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US `must defend Taiwan'

THE US needs to find the best strategy to constrain China without threatening military intervention, writes **Doug Bandow** in the National Interest. ``That means relying on America's friends to defend themselves. Nowhere is this policy more important than Taiwan.'' Although the island has been free of mainland control for more than a century, except for the period after World War II, Bandow says Beijing still sees the island as an errant province destined to return to Chinese control, and China's ``threats of war, although muted in recent years, are deadly serious''. Taipei warrants Washington's support, he writes. ``The 23 million islanders have built a prosperous democracy that provided the model to which Deng Xiaoping looked when he initiated economic reforms on the mainland.''

Journalists pay in blood

PARANOIA in the Mexican press is pervasive, and with good reason, writes Mary Cuddehe in The New Republic. ``Mexico is now the most dangerous country for journalists in the western hemisphere. According to a recent report issued by the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 30 Mexican journalists have been killed or have disappeared since President Felipe Calderon began his assault on the illegal drug trade in 2006.'' Investigations into the murder of journalists are consistently negligent, she writes: ``According to the CPJ report, 90 per cent of such deaths remain unsolved.'' This culture of virtual impunity has ``resulted in widespread self-censorship among the Mexican media -- some news outlets stick to vague details and mundane facts, some skip author bylines, others forgo drug-related coverage altogether''. Mexico's special prosecutor devoted to solving crimes against the press has a tiny budget and has been largely ineffective since it was created in 2006. Mr Calderon has promised to institute a number of protections for journalists and has pledged support for legal reforms to stiffen the penalties for the escalating number of crimes against the press. But details are still in the pipeline and unlikely to amount to much. ``For now, journalists who risk covering drug-related violence have few places to turn for protection.''

Japan 'humiliated'

JAPAN has suffered a ``diplomatic humiliation'' by succumbing to China's demand for the release of a Chinese fishing boat captain who was arrested for operating in Japanese territorial waters and ramming his boat into a Japanese Coast Guard patrol boat, says monthly magazine Sentaku. ``The handling of the incident has proved to the world how inept Japanese politicians are when it comes to facing diplomatic problems.'' In stark contrast with the rising nationalism in China, it says: ``There is a conspicuous lack of nationalism in Japan, as evidenced by the fact that when a legislative bill to institute the Japanese national flag and anthem was put to vote in the lower house in 1999, negative votes were cast by 46 legislators.'' For more than six decades since the end of World War II, the Japanese people had believed in a statement in the preamble of the constitution: ``We have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world.''

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