



US-China Conflict over Taiwan

This editorial is based on [“Why US-China tensions may lead to strategic instability”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 03/08/2022. It talks about the current visit by US speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan and related US-China issues.

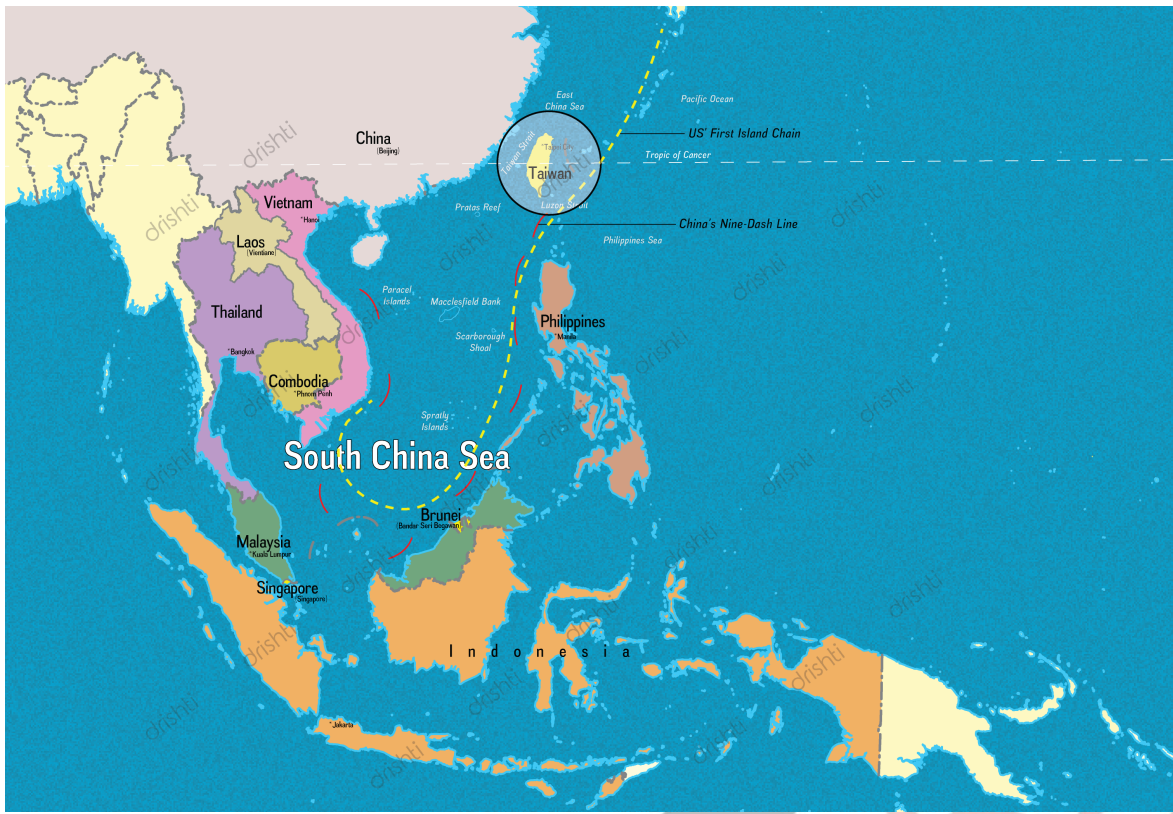
For Prelims: China-Taiwan Conflict, South China Sea, Taiwan Relations Act, One China Polic.

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

The visit by **US speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan** is **not being well received by China**. It has sparked intense tensions between the two powerful countries- **China and US** as **China sees Taiwan** as a **breakaway province**.

Taiwan, which **considers itself a sovereign nation**, has long been **claimed by China**, who considers Taiwan to be its **breakaway province**. Yet [Taiwan also counts the US as its biggest ally](#), and Washington has a law that requires it to **assist Taiwan in defending itself**.

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Why are US-China Loggerheads over Taiwan?





TAIWAN. WHERE?

Earlier known as Formosa, Taiwan is a tiny island off the east coast of China, separated from mainland China by the Taiwan Strait. It's part of what's called the "first island chain" – a string of islands nations/territories, including Japan, South Korea and Philippines that are seen as pro-US

WHAT IS THE TUSSLE ABOUT?

While China, the People's Republic of China (PRC), sees Taiwan as a breakaway province, Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (RoC), sees itself as independent, and has stood firm against China's "reunification" goal. Only 15 countries, most of them small island nations, recognise Taiwan



THE US POSITION

While the US maintains ties with Taipei, and sells weapons to it, it officially subscribes to PRC's "One China Policy" – where Taiwan does not exist as a separate entity. This position is premised on Beijing not invading Taiwan. It is this delicate diplomatic balance that Pelosi's visit may have disturbed

WORSENING TIES

On October 1, 2021, during the 72nd anniversary celebrations of the PRC, China flew over 100 fighter jets into Taiwan's air defence identification zone, setting off alarm bells. Every spike in China-Taiwan tensions worsens the already strained US-China relationship



INDIA'S POSITION

India does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan yet as it subscribes to the One China policy. But as its ties with China have come under stress of late, India has been playing up its relationship with Taiwan



- **Taiwan**, officially the **Republic of China**, is a country in **East Asia**, and is the largest land mass between **Japan** and the **Philippines** at the **junction of the East and South China Sea** in the northwestern **Pacific Ocean**.
 - Much of the world's **global supply chain of semiconductors** is reliant on Taiwan.
 - Further, its contract manufacturers together accounted for more than **60% of total global semiconductor revenue in 2021**.
 - Currently, **only 13 countries (plus the Vatican) recognise Taiwan as a sovereign country**.
- **Relevance to China:** Also, **China and Taiwan's economies are inextricably linked. China is Taiwan's biggest export partner**, with an export value of **515 billion dollars** from 2017 to 2022, more than double the US, which was the next biggest partner.
 - Taiwan is much **closer to mainland China** than the other islands, and **has been claimed by Beijing** since Nationalists were driven there during the **Chinese revolution in 1949**.
 - Some have seen **Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a potential catalyst for a China-Taiwan conflict**.
- **Relevance to the United States:** **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 **United States 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 is First Island Chain?

- The **First Island Chain** comprises the **Kuril Islands, the Japanese Archipelago, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, northwest Philippines** and **ending at Borneo**.
- This chain is also the first line of defence and serves as the maritime boundaries between the **East China Sea** and the **Philippine Sea** and the **South China Sea** and the **Sulu Sea**.
 - In this chain are located the **Bashi Channel** and the **Miyako Strait** which are critical chokepoints for China.
- China's maritime strategy, or the **"Island Chain Strategy,"** is a **geographical security concept crafted by the United States in the 1940s** to deter China and the Soviet Union's maritime ambitions.

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

- **India-Taiwan Ties:** 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 **co-operation in science & technology**, environment issues and **people-to-people exchange**.
 - For instance, the **India-Taipei Association (ITA)** and **Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC)** in New Delhi.
 - **India and Taiwan do not have formal diplomatic relations** but since 1995, both sides have **maintained representative offices** in each other's capitals that function as de facto embassies.
- **Stand of India:**
 - Since **1949, India has accepted the One China policy** that accepts **Taiwan and Tibet as part of China**.
 - However, **India uses the policy to make a diplomatic point**, i.e., **if India believes in "One China" policy, China should also believe in a "One India" policy**.
 - Even though **India has stopped mentioning its adherence to One China policy in joint statements and official documents since 2010**, its engagement with Taiwan is still restricted due to the framework of ties with China.

What is the One China Principle and One China Policy?

- It is important to distinguish between the **One China Principle** and the **One China Policy** to understand the **cross-Taiwan Strait problems**.
- The **People's Republic of China** follows the **One China Principle**, a core belief that sees **Taiwan as an inalienable part of China**, with its sole legitimate government in Beijing.
 - The **US** acknowledges this position but not necessarily its validity.
- The **US instead follows the One China Policy**, meaning that **The People's Republic of China was and is the only China**, with **no recognition for the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) as a separate sovereign entity**.
 - At the same time, the **US refuses to give in to the PRC's demands to recognise Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan**.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- 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)**.

Drishti Mains Question

Separating Taiwan's relationship from mainland China could be India's way of reversing the One China Policy. Explain with suitable arguments.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

- Q.** Evaluate the economic and strategic dimensions of India's Look East Policy in the context of the post-Cold War international scenario. **(2016)**
- Q.** The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of a China, that is much more challenging than the erstwhile Soviet Union. Explain. **(2021)**