

November 16, 2006

China Could Find Congress a Chillier Place

**Pelosi Has Fiercely Criticized
 Beijing's Human-Rights
 And Trade Practices for Years**

By NEIL KING JR.

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WASHINGTON -- She scuffled with police on Tiananmen Square, protested the visits of Chinese leaders to the White House, and calls the U.S. trade relationship with China "a disaster."

When Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi becomes House speaker in January, her views on China could set the tone for a new Congress looking to get tough on Beijing. Mrs. Pelosi's criticisms include human-rights abuses and unfair trade practices, as well as allegations that China is manipulating its currency and seeking technologies to undermine U.S. national security.

Just how much Mrs. Pelosi and other top Democrats will focus on China -- and how much influence they will have on China policy -- is hard to predict. But apprehensions run high in Beijing and Washington that a Pelosi-led, Democrat-controlled House could seize on China trade and security issues to bash President Bush, much as congressional Republicans did in the final years of the Clinton administration.

"There is definitely going to be a shift" in the House, said Republican Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois, co-chair of the bipartisan, pro-engagement, U.S.-China Working Group in the House. "The question is whether the shift will be effectively blocked by the Senate and the White House."


China's ambassador to Washington, Zhou Wenzhong, declined to comment on Mrs. Pelosi, and said that "mainstream Democrats basically support the current policy." Still, he expressed concern that the new Congress could be "more concerned about trade and about human-rights issues." Administration officials say that in private conversations, Chinese diplomats have expressed deeper worries about the new Congress than their ambassador has in public remarks.

The direction the Democrats take on China will depend on the strength of the economy before the 2008 presidential election and the party's overall strategy leading up to 2008. Some Democrats say the party may not need to make President Bush's China policy a key issue over the next two years, with Mr. Bush already beleaguered by the war in Iraq and rising nuclear threats in Iran and North Korea.

The Bush administration hasn't taken a hard-line approach toward China, with Beijing a pivotal player on global-security issues of concern to the U.S. The two countries have also strengthened ties and exchanges in many other areas, such as law enforcement and civil-service training.

"Whenever we have split government, Congress sees that as an opening to attack the administration's

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China policy," said Jeffrey Bader, a former Clinton official on China who now heads the Brookings Institution's Thornton China Center.

For months, Mrs. Pelosi has joined top Republican lawmakers and Democrats, including New York Rep. Charles Rangel, next chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, in calling on the Bush administration to crack down on China's trade practices through the World Trade Organization.

Mrs. Pelosi and a bipartisan cadre of lawmakers have urged the administration to put more pressure on China to further loosen its currency controls and take action against rampant piracy of U.S. goods. Critics say Beijing has kept the yuan artificially low, making its exports cheaper and fueling a huge trade surplus with the U.S. She has urged the U.S. to file a WTO case on that issue, too.

Other Democrats said they plan to push hard **on Chinese labor standards**, and have hinted that future trade restrictions could hinge on findings of unfair labor practices in China. Both Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Rangel have argued that China's holdings of U.S. Treasury bills, valued at \$339 billion as of August, pose a threat to U.S. national security.

Speaking after last week's midterm elections, which put both houses of Congress under Democratic control, Mr. Rangel said it might be hard to pursue China on trade violations because of its huge financial leverage over the U.S. "But at least we can be angry ... and try to protect American industry," he said.

Mr. Rangel said he intends to defer to the administration on China policy, at least to start, and wants to work alongside Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and others, "rather than Congress mandating that they do something."

Mrs. Pelosi's aides said her new prominence won't change her views on China, particularly when it comes to the country's human-rights abuses and lack of religious freedom. But they said she will have a lot on her plate, and won't try to dictate the direction of House policy on China at the committee level. Mrs. Pelosi declined to comment.

The most important change, Pelosi aides said, is that she will allow tough China legislation to come to a full vote in the House, instead of keeping bills bottled up in committee, as many previous speakers have.

Mrs. Pelosi's district includes San Francisco's Chinatown, which has traditionally taken an anti-Beijing stance.



Tough Words

Since 1989, Nancy Pelosi has been among the most vocal critics of China in Congress:

"Congress must send a very clear signal to the butchers of Beijing." -Jan. 24, 1990

"It is not right to roll out the red carpet for the leader of the country that rolled out the tanks at Tiananmen Square." -Oct. 29, 1997

"The China policy of the United States—Democrats and Republicans alike—is a total failure." -May 19, 2005

"Bush administration officials say they hope that China will become a 'responsible stakeholder.' We should avoid wishful thinking." -April 20, 2006

After Beijing crushed the democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, Mrs. Pelosi battled the first Bush administration and helped to protect Chinese students in the U.S. She also worked to make preferential trade benefits to China conditional on its showing "significant progress" on human rights.

In September 1991, Chinese police stopped Mrs. Pelosi and two other U.S. lawmakers on Tiananmen Square after they unfurled a pro-democracy banner. The Chinese foreign ministry called the move "a premeditated, anti-Chinese farce."

Mrs. Pelosi, along with several prominent House Republicans, continued to push for changes in China policy during the Clinton administration. In 1997, as Mr. Clinton was greeting Chinese leader Jiang Zemin at the White House, Mrs. Pelosi, at a nearby rally, denounced the visit.

In March, as the White House prepared to welcome Chinese President Hu Jintao, Mrs. Pelosi, Mr. Rangel and 14 other Democrats wrote to Mr. Bush, urging the U.S. to file more cases against China and other countries within the WTO. In an opinion piece published in the Los Angeles Times the day Mr. Hu arrived, Mrs. Pelosi wrote: "The American people want the administration to show resolve in standing up to Beijing, to demonstrate that we believe that the Chinese people deserve freedom."

Myron Brilliant, head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Asia division, said Democrats harbor "a lot of displeasure at the lack of follow-through in China on the trade front." He said the chamber is taking a "wait-and-see attitude" toward the next Congress, but would mobilize with other business groups if the House tries to address China issues through legislation.

Using "unilateral swords are not actions that we can support," he said.

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