

Donald Trump threatens to take back control of Panama Canal over fees

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Washington, December 23 RHC)-- U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to demand control of the Panama Canal after accusing Panama of charging excessive rates on U.S. ships passing through one of the busiest waterways in the world. "Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform over the weekend. "This complete 'rip-off' of our Country will immediately stop."

The U.S. largely built the canal in 1914 and administrated territory surrounding the passage for decades. But Washington fully handed control of the canal to Panama in 1999 after a period of joint administration.

Trump also hinted at China's growing influence around the canal, which connects the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. "It was solely for Panama to manage, not China, or anyone else," he said. "We would and will NEVER let it fall into the wrong hands!"

The post was an exceedingly rare example of a US leader saying he could push a sovereign country to hand over territory.

"It was not given for the benefit of others, but merely as a token of cooperation with us and Panama. If the moral and legal principles of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question," Trump said.

It also underlines an expected shift in U.S. diplomacy under Trump, who has not historically shied away from threatening allies and using rhetoric when dealing with counterparts.

Last month, Trump said he would impose tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports on day one of his administration and that the measures would remain until the "invasion" of undocumented migrants and drugs came to an end.

"Both Mexico and Canada have the absolute right and power to easily solve this long-simmering problem. We hereby demand that they use this power, and until such time that they do, it is time for them to pay a very big price!" he posted on his Truth Social platform.

Authorities in Panama did not immediately react to Trump's post.

An estimated 5 percent of global maritime traffic passes through the Panama Canal, which allows ships travelling between Asia and the U.S. East Coast to avoid the long, hazardous route around the southern tip of South America.

The Panama Canal Authority reported in October that the waterway had earned record revenues of nearly \$5 billion in the last fiscal year.

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