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Monroe Doctrine

By the early 1820s, numerous Latin American countries had won independence from Spain or Portugal. The US feared another European power would soon attempt to re-colonize the region. At the same time, Russia had its eyes on the Pacific Northwest. The US felt the need to act.

The Monroe Doctrine...unpacked.

During an 1823 address to Congress, President James Monroe declared the Western Hemisphere closed to European colonization—and that any attempt to colonize the Americas would be viewed as a threat. In turn, he vowed to stay out of European affairs and continue to recognize existing European colonies.

This declaration, later named the Monroe Doctrine, became a cornerstone of US foreign policy: Europe can have the Old World, but the Western Hemisphere falls under America's sphere of influence.

At the time though, America couldn't back it up. Its military was weak and even sat back as Britain and France violated the supposed mandate. But by the end of the US Civil War, America's military and economic might had grown, allowing the US to begin putting action behind the words of the Monroe Doctrine. One of the earliest instances came in 1867, when the US provided military and political support to help overthrow a French-installed Mexican emperor.

From 1870 on, the Monroe Doctrine was expanded and re-interpreted to justify military intervention throughout Latin America. In the early 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt had an aggressive approach, deputizing the US to not only combat European meddling in the region but also to police the internal affairs of Latin American countries. 25 years later, FDR was less aggressive, seeking to repair relations and implement a more collaborative approach.

After World War II, treaties were signed and organizations were created to formalize collaboration. Still, US presidents continued to invoke the Monroe Doctrine throughout the Cold War Era: first by JFK during the

Cuban Missile Crisis and later by Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

As the Cold War ended, the US vastly reduced its military presence in Latin America—but American economic and political influence over the Western Hemisphere remained intact.

How has the Monroe Doctrine shaped the dynamics of the world today?