

J. Ruben Clark, *Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine*, 1928

In this State Department memorandum, J. Ruben Clark, then Undersecretary of State in Calvin Coolidge's administration, rejected the Roosevelt Corollary's interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine. The excerpt here focuses on the document's conclusions, but much of the study is historical in nature, examining the ways U.S. leaders approached relations with Latin America.

Herewith I transmit a Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine, prepared by your direction, given a little over two months ago...

The Doctrine, thus declared by Monroe, when reduced to its lowest terms, covers—

- (1) Future *colonization by any European powers* of the *American continents*.
- (2) Any attempt by the *allied powers* to extend their political system *to any portion of this hemisphere*, or (in its second statement) *to any part of either continent*.
- (3) Any interposition, *by any European power*, for the purpose of oppressing or controlling in any other manner the destinies of the Latin American Governments “who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have on great consideration and just principles acknowledged.”
- (4) Noninterference by the United States with the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power.
- (5) Policy of leaving Spanish American colonies and Spain to themselves in the hope that other powers will pursue the same course.

...It is of first importance to have in mind that Monroe's declaration in its terms, relates solely to the relationships between European states on the one side, and, on the other side, the American continents, the Western Hemisphere, and the Latin American Governments which on December 2, 1823, had declared and maintained their independence which we had acknowledged.

It is of equal importance to note, on the other hand, that the declaration does not apply to purely inter-American relations.

Nor does the declaration purport to lay down any principles that are to govern the interrelationship of the states of this Western Hemisphere as among themselves.

The Doctrine states a case of United States *vs.* Europe, not of United States *vs.* Latin America.

Such arrangements as the United States has made, for example, with Cuba, Santo Domingo, Haiti, and Nicaragua, are not within the Doctrine as it was announced by Monroe. They may be accounted for as the expression of a national policy which, like the Doctrine itself, originates in the necessities of security or self-preservation—a policy which was foreshadowed by Buchanan (1860) and by Salisbury (1895), and was outlined in what is known as the “Roosevelt corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine (1905) in connection with the Dominican debt protocol of 1904; but such arrangements are not covered by the terms of the Doctrine itself.

Should it become necessary to apply a sanction for a violation of the Doctrine as declared by Monroe, that sanction would run against the European power offending the policy, and not against the Latin American country which was the object of the European aggression, unless a conspiracy existed between the European and the American states involved.

In the normal case, the Latin American state against which aggression was aimed by a European power, would be the beneficiary of the Doctrine not its victim. This has been the history of its application. The Doctrine makes the United States a guarantor, in effect, of the independence of Latin American states, though without the obligations of a guarantor to those states, for the United States itself determines by its sovereign will when, where, and concerning what aggressions it will invoke the Doctrine, and by what measures, if any, it will apply a sanction. In none of these things has any other state any voice whatever.

Furthermore while the Monroe Doctrine as declared, has no relation in its terms to an aggression by any other state than a European state, yet the principle “self-preservation” which underlies the Doctrine—which principle, as we shall see, is as fully operative without the Doctrine as with it—would apply to any non-American state in whatever quarter of the globe it lay, or even to an American state, if the aggressions of such state against other Latin American states were “dangerous to our peace and safety,” or were a “manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States,” or were “endangering our peace and happiness;” that is, if such aggressions challenged our existence...

The Doctrine has been useful, and such indeed was the real motive of its announcement, and it will remain of such use that it should never be abandoned, as a forewarning to European powers as to what this country would regard, in a restricted field, as inimical to its safety. It has been equally useful to the Americas as forecasting our attitude towards certain international problems and relations in which they might be involved.

No other power of the world has any relationship to, or voice in, the implementing of the principles which the Doctrine contains. It is our Doctrine, to be by us invoked and sustained, held in abeyance, or abandoned as our high international policy or vital national interests shall seem to us, and to us alone, to demand.

It may, in conclusion, be repeated: The Doctrine does not concern itself with purely inter-American relations; it has nothing to do with the relationship between the United States and other American nations, except where other American nations shall become involved with European governments in arrangements which threaten the security of the United States, and even in such cases, the Doctrine runs against the European country, not the American nation, and the United States would primarily deal there under with the European country and not with the American nation concerned. The Doctrine states a case of the United States vs. Europe, and not of the United States vs. Latin America. Furthermore, the fact should never be lost to view that in applying this Doctrine during the period of one hundred years since it was announced, our Government has over and over again driven it in as a shield between Europe and the Americas to protect Latin America from the political and territorial thrusts of Europe; and this was done at times when the American nations were weak and struggling for the establishment of stable, permanent governments; when the political morality of Europe sanctioned, indeed encouraged, the acquisition of territory by force; and when many of the great powers of Europe looked with eager, covetous eyes to the rich, undeveloped areas of the American hemisphere. Nor should another equally vital fact be lost sight of, that the United States has only been able to give this protection against designing European powers because of its known willingness and determination, if and whenever necessary, to expend its treasure and to sacrifice American life to maintain the principles of the Doctrine. So far as Latin America is concerned, the Doctrine is now, and always has been, not an instrument of violence and oppression, but an unbought, freely bestowed, and wholly effective guaranty of their freedom, independence, and territorial integrity against the imperialistic designs of Europe.

J. Ruben Clark, *Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine, December 17, 1928* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1930).