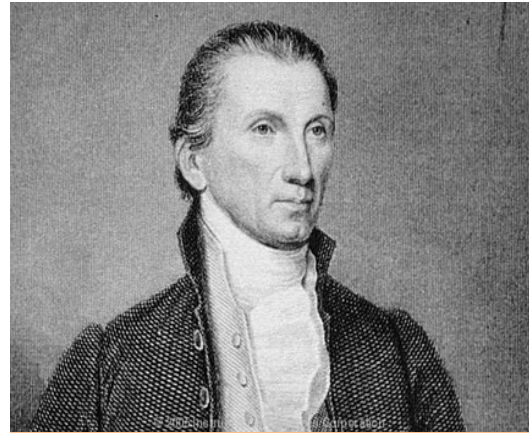


Each year, the president of the United States delivers to Congress a speech called the State of the Union address. The president's tone and theme vary according to the state of domestic and foreign affairs. There have been numerous unforgettable presidential speeches presented to Congress. Many believe President James Monroe's 1823 State of the Union was one of the greatest declarations of United States foreign policy. Or was it? Part of his address was later termed the Monroe Doctrine. In the doctrine, or policy, Monroe declared the separation between the Western Hemisphere and Europe. At that time, the doctrine was not taken seriously. A closer look reveals two complex sides of this policy.

### What Was the Monroe Doctrine?

On December 2, 1823, President Monroe delivered his State of the Union address to Congress. Part of Monroe's speech promoted camaraderie, or trust and friendship, in the Western Hemisphere. Monroe declared any aggression toward a Western Hemisphere nation as aggression toward the United States itself. This portion of President Monroe's address is included in the Monroe Doctrine.

Another part of the doctrine stated that the United States would not stand for European colonization of the Americas. He asserted that Europe could not interfere with former Spanish colonies in the Americas. These former colonies included Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. Monroe acknowledged that, in return, the United States would leave existing European colonies alone. Also, the United States would not interfere in conflicts among European nations. Monroe stated, "Our policy in regard to Europe. . . remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers. . . ."



President James Monroe issued the Monroe Doctrine during his State of the Union address in 1823.

### Advantages

Many praised the Monroe Doctrine. The policy stood up to powerful European nations. European nations had a history of taking over less-developed countries. The newly independent former colonies were vulnerable. Countries such as Colombia had battled Spain for years before gaining independence. News of the Monroe Doctrine gave hope to South American colonies such as Peru, which was still fighting for freedom. These countries sought strength in their newfound

friendship with the United States. Support from the United States meant a better chance to gain or maintain independence. Hope came in the form of one former colony protecting another. With help from the United States, South America could continue toward freedom.

The second part of the doctrine said that the United States would stay out of European activities. This included actions in established colonies. It provided assurance to Europe that as long as the Americas were not threatened, the United States would not threaten European countries. In other words, the United States promised to stay out of Europe's business as long as Europe stayed out of U.S. business.

The Monroe Doctrine demonstrated growing feelings of unity and pride. The president's announcement reaffirmed America as a strong nation—the United States was capable of supporting other struggling countries. The doctrine strengthened an American national identity. It showed the world that the United States was gaining and asserting power.

### Disadvantages

However, sometimes nationalism—strong sense of national pride—can have negative consequences. A nation that asserts too much power can be seen as a bully. Many saw Monroe's policy as nationalistic. Some citizens opposed the Monroe Doctrine's implied commitment to go to war if Europe interfered in the Western Hemisphere. They wanted the United States to remain isolated. Isolationism refers to staying out of other nations' affairs. Americans remembered President Washington's advice not to create permanent alliances and to keep out of international affairs.



An artist's interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine depicts Uncle Sam as a soldier protecting the United States against interference from European nations.

Another worrisome aspect of the Monroe Doctrine was what

it did not say. President Monroe did not state how the United States would enforce threats toward Europe. Monroe did not command a powerful navy like Great Britain. The United States did not have a large army like Spain. There was not money to fund acts of military intervention.

The doctrine's vague language opened doors for creative interpretation. Future presidents used the doctrine to their advantage. In 1843, the United States tried to annex, or obtain, Texas from Mexico. When the United States faced British and French resistance, President James Polk used the Monroe Doctrine. He cited the Monroe Doctrine as a reason why European countries should not get involved in the Western Hemisphere. Both France and Britain were opposed to the United States growing larger and expanding westward. But by Polk's logic, France and Britain should have no involvement in the annexation of any U.S. states. Polk succeeded. Soon, Texas became the 28th state of the union.

In 1845, President Polk again used the doctrine. Polk claimed that British presence in the California territory was a threat to the United States. He pushed the British out of California, and soon California became the 31st state. Using the Monroe Doctrine, Polk expanded the nation with the addition of two states. However, was expansion the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine? Many argue that it was not.

Was the Monroe Doctrine self-serving and aggressive? Or was it tough, but fair? Even today, the doctrine is worth analyzing because it played an important role in United States history. No matter how one chooses to view the Monroe Doctrine, it will continue to be an important policy that influenced North and South American history.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** To which hemisphere's countries did the Monroe Doctrine assure protection from European colonization?
  - A.** Northern Hemisphere
  - B.** Southern Hemisphere
  - C.** Western Hemisphere
  - D.** Eastern Hemisphere
  
- 2.** What feeling did the Monroe Doctrine encourage among United States citizens?
  - A.** colonialism
  - B.** interventionism
  - C.** socialism
  - D.** nationalism
  
- 3.** In what ways did the Monroe Doctrine's vague language cause problems?
  - A.** It did not say how threats would be enforced or when force could *not* be used.
  - B.** It allowed for European countries to colonize in the west, but not other countries.
  - C.** It only spoke of protecting former Spanish colonies but not any other countries.
  - D.** It provided no evidence of current European colonization threats.
  
- 4.** As the passage explains, there are two sides to the Monroe Doctrine. Imagine you were a member of President Monroe's cabinet. Prior to issuing the doctrine, he presented his ideas to the cabinet for a vote. Would you have voted for or against the Monroe Doctrine? Provide details from the passage to support your answer.