

US wants India to step up military ties in Indo-Pacific

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Honolulu (Hawaii): The US wants India to step up its multi-lateral military engagements in the Indo-Pacific region, even as it has offered bilateral combat exercises to “help integrate” its M-777 ultra-light howitzers, Apache attack and Chinook heavy-lift helicopters into the Indian armed forces.

India of course is steadily cranking up the scope and complexity of the several bilateral military exercises it holds with the US every year, with the two also deciding to hold their first mega tri-service amphibious war games in the Bay of Bengal next year.

But India remains reluctant to include Australia in the Malabar naval exercise it conducts with the US and Japan, while also being firmly opposed to any talk of militarisation of the fast-developing “Quad” among these four countries.

The US move to rename its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command, one of its military theatre commands spread around the globe, reflects the expanding connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. With India’s increasing military relevance for US as a hedge against China, Washington also believes the converging bilateral security interests will result in a more secure Indo-Pacific.

Senior US officials contend China is trying to “subvert” the “free, open and rules-based order” in the region with its aggressive and expansionist behaviour, backed by its “opaque” multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative.

Though India does not want to needlessly antagonise China with a multilateral military construct in Indo-Pacific, it’s certainly upgrading its military ties with Australia and Japan as well as Asean countries.