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The Monroe doctrine is dead -- long live Canada

By CARLO DADE

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

The Monroe doctrine has been the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy since 1823 when James Monroe declared the Americas to be an area of exclusive U.S. responsibility. European powers were warned to not meddle in the hemisphere or 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 United States, the high cost of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the fall of the neo-cons in Washington and rising expectations of a more open U.S. international engagement under an Obama or McCain presidency make the Monroe doctrine seem irrelevant. Today, the United States is focused on combating Islamic extremism, primarily in the Middle East and Asia, and simply lacks the resources, will or interest to micromanage the hemisphere as it did during the Cold War.

Brazil a fine leader

This change has created new openings that Latin Americans have begun to fill. The region is seeing the rise of emerging powers led by Brazil, Chile and Mexico, which now feel confident and competent to shoulder more responsibilities.

The best example of this is Brazil's leadership of the current U.N. mission in Haiti. Second-in-command of the mission rotates among Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, each of which has more troops on the ground than Canada and the United States combined.

The Brazilian assumption of control of the U.N. mission 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 United States; just the opposite. Somebody had to do something about Haiti and, with Canada and the United States fully occupied elsewhere, the United States was only too happy to see Brazil take over.

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 United States decide to bring the Monroe doctrine off the bench.

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

From Cuba to Central America to our current championing of free trade, the Americas is where Canada has demonstrated to the world how we differ from the Americans. We do not do this deliberately or to provoke the United States. 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 with 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 like Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil and Tabaré Vázquez 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 Chávez in Venezuela, and are reminded more of a certain provincial premier than of a threat to humanity.

A friend, ally

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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