



# Flying the flag in a recast Pacific order

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A HUNDRED years ago this week, the president Theodore Roosevelt sent a mighty fleet of US Navy battleships, painted a gleaming white, into Sydney Harbour as part of a show of American force around the Pacific.

It was a reassuring sight for an isolated British nation worried about the rise of Japan, whose navy and army had humiliated tsarist Russia just three years earlier.

On the eve of a smaller commemorative display of US naval might, Jonathan Pollack, a professor from the US Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, was in Sydney yesterday with some sanguine thoughts about the region's emerging security order in this century.

Barring a political rupture, we do not have to worry about Japan breaking out and going nuclear on its own, as it easily could from a technical point of view, Professor Pollack believes. But we do have to think about China and India emerging as autonomous powers in the Asia-Pacific region, with Russia on the scene as well.

A long-time analyst of Asia politics with a focus on China, Professor Pollack spoke last night as a guest of the University of Sydney's US Studies Centre and the Centre for International Security Studies. He was alongside the Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, in an event marking the centenary of the Great White Fleet's visit.

At the Naval War College, he is well placed to detect how the best

minds in the US Navy, especially, are thinking ahead. After all, it's where the great American strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan developed his sea control doctrine that has been the guideline for naval warfare ever since the Teddy Roosevelt era.

The US armed forces are starting to disentangle themselves from the diversion of the "war on terror" and the technological hubris of the former defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, and look at longer term strategic trends.

Professor Pollack notes that the US Navy's latest maritime strategy, released last October, has a "quiet line" about a new multipolar world order. "It is a long-term trend, it is obviously not a realised condition," he said before his speech.

But neither China nor India will become American allies, despite some unrealistic hopes in US security circles about the latter. With Japan still in the American camp, that means two "unequivocally autonomous powers" in the region, posing the challenge of building some kind of trilateral understanding.

China is building some military capabilities that clearly have relevance only to a contingency of attacking Taiwan and blocking US assistance. But Professor Pollack believes the People's Liberation Army chiefs are probably a long way from feeling confident.

"China has not fought a war in 30 years," he said. "Not only that, any kind of use of force

directed against Taiwan would be qualitatively different... The risks therefore are much higher: the risks of failure."

But conflict is not inevitable. "Right now we are at a very, very interesting moment," he said, citing the recent election of the Taiwanese President, Ma Ying-jeou, who has been putting out political feelers to the mainland and getting some response.

So far, Washington has not reached the point where it can accept China as a fully-arrived power with legitimate security interests. But Professor Pollack asked: "If you take Taiwan out of that scenario, the long pole in the tent, can one imagine another circumstance where we would be going head-to-head militarily?"

So far, the region is mostly benign, where without becoming allies, the US and China might recognise overlapping security interests.

How Washington shapes up to this new century will be clearer after the November election. "Who's the next American president?" Professor Pollack said. "If you tell me that, I'll tell you a lot."

Maybe it is not an omen, but the American warship being sent for the Great White Fleet celebrations this week is the missile destroyer USS John S. McCain, named after the father and grandfather (both admirals) of the Republican candidate of the same moniker.



**Jonathan Pollack ... learning to live in a multipolar region.**