

# Opinions

## **Canada should make itself at home**

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The Monroe Doctrine finally, officially, is dead - and Canada and the region stand to benefit.

The Monroe Doctrine had been a guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy since 1823 when president James Monroe declared the Americas to be an area of exclusive U.S. responsibility. European powers were warned not to meddle in the hemisphere or else face a strong U.S. response. Over time, the policy expanded to include Latin American groups such as fascists and later communists that threatened the status quo. While no one in the hemisphere endorsed the Monroe Doctrine, it was begrudgingly accepted as an unavoidable reality.

Reality has changed.

For the U.S., the high cost of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fall of the neo-cons in Washington, and rising expectations of a more open international engagement under an Obama or McCain presidency, make the Monroe Doctrine seem irrelevant. Also, the country's focus is on combatting Islamic extremism, primarily in the Middle East and Asia. The U.S. simply lacks the resources, will or interest to micromanage the hemisphere as it did during the Cold War.

This reality has created new openings for those in the region to fill. Emerging powers - led by Brazil, Chile and Mexico - now feel confident and competent to shoulder more responsibilities. The best example of this is Brazil's leadership role in the United Nations mission in Haiti.

The Brazilian assumption of control of the UN forces in Haiti signals that the era of U.S. hegemony of peacekeeping operations in this hemisphere is over. But this has not triggered alarm in the U.S.; just the opposite. Somebody had to do something about Haiti and with Canada and the U.S. fully occupied elsewhere, the U.S. was only too happy to see Brazilian leadership. Second-in-command of the mission rotates between Argentina,

Chile and Uruguay, each of which has more troops on Haitian soil than Canada and the U.S. combined.

The success in Haiti of Brazil and its Latin American allies has demonstrated that the emerging powers in the hemisphere are capable of playing a stronger role. They have paid their dues in Haiti and won't go back to the farm team should the U.S. decide to bring the Monroe Doctrine off the bench.

The death of the Monroe Doctrine also leaves Canada in an enviable position.

From Cuba to Central America to our current championing of free trade, Canada has demonstrated to the world how we differ from the Americans. We do not do this deliberately or to provoke the U.S.; we simply are different and the Latin Americans have noticed.

In many ways Canada shares more in common with Brazil, and certainly with Chile, than we do with the Americans. In contrast to a U.S. president, a Canadian prime minister does not need to have the concept of "social justice" explained before he tours the region. Canadians read about the danger of the rise of a "new left" in the hemisphere - led by socialists such as Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Lula in Brazil and Tabare Vazquez in Uruguay - and we scratch our heads and wonder what the fuss is all about. We look at the U.S. bogeyman du jour, President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and are reminded more of a certain provincial premier from the Atlantic provinces than of a threat to humanity.

Canada can play a natural role as a friend, ally and companion, who will actually listen to what Latin Americans have to say and engage them. The Canadian International Development Agency has already begun to reach out to its counterparts in Brazil, Chile and Mexico and this overture has been warmly received. Canada can do much more along these lines.

If the Monroe Doctrine is indeed dead in the hemisphere, then Canada may be able to, finally, make itself at home in the hemisphere.

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