



The Monroe Doctrine Goes Global: America, and only America, Gets To Intervene Everywhere

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On December 2, 1823 President James Monroe enunciated what became known as the Monroe Doctrine. It was a fantastic mix of presumption and chutzpah: the U.S., and only the US, was entitled to intervene whenever and wherever it desired for whatever reason it decided in Latin America.

Monroe made his position sound a little less imperialistic by emphasizing we didn't want the Europeans in, rather than admitting we planned on taking over their militarist game. In a statement mostly written by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, the Monroe administration insisted:

"We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power, we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States."

Nothing in the Monroe Doctrine forbid Washington from meddling in the same countries. Nor did the passage of time reduce Americans' proclivity to coerce, bombard, and invade their weaker neighbors. A century ago President Woodrow Wilson spent much of his first administration trying to remake Latin America before he went global in World War I. The Trump administration has been trying to starve Cuba and Venezuela into submission, while whining about Chinese and Russian interference and inveighing against spheres of influence elsewhere.

On crude geopolitical grounds such an approach makes sense. We are going to police our neighborhood to our standards, which basically means forcing every state to serve America's interests. After all, *someone* has to regulate the three dozen nations and score of dependencies in

the region lest they get uppity. Everyone else should stay out. It doesn't matter if another nation was here before America. It now is an outsider!

In 1823 spheres of interest were common around the world. But they usually were not created by proclamation. Rather, they arose from facts on the ground, as we say today. If no one challenged your claimed primacy, you had a sphere of influence.

Two centuries ago the United Kingdom, France, and Spain were global powers capable of confronting the US. They still held territory in the region, though most of their colonies had broken free. However, these governments had good reason not to act.

The Napoleonic wars kept all three busy slaughtering each other for years. Latin America seemed less important afterwards. Despite its once dominant position in Latin America, much weakened Spain was unable to stem the independence tide. At the end of the 19th Century the US completed Madrid's humiliation with the conquest of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The UK's commitments in Latin America always were marginal. Its continued control over Canada would be vulnerable in any confrontation with Washington. In contrast to Mexico, which ended up at war with America over Texas, London resolved its Canadian border disputes with the US peacefully. Two decades later the two countries similarly managed maritime disputes arising out of the Civil War.

Recovering from decades of conflict arising out of its revolution, France largely ignored the New World until the American Civil War, when it backed an ill-fated invasion of Mexico. That misadventure ended with a firing squad for Maximilian I, the Austrian Archduke and French factotum who ruled as emperor of the short-lived Second Mexican Empire. After that Paris had little to do with the New World.

Perhaps the most important factor in the Monroe Doctrine's apparent early success was the British navy. Although U.S.-UK relations remained difficult long after the Revolution and War of 1812, London did not want its continental rivals to gain influence in the rapidly growing New World. Near the end of the 19th Century there was a brief crisis involving Britain, Germany, and Italy when they sought to force Venezuela to pay its debts, which led President Teddy Roosevelt, an ever posturing and blustering warmonger, to send an American fleet in response. Otherwise the Europeans had little reason to involve themselves in Latin America even as Washington increasingly intervened hither and yon.

During the Cold War the issue flared most seriously over Soviet involvement in Cuba, later followed by Moscow's activity in Nicaragua and Grenada. Nuclear war almost resulted in the former case. More recent expressions of the doctrine have been mostly the Trump administration's empty braying and swaggering in response to foreign dabbling in Cuba and Venezuela.

For instance, under Trump Washington applied additional sanctions – always sanctions, every day more sanctions, though without ever achieving the administration's claimed objectives – on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. John Bolton announced to a Cuban-American audience last year: "Today, we proudly proclaim for all to hear: the Monroe Doctrine is alive and well." Citing

Chinese, Iranian, and Russian support for Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro government, Bolton insisted: "President Trump is determined not to see Venezuela fall under the sway of foreign powers." Venezuela and its friends ignored him and the administration, without consequence.

However, the biggest problem with the Monroe Doctrine is not its application to the Western Hemisphere, no matter how hypocritical, dodgy, and ineffective. These days no one is going to seriously challenge the globe's sole superpower in its own neighborhood. Beijing is mostly seeking economic gain. Moscow and Tehran are offering a bit of payback for hostile US activity in their regions. America's only restraint results from occasional bouts of conscience and shame.

Worse is how a perverted version of the Monroe Doctrine has essentially become America's guiding principle worldwide.

Ever hypocritical and sanctimonious, US officials have come to routinely deride "spheres of influence." Observed Paul Saunders of the Center for the National Interest: "Officials in the Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama administrations often denounced 'spheres of influence' as an outdated notion and – more importantly – opposed Russia (first) and China (later) when each nation sought to expand its regional sway, though these policies were decidedly mixed in their results." In contrast, the virginal American republic purports to go forth to defend everyone from everyone.

Of course, it can do so only by treating the entire world as its own sphere of influence. That is, current policymakers believe the US is anointed by God, providence, Manifest Destiny, the United Nations, and all that is good and wonderful in the universe to micro-manage the globe. Washington is entitled to intervene everywhere at any time for any reason. But no one else may do so without the American president's permission. Even then, other nations may only act as US agents, aiding Uncle Sam as he benevolently reorders the globe, no matter how many nations must be bombed, regions must be occupied, and people must be killed along the way to achieve his glorious ends.

Collateral damage is a tragic necessity resulting from American intervention. In contrast is the damage caused by other nations, always an atrocity, war crime, mass murder, and/or genocide – which offers additional justification for American intervention as Washington fulfills its unique role as guardian of the planet if not universe. No doubt, if life is ever discovered elsewhere in space, the US will take the Monroe Doctrine throughout our solar system and beyond. Who but America could save Martians from themselves?!

The consequences of America's disastrous arrogance is evident around the world. The US insists on the right to intervene for Taiwan against China, defend bits of rock scattered about the Asia-Pacific, and threaten war against North Korea. Yet Washington is shocked that the latter is developing nuclear weapons and outraged that Beijing is active economically in Latin America.

Successive American administrations cheerfully, even enthusiastically, expanded the historic anti-Moscow NATO alliance to Russia's border – barely 100 miles from St. Petersburg, Imperial Russia's capital – dismembered Moscow's allied power Serbia, and sanctioned Russia for acting without US permission in Syria and elsewhere. However, even a minor Russian dalliance with

Venezuela brought shrieks of outrage in Washington for violating the sacred Monroe Doctrine. Indeed, if the Putin government mimicked American and European behavior in Ukraine – sought to redirect commerce, overthrow a friendly, elected government, and offer membership in an anti-American alliance – in Canada or Mexico the wailing and gnashing of teeth by the US foreign policy establishment would be cacophonous. Members of the bipartisan War Party would organize flash mobs and perform the Maori Haka on Capitol Hill while demanding a tough military response.

The sanctimonious cant from Washington is even worse regarding the Middle East. US officials and analysts express shock and outrage that Iran and Russia are involved in Syria. Who would have imagined the effrontery of these two outsiders seeking to affect events in another sovereign state? Of course, Moscow's alliance with Damascus goes back to the 1950s in the Cold War. Iran's close relationship with the secular Assad regime is more recent but still consensual and reflects cooperation against shared enemies – Israel, US, and Gulf States. Nevertheless, in the view of successive US administrations, these ties obviously violate the Monroe Doctrine writ large.

America may be far more distant with far less at stake, but no matter. The US has aided Islamic radicals seeking to overthrow the Syrian government, created regional chaos by waging war on Iraq twice, destroyed Libya which remains riven by civil war years later, supported the Saudis and Emiratis as they committed murder and mayhem in Yemen, underwritten dictatorship in Egypt, tolerated brutal repression in Bahrain, intervened in Lebanon's multi-sided civil war, and aided and abetted Israeli occupation over millions of Palestinians for decades. All the while piously denouncing other governments for getting involved where they did not belong and creating regional instability.

Of course, hypocrisy is a staple of international relations. However, US policymakers leaven that with extra portions of sanctimony and cant. Alas, the spectacle of presidents and secretaries of state playacting like modern Vestal Virgins has gotten a bit old for other nations. Worse, the price for Americans has gotten far too high.

The US should treat the Monroe Doctrine as a shield against intervention in the Western Hemisphere and apply that principle around the world – meaning against American intervention in other nations as well. Washington's constant meddling overseas is no more justified than the European machinations in the New World which the US sought to discourage two centuries ago. Americans should live by the same international principles which they piously prescribe for others.

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