

## **China's secret strategy to replace the USA\***

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*Michael Pillsbury:*

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

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In his book, Michael Pillsbury has created a special genre: the book is simultaneously a memoir (based on his career of over 40 years with the CIA, RAND and the Pentagon) and an analysis of China's present situation, embedded in a kind of historical framework. One central thesis of his book is that the hawks in China have successfully persuaded the Chinese leadership to view the United States as a dangerous hegemony which it must replace. The title of this plan is "The Hundred-Year Marathon", the goal of which is that by 2049, i.e. the 100th anniversary of proclaiming the People's Republic of China, China should ultimately end the age of Western humiliation and create a world order with China as the Number One power. Pillsbury is firmly convinced that implementation of the goals of "The Hundred-Year Marathon" is progressing successfully, essentially due to two factors: one of them is that the Western countries, particularly the USA, make erroneous assumptions in respect of their perception of China, and the other is that China is following a successful strategy derived from its own historical experience.

According to the author, there are basically five false assumptions in the USA. The first is that the engagement shown by the Western countries in China increases China's willingness to cooperate. Pillsbury believes that the policy followed by China in Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran and North Korea demonstrates that China is not willing to cooperate in global interests and has no intention of taking part in the international order as a responsible participant. The second false assumption in the view of the author is that China is on the road to democracy. He believes that there is no evidence of this; moreover, the Chinese Communist Party has demonstrated spectacular flexibility in the recent decades, which presages the long-term autocracy of the party. The third typical misconception is that the situation of China and the

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official view of the Magyar Nemzeti Bank.

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Chinese economy is unstable, and thus – in order to avoid chaos – no pressure should be exerted on China. According to Pillsbury, this is not true. Indeed, quite the contrary: while the West is worried about China's woes, the Chinese economy is increasingly catching up with the USA. The fourth false conclusion of the American general public and leadership is that China wants to be just like the USA, which – according to the author – merely comes from America's hubris. And finally, the last misconception is that China's hawks are weak and play no major role in the governance of the country, in the army and among intellectuals. Pillsbury states that the hawks have been advising Chinese leaders since Mao Zedong, but were invisible to the outside world.

According to the author, the Chinese hawks derive their strategy from the Warring States Period, which contains nine key elements: *(i)* Induce complacency in your opponent, who thus becomes careless: you must not openly provoke the controlling power, unless it is no longer possible to interrupt its rise. *(ii)* Be patient – for decades or even longer – and continue developing your skills. *(iii)* Manipulate your opponent's advisers. For this purpose, China gives money to US think tanks and scientific institutions, it lobbies companies and individuals, pursues direct advertising and occasionally threatens (e.g. cyberattacks). *(iv)* Steal your opponent's ideas and technology for strategic purposes: For this purpose, China conducts continuous scientific espionage and does not recognise patent rights. *(v)* Military might is not the critical factor in winning a long-term competition. This partly explains why China has not devoted more resources to developing larger, more powerful military forces. *(vi)* Recognise that the hegemony will take extreme, even reckless action to retain its dominant position; thus, China must be prepared for such situations as well. *(vii)* Never lose sight of 'shi' (the flow of power). China is waiting for the point of maximum opportunity to erode the role of the USA. *(viii)* Employ metrics for measuring your status relative to other potential challengers accurately. *(ix)* Always be vigilant to avoid China being encircled and make others believe that China cannot be encircled.

Pillsbury comes to the conclusion that the USA must dispel the false assumptions stemming from its own strategy and China's strategy and cope with the new situation. Pillsbury proposes that a new Cold War be announced, since with this method the USA already managed to overcome a similarly threatening situation in the past. As part of this, the USA's strategy should comprise of the following elements: give nothing to China that may further strengthen its capacities; formulate a uniform US position in terms of goals; build a coalition with other nations against China; and finally the USA should support the Chinese opposition and the pro-democracy powers within China, to undermine the power of the Communist Party.

Pillsbury enriches his story with a large volume of (primarily intelligence agency) information, which easily captivates readers due to its personal style. The

information presented in the book, however, is often known already, and provides a convincing, albeit distorted picture. From the Hungarian reader's point of view, Pillsbury's prophecy and warnings do not achieve their objective, since the author's concern about China's intentions originates from his desire to preserve the global status which America obtained after World War II. The methods criticised by the author are often not foreign to US leaders either, and hence condemnation of such methods on a moral basis cannot be expected outside the USA. Despite its intentions, the book is also suitable for gaining insight into the thinking of not only the Chinese, but also of the American hawks.