The Monroe Doctrine Essay, Research Paper

One of James Monroe s most valuable asset to this country during his presidency would be the self titled Monroe Doctrine. This address set forth an American written policy on European intervention in the Western Hemisphere, and would soon become one of the foundations of United States policy in Latin America. President James Monroe made this declaration in his seventh annual address to the Congress of the United States on December 2, 1823. Initially it remained just a declaration of policy, because it was not supported by congressional legislation or made solid in international law, but eventually it became the keystone principle in the United States foreign policy, to be used by future presidents in other foreign campaigns. The Monroe doctrine was developed because the United States and Britain were worried over the possibility of European colonial expansion in Latin America, and South America. Britain s concern was caused by the fear that Spain would attempt to reclaim its former colonies, which had recently gained independence. This worried them because it would cause their trade with these new nations to drastically decline. The United State s main concern was to ensure that no European nations would attempt further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. At that time George Canning, the British foreign minister, suggested a joint venture with the United States in which both nations interests would be preserved. However John Quincy Adams, the secretary of state, was worried about the United States looking like a cockboat in the wake of a British man-o-war. So he convinced President Monroe to develop the United States own policy, which would protect U.S. interests that were independent of Britain. The Monroe Doctrine affirmed the two main policies of non-colonization and non-intervention. These notable declarations asserted that European nations could no longer colonize the American continents, and that they should not interfere with the newly independent Spanish American republics. Monroe specifically warned European powers against attempting to impose monarchy on independent American nations but added that the United States would not interfere in existing European colonies or in Europe itself. These two ideas are not new, nor are they original. Previous presidents, especially Jefferson, had vaguely hinted at them. The doctrine also stayed faithful to President Washington s farewell address of 1796, in which he urged the United States to stray from entangling alliances. This, however, was not representative of an isolationist policy. By separating Europe from American nations, Monroe was trying to preserve the existence of distinct Western Hemisphere, and specifically United States interests. Monroe s ideas were big forward looking. He opposed the European political system of monarchy believing that no American nation should adopt it, and felt that its presence anywhere in the Western Hemisphere endangered the peace and safety of the still young United States. He also believed that the United States, alone, should complete the colonization of North America. However, despite his strong assertions Monroe did not suggest any means to ensure completion of them. And the United States couldn t assure this policy alone, but Monroe knew this, and rallied for Britain s support. He was successful because Britain also opposed European intervention in Spain s attempt to restore its colonies.

As far as the United States was concerned, the Monroe Doctrine was never forced into action. It wasn t until the 1840s, when President John Polk and President James Polk used it to justify U.S. expansion. In 1845 Polk called upon the doctrine against British threats in California and Oregon, as Tyler had done in 1842 against French and British efforts to prevent the United States annexation of Texas. During an incident in 1848 Polk threatened to take control of the Yucatan region if the Europeans didn t withdrawal their involvement. Despite the use and growing popularity for the doctrine, its effectiveness was severely reduced during the Civil War. This was because the United States didn t have the stable government, or manpower to enforce it. As a result, Spain s recovery of land and the French involvement in some Mexican affairs went uncontested.During the 1870s and 1880s because the Monroe Doctrine was so successful and internationally accepted, it began to take on a new meaning. The United States was now interpreting it as both, prohibiting the transfer of an American nation from one European power to another, and granting the United States sole possession over any canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through Central America. Throughout the ensuing years the United States continued to expand the meaning of the doctrine successfully. In 1904 President Roosevelt claimed, in the Roosevelt Corollary, that the United States could intervene in any Latin American nation guilty of in internal or external misconduct. What Roosevelt says in 1904 and 1905 is to say, the United States should get into Latin American affairs. He essentially turns the Monroe Doctrine on its head and says the Europeans should stay out, but the United States has the right, under the doctrine, to go in, in order to exercise police power to keep the Europeans out (LaFeber). The doctrine would go on to be used many times in the next century. In 1948 the formation of the Organization of American States was created to achieve the aims of the Monroe Doctrine through Pan-Americanism. However, fears of communism forced the United States to return to forceful actions against Guatemala (1954), Cuba (1961), and the Dominican Republic (1965), without talking to its Latin American Allies first. During President Ronald Reagan s administration (1981-1989) he openly accepted the Monroe Doctrine to prevent Communism in Latin America. This was the original intent of the doctrine to prevent European expansion in the Americas. Despite this fact, Reagan supported Britain s claim for the Falkland Islands in 1982. As a keystone in U.S. foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine has had considerable effect and strong support in the United States, partly because it promoted U.S. interests. The doctrine hasn t served only the United States, but other Central and South American nations, particularly because it asserts their right to independence. Because the doctrine hadn t originally made a distinction between the interests of the United States and those of its neighbors, the U.S. has used it to justify intervention into the affairs of other nations. This document has proved to be the greatest component of United States foreign policy.