

US strategy 'not about China'

By CHEN WEIHUA in New York and ZHAO SHENGNAN in Beijing

Fresh from a visit with allies in Asia, a top Pentagon official on Wednesday dismissed concerns that the US' strategic rebalance of the Asia-Pacific region is intended to counter a rising China.

"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," Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter told a crowd at the Asia Society in New York.

"We seek to strengthen our very important relationship with China, and believe that China is key to developing a peaceful, prosperous and secure Asia-Pacific region," he said.

Carter, who just returned from a 10-day trip to the Asia-Pacific region with stops in India, Japan and the Republic of Korea, described the rebalance as one of the most prominent and important areas of US strategy.

Since US President Barack

Obama announced the new defense strategy in the Pentagon in January, many top US officials — Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta — have visited Asia.

The US is committed to developing a sustainable military-to-military program with the Chinese to improve mutual understanding and reduce risk, Carter said.

"The leaders of both countries have spoken to their respective militaries and said we don't want a zero-sum or less than zero-sum game. The Chinese leaders said exactly the same thing and we hear that," he said.

Vice-President Xi Jinping paid a visit to the Pentagon during his trip to the US in February while Defense Minister Liang Guanglie visited the US in May, the first by a Chinese defense minister in nine years.

It's impossible for Washington to neglect cooperation with China in the region, but its increasing military disposition and intensive drills that excluded China have harmed mutual trust, said Shen Yamei, a researcher on American stud-



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Acting Budget Director Jeffrey Zients with Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter (right) testifies before the House Armed Services Committee hearing on defense cuts on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday.

ies with the China Institute of International Studies.

Washington's closer military ties with its Asian allies, especially with countries that have competing territory claims with China, have aroused concerns about US interference in regional issues.

The US position on freedom of navigation, including the South China Sea, is not to take sides in territorial disputes, Carter said. But he noted that Washington will take sides with a collective approach to

common problems, without clarifying which issues he was referring to.

Carter also said the US leverages "multilateral forums, like ASEAN, to address international law and norms issues, like the excessive claims being made on the South China Sea", without mentioning whether the South China Sea isles claimed by both China and the Philippines fall into a mutual defense treaty signed between Washington and Manila in the early 1950s.

Bonnie Glaser, a senior fellow at Center for Strategic and International Studies, said last week that the US has been careful not to state that the disputed area falls under the treaty.

"We don't want to alienate China. The goal is not to have a zero-sum competition between the US and China in the region," said Glaser, admitting that the US is in a dilemma when different groups of countries have different hopes for the US in the Asia-Pacific.

While some have questioned the US' capability to accomplish its strategic rebalance given the poor economic and tight budgetary situation, Carter expressed confidence that the US will have the resources to accomplish all of the tasks.

The US often begins its strategic shift with strong military investment instead of consolidating economic or political ties, Shen said. "Once the regional tension escalates, Washington's interference will be logical and feasible."

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Australia rejects nuclear aircraft carrier proposal

By ROD MCGUIRK in Canberra, Australia
The Associated Press



We have made it crystal clear from the first moment — we don't have United States military bases in Australia. We don't see the need for that."

STEPHEN SMITH
AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

Australia on Thursday rejected a proposal by a Washington-based think tank to base a nuclear aircraft carrier strike group on Australia's west coast as part of a shift of US military might to the Asia-Pacific region.

A Pentagon-commissioned report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on repositioning US forces in the region suggested relocating an aircraft carrier from the US East Coast to an Australian naval base south of the city of Perth.

But Australian Defense Minister Stephen Smith said on Thursday that while negotiations were under way to increase US navy access to Australia's Indian Ocean base, HMAS Stirling, it would never become a US military base.

"We have made it crystal clear from the first moment — we don't have United States military bases in Australia. We don't see the need for that," Smith told Australian Broadcasting Corp television.

Smith said the think tank's proposal was not endorsed by the US government.

"It's a suggestion by an independent think tank. It's not one we're proposing to take up," he said.

The report said more than \$1 billion would need to be spent to make HMAS Stirling capable of becoming a home port to a nuclear carrier that would become the flagship of a carrier strike group.

Such a group would typically include two guided missile cruisers, two or three guided missile destroyers, two nuclear-powered submarines, a supply ship and up to nine squadrons of aircraft.

The Australian base would give the United States a second carrier strike group in the Asia-Pacific, the first with an existing Japanese home port in Yokosuka.

Washington has been forging closer military ties with countries in the region and has announced that 60 percent of the US Navy's fleet will be based in the Asia-Pacific by 2020, up from less than 55 percent now.

Australia is a staunch US ally and the only country to fight alongside the US in every major conflict since the start of the 20th century.

Washington and Canberra announced late last year an agreement on closer military cooperation in which up to 2,500 US Marines would rotate through a joint

military training hub in the northern Australian city of Darwin. The US Air Force will also make greater use of airfields and bombing ranges in the Australian Outback.

China — Australia's most important trade partner — has blasted the closer bilateral military ties as a return to the Cold War divisions that risked the peace and security of the region.

Hugh White, head of Australian National University's Strategic and Defense Studies Center, noted that American combat troops had not been based in Australia since World War II and said that was unlikely to change in the future.

He said Chinese objections were the major reason why Australia was unlikely to ever allow US bases on its soil.

"The government was surprised that China reacted as negatively as it has to the decision to have Marines rotate deployments through Darwin, and I think they'll be very careful not to risk further displeasure from China by doing anything that suggests they're supporting a US military buildup in Asia," White said.

"There's a concern that the more the US builds up its military posture in the Western Pacific as part of US President Barack Obama's pivot to Asia, the higher the risk that the US-China relationship will become more competitive, more adversarial, more hostile, and that pushes Australia close to the point of having to make a choice between the US and China, and that's something we badly want to avoid," he said.

The US in recent decades has had three exclusive military intelligence communication bases in Australia.

But they were targeted by protesters, and with pressure from Australian governments became joint US-Australian facilities.

The only one remaining is the top-secret Joint Defense Space Research Facility at Pine Gap in central Australia.



THAI SCHOOL DESTROYED IN FIRE

PHOTO BY SURAPAN BOONTHANOM / REUTERS

Children look through a gate on Thursday at the site of a school that was burned down on Wednesday night by suspected Muslim separatists in Pattani province, southern Thailand.

Pentagon weighs extra muscle for Asia-Pacific

By AGENCIES in Washington

Pentagon decision-makers will consider adding bombers and attack submarines as part of a growing US focus on security challenges in the Asia-Pacific, a senior US Defense Department official said on Wednesday.

The US will "take another look" at sending more muscle to the strategic hub of Guam in the western Pacific, now that this has been recommended by an independent review of United States regional military plans, Robert Scher, deputy assistant secretary of defense for plans, told lawmakers.

The Defense Department, however, must weigh the issue from a broad global perspective and take into account competing requirements, Scher testified before the US House of Representatives' Armed Services Subcommittee on the readiness of the plan.

The Defense Department will also continue to explore opportunities with the Philippines, a treaty ally, of deploying forces to unspecified "priority areas" to enhance maritime security, the Defense Department officials testified.

Li Jie, a Beijing-based navy analyst, said the essence of US pivoting to the Asia-Pacific is to contain and encircle China with deployment mainly on the sea, where it has many advantages.

"The US possesses large numbers of warships of various scales. Unlike on land where its operation is restricted by airports and bases in other countries, it can easily get close to other countries' maritime border for deterrence or even conduct long-range precision strikes from sea to land," Li said.

Yuan Peng, an expert on US studies with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said the US

has been reflecting on its gains and losses by pivoting to Asia-Pacific in the recent years.

"US high-level officials recently have been actively responding to China's call for building a new type of big power relationship between China and the US, which lays the basis for better Sino-US interaction in the Asia-Pacific region in future," Yuan said.

The new assessment of the US military force posture in the region was carried out by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a non-partisan policy research group, subsequent to a congressional mandate.

It recommended in a report made public last week stationing one or more additional attack submarines in Guam to provide what it called a critical edge against "anti-access, area denial" technologies being developed by China to keep the US military at bay.

CSIS listed as another option

permanently relocating a B-52 squadron of 12 aircraft to Guam, rather than the current practice of rotating in from bases in the US.

The central geostrategic uncertainty that the US and its allies and partners face in the region "is how China's growing power and influence will impact order and stability in the years ahead", the CSIS review said.

It said US forces can help shape the peacetime environment by standing behind US security commitments — a move the review said would "dissuade Chinese coercion or North Korean aggression".

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has announced plans to "rebalance" US naval forces from a nearly 50-50 split between the Atlantic and the Pacific to a 60-40 mix in favor of the Asia-Pacific. The details of this shift have not been spelled out, although officials have said much of the buildup

will involve new ships.

Scher, in a joint written testimony to the panel with David Helvey, an acting deputy assistant secretary of defense for the region, said the defense department agreed with the CSIS assessment that "there are opportunities to move forward with Guam and send an important signal to the region".

Neither additional bombers nor additional attack submarines are in current US plans for the region but will be considered based on CSIS's "good work", Scher told Reuters after the hearing.

David Berteau, director of the CSIS International Security Program and a co-director of the review, said Guam could absorb additional submarines without a huge amount of extra military construction costs, for instance for pier space or shore facilities.

CHINA DAILY—REUTERS



LOOKING FOR WORK

PHOTO BY JUAN MEDINA / REUTERS

People enter a government-run employment office in Madrid on Thursday. Spain's jobless rate fell by 0.6 percent in July from a month earlier, or by 27,814 people, leaving 4.6 million people out of work, data from the Labour Ministry showed.