

The US is renaming its largest military command to reflect the growing importance of the Indian Ocean in America's strategic thinking.

Defence Secretary James Mattis said the US Pacific Command would now be called the US Indo-Pacific Command.



The command has about 375,000 military and civilian personnel. AFP

The command oversees US operations in Asia. It has about 375,000 military and civilian personnel.

The name change comes amid tensions with China, which has been expanding its military activity in the region.

"In recognition of the increasing connectivity of the Indian and Pacific Oceans today we rename the US Pacific Command to the US Indo-Pacific Command," Mattis said at a change-of-command ceremony in Hawaii.

"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."

Mattis added that the command's history of adapting to changing circumstances would continue as the US focused westwards.

Analysts believe that while symbolic for the moment, the name change also reflects India's growing regional importance.

BBC

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