

## Suspicion rife in US of meddling in Chen trial

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There is widespread suspicion in the US that politics played a role in the sentencing of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and his wife Wu Shu-jen (吳淑珍) on Friday. “This is political persecution by judicial means,” said Bob Yang (楊伯煒), president of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA), a Washington-based advocacy organization of Taiwanese-Americans.

The LA Times called the sentence “unexpectedly stiff” and said the trial was “steeped in politics.”

The newspaper quoted Bonnie Glaser, a specialist on Taiwanese politics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as saying: “It was a quite harsh sentence; it is going to be hard for people to say that it was not politically motivated and that could have profound political implications.”

“Chen’s real ‘crime’ is that he pushed the entrenched [Chinese Nationalist Party, KMT] regime out of office in 2000 and moved Taiwan in the direction of freedom and independence,” Yang said.

“Many international scholars have expressed concern about the legal process. If we examine similar past graft cases in Taiwan and other countries ... this unusually heavy sentence given to Chen only reinforces the belief of many Taiwanese citizens and international scholars that the charges against Chen are politically motivated,” he said.

“FAPA calls upon the KMT authorities to release former president Chen pending the further appeal procedures, which are bound to take a long time. His incarceration is making it sheer impossible for him to build an adequate defense, denying him a truly fair trial,” Yang said.

The Associated Press, whose reports are carried by thousands of newspapers in the US, said the conviction marked a “watershed in Taiwan’s turbulent political history” and was a “crucial test for the island’s still-evolving democracy.”

It added: “While most Taiwanese believe that Chen is guilty of at least some of the charges against him, the severity of his sentence prompted some critics to charge that he was persecuted for his pro-independence views and his central role in ending the 50-year monopoly on power of the now-resurgent Nationalists.”

“The big question for Taiwan now is whether Chen’s pro--independence allies will capitalize on Ma’s weakened position — and on any wave of anger stemming from Chen’s heavy sentence — to sidetrack the new president’s rapidly developing China policy,” it said.

TV networks and news radio stations gave the story of Chen’s sentencing major play for most of the day, but there was no official comment from either the White House or the US State Department.

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/09/13](#)