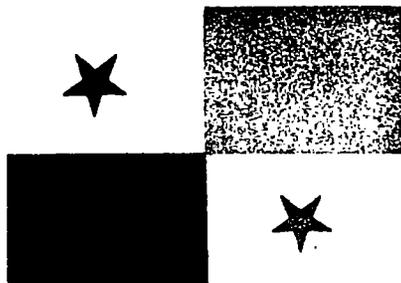


EXCURSUS I

Richard John Neuhaus on American Pragmatism on Panama and China

The debate over cutting ties with Taiwan has warmed up with Senator Edward Kennedy's forthright advocacy of quick "normalization" of relations with China. That debate has one odd common denominator with the debate over the Panama Canal treaties. In both cases it is the identifiable Right and identifiable Left that seem most concerned about the formalities of diplomatic language. The centrists seem less worried about nit-picking over the nuances of "sovereignty" and more focused on power realities.

Supporters of the canal treaties finally rest their case on the proposition that it really won't change things that much, and what it will change is increasingly less important. So we are told the U.S. is still guaranteed the right to intervene militarily in defense of the canal. Defense is a major attribute of sovereignty, and sovereignty by any other name is still sovereignty. As to handing over income generated by the canal, we are told the canal has been a losing proposition for some years now and that therefore Panama is getting more liability than as-



set. Viewed in the full context of international aid programs, the additional millions promised Panama hardly seem to warrant a major fuss. In short, say the supporters, U.S. interests are protected, Panama is mollified, a major barrier to U.S.-Latin American cooperation is removed, and we should therefore leave it to others to fret about the pluses and minuses the treaty offers in terms of symbolic and psychological satisfactions.

Domestic opponents of the treaty are not so cavalier about those satisfactions. They view the treaty as yet another post-Vietnam retreat by the U.S., a further weakening of the American will to act like a world power. Agreeing with this assessment by the U.S. Right are many leftists in Panama and elsewhere; at least those who support the treaty hail it as a major victory over residual colonialism and a defeat of Yanqui imperialist designs. Indeed, if the treaty is to be sold in Latin America, it must appeal to Latin American pride in relation to the U.S., and even to influential sectors of passionate

anti-Americanism. Thus, between the Right in this country and the Left in Latin America the same rhetoric of symbolic victory and defeat serves quite opposite purposes. In reality, the formal language of international affairs is constantly evolving. Whatever sovereignty may mean in this affair, the protection of U.S. interests, which include better relations with Latin America, seems to give the better part of the argument to the pragmatists.

The China question is much more complex and much more important. Again, the Left (China and its friends in this country) and the Right (Taiwan and its friends) are much exercised about the symbols and formulae of sovereignty. The pragmatists—represented by John K. Fairbank among sinologists and Edward Kennedy in the Congress—suggest it is all much ado about very little. The fact is, they say, that the importance of relations with a quarter of humanity can hardly be compared with our connection to the little island of Taiwan. Many of those who are most urgent about "normalizing" relations with China admit that Taiwan is, given the bleak state of the Third World, a bright example of economic success and relatively humane government. But that, they contend, need not be jeopardized by diplomatic recognition of China. A formula can be found for maintaining economic ties, and even some military assurances, with Taiwan while still tilting the Shanghai Communiqué's ambiguous language toward official recognition of China's claim to the island. Such advocates seem quite sure that China is neither able nor inclined to take Taiwan by force anytime soon.

There are several difficulties with this argument. First, it is by no means clear that "normalizing relations" with China is all that urgent. Some sinologists talk about this being "the crucial moment" for such action. But at the risk of sounding irreverent, what do they know about the future or, for that matter, the present of Chinese thinking? Over the past ten years especially, most sinologists have been proven diametrically wrong in their analyses and predictions. We shouldn't declare expertise, such as it is, irrelevant, but its record with respect to China invites the most robust skepticism.

Then, too, some argue from the economic advantages to accrue from Chinese-American trade. Since the Nixon "breakthrough" in 1972 economic expectations have been crushingly disappointed. It may be a quarter of the world's population, but in terms of U.S. trade it ranks a little below Honduras in importance. Nor is there any evidence whatever that the lack of trade is attributable to the absence of "normal" relations. It is more likely related to the convulsively erratic leadership of that country (how stand things this month between Mr. Teng and the partisans of the Gang of Four?), to its very low level of economic development, and to the pervasive Chinese fear of corruption by foreign involvements. It will be a very, very long time before Chinese will be renting Avis cars while staying at the Peking Hilton.

The strategic argument is that "normal" relations

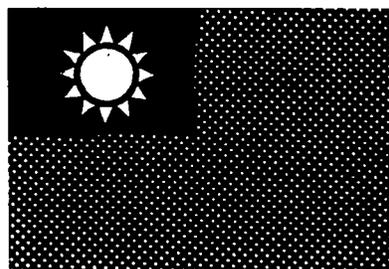
with Peking will strengthen the tripartite connection between the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union, and especially that it would advance the now flagging détente with the last. The logic is that Russia would have to up the détente ante in order to match any warming of relations between Peking and Washington. Presumably, it is in our interest to sustain the cold war between Peking and Moscow. At least that makes a kind of Kissingeresque sense, even if the role the U.S. plays in that cold war remains little understood. In fact it seems that, on purely geopolitical and ideological grounds, the Chinese and Russians have every reason and inclination to nurture their mutual hostility without our assistance. Kissinger fans are too inclined to take credit for the inclination of Chinese and Russians to fear, suspect, and hate one another. Some sins thrive without our sponsorship.

So much for some of the chief arguments that this is a rare and urgent moment of opportunity to normalize relations with China. In addition there are some positive arguments against such normalization, at least now. It cannot be doubted that around the world such normalization would be viewed as signaling a friendlier, if not approving, attitude toward the Peking regime. How does that square with the human rights commitment President Carter has declared the number one priority of his foreign policy? At least in terms of scale, China is the most massively and consistently repressive society in the world today. One leaves aside the question of whether such repression is essential to other good ends, as the admirers of Peking claim. The point is that its deliberate and rigorous denial of human rights can in no way be made compatible with the declared priorities of U.S. policy. If U.S. human rights commitments are to be believable, we should be careful about the signals we send. Of course formal recognition could be accompanied by clear censure of China's human rights violations. But at present it is almost inevitable that such censure, were it even to be made, would get lost in the glare of attention focused on the act of recognition.

Then, too, the status of Taiwan must be of compelling concern. While the die-hards who still dream of retaking the mainland may be ludicrous, the seventeen million people of that island clearly do not want to come under the control of Peking. This includes the original Formosans, who are being increasingly incorporated into Taiwan's economy and government but who seem not even to exist in the formal conversations between Peking and Washington. Again, Taiwan is by every measure of development a shining success story compared to most Third World nations. It is countered that Taiwan's success is attributable to massive American aid. That may be true in large part, but what does it prove? Were we inclined to press that argument it would seem to suggest that other nations might do better were they to establish greater solidarity with the interests of the U.S.

To be sure, formal recognition of China's

sovereignty over Taiwan does not mean that Peking would invade the island tomorrow, or even five years from now. It does mean, however, that China would, in international conventions, have the right to invade when and in whatever manner it thought expedient. It does mean that Taiwan would be stripped of any standing as a nation in international political and economic councils. It does mean that a pall of uncertainty would be cast over Taiwan's future, and that would have chilling, if not killing, consequences for its economic development. And—although this is not the most compelling argument—it does mean that America would be viewed as retreating once more, and precisely in that part of the world where it was so humiliatingly defeated less than three years ago. The argument that American policy should be reliable—and should be seen as reliable—is often overdone, but it dare not be dismissed entirely. It may be true that in diplomacy there are no permanent allies, only permanent interests. But it is in the interest of nations, as of individuals, to remember that there is an historically operative idea of honor. As Richard Nixon had to learn the hard way, one's words cannot be dismissed as “inoperative” without courting disaster. If the word of the U.S. Government cannot be trusted with respect to Taiwan, where, with the possible exception of Western Europe, can it be trusted? Again, this is not the only or even the chief concern. But those who are prepared, yes enthusiastic, about sacrificing Taiwan as an inconvenient hangover from the cold war era have evaded that question scandalously.



Those who press for recognizing Peking now generally shy away from saying they are prepared to sacrifice Taiwan to that goal, abandoning it to the tender mercies of the mainland. Senator Kennedy says we should give unilateral assurances to Taiwan that we would not allow their island to be forcibly subjugated. In backing the Kennedy proposal a *New York Times* editorial (August 18) says: “The choice that the people of the island would undoubtedly make if allowed a free vote—two separate states, China and Taiwan—is no longer possible.” So much for self-determination. Although the *Times* doubts that Peking would take the island in “a sudden blow,” it puts the alternative very delicately: “Over considerable time, Peking would probably come increasingly to influence political choices in Taipei.” Former Senator Hugh Scott also favors recognition now. In a memo to then President Ford more than a year ago he too hoped some arrangement could be made for the safety and well-being of

the people of Taiwan, but he acknowledged that China was "most unlikely to make a commitment to the United States not to use force in carrying out Taiwan's ultimate liberation."

Despite their protestations of concern for Taiwan, the advocates of recognition now seem agreed that the price to be paid is formal submission to Peking's insistence that the future of Taiwan is purely an internal question. (It is little more than a clever debating ploy to argue that Taipei agrees with this formula. Taipei's claim to the mainland is, by almost universal agreement, incredible, nothing more than a residual cold war fantasy. Peking's ability to act upon its claim to Taiwan, however, is ominously credible.) It would seem more honest were the proponents of recognition now to say forthrightly that they believe an independent and secure future for Taiwan is no longer in the cards. It only obscures the issue for Senator Kennedy and others to speak about unilateral assurances to Taiwan. After the U.S. has broken the most solemn formal agreements, why should Taiwan put its faith in informal assurances? If the present low-level leverage that Peking has with Washington is enough to force such American concessions over Taiwan, can anyone really imagine that the U.S. would be prepared to risk a major military confrontation with China in defense of Taiwan? Senator Kennedy should have the nerve of the *Realpolitik* he proposes. Broken down to its simple parts, the argument for recognition now goes like this: "For compelling reasons—political, military, and economic—it is urgent that the U.S. have full diplomatic relations with China. The status of Taiwan is the chief obstacle to such relations. In view of that fact, and despite our long history of association and our formal agreements, the protection of an independent Taiwan is no longer in the interests of the U.S. Sorry about that." So stated, without any obfuscating sentimentality about friendship with the people of Taiwan, the question of recognition now can be debated more honestly.

We believe that in principle it would be a good thing for the U.S. and China to have normal diplomatic relations. The present political convulsions inside China likely make this the least propitious time to try to resolve the difficulties in the way of such normalization. The success of diplomacy consists not in the striking of agreements but in striking agreements that are in accord with U.S. interests and ideals. A successful agreement with Peking should enhance the clarity of America's commitment on human rights, should avoid any suggestion of U.S. lack of reliability, and, implicit in both of these, should assure the independent future of Taiwan. We must speak cautiously about the importance of American credibility, remembering that that was the argument, pressed too exclusively, that kept us in Vietnam so long. But there should be no question about our determination to protect the well-being of the too easily forgotten people of Taiwan. An agreement with Peking that would meet these interests and

ideals does not seem possible now. Perhaps it will be possible three years from now. But if three or even five years from now there is not full normalization between Peking and Washington, that is less of a price to pay than the price that would almost certainly be required to reach an agreement now.

So the symbolists, so to speak, are wrong on the Panama Canal treaty and the pragmatists are right. U.S. interests seem to be protected, and if some people want to see the treaty as a defeat of U.S. imperialism, well, we should be a wise and strong enough nation not to fret about that. The rhetorical ammunition the treaty may give to inveterate anti-Americans is as nothing compared to the ammunition they would have were the Senate to succumb to conservative insistence upon our "ownership" of a slice of Latin America.

But, with due respect for the importance of Panama, it does not compare with the magnitude of the questions involved in our relations with China and Taiwan. On the canal treaty a little piece of American pride may be at stake. On the China question the future liberty and well-being of seventeen million people are at stake. In rushing to formal recognition, the pragmatists seem to be in too much of a hurry. Full normalization of relations is not necessary now. Politically and economically, we have little or nothing to gain from it that we do not have now in the *de facto* recognition that exists between Washington and Peking. Above all, it would not be honorable to pay the price that Peking has, at least so far, demanded. It would be a denial of justice to the people of Taiwan and to people elsewhere who believe, rightly or wrongly, that their interests and ideals depend upon solidarity with the United States of America.

EXCURSUS II

Walter C. Clemens, Jr.

An Open Letter to Leonid Brezhnev

Dear General Secretary Brezhnev:

You and your colleagues are no doubt puzzled and angered by the Carter administration's active support of human rights in the USSR and elsewhere. Your comrades ask: "How can Americans criticize our Socialist civilization when the United States is pockmarked with poverty and injustice?" "Will Carter risk world peace for the sake of a few renegades rejected by their own people?" "Is this a hypocritical crusade to divert the American masses from the scandals and privations generated by their bourgeois system?"

You and other Soviet leaders have visited not only in Washington but in San Clemente. But your talks with Messrs. Nixon and Kissinger may not have acquainted you with the deep idealism of the Ameri-