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A New Latin American Policy: The Trump Doctrine or a Trump Corollary?

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In January 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 As stated by the President, these enemies include not only, radical, left-leaning groups, but also illegal immigrants stemming from Latin America. A White House fact sheet, published two days after the presidential inauguration, stated 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 its own hemisphere. This emphasis 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 security in the Americas as the priority 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 article briefly states that the Trump Administration is enforcing a mix of these two principles: the defense of the Western Hemisphere from extra-continental adversaries (China,



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Russia, Iran), while actively intervening against those groups (mostly cartels, sometimes state governments) that pose or may pose a threat to U.S. national security interests. It analyzes some differences that the new Trump Corollary 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 the United States faces on its very own side of the world seem similar to those the United States faced in early nineteenth century, since some of these threats are represented by nation states. At the time, many former colonies, following the American example, escaped imperialist domination. By 1823, U.S. concerns that Spain, Britain, France, or any other European power would try to reconquer stretches of the American continent, or to at least intervene against American interests in the region, led to a policy developed and implemented by the James Monroe Administration. This policy, in the words of 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.⁵ In the decades to follow the policy was not heavily emphasized by the American government, and the European powers became less interested in Latin America per se; it returned to prominence in a more fervent fashion however, by the end of the century. In addition, in the early years of the twentieth century, a new foreign policy regarding Latin America came to be known as the “Roosevelt Corollary” that transcended the original ideas of the Monroe Doctrine.

In December 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.”⁶ 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, 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.”⁷ 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 strove to keep extra-continental powers outside of the continent. The end of the Cold War, the period known as “Pax Americana,” and perhaps the influence of globalization however, led to the withdrawal of American interest in the region. This left a vacuum that has since been occupied by Washington's foes and illicit organizations.



Criminal and Extra-Continental Threats in Latin America

In Latin America, several different elements have sought to fill the power vacuums left by powerless governments and the consequential withdrawal of U.S. influence over the region. Some of these elements have been composed of local or state-wide criminal and terrorist organizations, while extra-continental adversaries, such as China, Russia, and Iran, started to germinate in the region to raise their influence and partnerships with local governments to the detriment of America's. The combination of these two threats has created a problematic situation alongside the U.S. southern border as well as but also within the nation as the long-standing War on Drugs has not produced significant results.⁸ This section aims to explore the origin and current situation of these threats, which paved the way for the revival of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary in the twenty-first century.

On February 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of State issued a press release in which it informed the designation of several Latin American international cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). Some of the designated organizations were the Tren de Aragua, Mara Salvatrucha, and Cartel de Sinaloa, among others.⁹ Thus began a series of military and enforcement operations against these organizations within the United States and in the Caribbean region. 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 its collaboration with the intelligence community and U.S. military.

Beginning on September 2, 2025, the U.S. military started to carry out conventional strikes against alleged drug trafficking vessels and boats in the Caribbean Sea that belonged, allegedly, to FTOs. Since then, there have been more than 20 strikes against similar targets in the region.¹⁰ 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 been historically treated as part of the U.S. Coast Guard's jurisdiction.¹¹ Regardless of the legal or moral justifications for this change, the new policy has raised several questions regarding the Trump Administration's plans on the continent, and the courses of action it requires to achieve its objectives. Moreover, it has also raised questions on the possible role of Latin American governments, such as Venezuela, in the expansion of these cartels and other criminal organizations.

The Trump Administration's new focus on Latin America not only pursues the elimination of FTOs but also 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 worldwide, ambitious foreign policy—the Belt and Road Initiative—has been highly successful in most continents, and Latin America is no exception. In most cases, economic ties lead toward political ties, which often also lead to security commitments. Some Latin American countries have followed this road map, 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



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hosting training operations and military drills alongside Beijing.¹² 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.¹³

Russia is also active in Latin America, mostly behind the autocratic- or near-autocratic regimes of the region, such as 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.¹⁴ In Nicaragua, for instance, Russia has supplied 90 percent of the country's arms imports. Additionally, according to Ryan C. Berg, Director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Moscow 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 commercial, information warfare operations, and 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 in Latin America is observable on two different fronts: its formal ties with other autocratic regimes in the region, such as Venezuela and other aforementioned nations; and, its command and control over terrorist organizations, namely Hezbollah, which are 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, has established itself in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Moreover, Iran has also set up cordial relationships with autocratic regimes of the region. 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.¹⁵ In June 2023, for instance, then President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, visited Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, highlighting the need for the revolutionary movements in both Iran and Latin America to reassert their independence and sovereignty.¹⁶

At the same time, and perhaps more concerning, the activity of Hezbollah in the region, according to a RAND report, has not diminished. Indeed, according to this report, "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."¹⁷ The group controls drug trafficking, money laundering, document fraud, and contraband smuggling operations in the region.¹⁸



The Trump Doctrine, or the Trump Corollary?

In this new context, China and Russia have emerged as powerful contestants against the American-led order; they seek to secure and expand their own areas of influence, and also threaten to influence decisions and actions in America's backyard. Moreover, insecurity, corrupt governments, and poverty, among other factors, have strengthened the ranks of criminal organizations across the region which have expanded their operations and deepened their contacts within local governments. Perhaps these reasons have been sufficient for the Trump Administration to re-orient the course of American military focus and effort.

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 professor at the Universidad Torcuato di Tella in Argentina, described in his 2024 article for *Americas Quarterly* that, since his first administration, Trump sees Latin America in 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."¹⁹ Moreover, 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.²⁰

To date, 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. The U.S. Department of the Treasury 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."²¹ 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.

Along these lines, in an article written by Christopher Hernandez-Joy and others, 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."²² The authors contend that the Trump Administration has employed soft and hard power policies regarding Latin America. Securing alliances with some friendly regimes in the region to help contain the expansion of anti-American rhetoric could be considered to be part of this soft power package. In other words, the new Trump Doctrine may utilize friendly regimes alongside other measures to "encourage nations to limit their links to



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China, Russia, and Iran.” Nonetheless, the hard power policies have been more visible, at least for those countries who reject alignment with U.S. interests.

Secondly, the Trump Administration has 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.”²³ 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.”²⁴ This last point includes some differences from the original Roosevelt Corollary.

In an article 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.”²⁵ Today, the United States has been a leading power across the world for the last 80 years, which marks an important difference regarding means and goals.

The second difference involves the different stakes or adversaries in play. 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.²⁶ Previously, attacking the fleet of an already established great power could have carried the United States into an unwanted war. According to Holmes, “The Roosevelt Corollary sought to exclude extra-regional 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].”²⁷ In this sense, as the threats have shifted, so have the stakes.

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,”²⁸ which raises the question of the definition of “vital assets.” In President Roosevelt’s time, custom houses 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. According to Holmes, depending on how the administration defines that concept could have seismic impact on how it implements its corollary.²⁹ These non-territorial vital assets in



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the Americas could involve economic dependence from Latin American countries on extra-continental nations that may then acquire beneficial agreements in opposition to 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; or control over logistical nodes and vital supply chains that could raise costs in America. To tackle these issues, carrots and sticks might not be enough.

Conclusion

The Trump Administration has made a 180-degree turn away from the last 30 years of America's foreign policy. From combatting terrorism in the Middle East and China's ever-increasing ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, the administration is now focused on its own neighborhood, seeing it as a vital instrument 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 thwart these, the Trump Administration ramped up its military presence in the region, strengthened connections and political influence in the area, and increased the pressure and punitive actions against opposite sides, which include narco-terrorist organizations and autocratic regimes.

The threats that have strengthened U.S. positions in the region are varied in nature and power. China, Russia, and Iran have established themselves in the autocratic regimes of the region, such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. China has become the largest trade partner for some of the countries in the region while building important mega infrastructure projects in countries such as Peru and Brazil. Russia is Venezuela's most important military partner and a powerful anti-American actor. Iran, on the other hand, presents important trade agreements with Venezuela and Cuba, mostly in the energy sector. Finally, FTOs have grown in power and sophistication, delivering thousands of tons of drugs into the United States via several ground and maritime routes each year. The all-encompassing new policy from the Trump Administration for the region seeks to counter these threats and bring back the Western Hemisphere under America's influence, solely.

In this sense, the Trump Administration is bringing back two, centuries-old foreign policies framed under the Monroe and Roosevelt Administrations. These policies were used to devise the 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 they used to be. 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. Future research could delve into the outcomes of U.S. policy at the informational level in Latin America: 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



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Latin America, and the Trump Corollary is emerging as America's most important foreign policy in this decade.

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* (Washington, D.C.: White House, 2025), p. 15, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

⁵ Mark T. Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, No. 1 (2006), p. 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552742>.

⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, in Serge Ricard, "The Roosevelt Corollary," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, No. 1 (2006), p. 18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552743>.

⁷ Walter LaFeber, in Ricard, "The Roosevelt Corollary," *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸ The War on Drugs started in 1971, after then President Richard Nixon set in motion a tough-on-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/>.

⁹ Office of the Spokesperson, "Designation of International Cartels," *U.S. Department of State*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-international-cartels>.

¹⁰ 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/>.

¹¹ 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/>.

¹² 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>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ 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/>.



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¹⁵ 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>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marzia Giambertoni, "Hezbollah's Networks in Latin America," *RAND Corporation*, March 31, 2025, p. 14, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA3585-1.html>.

¹⁸ For more on Hezbollah's activities on the continent, see Giambertoni, Ibid.

¹⁹ 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/>.

²⁰ "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>.

²¹ 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>.

²² Hernandez-Joy, et al., "President Trump's Latin America Policy: Short-Term Gains, Long-Term Risks," op. cit.

²³ President of the United States, *National Security Strategy*, p. 15.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁵ 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>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ President of the United States, *National Security Strategy*, p. 15.

²⁹ Holmes, "What Would Teddy Roosevelt Think of the 'Trump Corollary'?" op. cit.

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