Lessons for India from the Taiwan Standoff

Why in news?

New Delhi must note that Taiwan's close economic links with China have not stopped Taipei from asserting its rights.

What is the issue?

> *Under the 'One China' policy, China does not recognise Taiwan, formed by the fleeing nationalists in 1949, as a sovereign, separate entity, but only acknowledges the People's Republic of China created by the Communist Party of China.*

- The brief visit by the U.S. House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan, against stern warnings issued by China, has the potential to increase the relationship between the U.S. and China, with major implications for Taiwan.
- **For China**- Its claims about a rising superpower might ring hollow if it is unable to unify its claimed territories, in particular Taiwan.
- **For the U.S.-** It is about re-establishing steadily-diminishing American credibility in the eyes of its friends and foes.
- **For Taiwan**- It is about standing up to Chinese bullying and making its red lines clear to Beijing.

To know about the US-China's tussle on Taiwan, click here

What mistakes were committed by India with respect to China?

- India's policy of meeting/hosting Chinese leaders while the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) continued to violate established territorial norms on the LAC is a deeply flawed one.
    - It can be argued that diplomacy must go on despite the problems on the border, there is indeed a danger of Beijing viewing such diplomacy as examples of India's acceptance despite provocations.
- India is unilaterally catering to Chinese sensitivities even during the standoffs between the two militaries.
    - The parliamentary delegation visits and legislature-level dialogues between India and Taiwan have not taken place since 2017, coinciding with the **Doklam standoff**.
- The soft-peddling of the Quad (Australia, Japan, India and the United States) when

China objected to it is another mistake.
    - It is only in the last two years or so that we have witnessed renewed enthusiasm around the Quad.
- The gravest mistake India has made has been the non-acknowledgement of the PLA's intrusion into Indian territory in 2020, and its capture and occupation of Indian territory along the LAC since.

What lessons should India learn from the Taiwan standoff?

- A small island of 23 million people has decided to stand up to one of the strongest military and economic powers on the planet, braving existential consequences.
- India is a far more powerful nation armed with nuclear weapons and with a 1.4 million standing military against whom China has only marginal territorial claims.
- And yet, India continues to be hesitant about calling China's bluff.
- **Articulation of sovereign positions**- The most important lesson for policymakers in New Delhi is the importance of articulating red lines and sovereign positions in an unambiguous manner.
- New Delhi needs to unambiguously highlight the threat from China and the sources of such a threat.
- India's leadership has not clarified to the country what really went on at the border in 2020 and whether China continues to be in illegal occupation of Indian territory.
- India's current policy of 'hide and seek' amounts to poor messaging, and confusing to its own people as well as the larger international community, and is therefore counterproductive.
- **No appeasement of China**- Taiwan could have avoided the ongoing confrontation by avoiding Ms. Pelosi's visit to Taipei but it chose to go ahead with the visit making it clear to China that it is unwilling to back down from its declared aims.
- With enormous power, appeasement might work in the short term, but will invariably backfire over the long term.
- **Flawed argument-** It is often argued that the growing economic and trading relationship between India and China is reason enough to ensure that tensions between the two sides do not escalate.
- Given that the economic relationship is a two-way process and that, the trade deficit is in China's favour, China too has a lot to lose from a damaged trade relationship with India.
- Taiwan knows that, given the economic interdependence between the two sides, China is unlikely to stop trading with Taiwan as China is dependent on the semiconductors produced in Taiwan.
- India for sure should do business with China, but not on China's own terms.

How about India-Taiwan relation?

- India does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan yet, as it follows the One-China policy.
- However, during then Chinese premier's visit to India in 2010, India did not mention support for the One-China policy in the joint communique.
- India has an office in Taipei for diplomatic functions (India-Taipei Association (ITA), 1995) headed by a senior diplomat.

- Taiwan has the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in New Delhi in 1995.
- The ties focus on commerce, culture and education.
- Now, these have been deliberately kept low-profile, owing to China’s sensitivities.

References

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