The term Indo-Pacific was first coined and conceptualised by German geopolitician Karl Haushofer in the 1920s

He imagined it as a region where Japan, China and India would ally with Germany in a struggle against imperialist forces

'INDO' DROP

LOADED SIGNALS FOR INDIA, THE QUAD, U.S. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ILLUSTRATION : SOURAV ROY

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

SOMETIMES, the disappearance of a single word can reveal more than a major policy announcement. The growing preference within the Trump administration for "Asia" over "Indo-Pacific" may seem semantic, but in geopolitics, language often signals strategic intent. The shift has sparked a debate over whether Washington is recalibrating its regional priorities, and what that could mean for India, the Quad, and the balance of power in Asia.

The debate intensified after the US Defense Department renamed the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) as Pacific Command (PACOM), restoring its original title. Combined with the November 2025 US National Security Strategy's use of "Asia" rather than "Indo-Pacific", the move was read by policy experts as a retreat from a concept that has shaped regional diplomacy for nearly a decade. For India, its implications could extend well beyond terminology.

Why Indo-Pacific matters

The concept of the Indo-Pacific emerged from the growing recognition that the Indian and Pacific oceans had become a single interconnected strategic theatre. Trade routes, energy flows, military deployments, and geopolitical competition increasingly linked East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the western reaches of the Indian Ocean. The idea gained prominence during the late 2010s, particularly under the first Trump administration. It reflected a growing concern in Washington, Tokyo, Canberra and New Delhi about China's expanding economic influence, military modernisation and increasingly assertive regional posture.

By replacing the older framework of "Asia-Pacific" with "Indo-Pacific", policymakers were making a deliberate statement. The change in terminology explicitly recognised India as a central strategic actor rather than a peripheral one. It broadened the geographic map of regional security and signaled that the future balance of power would depend not only on developments in East Asia but also on the Indian Ocean.

The phrase quickly became embedded in official documents, defence strategies, diplomatic dialogues, and alliance structures across several countries.

The Quad and the Indo-Pacific vision

Perhaps no institution embodies the Indo-Pacific concept more clearly than the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad. The grouping brings together Australia, India, Japan and the United States. First proposed in 2007, it remained dormant for several years before being revived during Trump's first term. Its revival coincided with growing concerns about China's regional influence and a shared desire among the four countries to preserve a rules-based order in the region.

Although Quad members have consistently rejected descriptions of the grouping as an anti-China alliance, its emergence has often been understood as a response to Beijing's growing geopolitical weight. The Quad has expanded beyond traditional security concerns to include cooperation on maritime awareness, critical technologies, supply chains, infrastructure, cyber security, climate resilience et al.

The Indo-Pacific framework provided the conceptual glue that held this agenda together. It gave the four countries a shared strategic geography and a common vocabulary for discussing regional challenges.

That is why any apparent retreat from the term "Indo-Pacific" immediately raises questions about the Quad's future trajectory. If the organising concept loses prominence in Washington, observers naturally wonder whether the institution built around it could lose momentum as well.

Early signals of change

The debate intensified after the publication of the US National Security Strategy in November 2025. The document continued to view India as an important partner and expected New Delhi to contribute to regional security. But unlike the 2017 NSS, which repeatedly emphasised the "Indo-Pacific", the 2025 document referred instead to "Asia".

Security documents are carefully crafted texts. Every phrase reflects internal debates, bureaucratic compromises, and policy preferences. When a term disappears, analysts wonder whether it reflects a broader rethinking of strategy.

The key question is whether the new terminology represents a genuine strategic shift or simply a rhetorical adjustment.

The shift away from the term "Indo-Pacific" may reflect more than a change in diplomatic vocabulary. It could signal a broader reassessment of how the Trump administration views America's role in Asia and, crucially, its relationship with China.

The Indo-Pacific framework emerged during a period when Washington increasingly viewed China as a strategic challenger and sought to strengthen partnerships with countries such as India, Japan and Australia. The Quad's revival under Trump's first term was widely seen as part of that effort to build a network of like-minded powers capable of balancing Beijing's growing influence.

The current administration, however, appears less interested in organising regional strategy around explicit competition with China. Rather than constructing coalitions aimed at balancing Beijing, it has signaled a preference for reducing geopolitical commitments and avoiding new antagonistic blocs. In this context, the shift from "Indo-Pacific" to the more neutral "Asia" may be an attempt to move away from a framework that had become closely associated with strategic rivalry and containment.

This also gains significance amid recurring discussions in Washington's strategic circles about a possible "G-2" approach -- the idea that the world's two largest economies, the United States and China, have a unique responsibility to manage global stability through engagement rather than confrontation. While the administration has not formally embraced such a framework yet, its reluctance to foreground China-centric alliances has fuelled speculation that it prefers selective cooperation with Beijing.

The change may also reflect the administration's longstanding emphasis on burden-sharing. The 2025 National Security Strategy continues to expect regional powers, including India, to contribute more actively to their own security and regional stability. Rather than positioning the US as the primary guarantor of order, the document suggests a model in which local actors shoulder greater responsibility.

At the same time, Washington faces competing demands in Europe, West Asia, and Asia. Economic pressures, domestic priorities and concerns about the costs of overseas commitments have strengthened arguments for a more restrained foreign policy. A narrower regional framing may therefore be part of a broader effort to reduce strategic obligations while preserving American influence.

Taken together, these shifts suggest a departure from the expansive Indo-Pacific vision that defined much of the past decade. The question is no longer whether the United States will remain engaged in the region, but whether it still sees balancing China as the organising principle of that engagement.

ADDRESSING THE MALADY OF JUDICIAL DELAYS

MANISH KUMAR @ Chennai

As CJI Surya Kant recently said, people's confidence in the justice delivery system rests on quick verdicts

ON June 3 this year, Justice G Jayachandran of the Madras High Court penned one of the most strident indictments of India's justice delivery system in recent memory. The reason: an election petition filed by DMK neta M Appavu in 2016 shortly after losing to AIADMK's I S Inbadurai by a slim margin of 49 votes from the Radhapuram assembly constituency in Tirunelveli district, got decided 10 years later, by which time the outcome was academic. It was not just that two assembly elections happened in between. It was that the Supreme Court ordered a stay on announcing the outcome of a recount of postal ballots in the case in 2019. It then sat on it for six long years before vacating the stay and remanding the matter back to the Madras high court. Curiously, the SC also let the question that was at the heart of the litigation go undecided: Do middle school headmasters qualify as gazetted officers to attest postal ballots?

Significantly, an SC bench extensively heard the matter on March 23, 2021 but inexplicably failed to wrap it up. One plausible explanation for leaving the core legal question on headmasters open could be that the bench that heard the arguments in 2021 had changed. As Chief Justice of India Surya Kant observed in a recent case, "The interval between the hearing and the pronouncement also affects the quality of the adjudication, as a judgment bears the imprint of the arguments that preceded it, and it reflects them most faithfully when it follows them closely."

The Appavu verdict is not just a story about a disputed election, but a mirror held up to a system in which justice grinds so slowly that it often defeats its purpose. As per the National Judicial Data Grid, a whopping 49 lakh cases have been pending in high courts across the country for over 10 years. They constitute 10% of the pendency of all high court cases.

Decade for 49-vote margin

The Appavu case reads like a slow burn thriller. After the May 2016 Tamil Nadu assembly election, the returning officer declared Inbadurai the winner by 49 votes. Appavu challenged it, alleging that 203 postal ballots, which were attested by headmasters of middle schools, had been wrongly rejected on the ground that "headmasters were not gazetted officers." He also alleged irregularities in the 19th, 20th and 21st rounds of counting of EVM votes.

The case went to Justice Jayachandran, who on September 24, 2019 reserved his order. A week later, on October 1, 2019, he delivered a categorical finding: the 203 postal ballots had been wrongly rejected as headmasters were indeed gazetted officers. Further, the judge ordered a postal ballot recount.

Inbadurai immediately approached the SC, which on October 4, 2019, let the counting proceed but stayed the declaration of result.

What followed was a series of adjournments, part-heard listings, and indifferent orders that stretched till the third week of May this year. As Justice Jayachandran eventually observed, it was a "grave mockery of justice".