GLOBAL UP-TO-DATE

December 2023

A cgs Publication



The world around us is changing rapidly. Wars, new turn in global politics, human rights issues are occurring every day, posing new challenges and concerns. Global Up-to-Date is an initiative by Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) which will work as a hub for explaining the contemporary global issues.

The regular briefs will focus and explain the issues related to International Politics, Economy, Security, Human Rights, and Development. There will be a monthly printed version newsletter containing briefs of all the contemporary global important issues. The online version contains regular updates of the pressing issues along with the PDF version of the newsletter.

Contributors



Depanjali Roy
Chief of Staff
Centre for Governance Studies



Aong Cha Ching Marma
Research Assistant
Centre for Governance Studies



Kazi Rhid
Content Strategy Coordinator
Centre for Governance Studies



cgs Centre for Governance Studies

Assistant Editor, Global Up-To-Date
Roman Uddin, Research Associate and Youth Outreach Program Coordinator, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

Taiwan Election: Showdown Against China's Influence

Depanjali Roy



Photo: Getty Images

The relationship between China and Taiwan is like a toxic relationship in the current century. Even after the separation one does not get over the other. Jokes apart, The People's Republic of China or mainland China is determined to annex Taiwan and reunite with them. The trembling history takes us to the 1927 civil war in China between nationalist and communist parties. Even today China is applying every tactic and strategy to influence the voters of Taiwan so they can vote for the pro-China party.

In 1947 the communist party won in the civil war, as the Nationalist party fled to the island of Taiwan and declared themselves as the only government of China, called Republic of China (ROC). At that time the United Nations recognized ROC as the Chinese government as USA pitched for it as well. In 1971, because of the broad influence of People's Republic of China (PRC) in economy and politics, the UN determined the "One China Policy" and recognized PRC as the government of China. Thus, Taiwan's influence was diminished. But it does not mean that the USA left Taiwan's side, but invested in it heavily. As a result, Nancy Pelosi (U.S. House of Representatives) visited Taiwan on August 2, 2022 added fuel to the fire over China's Taiwan policy.

The citizens of Taiwan strongly uphold their national identity and are resistant to any interference from China. Despite having ancestral ties to China, the majority of Taiwanese people now identify themselves primarily as Taiwanese. This sentiment is evident in the ongoing Taiwan election campaign, where a substantial number of individuals are supporting the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), known for its anti-China stance. Conversely, some analysis shows that, China is employing sophisticated tactics, including the spread of disinformation, to influence Taiwanese voters. Meta, a major online platform, took action against more than 7,500 accounts across various platforms that were promoting misleading information related to the Taiwan election. Some of these accounts were observed to be active only during peak hours (9 am to 5 pm). Chinese officials have framed the election as a "choice between peace and war," echoing the slogan of the Kuomintang party (KMT), the opposition party in Taiwan that advocates for a pro-China policy. They have urged the people of Taiwan to make the "right choice," underscoring China's determination to assert control over Taiwan at any cost. Apart from that, China is also flaunting soft power by lifting the fish import ban from Taiwan, regarding the election. Though this was a judicious move to show their support to the opposition Kuomintang party (KMT), which opposes the DPP.

The USA holds a gamble in the upcoming election of Taiwan, they have already declared a $345 million military aid package to support them to provide them security against Chinese aggression. The geopolitical location of Taiwan is worthy of attention because of its location in the East China Sea. Because of the protection given by the USA, attacking Taiwan will be laborious land to invade for China, and exacerbating power and influence over Japan and Philippines will be harder as well. This is why the USA has offered security protection through weapons, ships in sea to Taiwan, so China could not cross the sea and enter Taiwan territory. Eventually the USA has sophisticated interest in Taiwan's election as they did not want China to invade and reunite Taiwan and stretch out their power to other countries in the Pacific Ocean.

This election on 13th January will be significant to analyze the geopolitics of this region as it will define the balance of power. As the whole is witnessing China’s forceful authority over South China Sea, and thus they are engaging with assertive policies towards Vietnam and now Taiwan. China is also threatening Taiwan by sending a large number of military aircrafts, 10 aircrafts and 9 ships in Taiwan strait, to build pressure on this island regarding the election. Clearly, hard and soft power has been used to hold the claim over Taiwan by this communist country. Though the USA is on standby with all military support, China has sent clear indications of war if the election result goes against them. The rest of the story will be witnessed after 13th January after the election.

Prisoner Exchange Marks Milestone in Armenia and Azerbaijan's Path to Reconciliation

Aong Cha Ching Marma



Armenia and Azerbaijan took a significant step towards revitalizing their conflicted relations by exchanging prisoners of war (POWs) on December 13, 2023. The effort towards the normalization of relations took place for the very first time after the September 2023 conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The prisoner exchange between the two countries is seen as a potential “breakthrough” in the long-standing conflict. The exchange deal came to pass without any international mediators, as per the Al Jazeera news report. However, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz were invited to join the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, as mediators in talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The long-standing conflict between the two neighboring countries started over a century ago in 1918, after the collapse of the Russian Empire. The conflict occurred over the Nagorno-Karabakh region for the very first time in the history of the South Caucasus, and significantly in the history of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war ended in 1920, with Azerbaijan emerging as victors, backed by the Soviet Union. From then on, Soviet rule took control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, keeping the two neighboring countries as constituent states.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region remained cold for nearly six decades. However, the stalemate of the dispute was about to be disrupted due to the introduction of the “Glasnost” ideology by the then-president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in the late 1980s. Glasnost instilled openness and the freedom to express opinions among the people and political parties under Soviet rule.

Because of the offered freedom to express statements to the Armenian and Azerbaijani people, the Armenians residing in the Nagorno-Karabakh region initiated the free expression of their long-desired wish to be part of their mother country, resulting in riots in 1988. Eventually, a well-formed election was organized on this matter. Without a doubt, the people in Nagorno-Karabakh's long-stated desire were reflected in the election result.

A few months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence from Azerbaijan on January 6, 1992. The declaration of independence ignited the conflict to such an extent that Armenia and Azerbaijan waged a full-fledged war against each other. The war ended in May 1994, claiming the lives of over 30,000 people on both sides. Armenia emerged as the victor in the two-year-long war and took control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

In order to end the conflict over the region once and for all, international mediators and organizations came to the rescue, proposing various plans. The OSCE Minsk Group was formed to resolve the issue regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh region by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, the peace plan proposed by the OSCE fell apart in 2007.

Since Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas, it started investing heavily in weapons and modernizing the army. The staggering difference in military expenses between Armenia and Azerbaijan became quite apparent following the discovery of natural resource reserves by Azerbaijan. The resource advantage gained them a very strong ally, Turkey. As a result, Ibrahim Kalin, the Turkish Presidential spokesman, went so far as to state, "We call ourselves 'One nation, Two states'."

Due to the rebound in military strength by Azerbaijan, war broke out between the two neighboring countries after nearly three decades of stalemate in September 2020. Because of the powerful military strength amassed by the Azeris, they swiftly took control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Later on, Russia played a mediator role in the 2020 conflict and deployed peace corps in the region to ensure peace and stability.

Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of violating the ceasefire agreement that took place in 2020. Additionally, tensions over the Lachin Corridor, a vital road connecting Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, along with domestic political pressures, led to a large-scale offensive against the self-declared Republic of Artsakh within Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan on September 19, 2023. However, a ceasefire agreement was reached through international mediators, resulting in the conflict ending after just a single day.

Few months after the September conflict, Azerbaijan released 32 Armenian soldiers, mostly captured in 2020 and 2023, on December 13, 2023. On the other hand, Armenia released two Azerbaijani POWs held in April 2023 in exchange. Even though the prisoner exchange effort is a significant step towards the normalization of the relationship between the two neighboring states, many important issues such as the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region are yet to be resolved. In addition, historical grievances and domestic opposition need to be delicately addressed in order to sustain long-standing peace in the region.

Chinese Leadership in Renewable Energy: Should the World Learn?

Kazi Rhid



China is known as the highest emitters of carbon as its rapid growth of industrialization in the past 2 decades. The repercussions are catching up to the highly autocratic regime. Beijing has experienced its coldest December since records began in 1951. Temperatures in the city have frequently fallen below -10C this month. This has resulted in heavy snowfall that has caused blockades all over the city. The significance of this event is notable since the last time China had seen impacts of climate change on their region, they did what many other nations failed to do, act.

In other parts of the world things have been going as the scientist have predicted. “No surprises” says,Dr Mike Rivington the lead researcher at the James Hutton Institute in Ireland. When‘Storm Babet’ burst river defenses in Brechin, Angus, causing flooding in more than 400 properties. The windy storm flattened the nearby plant life to the ground which can be only described as dramatic. The flooding has resulted in displacement of communities in over 400 properties, and the food production has been heavily affected because of the storm.

The Amazon rainforest has been seeing droughts in the recent years which is only getting severe each year. This year it has been the worst in recorded history, the usual rainy season starts on October but it was dry up until late November this year. The El Nino weather pattern has been taking its toll on the South-western side of the globe. The Amazon was the carbon capturers, the vast ecologically diverse area was known as the lungs of the world. Which took in the carbon and replaced it with a breath of fresh air for all of the animal kingdom. As it stands "On average, the Amazon stopped functioning as a carbon sink" says Flávia Costa, a plant ecologist at the National Institute for Amazonian Research, who has been living and working in the rainforest for 26 years.

The COP28 summit has made some promises, like it always does, the change in language is the only significant outtake from the Climate Conference held in Abu Dhabi this year. The president of the conference was a CEO of Adnoc, an Abu Dhabi based Oil Giant, the irony lies in the sentence itself. Close to 200 nations were in the United Arab Emirates for almost two weeks to try to make progress on tackling climate change after months of record-breaking extreme weather. The previous language of the deal was to “Phase out” fossil fuels, whereas the new deal has changed it to “Transition away from” fossil fuels. The target of limiting emissions to 1.5C seems impossible to hit at this point.

Prof Kevin Anderson from University of Manchester said "No doubt there will be lots of cheering and back-slapping... but the physics will not care. As the new agreement locks in high levels of emissions for years to come, so the temperature will continue to rise." The globe is set to hit the peak carbon emission by 2025 though the developing countries would need some more years to hit that benchmark. Which leads us back to the first part of this piece, China, which is one of the countries that will be hit the hardest on the effects of climate change, which has set its goals to peak its carbon emissions by 2030 which experts say is ambitious.

The difference between the other world super powers and China is that, when faced with evident disasters they try to work their way out of the problem. In 2010 Beijing was the worst in terms of air pollution in the world, the Chinese leadership took the cautionary sign and invested heavily on the development of clean energy and green cities. The closed politics and open economic model of the country forced it to build an industry surrounding renewable. If any country in the world wants to build green infrastructure, they have to rely on China for some parts of it at some point. Having the same knee-jerk reaction to the overwhelming cold this time might trigger innovation in climate friendly infrastructure as it did in 2010. This is a reason for hope no doubt, but other countries need to remember that the dependability on China is not something they would want. The political economic advantage that comes with a powerful industry infrastructure would put the 'oriental powerhouse' quite a literal meaning, it would put a chokehold on the rest of the world that might shift the dynamic towards an authoritarian mode of governance globally.