

**Malaysia Can Play Important Role In Washington's Strategic Rebalance**  
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NEW YORK, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- Following visits by United States (US) politicians and defence officials in the Asia-Pacific region, the remarks made by US Deputy Defence Secretary Ashton B. Carter recently confirmed US interest in maintaining, what experts here describe as a "strategic presence" in that region, in alliance or partnership with local players.

Carter, fresh from his tour of Hawaii, Guam, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and India, in his remark on Wednesday at the Asia Society here, outlined the contours of the US strategic rebalance in Asia.

This includes adjustments to force structure and force posture, investments in new capabilities, and initiatives to strengthen defence relations with allies and partners in the region, where Malaysia can play a key role in the US calculations of its engagement in Asia.

Carter's visit followed the Asia visit by Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, who had a "useful and productive" exchange of views with his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi on June 2 during the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

The US administration has praised the role of the Malaysian Armed Forces' medical personnel in Afghanistan, and Panetta had earlier said that both the US and Malaysia looked forward to strengthening their military cooperation, including expanding multilateral exercises.

Carter described his Asia visit as an attempt "to make sure our forces and our partners understand that we are not just talking the talk....we're walking the walk".

Apparently, this was a veiled assurance to those Asian skeptics who fear America's disinterest or indifference in the region which fears China's growing aggressive posturing.

The US rebalance is expected to come about once the resources are set free after America's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"This rebalance is not about any single country or group of countries. It is not about China or the United States. It's about a peaceful Asia-Pacific region, where sovereign states can enjoy the benefit of security and continue to prosper," Carter said.

Carter explained that the rebalance would be reflected in the force structure decisions on what is to be kept and what needs to be cut. It will be reflected in new investments in technology and weapon systems, in innovative operational plans and tactics, in the posture and presence, and in alliances and partnerships in the region.

He further explained that this would be possible even "within the limits of a smaller budget". The resources that will be set free from the US withdrawal from Iraq and, later, from Afghanistan, can be allocated to the Asia-Pacific region.

Carter said Panetta had indicated that 60 per cent of US naval assets would be based in the Pacific by 2020, and the US would increase its alliances and partnerships with the region's players.

"We are cooperating with Japan and South Korea on missile defense technologies. We are integrating Japanese sensors into our space surveillance network, and cooperating with Australia on space capabilities.

"We are enhancing our access and sustainment across the region. In addition to rotationally deploying littoral combat ships, in Singapore we are exploring options for increased training.

"With the Philippines, we are exploring options for rotational force deployments in priority areas. We are focused on building the Philippines' maritime security presence and capabilities, and strengthening their maritime domain awareness," he said.

Malaysia can play an important role in US plans to bolster its presence in the region.

Before Panetta's recent talks with the Malaysian defence minister in Singapore, former Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates met in Kuala Lumpur in November 2010 with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zahid Hamidi, to forge closer military cooperation.

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