
THE FEBRUARY 28 INCIDENT

American Responses to the February 28 Incident in Taiwan

The February 28 Incident influenced the development of democracy in Taiwan and ignited Taiwanese nationalist and independent movements. The incident's impact on US-China-Taiwan relations, however, has largely been overlooked. US-China-Taiwan relations are inextricably entwined with questions of Chinese and Taiwanese nationalism. By examining US media accounts, writings of the American vice consul in Taipei and transactions between the American embassy in Nanking and the US Department of State, this paper explores the contrasting US responses to the February 28 Incident in Taiwan.

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On February 27, 1947, an altercation between agents of the Chinese Nationalist government's Monopoly Bureau and a female cigarette vendor brought native Taiwanese to the streets the next day. Demonstrations against the Kuomintang (KMT) spread throughout the island. The military under Governor-General Chen Yi responded with machine gunfire. During the first week of March, negotiations took place between the government and demonstration leaders even as the violence escalated. Chen Yi's military reinforcements began arriving on March 8 and finally put down the insurrection. Collectively, these events are known today in Taiwan as the February 28 (or 2-2-8) Incident and March Massacres.

The history of the 2-2-8 Incident itself remains controversial, with different political groups telling different versions of the story. Part of the reason for the controversy is that the KMT, as the governing body of the Republic of China in Taiwan from the

1940s until the year 2000, has never dealt with the aftermath of the Incident in a way that the Taiwanese dissidents felt was satisfactory.¹ The KMT largely blamed Japanese brainwashing and alleged Communist agents for inciting the riots. Interestingly enough, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has partially supported this claim, pointing to the unrest in Taiwan as evidence that all Chinese people were united in their revolutionary fervor and in their dislike of the corrupt KMT government.

Members of the Taiwanese independence movement that grew out of the Incident offered a third interpretation. For them, the 2-2-8 Incident was just one more episode in the longer history of Taiwan's struggle for self-determination. Only since the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 and the gradual democratization of Taiwan have the events of February and March 1947, as well as the circumstances leading up to them, been more openly discussed.²

Regardless of what was officially recorded in textbooks or was permitted in public forums, the 2-2-8 Incident has become over the years a symbol of conflict between the native Taiwanese (the descendants of the 17th-20th century immigrants from mainland China) and the mainlanders (those who fled from Communist China with Chiang Kai-shek after 1949) in Taiwan. It proved to many native Taiwanese that the KMT was inept at governing and was insensitive to their needs. The uprising prompted the Nationalist government to declare martial law and reinforced the Nationalist elites' belief that the Taiwanese were in serious need of re-education if the "sordid, evil education" they received from the Japanese were to be replaced by patriotic Chinese values.³

The Incident marked a divide between the Taiwanese and the mainland Chinese, and served as a catalyst for the development of modern Taiwanese nationalist and independence movements. Much of the tension that has characterized Taiwan's democratization, China-Taiwan relations, and by extension, US-China-Taiwan relations, have been born in this contentious historical period.

American Literature Review

The US had ardently supported the KMT throughout the Chinese civil war from during the 1930s and 40s and had taken charge of Japan's post-World War II reconstruction in the late 1940s. The situation during February-March 1947 on Taiwan, soon to become the US's strategic "unsinkable aircraft carrier," could not have passed by unnoticed. What role, if any, did the US play during the uprising? How did US decision-makers respond to it and what did the American public

know?

Unfortunately, there is relatively little scholarship on the US reaction to the 2-2-8 Incident or the Incident's relevance to US-China-Taiwan relations. In some ways, this is not surprising, as the US's relationship with Taiwan has always been defined by and secondary to its relationship with mainland China. However, given that the Incident played an important role in the formation of the Taiwanese independence movement and given that cross-strait tensions today revolve around the threat of Taiwanese independence, it seems odd that Americans remain largely unaware of this event and the relevance it has for the US's evolving relationship with Taiwan and its people.

The Incident has been under-studied partly because English-language accounts of the 2-2-8 Incident have been scarce. In "A Tragic Beginning," one of the few books in English about the 2-2-8 Incident, scholars Lai Tse-Han, Ramon Myers, and Wei Wou identify two main American sources about the Incident. One is decidedly pro-Taiwanese in its sentiment, written by the then-vice consul in Taipei, George H. Kerr. The other account is the more restrained US Department of State version found in official memoranda transmitted during the Incident from Taipei and Nanking to the State Department.⁴ This paper will also take into consideration a largely ignored third source of information, the US media, which was distinct in its role as the interpreter of events for the American public.

Upon examination of these three categories of American responses, it becomes evident that Americans felt some sympathy for the plight of the Taiwanese under Nationalist rule, but there was not

enough outrage to make a difference in the US's foreign policy. US policymakers ultimately decided that even though KMT repression in Taiwan was reprehensible, good relations with the KMT were too important for the US to jeopardize.⁵ Then, as now, US relations with greater China, whether ruled by the CCP or the KMT, took precedence over the US's relationship with Taiwan and the Taiwanese.

Kerr's Account

As mentioned, the 2-2-8 Incident continues to be highly controversial. It is difficult to find an unbiased account of what actually happened in Taiwan during February and March 1947, insofar as it is possible to find "unbiased" accounts of any historical event. George H. Kerr's writing has been criticized for its obvious pro-Taiwanese bent. Regardless of his bias, he still provides the most complete American account of the 2-2-8 Incident. As the American vice consul in Taipei from 1946 to 1947, Kerr was in a unique position to observe the unfolding of events. From 1942 to 1947, Kerr was the US military and State Department's recognized "Formosa Specialist," which gave him influence in shaping the US State Department's understanding of the situation.⁶ The following account comes from his book *Formosa Betrayed*, his articles in the journal *Far Eastern Survey*, and his papers, now located in Stanford's Hoover Institution Archives.

In Kerr's opinion, the island of Taiwan, then known as Formosa, which was returned to the China in 1945, is "China's richest prize of the war."⁷ Not only did the Taiwanese eagerly anticipate reunification with the motherland, but they also brought with them the fruits of their labor from

the "Japanese half-century," which started in 1895 when China ceded Taiwan to Japan after its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War. Under the Japanese, the Taiwanese had built a strong economy, learned advanced technological skills, and achieved a high standard of living, qualities that were missing from the mainland. Politically, while the Taiwanese had been kept out of top positions in the Japanese colonial government, there certainly had been some experience with local self-government.⁸ There had also been a persistent, if futile, fifteen-year effort to petition Tokyo for home rule based on Wilsonian principles of self-determination.⁹ This political tradition reveals a long-standing desire and potential for political participation by the Taiwanese. Many Taiwanese hoped that liberation from Japanese rule would mean more democracy and self-rule, as had been advertised in the Allies' wartime propaganda.¹⁰ Yet, despite all the indications that Taiwan's return to China would be beneficial for both sides, what could have been a relatively smooth integration of Taiwan into China somehow led to the disaster of the 2-2-8 Incident.

Kerr cites the ineptness and corruption of Governor General Chen Yi's government and the resulting decline of the economy and in standard of living in 1946-47 as reasons for Taiwanese discontent. For example, Japanese businesses were confiscated and re-organized into branches of larger companies, which were in turn organized into syndicates controlled by General Chen Yi and his commissioners. Native Taiwanese were denied management positions even after the Japanese left. Instead, these top positions were given to the commissioners' less qualified friends and relatives from the mainland. Furthermore, many

of the Taiwanese who occupied lower positions in the bureaucracy were fired to make room for immigrants from the mainland.

As managers and directors of the syndicates, the commissioners and their relatives were able to give themselves bonuses and government subsidies for failing or even non-functioning companies. Because of their simultaneous monopoly of virtually all of the island's important industries and government positions, officials from the mainland were even able to squeeze profit from the relief supplies sent by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which passed through their hands before being sold at exorbitant prices to the people.¹¹

As a result of the KMT's mismanagement, industrial and agricultural production levels all dropped significantly lower than pre-war levels. Sugar production was one of the most outrageous examples. In 1939, 1.4 million metric tons were produced. In 1947, a mere 30,000 tons were produced, similar to pre-modernization levels from 1895. It did not help the island's production crisis that coal, grain, and sugar reserves were being depleted. Originally produced to support the Japanese war effort, the stockpiles still left in Taiwan at the end of the war were shipped out for use on the famine-stricken mainland. The loss of the rice reserves combined with crop failures as a result of the government's ill-maintenance of irrigation systems and hoarding of fertilizer from UNRRA caused a rice shortage in Taiwan in 1945-1947.¹² Kerr and the Taiwanese blamed Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law T.V. Soong, then the president of the Executive Yuan, for the disappearance of Taiwan's reserves and suspected that the government was

selling the materials on the black market in Hong Kong.¹³ In response to the people's complaints, General Chen chided the Taiwanese for their selfishness and lack of patriotism.¹⁴

In mid-year of 1946, bubonic plague and cholera returned to Taiwan after a thirty-year absence. Kerr traced the first four cases of plague to mainlanders arriving on junks from China; he blamed incompetent government officials for not implementing a strict quarantine system as the Japanese had done in the past. The cholera epidemic also offered another example of the government's callous attitude toward their duties. The Director of Public Health refused to keep clinics open longer than normal hours during the epidemic and also declined to take action when human excrement was found to be contaminating commercial fishing waters. UNRRA personnel had to pick up the director's slack. According to Kerr, this further lowered the Taiwanese people's opinion of the government while enhancing their opinion of Americans, whom they associated with UNRRA.¹⁵

In addition to the island's public health and economic problems, another source of discontent was the dashing of Taiwanese hopes for increased participation in the government. In January 1947, Governor Chen Yi announced that anticipated local elections of mayors and magistrates would be postponed until December 1949 even though the Republic of China's new Constitution would be implemented on the mainland starting December 1947. After fifty-one years of living under Japanese despotism, he claimed, the Taiwanese were too "politically retarded" to govern themselves.¹⁶ To be fair on the question of Taiwanese representation

in the Governor General's government, there were a few token Taiwanese in the higher branches of government. But often they were "half-mountain men" (*ban-shan ren*), or Taiwanese who had grown up on the mainland, who were chosen for their loyalty to the Nationalists and were generally not trusted by the native Taiwanese.¹⁷

Overall, many Taiwanese felt disappointed that they had traded one dissatisfactory ruler for another. If the Japanese had been harsh and foreign, they had at least been efficient and fair. The mainland Chinese, on the other hand, were unjustifiably arrogant and condescending toward the local population and were also incapable of effective government administration. "Dogs go and pigs come" went one popular saying at the time. The Japanese "dogs" at least were good for protecting property, implying that the mainlander "pigs" were good for nothing.¹⁸

On the evening of February 27, 1947, the Taiwanese people's frustration came to a head. In Taipei, two Monopoly Bureau agents seized a female cigarette vendor's goods and her small cash reserve, accusing her of selling untaxed cigarettes. A crowd began to gather, growing angrier as the woman protested the seizure of her goods. When the agents struck her down with a pistol, the incensed crowd moved in and the agents fired wildly, shooting and killing one bystander. The street vendor was later reported to have died as well. The next day, an unarmed crowd of 2,000 demonstrated in Taipei in front of the Monopoly Bureau and later the Governor's office, where they were fired upon by the Governor's guard. Protests spread to cities across Taiwan as news of the Taipei demonstration traveled by phone and radio. On

March 2, Governor Chen was forced to deal with a delegation of Taiwanese local leaders and to allow the formation of a Settlement Committee after he unsuccessfully attempted to call in troops from the south (Taiwanese in Hsinchu removed rails so that trains could not get through).¹⁹ It was agreed that the Committee would have until March 10 to present recommendations for reforms to the administration. By March 3, Kerr received reports that "all major cities on the island were in the hands of the Formosans with the exception of Kagi...In most cases the administrations in the various cities were surrendered to Formosan patriots peacefully and in many towns there was no molestation of mainlanders."²⁰

Afraid that Chen was sending for more troops from the mainland and that March 10 would be too late, the Settlement Committee presented their 32 Demands to Chen three days early on March 7. Kerr grouped the 32 Demands into six general categories: 1) reforms to ensure equality and political representation for the Taiwanese, 2) reforms to ensure security of person and property, 3) economic reforms, 4) military reforms, 5) social welfare reforms, and 6) "subordinate" demands that were subject to compromise.²¹

Of these, Kerr highlighted the fourth category because Chiang Kai-shek later used them to justify retribution against the Taiwanese. There appeared to be confusion about what the demands for military reforms actually were. Lai, Myers, and Wou's version of the 32 Demands includes one that said military personnel should temporarily disarm. This, the authors thought preposterous because it would have negated the Nationalists' "sovereign authority."²² However, in Kerr's account, these

more radical demands were not included in the official presentation to Chen, but were published on handbills and posters on the street by “individuals and groups not authorized to develop a reform program.”²³ In Kerr’s opinion, the members of the Settlement Committee were sober and responsible individuals who were reformists, not revolutionaries.

On March 8, contrary to Chen’s repeated and explicit assurances that he would not send for more troops, military reinforcements from the mainland arrived in the night at Keelung harbor, north of Taipei. That day, while Nationalist soldiers rolled through the streets with machine guns, Kerr and other foreigners took shelter in a hospital. From an upstairs window, Kerr reported seeing “Formosans bayoneted in the street without provocation. A man was robbed before our eyes—and then cut down and run through. Another ran into the street in pursuit of soldiers dragging a girl away from his house and we saw him, too, cut down.” They also saw a Canadian nurse and her Formosan assistants dodging bullets as they brought in wounded people from the streets.²⁴

Kerr’s moral outrage on behalf of the Taiwanese is obvious throughout his book, but it is especially evident when he juxtaposes Chen and Chiang Kai-shek’s conciliatory rhetoric with his own eyewitness account of the March Massacres. He wrote, “The roadways, the river banks and the harbor shores were strewn with bodies at the moment, and the Nationalist troops were spreading out through the countryside, to bring ‘peace and protection’ à la Koumintang.”²⁵ The initial force of 2,000 troops eventually was followed by 50,000 to 60,000 more.²⁶ On March 9, martial law was declared again and

on March 10, Chen called for the dissolution of the Settlement Committee, which he claimed had “acted beyond its province.”²⁷ Feeling betrayed, many Taiwanese came to believe that Chen had never meant to listen to any recommendations, but had instead used the first week of March to identify Taiwanese leaders and activists—students, doctors, businessmen—so they could be targeted for arrest and execution in the days of terror that followed.²⁸

Individuals who had participated in the uprising escaped to Japan if they could. Of those who did not, many were arrested and killed. Kerr reported Nationalist soldiers using enrollment lists to round up students, whose dead bodies were left mutilated and unclaimed in the streets. Students and teachers had formed a voluntary corps to police the streets during early March when local Taiwanese had temporarily controlled the island. Because they were young, hot-headed intellectuals and potential leaders of future resistance, students were seen by the KMT as political hazards. On March 13, Kerr received a report that an estimated 700 students had been seized in Taipei over the course of five days. Foreigners in Taiwan at the time reported seeing dead bodies floating in Keelung Harbor for days following the initial landing of Nationalist troops, wharves and beaches being favored sites for executions. Altogether, approximately 10,000 Taiwanese were estimated to have disappeared or been killed in the month of March.²⁹

What was the true cause of the violence in Taiwan in 1947? Were the Taiwanese right to oppose the government? Was the KMT justified in putting a stop to the uprising? Lai, Myers, and Wou criticize Kerr for being too pro-Taiwanese and not sympathetic enough to the mainlanders’

point of view.³⁰ Much more sympathetic to the KMT themselves, these authors cite the different “worldviews” of the Taiwanese and the mainlanders as the primary cause for conflict. As much as the mainlanders were wrong to underestimate the Taiwanese’s intelligence, political capability, and loyalty to China, the Taiwanese should also have been more sympathetic to the soldiers who had just spent eight years fighting the Communists and the Japanese on the war-torn mainland. Also, they argued, the Taiwanese had set themselves up for disappointment by expecting too much from the KMT, for “in 1945, no Chinese political organization had yet acquired the political understanding and skills needed to overcome their economic and political problems.”³¹ Kerr, with his unrestrained dislike of Chen and his questioning of Chiang’s sincerity toward the Taiwanese, gave little special consideration to the plight of the mainland soldiers or to the KMT’s learning curve. American memoranda and news accounts at the time also understood the uprising as a consequence of Nationalist misrule rather than a hiccup in the KMT’s learning process. Unlike Kerr, however, other American state officials could not put the US’s relationship with the Taiwanese above the US’s special ties to the KMT.

Responses of the US State Department and the US Embassy in Nanking

At the time of the Incident, Kerr’s bias toward the Taiwanese was already known by his colleagues, though they continued to use him because of his extensive experience in Taiwan. Twice, his memoranda were forwarded to higher-ups accompanied by qualifying notes from his

immediate superiors, expressing their reservations about his overly emotional writing. Minister-Counselor W. Walton Butterworth wrote that Kerr’s comments might appear “highly keyed in tone and in certain instances categorical in content. However, with the continuation of Chen Yi’s regime in power in Taiwan, there is coming to be less and less middle ground which can be occupied by coolly impartial opinion.”³²

Clearly, Kerr’s fellow diplomats were aware of the magnitude of the violence in Taiwan and were personally somewhat sympathetic to the Taiwanese. However, they were also guided by a firm “This is China now” principle.³³ The “This is China now” principle, as Kerr derisively called it, meant that all the restrictions placed on US policy toward China, whether for ideological, geopolitical, or domestic political reasons, now also applied to Taiwan. For example, in response to a US senator’s inquiry about civil unrest in Taiwan, then-Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote,

*It can be stated that dispatches and telegrams received through Departmental sources generally confirm press reports indicating harsh measures were employed to suppress the recent uprising there. However, by virtue of the Cairo Agreement [of 1943], a copy of which is attached, this Government is committed to the return of Formosa to China.... Therefore, this Government would not be in a position to register with the Chinese authorities a formal protest in regard to its activities in suppressing Formosan unrest.*³⁴

In other words, in order to maintain good relations with the KMT, the official American policy toward Taiwan had to be “hands off.”

Along the same lines, it was deemed imprudent for the American Consulate in Taipei to take sides in the conflict. On the night of February 28,

eleven mainlanders showed up at the consulate seeking asylum, with twenty-two more mainlanders finding their way there the next day. Not wanting the consulate to become a sanctuary for more refugees, the embassy in Nanking instructed Taipei Consul Ralph Blake to strictly follow protocol on temporary refuge and to ask local authorities to remove the refugees as soon as possible, which he did.³⁵ During the first week of March, Taiwanese leaders asked the American consulate for assistance at least three times. One request was to pass along a petition to US Secretary of State George Marshall asking for UN administration of Taiwan. Another request was for the consulate to disseminate news of the situation in Taiwan to the rest of the world. Blake denied both requests, with the embassy's approval.³⁶ Even in regard to the consulate's primary duty of ensuring safety of US citizens, Blake was advised by the embassy:

*At this critical time you should be most careful to avoid any external appearance of prejudging the merits of present dispute or becoming a participant in it in any manner whatsoever. You will also realize that in this situation American officials must only look to the constituted authority, whose responsibility it is to afford you adequate protection.*³⁷

In other words, Americans must not take sides and must not appear to challenge the KMT's "constituted" authority.

But though the US was reluctant to overly antagonize the KMT, the consulate and embassy still felt compelled to push the KMT to make reforms. On March 3, the consulate in Taipei suggested that the US should intervene "in its own right or on behalf of UN to prevent disastrous slaughter by Government forces."³⁸ This suggestion was ignored, but Kerr's recommendation that the

Generalissimo replace General Chen with a civilian governor was eventually taken up by Ambassador John Leighton Stuart.³⁹ Concerned that Chiang was getting information only from extremely biased sources, Stuart offered to forward him one of Kerr's memorandum detailing possible courses of action, which was done on April 18.⁴⁰ On April 22, Wei Tao-ming, a civilian and a former ROC ambassador to the US, was finally appointed governor of Taiwan. Chen Yi was removed from Taiwan and later made governor of Zhejiang province before being executed in 1950 for conspiring with the Communists.

What motivated Stuart, Kerr, and others to push Chiang to make reforms in Taiwan? Sympathy for the Taiwanese, to be sure, but also concern for the KMT's reputation and, by extension, the US's. The KMT's talent for misrule and its inability to win the people's hearts on the mainland were already well-known, at least in policy circles if not to the American public. Taiwan had been an opportunity for the KMT to prove that they could rule successfully, and, by extension, a chance for the US to justify their extensive support of the KMT. The unrest in Taiwan threatened to negate all of that. This assumption can be drawn from Kerr's arguments in the memorandum that made its way to Chiang. Kerr stressed that "there can be no question that the Formosan-Chinese have felt loyalty to the Central Government and toward the Generalissimo" and that "Formosans have been ambitious to see Taiwan become a model province of China," not to become independent. He believed that the situation was still salvageable as long as the KMT did more than use the military to suppress opposition. If economic and political

reforms were made, Formosa could still be “put to work earning foreign credit for China”⁴¹ and, by association, for the US.

US Media Accounts

Accounts of KMT misrule in Taiwan started appearing in American newspapers in early 1947, but for most Americans, it was probably not on the radar until the violence began. During the actual protests and street violence, Western journalists did not have access to Taiwan, but had to rely mostly on the Chinese media and the American consulates for news, except for some first-hand accounts from witnesses who had managed to leave Taiwan.⁴² After martial law was declared on March 9, independent media sources in Taiwan were shut down and the Chinese Central News Agency became the only official news source out of Taiwan.⁴³ As a result, many of the details of the events were unclear, with most official-sounding quotes only coming from the Chinese side.

Because of the influence of the Chinese media, many of the reports that appeared in US media harped on the Communist connection – what role Communists played in the uprising and what potential there was for Communism to take hold in Taiwan after the KMT’s violent suppression of it. In *The New York Times*, for example, a story appeared about Formosan soldiers in Shantung province deserting to the Communist side. There was speculation that even though there did not seem to be any direct connection between the CCP and the uprising, the CCP would not pass up the opportunity to capitalize on anti-KMT sentiment in Taiwan.⁴⁴

Another example is *Newsweek* and *Time*’s

coverage of the uprising, which seemed to serve two purposes: first, to protect the Nationalists’ reputation and second, to battle Communism. True to its China Lobby heritage, the *Time* articles placed sole blame for the uprising in Taiwan on “carpetbagger” General Chen Yi’s shoulders, implying that his oppressive measures in no way represented the rest of the Nationalist government. The Nationalist government in Nanking is credited with sending a mission to Formosa to “comfort the people”⁴⁵ and with restoring order to Formosa so that it could be run like any other province of “metropolitan China.”⁴⁶ This image of China under the KMT as more modernized than Taiwan contrasts sharply with Kerr’s description of Taiwan as the more economically robust, technologically advanced, and politically sophisticated place at the time.

An article in the April 1947 issue of *Time*, “China: Snow Red and Moon Angel,” focused on Taiwanese Communist Party leader Hsieh Hsueh-hung (the “Snow Red” of the title)⁴⁷ even though most accounts except the KMT and CCP’s agreed that Communists played only a minor role in the uprising. Playing the Communist card in the article fulfilled multiple interests. First, it made for a more sensational story. Second, it explained why the KMT was crushing the insurrection in Taiwan, thus partially exonerating them for their actions. Third, as a function of the second reason, it placed the US in the superior position of tutoring the KMT in liberal democracy and in winning people over from Communism.

Peggy Durdin’s article on Taiwan in a June issue of *The Nation* cited the 2-2-8 Incident as an example of the corrupt and undemocratic nature

of the Nationalist government, and as a reason to question the US's continued idolization of Chiang Kai-shek and unwavering support for the KMT, which was so unpopular in China. Durdin was one of few that questioned the Nationalist government's competence to the point that she thought Taiwan would be better off without them. She advocated that the US help administer a UN mandate on Taiwan, warning that if this did not happen, the Taiwanese would rebel again and the US would lose its popularity on Taiwan as it already had on the mainland "and for the same reason—that it supports bad government."⁴⁸

In general, American news coverage of the 2-2-8 Incident reflected the US's relationship with Taiwan and with the KMT. Interest in Taiwan was generated through interest in the US's relationship with Nationalist China. The US's relationship with the KMT was defined as both an alliance against Communism and as a mentor-student relationship in which the US taught the KMT how to govern properly. Except for a few, most writers thought the Taiwan uprising was a sign that the Nationalist government needed to reform, rather than a sign that Taiwan should be separated from China either temporarily or permanently through US administration of a UN trusteeship.

Conclusion

In the tense last days of February and the beginning of March 1947, the official response of the American consulate in Taipei and the American embassy in Nanking was to stay uninvolved, except to make sure that American citizens were safe. Requests for help from the Taiwanese were rebuffed. However, behind the scenes, the

consulate and embassy were busy reporting on the uprising and pushing Chiang Kai-shek to enact reforms in Taiwan. Kerr's understanding of the situation played a large role in shaping the US State Department's perspective, resulting in Ambassador John Leighton Stuart convincing the Generalissimo to replace General Chen Yi with a civilian governor. It was believed that the US should not play a larger, more overt role because it was not in its own best interest to overly antagonize Chiang Kai-shek when the Nationalists were the only non-Communist alternative for a Chinese government to be had. This line of thought extended itself into American media accounts of the uprising. There were some who used the uprising as a way to question the US's tenacious and morally ambiguous decision to support for the KMT. Most, however, just saw a pressing need for the KMT to make reforms to prevent Communists from gaining a foothold in Taiwan.

Overall, the 2-2-8 Incident in Taiwan can be (and has been) understood as a symbol of several trends in US-China relations at the time. In the news, the situation in Taiwan was cast as a potential preventative battle against Communism, if not one in actuality. It was also an example of how the US tried to induce the KMT to introduce liberal, democratic reforms but ultimately felt they could not push too hard. Finally, Taiwan was a classic case in which the US supported "bad government" because it valued its strategic alliance with the KMT over the well-being of the people who lived under it.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Lai Tse-Han, et al., *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 192.
- 2 Ibid., 1-5.
- 3 Ibid., 139.
- 4 Ibid., 3-5.
- 5 Nancy Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 77.
- 6 George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), xiii.
- 7 George H. Kerr, "Formosa's Return to China," *Far Eastern Survey* 16, no. 18 (1947): 205.
- 8 Lai, 42.
- 9 David M. Finkelstein, *Washington's Taiwan Dilemma, 1949-1950: From Abandonment to Salvation* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1993), 51.
- 10 Ibid., 55.
- 11 Kerr, "Formosa's Return to China" 206-207.
- 12 Finkelstein, 57.
- 13 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 111.
- 14 Ibid., 108.
- 15 Ibid., 179-181.
- 16 Ibid., 204.
- 17 Mei-ling T. Wang, *The Dust That Never Settles: The Taiwan Independence Campaign and US-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 94.
- 18 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 97.
- 19 Ibid., 266.
- 20 Note by Kerr, 3 March 1947, Kerr Papers, box 2, Hoover Institution Archives.
- 21 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 286-287.
- 22 Lai, 175-176.
- 23 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 287.
- 24 Ibid., 293.
- 25 Ibid., 297.
- 26 Finkelstein, 64.
- 27 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 294.
- 28 Douglas Mendel, *The Politics of Formosan Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1970), 34.
- 29 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 300-302.
- 30 Lai, 218.
- 31 Ibid., 168-170.
- 32 The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Apr. 15, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 445.
- 33 Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 144.
- 34 Telegram, The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Acting Secretary of State, Mar. 21, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 76.
- 35 Telegram, The Minister-Counselor of Embassy in China (Butterworth) to the Secretary of State, Mar. 1, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 427-428.
- 36 Telegram, The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Mar. 5, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 430.
- 37 Telegram, The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Mar. 6, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 435.
- 38 Telegram, The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Mar. 6, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 433.
- 39 Richard C. Bush, *At Cross Purposes: US-Taiwan Relations Since 1942* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 48.
- 40 The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Apr. 21, 1947, FRUS 1947, 7: 451.
- 41 Memorandum, written by George H. Kerr, submitted by Ambassador Stuart to General Chiang Kai-shek, Apr. 18, 1947, found in United States, Department of State, *The China White Paper: August 1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 936-938.
- 42 The 2-2-8 Massacre, As Documented in the US Media, <<http://2-2-8.lomaji.com/>> (20 March 2007).
- 43 Henry R. Lieberman, "Formosan Rebels Set Up Assembly," *The New York Times*, 11 March 1947, <<http://2-2-8.lomaji.com/news/031147.html>>, (20 March 2007).
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- 45 "China: Snow Red and Moon Angel," *Time*, 7 Apr. 1947: 36.
- 46 "Formosa Valedictory," *Time*, 5 May 1947: 38.
- 47 "China: Snow Red and Moon Angel," 35.
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Footnote Abbreviations:

FRUS = United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1947*, Vol. 7, *The Far East: China* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972) 445.

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