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
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.