toetreding tot de

Wereldhandelsorganisatie (WHO) in 2001. China lapt de WHO-regels echter stelselmatig aan de laars en de staat houdt achter de schermen de controle over het grootste deel van de economie. De grootste bedrijven, waarvan een belangrijk aantal inmiddels tot de Fortune 500 ranglijst zijn doorgedrongen, zoals China Mobile en Huawei, worden door de staat gecontroleerd en gesubsidieerd. Behalve op staatskapitalisme berust China's concurrentiekracht en welvaart bovendien voor een belangrijk deel op – digitale – diefstal van bedrijfsgegevens en illegale namaak. (Pillsbury heeft in dit deel van zijn betoog overigens niet altijd de feiten aan zijn zijde: het Verenigde Koninkrijk heeft Huawei niet de algehele toegang tot de Britse markt ontzegd, maar slechts laten weten dat Britse veiligheidsdiensten geen Huawei-apparatuur zullen aanschaffen. Verder heeft Huawei samen met de Britse inlichtingendienst GCHQ een testcentrum voor software ingericht om vast te stellen of deze aan de eisen voldoet.)

Wat de militaire kant van het verhaal van China's opkomst betreft, is Pillsbury's betoog genuanceerd.

“While Chinese leaders harbor deep, even paranoid, insecurities about the United States and Western-led efforts to 'encircle' their country, there is little evidence that China seeks to intentionally incite a war with America. Indeed, military confrontation in the near term could be one of the greatest threats to the Marathon strategy, unraveling years of patient, assiduous efforts to build China into an economic and geopolitical hegemon. [...] Chinese leaders are playing a long game, aiming to build up their deterrent capability quietly and to improve their conventional forces gradually.” (135-6)

Pillsbury onderstreept dat China geen militaire veroveringsstrategie hanteert, althans buiten dat deel van de wereld dat het als Chinees grondgebied beschouwt. Die strategie is er vooral op gericht een zodanige krachtsverhouding te realiseren dat anderen er verstandig aan doen Chinese eisen in te willigen. Ook de plannen om Taiwan met militaire middelen in te lijven, staan volgens Pillsbury op een laag pitje; Hu Jintao vertrouwde zijn naaste adviseurs ooit toe dat het makkelijker en goedkoper is Taiwan te 'kopen' dan om het te veroveren. (209) Een van de kenmerken van de Chinese marathonstrategie, ook weer ontleend aan het tijdperk van de 'Warring States', is de overtuiging dat “military might is not the critical factor for winning a long-term competition.” (35)

Toch is ook op het militaire vlak oplettendheid wel degelijk geboden, aldus Pillsbury. Het militaire denken in China wordt beheerst door de zoektocht naar de 'assassin's mace' (shashoujian), het geheime wapen uit het tijdperk van de 'Warring States' waarmee de underdog de hegemoniale macht op zijn meest kwetsbare punt kan raken en verslaan. Macht wordt daarbij niet uitsluitend of zelfs niet overwegend in militaire termen uitgedrukt. Pillsbury citeert uit het controversiële boek *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999) van de PLA-kolonels Qiao en Wang: “... it is precisely the diversity of the means employed that has enlarged the concept of warfare. The battlefield next to you and the enemy is on the network. [...] Obviously, warfare is in the

process of transcending the domains of soldiers, military units, and military affairs, and is increasingly becoming a matter for politicians, scientists, and even bankers.” (138) Ook in dit deel van de wereld laat zich dus het samengestelde – of ‘hybride’ – karakter van hedendaagse en toekomstige conflicten gelden.

Pillsbury maakt duidelijk dat China niet probeert de VS militair te evenaren (zoals de Sovjet-Unie dat in de Koude Oorlog probeerde, tot het onder de last ervan bezweek). Hij bekritiseert Amerikaanse ‘haviken’ die de Chinese militaire opbouw sterk aanzetten: “Their expectation that China will strive to create a large military oriented toward the offensive projection of force to dominate its neighbors and beyond [...] has been shown to be unfounded. [...] Rather than enhancing its power projection capabilities to compete with the United States, China has made little or no investment in various means of power projection, such as long-range bombers, massive ground forces, and nuclear ICBMs.” (140)

Daar staat tegenover dat het beeld dat Pillsbury schetst nog verontrustender is: “Chinese military spending on advanced weapons has increased dramatically over the past decade. [...] From now to 2030, the Chinese will have more than \$1 trillion available to spend on new weapons for their navy and air force... [...] This, combined with U.S. trends, [...] paints a picture of near parity, if not outright Chinese military superiority, by midcentury.” (140-141) De officiële cijfers over de Chinese defensie-uitgaven, die in werkelijkheid veel hoger liggen, geven dit niet weer. Onderdeel van de Chinese misleiding, bedoeld om de ba niet voortijdig te provoceren.

Beijing probeert Washington vooral slimmer af te zijn door in het geheim nieuwe wapens te ontwikkelen die de kwetsbaarheden van de VS uitbuiten. Het investeert miljarden in “a generational leap in military capabilities that can trump the conventional forces of major Western powers.” (139) Het zogeheten 863-programma, dat de ontwikkeling van dual-use-technologieën met civiele en militaire toepassingen omvat, is vooral gericht op de achilleshiel van de Amerikaanse krijgsmacht en samenleving: de sterk gegroeide afhankelijkheid van informatietechnologie. China heeft fors geïnvesteerd in cyberoorlogvoering, elektromagnetische wapens waarmee in een groot gebied alle elektronica kan worden uitgeschakeld en verschillende middelen om satellieten uit te schakelen. Verder legt China zich toe op het kunnen bedreigen van de aanvoerlijnen over zee waarvan de VS voor de ontplooiing van hun militaire macht acht en de bevoorrading afhankelijk zijn; de onderzeeboot is in Chinese ogen daarom het belangrijkste schip van de eenentwintigste eeuw. (153)

China voelt zich inmiddels politiek, economisch en militair sterk genoeg om zijn positie in de ‘eigen’ regio met nationalistisch machtsvertoon op te eisen, in het bijzonder in de Zuid- en Oost-Chinese Zee. Tegen de nieuwe, geavanceerde Chinese kruisraketten met een groot bereik zijn de Amerikaanse vliegvelds en maritieme taakgroepen op dit ogenblik al niet meer opgewassen. In Chinese ogen heeft het Westerse verval zich bovendien sneller afgetekend dan verwacht, als gevolg van de financiële crisis vanaf 2008, de ‘mislukte’ militaire interventies in Irak en Afghanistan en de politieke verdeeldheid in het Westen. Door de assertievere houding van China groeit de kans op een – al dan niet beperkte of onbedoelde – oorlog in de regio, aldus Pillsbury. De vergelijking met de periode voorafgaand aan de Eerste Wereldoorlog, in het bijzonder met de maritieme wapenwedloop tussen Duitsland en het Verenigde Koninkrijk, die ondanks de economische verwevenheid tussen de landen uitmondde in een militair conflict, wordt ook in de regio steeds vaker gemaakt.

Is Pillsbury’s betoog overtuigend? Hij voert in het boek geen overtuigend bewijs aan voor de stelling dat China in een ‘zero-sum game’ de VS als hegemoniale macht in de wereld wil vervangen. Wellicht zijn deze bewijzen, zoals citaten uit interne Chinese documenten en verslagen van gesprekken met insiders, buiten het boek gehouden door de Amerikaanse inlichtingendiensten, die het boek hebben gescand op geheime informatie. Niettemin is Pillsbury’s stelling aannemelijk, al is het maar omdat de marathonstrategie vanuit Chinees perspectief en in het licht van de zowel roemrijke als tragische Chinese geschiedenis verklaarbaar is. De leiders in Beijing hebben duidelijk ook belangrijke lessen getrokken uit de desintegratie van de Sovjet-Unie begin jaren negentig. Het betoog van Pillsbury wint aan overtuigingskracht doordat hij duidelijk maakt dat China’s militaire strategie mede is ingegeven door de kwetsbaarheid die het ervaart als gevolg van het Amerikaanse militaire overwicht tot dusver. “Many U.S. officials – myself included – were late to recognize

just how seriously Chinese leaders considered the U.S. ‘threat’ to be.” (142)

Tot op zekere hoogte is Pillsbury de vertolker van een hegemoniale macht die, gewend aan een leidende positie gedurende vele decennia, zich bedreigd voelt door een opkomende macht die getalsmatig haar meerdere is en haar in strategisch geduld en sluwheid lijkt te overtreffen. In 2050 is de Chinese economie mogelijk drie keer zo groot als de Amerikaanse en is de renminbi een toonaangevende munteenheid. China is, aldus Pillsbury, tegen die tijd in staat de VS in militair opzicht af te troeven en op mondiale schaal vergaande politieke, economische en culturele invloed op landen en samenlevingen uit te oefenen.

“A world shaped in China’s image will be very different from the world we know today,” stelt hij terecht. (178) We doen er verstandig aan daarmee rekening te houden. Aanlokkelijk is dit vooruitzicht echter niet, ook niet vanuit Europees of Nederlands perspectief. Pillsbury onderstreept dit ook in scherpe bewoordingen. China subsidieert stelselmatig corrupte regimes die mensenrechten met voeten treden. Het heeft het communisme na de Koude Oorlog ingewisseld voor een virulent soort nationalisme, dat slechts wordt gemaskeerd door geopolitieke kansberekening en een schijnbaar economische liberalisme. Anders dan de VS stelt Beijing collectivistische boven individualistische waarden. De internetvrijheid zou in een door China gedomineerde wereld bijvoorbeeld vergaand in het geding komen. Misschien het meest bedreigend voor de wereld is de voortgaande vervuiling van de atmosfeer van de planeet die voor een belangrijk deel zijn oorsprong in China vindt, in combinatie met het onvermogen – of de onwil? – van Beijing hiertegen werkelijk wat uit te richten. Zolang de haviken in Beijing aan de touwtjes trekken, komt in dit beeld volgens Pillsbury geen verandering.

Pillsbury is het minst overtuigend in het laatste hoofdstuk, waarin hij zijn adviezen aan de Amerikaanse regering formuleert. Daarin is hij namelijk niet erg consequent.

Washington zou er volgens hem goed aan doen de axioma’s uit de Chinese oudheid zelf te hanteren, “to beat China at its own game.” (214) De eerste stap daarbij, aldus Pillsbury, is het probleem bij de naam te noemen, volgens de Chinese wijsgeer Confucius het begin van alle goede strategieën. Dat is ook het voornaamste doel van zijn boek. Niettemin onderschrijft hij de kalmerende woorden van Harvard’s Joseph Nye: “The greatest danger we have is overestimating China and China overestimating itself. China is nowhere near close to the United States. So this magnification of China which creates fear in the U.S. and hubris in China is the biggest danger we face.” (231) Veel is bovendien afhankelijk van het vermogen van China zijn opkomst, met inbegrip van de hoge economische groeicijfers, de komende decennia voort te zetten zonder verstrikt te raken in binnenlands-politieke strijd. In bepaalde opzichten zitten de leiders in Beijing op de onstuimige rug van een tijger. Dat is niet per se een comfortabele positie; de lessen van het Tiananmen-plein zijn in Beijing geenszins vergeten. China’s leiders zijn er tot dusver op een imposante, maar weinig lovenswaardige, manier in geslaagd in het zadel te blijven zitten. In het verleden behaalde resultaten, bieden echter geen garantie voor de toekomst.

Een ander advies aan Washington is te doen wat Beijing, geoefend in het wei qi spel, het meeste vreest: China geopolitiek omsingelen. Pillsbury maakt echter op geen enkele wijze duidelijk hoe dit advies bijdraagt aan de oplossing, behalve dan dat “China’s hawks will get the blame when China feels isolated and alone in the region.” (219) En hoe spoort dit advies met zijn – in het licht van de rest van het boek bevreemdende – opmerking dat de VS “must behave as Great Britain did during the gradual American rise and eclipse of the British Empire”? (231)

Pillsbury breekt voorts een lans voor actievare steun aan gematigde, democratiegezinde krachten en het maatschappelijke middenveld in China, zoals de VS in de Koude Oorlog Sovjet-dissidenten steunden. Dat lijkt een zinvolle suggestie, ware het niet dat hij op veel andere plekken in het boek het geloof in democratisering van China afdoet als een schadelijke vorm van “wishful thinking”.

Opvallend afwezig in het laatste hoofdstuk zijn adviezen die uitgaan van de eigen kracht van de VS in plaats van van antieke Chinese wijsheden. Of het Chinese regime slaagt in zijn opzet de VS als hegemoniale macht in de wereld te verdrijven, is voor een belangrijk deel afhankelijk van het vermogen van de VS de komende decennia hun leidende politieke, economische, culturele en militaire rol te vernieuwen. De VS zullen daarbij moeten aanvaarden dat zij, anders dan in de twee decennia na het einde van de Koude Oorlog, niet meer

alleen de top staan.

Verder blijft de mogelijkheid van co-existentie met een sterker en welvarender China in een hervormd multilateraal systeem in het geheel buiten beschouwing. Hierin zouden de VS samen kunnen optrekken met de EU, maar Europa schittert in het boek door afwezigheid. Aangezien Europa ook in de regio schittert door afwezigheid, althans in geopolitieke zin, valt Pillsbury dit laatste echter moeilijk te verwijten.

Wat uit Pillsbury's boek eens te meer blijkt, is dat de kracht van – al dan niet doelbewust gecreëerde – percepties niet mag worden onderschat en dat het Westen in de 'battle of the narrative' niet noodzakelijkerwijs in het voordeel is. Percepties zijn onderdeel van de werkelijkheid. Aangezien de opkomst van China waarschijnlijk het belangrijkste veiligheidsvraagstuk van de eenentwintigste eeuw is, althans op mondiale schaal, is de vraag wat China met zijn macht gaat doen en hoe wij daarop moeten inspelen van eminent belang. Het is daarbij van groot belang ons te verdiepen in percepties – hoopvolle verwachtingen, angsten, etc. – die over en weer over deze opkomst bestaan. Op dit punt heeft Pillsbury, met zijn langjarige ervaring en unieke toegang tot bronnen, een belangrijke bijdrage geleverd. Deze bijdrage is in het Amerikaanse China-debat niet onopgemerkt gebleven en zal waarschijnlijk invloed uitoefenen op het Amerikaanse beleid.

Bij het lezen van dit boek moest ik terugdenken aan de invloedrijke Chinese wetenschapper Yan Xuetong (Tsinghua universiteit), die op mijn uitnodiging in het kader van de Verkenningen een lezing hield over 'China in 2030'. Xuetong specialiseerde zich in gedetailleerde vergelijkingen tussen landen aan de hand van factoren die de macht van een land bepalen (een typisch Chinees verschijnsel waar ook Pillsbury op ingaat). Hij voorspelde nogal nadrukkelijk dat China in 2030 een democratie zou zijn. Ook in andere opzichten bevatte de lezing van Xuetong weinig om ons zorgen over te maken. Hij liet zich na de presentie, in kleiner verband, echter half-gekscherend ontvallen dat hij ons een rad voor ogen had gedraaid. Dit kleine voorval krijgt na lezing van Pillsbury's belangrijke boek nieuwe betekenis.

Cijfer: 7. Gelezen: december 2015 (in Japan).

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## Owlseyes says

Tao Xie Professor, at Beijing Foreign Studies University, on the book: "a total conspiracy theory".

Beijing paper cover 'Outsider strikes back'

"We're in year 65". Thence 35 more years to go.

2049: ends marathon.

With Abe's rush-visit to the USA next week, many wonder about Asia; how will Trump handle the "pivot"? Some speak of "unpredictability", some of "isolationism"; others about "the deal-maker" or even the "outsourcing". True, many "unknowns". The Dragon is watching, in the meantime.

(view spoiler)



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## Michael says

I reviewed a pre-publication copy of Michael Pillsbury's book, *The Hundred Year Marathon*, subtitled *China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*. This book was an eye-opener for me in a number of ways. Let me begin by saying that I am a 'layman' interested in China who spent 30 years directly or indirectly working for the technical and analytic sides of the intelligence community—none of them involving China.

He distances himself for so-called China experts who do not have a fluent grasp of spoken and written Mandarin or the history of ancient China. He has a practical background in the language, literature, and history of China. My conclusion is that Michael Pillsbury knows his stuff when it comes to his area of expertise.

I found Dr. Pillsbury's explanation of the Warring Period of China's history to explain a lot, which certainly was his intention in this book. Since he found so many direct quotations from or subtle references to the 36 Strategies in modern Chinese military writings, it seems he is on to something when he reveals what he calls a hidden strategy that the senior foreign policy leadership of the U.S. do not know or refuse to accept.

I appreciated his extensive use of untranslated books, articles, monographs, and reports obtained from high-ranking, cooperative Chinese army officers or from Chinese defectors with inside information. These extensively footnoted sources clearly support his claim that China has a long-term strategy of lulling the U.S. into friendly cooperation while secretly pressing toward their goal of defeating the U.S. and becoming the world's hegemon by the year 2049.

This book is not for the casual reader or for someone with only a passing interest in China since it delves heavily into esoteric and nuanced policy arguments. China "wonks" will read it because it stirs up controversies that analysts will argue about between now and 2049. For those who are not fluent in Mandarin, who are immersed in U.S. foreign policy with China, or who have ongoing commercial business in the country or with its official representatives, this book is a must-read. If they do not grasp the hidden agenda that guides all Chinese interactions with the U.S., they contribute to the decline of the U.S. and will empower China's rise to the world stage as the next superpower.

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## Adrian says

The Hundred Year Marathon is an earth shattering account of how a whole generation of US government officials and China experts have gotten China completely wrong, and how US China policy is grounded in naivety and wishful thinking. Among the main misconceptions Pillsbury highlights in his book are;

- ? China's Hawks are far more numerous and influential than were previously thought, and even mainstream politicians are not as moderate as they appear
- ? The US fundamentally does not grasp Chinese strategic thinking. China's strategy is extremely patient, very far sighted, and relies on exploiting externalities and weaknesses, and most of all, relies upon deception
- ? The Sino-Soviet Split was never fully understood, and warnings from the Soviets were not fully heeded
- ? The initial 1971 opening to China by Nixon was largely a Chinese initiative, not an American one as commonly believed

Pillsbury has highlighted how the Chinese are extremely patient, and very well disciplined, and have rigorously followed stratagems from both the Warring States period and are applying it to the present day. The key concepts are Shi, essentially the order of things, the momentum in the world, Wuwei, the exploitation of energy and getting others to do one's work for you (eg the US depleting the USSR in the Cold War), and Shashoubian, The Assassin's Mace, essentially asymmetric warfare or weapons that strike at an Achilles Heel.

Pillsbury has illustrated a long running narrative of national grievances toward China, wherein China is the victim and it's rightful place in the world has been denied. Additionally, a completely fictional narrative wherein every President since John Tyler (a forgotten President in the West, but the first to sign a Treaty with China) has sought to contain and undermine China.

As China has had very little tolerance for any kind of vocal dissent from the party line, this hostility toward free expression is being internationalized, with websites critical of China being attacked, and denying visas to journalists and other critics of China, a sanction the author himself was subject to, but was rescinded in the hopes of changing his views.

Pillsbury's book is eye opening, and as a China resident, I am unable to refute most of what he says about Chinese narratives, propaganda, or strategic thinking. For many, this book is a wake up call, for others such as myself, it confirmed and exacerbated previously held views.

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## Ian Westgate says

For this American with little initial knowledge of Chinese history, this book felt like an excellent way to dip one's toes in. The author is both credible and interesting, having spent half of his diplomatic career as a "dove" towards China and then as a "hawk." As this is my first book on Chinese history/current events from a Western perspective, it is impossible for me to definitively refute the author's POV that China is a looming exploitative threat to America and the world. That said, I did come away with some questions:

- Is Confucianism truly unimportant to the average Chinese person and used in this post-Mao era as a way to appear harmless and unassuming to the West?
- Has the Chinese government truly unified without any dissent or significant opposing forces around the views of the generals and hard-liners?
- The author makes it sound like Chinese reliance upon and interpretation of lessons from the Warring States period is uniform and absolute. Is this truly the case?

This book and these questions have helped spark a new interest in me for Chinese history which I greatly appreciate. Anything that can inspire a reader to read more about a subject is an automatic winner in my book. I look forward to taking this author's arguments, poking around them, and ultimately discovering more about this part of the world that I haven't wanted to learn too much about. Until now.

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## Oleksiy Synelnychenko says

What a great, down to earth uncovering of China's strategy to become a Global Superpower! I hesitated to read this book, but when I read the KIRKUS review below, I could not resist the temptation:

"A presentation of China's hidden agenda grounded in the author's longtime work at the U.S. Defense Department.

Since his recruitment into lofty intelligence circles as a young China expert in 1969, Council on Foreign Relations member Pillsbury (China Debates the Future Security Environment, 2004, etc.) has been privy to the debriefings of various Soviet spies and Chinese dissidents who have clearly warned of China's aim to surpass America as world leader in time for the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the Communist People's Republic: 2049. Yet America has not listened. Once also a "Panda hugger," as he calls this group of "happy barbarians gleefully ignorant of the deeply subversive" aims of China, Pillsbury has changed his view, as he demonstrates in this systematic destruction of the well-accepted Western notion of China as a

martyr and welfare state. A student of Mandarin, the author notes that the Chinese speak in a “secret code” difficult for outsiders to decipher. The assumptions of this “constructive engagement crowd,” which developed from the Nixon-Kissinger entente of 1971, include the idea that “engagement brings cooperation” and that China is “on the road to democracy”—both false. The truth can be found in the statecraft primer Mao Zedong cherished close to him from the Long March until his death, *The General Mirror for the Aid of Government*, containing the stratagems favored by the Warring States period dating from 4000 B.C. These Darwinian lessons, readily grasped by the wave of hawks directing China policy since the 1990s, who gained the upper hand over the reformers, encompass all kinds of sneaky tactics—e.g., stealing your opponent’s secrets. Perhaps most galling in Pillsbury’s findings is the degree of demonization of the U.S. taught regularly in Chinese institutions, without any positive sense of American historical contributions to China’s growth.

Fodder for concerned thought, with a dollop of paranoia."

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### **Tom LA says**

Not finished yet but it won't let me write more than 420 characters in the update box.

I'm confused. The author tries to make the case that “China has been duping us all by pretending to not be interested in global hegemony, while in reality it is and it's always been”. My question is : so what? It's not like this is a terrible secret that changes everything.

In fact, given the direction and the unstoppable force of the Chinese economy, China's upcoming economic hegemony is out there, for all to see. Of course world hegemony is a relative term - do you mean military? Economic? Political influence? For example, the US global hegemony in the last 30 years has not been “absolute” in every corner of the globe at all.

If the book's point is that China's internal hawks are stronger than what we think, ok, I'd buy that. But I don't see this as an incredible revelation as the author seems to suggest.

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### **Randall Harrison says**

Wow! I've read about a dozen books about China over the last few years: Gregor, Paulson, Jacques, Moyo, French, et al.. If I had to recommend one to the casual reader, this would be it.

Several of these books have also covered the potential "threat" to our way of life that China's rise portends. Even the most alarmist of these books doesn't put things into such bleak terms as Pillsbury. If reading this doesn't scare the pants off you, nothing will.

On the other end of the spectrum Hank Paulson's recent book paints a picture of a cooperative, honest and well-meaning cadre of Chinese leaders that Pillsbury can't see with a telescope.

While reading, I half joked with my teenage children that they should start learning Mandarin, as it will be the language of their masters and overlords as they reach adulthood.

As a student of politics and international affairs, I've been reading about China for 30+ years. However, this

is the first book that scares me to the point where I see my American way of life threatened before I depart this Earth.

Pillsbury provides example after example of the US aiding and abetting China's rise to economic, political and military superpower status, apparently oblivious to the harm this will bring to our own economy, political and military power, let alone the world-wide economic and political systems in place since the end of WW II . It's as if US policy makers are whistling past the graveyard.

Perhaps the most egregious example, we championed China's membership in the WTO but have done nothing to censure them for failing to live up to its basic principles on free trade: state-owned enterprises competing with free-market companies, respect for intellectual property, opening up of domestic markets for foreign goods, etc.. China violates WTO rules regularly and with impunity. Instead of standing up and challenging them to play by the rules, we set up business schools in China to train the next generation of leaders how to beat us at our own game. The short-sightedness of American foreign policy is on grand display in Pillsbury's narrative.

If Pillsbury understands this so clearly, and has had the ear of top policymakers at the White House, State, Defense and the intelligence community, none of this is a secret. Yet we continue to spend taxpayer dollars to provide the Chinese development aid in many forms as Pillsbury outlines in the penultimate chapter. To paraphrase Lenin, China is selling us the rope they are going to use to hang us.

The most important thing to take from this book is that China is playing the long game, something we appear to have gotten away from in recent years. Understanding the nature of their strategy and consciously making policy to counter it are the recommendations Pillsbury lays out in his summary.

The most important lesson I see is to not ever believe a word the Chinese say about their true motives -- to return to their "rightful" place as the center of the world, i.e., to replace the US as the world's hegemon. No amount of lying, cheating, stealing, deceit or chicanery is too much for them to practice to achieve this hundred-year goal. We think they are playing by our rules; they are clearly playing by another set. We are suckers and dupes for believing the former and place our country's future in great harm if we don't correct this.

It's odd though that after spending 200 pages pretty much saying the sky is falling, his conclusion is much more sanguine. He says it's not too late to counter, check and in some cases reverse the advantages China is acquiring at our expense. It's unclear if the political will exists in the American foreign policy community to accomplish any of this. Clearly, this is not a zero-sum game. However, China clearly believes that it is, planning to replace us as the world's hegemon as ancient Chinese political literature espouses.

Lest detractors declare me a close-minded Sinophobe, by itself China's rise as a competing superpower is not troubling to me in the least. What is troubling is two generations of American naiveté about China's true intentions has dramatically reduced the amount of time it will take them to succeed us. Pillsbury lists a number of changes a hegemonic China could impose on the international political, economic and military order, none of which do anything but diminish our power and stature in the world. In a fair fight, the better system wins. In Pillsbury's analysis, this ain't even close to a fair fight...

This book was published four years ago. I'd like to learn what Pillsbury makes of the developments since then, specifically the consolidation of power and constitutional elevation of Xi Jinping, and how that affects the arc of his narrative.

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## **Will Clausen says**

Good book from a seemingly highly credible author. Didn't know anything about China before, still feel mostly in the dark. The core thesis is exactly what's in the title. I'm not sure whether Pillsbury's idea falls more in the camp of conspiracy theories or is something Americans should be legitimately concerned about. On the one hand, it's been nice for me to think of China as a peaceful ally of the United States, whose interests fundamentally align with those of the US and Western Civilization. But it is also true that I can't square that idea with many of China's actions around censorship and cyber attacks. I'm ultimately left wary of the supposed sincerity of Chinese claims about becoming a peaceful ally and peer of the United States, and especially wary that the Chinese will change their actions to align with fundamental values of the West regarding free speech, free markets, and generally supporting individual rights.

Overall, worthwhile read about something I knew nothing about before. Hard to fully get behind the ideas because it's all about supposed secrets from another country, though. But thoughtful discussion about potential implications and things we can do to preserve American values in the coming decades.

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## **Dennis Murphy says**

It was around one in the morning last night when I made the switch from reading a book about Alan Greenspan and started a book by Michael Pillsbury called *The Hundred-Year Marathon, China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*. I had been very skeptical of this book, but it showed up both as a recommended read from Audible and was cited at least twice in my research on China.

I had to force myself to go to bed when four am came around the corner, and I have been reading it off and on all day - finishing it just moments ago.

I don't know what I feel about the book yet, but on a visceral level my body refuses to allow me to dismiss its conclusions. Pillsbury is a long-time China hand, he worked in the field, he consults for DoD, and cannot be easily dismissed since he views on China changed in response to Chinese behavior and his own failed expectations.

At the same time, the underlying argument for the book is utterly fantastic, straining credulity. The notion that the Chinese hardliners have been playing a long game for the desire to obtain global hegemony is, in my view, wrong. It doesn't mesh with what I know, which is admittedly much less than the author.

I am studying at one of the universities he mentions, and one of my teachers can comfortably be said to be one of those political scientists who look to the warring states period in order to draw inspiration on Chinese strategy and foreign policy as it rises. One thing that closely ties to the book is a point where my professor argues that China and the US are just pretending to be nice to one another, and eventually that will end. At the same time, he does not want war - he's convinced warfare has become impossible. He wants moral hegemony, whereby people recognize China's innate greatness and are willing to play by its rules in order to obtain monetary, political, or social relations.

When it comes to China's hardliners, I have no doubt that they have significantly more influence than is let on. I also have no doubt that they have done extensive work and research on a potential war with the US, and on how to beat the US. We've been their only rival of consequence for decades now, and were one of three

for over half a century. As the only real threat to their country, they'd be bankrupt as an institution to at least not have some working plan. Emphasis on asymmetric warfare is par for the course, has been since the Vietnam War.

When it comes to the government's relation to the hardliners, that's up in the air. Are they indulged, are they a major faction, or are they the driving faction of Chinese politics? Unknown, and arguably unknowable. If they are a big player, its politically advantageous to downplay them. If they are not a big player, then their rhetoric would remain the same.

Is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization a potential rival to NATO or the UN? No, not even remotely.

What about China's aid programs to dictators? Well, there's some speculation running about that China helped bring about the downfall of Mugabe, they have worked to end some genocides, and are currently working on the Rohingya issue. They have no great love for democracy, but I doubt they will actively subvert it - that creates dangerous instability, and unless they can control it, they are playing with fire that could come back to haunt them. Russia seems the more dangerous actor in this regard. That being said, they will never support it unless there are clear benefits to doing so.

I'm left with uncertain feelings about this. Susan Shirk and Thomas Christiansen are more convincing, but also more comforting. We owe it to confront things we are not comfortable with, and move on from there. I'll be reading more as China goes on, and so I feel like I will need to revisit this text in the future, but for now I'll give it a preliminary score.

91/100 (A-)

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## **Josh says**

This review is long because the book deserves it. Most of the review will involve disagreement, because agreement is easy to express, while disagreement requires elaboration. But as a whole, this book is interesting and I recommend it without reservation.

Having heard much about this book, I was compelled to read it in one sitting. The obvious strengths of this book are the expertise and credibility of the author, and the truly original material brought to light within the book, some of it declassified specifically for the publication of this book. The author has had a front-row seat to Sino-American diplomacy for forty years, and the stories are exhilarating, as if lifted from a spy novel.

But ultimately, this book is not a memoir, it is meant to be read as a foreign policy prescriptive. As to the main message of the book - that China seeks to displace the US as the world hegemon through a patient accumulation of national power - the author lays out a convincing case that should give any reader pause. However, the book has some weaknesses that prevent it from being as maximally persuasive as it could be.

But first, a step back. This book cannot be evaluated without reference to its self-admitted impetus and foil, *On China*, by Kissinger. Kissinger's book, like this one, is half-storytelling, half-whitepaper. Kissinger's main strength is in describing Chinese strategic problems from the Chinese perspective, giving their actions rationality, and ultimately, showing something close to sympathy. He regards Mao and Zhou Enlai as peers who play the game well, and gives them professional respect, even admiration. However, one can never shake the feeling that this intelligent man has been less-than-truthful. As someone still very much still in the

game, his book seems like a bit of knowing triangulation, with various layers of signalling buried within the book, intended for different audiences. His prescriptions at the end read more like diplomacy than honesty - the book is simply an extension of his day job.

In contrast, Pillsbury has an admirable directness to his book. His cards are on the table, he appears to have no greater ambition than to get the truth out. His policy prescriptions seem heartfelt and written in good faith. His weakness is a certain one-note myopia. Let's recall the state of affairs during Nixon: Vietnam, stagflation, OPEC embargoes. Or how about Reagan: West Germany and Japan in economic ascendancy, a conciliatory Gorbachev. These US-China diplomatic moves happened in the context of greater US strategic goals, and one cannot accurately assess the success of Chinese subterfuge without analyzing this context.

This leads to another point, left unexplored in the book. Pillsbury gives a few examples of Western intelligence choosing to believe a Russian or Chinese false defector over the real one. Pillsbury points out the cause - the false defector tells Americans what they want to hear. But why is this so effective? It is precisely due to this one-note myopia. In the euphoria of the post-Cold War Clinton years, the US was busy counting out the peace dividend and reading Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. Of course China could convince America of the inevitability of Chinese democracy, as the American policy establishment had already done a thorough job convincing itself. It is this same self-belief that (I believe) led to the various blunders of the present day, from deposing Gaddafi and Mubarak in the name of the Arab Spring, to finally Assad, Maliki, and ISIS. Unlike Kissinger, who can seamlessly slip into Zhou Enlai's shoes and sympathize with his plight, Pillsbury can't see the Chinese view. For a book that claims to understand the secret machinations of the Chinese government, this is a significant problem. He explains the application of ancient Chinese texts to modern Chinese thinking, but he doesn't acknowledge or give any agreement to the fundamental Chinese motivations - worries about the US fomenting rebellion in China, for example. To Pillsbury, it's just paranoia. So close, yet so far.

Pillsbury quotes one Russian joke about the future Politburo being all Chinese. He remarks that he later began to appreciate the truth within it. That reminded me of another Russian joke that has gained some notoriety.

Q: Why are there no revolutions in America?

A: Because there are no American embassies in America.

It seems that Pillsbury wouldn't appreciate this joke, while Kissinger would give a winking chuckle.

Personal Observations:

The greatest impression this book gave me was the maturity and competence of Soviet intelligence. They understood and anticipated the Chinese pivot to the US, and apparently took it in stride, understanding that it was in the natural interests of both the US and China, and simply sought to limit the damage, rather than expend resources in a futile effort to prevent it. I imagine a similar level of competence is at play in the current Ukrainian conflict, and in Russia's handling of both China and Germany.

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**Joseph says**



*The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* by Michael Pillsbury is a re-examination of the US-Chinese relationship over the four decades. Pillsbury earned his BA from Stanford and his PhD from Columbia University. He has been an influence on US policy for several presidential administrations.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend" is a very old maxim and is generally thought to be true. However, in dealing with China this is probably far from the truth. China once held a position of power and prestige and its current goal is to return to that position. When countries decide to "take their rightful place" in the world it is done with saber rattling and demagoguery. It is usually thought to be someone like Hitler, Quadafi, Hussein, or the Jungs and the combination of emotional pleas and military buildups. China behaves differently.

China through the 19th and 20th century has been victimized by outsiders. The British with the Opium Wars. Europe and America in the time leading to the Boxer Rebellion. Japan in World War II. China plays off these events to strengthen its position while bargaining, particularly with the US. We saw China as an ally against the Soviet Union. China saw the US as someone who would give military technology, relieve them of defending their border with the USSR, and provide naval security in the shipping lanes. China also hoped that the US and USSR would deplete themselves in the Cold War leaving it as the main power.

China is also different in its political thinking. It does not expect rapid change, and it is prepared to wait as long as it takes. The idea of a hundred year marathon is that China will replace the United States by the 100th anniversary of Mao's rise to power. Slow rise to power eliminates the usual threats to the outside neighbors. In keeping with Sun Tzu's "If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by." time is not an enemy to the Chinese.

In graduate school, we learned that a superpower needs three things: Political Power, Economic Power, and Military Power. The United States takes military power seriously. It continues to advance in power and technology. This path costs a fortune as evidenced by the growing national debt. China, however, has a story about the "Assassin's Mace." The mace is small and insignificant looking but in the hands of someone who knows how to use it, it is deadly. Rather than build a large blue water navy to project power, China's power comes from a different source. As impressive as the high-tech military of the United States is, it has a definite weakness. China is set to exploit that weakness. It has already demonstrated its ability to destroy satellites in orbit and is working on technology to spy on spy satellites. Rather than building large expensive weapons, China's "assassin's mace" is much cheaper than the weapons it destroys. Anti-ship weapons are cheaper than aircraft carriers. It is cheaper to hack into a computer system than design one. China's military concentrates on the small cracks in its enemy's impressive armor.

China is a growing economic power, there is little doubt of its manufacturing base and rising living standards. Western nations gained wealth by colonizing and or outright taking of land. China plays a much softer role gaining political and economic power. It supports America's enemies, even in Afghanistan after 9/11. It allows restricted technology to trickle out to aggressive countries. China knows it needs resources to grow and has turned to Africa for many resources in what seems to be reverse colonization. To secure resources, China invests heavily in African nation's infrastructure in return for access to strategic materials. The process is building bridges between nations instead of creating conflict.

Inside China things are complex. There are hawks and doves in the government, and it seems the hawks are the doers and the doves are the one's America hears. America has been very accommodating to China since the Nixon visit from technology to Most Favored Nation Status and viewed China as an end in itself. China sees America merely as a means to an end. Pillsbury gives an insider's look at four decades of

misinterpreting China and its goals. We assume all countries live by the western code of Just War and think in the same terms as those in the West. China is different. It is waiting and watching until our own misinterpretations become too great to turn back on. We thought the war over planned and open economies was over with the fall of the Soviet Union, but it is not. China was on the sidelines cheering the US on and watching it weaken with a mocking smile.

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### **Ann Solomon says**

I was so pleased to receive an advance copy of this book from Goodreads. Michael Pillsbury offers a fascinating take on China after many decades as a defense policy advisor in numerous presidential administrations. Perhaps most interesting is how his perspective and opinions have changed over a career which has given him a unique perch to observe the hundred-year marathon. I urge anyone who thinks they know China to read it.

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