**Cold War II**

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As the US and its Asia-Pacific allies in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) are engaging China in East and South China seas, they are also maneuvering to turn Taiwan into an ‘Achilles heel’ for Beijing.

Staking their hypothesis on Washington’s embarrassing retreat from Afghanistan, Western analysts predicted a showdown between the US and China in Taiwan. They argued that authorities in Beijing might find the present occasion the most opportune to mount a full-scale action in Taiwan as the US is no more in a position to intervene. Statements from Beijing also suggested the same. In July this year, President Xi Jinping vowed to smash any attempt by Taiwan to proclaim formal independence. Later, while addressing a ceremony at the Great Hall in Beijing earlier this month, he warned against Taiwan’s independence separatism, describing it the biggest hurdle to reunification with the motherland. Expressing the resolve to peacefully reunify the break-away island, the Chinese president vowed to defend his country’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity at all costs.

China has already mobilised its aircraft careers, nuclear submarines and combat ships in Taiwan Strait. Ma Xiaguang, the spokesperson of China’s Taiwan Affairs Office, categorically stated that his country’s drills were aimed against foreign forces and separatist activities, besides protecting China’s territorial integrity.

In the meantime, Taiwanese President Tsi Ing-Wing, in an article in the Foreign Affairs magazine, warned that there would be catastrophic consequences in Asia if Taiwan were to fall to China, warning that Taiwan would do whatever it takes to defend itself.

For its part, Beijing is determined to reunify the island with mainland China. President Xi has vowed that the ‘task of reunification will definitely be fulfilled.

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Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), had declared ‘independence’ following the defeat of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Kuomintang (KMT) Party at the hands of Chairman Tao Zedong’s Communist Party of China (CPC) in the 1949 Red Revolution. ROC held China’s seat at the UN until the People’s Republic of China took over the UN membership in 1971.

For three decades after its declaration of ‘independence’, Taiwan remained under martial law and started its transition to democracy in 1980s. It has very good relations with the so-called free world, particularly the US. However, its ‘independent’ status has not been recognised by majority of world countries.

In 1979, Former Chinese Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping had even floated the proposal of “One country Two Systems”, allowing Taiwan to retain its democratic system. But Taipei has rejected the proposal.

China accuses the US of provoking separatist tendencies among Taiwanese people and has warned Washington against supporting Taiwan’s ‘independence’. It has warned to firmly smash any plots for Taiwan’s ‘independence’.

President Joe Biden has, however, reiterated the “rock solid commitment” of the US to Taiwan’s ‘independence’. However, a showdown between China and Taiwan is not that imminent. In a report presented to the parliament, the Taiwanese Defense Ministry has stated that China will be capable of mounting a full-scale invasion against Taiwan by 2025.

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Nevertheless, QUAD is asserting its influence in South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. During her recent visit to Singapore, US Vice President Kamala Harris, while addressing the crew on board her country’s littoral combat ship (LCS), Tulsa, said the US presence in Asia-Pacific is for ‘freedom of trade and commerce, freedom of navigation, opening waterways and (ensuring) ruled-based international order.’

The US and the UK signed the AUKUS deal with Australia to bolster its naval fleet with 10 nuclear-powered submarines to counter-balance China’s naval presence in the strategic Asia-Pacific waters. The Five Eyes intelligence collaboration has also been reactivated to make QUAD a formidable power over the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

China, which makes territorial claim to East and South China seas, has, however, never concealed its resolve against any hostile movement on the part of the United States and its regional allies. China’s Disarmament Affairs Ambassador Li Song has described the AUKUS pact as “a case of nuclear proliferation based on Cold War mentality.”

When US Navy’s Pacific Fleet reported an incident involving its nuclear submarine, USS Connecticut, in South China Sea last month, a report in Chinese official media warned, “Secret infringement on China’s maritime territory in South China Sea runs the risk of triggering a war between the two major powers.”

In the meantime, India, another QUAD member, is, after months of détente in the wake of a bloody conflict in May this year, also heating the Ladakh front for China. It remains to be seen if QUAD pitches itself against Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Cold War II.

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