

THE ALLEGED DEATH OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE:

PANAMA AS A CASE STUDY, 1977-1999

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INTRODUCTION

On 14 December 1999, in the shadow of the Miraflores locks, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso presided over a crowded ceremony symbolizing the transfer of canal responsibility to the Panamanian government. The U.S. Senate had made the transfer possible twenty-one years earlier, after ratifying the Panama Canal treaties with just one vote to spare. The narrow margin of ratification indicated measurable opposition. In 1977, more Americans opposed the treaty than favored it, and for those opposed to the treaty, the most popular reason was that the U.S. had built and paid for the canal.¹ Statistics supporting the popular sentiment fueled the ratification debate. During the construction of the canal from 1904 to 1914, the U.S. spent \$352 million and 5,609 lives, or more than \$7 million and 112 lives for every mile.² For those opposed to “surrendering the canal,” these facts justified the popular claim, “We bought it. We built it. It's ours and we are going to keep it.”³

What made Panama different in U.S. eyes from any other Latin American nation was the fact that the U.S. owned the Canal Zone, a ten-mile wide strip of land in the middle of Panama. After the Senate ratified the treaties in 1978, the gradual realization

¹“International: Carter Thesis on Canal Treaties Basically Right: Better Informed More Likely to Favor Ratification,” *The Gallup Poll Index*, December, 1977, no. 149, p. 8.

²David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1904* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977): 610. The total cost including French efforts exceeds \$639 million and 25,000 lives, most of which were Panamanian.

³Presidential candidate Ronald W. Reagan, quoted in Adam Clymer, “Mirror on the Past: Canal's Fate Reflects Shift by U.S.,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1999, sec. A, p. 14.

that the U.S. was transferring canal ownership demanded a major shift in the U.S. policy debate with regard to Panama. Those who favored a dominant U.S. relationship with Panama could no longer rely on the constant presence of U.S. troops or the concept of U.S. sovereign soil to preserve a powerful U.S. influence. Instead, proponents who favored U.S. dominion in the isthmus discarded notions of U.S. territorial ownership and invoked Monroe Doctrine principles to guide the new U.S. relationship with Panama. In the short period since 1977, reference to the doctrine's principles as a standard for U.S. policy in Panama has noticeably increased. Whether explaining military intervention in 1989 or justifying panicked calls to rescind the treaties in 1999, Monroe Doctrine principles rose to the forefront of American political rhetoric toward Panama.

This essay explains how the Monroe Doctrine influenced American rhetoric and foreign policy toward Panama from 1977-1999. A sense of territorial sovereignty initially shaped the discourse among policymakers and the public during the canal treaties debate. The discussion changed after treaty ratification, especially as the U.S. struggled to define its relationship with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega. In December 1989, President George Bush and his administration used Monroe Doctrine rhetoric to justify Operation Just Cause and Noriega's arrest. By 1999, many members of Congress and the public regularly and directly cited Monroe Doctrine principles to argue against the final transfer of canal responsibility to the Panamanians. This gradual shift of guiding principles in the U.S.-Panama relationship sheds light on the larger

significance of this study: the subtle but regular influence of the Monroe Doctrine in American foreign policy.

For nearly a century, scholars have declared the Monroe Doctrine obsolete, basing their contentions on previous violations of the doctrine, a perceived incompatibility of doctrine principles to contemporary affairs, or the notion that the doctrine is irrelevant without a threatening foreign system in the hemisphere. Many academics interpret U.S. involvement in World War I and World War II as a violation of the doctrine's abstention principle, or the policy to avoid affairs internal to Europe. The U.S. dishonored its pledge to "abstain from interference in the 'wars of the European Powers,'" explained Professor Arthur Schlesinger, and because "[t]he U.S. has not kept its side of the pledge since 1917, . . . the case can be made that the Monroe Doctrine is therefore null and void."⁴ Other scholars have called the doctrine an historical anachronism, inapplicable to the changing global-political conditions that followed President James Monroe's era. In his 1913 book, *The Monroe Doctrine an Obsolete Shibboleth*, Professor and Senator Hiram Bingham proposed a formal renunciation of the doctrine in an attempt to revise the U.S. relationship with Latin

⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Monroe Doctrine Fails Again," *Wall Street Journal*, 21 April 1988, p. 30. Schlesinger argued against U.S. unilateral coercive action in Central America under the Ronald Reagan Administration. See also Michael Davis, "We Killed the Monroe Doctrine in 1898," *New York Times*, 31 July 1983, sec 4, p. 18, where Davis argued that the U.S. "killed the Monroe Doctrine" as early as 1898 during the Spanish American War. "It belongs on the historical shelf," Davis said of the doctrine, "with Manifest Destiny and other expressions of American adolescence." See also Lynn Hudson Parsons, "The Monroe Doctrine's Second Edge," *New York Times*, 23 March 1982, sec A, p. 26, where the history professor asserted the doctrine's contradictory nature. "Americans can no longer use the Monroe Doctrine to shield the New World from the interest of the Old," said Parsons, "while at the same time claiming the right to maintain an armed presence in such farflung [*sic*] places as West Germany and South Korea."

America.⁵ In 1966, Professor Larman C. Wilson explained that “the changing nature of power and international relations has left the Monroe Doctrine behind and it has become outmoded.”⁶ More recently, Professor Gaddis Smith asserted that the fall of the Soviet Union rendered the doctrine irrelevant without the threat of spreading communism in the Western Hemisphere. “The end of the Cold War marked the end of the Monroe Doctrine,” said Smith, declaring that “in the early 1990s the doctrine passed into history.”⁷ Popular academic interpretations of the Monroe Doctrine have thus repeatedly labeled the doctrine obsolete. However, successive claims of the doctrine’s demise reveal an illogical pattern: any subsequent assertion of the doctrine’s death naturally implies that the previous claim was inaccurate. These recurring claims of doctrine obsolescence are also vulnerable to contradictory evidence. Such evidence constitutes the focus of this paper and suggests that the Monroe Doctrine still influenced American foreign policy and public rhetoric as recently as the last quarter-century, especially in the case of the changing U.S.-Panama relationship.

⁵Hiram Bingham, *Monroe Doctrine an Obsolete Shibboleth* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1913). Bingham’s title is more emphatic than his argument; he called for a new U.S.-Latin American alliance to succeed the doctrine and the interventionist emphasis of President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1904 corollary.

⁶Larman C. Wilson, “The Monroe Doctrine, Cold War Anachronism: Cuba and the Dominican Republic,” *Journal of Politics*, vol. 28, iss. 2 (May 1966): 346. See also Professor Gaston Nerval’s *Autopsy of the Monroe Doctrine. The Strange Story of Inter-American Relations* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934). Nerval, citing the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the League of Nations, claimed that the doctrine, “is incompatible with the new, peaceful world order.” For a more recent account, see Professor Jerome Slater’s “Dominos in Central America: Will They Fall? Does It Matter?” *International Security* vol. 12, iss. 2 (Autumn 1987): 105-134. Slater argued that the notion of a hemispheric commitment to democracy, “is all but dead, victim of the facts – namely the broad political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and geographical *differences* between the United States and Latin America” (p. 119). Slater also questioned the strategic interests of the U.S. in Latin America, calling “mere myth” any notion of U.S. vital interests in the region that might justify use of the Monroe Doctrine (p. 133).

⁷Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994): 7-8.

The scope of this study is limited to the U.S. relationship with Panama from 1977-1999. This period was unique because it represented a significant change in Panama's identity, from a U.S. dependency to a more sovereign nation, free from direct and regular U.S. oversight. Originally Colombia's northern province, Panama declared its independence in 1903 in a move that was, ironically, dependent upon U.S. support. Panamanian rebels were willing to trade canal rights for U.S. protection. Frustrated with the failure of previous canal negotiations with Colombia, President Theodore Roosevelt quickly positioned U.S. ships on both sides of the isthmus to protect the rebelling Panamanians. By November 1903, the U.S. and the new Republic of Panama agreed to the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, which granted the U.S. extremely favorable conditions, including ownership of a ten-mile wide Canal Zone, intervention rights, and low annual payments.⁸ For the next seventy-four years, Panamanians struggled to gain recognition of Panamanian sovereignty in the Canal Zone. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian President Omar Torrijos introduced the canal treaties, designed to end the last vestige of U.S. colonialism and return the Canal Zone to Panama. After the treaties, Panama's status changed from colonial subject to sovereign nation. This transition forced the U.S. to redefine its relationship with Panama. Before the canal

⁸For Panamanian independence background see J. Michael Hogan, *The Panama Canal in American Politics: Domestic Advocacy and the Evolution of Policy* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986): 34-35 and David W. Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine: a Reference Guide to U.S. Involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999): 299-302. The U.S. and Panama completed treaty negotiations on 18 November 1903. The U.S. President and Senate ratified the treaty in late February 1904. For the complete text of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, see Department of State, "Construction of a Ship Canal to Connect the Waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans: Convention between the United States of America and Panama," 18 November 1903, no. 431, *Treaty Series*. Note: The Government Printing Office printed the cited series in 1938. In 1950, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements* superseded the original *Treaty Series*. The treaty number remained unchanged.

treaties, the Monroe Doctrine was inapplicable in Panama – no foreign system would threaten Panama as long as the U.S. military occupied the Canal Zone. But after 1977, once the American perception of Canal Zone ownership dissipated, many Americans referenced the Monroe Doctrine as a diplomatic guide for U.S. policy toward Panama. The abrupt change in Panama's status helps reveal the significance of Panama as a case study in Monroe Doctrine history. Only after 1977 was the doctrine cited in the U.S. relationship with the new, sovereign Panama.

To capture the role of the Monroe Doctrine in the U.S. relationship with Panama, this essay will first examine each of the doctrine's five tenets: the four original tenets introduced by Monroe in 1823, and the fifth tenet, or Roosevelt Corollary, introduced in 1904. Understanding the intent of President James Monroe's cabinet in 1823 and of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 is critical to confidently recognizing the application of Monroe Doctrine principles in the late twentieth century. After explaining the origin of the doctrine and its corollary, this study will then explore the U.S. relationship with Panama from 1977 to 1999, focusing specifically on three critical periods: the Panama Canal treaties debate from 1977-1978; the U.S. invasion of Panama from December 1989 to the spring of 1990; and the final canal transfer of responsibility which culminated on 31 December 1999. Although the U.S. presence in Panama gradually decreased after 1977, the influence of the Monroe Doctrine in American rhetoric and foreign policy toward Panama noticeably increased.

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE

Critical to recognizing the Monroe Doctrine's influence in the U.S. – Panama relationship is an adequate knowledge of the original Monroe Doctrine and its subsequent transformation, which occurred with the Roosevelt Corollary. To capture the meaning of the original doctrine and the corollary, this chapter will examine the five Monroe Doctrine tenets: four from the original doctrine and the fifth from the Roosevelt Corollary.¹ An investigation of each tenet's origin will help explain the confusing contradictions inherent in contemporary interpretations of the Monroe Doctrine, which can emphasize abstention, as did President Monroe in 1823, or espouse intervention as did President Roosevelt in 1904. The original doctrine's four tenets contributed to its broad characterization as a self-preservation concept, best explained in terms of its original *task* and *purpose*: the Monroe cabinet felt obligated to keep European monarchies out of the Americas (*task*), in order to preserve the still-vulnerable

¹This essay's synopsis of Monroe Doctrine tenets is atypical. Scholarly summaries of the doctrine normally recognize three tenets: non-colonization, an explanation of the monarchy's presence in the hemisphere as a threat to U.S. peace and safety, and abstention from European affairs. See Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine*, 3-4, and Smith, *Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 3 or for a summary of the doctrine using six tenets, see Department of State, *Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine (17 December 1928)*, by J. Rueben Clark (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930): 4-5. This study recognizes five tenets: the three popular tenets associated with the original doctrine; a fourth tenet from the original doctrine that espoused abstention from Latin American affairs; and a fifth tenet, the Roosevelt Corollary, despite the fact that this fifth tenet and its intervention emphasis contradicted the fourth tenet. Although most scholars addressed the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary as separate entities, this essay considers the corollary part of the doctrine's evolution. The doctrine's typical association with intervention, especially in the twentieth century, illustrates this strong relationship between the corollary and the doctrine.

democracies in the Western hemisphere (*purpose*).² In 1904, President Roosevelt, intent on fulfilling the doctrine's original task and purpose, incorporated an *associated task*: intervention. His revision transformed the Monroe Doctrine from a defensive, self-preservation concept to an aggressive, imperialistic tool that decreed a U.S. sphere of influence throughout Latin America.³ By understanding the original meaning and intent of these principles as they evolved, one can more confidently identify their influence in American foreign policy late in the twentieth century.

²Historians have interpreted differently the origin and intent of the Monroe Doctrine. W.F. Craven asserted that the doctrine was unwarranted given the negligible, "prospect of intervention," on the part of Europe's Holy Alliance. See W. F. Craven, Jr. "The Risk of the Monroe Doctrine (1823-1824)," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 7, no. 3 (August 1927): 320. For an explanation of the Holy Alliance, see the *Historical Background* section on the following page. See also Theodore Andrea Cook, "The Original Intention of the 'Monroe Doctrine,'" *Fortnightly Review* LXIV, New Series (July to December 1898): 367 or Gale W. McGee, "The Monroe Doctrine, A Stopgap Measure," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (September 1951): 250, who concluded that the security of the nation prevailed over any desire to abstain from European politics. Professor Ernest R. May attributed the doctrine's origins to domestic politics in *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975): x. The most popular understanding suggested that Monroe and his cabinet developed the doctrine to separate the new world from the old world. See Smith, *Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 8, or Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: the American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997): 59. Professor Dexter Perkins emphasized the doctrine's self-preservation nature in Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Company, 1941. Reprint, 1955): 45.

³Academic interpretations of the Roosevelt Corollary have typically described it as a reversal of original doctrine intent, given the corollary's interventionist underpinning. By interpreting the new U.S. role in the Americas as one of an "international policeman," Roosevelt had assigned primacy to the second tenet of the original doctrine while simultaneously declaring obsolete the fourth tenet (emphasizing American abstention from Latin American affairs). Professor Walter McDougall explained that the Roosevelt Corollary declared the U.S. the, "gendarme and bill collector in the region," in McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 115.³ Roosevelt, "essentially turn[ed] the Monroe Doctrine on its head and sa[id] the Europeans should stay out, but the United States ha[d] the right, under the doctrine, to go in," said Professor Walter LaFeber in "The Roosevelt Corollary," Statement made for "The Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt," *The American Experience Online* (Boston, Mass.: WGBH Television, Public Broadcasting System, 1997) available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/nf/featured/tr/lafecoro.html>, accessed 7 October 2001.

Historical Background

Competing pressures from Europe helped shape the Monroe Doctrine. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Russia, Prussia, and Austria formed the Holy Alliance. In reaction to the revolution that brought Napoleon to power, the Holy Alliance aggressively defended its “legitimate” monarchies by suppressing popular or democratic rebellions.⁴ In the fall of 1823, under the auspices of the Holy Alliance, France quelled the Spanish rebellion and restored Ferdinand VII to power. Spain’s global influence was waning, and many Americans and Europeans believed that France would, subsequent to their success in Spain, move across the Atlantic to quell the rebelling Spanish colonies in the Americas. To President Monroe and his cabinet, the thought of an expanding European presence in the Americas threatened the existence of their still-vulnerable democratic form of government. Great Britain feared that if France and other European powers occupied the Spanish colonies, they might restrict trade access. British Prime Minister George Canning pressured the U.S. to issue a joint pledge prohibiting any European move into the Spanish colonies; almost simultaneously, Russia’s Csar Alexander I, the spokesman for the Holy Alliance,

⁴The Holy Alliance had established its reputation of suppressing rebellion to restore “legitimate” monarchical governments well before Monroe’s cabinet felt pressure to create the Monroe Doctrine. The Holy Alliance called the Congress of Laibach (present-day Ljubljana, Slovenia) from January to May 1821, at which the congress authorized the Austrians to quell the Neapolitan revolutions and a similar revolt in the Piedmont at Novara. More than a year later, the Holy Alliance called the Congress of Verona, at which France (not a member of the Holy Alliance) requested and received permission from her neighboring European countries to quell the rebellion in Spain and restore Ferdinand VII to power. See William P. Cresson, *The Holy Alliance: the European Background of the Monroe Doctrine* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1922) and Margery Weiner, *The Sovereign Remedy: Europe after Waterloo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973).

demanded that the U.S. remain neutral with regard to the question of the Spanish colonies. Answering both of these competing demands, President Monroe announced what became known as the Monroe Doctrine, a unilateral policy that preserved U.S. neutrality while simultaneously prohibiting European expansion in the Western hemisphere. Summaries of the Monroe Doctrine typically emphasize three principles: one, the U.S. considered the American continents closed to further European colonization; two, any European attempt to extend its system of government to the Americas represented a direct threat to the peace and safety of the U.S.; and three, the U.S. would avoid meddling in affairs internal to European countries. A fourth but often overlooked point declared the U.S. intent to avoid internal Latin American affairs. Referring to the countries struggling for independence from Spain, President Monroe explained that “[i]t is still the true policy of the United States to leave the parties to themselves, in the hope that other powers will pursue the same course.”⁵

President Roosevelt reversed the fourth principle in his 1904 “Roosevelt Corollary,” which declared the U.S. a hemispheric policeman. Revolution and the resultant instability in South American countries threatened European investments, and several European countries deployed naval forces to the Caribbean to protect or collect on their investments. Roosevelt was convinced that this type of European intervention would lead to territorial aggrandizement, and he felt obligated to announce a new policy

⁵For the complete text of the Monroe Doctrine, see J.D. Richardson, ed. *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789 – 1897*. James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, 2 December 1823 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Literature, 1911): 2: 778, 786-788. President Monroe did not list sequentially the Monroe Doctrine tenets in his address. See the non-colonization tenet on p. 778 and the other three tenets on pp. 786-788.

to satisfy the principles of the original doctrine. On 6 December 1904, Roosevelt explained to Congress that “the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”⁶ Although Roosevelt claimed that the Monroe Doctrine would never serve as a “cloak for territorial aggression,” he warned that “[t]here are, of course, limits to the wrongs which any self-respecting nation can endure. It is always possible that wrong actions toward this Nation, or toward citizens of this Nation, in some State unable to keep order among its own people, unable to secure justice from outsiders, and unwilling to do justice to those outsiders who treat it well, may result in our having to take action to protect our rights.”⁷ Roosevelt’s new philosophy superseded Monroe’s original intent to “leave the parties to themselves.” By 1904, Roosevelt had transformed the Monroe Doctrine into an interventionist policy, a diplomatic blunder that long afterward undermined the credibility of U.S. foreign policy in the hemisphere.⁸

⁶Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, Theodore Roosevelt, *Fourth Annual Message to Congress*, 6 December 1904, vol. 9: 7053.

⁷Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, Theodore Roosevelt, *Fifth Annual Message to Congress*, 5 December 1905, vol. 10: 7375-7376.

⁸Walter LaFeber suggested that Roosevelt’s new philosophy, having reversed the fourth point to the original doctrine, was actually a different doctrine altogether. LaFeber suggested calling the corollary the Roosevelt Doctrine. See “The Evolution of the Monroe Doctrine from Monroe to Reagan,” in *Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner (Corvallis, Ore.: Oregon State University Press, 1986): 130-132.

The Monroe Doctrine's Five Tenets

Tenet 1: Non-Colonization

[T]he American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers . . .⁹

President James Monroe

On 17 July 1823, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams introduced the first principle of what later became the Monroe Doctrine. Russia's minister to the United States, Major Baron de Tuyl van Serooskerken (hereafter Tuyl) pressed the Secretary of State for information concerning the "Northwest question," or the U.S. position concerning Russia's presence and influence on the west coast of North America. Tuyl knew that Adams had recently sent instructions regarding the issue to Henry Middleton, the U.S. minister in St. Petersburg. Tuyl hoped to get advance word of Middleton's instructions to Russia's Csar Alexander I. Instead of giving Tuyl "the general purport" of what the U.S. "intended to propose," Adams bluntly revealed that there was no negotiation strategy, but rather a declaration. "I told him specially," Adams recorded in his journal, "that we should contest the right of Russia to *any* territorial establishment on this continent, and that we should assume distinctly the principle that the American continents are no longer subjects for *any* new European colonial establishments." On

⁹Richardson, ed. *Compilation, James Monroe, Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, 2 December 1823, vol. 2: 778.

21 November 1823, amid cabinet deliberations, Adams again advocated the prohibition of European monarchies “to subjugate by force any part of these continents to their will.”¹⁰ Adams’s non-colonization principle was the first indication of an emerging unilateral policy designed to limit monarchical presence in the hemisphere, and Monroe fully incorporated the concept in his address to Congress.

Tenet 2: Any Monarchy in the Americas Threatens the Peace and Safety
of the United States.

We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those [European] powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.¹¹

President James Monroe

President Monroe bolstered the non-colonization clause with a subsequent tenet that implied a forcible U.S. reaction to any European attempt to develop monarchies in the Americas. The threat of a French or Holy Alliance advance across the Atlantic to restore the Spanish dominion worried most of Monroe’s cabinet. President Monroe, “alarmed” at the news of French success in Spain, “appeared entirely to despair at the cause of South America,” fearful that “the Holy Alliance [was] about to restore

¹⁰John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Charles F. Adams, vol. VI (New York: AMC Press, 1970): 163 (“I told him specially . . .”), 194 (“to subjugate by force . . .”).

¹¹Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, 2 December 1823, vol. 2: 787.

immediately all South America to Spain.” Secretary of War John C. Calhoun fostered the sense of panic, telling Monroe that “there was a general expectation that the Holy Alliance would apply force against South America.” He encouraged the President to “sound the alarm to the nation,” lest the Holy Alliance turn northward and invade the U.S. “to put down what had been called the first example of successful democratic rebellion.”¹² For Monroe and Calhoun, a joint pledge with Great Britain was a logical solution--the combined British-U.S. naval strength would serve as an effective deterrent to France and the Holy Alliance. However, Adams knew a joint pledge with Britain would fail to satisfy Csar Alexander’s expectations of U.S. neutrality. Given the competing pressures, Adams proposed a principle-based policy that emphasized the incompatibility of the European and American systems and advised Europe of the U.S. intent to keep monarchical influence out of the hemisphere by force, if required. This new principle, designed to answer both Prime Minister Canning’s overture and Csar Alexander’s demand, “was meant also to be . . . an exposition of the principles of this Government, and a brief development of its political system as henceforth to be maintained.” Adams explained the policy as “essentially republican . . . essentially pacific . . . but declaring that . . . we could not see with indifference any attempt by European powers by forcible interposition either to restore the Spanish dominion on the American Continents or to introduce monarchical principles into those countries . . .”¹³

¹²Adams, *Memoirs*, vol VI, 185 (description of Monroe), 195 (Calhoun, “sound the alarm . . .”), 206 (Calhoun, “to put down . . .”).

¹³*Ibid*, 199-200. Note the enduring character Adams assigns to the doctrine.

With this enduring tenet, the Monroe cabinet assigned the doctrine its self-preservation emphasis.

Tenet 3: Abstention from European Affairs

Our policy in regard to Europe . . . remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers.¹⁴

President James Monroe

Well before 1823, the difference between the two governing systems of Europe and America had inspired an American desire to avoid entanglements in European politics. The most famous enunciation of this principle was President George Washington's farewell address.¹⁵ Not only was the British joint pledge proposal inconsistent with Czar Alexander's neutrality demand, but it also conflicted with the U.S. policy of avoiding alliances with Europe. "If a case can exist in which a sound maxim may, & ought to be departed from, is not the present instance, precisely that case?" President Monroe asked Thomas Jefferson in October 1823.¹⁶ Both Jefferson

¹⁴Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, 2 December 1823, vol. 2: 787-8.

¹⁵Washington emphasized the importance of avoiding involvement in European politics, saying, "hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enemies." See Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 17 September 1796, vol 1: 214.

¹⁶James Monroe, Oakhill, VA., to Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, VA., 17 October 1823, in James Monroe, *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. 6, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1902): 323-324. Note: To avoid confusion, this and subsequent references to letters to and from Jefferson list "Charlottesville" as Jefferson's location. He was, of course, at Monticello, located within the Charlottesville limits.

and James Madison agreed that the joint pledge with Britain was a prudent alliance.¹⁷ Convinced that the Holy Alliance or France would move across the Atlantic, Calhoun also advocated the pledge with Britain. Concerned that an alliance with Great Britain would limit diplomatic flexibility, Adams argued that the U.S. should follow established precedent and renounce “all interference with the political affairs of Europe.” “The ground that I wish to take,” Adams told the cabinet, is “to disclaim all interference on our part with Europe; to make an American cause, and adhere inflexibly to that.”¹⁸ The cabinet soon recognized the dual advantage of the European abstention clause: first, it honored the primary precedent of American foreign policy; second, and more importantly, it provided an adequate response to Prime Minister Canning’s pledge proposal – a response that did not violate Csar Alexander’s neutrality demands.

¹⁷Jefferson told Monroe that he “could honestly . . . join in the declaration proposed.” See Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, VA., to James Monroe, Washington, D.C., 24 October 1823, in Monroe, *Writings*, vol. VI, 391-2. Madison told Monroe that, “with that co-operation [with Britain] we have nothing to fear from the rest of Europe,” in James Madison, Montpelier, VA., to James Monroe, Washington, D.C., 30 October 1823, in Monroe, *Writings*, vol. VI, 394-5.

¹⁸Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. VI, 194 (“All interference . . .”), 197-8 (“The ground . . .”).

Tenet 4: Abstention from Latin American Affairs

It is still the true policy of the United States to leave [Spain and] the [Latin American] parties to themselves in the hope that others will pursue the same course.¹⁹

President James Monroe

Like the previous abstention clause, the desire to abstain from the internal affairs in Latin America fully satisfied the American isolationist tendency and its traditional emphasis on self-determination. Speaking against the joint pledge proposal, Adams said of the South American colonies, “we have no right to dispose of them, either alone or in conjunction with other nations. Neither have other nations the right of disposing of them without their consent. This principle,” Adams asserted, “will give us a clue to answer all Mr. Canning’s questions with candor and confidence.”²⁰ President Monroe also recognized the importance of basing his policy on principle, especially in terms of U.S. credibility within the hemisphere. Explaining why he rejected Great Britain’s proposal, President Monroe reminded Thomas Jefferson that any joint pledge with Britain would have caused the U.S. to lose “credit . . . with our Southern neighbors.”²¹

¹⁹Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, 2 December 1823, vol. 2: 788.

²⁰Adams. *Memoirs*, vol. VI, 186.

²¹James Monroe, Washington, D.C., to Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, VA., -- December 1823, in Monroe, *Writings*, vol. VI. 343-345.

Less than a week before President Monroe's address to Congress, John Quincy Adams simplified the debate over the various principles by reminding the cabinet that "the whole of the papers now drawn up were but various parts of one system under consideration."²² In formulating the Monroe Doctrine, the cabinet had answered Jefferson's call for an American system "of her own."²³ Amid the competing demands of rival European forces, Monroe's cabinet had constructed a comprehensive American doctrine designed to preserve democracy. Relying on principles integral to their republican government, Monroe and his advisors created a policy that satisfied the neutrality demands of the Holy Alliance, answered Great Britain's call for access to the commercial ports of the Americas, and kept the monarchical forces of Europe from endangering the blossoming democracies in the Western Hemisphere.

²²Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. VI, 205.

²³Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville, VA., to James Monroe, Washington, D.C., 24 October 1823, in Monroe, *Writings*, vol. VI, 391-2.

Tenet 5 (Roosevelt Corollary): Intervention in Latin American Affairs

Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in the general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.²⁴

President Theodore Roosevelt

Before 1901, Theodore Roosevelt had summarized the Monroe Doctrine as a policy designed to keep European powers from gaining territory in the Americas. After he assumed the Presidency, his interpretation of the doctrine gradually changed to help justify intervention in Latin America. In an 1896 article entitled, “The Monroe Doctrine,” assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt simplified the doctrine as a policy, “forbidding European encroachment on American soil.”²⁵ As vice president, he used the same rhetoric in a speech to the 1901 Pan-American exposition. “I believe with all my heart in the Monroe Doctrine,” Roosevelt announced. “[N]o Old World power,” he said, “shall acquire new territory here on this western continent.”²⁶ After President William McKinley’s assassination, Roosevelt began to qualify his interpretation of the

²⁴Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, Theodore Roosevelt, *Fourth Annual Message to Congress*, 6 December 1904, vol. 9: 7053.

²⁵Theodore Roosevelt, “The Monroe Doctrine,” *The Bachelor of Arts*, March, 1896, in *American Ideals and Other Essays, Social and Political* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1897): 222.

²⁶Theodore Roosevelt, “The Two Americas,” speech at the Pan-American Exposition Formal Opening, 20 May 1901, in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1902): 234.

doctrine, suggesting that *American* powers could aggrandize territory in the Americas. “The Monroe Doctrine should be a cardinal feature of the foreign policy of all the nations of the two Americas,” Roosevelt told Congress in his first annual message, asserting that the doctrine “is a declaration that there must be no territorial aggrandizement by any non-American power at the expense of any American power on American soil.”²⁷ By 1904, President Roosevelt grew increasingly suspect of European efforts to forcibly collect debts and protect investments in the Caribbean, and he subsequently used the doctrine to justify U.S. intervention. “I entirely agree,” Roosevelt told Cornell University President Jacob G. Schurman, “that the Monroe Doctrine should not be pushed to such an extreme as to warrant our interference with the affairs of other nations, unless in defense of our own interests and honor.”²⁸ Roosevelt had coupled the national interest with the Monroe Doctrine precedent of keeping European influence out of the Americas. Convinced that he was merely fulfilling the original intent of the Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt rationalized U.S. intervention in Latin America as a timely extension of the doctrine’s second tenet.²⁹ In a 20 May 1904 letter to Secretary of State Elihu Root, Roosevelt described the standards he thought validated intervention. “All that we desire,” said Roosevelt, “is to

²⁷Richardson, ed., *Compilation*, Theodore Roosevelt, *First Annual Message to Congress*, 3 December 1901, vol. 9:6662-6663.

²⁸Theodore Roosevelt, Oyster Bay, New York, to Jacob Gould Schurman, Ithaca, New York, 25 July 1904, in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, vol. III “The Square Deal: 1901-1903,” (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951): 865.

²⁹For discussions of Roosevelt’s sense of obligation and his failure to recognize the contradictory nature of his proclamation with the abstention emphasis of the original doctrine, see John M. Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961): 127-129 and Nathan Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992): 393-395.

see all neighboring countries stable, orderly and prosperous. . . . Brutal wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society,” Roosevelt continued, “may finally require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the United States cannot ignore this duty.”³⁰

The five tenets of the Monroe Doctrine help describe the original intent of President Monroe’s cabinet and President Roosevelt. However, only two tenets have survived into contemporary times: the second tenet, that any foreign system (whether monarchy or communism) in the hemisphere represents a threat to U.S. peace and safety; and the fifth tenet, that any Latin American country’s inability to govern or maintain a stable environment correspondingly threatens the security of the United States, which might perceive an obligation to act as an international policeman. The U.S. relationship with Panama from 1977-1999 is unique because it exhibited both of these competing principles. The George H.W. Bush administration warranted Operation Just Cause using language remarkably similar to the Roosevelt Corollary, and fears of an increasing communist influence dominated the debate over the final handover of canal responsibility in 1999. In either case, Monroe Doctrine principles affected the U.S. relationship with Panama between 1977 and 1999.

³⁰Theodore Roosevelt, Washington, D.C., to Elihu Root, 20 May 1904, in Dewey W. Grantham, ed. *Theodore Roosevelt* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971): 72-73.

The Monroe Doctrine in Contemporary Language

Because this essay focuses on the more contemporary period from 1977-1999, it is important to understand what type of rhetoric indicates Monroe Doctrine principles today. Since President Roosevelt's shift in doctrinal emphasis from abstention to intervention, the term "Monroe Doctrine" has become somewhat taboo. To many Latin Americans, the term "Monroe Doctrine" implies unsolicited intervention, a concept at odds with America's regular emphasis on self-determination. To assuage Latin American concerns, U.S. diplomats and members of the public often avoided direct reference to the doctrine, and instead, relied on euphemisms to invoke principles from both the original doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary. The absence of the term "Monroe Doctrine" from policy explanations or public opinion does not necessarily indicate a lack of Monroe Doctrine principles. Phrases like "end colonialism," "illegal regime," "dangerous foreign system," "Panama's civil disorder," "illegitimate Panamanian government," or "threat to hemispheric democracy," all indicate principles inherent in either the original doctrine or the corollary. This understanding is critical to the contemporary study of a doctrine whose principles remain popular, but whose mention by name usually constitutes a diplomatic *faux pas*. However, the term "Monroe Doctrine" was not an issue in 1977 as the debate over the canal treaties heated up. The issue for treaty opponents was ownership.

CHAPTER 2

THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES

It is important to have more cooperation with Latin America. People in Latin America feel the canal is just another example of American colonialism.¹

Miami stock speculator, 1977 *Gallup Poll*

[W]e have billions of dollars invested in [the canal] and it has been our property for three-quarters of a century; second, Panama is a dictatorship with no freedom for our citizens. How could they control the canal better than we [could]?²

Washington, D.C. retiree, 1977 *Gallup Poll*

The debate over the canal treaties was a struggle between two simple but opposing views: what the U.S. “owed” Panama and what Panama “owed” the U.S.--an apparent battle between ideology and raw emotion. President Jimmy Carter struggled to ratify the treaties to restore a better relationship with Latin America and end the lasting evidence of U.S. colonialism. To opponents, the President was giving away something the U.S. owned: Americans had built and paid for the canal. Fighting to maintain the U.S. presence in Panama, treaty opponents focused their argument on ownership of the canal, the threat of communism upon U.S. withdrawal, and the strategic importance of the canal to U.S. military and economic security. Their case could have included the Monroe Doctrine as a standard to protect U.S. strategic

¹George Gallup, “Public Closely Divided on Canal Issue,” *Washington Post*, 4 September 1977, sec. A, p. 3.

²*Ibid.*

interests in the hemisphere and to keep communism at bay, but Monroe Doctrine principles were peculiarly absent from their pleas. Instead, those challenging the treaty relied on emotional arguments like Ronald Reagan's claim, "We bought it. We built it. It's ours and we are going to keep it."³

The Panama Canal treaties consisted of two separate treaties, the Panama Canal Treaty and the Neutrality Treaty, both ratified in close succession in the spring of 1978.⁴ The Panama Canal Treaty nullified all previous canal treaties and returned the Canal Zone to Panama as sovereign Panamanian territory. In accordance with treaty provisions, the U.S. gradually withdrew its military forces from Panama and transferred canal management and operations to the Panamanians. This gradual reduction of military forces and transfer of canal authority culminated at noon on 31 December 1999, when Panama assumed total control of the canal. The Neutrality Treaty guaranteed forever the canal's neutrality and included provisions for universal canal fees and priority to U.S. and Panamanian warships in times of conflict. The Neutrality Treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1978 also included a provision for unilateral U.S. intervention to maintain the canal's neutrality and operation. Interestingly, Panamanian President Omar Torrijos did not accept this provision when he signed the treaties with President Carter.⁵ Nonetheless, the treaties agreed to the eventual removal of all U.S.

³Clymer, "Mirror on the Past," sec. A, p. 14. See introduction, p. 1, footnote 3.

⁴Department of State, *Texts of Treaties Relating to the Panama Canal* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Media Services, 1977): passim.

⁵The provision, the DeConcini Reservation (named after Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ)), guaranteed U.S. unilateral action to preserve the canal's neutrality. The Senate approved the reservation before the two countries' Presidents signed the treaties, but Panama's Omar Torrijos offered three

military personnel and the transfer of responsibility for the canal's operations to the government of Panama.

The Canal Treaty Debate

From August 1977 to the final vote for ratification in April 1978, the treaty debate raged between the White House, Congress, and the American public. The debate, crucial to President Carter, represented the first test of his new foreign policy: a liberal internationalism intended to link American foreign policy with moral ideas traditionally associated with American character.⁶ "We are a strong nation, . . ." Carter told the country in his inaugural address, "based not merely on the size of an arsenal but on the nobility of ideas."⁷ Carter saw in the canal treaties an opportunity to "connect our actions overseas with our essential character as a nation," and rid the U.S. of any

counter-reservations that denied the U.S. unilateral intervention rights. After Torrijos presented his counter-reservations, he and President Carter signed the Panama Canal treaties. The Senate never approved Torrijos's counter-reservations. This discrepancy provided evidence for many treaty opponents that the Neutrality Treaty was invalid. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) drew attention to the issue just a week before Carter flew to Panama to sign the Treaty. Helms noted that the little-publicized Torrijos interpretation of the DeConcini reservation was "diametrically opposed to the Senate's intention." However, the Senate had months before concluded one of the longest debates in recent history, and sudden apathy toward the issue allowed Carter to sign the treaties, though different from those ratified by the Senate. See Karen De Young, "Panamanian Document Reinforces Last-Ditch Effort Against Treaties," *Washington Post*, 11 June 1978, sec. A, p. 34. Debate on the constitutionality and validity of the treaties continued throughout the canal transfer process. See John F. McManus, "The Panama Canal Treaty: Invalid," *Washington Post*, 30 December 1999, sec. OP-ED, p. A3.

⁶Kenneth E. Morris suggested that Carter wanted to use Latin America, "as a proving ground for his liberal internationalism," in *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 271.

⁷Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James E. Carter, *Inaugural Address*, 20 January 1977, 3. Note: The Richardson *Compilation* ceased using volume numbers with the Herbert C. Hoover papers, subsequently relying on the President's name to distinguish chief executives' papers.

semblance of colonialism in Latin America.⁸ For Carter, the issue of the Panama Canal treaties transcended the emotional arguments against ratification.⁹ “Our Nation’s security is much better off having strong and friendly allies in Panama . . .” he said, reminding Americans that the treaties were “the right thing to do.”¹⁰ However, Carter’s ideological emphasis on foreign policy troubled many Americans who were determined to preserve American strength abroad in light of the recent national embarrassments of Viet Nam and Watergate.

On 4 August 1977, the White House looked to win public opinion by issuing an eighteen-page fact sheet that extolled the virtues of the treaty and reminded Americans that the current treaty was almost universally seen as “a relic of American colonialism . . . a festering wound,” that kept Panama from achieving “a more equitable relationship with the United States.”¹¹ The White House needed more than a fact sheet, however, to win popular support. The next day, an editorial in the *Washington Post* suggested that the White House underestimated the emotional issues associated with the Panama Canal. Quoting former Ambassador to Nicaragua James Theberge, the article explained: “there exists a deep, emotional – almost instinctive – opposition to what is

⁸Carter used this phrase in his first major foreign policy speech at the 1977 Notre Dame commencement exercises. See Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James E. Carter, *Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame*, 22 May 1977, 955.

⁹See Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1988): 160. Jones argued that the canal issue transcended the more personal issues of political gain and popularity, reinforcing Carter’s reliance on moral values as foreign policy determinants.

¹⁰Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, James E. Carter, *Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting, Bardstown, Kentucky*, 31 July 1979, 1349.

¹¹Murrey Marder, “White House Details Case for New Panama Treaty,” *Washington Post*, 4 August 1977, sec. A, p. 7.

viewed by the American people as surrendering of the canal and the Canal Zone to Panama.” “[T]he very thought,” argued Theberge, “seems to raise psychological problems, problems of national identity: what is a country if its territory is not ideologically as well as physically secure?”¹² The belief that the Canal Zone was U.S. territory continued to inspire treaty opposition.

Without acknowledging the contributions of Panamanians, U.S. citizens were quick to provide emotional generalizations and declare U.S. “ownership” of the Canal Zone. Americans had invested too much time, too much money, and too many lives since 1903. Moreover, the U.S. had established its own *legal* precedent. In 1907, Warren B. Wilson, an Illinois citizen who owned land in the Canal Zone, filed suit against Treasury Secretary Leslie M. Shaw. Wilson claimed that the U.S. did not own the land in the isthmus and therefore could not force him to sell his property so that the construction of the canal could continue. The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, where the court ruled in favor of the Treasury Secretary. Justice David J. Brewer delivered the opinion of the court, which reinforced the notion that the Canal Zone was, in fact, U.S. territory. Panama granted “to the United States all the rights, power, and authority,” said Justice Brewer, “which the U.S. would possess and exercise if it were the sovereign of the territory within which said lands and waters are located, to the entire exclusion of the exercise of the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights,

¹²Stephen S. Rosenfeld, “The Canal: An Emotional Passage,” *Washington Post*, 5 August 1977, sec. Op-Ed, p. A21.

power or authority.”¹³ According to the U.S. Supreme Court, Panama had no right to the territory ceded in the treaty. Justice Brewer made the U.S. sense of ownership even more clear. “It is hypercritical,” said Brewer, “to contend that the title of the United States is imperfect, and that the territory described does not belong to this nation.”¹⁴ If Americans needed legal justification to convince themselves of U.S. ownership of the Canal Zone and the associated rights, they had to look no further than their highest court. Not only had Americans bought and built the canal, but the Canal Zone was also legal U.S. soil. What Panamanians thought of the court decision was largely irrelevant to the United States. President Grover Cleveland’s administration had established a precedent for this disregard of Latin American opinion well before the Roosevelt Corollary, when Cleveland’s Secretary of State, Richard Olney, described what became a “cornerstone of United States foreign policy in the western hemisphere.”¹⁵ Addressing British attempts to move the border of British Guiana west into Venezuela in search of gold deposits, Olney explained to Great Britain: “To-day the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”¹⁶ What America deemed legal in Panama, America would enforce in Panama. By ratifying the canal treaties, President Carter thought he could

¹³*Wilson v. Shaw*, 204 U.S. 24 (1907).

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Robert Zevin, “An Interpretation of American Imperialism,” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 32, iss. 1 (March, 1972): 329.

¹⁶Richard Olney, Washington, D.C. to Thomas Bayard, London, 20 July 1895, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (1895, pt. 1)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896): 558-559.

eliminate this perception, which was inconsistent with America's traditional espousal of self-determination and democratic ideals.

On 11 August 1977, former Canal Zone Governor David S. Parker explained why Americans maintained such an emotional investment in the canal. "It was the moon shot of the day," said Parker. During its construction, he continued, "it was on the public consciousness in the United States for almost 10 years and a continuing topic of conversation for decades."¹⁷ The engineering feat of building the canal "became so much a part of American folklore," said Joanne Omang, a staff writer for the *Washington Post*, "that it was easy to forget that the canal was in another country."¹⁸ The American public seemed to be firmly opposed to relinquishing "their" canal to Panama. That same month, Senator Adlai Stevenson III (D-IL), a treaty supporter, reported that his office had received 5,600 letters opposed to the treaties, and only five in favor.¹⁹ Senators Strom Thurmond (R-SC) and Jesse Helms (R-NC) visited the Panama Canal that August. After their return to the U.S., both senators appeared on national television on "Meet the Press," where Thurmond fueled the emotional argument against the treaties. The canal is "American property," he said, "and I don't

¹⁷Quoted in Joanne Omang, "U.S. Created Panama, Setting Stage for Stormy Relations," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1977, sec. A, p. 11.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Warren Brown, "Drawing Battle Lines on the Canal Issue," *Washington Post*, 22 August 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

see how we can let American property – or the rights of Americans – go down the drain.”²⁰ Ownership was quickly becoming a rallying cry for treaty opponents.

On 28 August 1977, a week after the two Senators appeared on “Meet the Press,” conservative columnist George Will found merit in the canal transfer treaties. “A more serious argument is that the canal could be seriously damaged by a few saboteurs,” explained Will, “so it is prudent for U.S. policy to give Panama a large stake, including responsibility and revenues, in the canal’s security.”²¹ Two days later Congressman Paul Simon (D-IL) expressed a similar desire to grant Panamanians a larger role in canal security. Simon emphasized the primary goal of the United States: “to keep the canal open.” “More than 75 percent of the 13,000 people who work on the canal are Panamanians,” Simon reported in a weekly column to his constituents, and “any one of them with a hand grenade can close the canal. If Monday-morning quarterbacks here believe we can keep the canal open despite the feelings of the people of Panama, they are living in a dream world.”²² To counter the emotional argument against the treaties, advocates tried to focus the issues on the real interests of the United States. Sol M. Linowitz, one of the State Department’s primary negotiators during the

²⁰Ibid.

²¹George Will, “Canal Perceptions,” *Washington Post*, 28 August 1977, sec. Outlook, Op-Ed, p. B7.

²²Paul Simon, “The Treaty Debate: Cutting Through the Rhetoric,” *Washington Post*, 30 August 1977, sec. Op-Ed, p. A19.

treaty negotiations, explained that “the most important thing we get is the enhanced assurance of a continued, open, accessible, secure, neutral canal.”²³

Flanked by official representatives from twenty-six Western Hemisphere nations, President Carter and General Omar Torrijos signed the Panama Canal Treaty and the Neutrality Treaty on 7 September 1977 at the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, D.C.²⁴ Nine days later President Carter sent the treaties to the Senate for ratification. Committee hearings kept the treaties from debate on the Senate floor for almost five months. While the treaties stayed in committee, congressmen continued their debate in public.

On 12 September 1977, editorials across the country began to question Senator Simon’s and Sol Linowitz’s arguments for granting Panama a greater stake in canal security. “Sabotage is a remote possibility,” said Congressman Philip Crane (R-IL), “because of the economic importance of the canal to Panama.” Moreover, the Neutrality Treaty guaranteed passage to any country’s ship, communist, fascist, or democratic, and “under these terms, Panama is simply inviting the wolf to dine at his own table.” Crane continued to argue the concept of ownership: “The Supreme Court decision in 1907 on *Wilson v. Shaw* held that the United States does maintain legal

²³John M. Goshko and Murrey Marder, “Canal Treaties’ Foes Open Campaign,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

²⁴G. Harvey Summ and Tom Kelly, eds., *The Good Neighbors: America, Panama, and the 1977 Canal Treaties*, Monographs in International Studies, Latin American Series, ed. James L. Cobban, no. 14 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1988): 147-148.

sovereignty and ownership under the 1903 Treaty, a ruling upheld in 1972.”²⁵ That same day, Senator Helms offered a similar sentiment, calling the Canal Zone “our own sovereign territory.”²⁶ Treaty opponents predicted the power behind the notion of ownership, and continued to work public emotions to their advantage.

As autumn approached in 1977, Congress watched the public closely. Treaty advocates struggled to find a way to defeat the rising influence of their opponents, who effectively relied on national emotion and pride. John Averill, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, interviewed an anonymous aide to a Democratic senator on 25 September 1977. “There is one thing you must not forget,” explained the aide. “Panama is one of those rare gut issues where one vote will decide whether or not a guy will remain in office.” The treaty debate confronted congressmen with an issue that might have forced them to vote the will of their constituents and not their own conscience. “I fear we won’t see many statesmen around here when the vote comes,” the aide continued.²⁷ The Carter administration had previously underestimated public sentiment. That the President and treaty advocates had to win popular support became increasingly clear. “This country’s capabilities in foreign affairs,” said Professor Thomas H. Etzold, “depend on domestic consensus or its functional equivalent, apathy. The outcome of the Panama debate depends more on the ability of the President to

²⁵Philip Crane, “The Case Against the Canal Treaties: ‘Our Standing in the World Would Diminish,’” *Washington Post*, 12 September 1977, Sec. Op-Ed, p. A23.

²⁶Jesse Helms, “The Case Against the Canal Treaties,” *Washington Post*, 12 September 1977, Sec. Op-Ed, p. A23.

²⁷John H. Averill, “Canal Treaty Vote: Senatorial Careers Could Hang On It,” *Washington Post*, 25 September 1977, sec. A, p. 7.

explain his policies and command support at home.”²⁸ In the case of the Panama Canal, President Carter could not rely on apathy. The administration’s focus necessarily shifted to generating domestic consensus.

President Carter’s Treaty Campaign

While President Carter sent cabinet members across the country to drum up treaty support, debate continued in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On 5 October 1977, members of the committee, whose votes were critical to treaty approval, sent a clear message to the President: ratification hinged on the U.S. right to intervene in Panama. What precipitated the sudden demand? The previous day, Senator Robert Dole (R-KS) disclosed a cable from the U.S. embassy in Panama to the State Department. The cable revealed a difference in treaty interpretation between Panama and the United States. According to U.S. treaty negotiators, the U.S. maintained unilateral rights to intervene against threats to the canal. The Panamanian treaty negotiators denied that the treaty language provided these rights.²⁹ If the U.S. was going to lose sovereign rights in Panama, it had to maintain a similar right to intervene in canal affairs. The senators knew it would be much easier to cite treaty rights than political ideology to justify future calls for intervention.

²⁸Thomas H. Etzold, “Canal Treaties: What’s Really at Stake,” *Washington Post*, 19 December 1977, sec. Op-ed, p. A27.

²⁹John M. Goshko, “Clarify Panama Pacts, Senators Tell Carter,” *Washington Post*, 6 October 1977, sec A, p. 1.

By October 1977, President Carter faced an intervention ultimatum and a suspicious public. Three days after Senator Dole revealed the conflicting treaty interpretations, Carter spoke to the Democratic National Committee for the first time since taking office. His plea sounded desperate. "I need your help . . ." Carter said of the canal treaties, "the matter is in doubt." He again emphasized the moral advantage of transferring the canal to the Panamanian government, explaining that the treaties provided an "affirmation of mutual purpose [and] an end to colonialism."³⁰ By the end of October, it appeared that the administration's pleas for help, whether from cabinet members or Carter himself, were working. "The more Americans know about the Panama Canal treaties, the more likely they are to favor Senate ratification of the pact," said George Gallup. Americans who knew nothing of the treaty specifics voted it down by a nearly two-to-one ratio, while those who were familiar with the treaty and its provisions approved ratification by a margin of five to four. Carter's thesis appeared correct, and his message was getting out. Among those treaty supporters surveyed, the number one reason to favor the treaties was that it was "a good public relations move" and removed the "stigma of colonialism."³¹ By 9 November 1977, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) also noticed the change in public momentum. "What is required," Byrd told reporters, "is a better education of the public." He also declared that he had noticed a

³⁰William Claiborne, "President Appeals for Party Support on Panama Pacts," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

³¹George Gallup, "Canal Treaties are Enhanced by Information," *Washington Post*, 23 October 1977, sec. A, p. 30.

“shifting of opinion” among the public with regard to treaty ratification.³² Although debate intensity withered during the holiday recess, the emotional arguments of treaty opponents again emerged as the treaty began to move out of committee and onto the Senate floor for a ratification vote.

On 1 February 1978, President Carter took his case to the public. Using a technique reminiscent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s fireside chats, Carter sat beside the fireplace in the White House library and addressed the nation on television. The treaties, he told viewers, represented “what is right for us and fair to others,” and would allow the U.S. to be “the kind of great power we wish to be.” The President ended his fireside chat by reminding Americans that the agreement with Panama was something “we want because we know it is right.”³³ Carter’s treaty campaign had worked. A Gallup Poll released the same day indicated that 45 percent of the public favored the treaties and 42 percent opposed them, a noticeable change from the 48 percent opposed just a few months before.³⁴

One week later, on 8 February 1978, the Senate began debate on the Neutrality Treaty.³⁵ The emphasis on public perception of the canal treaties rose as the vote approached. However, polling experts began to question the validity of polls taken before the vote. According to polling analysts, polling agencies structured the questions

³²“Majority Leader Sees ‘Shifting of Opinion’ Toward Canal Pacts,” *Washington Post*, 9 November 1977, sec. A, p. 29.

³³Edward Walsh, “For Canal Treaties Carter Takes Case to Public,” *Washington Post*, 2 February 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Summ and Kelly, *Good Neighbors*, 148.

to draw an emotional response--a fault that played directly into the hands of treaty opponents. In some polls, the questions failed to even mention the treaties. In September 1977, the Opinion Research Company in Princeton, New Jersey asked respondents, "Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal, or do you favor turning ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama?"³⁶ In this case, respondents were 78 percent opposed to "turning over ownership." "Given such an extreme choice, and with no mention of the provisions of the actual treaty," explained Professor William Schneider, "there was no mistaking how Americans feel."³⁷ As the treaty debate raged, pollsters refocused their questions, often including the provisions of the treaties. A January 1978 NBC News poll asked, "would you favor or oppose approval of the Panama Canal Treaty if an amendment were added specifically giving the U.S. the right to intervene if the canal is threatened by attack?" Sixty-five percent of the respondents approved of the treaty, while only twenty-five percent opposed it. In the end, President Carter's theory was correct. The more Americans knew about the treaties, the more likely they were to approve them.

³⁶William Schneider, "Behind the Passions of the Canal Debate," *Washington Post*, 12 February 1978, sec. Outlook, p. C1.

³⁷*Ibid.*

Treaty Ratification

On 16 March 1978, the Senate approved the Neutrality Treaty voting 68-32, leaving just one vote to spare. The DeConcini amendment, submitted by Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), passed 75-23. The amendment guaranteed the U.S. the right to intervene to protect the canal. A month later, on 18 April 1978, the Senate ratified the Panama Canal Treaty by the same narrow margin as the Neutrality Treaty's vote, 68-32.³⁸ In the end, the most important issue to Americans was the right to intervene, the right to maintain the canal's operation and neutrality by force. Despite the semantics debate over the DeConcini amendment and Torrijos's counter-reservations (which still continues today), Vice President Walter Mondale presided over a ceremony marking the transfer of the Canal Zone to Panama on 1 October 1979, when the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the transfer of canal operations began in earnest.³⁹

In the case of the Panama Canal treaties debate, ideology won out over raw emotion. President Carter's hope to build a better relationship with Latin America and end U.S. colonialism seemed to prevail. At the heart of the opponents' argument was ownership. With sovereign U.S. territory came the inherent right to exercise military influence. But the thought of "losing control" of U.S. territory left treaty opponents in search of another way to guarantee forcible influence – a right to intervention. Before the canal treaties, the U.S. maintained a military presence in the Canal Zone, which

³⁸For a synopsis of the final ratification vote and associated statistics, see Summ and Kelly, *Good Neighbors*, 148-149.

³⁹*Ibid*, 150.

explains why the Monroe Doctrine was absent from the U.S.-Panama relationship before 1978: it was unnecessary. As soon as the Senate ratified the treaties, the Canal Zone belonged to Panama. The loss of U.S. sovereignty soon precipitated the emergence of Monroe Doctrine principles with regard to U.S. policy in Panama.

Ten years *after* the U.S transferred the Canal Zone to Panama, American citizens reevaluated the canal treaties in terms that had been absent during the original treaty debate. “[I]t was a complete violation of the Monroe Doctrine,” said Oscar Fendler, an Arkansas attorney and member of the Mississippi County Democratic Committee.⁴⁰ That same month, columnist Charles Krauthammer voiced similar disapproval. Jimmy Carter did nothing for our “back yard,” said Krauthammer, “decolonizing the Panama Canal and generally retiring the Monroe Doctrine.”⁴¹ These gentlemen used the Monroe Doctrine to express their concern in 1989, because by that time General Manuel Noriega had become unruly in the eyes of U.S. leaders. There was no U.S. sovereign soil in the Canal Zone, and to respond to Noriega’s dictatorial regime, the U.S. looked for an interventionist precedent.

⁴⁰Oscar Fendler, “New Policy Needed on Panama,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 2 March 1989, sec. Op-Ed.

⁴¹Charles Krauthammer, “Baker on Perestroika’s Promise,” *Washington Post*, 27 October 1989, sec. Op-Ed, p. A19.

CHAPTER 3
INVASION OF PANAMA

[T]he adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.¹

Theodore Roosevelt, 6 December 1904

We've seen General Noriega brutalize the people of Panama, crack down on his own civilian and military alike after the last coup attempt, designate himself as the leader of the country, and declare a state of war with the United States. These actions have created an atmosphere in which Panamanian defense forces feel free to fire on unarmed Americans.²

Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, 17 December 1989

In 1981, Panamanian General Omar Torrijos, whose greatest legacy to Panama was his Canal Treaty victory, died in a plane crash in the Panamanian jungle. His death led to a power struggle that lasted for nearly two years, at which point Manuel Noriega declared himself general and used his Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) to secure his position as the country's leader. Noriega's association with drug trafficking and dictatorial government quickly weakened relations between Panama and the U.S., especially at a time when Central America played a major role in the U.S. fight to contain communism. In the spring following President George Bush's 1989

¹Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, Theodore Roosevelt, *Fourth Annual Message to Congress*, 6 December 1904, vol. 9: 7053.

²Tom Kenworthy and Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Condemns Violence in Panama," *Washington Post*, 18 December 1989, sec. A, p. 20.

inauguration, Noriega ignored Democratic elections in Panama and reinforced his dictatorship using the PDF to eliminate his adversaries. Noriega's brutal government, drug trafficking, and threats to U.S. citizens in Panama eventually drove President Bush to initiate Operation Just Cause. In the early morning of 20 December 1989, U.S. forces parachuted into Panama to restore democracy and arrest Noriega.

The year 1989 brought a gradual decline in U.S. tolerance for Noriega's methods. Paralleling this decline was a noticeable shift in U.S. policy and the terms used to explain that policy. What started with simple calls for democratic elections in Panama eventually turned into the largest intervention action by U.S. military forces since Viet Nam. To justify intervention, President Bush used terms remarkably similar to the Roosevelt Corollary, and intervention opponents were quick to recognize the Monroe Doctrine as an underlying White House policy. Although the President avoided the term "Monroe Doctrine," both the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government directly referenced doctrine principles throughout the crisis to support or explain the U.S. action in Panama. Having transferred Canal Zone sovereignty a decade before, the U.S. turned to a doctrinal precedent to justify its actions in 1989.

*"Chronic Wrongdoing" and the
Emergence of the Monroe Doctrine*

The Monroe Doctrine had experienced an increasing role in the U.S.-Central American relationship during the final years of the Cold War. In the 1820s, European monarchies threatened the democracies of the Western Hemisphere. President

Monroe's cabinet had created the Monroe Doctrine to limit the monarchical system to Europe, preserving the Western Hemisphere for democracy. Similarly, the 1980s witnessed the threat of communism spreading through Latin American countries. The Monroe Doctrine seemed a perfect fit. Although the foreign system in this case was not the monarchy, communism represented a parallel threat to the democracies of the twentieth century. In 1987, Congress bluntly reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine as a guide for U.S. policy in Latin America. "It is the sense of the Senate," declared Senator Jesse Helms, "that the policy of the United States toward Central America should be based on the principles of the Monroe Doctrine." Later that day, 17 September 1987, the Senate approved an amendment endorsing the Monroe Doctrine by a vote of 90 to 2.³ Congressmen found utility in the doctrine as an anti-communist tool. On 15 December 1987, Congressman Robert Dornan (R-CA) expressed outrage at the possible delivery of fighter aircraft from the Soviet Union to Nicaragua. "The Soviets and their Sandinista clients," said Dornan, "are working to undermine the security of this hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine . . . ought to dictate what our response will be."⁴ Although these examples are not related to Panama, they indicate a willingness by policy makers to use the Monroe Doctrine as a standard for the U.S. relationship with

³Congress, Senate, Senator Helms of North Carolina speaking for an Amendment for the Department of Defense Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989, S. 1174, Amendment no. 695, 100th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 133, no. 141, (17 September 1987): 12322. For vote tally see "Daily Digest: Measures Adopted," 17 September 1987.

⁴Congress, House, Congressman Dornan of California speaking the delivery of Soviet Union fighter aircraft to Nicaragua, 100th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 133, no. 199, (15 December 1987): 11419.

Latin America in the late 1980s. Eventually, Congress's efforts to protect democracy in Latin America focused on Panama.

Even before General Noriega invalidated the 7 May 1989 elections, it was apparent to many U.S. leaders that the dictator was running a suspect and unstable regime. "General Noriega is stronger than ever," said Congressman Robert Livingston (R-LA) on 25 April 1989. "He has imprisoned his enemies, consolidated his control over the military, and suspended basic freedoms. All of this has served to create an increasingly tense and unstable environment," Livingston explained. "The Soviets and Cubans are smacking their lips in anticipation of another opening for communist expansion in the Western Hemisphere."⁵ Livingston's comments fittingly revealed the role of the Monroe Doctrine in the Cold War. The U.S. could not overtly refer to the doctrine to justify U.S. actions in Central or South America. Latin American countries detested the Monroe Doctrine--or more specifically, the Roosevelt Corollary--as an anachronistic, interventionist policy. However, Latin Americans typically accepted U.S. involvement if the U.S. explained its actions as an attempt to "preserve" democracy in the hemisphere. This reference to democracy in the Western Hemisphere directly corresponded to the original Monroe Doctrine. The policy was virtually the same, but U.S. leaders tempered their diplomatic language to assuage the understandably sensitive Latin Americans.

⁵Congress, House, Congressman Livingston of Louisiana speaking against the Dictatorship of Manuel Noriega in Panama, 101st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 135, no. 48 (25 April 1989): 1333.

Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. explained this “semantic requirement” more than a year before the botched Panamanian elections. “The Monroe Doctrine in its unilateral form,” said Schlesinger, “is extremely unpopular in Latin America, where it is remembered as an imperialist pretext for intervention.” In terms of Panama, Schlesinger explained, “all decent Latin Americans detest Gen. Noriega; but they detest U.S. intervention even more.”⁶ The public also recognized the need to associate U.S. involvement in Panama with the struggle for democracy. “Democratic progress is a goal that always has been at the heart of the American ideal,” said a *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida) editorial, “even if we have not always followed it in practice. It also is a goal that can be supported in this [Panamanian] case even by those regional governments that have [the] most reason to be suspicious of American military intervention.”⁷ The Bush administration recognized the hazards of direct reference to the Monroe Doctrine and initially emphasized the preservation of democracy as the overriding principle in U.S. efforts to discredit Noriega’s dictatorship.

On 2 May 1989, just five days before the Panamanian elections, the White House anticipated the illegitimate role Noriega might play in the upcoming Sunday’s elections. “It’s time for the plain truth [in Panama],” President Bush told members of the Organization of American States (OAS). “The day of the dictator is over. The

⁶Arthur Schlesinger Jr, “Monroe Doctrine Fails Again,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 April 1988, p. 30.

⁷“A Defensible Intervention,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 21 December 1989, sec. Editorials, p. 28A.

people's right to democracy must not be denied."⁸ On 11 May 1989, just four days after the botched elections, President Bush increased the military presence in Panama to "protect U.S. citizens and interests." "The United States will not recognize nor accommodate . . ." said Bush, "a regime that holds power through force and violence at the expense of the Panamanian people's right to be free."⁹ The next day President Bush again emphasized democracy as he offered his vision for Latin America. "I see a Western Hemisphere," Bush told graduating Texas A&M students on 12 May 1989, "of democratic, prosperous nations, no longer threatened by a Cuba or Nicaragua armed by Moscow."¹⁰

Unlike President Bush, the American public did not restrict itself to democratic ideals. The Monroe Doctrine was emerging in arguments that demanded U.S. intervention aimed at Noriega. The same day that President Bush spoke at the commencement exercises at Texas A&M, his "soft" policy toward Latin America came under fire from Paul Gigot of the *Boston Globe*. "'[M]ultilateralism' has been in charge of Latin policy," declared Gigot, and, "had replaced the Monroe Doctrine with the Rio Treaty. Perhaps that's why Manuel Noriega is also still in charge in Panama."¹¹ Less

⁸John W. Mashek and Adam Pertman, "Bush Sets Stance for Panama Vote Fraud," *Boston Globe*, 3 May 1989, sec. National/Foreign, p. 3.

⁹John W. Mashek, "Crisis in Panama," *Boston Globe*, 12 May 1989, sec. National/Foreign, p. 1.

¹⁰U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (College Station, Texas: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), George H.W. Bush, *Remarks at the Texas A&M University Commencement Ceremony in College Station*, 12 May 1989, doc. no. 89051201, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html>, accessed 30 March 2001.

¹¹Paul Gigot, "Panama Policy: Can Bush Fend Off Multilateralists?" *Boston Globe*, 12 May 1989, p. 1.

than a week later Mr. J.F. Emery of La Jolla, California, wrote to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, claiming that “[i]f the USA is the citadel of democracy and human rights, and if we care about maintaining and protecting our own vested economic and political interests, we must intervene militarily. We need resolve and action,” said Emery, who then cited the Monroe Doctrine as one of several “reasons to intervene.”¹²

Although President Bush continued to emphasize democratic ideals throughout the summer and fall of 1989, he and his administration began to characterize the situation in Panama in terms strikingly similar to those President Roosevelt had used in 1904 to warrant the U.S. role as international policeman. In a 29 August 1989 address before the OAS, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger recommended treating “the Noriega regime,” as “an outlaw among civilized nations.”¹³ On 1 September 1989, President Bush called Noriega himself an “outlaw,” described his government as “illegal,” and insisted that Panama was, “without any legitimate government.”¹⁴ Similarly, Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater reminded the White House

¹²J.F. Emery, “A Show of Force for Noriega,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 18 May 1989, sec Op-Ed, p. B15.

¹³Department of State, “Document 469: The OAS and the Crisis in Panama: Address by the Deputy Secretary of State (Eagleburger) Before the Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of American States, August 24, 1989 (Extracts),” *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1989*, eds. Nancy L. Golden and Sherrill Brown Wells (Washington, D.C., 1990), 715.

¹⁴Richardson, ed. *Compilation*, George H.W. Bush, *Statement on Panama-United States Relations*, 1 September 1989, 1131.

press corps of the “international condemnation” of “Noriega’s cronies” and “his puppet regime.”¹⁵

Tensions continued throughout the fall of 1989. Noriega ignored international calls to recognize the democratically elected leaders of Panama. Working in close proximity, the PDF and U.S. forces regularly engaged in visual and verbal stand-offs. Back in Congress, the talk turned from calls for democracy to demands for a more aggressive stance. In November 1989, while the Panama crisis continued, violence erupted in El Salvador, where communist guerillas attempted to disrupt the fledgling democracy. Addressing the challenges throughout Central America, Congressman Bill McCollum (R-FL) asked his fellow congressmen: “whatever happened to the Monroe Doctrine at times like this?”¹⁶ President Bush, however, continued to emphasize democracy as the ultimate goal. On the day after Congressman McCollum spoke on the House floor, President Bush again addressed the OAS in Washington, D.C. “Our common objective,” Bush reminded the delegates, is “the promotion of democracy.”¹⁷

¹⁵Richardson, ed. *Compilation, George H.W. Bush, Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Banning of Panamanian-Flag Vessels from United States Ports, November 30, 1989*, 1614.

¹⁶Congress, House, Congressman McCollum of Florida speaking on the Violence in El Salvador, 101st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 135, no. 158 (13 November 1989): 8494.

¹⁷U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (College Station, Texas: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), George H.W. Bush, *Remarks to the Organization of American States*, 14 November 1989, doc. no. 89111402, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html>, accessed 30 March 2001.

Operation Just Cause and World Reaction

In December 1989, the actions of Noriega and his PDF pushed the U.S. closer to intervention. The PDF harassed unarmed U.S. citizens, interrogated and tortured a U.S. serviceman and his wife, and shot and killed an unarmed U.S. serviceman after a confrontation at a traffic checkpoint. The White House rhetoric summarily changed from emphasizing democracy to relying on words that closely paralleled the Roosevelt Corollary. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney explained the chaos in Panama. “Ultimately, it is Noriega himself who has encouraged this kind of lawlessness,” Cheney said in a Pentagon statement. “His own conduct sets an example of cruelty and brutality. The lack of discipline and control in the Panamanian Defense Forces is further evidence that Panama is a country without a government.”¹⁸

In the dark morning hours of 20 December 1989, U.S. troops deployed to Panama, focusing their combat power on the arrest of Noriega and the defeat of his PDF. White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater explained the intervention from the White House pressroom that morning. “The President,” said Fitzwater, “has directed United States forces to execute at 1 a.m. this morning pre-planned missions in Panama to protect American lives, restore the Democratic process, protect the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties and apprehend General Manuel Noriega.”¹⁹ Assuming the role of international policeman, the U.S. policymakers intervened to correct what they

¹⁸Kenworthy and Tyler, “U.S. Condemns Violence in Panama,” sec. A, p. 20.

¹⁹Ann Devroy and Patrick E. Tyler, “Bush Launches Strike to Seize Noriega,” *Washington Post*, 20 December 1989, sec. A, p. 1.

viewed as a flagrant case of wrongdoing and impotence. Noriega and his PDF were wrong in harassing and killing unarmed Americans, and his failure to control the PDF reflected his governing impotence. In the days before the invasion, Bush cabinet members had used a more contemporary language to assert the Roosevelt Corollary.

Part of the public, both international and American, quickly recognized the theory behind the administration's justification. In the London *Financial Times*, Robert Graham listed word-for-word the Roosevelt Corollary the day after the U.S. intervention. "Though President Bush yesterday used less flowery language," Graham asserted, "his dramatic decision to wrest control of Panama from General Manuel Antonio Noriega was justified in precisely these terms."²⁰ A *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial said the same of Operation Just Cause. "The old-fashioned sentiments expressed by Roosevelt in the early years of the 20th century have abruptly come back to life."²¹ The early and less aggressive pro-democracy rhetoric of the Bush White House was true, but more importantly, it was an effective stratagem designed to placate the international community. As the Noriega regime took its toll on U.S. patience and lives, the White House justified the intervention using rhetoric that intentionally disguised the Roosevelt Corollary. It was no coincidence that a *Washington Times* editorial likened President Bush to one of Bush's favorite Presidents. "After nearly a

²⁰Robert Graham, "Why Bush is Acting Tough," *Financial Times* (London), 21 December 1989, sec. I, p. 12.

²¹"A Price to Pay in Latin America," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 December 1989, sec. Editorials, p. A24.

year of speaking softly,” read the editorial, “President Bush this week picked up a big stick.”²²

Operation Just Cause was not universally popular. Many Americans believed that an antiquated Monroe Doctrine had influenced decisions in the White House. Because the U.S. had transferred its sovereign status in Panama a decade earlier, some even thought the operation violated international law. “Certainly, the United States does not have the right,” exclaimed Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) on the Senate floor, “under international law or any other law that I know of to roam the hemisphere, bringing dictators to justice or installing new governments by force on other nations.”²³ William Van Alstyne, a constitutional law professor, contrasted Operation Just with the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada. In Grenada, Caribbean countries had requested U.S. intervention, but in Panama, said Van Alstyne, “we weren’t asked by anybody [t]here who had legal standing.”²⁴ The White House intentionally addressed the issue of international law, a decision that, upon examination, backfired because it further substantiated claims that Monroe Doctrine principles were at work in the White House.

²²“A New Age Begins,” *Washington Times*, 21 December 1989, sec. F, p. 2. The reference is to President Roosevelt’s credo, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” President Bush later called Theodore Roosevelt one of his favorite presidents, see U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (College Station, Texas: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), George H.W. Bush, *Remarks on Signing the Benjamin National Franklin Memorial Commemorative Medal and Fire Service Bill of Rights Act in Springfield, Pennsylvania*, 12 October 1992, doc. no. 92101200, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html>, accessed 30 March 2001.

²³Congress, Senate, Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts speaking against the Panama Invasion, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 136, no. 1 (23 January 1990): 12.

²⁴Bill McAllister, “U.S. Cites Self-Defense; Legal Scholars Skeptical,” *Washington Post*, 21 December 1989, sec. A. p. 36.

The Bush Administration invoked a loose interpretation of international law that masked its role as hemispheric hegemon. On the morning of 20 December 1989, Secretary of State James A. Baker III fielded questions at a State Department press conference. "The actions that we have taken, . . ." said Secretary Baker, "in our view are fully in accordance with international law."²⁵ "The United States, . . ." Baker continued, "has an inherent right of self-defense, as recognized in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and Article 21 of the O.A.S. Charter."²⁶ Scholars and diplomats quickly rejected Secretary Baker's logic, citing violated principles from the same charters Baker had referenced. "No State or group of States has the right to intervene," said Professor Charles Maechling, citing Article 18 of the O.A.S. charter, "directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State." "Article 20," Maechling continued, "states that the territory of a member state is inviolable; and Article 21 commits the member states to refrain from the use of force."²⁷ The UN General Assembly, citing Article 2 of its own charter, "strongly deplore[d] the intervention in Panama by the armed forces of the United States of America, which

²⁵Foreign Desk, "Fighting in Panama: the State Department; Excerpts from Statement by Baker on U.S. Policy," *New York Times*, 21 December 1989, sec. A, p. 19.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Charles Maechling, Jr. "Washington's Illegal Invasion," *Foreign Policy*, iss. 79 (Summer 1990): 113-132. Maechling provides honest evidence to support his argument, but his article also contained counterfactual generalizations that diminished its credibility. He suggested that Noriega's government posed "no conceivable military threat," insisting that Noriega had "almost no part in determining Panama's economic policy," and he even claimed that "Roosevelt forcibly separated Panama from Colombia" in 1903.

constitute[d] a flagrant violation of international law.”²⁸ The Bush Administration’s selective use of self-defense principles represented a deliberate attempt to choose which principles of international law were applicable, an effort that closely paralleled the Olney Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. In 1895, Secretary of State Richard Olney, summoning Great Britain to arbitration in the Venezuela boundary dispute, explained that U.S. interest in the region was based on “the silent force of the doctrine proclaimed by President Monroe.” “The United States is practically sovereign on this continent,” Olney warned Great Britain, “and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”²⁹ Using the Monroe Doctrine as precedent, Olney declared that by virtue of its position and influence, the U.S. could dictate hemispheric law. Likewise almost a century later, the Bush Administration told the world which principles of international law were relevant in Operation Just Cause.

Popular Recognition of the Monroe Doctrine

For many Americans, questions of international law were not as significant as the undeniable fact that the Monroe Doctrine had influenced U.S. policy in Panama. On 28 December 1989, a week after the intervention in Panama began, Professor William

²⁸United Nations, *Resolution, Effects of the Military Intervention by the United States of America in Panama on the Situation in Central America*, General Assembly, 29 December 1989, 44/240.

²⁹Olney, Washington, *Foreign Relations (1895, pt. 1)*: 558-559. See Chapter 2, footnote 16, p. 28 of this essay for complete citation. Scholars typically summarized Olney’s corollary using the “fiat is law” phrase cited in this essay’s text. However, Olney’s entire lengthy correspondence to Bayard, an exegesis on the Monroe Doctrine’s relevance to the Venezuela boundary dispute, comprised what was later designated as “Olney’s corollary.” See the above citation, pp. 545-562.

LeoGrande characterized the Panama invasion and other recent U.S. activity in Central America as “Washington’s aggressive pursuit of the Monroe Doctrine.”³⁰ Three days later, conservative columnist Patrick Buchanan told Americans in his editorial, “The Monroe Doctrine: Use It or Lose It,” that Operation Just Cause was a step in the right direction for U.S. policy. He further suggested that the U.S. should begin “reasserting, as the cornerstone of U.S. policy in the hemisphere, the Monroe Doctrine.”³¹ On 7 January 1990, the editor of the *St. Petersburg Times* questioned U.S. policy and asked, “[i]s the Monroe Doctrine’s gunboat philosophy to guide our actions?”³² The next day an editorial in the *Washington Post* accused the Bush administration of applying nineteenth century policy to contemporary diplomatic challenges. “In the case of Panama, however, the larger geopolitical theme was the Monroe Doctrine of the 1820s . . .” said columnist Dorothy Gilliam, and “the invasion makes clear that the Monroe Doctrine is still an operative policy of our government.”³³

Perhaps in reaction to the accusation of Monroe Doctrine policy, President Bush shortly thereafter returned to his original emphasis on democracy. “I will not neglect this hemisphere,” he told a friendly audience at an Executive Forum on 18 January 1990, because “these people are our brothers and sisters, and they deserve our help . . .

³⁰William M. LeoGrande, “An Anachronism – But it Works,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 December 1989, sec. B, p. 7.

³¹Patrick J. Buchanan, “The Monroe Doctrine: Use It or Lose It,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1989, sec. M, p. 5.

³²Andrew Barnes, “Panama is a Poor Model for Our Dealings with other Nations,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 7 January 1990, sec. Perspectives, p. 2D.

³³Dorothy Gilliam, “The Tired Tactics in Panama,” *Washington Post*, 8 January 1990, sec. Metro, p. E3.

and they'll receive it." He ended his remarks by reminding the audience: "Americans supported Operation Just Cause because democracy is a noble cause."³⁴ Bush continued his renewed emphasis on 8 February 1990, telling attendees at a fundraising dinner in Columbus, Ohio, of "the exciting changes that are taking place in this hemisphere." "Who would have dreamed," said Bush, "that in 1990 we might be on the verge of seeing a totally democratic, free and democratic Western Hemisphere, our own hemisphere?"³⁵ Some of the public remained unconvinced that democracy alone underscored U.S. policy in Latin America. On 12 February 1990, columnist Carlos Fuentes explained that recent events make "clear that the United States did not intend to use the Monroe Doctrine against Europe but against Latin America. It was simply a weapon to be deployed against any Latin American government that might be in conflict with Washington."³⁶

With no sovereign territory in Panama and a crisis that looked as though it might require U.S. intervention, the U.S. relied on the rhetoric of "restoring democracy" as a popular and non-threatening ideal to explain its increasingly aggressive policy toward Panama. To explain Operation Just Cause, President Bush used terms that bore a

³⁴U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (College Station, Texas: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), George H.W. Bush, *Remarks at the Bush Administration Executive Forum*, 18 January 1990, doc. no. 90011801, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html>, accessed 30 March 2001.

³⁵U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (College Station, Texas: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), George H.W. Bush, *Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner for the Ohio Republican Party in Columbus*, 8 February 1990, doc. no. 90020804, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html>, accessed 30 March 2001.

³⁶Carlos Fuentes, "Time for Our Sinatra Doctrine," *The Nation*, vol. 250, no. 6 (12 February 1990): 185-6.

noticeable resemblance to the Roosevelt Corollary. While the public and Congress debated in their separate forums whether the operation was legal or necessary, one pervading theme evolved: whether or not they advocated its use, many Americans realized that the Monroe Doctrine still influenced American foreign policy--this time in Panama.

By the summer of 1990, U.S. troops involved in Operation Just Cause had returned to the United States. Democratically elected officials were governing Panama, and the transition mandated by the 1977 canal treaties continued on schedule. The Berlin Wall had fallen, and the accompanying fall of communism was proof for many strategists that a Monroe Doctrine strategy in the Western Hemisphere would soon be irrelevant. Without the Cold War and a communist threat, democracy could flourish throughout Latin America. However, John G. Ruggie, a professor of international relations at the University of California at San Diego, reminded Americans that the Monroe Doctrine might not need the threat of communism to survive. “[O]ur Latin American neighbors are sure to remind us that the Monroe Doctrine was promulgated well before the Cold War began, . . .” explained the professor, reminding readers that “the United States hasn’t needed the Cold War to justify intervening in Latin America in the past.”³⁷ At least in terms of Panama, Professor Ruggie was prophetic. As the final days of the canal transfer approached, Americans turned to Monroe Doctrine principles again to explain their emotional desire to keep the canal in U.S. hands.

³⁷John G. Ruggie, “Global Change Should Prompt Integration of Region’s Economies,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1 July 1990, sec. Opinion, p. C6.

CHAPTER 4

CANAL TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Panama Canal Treaty was negotiated between President Carter and Panamanian Dictator Omar Torrijos. It doesn't reflect public opinion in Panama. It did not, arguably, reflect public opinion in the United States.¹

Senator Robert C. Smith (R-NH), 4 October 1999

This catastrophe in the making can be avoided in only two ways: invalidate the Panama treaty at this 11th hour and retake the canal or invoke the Monroe Doctrine . . .²

Mr. Robert A. Hitch, 13 September 1999

As the final days of the canal's transfer approached, the overwhelming concern among U.S. citizens and Panamanians was the security of the canal. Fundamental to these concerns were two larger issues: one, the likely pressure of foreign governments on a newly-independent Panama; and two, the probable influence of corrupt armed forces on a vulnerable canal. First, China invested heavily in the Canal Zone in the late 1990s. Hutchinson Whampoa, a Chinese company, purchased the rights to control the two largest port facilities on the canal, one on the Atlantic side and one on the Pacific side. Li Ka-shing, the company's chairman, "reportedly has ties to the Red Chinese

¹Congress, Senate, Senator Smith of New Hampshire speaking on the Panama Canal, 106th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 145, no. 132 (4 October 1999): 11850.

²Robert A. Hitch, "China's Beachhead in Panama Threatens U.S. Security," *Washington Times*, 13 September 1999, sec. Correspondence, p. 3.

government,” a U.S. government report suggested.³ Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), a regular critic of China, told a 1999 Senate committee that Li Ka-shing and his companies “have a history of acting as sources of funding or acting as intermediaries in deals for the People’s Liberation Army.”⁴ As U.S. leaders began to investigate further into Li’s background, a formerly classified Defense Intelligence Agency report emerged, claiming that “Li is directly connected to Beijing and is willing to use his business influence to further the aims of the Chinese government.”⁵ On 7 and 8 December 1999, Tomas A. Cabal testified before the House Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy. Addressing the potential level of Chinese influence on the canal, the Universidad Nacional de Panama professor testified that Li, “a key advisor to the Chinese leadership who also serves on the board of China International Trust and Investment Corporation which is a principal arm of the Chinese government and a technology-acquiring source for the Chinese military.” Cabal also claimed that Li was the director of the Chinese firm that acted as “the merchant marine for the Chinese military.”⁶ The Panamanian summarized his interpretation of Chinese influence by telling the subcommittee members: “the truth of the matter is that the

³A government law agency associated with import traffic drafted the report. See Bill Gertz, “With U.S. Gone, Panama is a Mecca for Drug Trafficking,” *Washington Times*, 9 June 2000, sec. A, p. 3.

⁴Juliet Eilperin and John Mintz, “Questions Raised on Hastert Advisor,” *Washington Post*, 15 July 2000, sec. A, p. 4.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Financial Services, *The Financial and Commercial Impact of the Panama Canal Treaty: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., 7, 8 December 1999, 10.

Peoples Republic of China, is rapidly filling the vacuum created by the departure of American military forces.”⁷ It was becoming clear to more Americans that Li and the Chinese influence was closely allied to the Chinese leadership back in Beijing. Many U.S. citizens feared that once the U.S. left the region, Li’s and his company’s dominant economic role would precipitate increased communist influence. The Monroe Doctrine provided those opposed to China’s presence with an acceptable retort. American policymakers had used the doctrine repeatedly to justify intervention during the Cold War to keep the Soviet Union’s communism out of the Americas.⁸ China’s communism was no different.

The second concern for Canal Zone security was the threat of guerilla forces dominating the Columbian government. With just a small explosive and a few men, any terrorist or militant organization could conceivably disrupt canal operations for a significant period. The economic repercussions were hard for many to imagine, especially if the canal stopped operating while workers repaired the locks or excavated narrow passages. Some Americans recognized the Roosevelt Corollary as the logical precedent for intervention in the event that the Panamanian government was unable to prevent Colombian guerilla forces from penetrating the jungles of Panama and disrupting canal traffic. As the transfer deadline loomed closer, Americans identified two primary threats to the canal’s security in the wake of the U.S. departure. In both

⁷Ibid, 11.

⁸As early as 1986, academics suggested that President Mikhail Gorbachev had radically altered the Soviet Union’s plans for communist expansion. Gorbachev was convinced that those types of foreign obligations were, “an interminable drain on [the U.S.S.R.’s] resources,” and “represented a double loss.” See Fernando Bustamante, “Soviet Foreign Policy toward Latin America: Time for Renewal,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 32, iss. 4 (Winter, 1990): 35.

cases, reference to Monroe Doctrine principles helped proponents argue for a continued U.S. presence to help protect the canal.

The Call for a Continued Presence of U.S. Troops

Despite these two perceived threats, the first priority for many Americans was a U.S. military presence in Panama beyond 1999. Just a year after Operation Just Cause, U.S. legislators argued for a new base rights agreement with Panama that would allow the permanent stationing of U.S. troops in the Canal Zone, beyond the 31 December 1999 deadline. On 6 February 1991, Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) sponsored such legislation. What most concerned Senator Craig and the resolution's co-sponsors was that Panama maintained no legitimate security force. The Guillermo Endara government, installed on the eve of Operation Just Cause, had dissolved the PDF. Senator Craig described the vulnerabilities of Panama and the canal. "As recently as December 1990," said Senator Craig, "there was a coup attempt in which 100 renegade policemen . . . seized control of Police Headquarters in Panama City." "At the request of the Panamanian Government," Craig continued, "the rebellion was stifled by the assistance of United States troops." To many Senators, a permanent U.S. military base in the Canal Zone made strategic sense. "Unless we act in time," Craig explained, "the canal will be turned over to Panama with no real safeguards against a third party."⁹

⁹Congress, Senate, Senator Craig of Idaho speaking for a Resolution to Maintain U.S. Military Bases in Panama, S. Con. Res. 24, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 137, no. 49 (6 February 1991): 4064-5.

Senator Craig was convinced that the mere presence of U.S. troops contributed to the canal's safety and Panama's general security. On 29 March 1995, even President Clinton reiterated how important the service members in Panama were to protecting Latin America "from the scourge of drugs and the illegal thugs that purvey them."¹⁰

Although Senator Craig's resolution died in committee the same year he submitted the bill, Congress continued to seek some type of exception to the 1977 canal treaties and guarantee a U.S. military presence beyond 1999. On 15 May 1995, Senator Helms submitted legislation that called on the U.S. President to "negotiate a new base rights agreement with the government of Panama." Some of the evidence he cited in introducing the resolution seemed convincing. "In a September 1994 poll," Helms explained, "eight in ten [Panamanians] (82%) – across all regional and educational levels – voiced favorable opinions of the United States." Helms then explained how most Panamanians wanted the U.S. to stay in Panama. "Half the public (50%) said the U.S. should maintain 'about the same number of troops it has now,' while a third (35%) said the troop presence should remain in 'reduced' form. Just one in ten (10%) preferred that all U.S. troops leave Panama."¹¹ The Senate passed the resolution, and

¹⁰In remarks to the community of Tallahassee, Florida. See U.S. President. *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the *Federal Register*, National Archives and Records Service, 1995), William J. Clinton, vol. 1, 29 March 1995, 416-7.

¹¹Congress, Senate, Senator Helms of North Carolina speaking for a Resolution to Negotiate a New Base Rights Agreement with the Government of Panama, S. Con. Res. 14, 104th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 141, no. 82 (15 May 1995): 6821-3.

although it died in the House International Relations Committee, legislators continued their efforts to maintain a regular U.S. presence in Panama.¹²

On 9 October 1997, Congressman Philip Crane (R-IL) joined the movement to amend the canal treaties and maintain U.S. bases in Panama. Citing a recent survey, Crane said, “72 percent of those [Panamanians] surveyed would like the United States bases to remain open after their scheduled closure date.” Crane also emphasized the economic effects of a continued U.S. presence. “6,000 Panamanian citizens are currently employed on U.S. bases,” explained Crane, “and \$200 to \$600 million in additional income for Panama is tied directly to the United States military presence in the region.”¹³ As the millennium deadline approached, the Clinton Administration initiated negotiations with the Panamanian government. It appeared that the U.S. might maintain a small presence of some 2,000 troops, who would occupy a multinational counter-narcotics center. This proposal seemed well suited for both countries. The U.S. presence would be minimal, but still enough to deter any attempts to disrupt the canal. In addition, the U.S. military would maintain a valuable platform from which it could support anti-drug operations farther south in Latin America.¹⁴ The negotiations failed, however, a product of Panamanian President Perez Balladares’s concern for his

¹²See *Bill Tracking Report*, S. Con. Res. 14, 104th Cong., 1st sess., available from http://web.lexis-nexis.com/Congcomp/form/Cong/s_trackbynumber.html, accessed 27 March 2001.

¹³Congress, House, Congressman Crane of Illinois speaking Continued U.S. Military Presence in Panama, 105th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 143, no. 140 (9 October 1997): 1997.

¹⁴For an explanation of the affects of fighting the drug war from bases outside of Panama, see Congress, House, Congressman Mica of Florida speaking about Illegal Narcotics and Substance Abuse in America, 106th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 145, no. 58 (27 April 1999): 2349.

political standing and the upcoming Panamanian elections.¹⁵ As the time grew closer to the canal transfer, many Americans continued their struggle to find a way to guarantee the canal's security.

Communism from the Far East

In the summer of 1997, Chinese companies began investing in Panama. By 1998, it became clear to many Americans that China would maintain a significant economic presence in the Canal Zone. While the presence of Chinese companies did not overtly suggest an influx of communist ideals or influence, several legislators interpreted their increased presence as a threat to the canal and Panamanian democracy. After negotiations for a continued U.S. presence failed, Americans began to look for other precedents to counter the rising Chinese presence. On 16 June 1999, Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) introduced a bill that would “prohibit United States assistance to Panama if a defense site or military installation built or formerly operated by the United States has been conveyed by . . . Panama to any foreign government-owned entity.” To justify the legislation, the bill’s text explained that “[t]he Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine proclaimed in 1904 that it was a national security concern of the United States when foreign powers attempted to use public or private investment as a vehicle for the expansion of political and military

¹⁵For an explanation of the failed negotiations and call for greater emphasis on reaching a base agreement with Panama, see Congress, House, Congressman Gallegly of California speaking for Continued U.S. Military Presence in Panama, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 144, no. 94 (15 July 1998): 1308-9.

influence in the Western Hemisphere.” Citing the threat directly, the bill also described “the specter of the expansion of Chinese political influence in Panama.”¹⁶

Congressman Hunter, among others, was concerned that the Chinese influence would bring communism back to Central America.

The American public also noticed the Chinese presence in Panama. In a 13 September 1999 editorial, New Jersey’s Robert Hitch seemed panicked. “Our freedom and ultimate survival are in as much danger as at any time since Pearl Harbor or the Cuban Missile Crisis,” explained Hitch. “Invoke the Monroe Doctrine and expel Hutchinson Whampoa Ltd.,” he declared. If the Chinese were not expelled from the canal, U.S. “survival will be in jeopardy.”¹⁷ That month, critics of the canal treaties submitted to Congress a petition with 250,000 signatures. In terms echoing Monroe Doctrine sentiment, the petition asked Congress to keep U.S. competitors out of the region and to “make sure the Chinese communists don’t gain control of it.”¹⁸

Congress continued to debate the issue. “At some point,” said Senator Robert Smith (R-NH), “the American people are going to have to wake up. I don’t know when it is going to be. But I hope it is not too late.” Smith continued warning of the approaching canal transfer, claiming that “on December 31, the Communist Chinese

¹⁶Congress, House, *Resolution to Prohibit U.S. Assistance to Panama*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., H. R. 2244, *Congressional Record*, 145, no. 85, (16 June 1999): 4470.

¹⁷Robert A. Hitch, “China’s Beachhead,” sec. Correspondence, p. 3.

¹⁸David Adams, “Question for Clinton on Canal Handover: Go or No?” *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 3 November 1999, sec. A, p.2.

flag will control both ends of that canal.”¹⁹ On 7 October 1999, three days after telling Americans to “wake up,” Senator Smith returned to the Senate floor to cite the Monroe Doctrine. Speaking again of the Chinese companies in Panama, he said, “I cannot understand how we can ignore this presence into the Western Hemisphere. Monroe would turn over in his grave.” “The Monroe Doctrine,” explained Smith, “said that foreign European nations, and other nations around the world, should stay out of the Western Hemisphere.”²⁰

By 1999, in the waning hours of the U.S. presence in Panama, it seemed appropriate for the White House to participate in the discussion, either to acknowledge or dispel concerns of future communist influence in Panama. However, the White House wanted to distance itself from anything Panamanian. As the final transfer ceremony in Panama approached, President Clinton refused to attend. Likewise, a campaigning Vice President Al Gore “worried about a political backlash against surrendering an American icon.”²¹ “It’s no surprise,” White House aides explained of the President’s apparent indifference, “giving up territory is never exactly popular.”²² The effort to distance the White House from the transfer worked until 30 November 1999, when President Clinton’s faux pas reinvigorated fears of China in Panama. When

¹⁹Congress, Senate, Senator Smith of New Hampshire speaking against the Chinese Presence in Panama, 106th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 145, no. 132 (4 October 1999): 11848-51.

²⁰Congress, Senate, Senator Smith of New Hampshire speaking against the Chinese Presence in Panama, 106th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 145, no. 135 (7 October 1999): 12230-2.

²¹Thomas M. DeFrank, “Panama Canal More Like Root Canal for Bill,” *Daily News* (New York), 10 October 1999, sec. News, p. 32.

²²David E. Sanger, “Ideas & Trends; In Panama, a Party But No Guests,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1999, sec. 4, p. 6.

asked by a reporter if he was concerned about the Chinese controlling the canal, Clinton said, "I think the Chinese will in fact be bending over backwards to make sure that they run it in a competent and fair manner." As if his misspoken words were not sufficient to arouse further suspicions, he continued: "I would be surprised if any adverse consequences flowed from the Chinese running the canal."²³ Clinton's slip only exacerbated concerns that once the U.S. left Panama, communism would again find its way into Central America.

Guerillas from the South

Similar in significance to the China debate were concerns with Panama's ability to safeguard the canal from physical threats. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) conducted guerilla warfare as they attempted to overthrow the Colombian government. In 1999, FARC rebels infiltrated southern Panama in search of supplies. Their presence in Panama, just 250 miles south of the canal, increased as they hid from paramilitary bounty hunters. By May 1999, witnesses claimed that as many as 500 FARC guerillas were inside Panama's Darien province.²⁴ One might argue that 250 miles of dense jungle formed a natural barrier to FARC movement northward, but on 2 November 1999, three FARC guerrillas hijacked a Panamanian helicopter taking off

²³Gil Klein, "Clinton Slips, Says China to Run Canal," *Richmond Times Dispatch* (Virginia), 1 December 1999, sec. A, p. 1.

²⁴For a description of the FARC activity see Ohio Senator Michael Dewine's floor speech, in Congress, Senate, Senator Dewine of Ohio speaking on the Sense of the Senate with Regard to Colombia, 106th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 145, no. 95 (30 June 1999): 7914-6.

from Colon, the port city astride the canal on the Atlantic side. After landing near the Colombian border and unloading the passengers and pilots, the guerillas explained that they needed the aircraft to transport wounded comrades and took off toward Colombia.²⁵ The FARC had reached the Canal Zone. Philip Clarke, a semi-retired Latin American journalist reporting the story, suggested that if the FARC ever overthrew the Colombian government, “the leftist rebels would almost certainly demand the return of Panama . . . a province of Colombia until 1903 when it declared independence following a U.S.-backed revolution.”²⁶ While Clarke’s speculation might seem far-fetched, the fact that FARC guerillas traveled to Colon, a city on the Panama Canal, demonstrated their ability to operate near the Canal Zone should the canal’s disruption ever become a FARC objective.²⁷

Panama’s apparent inability to secure the canal worried many Americans, who quickly advocated some type of regular U.S. military presence to safeguard the canal. To warrant this presence, those Americans used the Monroe Doctrine as a diplomatic precedent to justify either rescinding or modifying the canal treaties and keeping U.S. military troops near the canal. The FARC’s presence in Panama and Chinese investment in port facilities had illustrated the canal’s vulnerability to both military and

²⁵Philip Clarke, “Cold War May Be Over, But Real Dangers Persist For the Future,” *Greensboro News and Record* (North Carolina), 12 December 1999, sec. H, p. 1.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷This paper presents concerns for the canal’s security based on a military perspective. For an analysis of canal security including social, economic, and political issues, and related demands on the Panamanian government, see Max G. Manwaring, “The Security of Panama and the Canal: Now and for the Future,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 35, iss. 3 Special Issue: The Future of the Panama Canal (Autumn, 1993): 151-170.

economic influence. Those Americans calling for the Monroe Doctrine believed that without a trained and professional force capable of repelling terrorist attacks on the canal, or without a government strong enough to resist the temptation of economic incentives that might jeopardize the canal's neutrality, Panama could not guarantee U.S. access to such a vital transportation artery.²⁸ Nonetheless, Panama and the U.S. implemented the canal treaties as planned, and the last U.S. military unit left Panama in December 1999.

Transfer Complete

Despite the concerns voiced in both Panama and the United States, the canal transfer went as planned. President Carter--an appropriate choice, but more importantly a politically safe one--represented the United States at the 14 December 1999 ceremony at the Miraflores Locks. At noon on the thirty-first, Panama raised its flag alone for the first time. That day, most Americans focused on New Year's Eve festivities. Elliot

²⁸Those in favor of a continued U.S. military presence premised their argument on the canal's strategic value to the United States, in both military and economic terms. The debate over the canal's strategic value to the U.S. continues today. See G. Russell Evans, "Panama Canal: Last Ditch in U.S. Giveaways," *The Post and Courier* (Charleston, SC), 26 October 1998, sec. A., p. 13, which suggests that the canal maintains its strategic value, citing the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Morrer, who called the canal, "the most vital strategic waterway in the world." For a more economic assertion of the canal's strategic value to the United States, see Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Financial Services, *The Financial and Commercial Impact of the Panama Canal Treaty: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., 7, 8 December 1999, 2, where Congressman Spencer Bachus III (R-AL) deemed the canal, "absolutely essential to our commercial and financial well being," and p. 50 where a former canal pilot includes convincing economic statistics in his testimony. For the opposite assessment of the canal's strategic value, see Tom Carter, "Nothing Vital Here; Canal No Longer Crucial to U.S. National Security," *Washington Times*, 11 January 1999, sec. A, p. 1, or "Panama Canal Returns to Its Native Sovereignty; Critics Say It's a Mistake," *News and Record* (Greensboro, NC), 16 December 1999, sec. A, p. 22.

Abrams, a former assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs during the Reagan Administration, wrote in a *National Review* article that the full implementation of the canal treaties “could not be happening at a worse moment.” As the FARC threatened to move into Panama, Abrams explained, “no Panamanian security force remotely able to replace us has been created. The result is a security vacuum into which Colombians – traffickers and guerillas alike – can move with alacrity.”²⁹

Several months after the transfer, Americans continued to express displeasure with the U.S. departure from Panama. Retired Navy Commander Robert W. Selle wrote in the United States Naval Institute’s *Proceedings*, “Now there is a new day that will live in infamy: 31 December 1999. That was when our country let the Panama Canal slip through our fingers.” After referencing the new presence of China and the potential for corruption in the Panamanian government, he asked rhetorically, “does the Monroe Doctrine still have something to say to us about the importance of the canal?”³⁰ *Hispanic* columnist Mark Holston could have answered Selle’s question. “[W]ith or without [the canal treaties], it’s unlikely that the United States would allow any unfriendly forces to meddle with the canal’s operation,” said Holston. “With the examples of the Dominican Republic, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Panama itself as

²⁹Elliot Abrams, “Men, Plans, a Canal,” *National Review* 51 (31 December 1999): 23-25.

³⁰Robert W. Selle, “There Now, the Foul, Dark, Deceitful Deed Be Done!” *Proceedings* 126 (April 2000): 94.

proof that Monroe Doctrine thinking is still alive and well among the shapers of U.S. foreign policy, U.S. military intervention is an unspoken reality.”³¹

The debate over the final transfer was ripe with arguments relying on both the original Monroe Doctrine’s task and purpose and the Roosevelt Corollary’s associated task. As the canal transfer date approached, Americans witnessed a measurable increase in Chinese investment in the Canal Zone. The introduction of companies from a communist country--specifically companies run by individuals with clear ties to the Chinese government--convinced many Americans that communism was again threatening Central America. Legislators and the public looked to the Monroe Doctrine as a diplomatic shield for blocking the transfer of any foreign system of government into the hemisphere. In this case, the Monroe Doctrine’s original task and purpose came to the fore. The principles expressed in the Roosevelt Corollary also answered concerns caused by the Columbian guerillas. The expansion of FARC activities as far north as Colon revealed the vulnerability of the canal and underscored Panama’s inadequate security force. Jungle barriers were insufficient, and since the Panamanians appeared incapable of protecting the canal, Americans were quick to remind others of Roosevelt’s Corollary. If the Panamanian government could not maintain an asset like the canal, the U.S. would be forced to intervene to guarantee the canal’s continued neutral operation. Americans not only applied the Monroe Doctrine in 1999--given the threatening conditions, they also forecasted its future role in Panama.

³¹Mark Holston, “More Than a Canal: Panama Strives for Identity,” *Hispanic* 13 (January/February 2000): 104.

CONCLUSION

Time and course of events have altered the scope and perhaps diminished the relevance of the Monroe Doctrine; but this protean idea is not to be pronounced as extinct.¹

Professor Dexter Perkins

The tendency among most historians has been to declare the Monroe Doctrine either dead or obsolete, but recent rhetoric towards Panama offers convincing evidence that the doctrine, in both its system preservation and intervention forms, influenced the public and policymakers as they struggled to redefine U.S. policy with Panama. Between 1977 and 1999, Panama's relationship with the U.S. changed dramatically. Ending the last vestige of U.S. colonialism, the 1978 canal treaties directed the gradual transfer of the Canal Zone and responsibility for the canal's operation to the people of Panama. The U.S. relinquished its sovereign status in Panama, and the loss of territory forced the U.S. to revise its Panamanian policy. The treaty debate was an emotional issue for a majority of Americans and their lawmakers. Soon after treaty ratification, many Americans realized that they could no longer rely on a permanent contingent of U.S. troops to influence Panamanian events. The evolving relationship between the new Panama and the U.S. became especially challenging during the rise of the dictator Manuel Noriega. His military regime, suppression of democratic elections, and direct involvement in drug trafficking precipitated the U.S. invasion of Panama in December 1989. President George Bush and his administration used rhetoric remarkably similar

¹Perkins, *History of the Monroe Doctrine*, 393.

to the Roosevelt Corollary to characterize Noriega's regime and justify the U.S. operation. As the U.S. continued to withdraw its troops from Panama after Operation Just Cause, non-American forces, both commercial and military, began to move into Panama, further stimulating American concern for Panamanian neutrality. Fearful of an increased communist influence from Chinese firms and weary of the canal's vulnerability to guerilla attacks, Americans cited the Monroe Doctrine to justify rescinding the canal treaties and maintaining a sizeable U.S. military force in the Canal Zone. Since 1977, two enduring policies have increasingly influenced the U.S. relationship with Panama: the Monroe cabinet formulated the first policy to protect American democracies from threatening foreign systems; President Theodore Roosevelt created the second policy to justify U.S. intervention in Latin America. Both policies embody the surviving tenets of the Monroe Doctrine.

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