

“The era when the United States could treat Latin America and the Caribbean as its backyard . . . is receding ever faster into history.”

Requiem for the Monroe Doctrine

DANIEL P. ERIKSON

The United States has long been suspicious of foreign powers that meddled in the Western Hemisphere. In recent years, Latin America’s increasingly diverse international relations have stoked such fears anew, as the region has drawn closer to Washington’s global rivals at a moment when US influence is facing unprecedented challenges. The alliance forged between Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is only the most dramatic example of a new trend that has seen Latin America and the Caribbean seek greater independence from the United States while deepening ties with emerging powers outside the hemisphere such as China, India, and Russia.

Many US policy makers understand intellectually that this increasingly complex mosaic of international relationships is the product of a more globalized world. Still, there is an underlying current of unease that American primacy in the Western Hemisphere is being threatened in subtle but important ways.

Of course, a precept of US foreign policy has long existed to address precisely this problem. It is called the Monroe Doctrine, after its creator President James Monroe, and it constitutes the iconic assertion of the United States’ right to oppose foreign powers in the Western Hemisphere. Like a cat with nine lives, the Monroe Doctrine has died many times since its first articulation in 1823, only to reemerge in slightly different forms at different historical moments. Most recently, the Monroe Doctrine was buried with full honors at the end of the cold war in the early 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union left the United States without an enemy to fight in Latin America.

But today the ghost of President Monroe, once a secretary of state himself, continues to stalk the

halls of Foggy Bottom, and suspicions of foreign encroachment in the hemisphere are growing. The realities that formed the basis for the Monroe Doctrine have fundamentally changed, yet the United States has been slow to adjust its attitudes accordingly. If Washington wishes to be effective in Latin America, it must resist the temptation to revive the Monroe Doctrine and instead work to restore trust in inter-American relations as the region adapts to an increasingly globalized era.

WHAT BUSH OWES MONROE

If President George W. Bush were given the opportunity to go back in time and meet any historical figure, it is a safe bet that Monroe would not top his list. At first blush, the fifth and forty-third presidents appear to have little in common. Elected in 1816, Monroe was by most accounts a detail-oriented pragmatist whose nonpartisan approach to politics ushered in the “Era of Good Feelings.” Bush, by contrast, preferred after his election in 2000 to focus on the big picture while leaving the details to others, and his early promises to be a “uniter not a divider” have fallen prey to rancorous partisanship and an era of unease.

Monroe did, however, lay claim to a “big picture” achievement that Bush could surely envy: creating a doctrine, bearing his name, that guided American foreign policy for well over a century. December 2, 2008, will mark the 185th anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine, the declaration by President Monroe that the United States would no longer tolerate the meddling of European powers in Latin America. Speaking in his seventh State of the Union address to Congress, Monroe declared that “the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers. . . . We should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any por-

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tion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.”

Monroe’s words outlived the parochial concerns of that era to provide the philosophical underpinning for US foreign policy for decades to come. During the cold war, the doctrine was reinterpreted to support American efforts to contain the expansion of Soviet influence into the hemisphere. In 1962, for example, President John F. Kennedy defended US actions against Cuba by saying that “the Monroe Doctrine means what it has meant since President Monroe and John Quincy Adams enunciated it, and that is that we would oppose a foreign power extending its power to the Western Hemisphere.” Ronald Reagan was perhaps the last US president whose policies toward Latin America so clearly reflected the Monroe Doctrine’s core principles, demonstrated especially by his administration’s support for the rebels fighting against the Sandinistas—and, by proxy, the Soviets—in Nicaragua.

Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill

Clinton worried less about containing foreign powers in Latin America, instead emphasizing democratic consolidation, the war on drugs, and economic integration as the cornerstones of US policy in the region. The elder Bush presided over the last unilateral US military action in the hemisphere: the 1989 invasion of Panama to arrest the military dictator Manuel A. Noriega, an American ally turned embarrassing drug trafficker. Five years later, when Clinton staked US credibility on a well-intentioned but ultimately ill-fated effort to restore democracy to Haiti, he first asked the United Nations for permission. The Monroe Doctrine remained an animating idea in the national security consciousness, but with the end of the cold war it no longer provided a serious source of foreign policy guidance.

When George W. Bush arrived at the White House, he found a hemisphere that was increasingly democratic and market-friendly, and the specter of rival powers competing in the Americas seemed a thing of the past. On September 11, 2001, when the United States was struck by terrorist attacks, Secretary of State Colin Powell was in Lima, Peru, signing the Inter-American Democratic Charter along with representatives of 33 other democratic countries in the hemisphere.

Within a year, President Bush had made a series of major foreign policy pronouncements that came to be known collectively as the Bush Doctrine. It essentially asserted an American right to exercise unilateral military power to respond preemptively to threats from wherever they might emanate. The administration’s ex post facto justifications for the Iraq War expanded the Bush Doctrine to incorporate sweeping calls to liberate the world from tyranny. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this all sounded hauntingly familiar.

It was not only the United States’ southern neighbors who perceived links between the Monroe Doctrine and the Bush Doctrine. When Washington unveiled its strategy for preemptive war in 2002, a number of analysts heard echoes of the earlier doctrine. A Canadian commentator, Paul Knox, wrote in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* that “One way to read the National Security Strategy that Mr. Bush

unveiled last week is as a Monroe Doctrine for the entire planet. It proposes explicitly to maintain overwhelming military supremacy around

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the globe.” The foreign affairs editor of London’s *The Observer* argued that the Bush Doctrine recalled the Monroe Doctrine, except that “in the following 180 years, America has moved from local to regional and then to global superpower. . . . The country that once challenged those renewing their imperial ambitions in its orbit is now declaring in this document the ‘manifest destiny’ of Americans to exercise good across the world.”

The comparisons of the two doctrines continued into Bush’s second term. Reflecting on the president’s second inaugural speech in January 2005, the author Tom Wolfe wrote an essay in *The New York Times* entitled “The Doctrine That Never Died.” Recalling how Theodore Roosevelt dragged the Monroe Doctrine into the twentieth century by proclaiming that the United States had a right to reshape hemispheric nations guilty of “chronic wrongdoing,” Wolfe argued that Bush had issued a new corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. “The notion of a sanctified Western Hemisphere depended upon its separation from the rest of the world by two vast oceans, making intrusions of any sort obvious,” he wrote. “By Mr. Bush’s Inauguration Day, the Hemi in Hemisphere had long since vanished, leaving the Monroe Doctrine with—what?—nothing but a single sphere . . . which is

to say, the entire world.” Bush, in short, wanted to update the Monroe Doctrine for the twenty-first century by extending its messianic mission around the globe.

Alas, it was not to be. The flame of the Bush Doctrine burned brightly for a few years, but its failures have extinguished much of its light. The US military experience in Iraq will likely dampen any enthusiasm for future preemptive wars, and the prospects for the United States’ provoking another global wave of democratization look increasingly dim. Despite its sweeping rhetoric against tyranny, the Bush administration has failed to advance liberty in countries like Myanmar, Belarus, Pakistan, and Russia.

Meanwhile, if the Bush Doctrine was intended to raise the Monroe Doctrine to a higher plane, the result has been to crush the original doctrine’s foundations. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the practical effects of the Bush Doctrine, far from revitalizing US sway in the region, have instead distracted the United States from hemispheric affairs, alienated its closest neighbors, and left Washington ill-equipped to prevent rivals from gaining a foothold in its sphere of influence. And this has occurred at a moment when Latin America is more independent and self-assured, and when the heavyweights of the developing world are seeking to cultivate alliances with countries in the region.

THE NEW ASSERTIVENESS

The 9-11 attacks and their aftermath caused the Bush administration largely to neglect Latin America, but Washington’s absence did not make the region’s heart grow fonder. Instead, during the past six years virtually every country in Latin America and the Caribbean has responded by forging its own path, showing ever less regard for US preferences. The new geopolitical environment in fact accelerated what had been a gradual trend under way in the region. This movement toward greater political independence has occurred quickly in many of the nations of South America, and more slowly in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, but all countries in the region have come to grips with the post-9-11 reality.

Of course, the United States remains the dominant economic partner and an important political reference for all of Latin America and the Carib-

bean. Trade between the United States and the region totaled more than \$550 billion in 2006, and the more than 20 million Latino immigrants who live in the United States send back another \$45 billion in remittances annually. This process of integration makes it all the more ironic that Washington’s views now carry far less weight in the region than at any other point in recent memory.

The decline of US influence in Latin America is driven by a confluence of positive and negative trends. The most favorable change is that the Western Hemisphere has arrived at a consensus on democratic norms, a consensus ratified by the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Setting aside the troubling case of Cuba, the spread of democracy has increased the political legitimacy of governments throughout the hemisphere—including those that dislike the United States. Washington’s

foes, such as Venezuela’s Chávez and Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega, now have a level of democratic legitimacy that did not exist during the region’s long periods of military dictatorship. The United States

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helped democracy take root in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s, but this has created new limits on Washington’s ability to intervene in these countries to pursue its own interests.

Since his election in 1998, Chávez has been the leader who poses the most severe test for US power in the region. Chávez rejects the United States’ historical leadership role (which he terms “imperialism”) and has strived to create a network of alliances and institutions independent of US influence. He wants to replace the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the region with the Latin America–dominated Banco del Sur, and exchange the Free Trade Area of the Americas for a social trade pact known as the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America. He has funded a new Spanish-language news station, Telesur, as an alternative to American media sources. Chávez has won a limited following for these ideas in the region, and despite his recent defeat in a constitutional referendum, he still benefits from high oil prices and has five years left in his presidential term.

In an interview with *Time* magazine shortly after he called President Bush “the devil” in a speech before the United Nations in 2006, Chávez described his “Bolivarian Revolution” in the following way: “For two centuries in this hemisphere

we've experienced a confrontation between two theses: America's Monroe Doctrine, which says the US should exercise hegemony over all the other republics, and the doctrine of Simón Bolívar, which envisioned a great South American republic as a counterbalance. Bush has spread the Monroe thesis globally, to make the US the police of the world—if you're not with us, he says, you're against us. We're simply doing the same now with the Bolívar thesis, a doctrine of more equality and autonomy among nations, more equilibrium of power.”

Brazil, with the world's fifth-largest population and tenth-largest economy, is similarly interested in a realignment of global power that recognizes its own political and economic heft. Unlike Venezuela, however, Brazil has sought to avoid conflict and instead strengthen its global influence in tandem with its ties to the United States. Indeed, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva enjoys one of the warmest relationships with President Bush of any Latin American leader, and their two nations have agreed to cooperate on a new ethanol initiative.

Still, Brazilian opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas helped cause its demise in 2005. And the country, as a leader of the G-20 group of developing countries, which also includes China, India, and South Africa, has clashed with the United States in world trade talks. Brazil's aggressive bid to win a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has led Lula on an international tour to drum up support for his country's global aspirations. Such diplomacy has included special outreach to the Middle East: Brazil hosted the first-ever summit between South American and Arab countries in 2005—and pointedly left Washington off the invitation list.

This independent streak is increasingly apparent throughout South America. Leaders in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina have all taken steps to distance themselves from the United States. Chile and Peru have signed free trade agreements with the United States but are increasingly focused on building trade relationships in the Asia-Pacific region. Colombia remains reliant on US military aid but its stalled free trade deal in Washington has clearly soured relations with the government of Alvaro Uribe. In Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, economic interconnectedness with the United States remains the dominant fact of politics in the region. Mexican President Felipe Calderón has pledged to work closely with the United States to solve the problem of drug-related insecurity along the border, and El Salvador maintains troops

in Iraq. Still, all Latin American countries are experiencing a diversification of political relationships, and the Caribbean is looking increasingly to China and Venezuela as key partners.

The result is that the United States can no longer dictate decisions that were once considered solely in its purview. In the 2005 election for the secretary general of the Organization of American States, the region rebuffed Washington's preferred candidates from El Salvador and Mexico, forcing it to accept Chilean socialist José Miguel Insulza as the consensus candidate. In 2006, US officials disapproved of awarding a first-round election victory to presidential candidate René Préval in Haiti when his vote tally fell just short of the 50 percent margin required for outright victory. But the Bush administration's reluctance to join the UN mission in Haiti left Latin American nations like Brazil, Argentina, and Chile in the driver's seat, and they brushed aside US concerns to deliver a quick victory to Préval. Even in Cuba, the United States vowed to block Fidel Castro's succession strategy, only to watch from the sidelines as Raúl Castro consolidated his power and renewed the island's relations with Europe, Latin America, and Asia. The power dynamic in the Western Hemisphere has tilted away from the United States, but Washington has been reluctant to adapt its playbook accordingly.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years have sought to capitalize on booming commodity prices in global markets to diversify their trade ties beyond the United States, especially with Europe and Asia. In 2006, total trade between the European Union and Latin America reached a record \$177 billion. Although this equals only one-third of US–Latin American trade, the EU's share is growing at a fast pace, led by Germany, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands. Currently, the EU's top trading partners in the region are Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela. The union is also negotiating a trade agreement with the Central American countries, and is in preliminary discussions with the Andean Community and the South American Common Market (Mercosur). In December, Mercosur signed a free trade agreement with Israel, its first with any country outside the Western Hemisphere, and Brazil's foreign minister declared that the trade bloc “is open to the world.”

In Asia, Japan remains one of Latin America's biggest investors and trading partners. Japanese officials, worried that trade growth is languishing,

are focusing on reactivating the economic relationship with the region. China is already having a big impact on Latin American economies. India, also scouring the region for investments in the oil sector, is the next giant on the horizon.

Even Russia is renewing ties with Latin America that had been virtually dormant since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In June 2004, Vladimir Putin made the first-ever visit to Mexico by a Russian president for talks focusing on military sales. Later that year he attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Chile, and then visited Brazil to initiate cooperation in satellite technology and oil exploration. In 2007, the Russian leader attended an international Olympics meeting in Guatemala and then promised to cooperate with that country on electricity production, prompting then-President Oscar Berger to describe Putin as “one of the brightest leaders in today’s world.”

Russian arms sales to the region amounted to only \$300 million for the period from 1998 to 2001, but they have since escalated dramatically. In 2006, Russia’s military sales to Venezuela alone totaled \$3 billion (including 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles), and hundreds of millions more in weapons were sold to other Latin American countries. If the pace of military trade continues, Russia’s arms sales to Latin America will soon surpass the records set by the Soviet Union.

But perhaps no country has flummoxed US policy makers as much as the People’s Republic of China, which has established itself as the new power to be reckoned with in the Western Hemisphere.

CHINA’S INROADS

China’s emerging role in Latin America and the Caribbean perfectly encapsulates the new challenge facing US policy makers in the hemisphere as they wrestle with the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine. On one hand, China is viewed as a growing rival that is seeking to achieve economic and military parity with the United States and must therefore be treated with caution. On the other hand, the United States and China have deep economic ties, including one of the largest trade relationships in the world, and the two countries cooperate on a wide range of issues.

In recent years, China has charged into South American commodity markets to snap up goods

including oil, agricultural products, and heavy metals, and has used promises of trade and aid to win over most of Taiwan’s remaining allies in the region. Just a decade ago, China was viewed as a peripheral actor in the Western Hemisphere. Today, though far from being a dominant player, China is a top-five trading partner of most Latin American countries, and has become a relevant actor in hemispheric affairs.

In 2001, Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s landmark visit to the region was followed by a wave of exchanges among Chinese and Latin American senior officials and business leaders to discuss political, economic, and military concerns. Jiang’s successor, Hu Jintao, traveled to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Cuba in 2004 and visited Mexico in 2005. The presidents of all of these countries (and several others) have subsequently paid reciprocal

visits to China. Growing political engagement has accompanied the skyrocketing volume of trade between China and the region, which totaled an estimated \$80 billion in

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2007. China has also become a strong competitor with the United States in sales of manufactured goods, making deep inroads into markets in Mexico and Central America and, more recently, in Brazil and Argentina.

Rising Chinese influence in Latin America has prompted some US officials and members of Congress to view China as the most serious challenge to US economic and security interests in the region since the end of the cold war. American policy makers cite concerns about stable access to the Panama Canal, the deployment of Chinese peacekeepers in Haiti, China’s support for Castro, and Beijing’s growing claims to Venezuelan oil. In 2004, when President Hu’s three-week tour through Latin America sparked feverish speculation about how this new relationship would affect US interests, a rash of publications warned of the “China threat” on America’s southern flank.

There is little question that Chinese competition for Latin America’s energy resources has created a new and uncertain dynamic for US policy makers. Even the most benign interpretation of Chinese penetration into Latin American markets—that China is growing and needs resources, while the region is searching for new customers—implies a potential loss for US business interests. Some

analysts in 2004 ominously warned of an emerging anti-American alliance, led by China and Venezuela, that might include other energy-exporting nations in Latin America and elsewhere. Others argued that China's new role could benefit both Latin America and the United States by fueling the region's economic growth.

Seeking to defuse the growing wariness about Chinese intentions in Latin America, the United States has shifted course to engage China from a more cooperative stance. In 2004, China became an observer at the Organization of American States, and discussions are ongoing about bringing the country into the Inter-American Development Bank. In the spring of 2006, US Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon traveled to Beijing for a first round of dialogue with Chinese officials on Latin American affairs, and follow-up talks were held in Washington in November 2007. The United States even persuaded China to back a one-year extension of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti (which includes 125 Chinese riot police), despite the fact that Haiti's recognition of Taiwan remains a sore spot for Beijing.

Only time will tell if the State Department's vision of converting China from a potential threat into a responsible stakeholder in Latin America will be achieved. Still, the new emphasis on diplomacy offers a novel strategy for dealing with rival powers in the US sphere of influence, replacing containment with mechanisms for cooperation. Whether this would leave Monroe nodding his approval or spinning in his grave is anyone's guess.

MULLAHS IN THE BACKYARD

Washington's China fever had barely dissipated when a new and more ominous specter raised its head in Latin America—in the form of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In September 2007, the Bush administration's efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions had brought the two countries to the brink of confrontation at the United Nations. By that time, Iran had already succeeded in cultivating a range of new allies in Latin America, most prominently Chávez. President Ahmadinejad encountered a hostile reception in New York during his September trip to speak at the UN, but afterwards he flew directly to Caracas, where Chávez warmly greeted him.

The Venezuelan president praised Ahmadinejad's Columbia University speech, which had followed a harshly critical introduction by the university's president. "An imperial spokesman tried to disre-

spect you, calling you a cruel little tyrant," Chávez told him. "You responded with the greatness of a revolutionary." From Venezuela, Ahmadinejad traveled to Bolivia. That country's president, Evo Morales, had just days earlier appeared on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," during which he said, "Please don't consider me part of the 'axis of evil.'" But back in Bolivia, Morales met with Ahmadinejad for five hours, established diplomatic relations between the two countries, and signed an economic cooperation agreement worth \$1 billion over five years.

Ahmadinejad's most recent trip to Latin America highlighted the Iranian government's ambitious diplomatic efforts to create new allies in the traditional US sphere of influence. Chávez has emerged as the godfather and relationship manager, striving to draw in other allies such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. Iran's courtship is moving quickly. In September 2006, Ahmadinejad attended the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Havana and met with Chávez in Caracas. In January 2007, the Iranian president was treated as an honored guest in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. Chávez called him a "hero of the struggle against American imperialism." Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega met with him to discuss "common interests, common enemies, and common goals." Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa exchanged warm words with Ahmadinejad as well.

Chávez and Ahmadinejad see political benefits to their alliance, and they also claim economic benefits. The two countries have signed 180 agreements since 2001, in areas such as gas and oil exploration and petrochemical and agricultural production. Officials claim the agreements are worth \$20 billion, though bilateral trade has been less than \$20 million annually. Chávez recently granted Iran observer status in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, his leftist trade-pact group. Iran and Venezuela have also announced a \$2 billion development fund for "anti-imperialist" countries, though the money has been predictably slow to materialize. And Tehran has promised to finance a \$350 million deep-water port and build 10,000 houses in poverty-stricken Nicaragua, whose president has defended Iran's nuclear program at the UN.

To be sure, Ahmadinejad remains an unwelcome figure in other parts of Latin America—including Argentina, where Iran was allegedly involved in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires; and in Brazil, where Lula has

repeatedly rebuffed meeting requests. Even so, the United States has been at a loss about how to counter Iran's growing influence in the region, or even how to fully calculate its impact on US interests.

Clearly, Iran is neither a benign force in world affairs nor a major power capable of posing a threat on par with the Soviet Union during the cold war. Iran's interest in Latin America could just be an example of normal state-to-state diplomacy or an attempt to lay the foundation for more sinister plans. But the fact that it is occurring at all unearths latent fears associated with the Monroe Doctrine. It also underlines that the United States has limited options in its efforts to counteract foreign powers in the Western Hemisphere, with intelligence collection and diplomacy taking precedence over unilateral military action. Meanwhile, as a network of ties emerges between Iran and Latin America, Chávez is vowing to "unite the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean."

IS THERE A DOCTRINE IN THE HOUSE?

President Bush entered office vowing to strengthen and intensify US relations with Latin America. His administration instead has presided over an era that paradoxically has seen expanded economic ties between the United States and Latin America while leaving Washington's political influence in the hemisphere greatly reduced. Still, the United States has much to be happy about in Latin America. To some degree, US policy has been a victim of its own success in ensuring that democratic norms have taken hold throughout the region. Moreover, Latin American peoples have largely elected leaders whose respect for democracy and commitment to market economics are in sync with the United States.

Frictions on trade policy and immigration continue to plague US relations with the two largest countries in the region—Brazil and Mexico—but this has not prevented constructive ties on a wide range of issues. US relations with the Caribbean and much of Central and South America remain positive on balance. Venezuela's Chávez will continue to be a thorn in the side of the United States for the foreseeable future, but his "Bolivarian Revolution" shows signs of reaching its natural limits.

Latin America's increasing connectedness with the rest of the world does not inherently undermine US interests, but Washington will continue to find these links disturbing in certain cases. Despite the current calm, China's role in the Western Hemisphere will become increasingly

controversial as that country evolves into a major world power in the coming decades. Iran is a new factor to contend with, and broader links between Latin America and the Middle East are certain to grow. Putin's Russia is selling billions of dollars' worth of weapons in the region, and other non-traditional actors likely will emerge in the years to come. Even the "hermit kingdom" of North Korea has opened talks with the Dominican Republic and Guatemala.

What does all this mean for President Monroe's doctrine? The Bush Doctrine may share an intellectual heritage with the Monroe Doctrine, but the practical implementation of Bush's foreign policy has created a climate that has eviscerated what was left of the Monroe Doctrine's relevance in Latin America. The United States has been distracted at a time when rivals like China, Iran, and Russia are newly emboldened to seek alliances in the region. Economic globalization in any event has assured Latin America's increasing connectivity to nations across the oceans, essentially rendering obsolete Monroe's vision of a hemisphere under US tutelage. In 2008, the Monroe Doctrine has become the phantom limb of America's posture in the hemisphere: US policy makers still occasionally feel its tingle, but no weight can be put on it.

The major candidates for the American presidency have all vowed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and specificity, to reverse the perception of US neglect and reenergize relationships with Latin America and the Caribbean. The change in presidential administrations will undoubtedly introduce fresh thinking that will be helpful to US-Latin American relations, whoever wins the White House. President Bush's successor, however, will find a region that has changed dramatically since the 1990s, in ways both good and bad, and that is increasingly reluctant to resume its dependence on US leadership.

Given all the pressing challenges elsewhere in the world that will confront the next administration, prospects for developing a major new doctrine to replace the Monroe Doctrine as a guide for US policy in the hemisphere seem remote at best. With serious engagement and intelligent policy choices, the next US president will still have the opportunity to help guide the hemispheric community of nations. But the era that began 185 years ago with the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine—the era when the United States could treat Latin America and the Caribbean as its backyard—is receding ever faster into history. ■