

# Will trade war help pick China's leader?

by Cho Wen-pin

To protect Madonna, Hollywood, Microsoft, and other "Third Wave" products, U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor on Feb. 4 hit China with 100% tariffs on a list of goods worth \$1.08 billion. Not only did China respond with tariffs on a list of U.S.-made goods, but Foreign Trade Minister Wu Yi, in a note of defiance, said that China can simply turn elsewhere to meet its import needs.

Yet, there were casualties before the two sides had even exchanged fire. In January, China openly announced that it had executed some of the 2,665 people convicted of intellectual property piracy since 1991. Beijing, in answer to the pressure of the American interests groups demanding protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), had again violated human rights protected by the U.S. Constitution, and human life highly valued by all Americans who roared in protest against the bloody crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989. But, oddly enough, even the most active rights groups failed to point a finger at Beijing on this matter.

The question is, with Sino-U.S. trade war and human rights rhetoric at fever pitch, whether the roller-coaster ride of relations will eventually push some leaders in Beijing over the edge.

## Beyond the trade war

In late January, the Pentagon declassified a report, entitled "China in the Near Term," which was drafted by a select team about four months ago. One reason for the delay in its release, is because the report estimates only a 50-50 chance for China to survive disintegration after Deng Xiaoping's death—a prediction which, if it came true, could lead to diplomatic and political regrets. Besides, the Clinton administration wants to conceal its preference in Beijing's coming leadership struggle, which seems imminent. Dr. Ronald Morse, organizer of this study (who once said that the Japanese invasion had helped Mao Zedong gain power), stated that he expects a new Beijing leader to surface within six months whose name no one will have even heard of.

In fact, there are quite a few people in the United States who clearly want to pick a Chinese leader who will orient in their favor. And this trade war against China certainly casts a vote concerning the new host of Zhongnanhai, or even of the White House.

Some of these experts believe, as the *New York Times* has implied, that Chinese President Jiang Zemin and U.S. President Bill Clinton should share the blame for the souring of the Sino-U.S. relationship. Clinton, they say, misled Jiang to believe that Washington would overlook the IPR and the human rights issues for the sake of the "strategic engagement" with China. As for the technocrat Jiang, after talking with him, "you don't walk away with the feeling that he's a deep, thoughtful kind of guy," the *Wall Street Journal* commented. A rumor reported in the *New York Times* says that even Deng, who threw all his weight behind Jiang for the past few years, is unhappy about the way Jiang stumbles in handling foreign affairs.

To be sure, London's news media are also voicing opinions over China's leadership transition, because they see—as an indication that Beijing is changing the guard—that compared to what Deng did to the British government on the Hongkong issue, current leaders are more cautious and less responsive to issues such as the balance of trade, the environment, human rights, the Spratly Islands, nuclear proliferation, and Taiwan's independence.

Thus, some Anglo-Americans, led by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and company, are pressing ahead on these issues in order to squeeze Beijing.

## China paying 'too high a price'

But neither China nor the rest of world would benefit, if Beijing's new leader comes to power when the country's sovereignty is under fire. Already in Beijing, senior policymakers tied to the military are saying that "China may be paying too high a price for Washington's favor," and an extreme-nationalist faction among junior officers, many of whom became politically active in the Red Guards, is gaining influence in China's domestic and international affairs.

New U.S.-China talks in the works may avert this trade war for the moment, but some people in London and Washington will keep provoking other flashpoints until they see a new leader in Beijing whose face they will back for "man of the year" in either *Time* magazine or the London *Financial Times*.

When two of the world's largest countries go toe-to-toe, a miscalculation by hotheads could send the politics of reprisal over the brink, and throw the world into a new Cold War. The real danger is that there is no margin for a misstep in the case of a China where the new leader is seeking external crises to line up its people behind the regime, while in the United States the Conservative Revolutionaries are trying to bring Beijing to its knees!

According to Dr. Morse, who has experience working for the Pentagon, the United States is indeed preparing for political and economic warfare with China. But if China dares to strike the United States with its ICBMs, "we are able to turn China into a nuclear wasteland," warns Morse.