Author: Peter Rykowski
Date: February 13, 2025



Reclaim the Panama Canal — and Nullify Illegal 1977 Treaties



In his inauguration address, President Trump vowed that "we're taking [the Panama Canal] back," 25 years after which the U.S. government illegally and foolishly surrendered to Panama in 1999, following a 1977 treaty paving the way for it. In making this announcement, Trump became the first prominent American politician in decades to even mention this important issue.

Congress must back up President Trump's goal with robust legislation — and we must inform both Congress and the president about the deeper problems with the Panama Canal treaties.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos negotiated and signed the Carter-Torrijos Treaties, which paved the way for surrendering U.S. control over the Panama Canal. This agreement not only foolishly compromised U.S. national security, but was illegal, since the United States and Panama agreed to two different treaties.

The New American magazine reported on this problem in the article "Reclaim Our Canal!" published on January 31, 2000:

> As treaty expert Dr. Charles H. Breecher pointed out in his Senate Judiciary Committee testimony in 1983,
>
> The Panama Canal treaties have not, I repeat, been ratified in international law, and they therefore did not go into effect on the 1st of October 1979, and are not in effect now.
>
> The reason is very simple. In their respective instruments of ratification, the United States and Panama did not agree to the same text of treaties.…

Dr. Breecher's testimony, which includes evidence that the Panama Canal treaties are illegal, can be found here.

Since the Carter-Torrijos Treaties are illegal, the United States is legally justified in retaking control of the Panama Canal. Congress and the president need to know this important fact.

U.S. surrender of the Panama Canal also threatens our national security. Communist China has been tightening its hold on the canal. For example, the Panamanian government has allowed Chinese subsidiary Hutchinson Ports to operate ports on both sides of the canal. As a Chinese company, it is legally obliged to obey the Chinese government edicts, including a potential order to shut down the canal to the United States.

Additionally, Chinese companies are currently building a bridge across the canal. However, this project is expected to last up to a decade, and it gives China a potential excuse to shut down the canal to American shipping.

Since more than 40 percent of American container traffic uses the Panama Canal, a shutdown would be economically detrimental to the United States.

The John Birch Society has been the leading force advocating against the U.S. surrender of the Panama Canal. In addition to the article linked above, *The New American* published the following articles warning of the national-security consequences of ceding control of the Panama Canal:

- "Save Our Canal!" (August 2, 1999)
- "Don't Give Up the Canal!" (December 6, 1999)

The JBS's warnings are now being realized and recognized by American leaders. It's time to take back the Panama Canal and fully restore U.S. sovereignty and prioritize national interests.

Urge your U.S. representative and senators to back up President Trump's promise with strong action — and let them know how the Carter-Torrijos Treaties are illegal and should be overturned.