

U.S. renames Pacific Command

Symbolic step: Outgoing Pacific Command head Adm. Harry Harris (left) with Gen. Joe Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. AFP/THOMAS WATKINS

The U.S. on Wednesday renamed its strategically important Pacific Command (PACOM) as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, in a move widely seen as a public expression of America's keenness to count India as key partner in its strategic planning. The Trump administration has already been using the term Indo-Pacific instead of Asia-Pacific in official documents.

Secretary of Defence James Mattis made the announcement at the change-of-command ceremony in Hawaii where Admiral Philip S. Davidson took charge of the command from Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.

'Combatant command'

Mr. Harris, a strong proponent of enhancing ties with India, commanded PACOM for three years. Mr. Trump has nominated him as U.S. Ambassador to South Korea. "For U.S. Pacific Command, it is our primary combatant command, it's standing watch and intimately engaged with over half of the earth's surface and its diverse populations, from Hollywood to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins as Admiral Harris puts it," Mr. Mattis said.

The Indo-Pacific Command is critical for "a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade, not bound by any nation's predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads," Mr. Mattis said, alluding to China's 'One Belt, One Road' policy for the region, and echoing Indian concerns about it. India is currently caught in the crossfire of anti-Russian sanctions mandated by the U.S. Congress and Mr. Mattis has called for waiver for India though it has significant defence cooperation with Russia. The first 'two-plus-two' ministerial dialogue between India and the U.S. is scheduled for the first week of July.

"America continues to invest vigorously in Indo-Pacific stability, bolstering the free and open rules-based international order that has enabled this region to grow and to thrive for over 70 years. While we are prepared to face any who would seek to challenge America's resolve, our National Defense Strategy is not a strategy of confrontation," the Defence Secretary said.

'Greater connectedness'

"The renaming reflects the existing geographic coverage of the command and the acknowledgement of the increasing connectedness between the two oceans — what happens in the Pacific, doesn't stay in the Pacific —, but also, more broadly, the process of India's re-entry into the U.S. government's 'Asia' orbit," said Tanvi Madan, fellow and director of India Project, Brookings Institution in Washington DC.

"Renaming the combatant command is strategically significant, in that it reflects a recognition within the U.S. government that East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are gradually becoming a single competitive space. It's also shrewd marketing — a way of reaffirming to New Delhi and to the rest of the world that India is, and ought to be, an indispensable pole of the future Asian order," said Joshua T. White, associate professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Washington.

However, the effectiveness of an Indo-Pacific defence and security strategy and U.S.-India cooperation will still depend on the level of discussion and coordination across combatant

commands and bureaus, according to Ms. Madan. “Such a step can have organisational implications, and affect the policy debate outside government as well. However, it’s worth keeping in mind that, in other parts of the government (e.g. State, NSC), these regions are still categorised separately. Moreover, the U.S. and India have different ideas of what constitutes the Indo-Pacific — India includes the whole Indian Ocean region, which U.S. CENTCOM and AFRICOM cover as well,” she said.

Representatives from Australia, the U.K., Japan, India, New Zealand, Canada, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei, and Nepal attended the change-of-command ceremony in Pearl Harbor.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com