

US, China presence in Asia-Pacific not a threat

PM downplays presence of superpowers, but expresses concern about accidents

VLADIVOSTOK: Malaysia is not threatened by the US's plans to deploy missiles to the Asia-Pacific region or by Chinese warships there, but



Mahathir shaking hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the forum yesterday. - BERNAMAPIX

is worried about potential accidents, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Sputnik news agency in an interview yesterday while on a working trip to Russia.

The PM's statement was in relation to what US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper said in August, saying he would like to deploy medium-range missiles in Asia. However, he added this could take a long time.

"I don't think any official offer has been

made, but this is something that we gather from the news. And we think that if we have to spend money on defence, it must really be something that is useful for us to maintain our security.

"At the moment, Malaysia does not feel threatened. Yes, there are Chinese warships in the South China Sea and Americans have also gone there, but we don't see that as a direct threat against Malaysia," Mahathir said when asked how the potential deployment of US missiles could impact the situation in the region.

Instead, he said the possibility of accidents happening is what worries Malaysia.

"If accidents happen and lead to some fighting, we are not going to be involved. We don't want to take sides with anyone," he added.

Mahathir also said that he did not like military drills in the country's waters, qualifying them as provocative and stressing the need to scale down exercises for the sake of global peace.

"On the whole, we are not very keen on exercises. They are usually very provocative. We have recently participated (in the joint exercise) with the Asean group, with the US, but I have made my views known about this.

"I don't like military drills in our waters because it tends to provoke other countries. I think we should scale down military activities if you want to have peace," Mahathir said on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum when asked whether the country had plans to hold any new joint drills.

Mahathir previously slammed the Asean-US Maritime Exercise, which started on Sept 2, as meaningless, expressing concerns it could make China feel threatened and deploy its naval forces.

He also said the US should hold such drills in its own territory. - Bernama