# The China-Taiwan Tussle

## What is the issue?

A statement by US President Joe Biden suggesting that any attempt by China to invade Taiwan would attract American military intervention set off an angry response from the government in Beijing.

## What is the current tension between China and Taiwan?

- The current round of tensions between China and Taiwan began on October 1 2021, when China observes its National Day to mark the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Coinciding with the 72nd anniversary celebrations, China flew over 100 fighter jets into Taiwan's air defence identification zone.
- Although largely unrecognised by other countries, Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (RoC), sees itself as a de jure sovereign state.
- Since Taiwan is entirely dependent on the US for its defence, every spike in military tensions between China and Taiwan injects more hostility in the already strained relationship.

## Where does Taiwan stand in relation to China and the world?

- Taiwan, earlier known as Formosa is a tiny island off the east coast of China.
- It is where Chinese republicans of the Kuomintang government retreated after the 1949 victory of the communists and it has since continued as the Republic of China.
- The island is located in the East China Sea, to the northeast of Hong Kong, north of the Philippines and south of South Korea, and southwest of Japan.
- Taiwan observes October 10 as its national day as it was on this day in 1911 that sections of the Manchu army rose in rebellion, leading ultimately to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty.
- The RoC was declared on December 29, 1911, and it found its feet in the 1920s under the leadership of Dr Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Kuomintang (KMT) Party.
- Since its founding in 1949, the PRC has believed that Taiwan must be reunified with the mainland, while the RoC has held out as an independent country.
- The RoC became the non-communist frontier against China during the Cold War.

*Just 15 countries around the world recognise Taiwan.*

## When did the tensions with China begin to acquire a serious dimension?

- In 1954-55, and in 1958, the PRC bombed the Jinmen, Mazu, and Dachen islands under Taiwan's control.
- The Congress passed the Formosa Resolution authorising President Dwight D Eisenhower to defend RoC territory.

- In 1955, Premier Zhou En-lai declared at the Bandung Conference that he wanted negotiations with the US.
- But as civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1958, China resumed the bombing, provoking the US to supply Taiwanese outposts on the islands.
- The PRC and ROC then arrived at an arrangement to bomb each other's garrisons on alternate days which continued until 1971.
- The most serious encounter was in 1995-96, when China began testing missiles in the seas around Taiwan, triggering the biggest US mobilisation in the region since the Vietnam War.

## How has Taiwan's recent political and economic history unfolded?

- Starting from the 1990s, and despite the missile crisis, relations between the PRC and RoC improved, and trade ties were established.
- As the British prepared to exit Hong Kong in 1999, the "One China, Two Systems" solution was offered but it was rejected by the Taiwanese.
- In 2004, China started drafting an anti-secession law aimed at Taiwan.
- The 2016 election of President Tsai marked the onset of a sharp pro-independence phase in Taiwan, and the current tensions with China coincided with her re-election in 2020.
- Taiwan now has massive economic interests, including investments in China.

# How did the current round of tensions come about?

*The US has a policy of "strategic ambiguity" towards Taiwan which means that it maintains ties with Taipei, and sells weapons to it, but officially subscribes to the PRC's "One China Policy".*

- In 2020, President Xi Jinping asked the PLA to prepare for war, triggering alarm in Taiwan, which read it as an open threat.
- The Biden Administration declared America's "rock solid" commitment to Taiwan.
- In 2021, Taiwan reported Chinese jets in its air defence zone.
- Xi appeared to allay fears of a forcible takeover, and spoke about peaceful reunification but underlined that the historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland will definitely be fulfilled.
- After speaking with Xi in 2021, Biden had said that they had agreed to abide by the "Taiwan Agreement", under which US support for the "One China Policy" is premised on Beijing not invading Taiwan.

# What are the implications of the rising tensions for India?

- India and Taiwan currently maintain "trade and cultural exchange" offices in each other's capitals.
- India has been reported to be in talks with Taipei to bring a $7.5-billion semiconductor chip manufacturing plant to India.
- There have been suggestions that India should review its One China Policy and use not just the Tibet card, but also develop more robust relations with Taiwan to send a message to Beijing.

**Reference**

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/china-taiwan-tussle-history-current-tensions-impact-explained-7932161/

