

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Future Prospects for the Indo-Pacific beyond US Commitment

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S*ummary*

India, Japan and Australia must contribute to the Indo-Pacific through trilateral cooperation to build a multi-layered network of competencies.

The Renaming of INDOPACOM

The United States of America's late June 2026 announcement that the official designation for the US Indo-Pacific Command based in Japan would revert to its pre-2018 nomenclature, that is, US Pacific Command, ignited active debates about the implications of the move for regional allies and partners as well as adversaries. Some commentators argued that the commitment to retain the expanded remit of USINDOPACOM indicated that the US did not seek to abandon its regional commitments.¹ Others brandished the renaming (some celebratorily) as further evidence of the US resizing its commitments closer to home.²

To be sure, the redesignation of INDOPACOM, when embedded in the broader pattern of signals emerging from the Trump White House, does, to some extent, indicate a reordering of American priorities.³ However, contrary to much of the commentary espousing a 'pessimistic' view of American abandonment, it is not definitively the case that the US has decided to deprioritise the region entirely. It remains actively involved diplomatically, and its military continues to train, exercise and cooperate with regional militaries.

Therefore, it may be more accurate and realistic to view the US' stance on the Indo-Pacific as a switch to an episodic, issue-based form of involvement that operates in parallel to the Trump administration's other priorities in West Asia, Eastern Europe and, most actively, the Americas. It may well be the case that changes in the dynamics of US-China competition could act as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the level of US attention to the region going forward.

Simultaneously, it is difficult to argue that the US' de-emphasised Indo-Pacific position implies the obsolescence or irrelevance of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical object.⁴ If the Indo-Pacific as a concept lacks content, the answer is not to dismiss it as a placeholder, but to fill it with content amenable to empirical measurement and demonstration. In terms of the 'content' with which to substantiate the Indo-Pacific, greater importance must now be given to efforts to accelerate and realise an India-Japan-Australia trilateral mechanism, as advocated by some commentators.⁵ As

¹ Sayantan Halder, [“What's in a Name? The Curious Case of the Indo-Pacific”](#), Expert Speak, Observer Research Foundation, 20 June 2026.

² [“Indo-Pacific Name Change Unnerves Many”](#), *The Japan Times*, 26 June 2026; Sarang Shidore, [“Goodbye Indo-Pacific, Hello First Island Chain!”](#), Commentary, Responsible Statecraft, 7 July 2026.

³ Kshitiz Bhardwaj, [“The Return of Pacific Command: 5 Signals about America's Changing View of Asia”](#), *Firstpost*, 17 June 2026.

⁴ Sarang Shidore, [“Goodbye Indo-Pacific, Hello First Island Chain!”](#), no. 2.

⁵ Gurjit Singh, [“Time for Middle Powers to Sustain 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'”](#), *The Japan Times*, 8 July 2026; Sanchari Ghosh, [“Four Legs Bad, Three Legs Better? Rescuing the Quad with an India-Japan-Australia Grouping”](#), Commentary, Lowy Interpreter, 1 September 2025.

resident powers in the Indo-Pacific, it is incumbent upon New Delhi, Tokyo and Canberra to develop ways to ‘add content’ to the region in a way that stabilises the concept while retaining inclusivity. Although it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of such content, some future directions are outlined below.

Potential Roles for Japan, India and Australia

Japan

Japan has arguably added the most ‘content’ to the Indo-Pacific among all four Quad partners, since it invented the concept in 2007. Since then, Japanese leaders have continued to add meat to its bones. Japan’s well-articulated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) has achieved the level of a foreign policy doctrine, through which it has deftly combined security and strategic coordination with the provision of public goods through economic security and cooperation pillars.⁶

Japan’s strengths in the field of high technology and systems planning are well known. Its continued leadership in several fields of high-end precision manufacturing, as well as the management ideologies that shape and direct them, are the greatest ‘content’ Japan can contribute to the Indo-Pacific. The Quad’s infrastructural initiatives, as well as its environmental protection and technical educational exchange programmes, are areas where Tokyo can take a driving role.

Further, the recent liberalisation of its defence technology cooperation makes it a valuable partner for New Delhi and Canberra, which have privileged relationships and track records of close coordination with Tokyo. Joint development and manufacturing of dual-use systems and platforms involving all three countries could do wonders for supply chain resilience while providing indigenous (within-region) alternatives for countries seeking to diversify sources of technology procurement.⁷

India

India’s contribution to the delineation of the Indo-Pacific has been avid and well-defined. The articulation of the 2015 SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine and the 2025 upgrade of SAGAR to MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) can be seen as the most precise definition of India’s view on the Indo-Pacific. India has the distinction

⁶ Ishida Yasuyuki, [“How Japan Discovered India and Helped Invent the Indo-Pacific”](#), Commentary, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 30 June 2026.

⁷ Sujan Chinoy, [“Modi-Takaichi Summit: Deepening India-Japan Ties in a Changing Indo-Pacific”](#), Expert Speak, Observer Research Foundation, 1 July 2026.

of devising the largest alternative framework to the Quad in the form of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) in 2019. India has to a large extent shaped its foreign policy and security doctrine in line with the Indo-Pacific idea.⁸ As such, India’s ownership of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical site cannot be doubted.

What capabilities can India bring to the table? Two in particular may be worth mentioning here—space and digital public infrastructure (DPI). India’s demonstrated prowess in operating a homespun, highly advanced yet cost-efficient space programme is well acknowledged worldwide. India has had a long track record of cooperative space exploration, including launching satellites for Global South countries on Indian heavy-lift rockets and sharing climatological and other data from Indian satellite systems. Naturally, India (along with Japan) should shoulder enhanced responsibilities for regional space-related initiatives.

In the case of DPI, the success of India’s Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) projects has already provided a template for several countries planning national identification and payment systems of their own. These capabilities have been further boosted by the open access India provides to the India Stack, which forms the backbone of at least 23 countries’ national plans.⁹ As such, India could gainfully play an active role in DPI initiatives within and beyond the Quad.

Australia

Australia was the first country to use the term Indo-Pacific in governmental discourse, though it was relatively slow to embrace the attendant geopolitical implications fully. Since 2017, however, it has achieved considerable traction in its understanding, and has now emerged as one of the staunchest advocates for the Quad framework.¹⁰ It enjoys strong relationships with India and Japan, making it a trusted partner for both.

Australia’s resource wealth, particularly its critical mineral wealth, is valuable ‘content’ for the Indo-Pacific, but is not sufficient in and of itself. Complemented by its long experience and significant skills in sustainable mining technologies, however, Australia could well be considered the strongest candidate to anchor regional supply chain diversification and sustainable resource extraction initiatives.

⁸ Thibault Fournol, “[India's Indo-Pacific: Reclaiming Centrality in Asia](#)”, Note de la FRS n°23/2026, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), 3 July 2026.

⁹ “[India Has Signed MoU / Agreements with 23 Countries for Cooperation on Digital Public Infrastructure \(DPI\)](#)”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Electronics & IT, Government of India, 6 February 2026.

¹⁰ Matthew Parry, “[Australia's Strategic View of the Indo Pacific](#)”, Briefing, European Parliament, 8 February 2022, p. 3.

Beyond critical minerals, Australia is significant as it has traditionally maintained strong relationships with Pacific Island Countries (PICs).¹¹ As such, it remains a key interlocutor in discussions on specific initiatives aimed at providing public goods to these countries, especially if joined by New Zealand.

Broader Directions

An important formal expression of this new strategy would be to engage more intensively with an expanded Quad Plus in more formal settings. The Republic of Korea and New Zealand, already Quad Plus partners, could be brought deeper into the fold, while Vietnam may be joined by Indonesia and Singapore (as well as the Philippines, should it be willing). Issue-based engagements with relevant countries could continue as before, but with greater emphasis on inclusivity for Global South states. These engagements and dialogues could do much to shape the concept further and improve the implementation of Quad initiatives.

Another key initiative would be the pursuit of cross-cutting memberships or observerships by India, Japan and Australia in minilateral/multilateral dialogue mechanisms and institutions. Canberra and Tokyo’s membership in IPOI could be strengthened by inviting both countries to participate in other initiatives launched by India, and vice versa. Regional dialogues could also be included: as Canberra, Tokyo and New Delhi operate independent dialogue mechanisms with the PICs, they should promote and, if possible, secure observerships for each other in them.

The primary objectives of the three regional Quad partners should essentially be ‘adding content’ by forming a multilayered network of competencies. This network should not be conceived of as exclusive: the door would remain firmly open to the US and Quad Plus partners to contribute whatever they can in whichever domain they favour. Principally, though, regionally-generated ideas and initiatives would be given preference. An open-ended system of engagement directed at achieving strategic stability and greater resilience in the face of the weaponisation of interdependencies would be a fitting hallmark for the Indo-Pacific going forward.

¹¹ [**“Report: Pursuing the Priorities of the Pacific”**](#), Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, Parliament of Australia, Government of Australia, November 2024, especially Chapter 1.

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