

STRATEGIKA

ISSUE 60

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

SEPTEMBER 2019



THE MONROE DOCTRINE AND CURRENT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

IN THIS ISSUE

WILLIAMSON MURRAY • CHRIS GIBSON • BING WEST

EDITORIAL BOARD

Victor Davis Hanson, Chair
Bruce Thornton
David Berkey

CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

Peter Berkowitz
Max Boot
Josiah Bunting III
Angelo M. Codevilla
Thomas Donnelly
Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.
Niall Ferguson
Chris Gibson
Josef Joffe
Edward N. Luttwak
Peter R. Mansoor
Walter Russell Mead
Mark Moyar
Williamson Murray
Ralph Peters
Andrew Roberts
Admiral Gary Roughead
Kori Schake
Kiron K. Skinner
Barry Strauss
Bing West
Miles Maochun Yu

CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 2019 • ISSUE 60

BACKGROUND ESSAY

The Monroe Doctrine: Guide to the Future
by Williamson Murray

FEATURED COMMENTARY

Principled Realism and the Monroe Doctrine
by Chris Gibson

E Pluribus Plures by Bing West

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions

Suggestions for Further Reading



ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

The Monroe Doctrine: Guide to the Future

By Williamson Murray

The Monroe Doctrine, which purports to warn other states from interfering in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere, has supposedly remained a basic principle of American foreign policy since the first half of the nineteenth century. From the point when it was issued, its actual relevance has depended on the willingness to enforce it, or whether there was any real threat. President Monroe issued it during a period when all of the major Spanish colonies in the Western Hemisphere were in the process of gaining their independence from Spain. That independence reflected the fact that the Napoleonic Empire had occupied the Iberian Peninsula from 1808 until 1813, thus providing no guidance from the home country, which a French puppet now ruled. Napoleon's armies were finally driven out by the Duke of Wellington's Peninsula Army in 1813—with some major help from Spanish guerrillas and minimal help from Spanish armies. The corrupt Bourbon monarchy returned to power. But for the colonies, the period of independence when Spain was under Napoleon's rule proved too enticing to abandon it and return to Madrid's incompetent rule.

The American fear was that the European powers would take the opportunity to carve their own slice of territory from the collapse, thus bringing Europe's troublesome competition to the Western Hemisphere. However impressive the Monroe Doctrine might have sounded, the United States simply did not have the economic or military power to make it stand up to any effort by a European power to grab off chunks of the Western Hemisphere. For the most part the Europeans contemptuously dismissed the Monroe Doctrine. But the British did not, and they possessed real military power that they were willing to employ against European interlopers. They had no intention of allowing the Spanish or any other European power to move into the newly independent states. But their stance had nothing to do with an idealistic desire to keep the Americas free from the messiness of a European involvement. Rather, the disappearance of control from Madrid in 1808 had opened the Central and South American markets to British exports to the extent that they made up for much of the pain that Napoleon's Berlin decrees (in effect, embargoing British goods from France and French occupied Europe, which was most of the continent) inflicted on the British economy. And the British were not about to lose that valuable trade to any European powers that seized a former Spanish colony.

By the midpoint of the nineteenth century the United States possessed a booming economy, but little military power. Still, it simply did not appear worthwhile for the Europeans to tangle with the Americans when there were easier pickings with the steady collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and possibilities in Africa, particularly in Asia. That situation changed with the outbreak of the ferocious American Civil War, which threatened to tear the United States apart. It certainly gave the Americans little opportunity to interfere with European machinations. In this case, the French bet heavily that the Confederates would win the



Image credit: Poster Collection, US 2318, Hoover Institution Archives.

Civil War. After participating in a joint effort with the British and Spanish in the winter of 1861 to force the Mexicans to pay their debts, the French took advantage of the turbulent situation to attempt to overthrow the Mexican government. Napoleon III, emperor of France, then offered the crown of Emperor of Mexico to Maximilian of Austria, who accepted in 1864. But the Confederacy soon afterward expired, and the American government deployed its military power to the Rio Grande, the deploying forces led by the ferocious Phil Sheridan. The French, recognizing the strategic reality, then withdrew, leaving Maximilian to be shot by the authorities of the Mexican Republic.

Succeeding decades would see the United States continue to involve itself in various disreputable activities in Hispanic America, but the next truly serious case where the Monroe Doctrine was applicable, would be the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The effort by Nikita Khrushchev to sneak nuclear short-range missiles into Cuba and deploy them created an explosive confrontation that came close to unleashing massive nuclear war. In the end, the powers backed off when the Soviets agreed to withdraw the missiles, against the insane attempt by Fidel Castro to stand up to the Americans and fight a nuclear war. There was certainly much talk of the Monroe Doctrine, but when was all said and done, the Americans were satisfied to have the missiles and nuclear weapons removed, although Castro's regime remained tightly committed to their Soviet allies. In the end, whatever the Monroe Doctrine, Cuba was not worth a nuclear war.

So what relevance does the Monroe Doctrine have for the twenty-first century? Here we must recognize that diplomatic documents and doctrines are no more than pieces of paper. What matters, however, is the willingness and the character of the government that stands behind the stated document. Thus, the Monroe Doctrine's only relevance lies in the willingness of the United States government to back it up with whatever means are relative.

In the 1920s France made an alliance with the Republic of Czechoslovakia to protect it should it become involved in a war with Germany. The disastrous Munich Agreement of September 1938, in which the premier of France Édouard Daladier pusillanimously surrendered the Czechs to the none too tender mercies of Adolf Hitler and his gang of criminals, underlined exactly how much an alliance means when one of the partners has no intention of abiding by its provisions. The following year, the only thing that prevented the British and French appeasers from running out on their agreement with the Poles was the fact that the British government would have fallen had Prime Minister Chamberlain not appeared in the House on September 3, 1939 with a declaration of war on Nazi Germany.

The American record in backing up its statements over the past half century has not been impressive. In 1972, Nixon and Kissinger persuaded the South Vietnamese to agree to a peace agreement with promises of support, should the North Vietnamese renege. In retrospect, the decision in 1964 to involve major US forces in the war in South Vietnam was a disastrous mistake which our current semi-alliance with Vietnam underlines. Still the disgraceful performance of the US Congress and government in 1975 when the North Vietnamese thumbed their noses at the United States as their tanks rolled southwards still leaves a nasty taste in this author's mouth. In the end it did not matter, because the United States as a great power did not suffer from the foolishness of its strategic policies and failure to honor its commitments. The hard words of the Athenians to the Melians in 415 BC echo throughout: "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."

The attempt to cajole opponents on the international scene into behaving in a fashion more congruent with American interests simply does not work without a willingness to back up paper niceties with force. President Obama's line in the sand in Syria had absolutely no effect, because the Syrians, undoubtedly encouraged by the Russians, fully understood there would be no response. And so the line in the sand had no effect except to act as an embarrassment to a weak administration that understood little about military force or the dismal politics of the Middle East.

And so what conclusion remains? If there are matters in the Western Hemisphere that demand an American response, then what will be of importance is only that the United States is willing to back up its interests with force. If it is not, then all the pronouncements about the Monroe Doctrine will be nothing more than blowing in the wind.



WILLIAMSON MURRAY serves as a Minerva Fellow at the Naval War College. He graduated from Yale University in 1963 with honors in history. He then served five years as an officer in the US Air Force, including a tour in Southeast Asia with the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing (C-130s). He returned to Yale University, where he received his PhD in military-diplomatic history under advisers Hans Gatzke and Donald Kagan. He taught two years in the Yale history department before moving on to Ohio State University in fall 1977 as a military and diplomatic historian; in 1987 he received the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award. He retired from Ohio State in 1995 as a professor emeritus of history.



Image credit: Poster Collection, US 3612A, Hoover Institution Archives.

Principled Realism and the Monroe Doctrine

By Chris Gibson

With the publication of the December 2017 version of the *National Security Strategy*, the Trump administration changed the course of American grand strategy. With it, the United States made a conscious choice to leave behind President George W. Bush's controversial neo-conservative inspired policy of "preemption" and Barack Obama's convoluted "consequentialism," embracing instead the more traditional approach of "principled realism," first articulated by President George Washington. In this new era, all previous policies and approaches are under review, including one of our oldest foreign policy statements—the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.

In my view, the Monroe Doctrine is as important to American interests now as it was when first advanced in the early 19th century, and perhaps more so.

The origins of the Monroe Doctrine can be traced to the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the peace secured in its aftermath at the Congress of Vienna. Some of the victors of that protracted conflict, namely Prussia, Austria, and Russia (the so-called Holy Alliance) sought to take advantage of their improved strategic position by attempting to assert influence in several new nations in Latin America, which had recently won independence from Spain. This development was of great concern to the United States, leading President James Monroe to draft his statement warning European powers not to meddle in the Western Hemisphere. Great Britain, similarly concerned as to what impact these developments would have on the global balance of power, offered to co-sign the statement. Monroe wisely declined. Such a move would have weakened the American strategic position and hurt Monroe politically. However, to Monroe's pleasant surprise (and all subsequent American presidents over the next 75 years), Great Britain, seeing this as in their best interests too, essentially enforced the Monroe Doctrine anyway with the powerful presence of its navy, then clearly the world's strongest. Thus, the United States was able to enjoy all the "upsides" of British support without having to pay the consequences for their formal collaboration.

Since its inception, the political success of the Monroe Doctrine can be attributed, in large part, to its simplicity, clarity, and perceived mutual benefit of most of the world's major powers. Essentially, the Monroe Doctrine stated, if European nations stayed out of the Western Hemisphere, the United States would not meddle in European affairs. Given the long history of internecine conflict in Europe, the United States was offering assurances that it wouldn't leverage or take advantage of these realities in return for Europeans honoring US "supremacy" in the Western Hemisphere. The word supremacy here is in quotation marks because no one actually believed the United States was powerful enough to enforce such a proclamation, and it was ambiguous how committed Great Britain was to enforcing it, despite their increased presence in the Atlantic. Thus, the nations of the Holy Alliance really didn't think they were giving up anything for the US promises of non-involvement in the nasty business of European politics. The Holy Alliance nations soon had other claimants on their time and resources, and found reason to divert their attention away from the Western Hemisphere, so the Monroe Doctrine seemed to work for all concerned.

All presidents since Monroe have used this doctrine to US advantage, occasionally offering revisionist interpretations, allowing for more direct US involvement in the domestic affairs of Latin American countries, including at times, American military intervention (moves which were not envisioned by Monroe). Both Roosevelts (T.R. and F.D.R.) invoked the Monroe Doctrine to increase American power and influence in the region. President Kennedy cited it as justification for bold action in our standoff with the Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In short, the Monroe Doctrine played an instrumental role in propelling the United States into a global superpower.

President Trump campaigned on an “America First” platform, promising to end protracted US military interventions brought on particularly after 9/11, and pivot to more of a “peace through strength” grand strategy approach. The Monroe Doctrine offers a helpful vehicle to instantiate that vision, both with respect to communicating American strength (other nations staying out of the Western Hemisphere) and the other side of the promise—for the United States to stay out of the affairs of other countries, leaving behind Bush 43’s destructive and costly regime change approach.

The Western Hemisphere has seen the painful effects of political instability, corruption, and government inefficacy and how that adversely affects local security and economic vitality in Latin America. Especially in places like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and lately, Venezuela, this has led to massive outward migration to the United States when families feel they have no choice but to flee their homeland to find protection and a future for their families. China and Russia see these concerning developments as an opportunity to undermine American interests, and have correspondingly stepped up their activities in the region to foment further unrest. They recognize that all of this has exacerbated the political divide in American politics and weakened our country as the United States deals with significant numbers of asylum-seekers.

Going forward, the United States should invoke the Monroe Doctrine, which comports with President Trump’s campaign pledges, to reverse these negative trends. We should update NAFTA, CAFTA-DR (Central American–Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement), and bring forward new trade agreements to foster more economic growth and work to revitalize the Organization of American States (OAS) to help broker a peaceful resolution in Venezuela, improve governmental efficacy throughout the region, and adopt a hemispheric approach for asylum-seekers. By doing so we will help facilitate a flourishing life throughout the Western Hemisphere. Importantly, all of this will benefit the American worker and help unify our country—an under-appreciated dimension of national power.



CHRIS GIBSON is a decorated combat veteran and former US Representative from New York. In Congress, Chris served on the House Armed Services Committee and was the author of the POSTURE Act, which was enacted with the NDAA of 2017, reversing the Obama drawdown of the Armed Forces. He is currently the Stanley Kaplan Distinguished Visiting Professor of American Foreign Policy at Williams College and the author of *Rally Point: Five Tasks to Unite the Country and Revitalize the American Dream*, published by Twelve Books in 2017.



Image credit: Poster Collection, US 3615, Hoover Institution Archives.

E Pluribus Plures

By Bing West

A doctrine is a set of guiding principles shared widely by an organization or a nation. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 stated that any effort by a European nation to take control of any North or South American country would be viewed as “the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.” In 1962, the Doctrine was invoked during the Cuban Missile Crisis. With the support of the Organization of American States (OAS), President Kennedy established a naval quarantine around the island.

Does the Monroe Doctrine apply today? Probably not, for three reasons. First, the current case in point is Venezuela, where starvation and descent into misery are underwritten by Cuba’s unrelenting support for thugs who are leaching the blood from their own people. Although the situation is as overt as it is repugnant, the feckless OAS cannot summon the moral authority to censure and force the Maduro oppressors from power.

Second, the problem is compounded by President Trump’s approval—indeed, almost his endorsement—of the world’s most prominent oppressors: Xi of China and Putin of Russia. Putin’s geopolitical dalliances with Cuba and Venezuela, intended to diminish and distract America, pass without criticism from the White House. At the same time, the instincts of the Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Pompeo, and National Security Adviser Bolton incline toward a vigorous Monroe Doctrine, as manifested by the imposition of stringent economic sanctions against the Maduro tyranny. On balance, President Trump seems guided more by a transactional business mindset than by a moral compass or a consistent set of doctrinal beliefs. He defines any country’s “disposition toward the United States” based upon material, often meretricious bargaining.

The third reason to doubt the applicability of the Monroe Doctrine is our national divisiveness. President Trump instinctively employs divisive rhetoric in the furtherance of his many policies that in themselves are sensible, such as combating the predatory behavior of China and enhancing our economic growth while chopping back the suffocating vines of bureaucratic regulations. Most of his opponents for the presidency employ equally divisive rhetoric solely to further the reallocation of material wealth. The acquisition and distribution of money has become the talisman in political discourse and competition. Those old enough to vote are wooed by liberal progressives with preposterous promises, ranging from free college education to free and unlimited health care.

No matter his personal inclinations, no American commander-in-chief can simply concoct and declare a doctrine. While the office of the presidency has accumulated powers not intended by the Founding Fathers, any geopolitical doctrine must still strike a resonant chord in the body politic as a whole in order to endure. President Monroe’s overt declaration of hemispheric hegemony, if reiterated today in even the most bowdlerized locution, would be denounced by academia, the mainstream press, and half the population.

Our Congress tolerates—nay, by its legislative actions and inactions it encourages—a monthly flow of 100,000 illegal immigrants at our southern border [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/from>

-the-border-more-frustrating-immigration-numbers-for-president-trump/2019/05/08/ad6ac140-71a7-11e9-9eb4-0828f5389013_story.html]. Immigrants and their descendants are projected to account for 88% of US population growth through 2065 [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants]. The composition of our nation is changing dramatically. How can we unite behind any doctrine when we cannot agree what defines an American citizen or what kind of country we want to be and what our basic principles and history are? We are a divided nation, unmoored from our founding principles of individual liberty, equality of opportunity and of justice, and limited government. It is hard to believe there would be strong public support for a firm stand against nations manifesting “an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.” Instead, Americans have an unfriendly disposition toward each other. On our coins is inscribed, *E Pluribus Unum*. Out of many, one. Of our current culture, it would be more accurate to inscribe, *E Pluribus Plures*.

POLL: Is the Monroe Doctrine still applicable to U.S. foreign policy—and should it be?

- The Monroe Doctrine is an anachronistic imperialistic policy that rightly was discarded.
- There is no practicable way ever again to apply the Monroe Doctrine in the 21st Century.
- The Monroe Doctrine would be useful, but only if Latin American countries wished our protection.
- The Monroe Doctrine should be reenergized to prevent Russian or Iranian intrusions into the Western Hemisphere.



F. J. BING WEST is a military historian who has written a dozen best-selling books about the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His most recent book, with co-author General Jim Mattis, is *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, where he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, he served in the Marine infantry in Vietnam and later as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Among other awards, he is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the Marine Corps Heritage Award, Tunisia’s Medaille de Liberté, the Colby Military History Award, the Goodpaster Prize for Military Scholarship, the Marine Corps Foundation Award for Leadership, the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Media Medal, and the Free Press Award.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral justification for the Monroe Doctrine?
2. Is there a real chance that the Monroe Doctrine would ever be applied in the 21st Century?
3. Would the majority of Latin American countries appreciate a non-intervention policy enforced by the United States?
4. How could the Monroe Doctrine be updated for contemporary exigencies?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Monroe Doctrine, December 2, 1823 (Yale Law School, The Avalon Project) [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/monroe.asp]
- Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Harvard University Press, 1975). [<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674180703>]
- Brook Poston, *James Monroe: A Republican Champion* (University Press of Florida, 2019). [<https://upf.com/book.asp?id=9780813056104>]
- Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993* (Hill and Wang, 1994). [<https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780809015689>]



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Tariffs and Embargoes

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



The publisher has made an online version of this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonDerivs license 3.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0>.

Efforts have been made to locate the original sources, determine the current rights holders, and, if needed, obtain reproduction permissions. On verification of any such claims to rights in the articles reproduced in this book, any required corrections or clarifications will be made in subsequent printings/editions. Hoover Institution assumes no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Copyright © 2019 by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University

Hoover Institution, Stanford University
434 Galvez Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-6003
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington
The Johnson Center
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-760-3200

