



China unlikely to go to war over Taiwan, says defence expert

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CHINA is unlikely to be a military threat and the chances of a conflict over Taiwan are diminishing, according to a US defence expert.

Jonathan Pollack, professor of Asian and Pacific studies at the US Naval War College, told *The Australian* that China would become a much more potent military force in the long run.

“They see this as an inevitable and logical outgrowth of their economic emergence,” Professor Pollack said. “For all the shiny new systems they are acquiring, China has not gone to war for 30 years. I don’t see them as a kind of budding overlord of East Asia. I don’t think that is the way they conceptualise these things.”

China has reported average real increases in military spending of 9.6 per cent in the 15 years to 2005; outside estimates are much higher.

The US Defence Department

has been among those expressing concern about a military build-up that could put regional balances at risk.

Professor Pollack, who has been visiting China for 30 years, said he could not preclude China becoming a military threat, but added: “I just don’t see it as terribly likely.”

Professor Pollack is in Australia as a guest of the Centre for International Security Studies and the US Studies Centre, both at Sydney University.

He recently visited Taiwan, whose Government, elected this year, comprised realists who knew they had to try to find a means of dealing with China.

“They have to find a way to give China clear incentives to collaborate with them, hopefully in a transition to some longer-term accommodation, the terms of which they don’t know yet,” Professor Pollack said.

“As long as you have a Government in Taipei that is going to work hard to not provoke the

Chinese, I would see the probability (of China using military force against Taiwan) diminishing, not increasing, even as China becomes much more capable militarily.”

He said the US was undergoing a reassessment of long-term strategy following the Cold War, which had been deferred by the September 11, 2001, terror attacks.

“A legitimate issue is whether American foreign policy is over-militaristic,” he said. “We look at the problems we face in the world and there has been a tendency to think way too quickly about finding a military solution for things for which there may not be a military solution.”

This was true of Iraq and probably Afghanistan, he said.

“(US Defence Secretary) Robert Gates has pointed out that if you look at the number of uniformed personnel on a single Nimitz aircraft carrier — about 6000 — that is more than the foreign service officers in the entire State Department.”



Visiting: Jonathan Pollack