



ANALYSIS

A NEW LATIN AMERICAN POLICY: THE TRUMP DOCTRINE OR A TRUMP COROLLARY?

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Introduction

In January of 2025, President Donald J. Trump inaugurated his second term by promising to “Make America Great Again” and protect it from its “enemies from within.”¹ These enemies include not only, as stated by the president, radical, left-leaning groups, but also illegal immigrants stemming from Latin America. A White House fact sheet, published two days after the presidential inauguration, states that, “Today, President Trump signed an Executive Order that suspends the physical entry of aliens engaged in an invasion of the United States through the southern border.”² This was then translated into different actions, policies, and decisions that brought the Western Hemisphere, or in other words, the Americas, back into prominence. This was done in response to the belief that the United States had prioritized power projection overseas for too long, instead of attending to its own hemisphere. This allowed criminal organizations and record migration flows to threaten the very safety of the nation.³

In December of the same year, the Trump Administration released its National Security Strategy (NSS), which placed this continent at the top of the list of regions of concern. Moreover, the document also stated that this “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine is a common-sense and potent restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests.”⁴ This study concludes that the Trump Administration is enforcing a mix of these two principles: the defense of the Western Hemisphere from extra-continental adversaries (China, Russia, Iran), while actively intervening against those groups (mostly cartels, sometimes state governments) that pose or may pose a threat to the U.S. national security/interests. It analyzes some differences that the new Trump Corollary

¹ Indeed, in a speech addressing top military leaders in Quantico, Virginia, President Trump stated that “We’re under invasion from within, no different than a foreign enemy, but more difficult in many ways because they don’t wear uniforms.” President Donald J. Trump, “Speech: Donald Trump Addresses Military Leadership in Quantico, Virginia - September 30, 2025,” at *Rollcall*, September 30, 2025, <https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-speech-department-of-defense-leaders-quantico-september-30-2025/>.

² White House Fact Sheet, “FACT SHEET: President Donald J. Trump Protects the States and the American People by Closing the Border to Illegals via Proclamation,” *The White House*, January 22, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-protects-the-states-and-the-american-people-by-closing-the-border-to-illegals-via-proclamation/>.

³ Christopher Hernandez-Roy, Juliana Rubio, Jessie Hu, and Sam Smith, “President Trump’s Latin America Policy: Short-Term Gains, Long-Term Risks,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 6, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/president-trumps-latin-america-policy-short-term-gains-long-term-risks>.

⁴ President of the United States, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House, 2025), p. 15, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.



presents vis-à-vis its predecessor, the Roosevelt Corollary, and the new stakes and regions affected by the American shift in its foreign policy.

The Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary

In principle, the threats that Washington faces on its side of the world seem similar to those the United States faced at the dawn of its history. At the time, many former colonies, following the American example, were set free from their imperial metropolis across the continent. By 1823, concerns that Spain, Britain, France, or any other European power would try to reconquer stretches of the American continent, or intervene against Latin American independence movements, fermented the soil for a policy developed and implemented by the James Monroe Administration. This concern understandably followed the war of 1812, in which British troops crossed into the United States from Canada and attacked and burned Washington, D.C. along with the White House and many other government buildings.⁵ This concern was also observed in the area today known as Florida, at the time a Spanish territory. American leaders started to raise the alarm on the possibility of a British purchase or claim over the territory, from which it could harass American states and disrupt commerce. Florida, in other words, was “seen by Monroe (President Monroe) exactly as many of his successors would see other parts of Latin America – as pieces of unattractive land that nonhemispheric (*sic*) adversaries might use as a base to attack the United States.”⁶ This set the course for America’s first consistent foreign policy in regard to Latin America.

This policy, in the words of the historian Mark Gilderhus, had three goals: to keep the Europeans out, especially after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the surge of conservative and monarchical alliances in the Old World; to safeguard order and stability in areas of special concern; and to ensure open access to markets and resources.⁷ Although in later decades the policy was not emphasized by the American government, nor did European powers show much interest in Latin America per se, it came back to prominence in a more fervent fashion by the end of the century. At first, during the American involvement in the Venezuela vs. British Guiana dispute in 1895—a dispute that still stands to this day in the Essequibo region; and more clearly in the American involvement in the Cuban civil war, in 1898. The latter had clear goals underlined by the Monroe Doctrine: the expulsion of the Spanish presence from the Caribbean, the restoration of peace, and the establishment of a special relationship with the nascent Cuban nation.⁸ In the years to come, the policy was used to keep European and then Communist foes away from the Americas, but it became largely

⁵ Office of the Historian, “War of 1812–1815,” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/war-of-1812>.

⁶ Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 17.

⁷ Mark T. Gilderhus, “The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): p. 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552742>.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

unnoticed after the end of the Cold War. In addition, in the early years of the 20th century, a new foreign policy regarding Latin America came to be known as the “Roosevelt Corollary” that went beyond the original ideas of the Monroe Doctrine.

In December of 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt presented the following message to the American audience: “...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.”⁹ If the Monroe Doctrine was designed to keep the European powers out of the continent, the Roosevelt Corollary was meant to legitimize interventions on it. This was openly carried out during the first decades of the century in Panama and the Caribbean in general, but also after the end of the Second World War and throughout the Cold War. As noted by the scholar Walter LaFeber: “It is the Roosevelt Doctrine, not Monroe’s, that Dulles, Acheson, Johnson, Reagan, and Weinberger had in mind when they justified unilateral US intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American States.”¹⁰ As noted, these two policies became the foundations of American control and oversight over the Western Hemisphere, over its backyard. For almost two centuries, American decision-makers decided to keep extra-continental powers outside of the continent, but the end of the Cold War, the period known as “Pax Americana,” and perhaps some influence of globalization phenomenon, led to the withdrawal of American interest in the region and left a vacuum. A vacuum that has since been filled by Washington’s foes and illicit organizations.

Criminal Threats in Latin America

In Latin America, several different elements have sought to fill the power vacuums left by weak governments and the withdrawal of U.S. influence over the region. Some of these elements are composed of local or state-wide criminal and terrorist organizations, while extra continental adversaries, such as China, Russia, and Iran, have emerged in the region to raise their influence and partnerships with local governments to the detriment of America’s. The combination of these two developments has created a problematic situation not only alongside the U.S. southern border but also within the nation as the long-standing War on Drugs has not produced significant results.¹¹ This study now proceeds to explore the origin and current situation of these threats, as they paved the way for the revival of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary in the 21st century.

On February 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of State issued a press release in which it designated several Latin American international cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations

⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, in Serge Ricard, “The Roosevelt Corollary,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): p. 18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552743>.

¹⁰ Walter LaFeber, in *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ The War on Drugs started in 1971, after then-President Richard Nixon set in motion a tough-in-crime policy agenda that involved harsher sentencing laws and increased enforcement actions. Betsy Pearl, “Ending the War on Drugs: By the Numbers,” *Center for American Progress*, June 27, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/ending-war-drugs-numbers/>.

(FTOs) and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). Some of the organizations so identified were the Tren de Aragua, Mara Salvatrucha, and Cartel de Sinaloa.¹² This began a series of military and enforcement operations against these organizations within the United States and in the Caribbean region. On the domestic front, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reportedly has more than 6,200 active gang investigations into local neighborhood gangs across the country, which often act as vital partners to the cartels by helping them expand and evade U.S. law enforcement.¹³ To dismantle these organizations the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are creating a Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF) to extend the reach of law enforcement operations, share intelligence in real time, and target these organizations at every level.¹⁴ This HSTF has already carried out more than 2,500 arrests this year, mostly thanks to the designation of these organizations as FTOs. According to Jose Perez, Assistant Director of the Criminal Investigative Division of the FBI, the designation of these organizations as FTOs has expanded the bureau's intelligence collection capability and the collaboration with the intelligence community and the U.S. military. In addition, it has allowed the FBI to work alongside the Department of Justice (DOJ) to bring additional charges against the members of these cartels.¹⁵

In the Caribbean, the War against Drugs has been more noticeable. Beginning on September 2nd, 2025, the U.S. military started to carry out strikes against drug trafficking vessels in the Caribbean Sea that belonged, reportedly, to FTOs. Since then, there have been more than 20 strikes against similar targets in the region. According to Ara Friedman, from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, this has been a change in policy for the U.S. approach to maritime drug trafficking off the coast of Latin America, which has historically been treated as part of the U.S. Coast Guard's jurisdiction.¹⁶ Regardless of the legal or moral justification of this change of policy, the modification has raised several questions regarding the Trump Administration's plans on the continent to achieve its objectives. Moreover, it has also raised questions regarding the possible role of Latin American governments in the expansion of these cartels and other criminal organizations, such as in Venezuela. These groups and organizations have become the centerpiece of America's new effort on the continent. In short, this administration has repurposed two, centuries-old foreign policies designed to address the problems emanating from Latin America and brought these to the Twenty-First century's challenges.

¹² Office of the Spokesperson, "Designation of International Cartels," *U.S. Department of State*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-international-cartels>.

¹³ Statement of Jose Perez, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigative Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, June 24, 2025, p. 2, <https://www.justice.gov/ola/media/1404816/dl?inline>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Ara Friedman, "The Trump Administration and Venezuela: Michael Shifter analyzes maritime strikes and possible regime change," *Georgetown University School of Foreign Service*, November 14, 2025, <https://sfs.georgetown.edu/news/the-trump-administration-and-venezuela-michael-shifter-analyzes-maritime-strikes-and-possible-regime-change/>.

Extra-Continental Threats in Latin America

The Trump Administration's new focus on Latin America includes the battle against extra-continental influence in the region. Among the different external adversaries that have sought to limit U.S. influence on the continent, China, Russia, and Iran have been the most successful. In the case of Beijing, its world-wide, ambitious foreign policy, the Belt & Road Initiative, has been highly successful, including in Latin America. This project was conceived in 2013 as the new masterpiece in China's foreign policy doctrine. The purpose was to restore China as an influence superpower that could fight and replace Western influence globally.¹⁷ To achieve this goal, Beijing has poured billions of dollars/yuans into developing countries, seeking to develop a debtor-lender relationship between these nations and China. Indeed, dependence on these funds can push economically unstable countries, such as Venezuela, into what critics call debt traps that can result in default.¹⁸ In this process, China's foreign investment on the continent amounted to roughly \$8.5 billion in 2024, about 6% of Beijing's total outward foreign direct investment.¹⁹

In most cases, economic ties lead towards political ties which often also lead to security commitments. Some Latin American countries have followed this roadmap, such as Venezuela, which is China's most important partner in the region. In terms of security, it is the top purchaser of Chinese military equipment in the region, while hosting training operations and military drills alongside Beijing.²⁰ In addition, other countries, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, have also purchased Chinese military aircraft, ground vehicles, radar systems, assault rifles, and other equipment. In the Caribbean, Cuba has hosted the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for port visits and training on the island. U.S. intelligence officials have also warned about evidence that China is strengthening its intelligence cooperation with Havana.²¹

Furthermore, the financing of several maritime projects by China in the region, such as the Chancay Port in Peru, has also raised alarms regarding the Chinese penetration in South America. This port, for instance, has the potential to transform the logistics dynamics of the Pacific, affording significant benefits to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the customers and users to whom it gives preferred access, at the expense of its global logistics rivals.²² This could in turn facilitate PRC control over a range of ports and other infrastructure projects not only in Peru but across South America. Finally, it could also give

¹⁷ Santiago Spadilero, "Uninvited Guests in the Backyard: Dangers and Risks of Terrorist and Anti-American Activity in Latin America" (MS Thesis, Missouri State University, 2023), p. 37.

¹⁸ Diana Roy, "China's Growing Influence in Latin America," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 6, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Evan Ellis, "Strategic Implications of the Chinese-Operated Port of Chancay," *REDCAEM*, November 2024, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Recent-Publications/Article/3959936/strategic-implication-of-the-chinese-operated-port-of-chancay/>.

PRC-controlled companies easier access to the mining, agricultural and other products of the region, becoming these countries' most important trade partners. Overall, Beijing's influence over the continent has grown exponentially in the last two decades, signing dozens if not hundreds of trade and security agreements with the nations of this region. Perhaps more importantly, it has also established ports and bases on the continent, such as the deep-space station in the Argentinean Patagonia region.²³ But it is not the only extra-continental adversary present in the region.

Russia is also active on the continent, mostly behind the autocratic or near-autocratic regimes of the region, including Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. These countries, alongside Peru and Bolivia, to a lesser extent, are the main purchasers of Russian military equipment, which is not a minor detail considering the multiple sanctions the Russian military-industrial sector received after the outbreak of its invasion of Ukraine.²⁴ In Nicaragua, for instance, Russia has supplied ninety percent of the country's arms imports. Moscow apparently views Latin America as a counterpoint to U.S. policy in the European theater. In terms of areas of influence, Russia believes that the United States has intervened in Moscow's own region, thus making it "reasonable" for Russia to do the same in Latin America. This is done not only through military activities but also through commercial agreements, in information warfare operations, and by generating anti-U.S. coalition regimes in the region. Nonetheless, Russia's influence over the region is less dynamic or pronounced than China's.

Finally, Iran's activity on the continent is on two different fronts: Its formal ties with other autocratic regimes in the region, such as Venezuela and other aforementioned nations; and, with its command and control over terrorist organizations, namely Hezbollah, active in the region. Iran's dangerous presence on the continent predates China's by over a decade. Since the late 1980s and 1990s, Tehran's militant-terrorist arm, Hezbollah, established itself in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Moreover, Iran has set up cordial relationships with the autocratic regimes of the region, including by creating cultural linkages with the local populations of these regions, with the creation of Shiite Islamic cultural centers.²⁵ In this effort, Venezuela leads the charge by opening the doors to Iranian financial and military investment in the country. At the time, during the administration of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's oil wealth and diplomatic clout gave Tehran a powerful platform to advocate for an expanded role on the continent.²⁶ In June of 2023, for instance, then-President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, visited Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, highlighting the

²³ For more information on the PRC base in Argentina, see Carlo J. V. Caro, "The Patagonian Enigma: China's Deep Space Station in Argentina," *The Diplomat*, January 8, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/the-patagonian-enigma-chinas-deep-space-station-in-argentina/>.

²⁴ Ryan C. Berg, "China and Russia engage Latin America and the Caribbean differently. Both threaten US interests," *Atlantic Council*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/china-and-russia-engage-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-differently-both-threaten-us-interests/>.

²⁵ Santiago Spadiliero, op. cit., p. 48.

²⁶ Henry Ziemer, Tina Dolbaia, and Mathieu Droin, "Russia and Iran in Latin America: Same Outlook, Similar Playbooks," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, July 25, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-iran-latin-america-same-outlook-similar-playbooks>.

need for the revolutionary movements in both Iran and Latin America to reassert their independence and sovereignty.²⁷

At the same time, and perhaps more concerning, the activity of Hezbollah in the region has, according to a RAND report, not diminished: “Hezbollah’s Latin American networks could exploit cross-border vulnerabilities, manipulate existing trafficking routes into U.S. cities, and potentially leverage criminal networks for intelligence-collection or operational support within the United States.”²⁸ Still, this presence is not new. Hezbollah has been active on the continent since at least the early 1990s, when they carried out two terrorist attacks against Israeli targets in Buenos Aires, Argentina.²⁹ It controls drug trafficking, money laundering, document fraud, and contraband smuggling operations in the region.³⁰

The Trump Doctrine, or the Trump Corollary?

In this context, China and Russia have emerged as powerful contestants against the American-led order. They have sought not only to secure and expand their own areas of influence, but to influence decisions and actions in America’s backyard. Moreover, insecurity, corrupt governments, and poverty, among other factors, strengthened the ranks of criminal organizations across the region that have expanded their operations and deepened their contacts within local governments. Perhaps these reasons have been sufficient for the Trump Administration to veer the course of American military focus and effort. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Latin America lost its position within America’s national security and foreign policy concerns in favor of the Middle East and East Asia. This was a reasonable measure, given the rise in terrorist activity in the former and the emergence of North Korea as a nuclear state in the latter. However, the U.S. government may not need to implement a new policy towards Latin America but reutilize these two old policies designed to control and intervene in the region.

First, the Trump Administration will seek to establish a new Monroe Doctrine across Latin America to prevent the spread of anti-American values encouraged by extra-continental adversaries. Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, scholar and current professor at the Universidad Torcuato di Tella in Argentina, asserts in his 2024 article for *Americas Quarterly* that Trump sees Latin America in largely negative terms: “a destructive source of instability, drug trafficking, migrants, and criminals to the detriment of the United States—and barely relevant in economic terms.”³¹ However, the region is now linked to those afflictions

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marzia Giambertoni, “Hezbollah’s Networks in Latin America,” *RAND Corporation*, March 31, 2025, p.14, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA3585-1.html>.

²⁹ For more on the terrorist presence in Latin America, see Mark P. Sullivan and June S. Beittel, “Latin America: Terrorism Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, December 15, 2016, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RS/PDF/RS21049/RS21049.54.pdf.

³⁰ For more on Hezbollah’s activities on the continent, see this report from *RAND Corporation*: Marzia Giambertoni, op. cit.

³¹ Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, “Donald Trump and the Return of the Monroe Doctrine,” *Americas Quarterly*, September 4, 2024, <https://americasquarterly.org/article/donald-trump-and-the-return-of-the-monroe-doctrine/>.

challenging U.S. security. Congressman French Hill (R-AR), Chairman of the House Committee on Financial Services, stated that “After all, challenges here at home are often inextricably linked to tackling those in our backyard. Meanwhile, conscious efforts on nearshoring and supply chain diversification could bring manufacturing, economic growth, and investment to the Americas — thereby making America First into Americas First.”³² Furthermore, in 2023 eleven Republican legislators presented a resolution in the Senate commemorating the 200 years of the Monroe Doctrine while reaffirming its validity to “oppose a foreign power extending malign influence” in Latin America.³³

In this context, the Trump Administration has carried out several measures to limit the spread of extra-continental influence, mostly Chinese, in the region. First, it has provided important political support to those elites and regimes that support America’s foreign policy and values, or that try to contain the Chinese presence in the region. Argentina’s president Javier Milei, and his Salvadoran counterpart, Nayib Bukele, have received significant support from the Trump Administration in the last year. In the case of the former, the U.S. government authorized a \$20 billion currency swap with Buenos Aires amid a severe trade balance deficit with the Latin American nation. According to Scott Bessent, U.S. Treasury Secretary, “We do not want another failed state in Latin America, and a strong, stable Argentina as a good neighbor is explicitly in the strategic interest of the United States.”³⁴ Furthermore, the Treasury has also stated that “the United States has an interest in the success of Milei’s agenda, as his commitment to the unfettered market is setting an important example for the rest of the region.”³⁵ In other words, assisting Argentina has the intention of securing the support base for an allied regime that could help spread pro-American interests across the southern cone of the continent, while limiting the reach of Chinese activities in the region. In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele has followed a similar political and ideological path as Milei, becoming one of America’s closest allies. In April of 2025, President Bukele visited the White House to underscore his cooperation with the U.S. government’s plan to deport some migrants to El Salvador for imprisonment, while recently signing a reciprocal trade agreement with the country.³⁶

³² Congressman French Hill, “President Trump Can Make the Americas Great Again,” *United States House Committee on Financial Services*, January 26, 2026, <https://financialservices.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=410998>.

³³ Congress.gov. “Text - S.Res.434 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): A resolution commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine.” October 26, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-resolution/434/text>.

³⁴ U.S. Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, in Michael Stratford, “Bessent inks ‘economic stabilization’ deal with Argentina,” *Politico*, October 21, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/21/bessent-argentina-economic-deal-00616391>.

³⁵ Brad W. Setser, “Will Trump’s \$20 Billion Backing Help Milei Change Argentina’s Fortunes?,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 14, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/article/will-trumps-20-billion-backing-help-milei-change-argentinas-fortunes#chapter-title-0-5>.

³⁶ Liz Mineo, “Closer look at ‘coolest dictator in the world’,” *The Harvard Gazette*, May 15, 2025, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/05/closer-look-at-coolest-dictator-in-the-world/>; and, “Joint Statement on Framework for United States-El Salvador Agreement on Reciprocal Trade,” *The White House*, November 13, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-el-salvador-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/>.

Along these lines, in an article written by Christopher Hernandez-Joy et al., the authors recognized that “The current administration seems to be adopting a ‘Monroe Doctrine 2.0’ approach to the Western Hemisphere: decimating soft-power initiatives in favor of deploying (or threatening to deploy) military force, while also relying on economic coercion and trade pressure.”³⁷ In the authors’ argument, the Trump Administration has employed soft and hard power policies in Latin America. Securing alliances with some friendly regimes in the region to help contain the expansion of anti-American rhetoric should be part of this soft power package. In other words, the new Trump Doctrine may support friendly regimes alongside other measures to “encourage nations to limit their links to China, Russia, and Iran.” These other measures include cutting down USAID assistance for these countries and to reduce other types of economic and political assistance for some Latin American regimes. Nonetheless, the hard power policies have been more visible and tangible, at least for those countries that reject alignment with U.S. interests.

Secondly, the Trump Administration confirmed its intention to include a “Trump Corollary” to the traditional tenets of the Monroe Doctrine. Indeed, the NSS clearly states that “After years of neglect, the United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region,” and that “We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere.”³⁸ This document also declares that “Our goals for the Western Hemisphere can be summarized as ‘Enlist and Expand.’ We will enlist established friends in the Hemisphere to control migration, stop drug flows, and strengthen stability and security on land and sea. We will expand by cultivating and strengthening new partners while bolstering our own nation’s appeal as the Hemisphere’s economic and security partner of choice.”³⁹ This last point includes some differences from the original Roosevelt Corollary.

In an article written by James Holmes for *The National Interest*, he identified three differences between the Roosevelt Corollary and its namesake. First, the context is both similar and different. In the NSS, the word “restoration” was used as the sole purpose of the revival of this policy. This implies the perspective that the United States fell behind others in its own hemisphere, and it was now seeking to reestablish supremacy in the region. On the other hand, the Roosevelt Corollary also saw the challenges posed by a different set of threats, but at the time, the United States was a regional great power in ascent; “Roosevelt’s America was a confident newcomer to regional great power.”⁴⁰ Today, the United States has been a superpower across the world for the last 80 years, which marks an important difference regarding means and goals.

³⁷ Hernandez-Joy et al., op. cit.

³⁸ President of the United States, op. cit., p.15.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁰ James Holmes, “What Would Teddy Roosevelt Think of the ‘Trump Corollary?’” *The National Interest*, December 9, 2025, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-would-teddy-roosevelt-think-of-trump-corollary-jh-120925>.

The second difference involves the different stakes and adversaries. President Theodore Roosevelt was mostly concerned about hostile armadas barging into the Caribbean, while the Trump Administration is worried about guarding the homeland against threats posed by substate as well as state wrongdoers.⁴¹ Previously, attacking the fleet of an already established great power could have carried the United States into an unwanted war. Today, the stakes are lower. It is unlikely that the bombing of drug trafficking boats and vessels or the intervention over a Latin American state could trigger the involvement of another superpower, such as Russia or China. According to Holmes, “The Roosevelt Corollary sought to exclude extraregional conventional forces from the Caribbean and Gulf. The Trump Corollary aspires to manage a far more variegated, blurrier threat seascape than the one that confronted TR [Theodore Roosevelt].”⁴² In this sense, as the threats have shifted, so have the stakes and tools.

Finally, the NSS asserts that “We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere,”⁴³ which raises the question of the definition of “vital assets.” In President Roosevelt’s time, customhouses and ports were certainly counted as vital assets since an adversary could then physically and geographically occupy a territory and convert it to malign use. Are these vital assets the same? According to Holmes, depending on how the administration defines that concept could have seismic impact on how it implements its corollary.⁴⁴ These non-territorial vital assets in the Americas could involve economic dependence of Latin American countries on extra-continental nations which may then acquire beneficial agreements to the detriment of the U.S. interests; information control over the region, which might make it easier for foreign nations to acquire information on America’s weaknesses or interests in the region; and control over logistical nodes and vital supply chains that could raise costs in America. To tackle these multiple threats and issues, U.S. carrots and sticks may not be enough.

Setting the Example: Venezuela

Since the emergence of President Hugo Chavez as the leader of Venezuela in 1999, the country has faced several crises that have undermined the political authority of the democratic institutions, turning a once prosperous democracy into an autocratic regime whose only allies can be counted with one hand, i.e., Russia, Iran, China, North Korea, and Cuba. The political and economic turmoil inside the country prompted millions of Venezuelans to leave their homes and migrate across the continent: some to the United

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ President of the United States, op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁴ James Holmes, op. cit.

States, some to Europe, some to other parts of Latin America.⁴⁵ This is just one of the many problems that the Venezuelan leadership, led by President Nicolás Maduro, created for its neighbors. This section briefly analyzes the dangers posed by the Venezuelan regime in the eyes of the Trump Administration and the use of the “stick” to correct its course.

Namely, two crises emerged since the Maduro regime decided to derail what was once one of the most prosperous nations of the continent. First, the migration crisis has led millions of Venezuelans to flee overseas to other nations, creating social crises in those countries unprepared for their arrival. According to the U.S. delegate to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 8 million Venezuelans have left since the crisis in their homeland began, of which almost a million arrived in the United States.⁴⁶ Secondly, the Venezuelan regime first led by Chávez and then by Maduro set the foundations for the institutional decline that would allow drug trafficking organizations to expand their operations in the Caribbean nation and region, mostly after the expulsion of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration back in 2005.⁴⁷ Moreover, other authors also agree that “Venezuela is not only not making efforts to combat drug trafficking but rather appears to be even allowing drug-trafficking operations free range over its borders.”⁴⁸ Finally, and in tune with the growing potential of these organizations, uncontrolled migration has allowed some of these elements to set up bases in the United States. The U.S. Department of Treasury stated in 2024 that “From its origins as a prison gang in Aragua, Venezuela, Tren de Aragua has quickly expanded throughout the Western Hemisphere in recent years.”⁴⁹ In March of 2025, Joseph Humire, Executive Director of the Center for a Secure Free Society, provided testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Federal Law Enforcement, in which he offered his analysis on the weaponization of migration. In this capacity, he stated that “China, Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela (and Russia) are all finding ways to capitalize on the U.S. border and immigration crisis, by partnering with or utilizing Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) to destabilize American communities and steal U.S. sovereignty.”⁵⁰ These threats emanate from Venezuela and may also do so from other countries, and in response, the current administration seems to be more decided to

⁴⁵ For more on the Venezuelan crisis and the fall of the “petrostate,” see Diana Roy and Amelia Cheatham, “Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 31, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/venezuela-crisis>.

⁴⁶ USA for UNHCR, “Venezuela Crisis Explained,” April 17, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/venezuela-crisis-explained/>.

⁴⁷ Juan Miguel Matheus, “How Venezuela Became a Gangster State,” *Journal of Democracy*, September 2025, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-venezuela-became-a-gangster-state/>.

⁴⁸ Francisco R. Rodriguez, in Bernard Gwertzman, “Rodriguez: Chavez Using Attack on FARC to Bolster Diminishing Popularity,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 6, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/rodriguez-chavez-using-attack-farc-bolster-diminishing-popularity#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20FARC,over%20its%20borders>.

⁴⁹ Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Tren de Aragua as a Transnational Criminal Organization,” *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, July 11, 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2459>.

⁵⁰ Joseph Humire, “Enhancing Federal, State, and Local Coordination in the Fight Against Criminal Illegal Aliens: Testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Federal Law Enforcement,” *U.S. House of Representatives*, March 11, 2025, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Humire-Written-Testimony.pdf>.

actively intervene in Latin America on behalf of America's interests than any administration in the last three decades.

Because of these threats, the Trump Administration decided to increase its pressure on the Venezuelan regime and its coalesced FTOs by starting a campaign of bombings against alleged drug trafficking vessels in the Caribbean Sea. The operation, named Operation Southern Spear, started in early September of 2025 and launched over 25 kinetic strikes against these vessels, killing at least 82 narco-terrorists.⁵¹ Moreover, President Trump himself ordered a direct military operation on Venezuelan soil against Maduro and his wife, Celia Flores. On January 3rd of 2026, a complex operation was launched to capture the leader of Venezuela and his wife and extradite them to U.S. soil where they could be prosecuted in narco-terrorism, drug trafficking, and weapons charges.⁵² After the operation, Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as interim President of Venezuela, while President Trump has stated that the United States will "run" Venezuela until a transition takes place, and that Venezuelan officials must turn over "sanctioned oil" and negotiate an energy deal with the United States.⁵³

The traditional "big stick" campaign devised by President Roosevelt might work in the current century, as the case in Venezuela shows, at least for the short-term. As historian H. W. Brands remembers: "In his 1904 annual message to Congress, Theodore Roosevelt issued a statement claiming for the United States the right to act unilaterally and, if necessary, preemptively, to maintain order in the Western Hemisphere."⁵⁴ In doing so, President Trump has shifted the emphasis of America's foreign policy, from global affairs to neighborhood affairs. And Venezuela was the first to feel the effect.

Conclusion

The Trump Administration made a 180-degree turn from the last 30 years of America's foreign policy. From combating terrorism in the Middle East and growing Chinese ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, the administration has enhanced its efforts in its own neighborhood. It sees this shift as in the vital interest of U.S. national security due to two main concerns: massive migration, and drug production and trafficking that affects the lives of thousands if not millions of Americans. To accomplish these new goals, the Trump Administration has ramped up its military presence in the region, strengthened connections and political influence in the area, and increased the pressure and punitive actions against opponents, including narco-terrorist organizations and autocratic regimes.

⁵¹ Matthew Olay, "Pentagon Provides Update on Operation Southern Spear, Reaffirms Socom Called for Second Strike on Drug Boat," *Pentagon News*, December 2, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4346303/pentagon-provides-update-on-operation-southern-spear-reaffirms-socom-called-for/>.

⁵² Clare Ribando Seelke, "U.S. Capture of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro: Considerations for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, January 12, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12618>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ H. W. Brands, in Ricard, op. cit., p.18.

The expanding threats in the region are varied in nature and power. China, Russia, and Iran have established themselves in the autocratic regimes of the region. China has become the largest trade partner for some of the countries in the region while building important mega infrastructure projects in Peru and Brazil. Russia is—or was—Venezuela’s most important military equipment partner and a powerful anti-American blockbuster. Iran, on the other hand, presents important trade agreements with Venezuela and Cuba, mostly in the energy sector, as it attempts to avoid the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies. Finally, FTOs have grown in power and sophistication, delivering thousands of tons of drugs into the United States via several ground and maritime paths. The Trump Administration’s expansive new policy seeks to counter these threats and return the Western Hemisphere solely to America’s sphere of influence.

The Trump Administration is not enforcing a new type of policy over Latin America, but an updated version of two, centuries-old foreign policies framed under the Monroe and Roosevelt Administrations. These policies were used to design this administration’s approach to Latin America, but with its own characteristics. First, the United States is no longer an empire in construction, but a nation that seeks its “revival,” as expressed in the recently published NSS. Secondly, the stakes are different. The new purpose of the Trump Corollary is not to fight and sink European armadas but FTO vessels and hubs. Finally, the vital assets to be protected in the region may be different than before. Physical enclaves could be protected or taken, but more abstract elements such as information and propaganda could be much harder to fight if the administration does not utilize the right tools in the right way. Future research could delve into the outcomes of the U.S. policy in Latin America at the informational level: how has propaganda modified the conceptions and perspectives from local populations vis-à-vis America’s new policy in the region. As of now, the effort has shifted to Latin America, and the Trump Corollary is emerging as America’s most important foreign policy in the 2020s.

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