US-China's tussle on Taiwan

What is the issue?

- Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of U.S House Representatives and veteran Democrat politician recently visited Taiwan.
- Her visit, ignoring China's threats and warnings, has risked triggering a dangerous escalation amid already worsening ties.
- Beijing has responded by announcing military drills near Taiwan and more countermeasures could follow.

What is the history of China-Taiwan relation?

- Taiwan 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.
- At present, it is a democracy with a separate government and a military.



- Taiwan, earlier known as Formosa and formally as the Republic of China (ROC), was administered by the imperial Qing dynasty.
- Its control passed to the Japanese in 1895 by the Treaty of Shimonoseki.
- After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the island passed back into Chinese hands.
- After the communists led by Mao Zedong won the civil war in mainland China, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the nationalist Kuomintang party, fled to Taiwan in 1949.
- Chiang Kai-shek set up the government of the Republic of China on the island, and remained President until 1975.
- In 1971, the UNGA recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only legitimate representative of China to the global body and does not recognize Taiwan as a separate country.
- In fact, only 13 countries around the world, mainly in South America, the Caribbean, Oceania, and the Vatican, recognizes Taiwan.
- In recent years, Taiwan's government has said only the Island's 23 million people have the right to decide their future and that it will defend itself when attacked.
- Since 2016, Taiwan has elected a party that leans towards independence.



What is the US stand over Taiwan?

- **Strategic ambiguity** - The US has maintained a "One China Policy" since the 1970s, under which it recognizes Taiwan as a part of China.
- US has unofficial ties with Taiwan as well and this strategy is known as strategic or deliberate ambiguity.

- In May, 2022, President Biden said that the US would defend Taiwan if it was invaded, but it was soon clarified that America does not support Taiwan's independence.
- While the US has no formal ties with Taipei, it remains Taiwan's most important international backer and arms supplier.

Why China is against the visit?

- Beijing has never recognised the existence of Taiwan as an independent political entity, arguing that it was always a Chinese province.
- The Chinese government also passed a law in 2005, giving Beijing the legal basis for military action if it judges Taiwan to have seceded or to be about to.
- For China, the presence of a senior American figure in Taiwan would indicate some kind of US support for Taiwan's independence.
- Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijiang has said that the visit would severely undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- It will gravely impact the foundation of China-US relations and send a seriously wrong signal to Taiwan independence forces.

What causes the avoidable crisis to escalate?

- Domestic political considerations appear to be driving both sides into their respective corners in this entirely avoidable crisis.
- **U.S. View** - Officials in the Biden administration and the U.S. military had called on Ms. Pelosi to reconsider the visit.
- But, China's public warnings have forced US to ensure the trip as cancellation would be politically costly for the Biden administration.
- The U.S had clarified that the visit is driven largely by Ms. Pelosi, who has been sharply critical of China's policies, rather than by the Biden administration.
- But it has not appeared to have assuaged Beijing.
- **China's View** - Mr. Xi is three months away from a politically sensitive Party Congress that will mark the start of his third term.
- A sharp response would discourage other countries from engaging with Taiwan at higher political levels and it may also shine Mr. Xi's status at home.
- The fact that neither side wants, nor can afford, a military confrontation may yet see the current tensions defused with each side walking away and claiming a show of strength for their domestic audiences.

References

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