

228 anniversary is window to Taiwan political purgatory under Republic of China

Written by Michael Richardson
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Once a year, for a day, the exiled [Republic of China](#) acknowledges “serious government abuses” on the February 28 anniversary of the

[228 Massacre](#)

. There will be a solemn ceremony with bouquets of flowers on the podium.

[Ma Ying-jeou](#)

will vow that such crimes will never again happen. Elderly survivors of the bloody rampage by Kuomintang troops of Chiang Kia-shek will be recognized and given plaques or some souvenir for their suffering. And then, at day’s end, the “political purgatory” as recognized by the District of Columbia U.S. Court of Appeals will once again envelope the island in a “strategic ambiguity” that obscures nationhood itself.

No one knows quite what to do about 228 in [Taiwan](#). The Republic of China in-exile, imposed by the United States, realizes it cannot any longer ignore the anniversary, as it did for decades under harsh martial law. Taiwanese independence advocates debate the tactics of a peaceful uprising versus use of the partial democracy now extended to the Taiwanese people by the ROC caretakers. Advocates of statehood for the former Japanese territory recognize the anniversary is a reminder of the United States’ failure to protect the people from Chinese Nationalist abuses in 1947 and the many years of the White Terror period.

The White Terror period, the years of executions and long imprisonments for so-called political crimes, was permitted by the United States despite obligations to the people of the island, then called Formosa, under the laws of war. The United States is the principal occupying power of Taiwan under the San Francisco Peace Treaty that ended World War II with Japan. The Cold War with the Soviet Union and Red China kept Taiwan locked in a unresolved international status. Now there is a move afoot by Ma’s government to purge White Terror from high school textbooks and call the bloody era “severe government abuses.”

Somewhere along the way Formosa became Taiwan, and now Taiwan is becoming Chinese Taipei. Or is it the Republic of China that is becoming Chinese Taipei? Taiwanese athletes had to compete in the Olympics as Chinese Taipei and wave a white flag to boot. It is all ambiguous, by intention of the United States foreign policy makers.

Last week a congressional delegation led by Edward Royce, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, made a [three-day trip to Taiwan](#) and met with ROC President [Ma Ying-jeou](#) and also opposition political leaders.

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The delegation included [Steve Chabot](#) who is on a foreign affairs subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. Brad Sherman, who is on a subcommittee on terrorism, nonproliferation and trade; and Joe Wilson and Madeleine Bordallo, who are both on the House Armed Services Committee, also made the trip.

The Chinese-language *Apple Daily* reported that during the meeting with Ma Ying-jeou that two members of the delegation asked Ma about [Chen Shui-bian](#).
Ma told the congressmen that Chen was doing just fine.

[Chen Shui-bian](#), Ma's predecessor, has been imprisoned since shortly after leaving office in 2008, long confined in a tiny punishment cell without any furniture and constant lighting, Chen's [health and spirit broken](#).

Later, at a reception with leaders of the Democratic Progressive Party, a member of the Legislative Yuan, [Mark Chen](#), told the congressmen they had been deceived about Chen's condition. Presently the former president is incontinent, tremors uncontrollably, has significant memory loss, has severe sleep apnea, and is suicidal, having made two attempts on his own life by hanging.

Chen was convicted following a [controversial no-jury trial](#). The judge was switched contrary to ROC law, and Chen was subjected to numerous middle-of-the-night court sessions to discourage trial observers. Chen was subjected to courtroom heckling, was the subject of a parody skit by court personnel at a legal conference, and was convicted on coerced perjured testimony, according to the chief witness who recanted his testimony.

As the one day window into Taiwan's past and future approaches, Chen Shui-bian is today's White Terror victim. Chen's continued suffering is turning him into a living martyr and shows to anyone who cares to pay attention the dangers facing the Taiwanese people caught in political purgatory.

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