



DODReads Executive Summary

The Hundred-Year Marathon

China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower

Thesis: China is over halfway through executing a secret strategy to supplant America as the world's dominant power by 2049, the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

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CHINA'S SECRET
STRATEGY TO REPLACE
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GLOBAL SUPERPOWER



Michael Pillsbury

[The Hundred-Year Marathon](#)

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Why this book is important for the Military Professional:

With the release of an updated [National Defense Strategy](#) in 2022, the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains the pacing challenge for the United States military. Therefore, it is necessary to understand not just what China is doing regionally and globally, but also why they are doing it. China has been planning for decades to replace the United States as a global superpower, and U.S. military professionals need to recognize these actions and motivations now to adequately counter any potential future aggression.

Chapter One: The China Dream

- China reclaiming its rightful place atop the global hierarchy has been a Communist Party ambition since Mao took power in 1949 – the beginning of the Hundred-Year Marathon.
- “The Road to Renewal,” or *fu xing zhi lu*, is a slogan that President Xi Jinping adopted from China's hawks when he took office in 2013.
- The notion of China's special position in the hierarchy of nations predates Chinese Communist Party.
 - Early 20th century Chinese writers became interested in the concepts of competition and survival of the fittest (Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley)
- Throughout the mid-20th century, Mao continued developed and strengthened the foundation of Chinese superiority. Soviet Union warned the UN about these deceptive tactics and long-term ambition in 1969.
- These concepts shaped China's path through the second half of the 20th century
 - *The China Dream*, a 2009 book written by a People's Liberation Army colonel, Liu Mingfu.
 - President Xi tapped the sentiments in this book. Only parts of this book have been translated to English.

Chapter Two: Warring States

- Chinese hawks do not get lost in the long, complex history of their nation.
 - Specific lessons were drawn from the Spring Autumn and Warring States periods from 475 BC to the unification of the seven feuding states under the Qin dynasty 250 years later.
- Largely derived from the Warring States period, the nine principal elements of Chinese strategy include:
 1. *Introduce complacency to avoid alerting your opponent.*

2. *Manipulate your opponent's advisers.*
 3. *Be patient – for decades, or longer – to achieve victory.*
 4. *Steal your opponent's ideas and technology for strategic purposes.*
 5. *Military might is not the critical factor for winning a long-term competition.*
 6. *Recognize that the hegemon will take extreme, even reckless action to retain its dominant position.*
 7. *Never lose sight of shi. Shi is what Chinese linguists describe as “the alignment of forces” or “propensity of things to happen.”*
 8. *Establish and employ metrics for measuring your status relative to other potential challengers.*
 9. *Always be vigilant to avoid being encircled or deceived by others.*
- Chinese military authors often refer to how *shi* can tip one direction or another, or even reverse itself instantly.
 - The Chinese military often uses the Battle of Red Cliff in AD 208 as an example of the effective use of *shi*, in which a hegemon is beaten in battle.
 - *Shi* helps shape the foundation with which the Chinese view the United States' actions.

Chapter Three: Only China Could Go to Nixon

- In 1971, President Nixon and national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, opened U.S. relations with the PRC, thinking that such an alliance would bolster America's position against the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War.
 - However, what was seen on the world stage as the U.S. reaching out to China, was in fact China influencing global politics to bring the U.S. to China.
- During Kissinger's secret visit to China in July 1971, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai said, “America is the *ba*.” Interpretations at the time interpreted this as “America is the leader.” However, the intended interpretation of *ba* was *tyrant*.
- Sino- American relations continued to mature through the 1970s. The U.S. saw this new relationship as advantageous in their countering of aggression from Moscow. China also saw this as an opportunity to establish relations in science and technology.
 - Secretly, China was using a concept known as *wu-wei* - or, having others do your work.
- Sharing advanced air, ground, naval, and missile technology with China continued throughout the 1980s.
 - National Security Decisions Directive (NSDD) 11, signed by President Reagan in 1981.
 - Covert cooperation between the U.S. and China continued from 1982 through 1989, when the Sino-American Cambodian program was run out of Bangkok, with the support of the Chinese, the Royal Thai Army, Singapore, and Malaysia.
- China saw *shi* in action as Moscow declined and the American hegemon continued to strengthen.

Chapter Four: Mr. White and Ms. Green

- Hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of unarmed Chinese students died in Tiananmen Square when 250,000 troops rushed into the Chinese capital in May of 1989, after Deng Xiaoping declared martial law.
 - To control the distribution of information on the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Chinese government “had closed 12 percent of all newspapers, 13 percent of social science periodicals, and 76 percent of China's 534 publishing companies.”
- Chinese defectors increasingly approached the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s speaking of a more ominous message coming from within their country. This ran counter to the diplomatic actions and policy decisions pursued by the Reagan and Bush administrations to open relations with China.
 - Information provided was often imperfect and contradictory, leaving it up to the Federal Bureau of Investigations to decide what was actionable.
- Throughout the late 20th century, inside information provided to the U.S. government was a double-edged sword. Informants would routinely provide information that appeared to aid America, however, it also bolstered China's position on the world stage.

Chapter Five: America, the Great Satan

- Evidence suggests that the Chinese hawks have successfully persuaded the Chinese leadership to view America as a dangerous hegemon that it must replace.
- The fall of the Soviet Union is often used by China to highlight what they view as U.S. attempts to suppress Chinese growth.

- o The history of the Cold War has been rewritten to depict it as a U.S. plan to achieve global dominance.
- Chinese hawks have worked to demonize the American government in a way designed to undermine any appeal of American models of government in the eyes of the next generation of Chinese civilians, military officers, and political leaders.

Chapter Six: China's Message Police

- China's strategy depends greatly on U.S. goodwill towards the PRC.
 - o Foreign investment, accepting Chinese exports, reacting lightly when it's China is caught stealing technology, and looking the other way when human right violations come to light are all examples of how the U.S. allows China to pursue their objectives in the Hundred-Year Marathon.
 - o Surly China is still moving in the "right" direction.
- Chinese censorship methods take several forms, as reported by *Business Insider* on November 5th, 2013:
 - o Direct Action: regulation of information flow
 - o Employing economic carrots and sticks: induces self-censorship
 - o Applying indirect pressure: influence proxies to take action
 - o Conducting cyberattacks and physical assaults: often not directly traceable to government
- An active state-run media is required to maintain a veil of acceptable behavior on a global scale, and within the last twenty years, some aspects of this control over the media are beginning to show cracks.

Chapter Seven: The Assassin's Mace

- Early 21st century involved an "Asia pivot" that required wargaming to assess U.S. capability to counter Chinese aggression in the theater. The Assassin's Mace is an ancient Chinese weapon that is used to attack a more powerful foe.
 - o This includes luring in opponent with non-traditional means which induce complacency.
- Defectors describe how China has Seven Fears regarding U.S. war planning:
 1. America's war plan is to blockade China.
 2. America supports plundering China's Maritime resources.
 3. America may choke off China's sea lines of communication
 4. America seeks China's territorial dismemberment.
 5. America may assist rebels inside China.
 6. America may foment riots, civil war, or terrorism inside China.
 7. America threatens aircraft carrier strikes.
- To counter these fears, for two decades China has been building specific, less expensive capabilities to target specific U.S. weak spots.

Chapter Eight: The Capitalist Charade

- China has worked tirelessly to appear that they are on the path toward economic freedom, with private property rights, and a free market.
 - o By 2014, roughly half of the Chinese economy remained in the government's hands.
- State Owned Entities (SOEs) have strengthened China's ability to become an exporting powerhouse.
 - o Using SOEs, in a decade China overtook the U.S. as the largest producer of paper, steel, and auto parts.
- Defectors have provided additional insight in the 21st century and shown that China has designed a hybrid, mercantilist strategy and successfully covered it up for three decades.

Chapter Nine: A China World Order in 2049

- By 2050, China's economy will be much larger than America's, perhaps three times larger.
 - o Possible scenarios include: a unipolar world in which China is the sole superpower, a world in which China and the U.S. are dual superpowers, and a tripolar world of China, India, and the U.S.
- Africa has become a focal point for Chinese global expansion
 - o China may be further weakening democracy and strengthening autocracy in Africa as Chinese businesses inflict abuses on the African people without retribution.
- China's growth, coupled with its reliance on coal for energy has resulted in significant pollution and contamination within its borders and beyond.

- Pressuring China to change has become less and less feasible as any leverage the U.S. has over China dwindles over the coming decades.

Chapter Ten: Warning Shots

- Public perception has, at times, dulled the edge of China's motivations in the Hundred-Year Marathon by depicting the nation as a more open partner with the U.S. and allies.
 - Popular culture, such as the movie *Gravity*, portray the Chinese government as willing to cooperate with the U.S. during crises.
- Diplomatic demands and increased assertiveness should be expected from China in the coming years, and some of these actions may be difficult to conceive today.

Chapter Eleven: America as a Warring State

- China is winning a race that the U.S. hasn't realized has been occurring for over seventy years. The U.S. can adapt a few Chinese concepts from the Warring States era to beat China at its own game:
 1. Recognize the problem
 2. Keep track of your gifts
 3. Measure competitiveness
 4. Develop a competitive strategy
 5. Find common ground at home
 6. Build a vertical coalition of nations
 7. Stand-up to anti-American competitive conduct
 8. Identify and shame polluters
 9. Expose corruption and censorship
 10. Support prodemocracy reformers
 11. Monitor and influence the debates between China's hawks and reformers
- The U.S. must first recognize the fact they are a competitor in a marathon, which might be the most difficult step to accomplish.

Resources and Additional Reading

- 1) [On China](#)
- 2) [China Worldcraft](#)
- 3) [American Schism](#)
- 4) [Stealth War](#)
- 5) [Unrestricted Warfare](#)

*Thanks to Chris Mundy for compiling this Executive Summary. Chris is a former Commander of the 99th Reconnaissance Squadron and a retired command pilot with nearly 3,000 hours of flight time in the T-37, T-38, A-10, and U-2 aircraft. Chris has also served on the Headquarters Air Force staff, routinely interfacing with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, other military services, industry partners, and Congress. This executive summary is composed of both verbatim excerpts and summarizations from **The Hundred-Year Marathon**, by Michael Pillsbury. Chris can be reached through [LinkedIn](#).*



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