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The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications

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This article presents a brief history of the Monroe Doctrine since its articulation in 1823. First conceived as a statement in opposition to European intrusions in the Americas, it became under President Theodore Roosevelt a justification for U.S. intervention. To cultivate Latin American trade and goodwill during the Great Depression and the Second World War, Franklin Roosevelt's administration accepted the principle of nonintervention. Later with the onset of the Cold War, perceived international imperatives led to a series of new interventions in countries such as Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Chile. Though typically couched in idealistic rhetoric emphasizing Pan-American commitments to solidarity and democracy, the various versions of the Monroe Doctrine consistently served U.S. policy makers as a means for advancing what they understood as national strategic and economic interests.

The Monroe Doctrine as articulated before the U.S. Congress in 1823 established a rhetorical style associated many years later with similar pronouncements during the Cold War and after. Typically couched in the language of idealism and high principle, such affirmations of presidential purpose often purported to advance the cause of humankind, or at least a substantial portion thereof, by upholding values such as freedom, democracy, and peace. Such language sometimes served as a cover for less ennobling purposes connected with the defense of strategic and economic interests and usually contained some kind of threat to take countermeasures if other nations went beyond what the United States regarded as the appropriate bounds. The Monroe Doctrine also instituted a pattern by affirming defensive objectives.

Over the years, James Monroe's doctrine took on various meanings and implications, depending upon shifting policies and preferences, but nevertheless consistently

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served as a mainstay in the articulation of U.S. goals and purposes in the Western Hemisphere. Three stood out among them. Policy makers wanted to keep out the Europeans, to safeguard order and stability in areas of special concern, and to ensure open access to markets and resources. To be sure, the means of implementation varied from time to time, but the pursuit of these objectives remained much the same. Underlying them, another constant projected a sense of racist condescension. Usually viewed as unruly children in need of discipline and direction, according to a prevailing assumption among U.S. policy makers, Latin Americans could not function without paternalistic oversight and supervision.

The Monroe Doctrine emerged in response to the exigencies of European politics at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In efforts to put the world back together again, the Great Powers, that is, the Austrians, Prussians, Russians, and British, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1815 formed the Quadruple Alliance, an alignment committed to peace, order, and the status quo. Three years later, it turned into the Quintuple Alliance with the admission of France, a newly rehabilitated monarchy under the restored Bourbon kings.

For good reason in the aftermath of the French upheaval, European leaders feared the threat of revolution more than most things. Consequently at the Congress of Troppau in 1820, they agreed forcibly to put down insurrectionist activities whenever and wherever necessary. Soon after, in 1821, Austrian armies suppressed a series of revolts in Italy. A year later French forces took action against an uprising in Spain. The Europeans also supported the Ottoman Turks in efforts to snuff out a rebellion in Greece. Such actions caused John Quincy Adams, the U.S. secretary of state, to wonder whether the Great Powers also might harbor similar ambitions in the New World, possibly to reinstate the Spanish American empire.

The Latin American wars for independence inspired a great deal of interest among citizens of the United States. Indeed, many, such as Congressman Henry Clay of Kentucky, regarded them as conscious attempts to emulate the American Revolution. As Clay observed in 1818, Latin American leaders such as Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín have “adopted our principles, copied our institutions and . . . employed the very language and sentiments of our revolutionary papers.” Such perceptions probably attributed too much importance to the U.S. example and not enough to indigenous circumstances, but nevertheless they indicated high levels of popular enthusiasm.

For U.S. leaders, in contrast, *realpolitik* governed official reactions. The negotiation of the 1819 Transcontinental Treaty with Spain leading to the acquisition of the Floridas preoccupied Secretary Adams. Premature recognition of the newly independent Latin American states might alienate Spanish leaders and ruin his diplomacy. While wishing Spanish Americans well, he put scant faith in their ability to establish “free or liberal institutions of government.” In his view, “arbitrary power, military and ecclesiastical, was stamped upon their education, upon their habits, and upon all their institutions. Civil dissension was infused into all their seminal principles.” In a proclamation on July 4, 1821, he elaborated upon his thoughts. “Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has or shall be unfurled, there will her [the United States] heart, her benediction, and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”

In the spring of 1823, the defeat and expulsion of Spanish armies opened up new commercial possibilities in Spanish America. President Monroe consequently extended diplomatic recognition to the new governments beginning with Argentina, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico and later the others. Adams, meanwhile, instructed U.S. diplomats to cultivate goodwill and trade. He worried especially about British rivalry. British policy, at the same time, entered a period of flux. Following the Congress of Vienna, Lord Castlereagh, the foreign secretary, had believed in maintaining the alliance system responsible for defeating Napoleon. In contrast, his successor, George Canning, reacted against the implications when French and Austrian troops intervened in other countries, especially in Spain, where the Duke of Wellington had waged a long struggle against Napoleonic domination. Rather than risk the possibility of continental entanglements, Canning reversed course, took Great Britain out of the alliance, and pursued a policy of “splendid isolation.”

The superiority of Great Britain’s economic and naval capabilities also facilitated Canning’s decision. British leaders intended to capitalize on such advantages by taking command of commercial transactions with Spanish America. The foreign minister worried that his former allies might connive with King Ferdinand VII in efforts to restore Spanish authority in the Americas. Such an outcome would nullify British commercial ambitions and remove a potentially lucrative source of trade.

Subsequently in a conversation in August 1823, Canning and Richard Rush, the U.S. minister, discussed the ramifications of the French involvement in Spain. When Rush expressed his view that fundamental British interests required that Great Britain oppose French intervention or seizure of territory in the New World, Canning inquired whether the United States might join with Great Britain in a unified declaration of policy. Further, as a sign of good faith, he suggested a pledge of self-denial in which the British and Americans would renounce any intention of seeking real estate for themselves.

When Rush forwarded the proposal to Washington, he set off a flurry of high-level discussions. Seeking advice early in October 1823, Monroe contacted former presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, both of whom favored acting in tandem with the British, arguing essentially that with Great Britain as an ally, the United States had nothing to fear from the rest of Europe. Adams, in contrast, preferred to act unilaterally. He distrusted the intentions of the British as commercial competitors. He disliked the proposed self-denying clause; for him, a promise against annexing Texas or Cuba made no sense. He preferred an independent statement of policy instead of appearing, in his words, as “a cockboat in the wake of a British man-of-war.”¹

Meanwhile, Canning lost interest in a joint declaration. On October 9, British and French diplomats signed the Polignac Memorandum in which France made a pledge against intervention in Spanish America. Nevertheless, rumors of a French fleet poised

1. All the foregoing quotations appear in Thomas G. Paterson, J. Garry Clifford, and Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Foreign Relations: A History to 1920*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 101-03. For more details on the European background and the framing of the Monroe Doctrine, see Dexter Perkins’s classic work, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), chaps. 1, 2. On the role of racist assumptions, see Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

and ready to move against the New World raised anxiety in the United States and put Clay, a self-appointed champion of Latin America, into a panic. A related concern centered on the interest of Tsar Alexander I in extending Russian territory southward from Alaska.

In close conformance with Adams' recommendation, Monroe's message to the Congress on December 2 set forth three essential points. The first committed the United States to a policy of noncolonization by affirming that "the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects to future colonization by any European powers." The second endorsed a policy of "hands off" while arguing that the monarchical system of the Old World "is essentially different from that of America" and that "any attempt" by the Europeans to "extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere" would appear as "dangerous to our peace and safety" and as evidence of "an unfriendly disposition toward the United States." The third recalled Washington's farewell address by embracing a policy of abstention from European political affairs: "In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so." A related policy of "no transfer" already had taken shape in April 1823 when Adams warned Spain against selling Cuba to Great Britain. In his words, "Cuba, once disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can only gravitate towards the North American Union, which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from its bosom." Such an expectation guided U.S. policy all through the nineteenth century.²

For the most part, Europeans expressed scant interest in the Monroe Doctrine. A few leaders, such as Foreign Minister Klemens von Metternich of Austria and Tsar Alexander I of Russia disdained it as an arrogant gesture worthy of international contempt. In their view, the United States lacked the naval and military power to enforce it. In contrast, while worrying that Monroe had gained an advantage in the quest for Latin American trade, Canning sent copies of the Polignac Memorandum to government leaders, showing Britain's role in constraining the French. Latin Americans at first expressed high levels of interest but then lost much of it when the United States rejected their offers of military alliance. Ironically, the responsibility for upholding the Monroe Doctrine devolved upon the Royal British Navy, the result of a common concern with the United States for maintaining open markets and free trade. As historian John J. Johnson observes, the Monroe Doctrine, a unilateral presidential statement without standing under international law, committed the United States to do very little, except to defend its own basic interests.³

Following the initial stir, the Monroe Doctrine receded into the background for most Americans during the remainder of the nineteenth century. Indeed, except for Mexico, Cuba, and Central America, Latin America passed out of vogue as a compelling

2. Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, chap. 2; James W. Gantenbein, ed., *The Evolution of Our Latin-American Policy: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 323-26.

3. John J. Johnson, *A Hemisphere Apart: The Foundations of United States Policy Toward Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 80-81.

interest. Geographically distant and culturally remote, South American countries presented neither dangers nor opportunities for the United States. Instead, those nations cultivated economic and political ties with the Europeans, especially the British, and regarded such connections as counterweights against the growing power of the northern colossus. Driven by land hunger, commercial ambition, and a constellation of ideological convictions known as "Manifest Destiny," U.S. territorial expansion resulted in the conquest of the North American continent. As a consequence of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the War with Mexico in 1848, the United States absorbed half of Mexico's national territory. Cuba and Central America also aroused interest among southern slave owners seeking new territory and northern merchants in search of a shorter route to Asia, but neither group succeeded in adding new states to the Union.

Early in his presidency, James Knox Polk briefly resurrected the Monroe Doctrine and invoked it in 1845 as a warning against British and French meddling in Texas and California, regions already earmarked for incorporation into the United States. Similarly, at the end of the Civil War, Secretary of State William Henry Seward warned the French to cease and desist in their intervention in Mexico but without explicitly mentioning the Monroe Doctrine. When the French later withdrew their forces, they left the hapless Emperor Maximilian to meet his fate before a Mexican firing squad at Qu eretaro. In other instances in the mid nineteenth century, when the Spanish and French sent expeditions against Argentina, Mexico, and Santo Domingo for the purpose of redressing legitimate grievances, U.S. government officials raised no objections.⁴

A paradigm shift in U.S. foreign relations in the late nineteenth century resulted in a more aggressive, less reactive approach to policy. Driven in no small measure by a quest for markets and resources at a time of uncertainty and instability, the consequences of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, the ensuing "new diplomacy" thrust the United States more emphatically into the imperial struggle among the great European powers and the Japanese. In the New World, one indication of change appeared during Benjamin Harrison's presidency in the form of a new emphasis on Pan-Americanism, specifically in 1889 at the first International American Conference in Washington, DC. Summoned by Secretary of State James G. Blaine, a staunch advocate of Pan-Americanism, the delegates in attendance from Latin America considered whether to accept invitations for them to cooperate with the United States in efforts to promote peace and trade through arbitration and a customs union. For the most part uninterested and distrustful of such initiatives, they resisted Blaine's most ambitious proposals but acquiesced in the creation of a commercial clearing house later known as the Pan-American Union. In spite of a dearth of concrete accomplishment, Blaine's agenda suggested the main directions of the "new diplomacy" with its emphasis on commerce and peace.⁵

4. Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, chaps. 3, 4.

5. Most of the themes in the remainder of this essay also appear in my book, *The Second Century: U.S.-Latin American Relations Since 1889* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000); see it for elaboration and clarification. On the "new diplomacy," see Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963); Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, vol. 2, in *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, 2d ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1986).

Another sign of paradigm shift took shape in a revived and more militant definition of the Monroe Doctrine. In 1895, in the course of a controversy with Great Britain over a disputed boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela, Richard Olney, secretary of state under President Grover Cleveland, proclaimed his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, declaring in unsubtle terms that “today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition,” in this case, a demand for arbitration of the dispute. Expressing disdain, the British withheld a response for five months and then simply denied the applicability of the Monroe Doctrine. Cleveland in response took up the issue by supporting Olney’s position in his annual message to Congress in December and subsequently managed to extract a compromise. The British agreed to arbitrate on the understanding that the proceedings would exclude territory occupied by them for more than fifty years.⁶

Even more assertively, the U.S. intervention in the Spanish-Cuban conflict in 1898 marked the influence of more nationalistic and expansive attitudes on policy during the presidency of William McKinley. This decision came after nearly three years of attempting to find peaceful means for restoring order and stability to an island wracked by civil war. Though not explicitly linked to the Monroe Doctrine, McKinley’s request for a war declaration aimed at goals consistent with it, specifically the expulsion of the Spanish presence from the Caribbean region, the restoration of peace, and the establishment of a special relationship binding Cuba to the United States.

In this war, the fighting lasted only three months but nevertheless introduced significant long-term consequences, among them, the acquisition of the Philippines and the overthrow of Spanish sovereignty in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The outcome also initiated a process resulting in the construction of an empire without colonies in the Caribbean, marked by the subsequent transformation of Cuba into a U.S. protectorate as authorized by the so-called Platt Amendment. Under its terms, Cuban authorities, with scant choice in the matter, bestowed upon the United States the right to intervene militarily in defense of Cuban sovereignty and independence. This arrangement might safeguard Cuba against the Europeans but not against the United States, whose subsequent actions in Cuba resulted in violations of those very attributes. Nevertheless, following the Cuban model, other places of interest to the United States—Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic—also became U.S. protectorates. For the rest of the twentieth century, U.S. policy toward Latin America oscillated between displays of coercion and cajolery, or to make the point differently, from an emphasis on intervention to nonintervention and then back again.

In the annual message to Congress in December 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt presented his rationale for coercion and intervention. As an expression of his preferred assumptions and favorite techniques, TR’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine uncompromisingly affirmed U.S. responsibility for warding off threats of European intervention in the Western Hemisphere and for taking corrective action whenever Latin Americans reneged on international debts, in which case he prescribed the use of pre-

6. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 11.

ventative intervention. While invoking the authority of the Monroe Doctrine, he would have his country step in and set things right, even though such an act would invert the original meaning. Initially a prohibition on European intrusions, the Monroe Doctrine according to TR became a sanction for U.S. intervention when, in his words, “chronic wrongdoing” or “impotence” caused breakdowns in “the ties of civilized society” and compelled intercession by “some civilized nation.” In the Western Hemisphere the United States, “however reluctantly, in flagrant cases” must assume the obligation of carrying out “the exercise of an international police power.” As Roosevelt later explained to Secretary of State Elihu Root, a decision “to say ‘Hands off’ to the powers of Europe” meant that “sooner or later we must keep order ourselves.”⁷

Such assumptions undergirded U.S. policy toward Mexico and the Caribbean countries until the 1920s and inspired an ongoing debate among historians over the meaning and ramifications, especially whether the policy served primarily strategic or economic interests. In my view, such an either/or formulation presumes a distinction without much of a difference. Obviously TR and his successors, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson, intended to safeguard both sets of interests by keeping out the Europeans and laying claim to markets and resources in Latin America. By implication, the Monroe Doctrine always had the effect of a two-edged sword.

Under Taft, the emphasis on “dollar diplomacy” called for copious loans negotiated through U.S. banks and for skilled administration of Caribbean customs houses by U.S. experts. As Taft reasoned, such methods would have good effects, notably by encouraging peace, order, and commerce. In contrast with expectations, they seldom worked in practice and often had counterproductive consequences, the result of political meddling and racial condescension by U.S. officials.

Under Wilson, the Monroe Doctrine became more explicitly an issue in 1913 when Professor Hiram Bingham of Yale University published an article describing the hallowed creed as “an obsolete shibboleth” because of its unilateralist pretensions. Bingham advised a multilateral definition according to which all the nations of the Western Hemisphere would take collective action in response to trouble. Such an approach conformed with Wilson’s preferences, but because of the confused and contradictory premises of his policies, Wilson never achieved implementation of the goal.

Wilson combined acts of unilateral intervention with appeals for cooperative endeavors in ways that puzzled and angered Latin Americans. In response to the violence in Mexico following the onset of revolution in 1910, the president twice employed military force, first by seizing the city of Veracruz in 1914 and then by ordering the Punitive Expedition into Chihuahua in pursuit of Francisco Villa following Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916. In response to disorder, instability, and alleged threats, he also used interventionist methods in Haiti in 1915 and in the Dominican Republic in 1916. On each occasion, his actions elicited violent resistance and nearly produced a war with Mexico.

7. *Ibid.*, chap. 1, quotes, 29. Serge Ricard examines the Roosevelt Corollary in detail in an article in this issue.

Wilson additionally called for new forms of international cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. Encouraged by his friend and confidant Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson proposed late in 1914 the negotiation of a Pan-American treaty providing for a regional collective security system featuring the compulsory arbitration of disputes and a multilateral definition of the Monroe Doctrine. Although the Argentines and Brazilians responded positively, the Chileans expressed misgivings, particularly because of the implications for an ongoing territorial dispute with Peru. Would such a treaty require outside intervention? The proposed treaty died in 1916 as a consequence of the Pershing Punitive Expedition into Mexico and the loss of trust in Wilson among Latin Americans everywhere. Subsequently Venustiano Carranza, the president of Mexico, renounced the Monroe Doctrine altogether and announced his own Carranza Doctrine in defense of the inviolability of Mexican sovereignty.

Waging war and making peace preoccupied Wilson for the remainder of his presidency. These issues transcended Latin American concerns, even though some of them still demanded attention. One centered on the need to obtain diplomatic support from as many Latin American countries as possible. Another concerned new opportunities for expanding trade when the effects of World War I denied Latin Americans access to European markets and loans. In response, U.S. initiatives for the most part succeeded. U.S. efforts fared less well in attempts to resist the radical provisions of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, especially the authorization in Article 27 for expropriating private property and nationalizing mineral resources. In 1938, President Lázaro Cárdenas took possession of the petroleum industry.

Wilson obtained a declaration of war in April 1917 and later sent an army to France for various reasons, among them, his determination to play an influential role in the peace making. To rid the world of colonialism, militarism, and autocracy, he developed the Fourteen Points as a statement of his purposes and goals. These asserted various principles, among them free trade, self-determination, and collective security, and also addressed various territorial issues. The Fourteenth Point, his most cherished, appealed for the creation of a League of Nations.

While seeking the adoption of his peace plan, Wilson faced a political fight on two fronts. First, he had to win over the victorious Allies, notably the French, British, and Japanese, through a process of give and take. In his view, what emerged, the Treaty of Versailles providing for collective security and the League, represented the best that he could have hoped to gain. He then had to deal with Republican opponents who had taken over the U.S. Senate in 1918. They raised difficult questions about the treaty. Would collective security subvert conceptions of U.S. sovereignty? Could the League compel the commitment of military forces? And what about the Monroe Doctrine? Could the treaty result in outside intervention in the Western Hemisphere?

Wilson's incapacity to respond convincingly, his unwillingness to make concessions, and his illness in the fall of 1919 all contributed to another failure. The treaty went down to defeat in the Senate while Wilson languished from the consequences of a cerebral thrombosis. As a result, he left office in early 1921 with a broken heart. Meanwhile, the victory in the presidential election of 1920 meant that Republicans could implement their own vision of world order. In Latin America, they initiated a line of

policy resulting eventually in a new conception of hemispheric relations, the Good Neighbor policy.⁸

Such innovations came about for various reasons, among them, the absence of a European threat following the German defeat in World War I. Republican leaders also believed that interventionist practices had counterproductive consequences by arousing anti-American forms of Latin American nationalism. Consequently, Undersecretary of State J. Reuben Clark wrote a memorandum in 1928 in which he disavowed TR's corollary as a rationale for the exercise of an international police power and disconnected the right of intervention from the Monroe Doctrine. According to this interpretation, the United States under international law retained the right of intervention in defense of U.S. citizens and property but not in conjunction with the hallowed creed.

This understanding played a vital role in shaping the Good Neighbor policy under President Franklin Roosevelt, the essential parts of which conformed with Pan-American assumptions. The central feature committed the United States to the principle of nonintervention, affirming that no nation has the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of another for any reason. Another called for Latin American cooperation in efforts to uphold peace, maintain security, and expand commerce. In part an attempt to combat the effects of the Great Depression at home by finding new markets overseas, such measures entailed a trade-off. In effect, FDR gave up the right of intervention, self-proclaimed by his cousin Theodore, in return for new commercial opportunities gained through the negotiation of reciprocal trade agreements. Another part of the policy once World War II started in Europe gave prominence to questions of hemispheric security, resulting in attempts first to insulate the region against the fighting and then to mobilize support when the United States entered the conflict after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Such changes in diplomatic tactics implied a multilateral understanding of the Monroe Doctrine by leaders in the Roosevelt administration, and the payoff came when all but two Latin American nations either broke relations with the Axis powers or declared war on them. Under pressure, the exceptions, Argentina and Chile, came around later. Roosevelt regarded Latin American resources as vitally important and wanted easy access. He took less interest in actual military participation. Nevertheless, Brazil and Mexico sent ground and air forces, respectively, to Italy and the Philippines. By means of shrewd diplomacy, sweet talk, and bribery, the administration obtained its purposes with offers of military aid and promises of loans in the postwar era to promote development and modernization.⁹

8. Mark T. Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions: Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere, 1913-1921* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986); Gilderhus, *Second Century*, chaps. 1, 2; Gantenbein, *Evolution*, 100-07, 401. Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt's Caribbean: The Panama Canal, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Latin American Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), xiii-xiv, for example, expresses disdain for predebt-minded, neo-Marxist accounts which misrepresent TR's aim. According to Collin, the president always took less interest in "the subjugation of Latin America" than in "the exclusion of Europe," especially the Germans, from the Western Hemisphere. On the proposed multilateral definition of the Monroe Doctrine, see Thomas L. Karnes, "Hiram Bingham and His Obsolete Shibboleth," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Winter 1979): 39-57.

9. Fredrick B. Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy, Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) presents an exceptionally able analysis; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, chap. 3.

As the fighting drew to a close, U.S. diplomatic concerns shifted to peace making and questions of global and regional organization. After Roosevelt's death in April 1945, his successor, Harry S Truman, retained a commitment to the creation of the United Nations, viewed by him and other Democrats as a second chance to compensate for the failures of 1919. In the Western Hemisphere, the leaders also proposed the creation of a regional system to defend the traditions associated with the Monroe Doctrine. This endeavor resulted in the Rio Pact in 1947, a military alliance based on collective security, and the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948, an entity conceived as the successor of the Pan-American Union to promote political solidarity and commercial intercourse. As a central feature, the OAS Charter also embraced the principle of nonintervention.

After 1945, the exigencies of the Cold War profoundly influenced U.S. policy when U.S. leaders perceived regional issues through a Cold War prism and saw the Western Hemisphere primarily as an arena in which to turn back Soviet threats. Consequently, issues became important or unimportant depending upon the consequences within the Cold War context. The promise of U.S. loans for purposes of development and modernization became an early casualty. The countries of Western Europe obtained the benefits of U.S. largess under the terms of the Marshall Plan. Latin America, in contrast, would have to depend on trade, not aid.

During the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the era of the Good Neighbor formally came to an end when Cold War imperatives came into conflict with the principle of nonintervention. In Ike's view, the former took priority, resulting in a new era of intervention. In Guatemala, for example, a coalition of reformers and radicals had assumed power under President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and confiscated the properties of the U.S.-owned United Fruit Company. In response, the Eisenhower administration charged that Communists had taken over and in 1954 clandestinely sponsored an invasion by anti-Communists under Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Supposedly congruent with the requirements of the Monroe Doctrine but clearly not with the OAS Charter, this intervention by indirect means drove Arbenz Guzmán into exile and inadvertently set off a civil war lasting for four decades and causing the deaths of over 100,000 Guatemalans.¹⁰

The incoming administration of John F. Kennedy faced the boldest challenge to the Monroe Doctrine ever. Though Kennedy seldom specifically mentioned the hallowed creed by name, he took strong measures in defense of it and became embroiled in the biggest Cold War crisis since the Chinese intervention in Korea in 1950. Early in 1959, the triumph of Cuban revolutionaries under Fidel Castro set the events in motion. Castro, a devotee of the nineteenth-century Cuban patriot and nationalist José Martí, initially had no Communist ties but favored an anti-American course of action in efforts to liberate his country from what he saw as foreign domination. His execution of political

10. Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), chaps. 1-4; Smith's discussion of "the [George F.] Kennan Corollary" takes on special importance in connection with the Guatemalan caper in 1954. Kennan reasoned that U.S. policy makers had no choice except to work with right-wing dictators if they wished to keep communism at bay. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, chap. 4.

enemies, his expropriation of private property, and his interest in spreading radical alternatives to other places in Latin America turned the Eisenhower administration against him. Drawing on the Guatemalan model from 1954, a plan emerged for bringing about his downfall.

Devised by the Central Intelligence Agency late in Eisenhower's second term, this proposed clandestine operation relied on an army of 1,500 anti-Castro Cubans who according to plan would invade the island and trigger a popular uprising. When Kennedy took over, he developed a dual strategy. First, he sponsored the creation of an Alliance for Progress to promote democracy and modernization. At last, Latin Americans would get some of the funds promised to them during World War II. Second, he agreed to go ahead with the CIA plan to eliminate Castro. Neither part worked. Driven by false assumptions and misleading expectations, the alliance foundered when policy makers discovered the impossibility of promoting change while working through the traditional ruling elites, the very people most opposed to it. In addition, the U.S.-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961 went down to defeat in a spectacular failure when Castro's superior forces overwhelmed the attackers on the beach, killed some of them, and captured the rest.

From the U.S. point of view, the situation then grew even worse. In response to CIA plots to kill him, Castro asked for help from the Soviet Union and got it when Nikita Khrushchev, the premier, agreed to send military forces armed with medium-range ballistic missiles and capable of carrying nuclear warheads against targets in the United States. When Kennedy learned of Khrushchev's gambit from photos taken by a U-2 spy plane high over Cuba, he hastily summoned his top advisors into emergency sessions. Various alternatives came under consideration, including the possibility of air strikes or perhaps an invasion, but in the end, the group decided on diplomacy. Kennedy authorized a naval blockade, euphemistically called a "quarantine," and demanded that Khrushchev withdraw the troops and missiles. For thirteen days in the middle of October 1962, the tension mounted until a solution finally emerged. As Kennedy insisted, the Soviets would withdraw from Cuba. As Khrushchev required, the Americans would promise against an invasion of Cuba and also agree to take their missiles out of Turkey, albeit this latter provision remained a secret so that Kennedy could avoid the appearance of nuclear blackmail. And so by such means, each side could claim a victory while accomplishing its basic goals. Champions of the Monroe Doctrine, such as Samuel Flagg Bemis, a professor of diplomatic history at Yale University, emphatically denounced the outcome on grounds that Cuba still remained a Soviet protectorate in the Western Hemisphere, but nevertheless Kennedy could express satisfaction that he had avoided a nuclear war.¹¹

During the remaining years of the Cold War, other U.S. interventions in Latin America served interests and purposes implicitly associated with the Monroe Doctrine, but none of them had as much potential for catastrophe because they failed to bring in the Soviet Union. President Lyndon B. Johnson premised his invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 on the need to prevent "another Cuba." In 1973, President Richard

11. Smith, *Last Years*, chap. 5; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, chap. 5.

M. Nixon succeeded by indirect means in bringing about the overthrow of President Salvador Allende's socialist regime in Chile while encouraging military leaders to take action, presumably for the purpose of safeguarding U.S. corporate interests and preventing the dominoes from falling in the Andes. Under President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, the U.S. government supported and sustained a right-wing insurgency in Nicaragua against the reformist/radical Sandinista government headed by Daniel Ortega, depicting it as a Communist operation with backing from Havana and Moscow.

Though seldom invoked explicitly during the Cold War, the Monroe Doctrine and the aims and purposes associated with it provided both a justification and an explanation for interventionist measures. Typically shrouded in expressions of idealism and high purpose in defense of liberty, democracy, and the American way, the invocation of the Monroe Doctrine and the assumptions underlying it provided policy makers with a justification for acting on behalf of what they defined as the strategic and economic interests of the United States. As always, the Monroe Doctrine could serve multiple purposes, whether wisely and effectively or not.

Alas, the hallowed creed could not survive the end of the Cold War. As Gaddis Smith has shown in his thoughtfully insightful book, *The Last Days of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993*, the collapse of the Soviet Union removed all sense of external threat to the Western Hemisphere and denied the principal rationale for retaining the commitment. The Monroe Doctrine no longer served a useful purpose and for all practical purposes ceased to exist.¹² Nevertheless, a review of its history reveals many things about U.S. policy. The Monroe Doctrine consistently served what U.S. leaders defined or fabricated as the self-interest of the United States and also reflected the oscillations in U.S. policy between coercion and cooperation and intervention and nonintervention. They also revealed a sense of ignorance and built-in condescension toward Latin Americans, often regarded as inferiors on racial grounds. No wonder that so many Latin American radicals and nationalists historically have looked upon the United States as their natural enemy.

12. Smith, *Last Years*, chaps. 6-10; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, chap. 6.