China Objects US Missile in South Korea

Why in news?

China has issued a statement reiterating its objections to the presence of the US THAAD missile defence system in South Korea.

Why is China opposing?

- Its opposition came following reports of an overnight operation to bring in new, replacement interceptor missiles to the US base in South Korea.
- China has been objecting to the defence system since it was first deployed in South Korea three year ago.
- This caused deterioration in ties between the two countries.

What is THAAD?

- THAAD is an acronym for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, a transportable, ground-based missile defense system.
- This anti-ballistic missile defence system has been designed and manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.
- This defense system is coupled with space-based and ground-based surveillance stations.
- These stations transfer data about the incoming missile and inform the THAAD interceptor missile of the threat type classification.
- THAAD is alarmed about incoming missiles by space-based satellites with infrared sensors.
- Before South Korea, the THAAD system has been previously deployed in the UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania.

What is this South Korea-China controversy over THAAD about?

- In South Korea, the US army stationed in the country operates the THAAD missile defense system.
- The US had previously announced that the deployment of the THAAD was a countermeasure against potential attacks by North Korea.
- In 2017, matters escalated in the Korean Peninsula after North Korea test fired a few missiles in the direction of US bases in Japan.
- Following this incident, the US amended its plans and moved THAAD to its army base in Osan, South Korea while the final deployment site was being

prepared.
- The Osan Air Base is located in South Korea.
- These moves by the US and South Korea angered China.
- For a while the dispute has temporarily subsided, if not resolved.
- However, with the latest developments, it appears the controversy has resurfaced.

Why is China opposing THAAD in South Korea?

- China's opposition is more about the missiles' inbuilt advanced radar systems that could track China's actions than the missiles itself.
- The controversy also has much to do with the geo-politics in East Asia, with the US having a presence in the region particularly through its military bases in Japan and South Korea.
- China believes the US exerts influence over South Korea and Japan.
- It also believes that the US may interfere with its long-term military, diplomatic and economic interests in the region.
- Following the deployment of replacement missiles, China had issued a statement urging the US not to harm Beijing's relationship with Seoul.
- The US and South Korea have consistently maintained that these missiles are only to counter potential threats by North Korea.
- South Korea also issued a statement saying the number of missiles had not increased, but had only been replaced with newer versions.

What was China's response to THAAD in the past?

- When the controversy first arose in 2017, China had hit South Korea economically.
- South Korean businesses, including large conglomerates like LG, Lotte and Samsung, found their diversified operations hampered.
- These included the shutting down of institutions and enterprises that had little to do with the defence and military, like shopping malls.
- Post this development, tourism from China to South Korea fell hugely.
- Many Chinese tourists who are fans of Korean entertainment travel to South Korea - the tourism industry contributes significantly to South Korea's economy.
- South Korean cosmetics and beauty products that are extremely popular in China also witnessed their sales being impacted, due to calls on social media to boycott South Korean products.
- Hence, the impact of the controversy was not limited to a diplomatic level, but had far-reaching consequences.
- Three years on, it is yet to be seen if the latest development will have a similar effect on relations between the countries.

Source: The Indian Express

