



ROUNDTABLE ON THE INDO-PACIFIC 2.0 AND THE CHURN IN EAST ASIAN GEOPOLITICS

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The idea of the Indo-Pacific has evolved significantly since its early articulation by leaders such as Shinzo-Abe, who emphasised the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a strategic continuum. Initially rooted in the maritime security and the rise of China, the Indo-Pacific framework has now entered a second phase – “Indo-Pacific 2.0” – characterised by deeper institutionalization, economic diversification and issue-based coalitions. The US aims to deny the ability of any country in the Indo-Pacific to dominate its allies. On the other hand, China’s PLA measures its concepts and capabilities against the “strong enemy” of the US and hopes to deter US in absolute terms through “national total war”. The shift is visible in how during the earlier term the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ strategy of US was heavily infused with ideological overtones. But since May 2025, the Trump administration decided to refrain from lecturing allies and partner states on political or ideological grounds. Even though China was outlined as the primary threat, he clarified the US’ intentions of prioritising cooperation grounded in mutual ‘interests and common sense’ to safeguard peace and protect economic ties.

Trump administration’s emphasis on ‘America First’ has caused unease even among Washington’s closest allies. Japan and Australia, traditionally the most steadfast US allies in the Indo-Pacific, have expressed dissatisfaction with the Trump administration’s perceived ‘burden-shifting’ in security and heavy-handed economic demands. Global rupture has engendered a shift in priorities forcing each nation to reassess their commitments to the security apparatuses in the region – especially since the Busan truce between China-US exposed the non-viability of the existing faultlines. US actions in Venezuela also raised concerns about security crisis in the west. Meanwhile, Japan maintains that Tokyo faces a severe security environment, specifically in the light of a string of Japanese islands that stretch across the East China Sea.



There are several underlying drivers for the change in winds, nevertheless, the role of the US in reshaping the global operating environment remains extremely significant. Other trends can be enumerated as follows: a) '*historical revisionism*', especially, since Sanae Taikachi emerged victorious with an absolute majority in the parliament sustaining a momentum for change in the long-held pacifist constitution; b) discursive war that stems from irredescent band-wagoning amongst the Pacifists and the revisionist powers – Japan now bending towards revisionism; c) change in the notion of 'collective security' with the consolidation of hard power and comprehensive national strength that has facilitated China's rise in multilateral institutions plummeting it to a position of 'game-changer.' Last but not the least, India's position as an influencer on the global stage and its emphasis on the Indo-Pacific narrative.

Some immediate trigger points indicating the change in trends are listed below:

1. In March 2026, Chinese media (PLA Daily) voiced concerns over Japan's Deployment of long range stand-off weapons, notably the upgraded Type-12 surface-to-ship missiles and the upcoming Hypersonic Glide Projectile.
2. Japan's alacrity to interfere in the Taiwan Strait has yet again become an irritant amongst Sino-Japan ties.
3. Korean leaders signalled a departure from Moon's former strategic ambiguity, aligning South Korea more closely with the US and Japan's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

For India also it is even more significant to revisit and review its Indo-Pacific engagement given the shifting alliances in the international order. It would be helpful to deliberate on strategies focused on long-term strategic gains rather than short-term tactical advantages.

In the above light, the Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) proposes to convene a high-level roundtable bringing together stakeholders from the diplomatic and the broader strategic community to deliberate on the geopolitical churn in the Indo-pacific. The Round Table discussion aims to bring out policy perspectives on the following:

1. How does one construe the political signalling amongst the East Asian states towards the Indo-Pacific 2.0?
2. What do the security strategy documents from the various countries reveal about the medium-term and long-term strategies of the East Asian countries on the Indo-Pacific.
3. Plausible scenarios on how regional actors and temporary rivalries could impact the rising Chinese ambitions in the East and South China Seas as well as their plans about the Taiwanese peninsula.
4. What should be India's approach to balance strategic competition amongst China-Japan-Korea and the US in this region?

