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–MICHAEL PILLSBURY

The Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy

Michael Pillsbury

President Donald J. Trump laid the basis for his strategy toward China when he wrote about the challenge of China in a book published in 2000, *The America We Deserve*. In a parallel manner, Ronald Reagan had formed detailed ideas about how to deal with the Soviet Union at least two decades before he was elected president. Victorious presidential candidates are not necessarily blank pages on which their national security advisers can write freely. Both Reagan and Trump changed their advisers many times, perhaps seeking a team more in line with their deeply held strategies.

In early December 2016, I first came to understand Mr. Trump's thinking about China as a member of the Presidential Transition Team on the 14th floor of Trump Tower in New York. Chinese delegations began to visit Trump Tower, and several of Mr. Trump's friends, including Henry Kissinger, offered to carry messages to China's President Xi Jinping. The president-elect announced his choice of a new ambassador to China within hours of his election, and the media reported Iowa's long-serving governor Terry Branstad was considered a "friend" of Xi Jinping for decades since Xi's visit to Iowa. The Chinese indicated a desire to meet President Trump as early as possible and hinted a visit to Mar-a-Lago would be welcome, even if Xi did not play golf. Wilbur Ross contributed ideas to the Transition Team and revealed to us he had made 84 trips to China. He soon took the lead on China trade and economic issues.

Mr. Trump made it clear that he had an intense interest in China and that he would essentially serve as what a diplomat might call the "desk officer" for his China policy. He approved several recommendations about China during the transition, including to observe what he later called "our" one China policy, to terminate the Security and Economic Dialogue process originally created by Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and replace it with four dialogues among 2+2 Cabinet secretaries and to focus on getting a deal to end Chinese unfair trade practices, theft of U.S. intellectual property, forced technology transfer, and in particular reduce the \$500 billion trade deficit about which he had spoken passionately during the campaign.

Other transition recommendations he endorsed were to foster a personal relationship with President Xi by at least monthly telephone calls often an hour or more in length, to seek Xi's help in toughening sanctions on the DPRK at the UN Security Council and to maintain overall policy continuity on China. This included continuing the traditional duties of the 2,300 employees of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, with nearly fifty federal agencies located there and extending President Obama's NSC senior director for Asia in his post before naming him U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. The president authorized the proposal of his new Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to expand military exchanges with China, including for Mattis to make the first visit to Beijing in his life. Indeed, by December 2017, one of the most far-reaching objectives of the National Defense Strategy was to set the military relationship between the United States and China on a long-term path of extensive communication.

In my view, the three most important recommendations that the president-elect endorsed were to be sure that China's economy did not surpass America on his watch, to challenge China's misconduct at the WTO by instructing our ambassador there to criticize China bluntly and demand reforms, and to seek a whole-of-government approach

in which all federal agencies would focus on working with allies and partners building a “free and open Indo-Pacific” region. This concept came to be known as the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The president instructed nearly a dozen agencies and departments to coordinate in a larger regional context and to seek support from allies and partners.

In the thirty months since the transition, President Trump first unveiled these concepts at different moments. For example, on November 10, 2017, at the APEC Summit in Vietnam he stated, “The story of the Indo-Pacific in recent decades is the story of what is possible when people take ownership of their future.... This region has emerged as a beautiful constellation of nations, each its own bright star, satellites to none.” However, he never gave a major speech on his China policy. This permitted his critics to complain he must see China as an enemy or be seeking a global confrontation with China. Yet when any fair-minded observer examines the four main grand strategies described in Graham Allison’s *Destined for War*, it is clear President Trump did not choose “accommodate,” or “undermine” or “negotiate a long peace” or “redefine the relationship,” but rather a unique blend of elements drawn from all four of them. Indeed, by mid-2019, President Trump would propose three-way arms control talks with China and Russia. Draft congressional legislation soon proposed that New START not be extended in 2021 unless China joined the talks, too.

The conspiracy-minded hawks in Beijing I describe in *The Hundred Year Marathon* have their own assessment of President Trump’s strategy toward China. They have become obsessed with the Indo-Pacific Strategy, a whole-of-government commitment that was first spelled out in detail at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in 2018, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Mark Green, and other cabinet-level officials launched new initiatives to expand U.S. public and private investment in Indo-Pacific infrastructure, energy markets, and digital economy. Secretary Pompeo announced the establishment of new development finance partnerships with Japan, Australia, Canada, and the European Union, supported by significant new resources and authorities in the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act, or the BUILD Act, which President Trump signed into law in October 2018. The following month, Vice President Michael Pence announced efforts to coordinate with allies and partners, including efforts across the spectrum of federal agencies for: diplomatic initiatives, governance capacity building, economic cooperation and commercial advocacy, and military cooperation. Chinese hawks did not seem to notice or believe that the United States does not oppose Chinese investment activities as long as they respect sovereignty and the rule of law, use responsible financing practices, and operate in a transparent and economically sustainable manner.

The challenges President Trump decided to take on in the Indo-Pacific extend beyond what any single country can address alone. Therefore, he decided to cooperate with like-minded allies and partners to address common challenges. Unfortunately, that is not how Beijing’s hawks saw it.

Prior to his November 2017 trip to Asia, President Trump decided to strengthen our five military Asian alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. He also took steps to expand partnerships with Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Mongolia. After meeting with Prime Minister Modi, he decided to operationalize our Major Defense Partnership with India, while pursuing emerging partnerships with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal. He is also continuing to strengthen security relationships with partners in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and sustaining engagements with Brunei.

Japan

In Japan, the government of Japan has already provided more than \$2 billion of a \$3.1 billion commitment for construction of facilities for the U.S. Marine Corps realignment. The U.S. government will fund the balance of construction, estimated at \$8.6 billion, and is working toward an outcome that enhances our Indo-Pacific posture.

Republic of Korea (ROK)

South Korea has earned President Trump's praise in part because it spends over 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense and increasing foreign military procurements from the United States, such as the KF-16 and PATRIOT battery upgrades, AH-64E Apaches, the F-15K, RQ-4 Global Hawk variants, and the F-35A Joint Strike Fighter. Seoul also has future procurement plans for the P-8, advanced munitions, upgrades to PAC-3 missiles, and F-16 fighters—all of which will increase interoperability with the United States.

Significant improvements in U.S. force posture during 2018 include adding essential munitions, BMD systems, and pre-positioned wartime stocks. The United States continues to work with the ROK to create an interoperable BMD architecture that addresses the ballistic missile threat from North Korea.

In 2018, USFK and United Nations Command Headquarters relocated both commands from U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan to U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, joining U.S. Eighth Army and 2nd Infantry Division in new state-of-the-art facilities on the largest DoD facility outside of the continental United States. By consolidating capability in Pyeongtaek, on facilities built mostly with ROK funds, we maximize our ability to uphold U.S. security commitments, return large portions of downtown Seoul to the Korean people for economic development, and improve the quality of life for our service members and their families.

Australia

Both the United States and Australia are strengthening security in the Indo-Pacific through more deliberate coordination of the policies and priorities underlying regional engagements by promoting interoperability to address new threats, increasing focus on the Pacific Islands, and leveraging the U.S.-Australia force posture initiatives and the unique exercising and training opportunities created in the process.

In 2014, the United States and Australia signed the Force Posture Agreement, a twenty-five-year-plus agreement governing our Force Posture Initiatives and providing our forces more opportunities to work bilaterally and in trilateral and regional activities, in areas including maritime capacity building and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

There are two Force Posture Initiatives in northern Australia: 1) the Enhanced Air Cooperation, improving interoperability through longer duration, and more sophisticated training; and 2) Marine Rotational Forces-Darwin, an annual rotational presence of up to 2,500 U.S. Marines. The Force Posture Initiatives promote a combined capability to respond to crises and contingencies, strengthen interoperability, and further engagement with regional partners.

In 2018, the U.S. Marine Rotational Forces-Darwin completed its seventh rotation, training with forces from Australia and twelve other regional countries and deploying as part of Australia's Indo-Pacific Endeavor—a flotilla that conducted security cooperation activities in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Philippines

We have 280 bilateral defense activities planned with the Philippines in 2019, and the Philippines hosts the most bilateral exercises in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility. This robust annual cooperation ensures our forces will maintain a sufficient level of interoperability to respond in times of crisis.

President Trump met in Manila with the president and the armed forces of the Philippines and praised its fifteen-year modernization plan to upgrade its capabilities for territorial defense. The main areas of emphasis are maritime security, ISR, and aviation. In December 2018, then-Secretary James Mattis, with authority delegated by

the president, returned the Bells of Balangiga to the Philippines. The Bells were seized during the U.S.-Philippine War in 1901 and are venerated as religious artifacts by the people of the Philippines.

The United States holds some ninety named military exercises in the Indo-Pacific each year, with the vast majority of these exercises being conducted jointly or combined with our allies and partners. These forces and exercises cooperate with militaries across the region in a range of activities from real-time disaster relief to the full spectrum of conventional warfare skills to deter our adversaries.

There are now five Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) Agreed Locations arrayed throughout the archipelago: Antonio Bautista Air Base, Basa Air Base, Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation, Lumbia Air Base, and Mactan Benito Ebuen Air Base. The first projects under the agreement were completed in 2018 and an additional twelve projects have been approved for implementation for 2019 and 2020. These investments provide force posture enhancements, improve our future readiness, and improve the operational flexibility of the alliance during contingencies.

In March 2019, Secretary of State Pompeo reaffirmed our commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty, providing assurances that, “as the South China Sea is part of the Pacific, any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft, or public vessels in the South China Sea will trigger mutual defense obligations under Article IV of our Mutual Defense Treaty.”

The United States and the Philippines continue to find new ways to meet our shared goals. For example, at the invitation of the government of the Philippines, we concluded a bilateral air exercise at Basa Air Base that incorporated fighter aircraft of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the U.S. Air Force.

Thailand

Thailand plays a key geostrategic role in the Indo-Pacific region. The access provided to Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Station and the associated deep-water port at Sattahip is a critical enabler for U.S. force projection. The Royal Thai Army intends to update its Brigade Combat Team construct centered on the U.S. Stryker vehicle.

Singapore

Singapore provides access to U.S. Navy ships as well as U.S. military aircraft, including most recently littoral combat ships and P-8 Poseidon aircraft, whose presence has contributed to the security and stability of Southeast Asia and continues to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Singapore was the first and only Asian country to contribute assets and personnel to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and has participated in Operation Gallant Phoenix since May 2017. Singapore has commanded Combined Task Force 151 in the Gulf of Aden five times.

New Zealand

New Zealand plays a critical role as a regional leader promoting stability, building capacity, and responding to crises and contingencies in the Pacific Islands, such as natural disasters. In 2018, New Zealand announced the “Pacific Reset,” its new whole-of-government policy to engage in the Pacific Islands, building capacity and resilience in response to a range of threats. By collectively stepping up in partnership with Pacific Island nations and other like-minded allies and partners, New Zealand’s Pacific Reset directly complements American efforts in the Indo-Pacific.

President Trump seeks opportunities to broaden and strengthen partnerships with India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal to respond to shared regional challenges.

India

In June 2016, the United States designated India a “Major Defense Partner,” a status unique to India. The designation seeks to elevate the U.S. defense partnership with India to a level commensurate with that of the United States’ closest allies and partners. The establishment of the U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in September 2018 also serves as a tangible demonstration of our commitment to promoting the shared principles of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

President Trump has authorized a whole-of-government approach to pursue a range of initiatives with India to enable cooperation, strengthen our interoperability, and establish a strong foundation for defense trade, technology sharing, industrial collaboration, and broader cooperation on defense innovation. The signing of the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement in 2018 represents a significant development in our military-to-military relationship, facilitating greater interoperability and real-time secure information-sharing. DoD and the Indian Ministry of Defence are increasing the scope, complexity, and frequency of our military exercises. Later this year, the United States and India will conduct our first tri-service exercise, and we continue to collaborate on maritime security and domain awareness, HA/DR, counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, and other transnational issues.

India has purchased approximately \$16 billion in U.S. defense equipment since 2008. Through the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative, we are increasing cooperation in defense technology, building industry-to-industry ties, and identifying opportunities for the co-development and co-production of defense systems for the sustainment and modernization of military forces.

Sri Lanka

Since 2015, DoD has strengthened its relationship with Sri Lanka and increased military engagements significantly, particularly with the Sri Lankan Navy. In 2017, we conducted the first port visit in thirty years by a U.S. aircraft carrier—the USS NIMITZ Carrier Strike Group—and the first ever bilateral Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Exercise. In 2019, we increased cooperation on mutual logistics arrangements in support of Indian Ocean security and disaster response.

Maldives

Following the recent democratic transition in the Maldives, the United States started to explore avenues to expand security cooperation, with particular emphasis on providing capacity-building opportunities to the Maldives National Defence Forces and Maldivian Coast Guard. Key areas of focus include maritime domain awareness (MDA)—to enable Maldivian forces the ability to monitor and patrol its sovereign maritime area and contribute to regional efforts to protect sea lines of communication.

Through the implementation of the National Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific, the United States is prioritizing new relationships with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia—key players in ASEAN.

Vietnam

The U.S.-Vietnam defense relationship has grown dramatically over the past several years, as symbolized by the historic March 2018 visit of a U.S. aircraft carrier for the first time since the Vietnam War.

President Trump seeks to improve Vietnamese defense capabilities by providing security assistance, including Scan Eagle Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, T-6 trainer aircraft, a former U.S. Coast Guard high-endurance cutter, and small patrol boats and their associated training and maintenance facilities. The U.S. military also engages in numerous annual training exchanges and activities to enhance bilateral cooperation and interoperability with the Vietnamese Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard.

Indonesia

Through the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership, the United States and Indonesia conduct an active exercise program that enhances our respective capacity and interoperability based on common platforms such as F-16 fighters and Apache attack helicopters.

Indonesia is a major recipient of IMET funds in the Indo-Pacific, which are used to enhance the military professionalization of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

Malaysia

Under President Trump, we conduct more than 100 defense engagements with Malaysia annually, including exercises and subject matter expert exchanges, and we partner on common objectives such as maritime security and counter-terrorism. We improve our interoperability through combined air, maritime, and amphibious training in multiple locations across the country.

The Malaysian armed forces have demonstrated the professionalism, capacity, and resolve to contribute to regional security and international U.N. missions. We will continue to work closely with Malaysia to advance these and similar efforts that support a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Brunei

The Bruneian government has welcomed the growth of military ties with the United States and like-minded nations, including with respect to enhancing MDA. In 2018, in addition to the Brunei Navy's participation in the RIM OF THE PACIFIC Exercise and holding our annual bilateral CARAT Exercise, the Royal Brunei Land Forces and U.S. Army conducted their first bilateral exercise—PAHLAWAN WARRIOR—in Brunei. This year, the United States co-hosted with Brunei a multilateral Cooperation Against Transnational Threats workshop.

President Trump in 2018 began to revitalize our engagement in the Pacific. The Pacific Islands represent a region distinct from other regions in the Indo-Pacific because of the relatively small size of states, unique geography, and challenges to promote economic prosperity, and U.S. security guarantees to the Freely Associated States. We believe strongly in respect for a safe, secure, prosperous, and free and open Indo-Pacific that must preserve small states' sovereignty, as signified by the 2018 Boe Declaration.

Three of the Pacific Islands have militaries: Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Tonga. The United States works with each to support improved capability within partner armed forces and, consistent with a partner-centric approach, often in support of efforts from allies and partners such as Australia and New Zealand.

Allies such as the United Kingdom and France play a critical role in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. In addition to military capability and regional presence, these allies contribute vital support to upholding free and open principles in the region and globally.

For example, the United Kingdom has increased deployments and operations in the region since 2017, contributed to the coordinated, multinational initiatives to enforce UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea, and performed its first naval operation aimed at asserting navigational rights and freedoms in the South China Sea in 2018 with the transit of its frigate HMS SUTHERLAND and amphibious transport HMS ALBION, followed by the transit of its frigate HMS ARGYLL in 2019. The United Kingdom shares our holistic view of the region as the “Indo-Pacific.”

The United States and France have restarted the Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue and the U.S. took notice of the deployment of the aircraft carrier FNS CHARLES DE GAULLE to the Indo-Pacific in 2019, accompanied for portions of its deployment by ships from other NATO countries, Australia, and the United States. Paris published its strategy on France and Security in the Indo-Pacific.

The president has been personally involved in developing a trilateral partnership with Japan and Australia. Together, we are cooperating in tangible ways to enhance security across the region and increase our interoperability, in part, by augmenting our exercises and training; increasing information sharing; and building capabilities. For example, we are taking what would otherwise be separate or bilateral capacity-building initiatives in Southeast Asia and ensuring that they not only complement one another, but are also tailored to assist in building up more comprehensively capable partners. This grouping is also effectively improving our interoperability by trilateralizing and multilateralizing key military exercises, including COPE NORTH GUAM and SOUTHERN JACKAROO.

The United States, India, and Japan also enjoy a robust trilateral partnership. The annual naval exercise, which began as a U.S.-India exercise, has included Japan as a participating partner since 2014. The exercise has increased our ability to operate trilaterally, including via real-time information sharing, and has increased in complexity over time to incorporate surface, amphibious, and air components. Underpinning this cooperation is the State Department-led trilateral dialogue, which completed its 9th iteration in April 2018. This dialogue enhances trilateral cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development, counter-proliferation, counterterrorism, maritime security and domain awareness, and disaster relief. The first-ever trilateral meeting between the leaders of the United States, India, and Japan took place in November 2018 at the G20 meeting and again at the G20 meeting in Osaka.

The United States continues to support ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture, and the U.S. free and open Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to further empower it.

Singapore’s Information Fusion Centre (IFC) is also an example of how countries in the region are collaborating to facilitate information sharing and enhance maritime security. Since its inception in 2009, Singapore’s IFC has served as a maritime information hub for the region, contributing actionable information to regional and global navies and coast guards to cue timely operational responses to maritime threats such as piracy and drug smuggling. The IFC has hosted over 100 international liaison officers from over twenty countries.

Last December, the United States also welcomed the inauguration of India’s maritime IFC, which will function as a regional platform for the exchange of information in the maritime domain among partner nations. Likewise, Sri Lanka, whose strategic location in the Indian Ocean through which 70 percent of maritime traffic passes, has outlined a vision to become a regional hub for logistics and commerce. Supporting this vision, the U.S. Navy recently initiated a series of temporary cargo transfer initiatives enabling non-lethal resupply of passing naval vessels in Sri Lanka.

My impression is that President Trump's team is open to suggestions about how and where to make mid-course corrections in their strategy toward China. The Indo-Pacific Strategy that I have detailed, of course, is only a part of the overall approach. Still, America's annual two-way trade with the region is \$2.3 trillion, with U.S. foreign direct investment of \$1.3 trillion in the region—more than China's, Japan's, and South Korea's combined.

The Indo-Pacific contributes two-thirds of global growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and accounts for 60 percent of global GDP. This region includes the world's largest economies—the United States, China, and Japan—and six of the world's fastest growing economies—India, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Nepal, and the Philippines. A quarter of U.S. exports go to the Indo-Pacific, and exports to China and India have more than doubled over the past decade. And as we meet in Aspen, Secretary Pompeo will spend three days with ASEAN defense ministers at the security forum in Bangkok before visiting Australia for an annual meeting of the U.S. and Australian foreign and defense ministers. Newly sworn-in Defense Secretary Mark Esper will join him in Sydney for those talks. On his return, Pompeo will become the first sitting secretary of state to visit Micronesia, meeting leaders from the Pacific Islands that have compact associations with the United States, including Palau and the Marshall Islands.

Michael Pillsbury is the Senior Fellow and Director for Chinese Strategy at the Hudson Institute. He is a distinguished defense policy adviser, former high-ranking government official, and author of numerous books and reports on China. During the Reagan administration, Dr. Pillsbury was Assistant Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Planning and responsible for implementation of the program of covert aid known as the Reagan Doctrine. In 1975-76, while an analyst at the RAND Corporation, Dr. Pillsbury published articles in *Foreign Policy* and *International Security* recommending that the United States establish intelligence and military ties with China. The proposal, publicly commended by Ronald Reagan, Henry Kissinger, and James Schlesinger, later became U.S. policy during the Carter and Reagan administrations. Dr. Pillsbury served on the staff of four U.S. Senate Committees from 1978-1984 and 1986-1991. As a staff member, Dr. Pillsbury drafted the Senate Labor Committee version of the legislation that enacted the US Institute of Peace in 1984. He also assisted in drafting the legislation to create the National Endowment for Democracy and the annual requirement for a DoD report on Chinese military power. In 1992, under President George H.W. Bush, Dr. Pillsbury was Special Assistant for Asian Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, reporting to Andrew W. Marshall, Director of Net Assessment. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Dr. Pillsbury is the author of *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (NDU Press, 2000), *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, and editor of *Chinese Views of Future Warfare* (NDU Press, 1998). Dr. Pillsbury was educated at Stanford University (B.A. in history with honors in social thought) and Columbia University (M.A., Ph.D.).