

THE MONROE DOCTRINE AND SUBSEQUENT COROLLARIES ETC

Even today, the Monroe Doctrine, first proclaimed in 1823, sometimes makes it into the current news. The attitude of the Trump administration to Latin America is sometimes said to represent a modern version of the Doctrine.

While its original intention was to warn European countries about further colonisation and interference in the Americas, it has come to be regarded, at least in popular understanding, as laying out that Latin America is the US “back yard”, its sphere of influence, with an assumed right to interfere in countries’ politics and internal affairs, to effectively have the region operating as the US expects and in its interest (or, at least, not against its interests).

The Doctrine was also mentioned in recent years in connection with complaints about undue Chinese presence and influence in the Panama Canal Zone, so it might be of use or interest to consider the history of the Doctrine, and the modifications applied over the decades.

In 1823, the former colonial power, Spain, backed by the Holy Alliance of Russia, Prussia and Austria – was becoming more assertive, and had put down a short-lived constitutional government that year. At the same time as Russia was laying claim to Oregon there were concerns that Latin America could once again fall under the control of Imperial Spain or France.

Britain was also concerned, and it approached the administration of President James Monroe (1817-24), proposing a joint declaration against potential interference by the Holy Alliance in the Western Hemisphere. However, the Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, pushed for a US-only declaration.

What became known as the Monroe Doctrine was presented to Congress on 2 December 1823, calling for a hemisphere free of European interference.¹ In return for resisting European involvement in the Americas, it pledged US non-intervention in Europe. It also warned that the US would view European attacks on its hemispheric neighbours as aggression against the US. The Monroe Doctrine also involved an emphasis on republicanism, as opposed to monarchies as a form of government in the region.²

Note that pre-existing European interests, the British, Dutch and French colonies, as well as Canada and Newfoundland,³ were unaffected by the Doctrine, and only new interference was involved. In any case, at the time, the US was not the military and naval power it later became. It simply lacked the ability to enforce the Doctrine, and could not prevent some subsequent moves by European powers.⁴ Until the end of the 19th Century, the US was largely concerned with its Civil War, and westward expansion.⁵

Between 1865 and 1895, various administrations expanded the Doctrine to include a no-transfer clause that opposed transfer of territory to European powers, a declaration that a proposed canal across Central America should be controlled by the US to avoid European control, and that the US could intervene in a situation to prevent the European powers from intervening.⁶

In the 19th Century, many Latin Americans were supportive of the Doctrine, with the former Spanish colonies only having gained independence in the early years of the century, and saw the Doctrine as bolstering their precarious independence. In 1902, a

¹ https://guides.loc.gov/sb.php?subject_id=162830

² Although the US did acknowledge the independence of Brazil, headed by Emperor Pedro I, in 1824.

³ Newfoundland only became part of Canada in 1949. Canada and Greenland were brought into the scope of the Doctrine at the time of World War 2, to stymie any possible German moves.

⁴ For example, in 1833, Britain annexed the Falkland Islands; in 1861, Spain reasserted colonial control over Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic); and France's Napoleon III tried to establish a puppet regime in Mexico, while the US was busy with the Civil War.

⁵ Immediately after the Civil War, the US sent troops to the border, seeking to compel France to withdraw support for the regime installed in Mexico, which it did in 1867.

⁶ <https://archive.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/monroe-doctrine-21st-century-great-power-competition>

Canadian prime minister asserted that the Doctrine provided Canada with a *de facto* security guarantee from the US, with it protected by both the US and the Royal Navies.⁷

However, it is said that the Doctrine was largely ignored outside the US, and indeed was not even known by that name for nearly another 30 years.⁸

THE OLNEY COROLLARY

In 1895, under the administration of President Grover Cleveland, the Olney Corollary (aka the Olney interpretation or Olney declaration) from Secretary of State Richard Olney was an interpretation of the Doctrine. It came during the border dispute between the British and Venezuelan governments over the Essequibo River territory.⁹

Olney claimed that the Monroe Doctrine gave the US authority to mediate border disputes in the Western Hemisphere. In due course, Britain was to accept the US right to intervene in this dispute, and Britain was compelled to accept arbitration of the dispute, which was finally resolved by the Treaty of Washington in 1897.

The Olney Corollary is said to have foreshadowed the events of the Spanish–American War 1898, but that “Good Neighbor” policy of the Roosevelt administration in 1933 rendered it defunct.

⁷ *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada, 1939–1945* by Stanley W Dziuban (Center of Military History, US Army. 1959).

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Latin-America/Types-of-Western-Hemisphere-societies>

⁹ Also back in the news in 2025, given the dispute between Venezuela and Guyana, with the former claiming it whilst it is part of the latter. It had become British territory following Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814, to become the western border region of British Guiana. Venezuela had lobbied in Washington, claiming that British occupation violated the Monroe Doctrine.
<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/14/americas/venezuela-essequibo-guyana-csis-intl-latam/index.html>

THE ROOSEVELT COROLLARY

At the dawn of the 20th Century, the Doctrine received another adjustment, in the form of what became known as the Roosevelt Corollary. By 1904, the US was a substantial industrial and economic power, and, in the wake of its success in the Spanish-American War of 1898, now an acknowledged military and naval one too. Reacting to what was seen as European “meddling”, President Theodore Roosevelt announced that the US had the right and responsibility as an “international police power” to curb “chronic wrongdoing”, including civil unrest, in its sphere of influence of Latin America. This was then used as justification for continued intervention, particularly in Central America.

The Corollary also stated that the US would intervene as a last resort to ensure that other nations in the Western Hemisphere fulfilled their obligations to international creditors, and did not violate the rights of the US or invite “*foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations*”. In reality, the Roosevelt Corollary was a significant extension of the Doctrine rather than a mere interpretation of it.¹⁰

Even before becoming President, Roosevelt had used the Monroe Doctrine in supporting intervention in Cuba in 1898.

THE LODGE COROLLARY

In 1912, the so-called Lodge Corollary, ratified by the Senate, extended the Monroe Doctrine to cover actions of corporations and associations controlled by foreign states.¹¹ It took its title from Henry Cabot Lodge, a senior Senator and member of the Foreign Relations Committee.

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Monroe-Doctrine/Application-and-extension-of-the-Monroe-Doctrine>

¹¹ It was a reaction to negotiations between a Japanese syndicate and Mexico for the purchase of a considerable portion of Baja California, including a harbour considered to be of strategic value. However, Japanese government disavowed any interest in Baja, and no investment took place. In the 1930s, in something of an echo of this, the US Army opposed plans for a fish processing works in Panama.

Once again, this adjustment has current day echoes. In part, it said that the US *"...could not see without grave concern the possession of such harbor or other place by any corporation or association which has such a relation to another government, not American, as to give that government practical power of control for national purposes"*.¹²

One cannot help thinking of the disagreement between the US and Panamanian Governments over ports in Panama owned or controlled by companies linked to China. It was argued that the Corollary *"rests on the principle that every nation has a right to protect its own safety, and that if it feels that the possession by a foreign power, for military or naval purposes, of any given harbor or place is prejudicial to its safety, it is its duty as well as its right to interfere"*.

THE CLARK MEMORANDUM

In 1928, President Coolidge's Undersecretary of State, J Reuben Clark, put forward the so-called Clark Memorandum. This was concerned with the use of military force to intervene in Latin American nations. Initially kept secret, it was officially released in 1930 by the following Hoover administration.

The Memorandum stated that any intervention by the US was not sanctioned by the Monroe Doctrine but rather was the right of the US as a state. It differentiated the Roosevelt Corollary from the Monroe Doctrine by noting that the Doctrine only applied to situations involving European countries.

It was noted that the Monroe Doctrine was based on conflicts of interest only between the US and European nations, rather than between the US and Latin American countries.

<https://www.historycentral.com/WStage/LodgeCorollary.html>

¹² <https://www.historycentral.com/WStage/LodgeCorollary.html>

THE “GOOD NEIGHBOR” POLICY

Unlike some of his predecessors, President Franklin Roosevelt expressed a preference for consultation and cooperation over sending of the US Marines. His administration accepted the principle of non-intervention at the Montevideo Conference of 1933.¹³

Roosevelt had assumed office determined to improve relations with Latin America, and emphasised cooperation and trade rather than military force to maintain stability in the Hemisphere. For this reason, his administration backed the declaration approved at the Montevideo Conference of December 1933 which approved the Convention.¹⁴

The 1936 treaty with Panama, which (to an extent) modified the provisions of the original 1903 Treaty to involve a fairer agreement, and a relationship built more on cooperation, rather than compulsion and the peremptory rights, might be seen as one product of the policy.¹⁵

THE RIO PACT

The Rio Pact in 1947¹⁶ appeared to make the Monroe Doctrine multilateral, transferring the responsibility for defence from the US to all 19 signatory states from the Americas. It provided for mutual assistance if an act of aggression threatened the peace of the Western Hemisphere, with any act of aggression against one member state to be considered an act against all the signatory states.¹⁷ The principles of the

¹³ The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, signed by 19 states. An important part of the Convention was a prohibition of using military force to gain sovereignty, and not to recognise territorial acquisitions or advantages that have been obtained by force.

http://www.hudok.info/files/1114/3526/0588/Evi-Doc_12_Montevideo.pdf

¹⁴ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor>

¹⁵ For more on the 1936 Treaty, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-in-world-war-2-the-1936-treaty-and-changes-in-the-relationship-with-the-us/>

¹⁶ The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance.
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/rio-treaty-1947>

¹⁷ The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance.

Treaty became the basis of the Pact of Bogotá of 1948 which established the Organization of American States (OAS).¹⁸

While it is said that, in 1982, the Treaty was undermined after the US backed the UK in recovering the Falkland Islands following an Argentinian invasion, in 2001, the US invoked the Treaty and tried to enlist Latin American countries in its “War on Terror”.¹⁹ As noted below, it was also cited earlier, by President Kennedy, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

Created in 1948, this appeared to render the Monroe Doctrine obsolete. For example, in 1962, President Kennedy cited the Rio Pact, and not the Monroe Doctrine, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. In referring to the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, President Johnson also omitted any reference to the Monroe Doctrine.²⁰

Nonetheless, the Monroe Doctrine saw use during the Cold War as a catchphrase employed in both liberal and conservative accounts of US regional policy. The fear of the spread of communism in the Hemisphere would once more lead to unilateral intervention by the US.

Both the Pact of Bogota and the OAS Charter obliged member states to settle controversies between them by peaceful means, and list the procedures to be followed: mediation, investigation and conciliation, good offices, arbitration, and, failing that, recourse to the International Court of Justice of The Hague.²¹

¹⁸ https://www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp

¹⁹ While other countries voiced their support for the US and the Rio Treaty at an OAS following the attacks, but many countries did not join the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

²⁰ This saw the US deploy some 22,000 troops amid a civil war following the overthrow of democratically-elected President by a military junta. As well as seeking to stabilise the country, the deployment was to protect US interests, and prevent a Cuba-style regime being established. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/us-troops-occupy-dominican-republic>

²¹ https://www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp

TODAY

While, in 2013, President Obama's Secretary of State, John Kerry, told the OAS that the "*era of the Monroe Doctrine is over*", in August 2017, President Trump implied potential use of the Doctrine when he mentioned the possibility of military intervention in Venezuela.²² Other members of the Trump administration also referred to the Doctrine²³ and, in 2019, National Security Adviser John Bolton invoked the Monroe Doctrine in describing the administration's policy in the Americas.

The Monroe Doctrine was now being seen as shorthand for an unapologetically hawkish approach to the US sphere of influence. On the other hand, most Latin Americans viewed the Doctrine as being synonymous with US unilateralism and neo-imperialism.²⁴

The Doctrine has also been seen, at least in part, as justification for such things as US pressure on Cuba, for funding the Contras, the right-wing rebels involved in the Nicaraguan civil war (1979-90), and as a useful historical reference to explain and justify US actions to ensure its security, or to prevent or counter threats (real or perceived) to its national or commercial interests.

In 2023, an article in Foreign Policy had warned that the US response to a growing presence of Chinese interests in Latin America risked a return to a more hawkish interpretation of the role and purpose of the Doctrine. This warning might be seen to have been illustrated most clearly in the case of the Panamanian container ports operated by Hong Kong Chinese company.²⁵ In late 2024, an article by an Argentine

²² Once again, current events echo the past, with confrontation between the US and the Maduro regime in Venezuela currently on the front pages.

²³ In February 2018, Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State, said that it was "as relevant today, as it was the day it was written".

²⁴ <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/the-monroe-doctrine-turns-200-why-wont-it-go-away/>

²⁵ Note "operated", not owned. Such ports, of which there are several with operators of various nationality, operate as concessions from the Panamanian Government and (importantly perhaps, given fears expressed by the Trump administration) while adjacent to the Panama Canal, are not on, or part of, the Canal itself.

academic warned that, should Trump win election once more, Latin America should be prepared for yet another resurrection of the Monroe Doctrine, with emphasis on the region's ties to China.²⁶ He did not mention the other oft-cited "danger" declared by the administration, that of drugs such as fentanyl and cocaine, or the risk that a Trump administration would act in a unilateral fashion, as hawks insist the Doctrine provides for, to be seen to counter these latter dangers by force and/or commercial pressure.

It does seem at times that at least some in the US regard the Monroe Doctrine as if an extension of its "manifest destiny" myth, that was used to support the 19th Century expansion of the US as both justified and inevitable, and to be as predestined by God. For this reason, amongst others, it is said that the US will always view its near abroad differently from other parts of the world, encouraging unilateral action.

So, it seems that, despite having been declared dead, or at least obsolete, several times in the past, the Monroe Doctrine, or at least the mindset it tends to mirror, is alive and well in the US of the 21st Century.

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²⁶ <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/donald-trump-and-the-return-of-the-monroe-doctrine/>