



China Taiwan Conflict

For Prelims: China-Taiwan Conflict, South China Sea, Taiwan Relations Act, One China Policy.

For Mains: Significance of Taiwan, Stand of India on the Taiwan Issue, India's Act East Foreign Policy.

Why in News?

China has announced that it is prepared to fight against any attempt to achieve Taiwan's independence or any foreign interference.

- China conducted **military exercises simulating a "seal off" of Taiwan**, in response to the visit of Taiwan's President to the United States.
- Largely unrecognized by other nations, **Taiwan sees itself as a sovereign country**. However, China considers it to be a breakaway state and is determined to bring the island under its control.



What is the Point of Contention?

- **Background:**
 - Taiwan came under Chinese control **during the Qing dynasty** but was given to Japan after **China lost the first Sino-Japanese war in 1895**.

- China regained control of Taiwan in **1945 after Japan lost World War II**, but the civil war between the nationalists and communists led to the nationalists fleeing to Taiwan in 1949.
- The Kuomintang party, led by Chiang Kai-shek, ruled Taiwan for many years and is still a prominent political party. China claims **Taiwan as a Chinese province, but Taiwan argues that it was never part** of the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Currently, only 13 countries recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country due to China's diplomatic pressure.
 - The US backs Taiwan's independence, maintains ties with Taipei, and sells weapons to it — but officially subscribes to PRC's **"One China Policy"**, which means there is only one legitimate Chinese government
- **Escalation:**
 - In the 1950s, the PRC bombed islands under Taiwan's control, drawing in the **US, which passed the Formosa (Old Name of Taiwan) Resolution** to defend Taiwan's territory.
 - In 1995-96, China's testing of missiles in the seas around Taiwan led to the **biggest US mobilization in the region** since the **Vietnam War**.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - The 2016 election of President Tsai marked the beginning of a sharp **pro-independence phase in Taiwan**, which has been intensified by her re-election in 2020.
 - The island now has significant economic interests, including investments in China.
 - Pro-independence groups worry that **this economic dependence may hinder their goals**, while pro-reunification groups in Taiwan, as well as China, hope that increasing people-to-people contacts will eventually wear down the pro-independence lobbies.
 - Taiwan has been able to maintain its independence, but the situation remains volatile. As Taiwan continues to develop economically, it is **likely that tensions will continue to rise between China and Taiwan**, making it crucial to monitor the situation in the region closely.

What is the Strategic Significance of Taiwan?

- Taiwan is situated in a strategically important location in the **western Pacific Ocean**, adjacent to China, Japan, and the Philippines. Its location provides a **natural gateway to Southeast Asia and the South China Sea**, which are critical for global trade and security.
- It is a major **producer of high-tech electronics, including semiconductors**, and is home to some of the world's largest technology companies.
 - Taiwan produces over **60% of the world's semiconductors** and over 90% of the most advanced ones.
- Taiwan has a **modern and capable military that is focused on defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity**.
- Taiwan is a major focus of regional and global geopolitics, with the potential to influence the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

What is the US' Interest in Taiwan?

- Taiwan anchors a chain of islands which includes a list of **US-friendly territories** that the US is planning to use as a place of leverage for countering China's expansionist plans.
- The US does not have official diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is bound by US law (**Taiwan Relations Act, 1979**) to provide the island with the means to defend itself.
- It is by far the largest arms dealer for Taiwan and follows a **'strategic ambiguity' policy**.

What has been the Stand of India on the Taiwan Issue?

- **India-Taiwan Ties:**
 - India-Taiwan Ties have been gradually improving over the years, as a part of **India's Act East Foreign Policy**. India has sought to cultivate extensive ties with Taiwan in trade and investment, as well as developing cooperation in science & technology, environment issues, and people-to-people exchange.

- Despite not having formal diplomatic relations, India and Taiwan have maintained **representative offices in each other's capitals since 1995 that function as de facto embassies**. These offices have facilitated high-level visits and helped deepen the economic and cultural ties between the two countries.
- **One China Policy:**
 - India follows the One China policy which recognizes Taiwan as part of China.
 - However, India also expects **China to recognize India's sovereignty over territories like Jammu and Kashmir**.
 - India has recently stopped mentioning its adherence to the **One China policy. Although India's engagement with Taiwan is restricted due to its ties with China**, it sees Taiwan as an important economic partner and strategic ally.
 - India's increasing ties with Taiwan are viewed as a move to counter China's growing influence in the region.

Way Forward

- The **Chinese economy** is far more interconnected with the global economy than Russia's Economy. Thus, China **will look to mind the gap very carefully** if they want to launch an invasion of Taiwan, especially so close to the Ukraine crisis.
- After all, the Taiwan issue is not just about a moral question of allowing the destruction of a successful democracy, or about international ethics, the day after China's invasion of Taiwan will mark a very different Asia, regardless of what happens.
- In addition, India can rethink the One China Policy and separate its relationship with mainland China from that with Taiwan just as China is expanding its involvement in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) through its ambitious project **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. "China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia". In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour. **(2017)**

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