

# **J. Reuben Clark to the Secretary of State:**

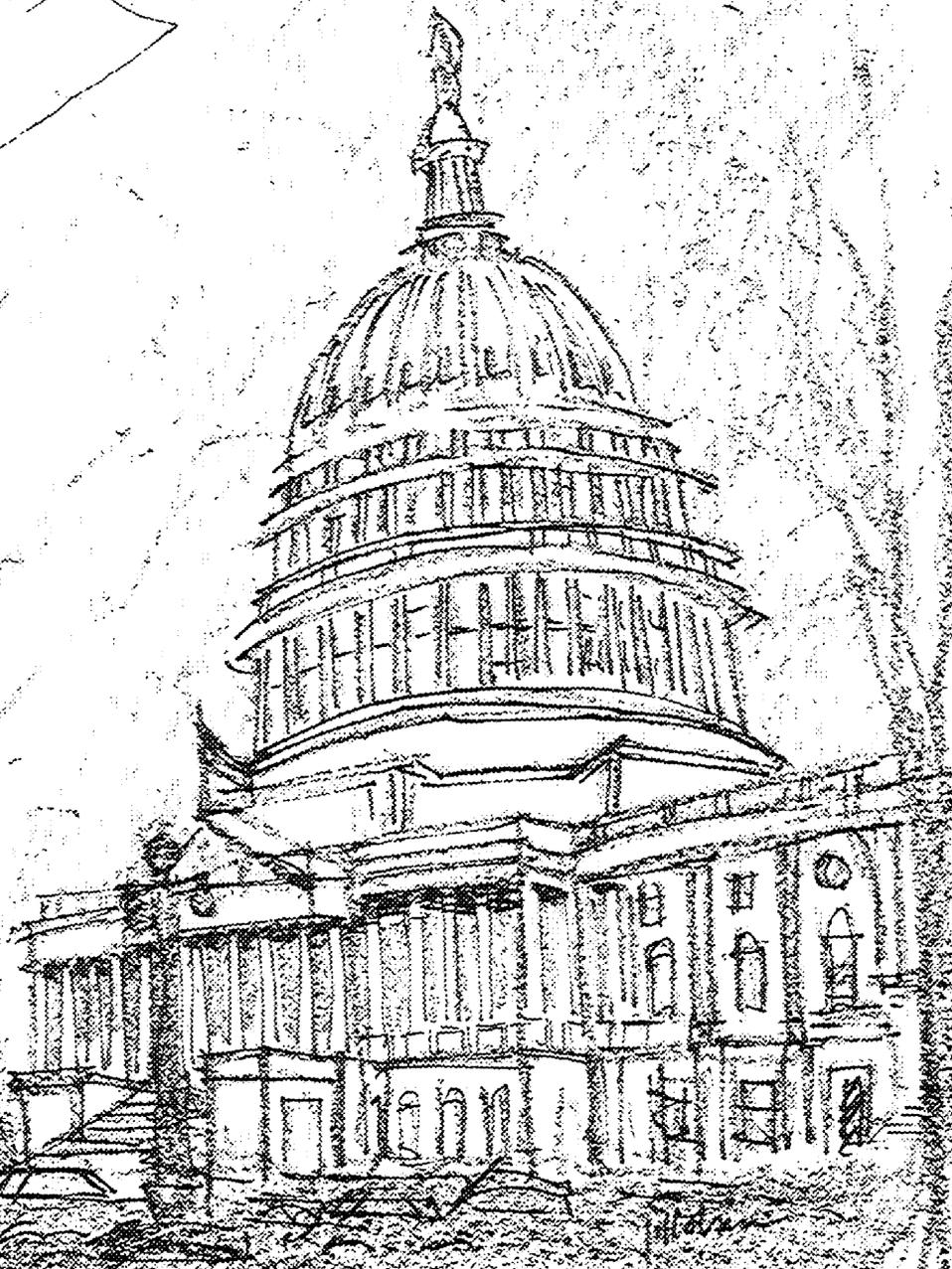
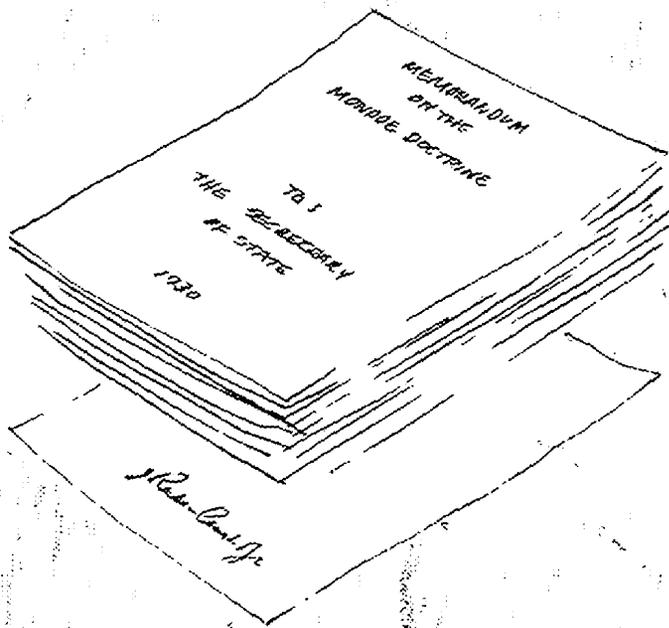
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# **The Clark Memorandum**

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**T**he Clark Memorandum is one of the most powerful and influential documents against imperial, colonial, or interventionist policies ever drafted by an American in high office, one of the most important documents dealing with United States foreign relations, and the best known counsel written by J. Reuben Clark, Jr. while he was the Under Secretary of State to President Calvin Coolidge. As such it was influential in the resolution of important international issues in addition to shaping the policy of the State Department regarding the Monroe Doctrine.

**It was accepted by both the American public and by foreign governments as an official interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine and has since become one of the landmark documents of American foreign relations.**



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It denies the existence of any particular right of the United States to intervene in the affairs of Latin American states. In effect, the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine was repudiated by the Clark Memorandum. It was an answer to a request by then Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg. Kellogg instructed Clark "to give me everything that had ever been said on the Monroe Doctrine by presidents, secretaries of state and other officials, so that I could have before me a complete compilation of all the expressions about the Monroe Doctrine."

Kellogg intended to use the study as the basis for an official declaration which would correct the misunderstanding among the Latin American Republics that the Monroe Doctrine furnished a justification for intervention by the United States into the internal affairs of those countries. Kellogg was concerned about the future of the peace pact which he had negotiated in Paris, and he wanted support for his position in hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (December 1928) that the Monroe Doctrine did not contradict in any way the principles of the Kellogg-Briand Pact to renounce war as an instrument of policy. As if to forestall any embarrassing questions during the hearings, Secretary Kellogg had asked Clark to prepare the study.

Clark's Memorandum repudiated the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and stated that the Monroe Doctrine was relevant only to relations between the European and American continents, and did not apply to "purely

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inter-American relations." Clark further stated that: (1) the Monroe Doctrine is purely unilateral; (2) it is based on the right of self-defense; (3) all actions of self-defense taken by the United States in regard to Latin America are not by that fact implementations of the Monroe Doctrine, but only such actions as are directed against European countries; and (4) the United States cannot justify actions against American nations under the Monroe Doctrine, however much such actions may be justified on the grounds of self-defense.

The Clark Memorandum was published by the State Department in March 1930. Although Clark stated that it expressed only his personal views, it was accepted both by the American public

and by foreign governments as an official interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, and has since become one of the landmark documents of American foreign relations.

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**Printed here is the standard  
extract of the Memorandum found in textbooks:**

# **The Clark Memorandum On The Monroe Doctrine**

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## **To the Secretary of State:**

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**H**erewith I transmit a Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine, prepared by your direction, given a little over two months ago. . . .

It is of first importance to have in mind that Monroe's declaration in its terms, relates to the relationships between European states on the one side, and, on the other side, the American continents, the Western Hemisphere, and the Latin American Governments which on December 2, 1823, had declared and maintained their independence which we had acknowledged. . . .

In the normal case, the Latin American state against which aggression was aimed by a European power, would be the beneficiary of the Doctrine, not its victim. This has been the history of its application. The Doctrine makes the United States a guarantor, in effect, of the independence of Latin American states, though without the obligations of a guarantor to those states, for the United States itself determines by its sovereign will when, where, and concerning what

aggressions it will invoke the Doctrine, and by what measures, if any, it will apply a sanction. In none of these things has any other state any voice whatever.

Furthermore, while the Monroe Doctrine as declared, has no relation in its terms to an aggression by any other state than a European state, yet the principle "self-preservation" which underlies the Doctrine — which principle, as we shall see, is as fully operative without the Doctrine as with it — would apply to any non-American state in whatever quarter of the globe it lay, or even to an American state, if the aggressions of such state against other Latin American states were "dangerous to our peace and safety," or were a "manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States," or were "endangering our peace and happiness"; that is, if such aggressions challenged our existence. . . .

In this view, the Monroe Doctrine as such might be wiped out and the United States would lose nothing of its broad, international right; it would still possess,

in common with every other member of the family of nations, the internationally recognized right of self-preservation, and this right would fully attach to the matters specified by the Doctrine if and whenever they threatened our existence, just as the right would attach in relation to any other act carrying a like menace . . .

It is evident from the foregoing that the Monroe Doctrine is not an equivalent for "self-preservation"; and therefore the Monroe Doctrine need not, indeed should not, be invoked in order to cover situations challenging our self-preservation but not within the terms defined by Monroe's declaration. These other situations may be handled, and more wisely so, as matters affecting the national security and self-preservation of the United States as a great power. . . .

The statement of the Doctrine itself that "with the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere," has been more than once reiterated.

It has also been announced that the Monroe Doctrine is not a pledge by the United States to other American states requiring the United States to protect such states, at their behest, against real or fancied wrongs inflicted by European powers, nor does it create an obligation running from the United States to any American state to intervene for its protection. . . .

The so-called "Roosevelt Corollary" was to the effect, as generally understood, that in case of financial or other difficulties in weak Latin American countries, the United States should attempt an adjustment thereof lest European Governments should intervene, and intervening should occupy territory — an act which would be contrary to the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. This view seems to have had its inception in some observations of President Buchanan in his message to Congress of December 3, 1860, and was somewhat amplified by Lord Salisbury in his note to Mr. Olney of November 6, 1895, regarding the Venezuelan boundary dispute.

As has already been indicated above, it is not believed that this corollary is justified by the terms of the Monroe Doctrine, however much it may be justified by the application of the doctrine of self-preservation.

These various expressions and statements, as made in connection with the situations which gave rise to them, detract not a little from the scope popularly attached to the Monroe Doctrine, and they relieve that Doctrine of many of the criticisms which have been aimed against it.

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Finally, it should not be overlooked that the United States declined the overtures of Great Britain in 1823 to make a joint declaration regarding the principles covered by the Monroe Doctrine, or to enter into a conventional arrangement regarding them. Instead this Government determined to make the declaration of high national policy on its own responsibility and in its own behalf. The Doctrine is thus purely unilateral. The United States determines when and if the principles of the Doctrine are violated, and when and if violation is threatened. We alone determine what measures if any, shall be taken to vindicate the principles

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of the Doctrine, and we of necessity determine when the principles have been vindicated. No other power of the world has any relationship to, or voice in, the implementing of the principles which the Doctrine contains. It is our Doctrine, to be by us invoked and sustained, held in abeyance, or abandoned as our high international policy or vital national interests shall seem to us, and to us alone, to demand.

It may, in conclusion, be repeated: The Doctrine does not concern itself with purely inter-American relations; it has nothing to do with the relationship between the United States and other American nations, except where other American nations shall become involved with European governments in arrangements which threaten the security of the United States, and even in such cases, the Doctrine runs against the European country, not the American nation, and the United States would primarily deal thereunder with the European country and not with the American nation concerned. The Doctrine states a case of the United States vs. Europe, and not of the United States vs. Latin America. Furthermore, the fact should never be lost to view that in applying this Doctrine during the period of one hundred years since it was announced, our Government has over and over again driven it in as a shield between Europe and the Americas to protect Latin America from the political and territorial thrusts of Europe; and this was done at times when the American nations were weak and struggling for the establishment of stable, permanent governments; when the political morality of Europe sanctioned, indeed encouraged, the acquisition of territory by force; and when many of the great powers of Europe looked with eager, covetous eyes to the rich, underdeveloped areas of the American Hemisphere. Nor should another equally vital fact be lost sight of, that the United States has only been able to give this protection against designing European powers because of its known willingness and determination, if and whenever necessary, to expend its treasure and to sacrifice American life to maintain the principles of the Doctrine. So far as Latin America is concerned, the Doctrine is now, and always has been, not an instrument of violence and oppression, but an unbought, freely bestowed, and wholly effective guaranty of their freedom, independence, and territorial integrity against the imperialistic designs of Europe

J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine, Department of State Publication #37 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), p. 238.