

The U.S. Congress v. the White House: A Case Study of Most-Favored-Nation Status for the PRC, 1990-92

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ABSTRACT

Since the Tiananmen Square Massacre of June 4, 1989, the U.S. Congress has passed various resolutions condemning Beijing's human rights violations. The renewal of Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status for the PRC had been a very controversial issue between Congress and the Bush Administration in 1990-92. This study examines the MFN issue from executive-congressional conflict perspective.

The first part of this study examines congressional assertiveness on the MFN status for the PRC issue from the perspective of institutional and electoral motivations. The MFN status for the PRC issue demonstrates another case that Presidential preferences prevail over those of Congress. The second part of this study examines how President Bush fended off Congressional oppositions on the MFN issue from institutional and political maneuver perspectives.

The third part of this study probes into Beijing's strategy to overcome Congressional opposition to unconditional renewal of MFN status for the PRC. During the period of Congressional debates on the MFN issue, the PRC did not stand still, instead, it tried to do everything to influence U.S. decision makers and American public.

The fourth part of this study examines the reasons why Congress failed to override President Bush's veto. The last part of this paper analyzes the impact of executive-legislative conflict on U.S. policy toward the PRC. Although Congress failed in 1990-92 to enact a new set of conditions on MFN status for the PRC, Congressional efforts served a dual purpose. First, it provides a means to air Congressional opposition to President Bush's China policy. Second, it puts more pressure on the PRC to improve its behavior. In order to get unconditional MFN status, Beijing did take some measures to satisfy demands from the U.S. Congress.