

## Indiana University - Purdue University Fort Wayne Opus: Research & Creativity at IPFW

---

History Faculty Publications

Department of History

---

11-2006

### “The Congressional Debate over U.S. Participation in the Congress of Panama, 1825-1826: Washington’s Farewell Address, Monroe’s Doctrine, and the Fundamental Principles of U.S. Foreign Policy”

Jeffrey J. Malanson

[malansoj@ipfw.edu](mailto:malansoj@ipfw.edu)

This research is a product of the [Department of History](#) faculty at [Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne](#).

Follow this and additional works at: [http://opus.ipfw.edu/history\\_facpubs](http://opus.ipfw.edu/history_facpubs)

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

#### Opus Citation

Jeffrey J. Malanson (2006). “The Congressional Debate over U.S. Participation in the Congress of Panama, 1825-1826: Washington’s Farewell Address, Monroe’s Doctrine, and the Fundamental Principles of U.S. Foreign Policy”. *Diplomatic History*.30 (5), 813-838.  
[http://opus.ipfw.edu/history\\_facpubs/82](http://opus.ipfw.edu/history_facpubs/82)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at Opus: Research & Creativity at IPFW. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Opus: Research & Creativity at IPFW. For more information, please contact [admin@lib.ipfw.edu](mailto:admin@lib.ipfw.edu).

## The Congressional Debate over U.S. Participation in the Congress of Panama, 1825–1826: Washington’s Farewell Address, Monroe’s Doctrine, and the Fundamental Principles of U.S. Foreign Policy

When Simón Bolívar resolved in December 1824 to call a grand meeting of representatives from the independent republics of the Americas to meet at the Isthmus of Panama, he had no intention of inviting the United States to attend. As perhaps the earliest sign that the other nations of Latin America did not share the same vision for the Congress of Panama as Bolívar did, three nations called upon the United States to send a delegation. Throughout 1825, newly elected President John Quincy Adams debated the merits of U.S. participation in such an international conference with his cabinet. Once he had received assurances from both his secretary of state, Henry Clay, and from the ministers of the nations that had extended invitations that the United States would not be required to take part in any discussions, debates, or negotiations of a belligerent or binding nature, he agreed to attend, a decision that he announced to a stunned Congress in his first annual address that December.<sup>1</sup> This address, which historian James Lewis believes may have been “the most amazing annual message of the antebellum era, calling for the use of federal power in almost every area of American life,” laid out Adams’s vision and agenda for his entire presidency—a vision and agenda that did not sit well with most congressmen.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, though, it was the debate over a potential U.S. mission to the Congress of Panama that dominated the first congressional session of Adams’s presidency, a debate that Charles Wilson Hackett described as “one of the

1. Joseph Byrne Lockey, *Pan-Americanism: Its Beginnings* (New York, 1920; reprint ed., New York, 1970), 312, 393–95 (page citations are for the reprint edition); George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York, 1952; reprint ed., Gloucester, MA, 1973), 360 (page citations are for the reprint edition); Mary W. M. Hargreaves, *The Presidency of John Quincy Adams* (Lawrence, KS, 1985), 147; John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874–1877), 7: 16; and John Quincy Adams, First Annual Address, 6 December 1825, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 11 vols., ed. James D. Richardson (New York, 1911), 2: 302.

2. James Lewis, Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783–1829* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), 199.

severest parliamentary battles in [Congress's] history" and stepped off the political organization that led to the formation of the Democratic party.<sup>3</sup>

And this is how the debate is most often remembered, as the first salvo in a renewed oppositional political system. Historian Andrew Cayton summarized the modern view best when he said that most historians see it as "either a diplomatic anti-climax to the Monroe Doctrine or one of many political harbingers of the Jacksonian period."<sup>4</sup> Certainly this debate must be understood for its connection to the wider currents of American history; however, only seeing it as an epilogue to Monroe or a prologue to Jackson ignores the intrinsic importance of the debate itself. Congress's deliberations touched upon issues of religious freedoms, American commercial interests, and, the topics emphasized by most historians in their treatment of the debate, race and slavery; but it was the debate over what have come to be recognized as the fundamental principles of U.S. foreign policy, namely Washington's farewell address and the Monroe Doctrine, that truly stands out as being of the greatest significance. One historian, writing in the early part of the twentieth century, argued that the debate over the Panama Congress was "worthless except for the fact that slaveholders had at last put themselves irrevocably on record in defense of their interests."<sup>5</sup> While he was correct to point out the importance of this debate in the developing national discourse on slavery, it was ultimately one of many focused on this issue. The debate over U.S. participation at the Congress of Panama provides a vital and rare insight into political thought on questions of foreign-policy principle a quarter of the way through the nineteenth century, and it defined the legacies of Washington's farewell address and the Monroe Doctrine to such an extent that they were not questioned again in any important way until the 1840s.<sup>6</sup>

President George Washington's farewell address of September 1796 is unquestionably one of the most influential presidential addresses in the history of the office. Samuel Flagg Bemis described the address as being an "immortal document, ever since a polestar of American foreign policy," and Matthew Spalding and Patrick J. Garrity have argued that "few such pronouncements, or doctrines, have taken on a particular gravity and have essentially defined the

---

3. Charles Wilson Hackett, "The Development of John Quincy Adams's Policy with Respect to an American Confederation and the Panama Congress, 1822-1825," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (November 1928): 526.

4. Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Debate over the Panama Congress and the Origins of the Second American Party System," *Historian* 47, no. 2 (February 1985): 220.

5. Frances L. Reinhold discussing the conclusions of Hermann Von Holst, in "New Research on the First Pan-American Congress Held at Panama in 1826," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 18, no. 3 (August 1938): 358.

6. Dexter Perkins, one of the foremost authorities on the Monroe Doctrine, pointed out that "for the decade and a half which follows on the debates over the Panama Congress allusions to the President's declaration [the Monroe Doctrine] are few and far between. . . . Very distinctly, it falls into the background." Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine: A New Revision of the Book Originally Published under the Title: Hands off: A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston, 1963), 72.

course of acceptable political debate.”<sup>7</sup> While the address touched upon many aspects of political life, it was most influential in its discussion of foreign policy. Washington declared that it was the “true policy” of the United States “to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” He believed that “nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded; and that, in place of them, just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated.” Washington believed that the purpose of foreign policy was to protect the interests of the United States and he feared that too often people mistook amity and antipathy as equating to interest. He warned that “Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation,” and, recognizing this, he asked “why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?”<sup>8</sup> These ideals would be echoed by Washington’s successors in office and would guide American foreign policy for decades to come.

The most famous and important restatement of these principles undoubtedly came in Thomas Jefferson’s first inaugural address, wherein he promised “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.”<sup>9</sup> Historically speaking, this turn of phrase is most commonly attributed directly to Washington, rather than to Jefferson. In their volume on the farewell address, Spalding and Garrity conclude that because the Jeffersonian “expression ‘entangling alliances’ is often mistakenly attributed to Washington and the Farewell Address [it] is an indication of how well Washington captured the common ground about foreign policy that existed among Americans.”<sup>10</sup> While on the surface Jefferson’s remarks seemed to be a simple allusion to the ideas put forward in the farewell address, in reality those twelve words represented something much more significant than a demonstration of the similarity of beliefs between Americans, as they forever changed the common conception and fundamental meaning of Washingtonian precepts. A close examination of the farewell address reveals that at no point did Washington call for a complete and total neutrality at all points in time and in all circumstances. He strongly cautioned against entering into permanent alliances or entangling American interests with the dissimilar ones of Europe, but he also stressed the importance of using foreign policy as a tool to protect American interests. In the cases encountered

7. Samuel Flagg Bemis, “Washington’s Farewell Address: A Foreign Policy of Independence,” *American Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (January 1934): 262; and Matthew Spalding and Patrick J. Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens: George Washington’s Farewell Address and the American Character* (Lanham, MD, 1996), 142.

8. Washington’s Farewell Address, 19 September 1796. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington from Their Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, DC, 1931–1944), 35: 214–38.

9. Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1801, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 1: 323.

10. Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens*, 94.

by Washington, those interests were best protected by the maintenance of neutrality. As John Quincy Adams would later argue, though, this did not mean that complete neutrality was the only acceptable policy. Washington himself, as historian George Dangerfield pointed out, “admitted that the nation, as it grew stronger, could disregard his warnings,” and, in writing the address, had accepted the “principle of change.”<sup>11</sup> Washington sincerely hoped that future presidents and generations would heed his warnings, but he did not intend to lay down unbreakable strictures on the scope of American foreign policy.

Writing in 1796, Washington was clearly most concerned with America’s relationship with Europe. Geographically and ideologically that continent was too far removed from the United States to justify a departure from a neutral course. His specific advice clearly did not envision, or at least explicitly lay out, the proper course of relations with much closer nations with much more sympathetic governments, as was the case with Latin America by the 1820s. This is where the Jeffersonian formulation greatly complicated matters for Adams. The Jeffersonian phrase “entangling alliances with none” was much more all-encompassing than anything Washington wrote; where Washington could envision a day when American interest dictated nonneutral American action, Jefferson could not. Jefferson’s promise provided for no alternative to neutrality, regardless of America’s true interest. As will be seen in the subsequent discussion of the congressional debate over the Panama Mission, Jefferson’s twelve words had come to define Washington’s farewell address by 1825–1826; in the eyes of most congressmen, the Jeffersonian prohibition against “entangling alliances” was a Washingtonian precept.

In the context of the Panama Congress debate, the challenge of the Monroe Doctrine was in many ways the complete opposite of that of Washington’s farewell address. While by 1826 the precepts of the farewell address had already become American foreign-policy dogma, the Monroe Doctrine, only two years after its initial declaration, was not even accepted as still being applicable to the international landscape, let alone viewed as being a fundamental component of American foreign-policy thought. Issued as a portion of President James Monroe’s seventh annual address to Congress in December 1823, what has come to be known as the Monroe Doctrine consisted of two distinct foreign-policy principles: the noncolonization principle and the doctrine of two spheres.<sup>12</sup> The noncolonization principle, originally developed by Monroe’s secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, in response to an ongoing dispute over the territorial boundary between the claims of the United States, Russia, and Great Britain on

11. Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings*, 361; and George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism: 1815–1828* (New York, 1965), 250.

12. Dexter Perkins has noted that the Monroe Doctrine was not actually labeled as such until 1853; to that point “the references are almost invariably to [the] ‘principles’ of Mr. Monroe, or to the ‘Monroe declaration.’” For ease of reference, though, throughout this paper the principles of Mr. Monroe’s declaration will simply be referred to as the Monroe Doctrine. Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine*, 99.

the northwest coast of North America, declared “as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of two spheres emerged in response to the Monroe administration’s concerns that France or the Holy Alliance of Austria, Russia, and Prussia would potentially interfere in the wars for independence then ongoing between Spain and its mainland American colonies. While by 1823 several of Spain’s former colonies had successfully achieved their independence and been formally recognized as independent nations by the United States, members of the cabinet feared that if Europe intervened to assist Spain in putting down those revolutions still under way, it could attempt to resubjugate those nations already secure in their independence.<sup>14</sup> The doctrine of two spheres asserted that the United States “should consider any attempt on [Europe’s] part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.” While the United States had not and would not interfere with “the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power,” when it came to the “Governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged,” the United States “could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.”<sup>15</sup> The noncolonization principle and the doctrine of two spheres came together to defend the territorial integrity of the Americas against European aggression, expansion, and interference. In many ways, the Monroe Doctrine represented both a reiteration of the idea contained in Washington’s farewell address that America must remain separated from Europe, as well as an expansion of that idea to include all parts of the American hemisphere then free from European control.

---

13. James Monroe, Seventh Annual Address, 2 December 1823, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 2: 209. The noncolonization principle was originally enunciated on 17 July 1823 by Adams to the Russian foreign minister. At that time, Adams declared that “the United States should contest the right of Russia to *any* territorial establishment on this continent, and that we should assume distinctly the principles that the American continents are no longer subjects for *any* new European colonial establishments.” Monroe’s message to Congress echoed Adams’s original phrasing almost verbatim. Adams, *Memoirs*, 6: 163. Emphasis in original.

14. The genesis of the Monroe Doctrine and the doctrine of two spheres is certainly much more complicated than portrayed here, but this simplistic overview is intended to provide a basic context for understanding Monroe’s language. For a fuller discussion of the doctrine’s origins, there is a plethora of works that provide almost as many theories; however, the best work on the subject is probably still Dexter Perkins’s *The Monroe Doctrine: 1823–1826* (Cambridge, MA, 1927; reprint ed., Gloucester, MA, 1965).

15. James Monroe, Seventh Annual Address, 2 December 1823, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 2: 218.

While at the time the Monroe Doctrine was enunciated there was, in Dexter Perkins's assessment, "substantial agreement" over its tenets between both the eventual supporters and opponents of the Panama Mission, by 1826 the unanimity of opinion regarding it had dissipated. Despite the fact that "the legend that Monroe had warded off a terrible danger found confirmation in the debates in the Senate," the tone surrounding the discussion of Monroe's doctrine had changed. In just two years, many congressmen now saw it as a threat to the principles of the farewell address; even those who did not "were far from wishing to extend its scope."<sup>16</sup> The uncertain status of the Monroe Doctrine by 1826 played just as important a role in the debates over U.S. participation at the Congress of Panama as did the total faith placed in Washington's precepts.

The Panama Congress itself was conceived of by Bolívar in an attempt to bring the nations of Latin America together in an alliance reminiscent of the European Holy Alliance. The Congress would allow these nations to come together to normalize their economic and political relations, to concert their means of self-defense from potential interference by Spain or the rest of Europe, and to come to agreements on other issues of common interest. While Bolívar did not envision the United States as being a necessary participant in any of the Congress's deliberations, once the United States had been invited and agreed to attend the understanding was that its representatives would only participate in discussions of a nonbelligerent nature, meaning that any agreements reached on military issues would be done in the absence of U.S. input and without U.S. sanction. As will be seen, the mission's congressional opponents seriously doubted that it would be possible for the United States to send representatives to Panama without, by virtue of their presence, assuming a state of cobelligerency with the Latin American nations and thus violating the neutral course that had been followed since Washington had guided the nation's foreign policy.

President John Quincy Adams introduced Congress to the Panama Mission in his first annual address on 6 December 1825. He stated that "among the measures which have been suggested to [the South American republics] by the new relations with one another, resulting from the recent changes in their condition, is that of assembling at the Isthmus of Panama a congress, at which each of them should be represented, to deliberate upon objects important to the welfare of all . . . , and they have invited the United States to be also represented there by their ministers." Adams informed Congress that "the invitation has been accepted, and ministers on the part of the United States will be commissioned to attend at those deliberations." While he stressed that participation would be "compatible with that neutrality from which it is neither our intention nor the desire of the other American States that we should depart," many

---

16. Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine: 1823-1826*, 210, 221 (page citations are for the reprint edition).

congressmen were nonetheless put off by the fact that Adams had failed to consult with Congress before accepting the invitation.<sup>17</sup>

The irony of Adams's first annual address was that while it presented one of the most visionary programs ever laid out by an American president (of which the mission to the Panama Congress was but a small part), it also acted as the call to arms for Adams's political opponents. One historian has described the entirety of the address as "breathhtakingly original and imaginative," and "a bold, courageous, and statesmanlike assertion of the government's responsibility to assist the advancement of the nation's intellectual and economic well-being." At the same time, it was also a program that "horrified states' rights advocates" who saw it as "one gigantic grab for power." Perhaps worst of all, the address had revealed Adams to be "closer to the Hamiltonian than to the Jeffersonian principles of government."<sup>18</sup> Elected in the absence of any coherent political parties, Adams did more than just enrage those congressmen who saw themselves as Jeffersonians and who had supported other candidates for president in 1824; it drove them to put aside their own differences and join behind the man most likely to defeat Adams in 1828, Andrew Jackson. These men came together to oppose an agenda that they wholeheartedly objected to, and the debate over Panama, in the words of historian Charles M. Wiltse, would be the "first test of strength" between this opposition and those who continued to support John Quincy Adams.<sup>19</sup> By January 1826, Adams recognized that Panama was the "first measure in which the opposition are endeavoring to array themselves." Martin Van Buren, one of the opposition's key leaders, described the Panama Mission as the "first tangible point for the opposition which had been anticipated and could not have been avoided without an abandonment of cherished principles and which there was in truth no disposition to avoid."<sup>20</sup> They were looking for a fight and their natural inclination to oppose the Panama Mission made it the logical place to begin.

On 26 December, Adams sent a message to the Senate officially nominating Richard C. Anderson of Kentucky and John Sergeant of Pennsylvania as ministers and William R. Rochester of New York as secretary on a mission to the Congress of Panama. He opened this message by stating that although he deemed the sending of ministers to Panama as being "within the constitutional competency of the Executive," he did not think it "proper to take any step in it before ascertaining that my opinion of [the mission's] expediency will concur

17. John Quincy Adams, First Annual Address, 6 December 1825, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 2: 302.

18. Robert V. Remini, *Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time* (New York, 1997), 255; Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York, 1991), 284; Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams* (New York, 2002), 81; and Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1959), 104.

19. Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, 1782-1828* (Indianapolis, 1944), 325.

20. Adams, *Memoirs*, 7: 103; and Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC, 1920; reprint ed., New York, 1969), 199 (page citations are for the reprint edition).



with that of both branches of the Legislature: first, by the decision of the Senate upon the nominations to be laid before them; and secondly, by the sanction of both Houses to the appropriations, without which it cannot be carried into effect." Adams reiterated that participation would not represent a change in course vis-à-vis U.S. neutrality, as "the United States neither intend, nor are expected to take part in any deliberations of a belligerent character; that the motive of their attendance is neither to contract alliances, nor to engage in any undertaking or project importing hostility to any other nations." In further outlining the motivations for U.S. participation, Adams pointed to, among other measures, the noncolonization principle of the Monroe Doctrine. He argued that

An agreement between all the parties represented at the meeting, that each will guard, by its own means, against the establishment of any future European Colony within its borders, may be found advisable. This was, more than two years since, announced by my predecessor [James Monroe] to the world, as a principle resulting from the emancipation of both the American Continents. It may be so developed to the new Southern Nations that they will all feel it as an essential appendage to their independence.<sup>21</sup>

Adams believed that the adoption of the noncolonization principle by all of the independent nations of the Americas would not only further cement the separation between the Old World and the New, but would also enhance the security of the United States. Just as importantly, while the discussion of a foreign mission of this type put the questions of American neutrality and entangling alliances stemming from the farewell address on the table, it was Adams himself who attempted to raise at least part of the Monroe Doctrine as a legitimate international pursuit, and thus give to it a greater significance than many were willing to concede at that time.

The president's nominations were referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which submitted its report to the Senate on 16 January 1826. The committee, comprised of four Jeffersonian southerners and one northerner who "personally disliked the President,"<sup>22</sup> argued that these appointments fell outside

21. John Quincy Adams, Special Message to the Senate of the United States, 26 December 1825, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 2: 318–20.

22. Bennett Champ Clark, *John Quincy Adams: "Old Man Eloquent"* (Boston, 1932), 240. The composition of the committee was a point of contention, both in 1826 and in the current historiography. It fell to Vice President John C. Calhoun, as president of the Senate, to appoint Senate committees. An opponent of both John Quincy Adams and the Panama Mission, Calhoun had been accused by Adams's supporters of stacking the committees against Adams's interest, and the historical scholarship does little to clarify the matter. Calhoun biographer John Niven argued that Calhoun took "full advantage of whatever limited powers he had as vice-president to counter the administration." Charles M. Wiltse countered that Calhoun "stroved for rigid impartiality" in making the appointments. Whatever Calhoun's actual intentions were, the Senate ended up with a Foreign Relations Committee decidedly opposed to the mission and to the president. John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1988), 113; and Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 323.

of the purview of the president's normal appointment powers, because "very different . . . is the case, when it is proposed to create new offices by nomination, or to despatch [sic] ministers to foreign States for the first time, or to accomplish by such missions objects not specifically disclosed, or under circumstances, new, peculiar, and highly important." Such differences were significant because, in the committee's opinion, they fundamentally altered the duties of the Senate; no longer was confirmation of the appointments themselves the sole task, but it was also incumbent upon the Senate to fully evaluate the proposed mission itself. The committee insisted that

Instead of confining their inquiries to the mere fitness of the persons nominated to fill such offices, it is not only the right, but the duty of the Senate, to determine, previously, as to the necessity and propriety of creating the offices themselves; and in deciding these questions, not only the objects for the accomplishment by which it is proposed to create them, but every other circumstance connected with such a measure, must necessarily and unavoidably become a subject of their serious examination.

Based upon these factors, the committee concluded that "there exists no adequate motive to induce [the] adoption" of the mission to Panama. The presentation of the report culminated with the introduction of a resolution declaring "that it is not expedient, at this time, for the United States to send any Ministers to the Congress of American nations, assembled at Panama."<sup>23</sup> Adams's opponents struck the first blow with the committee's report, but it would be a month and a half before the Senate would take up debate of the resolution.

Once the debate commenced, the most consistent principled criticism leveled by opponents of the Panama Mission was that, contrary to Adams's assurances, it threatened American neutrality with the "entangling alliances" that these senators believed the farewell address had warned against. Robert Hayne of South Carolina argued that sending ministers to the Congress of Panama would produce "an entire change of the neutral position which we have hitherto so happily occupied." He believed that the mission was part of a wider system of foreign policy being pursued by the Adams administration that was attempting to entwine the United States in "entangling alliances." He asserted that should the Senate vote to send ministers to Panama, the United States would "violate the maxim of the Father of his Country [George Washington], which enjoins upon us, as the most sacred of duties, 'to cultivate peace and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.'"<sup>24</sup> Hugh White of Tennessee

---

23. U.S. Congress, *The Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States, on the Subject of the Mission to the Congress at Panama, Together with the Messages and Documents Relating Thereto*, 22 March 1826, retrieved from NewsBank Database (U.S. Congressional Serial Set, vol. 127, Session vol. 3, 19th Cong., 1st sess., S.Doc.68, Record no. oFF34337F239ECE8), 57-76.

24. Sen. Robert Y. Hayne, South Carolina, March 1826, 19th Cong., 1st sess., U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates in Congress: Comprising the Leading Debates and Incidents of the*

echoed Hayne's sentiments when he declared that "if this mission should be advised, a new era will have commenced in the history of our foreign relations. Have peace with, and good will towards, all Nations; entangling alliances with none—has been our cardinal principle in times past. It was recommended by the Father of our Country—repeated, and practiced upon by his *republican* successors."<sup>25</sup> The statements of Hayne and White clearly establish the mistaken association of Jefferson's twelve words with Washington's farewell address by 1826 and demonstrate how central this concept of it was to the opposition.

Senators opposed to U.S. involvement looked at the documentation and simply could not believe that it would be possible for the United States to participate at Panama and remain neutral; the belligerent nature of the Congress precluded it. In the words of J. McPherson Berrien of Georgia, "An association with such a Congress, must necessarily commit our neutrality."<sup>26</sup> Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire put the opposition's position into stark perspective when he incredulously remarked,

I have been utterly astonished, that any gentleman could read these documents, and still contend that this was not a belligerent Congress. What! a Congress, originating with those engaged in war; confined for years, in its incipient stages, to those only who are engaged in war; to be convened within the territories of those engaged in war; and having for its main objects, as again and again repeated, the triumphant prosecution of that very war; and yet a Congress, in no degree belligerent, and perfectly safe for neutrals to unite in?<sup>27</sup>

That Adams had specifically agreed to attend only to take part in discussions of a nonbelligerent nature was not enough of a safeguard, as several senators argued that by virtue of their sheer presence at the Congress of Panama, the United States would assume a state of cobelligerency with the South American republics. White made the point that regardless of what actions the United States did or did not take, participation would permanently hinder U.S. relations with Spain. He argued that "if we send Ministers to this Congress of belligerents, we lose all influence with Spain. It is hardly possible that we could ever satisfy her that we were impartial in any question between her and her former colonies."<sup>28</sup> If these senators' fears proved legitimate, participation at Panama

---

*Congress; Together with an Appendix Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents and the Laws Enacted during the Session: With a Copious Index to the Whole*, 14 vols. (Washington, DC, 1824–1837), 2: 153, 166, 175 (all subsequent references from the *Register of Debates* are from the 19th Cong., 1st sess., and will not be individually noted as such). The Senate's consideration of Adams's nominations for ministers to the Congress of Panama was carried out in executive session, meaning that these speeches, even though they were ultimately placed into the *Register of Debates*, were not inserted on their original dates and instead were all listed as March 1826.

25. Sen. Hugh L. White, Tennessee, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 198. Emphasis in original.

26. Sen. J. McPherson Berrien, Georgia, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 278.

27. Sen. Levi Woodbury, New Hampshire, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 187.

28. Sen. Hugh L. White, Tennessee, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 214.

would jeopardize American neutrality toward both Latin America and Europe. With one diplomatic mission, Adams could negate thirty years of foreign-policy achievement.

Even if participation in and of itself would not violate the spirit of the farewell address, the prospect of a mission was further complicated by the reception and interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America. Many Latin American officials held out hope that the Monroe Doctrine would mean more to the evolving relationship between their nations and the United States than a simple declaration of sympathetic principles. Historian Samuel Flagg Bemis estimated that the United States was first approached about participating in the Congress of Panama in order to “convert the Monroe Doctrine into a conditional multi-lateral alliance among the states of the Western Hemisphere,” and while Adams had no intention of involving the United States in such an endeavor, it sheds a great deal of light on Latin American motivations, an understanding of which is essential to understanding the fears of many senators on this point.<sup>29</sup> The pervasiveness of the view among America’s southern neighbors that the Monroe Doctrine represented a pledge on the part of the United States to come to the defense of these nations’ sovereignty if it was threatened from abroad was troubling. In historian Andrew Cayton’s estimation, while it was “widely praised when it was articulated, the Doctrine seemed to many in 1826 too binding a contract.”<sup>30</sup> It now appeared that, regardless of what Monroe’s intentions were when he issued his doctrine, Latin America perceived in it a pledge, and this fact weighed heavily on the debates in both houses of Congress.

Hayne suggested that “the new States have conceived themselves *entitled to our aid* whenever foreign interference shall be threatened.”<sup>31</sup> New York Senator Martin Van Buren argued that Monroe “did not pledge the United States to any course. . . . There are few who require to be informed that no declaration of the Executive could have that effect. But he had no such intention. He asserted (if you please) correct principles, but left us at liberty to act, or not, in enforcing them, as our interest or our policy might at the moment require.”<sup>32</sup> Berrien agreed with Van Buren, stating that Monroe “had no authority, by his own act alone, to pledge the United States to a foreign Power. He did not intend to do so. It was a mere declaration of the policy, which, under given circumstances, he believed it proper for the United States to pursue. It did not bind him. It did not bind Congress. [Congress] declined to respond to it. No foreign Power could demand the enforcement of it, because no foreign Power was party to it.”<sup>33</sup> White put the finest point on the argument by concluding that, regardless of

---

29. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949; reprint ed., Westport, CT, 1981), 548–49.

30. Cayton, “The Panama Congress and the Second American Party System,” 231.

31. Sen. Robert Y. Hayne, South Carolina, March 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 162. Emphasis in original.

32. Sen. Martin Van Buren, New York, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 242.

33. Sen. J. McPherson Berrien, Georgia, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 284.

Monroe's intentions, "If we send Ministers [to Panama] . . . then, indeed, will the United States be *pledged*."<sup>34</sup> Because the Latin American nations saw in the Monroe Doctrine a concrete pledge of support, attendance at the Panama Congress would only confirm its existence.

In the opposition's eyes, the only way to avoid jeopardizing American neutrality and the principles of Washington's farewell address, the only way to avoid recognizing any pledge and cementing the undesirable legacy of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America, was to not participate in the Panama Congress at all. They believed that any of the appropriate objects President Adams sought to achieve by sending ministers to Panama should, in the words of Robert Hayne, properly "belong to *ordinary diplomacy*."<sup>35</sup> Even on the noncolonization principle, the issue Adams specifically raised to justify participation, the opponents denied the need for the Panama Mission. White argued that

Whenever we can feel the necessity for such a stipulation, to guard our Territory against the encroachments of European nations, then, indeed, . . . we are prepared for the vassal condition of colonies. If these new States set so little value upon independence, as to require such an agreement to stimulate them to exert their means to prevent colonies from being planted within their limits, then I shall conclude they are unfit for self-government, and that no agreement with them, upon any subject, can be of much utility to us.<sup>36</sup>

Mahlon Dickerson of New Jersey dismissed the noncolonization principle entirely, concluding that "if the powers of Europe possess, by right, any portion of either of these continents, they may colonize such possessions, and this Government will not prevent them—the pledge of the late President to the contrary, notwithstanding."<sup>37</sup> In their view, the noncolonization principle was a worthless international pursuit, and certainly did not justify a potential violation of U.S. neutrality.

Perhaps the greatest success achieved by the Senate opposition was in delaying final confirmation of Adams's nominees for several months. While it is clear that the opposition aligned itself against Adams and the Panama Mission for legitimate, principled reasons, they were also aware from the beginning that they did not have the votes necessary to actually prevent the mission's passage. A majority of senators supported Adams, and, while not disagreeing with the opposition's assessment of the importance of America's foreign-policy principles, did put faith in his assurances that the United States could go to Panama without violating them. Their minority status did not stop the opponents of the mission from introducing what historian Robert Remini described as a succes-

---

34. Sen. Hugh L. White, Tennessee, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 201. Emphasis in original.

35. Sen. Robert Y. Hayne, South Carolina, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 170. Emphasis in original.

36. Sen. Hugh L. White, Tennessee, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 206.

37. Sen. Mahlon Dickerson, New Jersey, March 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 297.

sion of “dilatatory motions” that brought the proceedings to a virtual halt and giving speeches of “gargantuan length, all deliberately conceived to consume as much time as possible.”<sup>38</sup> This continued until 14 March, when supporters of the mission had had enough of the stall tactics and voted down the Foreign Relations Committee’s resolution by a vote of 19 to 24.<sup>39</sup> The Senate then voted to confirm Anderson, Sergeant, and Rochester by votes of 27 to 17, 26 to 18, and 28 to 16, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The day after the Senate voted to confirm, Adams transmitted to the House of Representatives a lengthy message advocating the allocation of the funds necessary to support the mission. Samuel Flagg Bemis described this message as “one of the most important papers of [Adams’s] diplomatic career, and to it he summoned all the powers of rhetoric, all the weight of his experience.”<sup>41</sup> Learning from the course of debate in the Senate, Adams put special emphasis on two points in his message to the House. First, he stressed that the Congress of Panama was “in its nature diplomatic and not legislative . . . nothing can be transacted there, obligating upon any one of the States to be represented at the meeting.”<sup>42</sup> He was attempting to demonstrate to the House that, contrary to some senators’ fears, simply being present at the Congress of Panama would not violate U.S. neutrality.

Adams also wrote at length about Washington’s farewell address. He stated that he was “mindful of the advice given by the father of our country in his Farewell Address, that the great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible.” The key to Adams’s interpretation of the farewell address was his belief that “like all the counsels of wisdom, [it] was founded upon the circumstances in which our country and the world around us were situated at the time when it was given,” specifically that “Europe had a set of primary interests, which to us had none, or very remote relation . . . [and] that our *detached* and *distant* situation, invited and enabled us to pursue a different course.” Adams asked the House to

Compare our situation and the circumstances of that time with those of the present day. . . . Europe has still her set of primary interests with which we have little or a remote relation. Our distant and detached situation with reference to Europe remains the same. But we were then the only independent nation of this hemisphere, and we were surrounded by European colonies, with the greater part of which we had no more intercourse than with the

---

38. Remini, *Martin Van Buren*, 107; and Remini, *Henry Clay*, 292.

39. U.S. Congress, *Executive Proceedings*, 100–101.

40. *Ibid.*, 102–3.

41. Bemis, *Foundations*, 554.

42. John Quincy Adams, Special Message to the House of Representatives of the United States, 15 March 1826, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, 2: 336.

inhabitants of another planet. Those colonies have now been transformed into eight independent nations, extending to our very borders, seven of them Republics like ourselves, with whom we have an immensely growing commercial, and *must* have and have already important political, connections; with reference to whom our situation is neither distant nor detached; whose political principles and systems of government, congenial with our own, must and will have an action and counteraction upon us and ours to which we can not be indifferent if we would.

Adams concluded that if Washington had written his address in 1826 instead of 1796, he would have asserted “that *America* has a set of primary interests which have none or a remote relation to Europe,” that economically, geographically, and ideologically it was in the interest of the United States to not isolate itself from its American neighbors. By Adams’s understanding of U.S. interest and Washington’s farewell address, “the acceptance of this invitation, . . . far from conflicting with the counsel or the policy of Washington, is directly deducible from and conformable to it.”<sup>43</sup>

Adams was clearly advancing an interpretation of Washington’s farewell address unclouded by the Jeffersonian restatement of it. He was attempting to demonstrate that by Washington’s words and by Washington’s logic the United States could and should send ministers to Panama. He believed that the global context for American foreign policy thirty years after the farewell address was

---

43. *Ibid.*, 2: 337–38. Emphasis in original. In *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783–1829*, James Lewis presents an intriguing argument regarding a solution to the problems faced by the United States with the emergence of these newly independent republics to the south. He states that “between 1783 and 1829, the first two generations of American policymakers responded to the gradual dissolution of the Spanish empire in the New World within an intellectual framework in which neighborhood was a problem and union was a solution.” Specifically, he argues that the same unionist thinking that produced the federal union of the states under the Constitution of 1787 should have led Adams and Clay to pursue a similar union with Spanish America in 1826. When Adams and Clay “confronted and rejected the idea of a single hemispheric union as they prepared for the Panama Congress in 1825 and 1826,” Lewis believes they “rejected the only possible solution to the problem of neighborhood and undermined their effort to ease this problem by spreading North American principles through the New World. By accepting the impracticality of a single union of such scope and diversity, they suggested that there were physical and cultural limits to the unionist logic of the 1780s. A federal system that had held so much promise as the means to secure peace between states and republican government within states for an entire continent now seemed inapplicable for an entire hemisphere. But their approach to the Panama Congress embodied more than just a recognition of limits. It also marked the abandonment of a distinctly American contribution to political thought in favor of a traditionally European idea of international relations.” In light of the debates over the prospect of U.S. participation in the Panama Congress, it seems safe to say that Adams and Clay were not the only ones who would have rejected a move toward the establishment of a hemispheric union. It also represents a significant leap of faith to assume that George Washington would have moved so far beyond the maxims of his farewell address (a document Lewis does not reference) to support such a union. Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 219, 211–12. For a more complete discussion of Adams’s confrontation with unionist logic as he prepared for the Panama Congress, see 189–214.

markedly different from the world Washington had written about. This did not mean that the United States had to enter into alliances, violate its neutrality, or veer away from the general ideals laid out by Washington, but it did mean that policymakers had to recognize the potential for mutual interest that could exist among the American republics. The mission's opponents in the House, though, were not so willing to abandon their Jeffersonian understanding of Washington's farewell address in favor of Adams's interpretation of its original meaning and contemporary significance.

The House Committee of Ways and Means reported a bill on 25 March "making appropriations for carrying into effect the appointment of a mission at the Congress of Panama."<sup>44</sup> The Committee of Foreign Relations also issued its own report and resolution on the same day, which declared that "in the opinion of this House, it is expedient to appropriate the funds necessary to enable the President of the United States to send Ministers to the Congress of Panama."<sup>45</sup> The House would not consider either measure until 3 April, at which time it took up the Foreign Relations resolution despite the objections raised by many representatives who believed that it was the duty of the House to immediately consider the Ways and Means appropriation. From a tactical perspective, though, consideration of the Foreign Relations resolution lent itself to a wider-ranging debate, as it was concerned with more than just a monetary allocation.

The vast majority of the House debate on the Foreign Relations resolution centered not on the resolution itself but on two proposed amendments to it, both of which sought to remedy the perceived defect that President Adams and his ministers would have an unbounded authority over how the United States would conduct diplomacy at Panama. The amendments attempted to, if not impose, at least recommend limits on U.S. action. The first amendment, introduced by Representative Louis McLane of Delaware on 3 April, sought to explicitly tie approval of the mission to Panama to both the Jeffersonian conception of Washington's farewell address and a rejection of the internationalization of the noncolonization principle:

It being understood as the opinion of this House, that, as it has always been the settled policy of this Government, in extending our commercial relations with foreign nations, to have with them as little political connection as possible; to preserve peace, commerce, and friendship, with all nations, and to form entangling alliances with none; the Ministers who may be sent shall attend at the said Congress in a diplomatic character merely; and ought not

---

44. U.S. Congress, *Message from the President of the United States, upon the Subject of an Appropriation to Carry into Effect a Mission to Panama*, 17 March 1826, retrieved from NewsBank Database (U.S. Congressional Set, vol. 139, Session vol. 9, 19th Cong., 1st sess., H.Doc.162, Record no. oFF527DA87981780) and 25 March 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 1764.

45. 25 March 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 1765.



to be authorized to discuss, consider, or consult, upon any proposition of alliance, offensive or defensive, between this country and any of the South American Governments, or any stipulation, compact, or declaration, binding the United States in any way, or to any extent, to resist interference from abroad with domestic concerns of the aforesaid Governments, or any measure which shall commit the present or future neutral rights or duties of these United States, either as may regard European nations, or between the several States of Mexico and South America.<sup>46</sup>

According to McLane, in structuring this amendment, he had “endeavored . . . to embrace all those principles which had characterized the policy of the United States from our earliest history . . . [and] to preserve that policy unimpaired.” He believed “that this House cannot vote the resolution recommended by the committee [of Foreign Relations], apart from some expression of its opinion, without committing itself to the doctrine, that a different line of policy is to be observed towards the New, from that which we have hitherto observed towards the Old World.”<sup>47</sup>

Adams would not necessarily have disagreed with McLane on this point; he *was* urging a new course of policy toward the New World (or at least those parts of it that had achieved independence) from that followed toward the Old. What McLane failed to grasp, though, was that by Adams’s calculus, both lines of policy were dictated by the original policies and precepts laid out by Washington. In that respect, while the mission to Panama did represent a new line of policy toward the independent nations of the New World, it did not represent a change in the fundamental principles underlying American foreign policy. McLane was the first of many representatives to hold this basic difference of opinion as to what Washington’s farewell address truly meant. His desire to “preserve that policy unimpaired” represented an entire school of thought influenced by Jefferson and premised on the idea that the farewell address was a permanent and universal declaration; what applied to Europe in 1796 applied to Latin America in 1826.

Two days later, William C. Rives of Virginia introduced the second amendment debated on the Foreign Relations resolution as an amendment to McLane’s amendment. Rives proposed to insert an additional clause in McLane’s original amendment that sought to prevent “any compact or engagement by which the United States shall be *pledged* to the Spanish American States to maintain, by force, the principle that no part of the American continents is henceforward subject to colonization by any European Power.”<sup>48</sup> While McLane sought to implicitly block international adoption of the noncolonization principle, Rives’s goal was to explicitly prevent it.

46. Rep. Louis McLane, Delaware, 3 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2009.

47. Rep. Louis McLane, Delaware, 4 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2011, 2020.

48. Rep. William C. Rives, Virginia, 5 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2059–60. Emphasis in original.

As if taking their cue from their Senate brethren and the text of Rives's amendment, the House opponents of the mission focused their attacks on the question of whether or not the Monroe Doctrine constituted a pledge on the part of the United States to defend the sovereignty of the new Latin American nations against European intervention. Charles Wickliffe of Kentucky asserted that it was "not until after the message of President Monroe, of 1823, had superinduced the belief, in some of these Republics, that the United States had 'pledged themselves . . . ' do we hear of any determination, officially, to invite us to take part . . . in the deliberations of this Congress."<sup>49</sup> Wickliffe was not alone in believing that the United States owed to the Monroe Doctrine its invitation to Panama. John Carter of South Carolina raised the issue when he stated that "without pretending to say, or know, what the exact meaning of [Monroe's] declaration was, I think very little doubt can be entertained but that we owe the invitation we have received to send Ministers to Panama, to nothing else."<sup>50</sup> John Forsyth of Georgia was especially critical of the mission in light of the Latin American perception of the Monroe Doctrine. He believed that the purpose of U.S. involvement in the Congress of Panama was "to concert means of resisting European interference; these being considered as the principles of Mr. Monroe's message, that we have been invited, and have consented to go to Panama. We go not to undeceive them; not to explain to them their mistake, in supposing us pledged to any efforts for the defence of their rights; but to discuss the question of means, as if the pledge existed in full force."<sup>51</sup> The problem for Forsyth was not participation in the congress, per se, but participation under the auspices of a pledge, which in reality did not exist, but would nevertheless be sanctioned by that participation.

James Buchanan of Pennsylvania and James Hamilton of South Carolina were especially critical of the Adams administration's handling of the Latin American nations' mistaken belief in a pledge. They both pointed to examples in the diplomatic correspondence provided to the House of U.S. foreign ministers explicitly referring to a pledge by Monroe, and asserted that their actions represented a conscious and intentional change in the established foreign policy of the United States by Adams, Clay, and the rest of the administration. Buchanan argued that the Monroe Doctrine "contained no pledge to any foreign Government. It left us perfectly free: but it has since been converted into such pledge by the present Administration."<sup>52</sup> Hamilton believed that the "basis of our negotiations with the South American Republics" had been "this declaration of Mr. Monroe (which has been most unjustifiably termed by the administration a pledge, and, by their subsequent commentaries on it, converted into one)."<sup>53</sup>

---

49. Rep. Charles A. Wickliffe, Kentucky, 5 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2034.

50. Rep. John Carter, South Carolina, 15 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2283-84.

51. Rep. John Forsyth, Georgia, 17 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2322.

52. Rep. James Buchanan, Pennsylvania, 11 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2172.

53. Rep. James Hamilton, South Carolina, 10 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2146.

Buchanan and Hamilton went further than anyone else in accusing the administration of intentionally fostering the Latin American belief in a pledge and, as a result, perverting the long-standing principles of U.S. foreign policy.

Several representatives took the opposite view of the Monroe Doctrine altogether and conceded that, while it may have constituted a pledge at the time that it was enunciated, it no longer stood as such by 1826. While many feared that the doctrine had become “too binding a contract,” these representatives argued that the contract had already expired. Edward Livingston of Louisiana looked to the doctrine as a pledge: “A pledge, not to ourselves or to posterity . . . but a pledge to the world, that we would interfere, according to our means, to resist [European] interference.” He went on to stress that such a pledge “related only to the state of things that then existed. . . . The circumstances under which the declaration was made, have passed away; they are not likely again to recur; but, I should wish all Europe to understand, that if they should, our conduct would redeem the pledge our Executive then made.”<sup>54</sup> Livingston described what could best be termed a conditional pledge. In December 1823 a set of prevailing conditions existed globally to warrant a pledge of support to Latin America by the United States. That those conditions no longer existed by 1826 only meant that the pledge, at that point in time, was ineffectual; should those prevailing conditions return, though, the original pledge would then once again be actionable.

The existence of such varying perspectives begged the question, if the Monroe Doctrine’s purpose had been served by 1826 (at least in terms of the doctrine of two spheres and the threat of European intervention in Spanish America), was it still pertinent? Could it still represent an important declaration of U.S. foreign-policy principles if it was no longer applicable to the existing global context? John Forsyth and Daniel Webster believed that it could and did. Forsyth argued that “the law of self-defense requires us to act, whenever any combination of Powers—Asiatic, African, European, or American—interferes with the domestic concerns of the American States. This was all that was rightfully asserted by the message of 1823.”<sup>55</sup> Pledge or no pledge, Monroe’s message was founded on the basic principles of a nation’s right to defend itself against foreign interference. This idea was just as true in 1826 as it had been in 1823, would always be true for a sovereign and independent nation, and was why the Monroe Doctrine was important.

Webster echoed these sentiments in proclaiming that Monroe’s “declaration must be considered as founded on our rights, and to spring mainly from a regard to their preservation.” He never believed that the doctrine had constituted a pledge, as he asserted that “it did not commit us, at all events, to take up arms on any indication of hostile feeling by the powers of Europe towards South America.” Monroe’s declaration was important, not because of any nonexistent

54. Rep. Edward Livingston, Louisiana, 12 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2211–12.

55. Rep. John Forsyth, Georgia, 17 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2321.

pledge, but because it was a statement of American rights and American principles, rights and principles that were hailed when they were announced but were under attack in 1826. Webster looked upon the Monroe Doctrine “as forming a bright page in our history. . . . But how should it happen . . . that there should now be such a new-born fear, on the subject of this declaration? The crisis is over; the danger is past. . . . Most of the gentlemen who have now spoken on this subject, were at that time here [in Congress]. They all heard the declaration. Not one of them complained. And yet, now when all danger is over, we are vehemently warned against the sentiments of the declaration.”<sup>56</sup> Of course, Webster’s understanding of the doctrine’s contemporary meanings was founded both on the idea that President Adams had not and would not pervert its meanings and independently of its interpretation as a pledge in Latin America, two points which the opposition was clearly, and, on the latter point justifiably, unwilling to concede.

For President Adams, the Monroe Doctrine was still pertinent and important, if not because of the declaration of rights and principles contained within the doctrine of two spheres, then at least because of the noncolonization principle. According to Dexter Perkins, in raising the noncolonization principle as an object of U.S. foreign policy, Adams desired to see it translated “into a rule of American public law.”<sup>57</sup> Despite the importance Adams placed on it, many congressmen felt that it would be a worthless exercise to advance such a principle abroad. Charles Wickliffe, for one, wondered, “Why should we be called upon to stipulate by treaty that we will not suffer our own soil to be invaded; to be occupied by an European Power; to be colonized? We need no paper stipulations upon such a subject. We have a stronger guarantee than all the parchment the South can give us: it is that devotion to liberty and self government which is felt and seen by our citizens. For the honor and character of my country, I would not enter into such a stipulation with any Power.”<sup>58</sup>

Louis McLane echoed a similar sentiment when he stated his belief that “any stipulation, or any treaty, on the subject of a resistance to colonization, or of interference, by European Powers, with the Independence of the South American States, I view as utterly incompatible with the settled policy of this Government.” He argued that no nation could ever “negotiate about its own policy or attitude towards foreign nations. . . . It consults its own honor and interests, and the happiness of its citizens; and when it has decided on its course, it is its duty to announce its policy to the world—not to negotiate about it.” In the case of the United States, “it is the duty of the Executive to say to all People that our policy is pacific—it is neutral—it is to steer clear of the difficulties and quarrels of other People, and not to negotiate with any body whether we shall commit

---

56. Rep. Daniel Webster, Massachusetts, 14 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2269–70.

57. Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823–1826*, 207–8.

58. Rep. Charles A. Wickliffe, Kentucky, 5 April 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 2045.

ourselves to their destiny.”<sup>59</sup> Wickliffe and McLane advanced the view that the noncolonization principle was a suitable policy at home but not one that the United States should or could discuss abroad, let alone convert into a pledge of support. They believed that entering into agreements based on the noncolonization principle would not strengthen the ability of the United States to defend itself against foreign interference and would likely only serve to weaken it by binding the United States to defend other nations’ sovereignty. Wickliffe and McLane were arguing against a different object than Adams was proposing, though. He did not seek the aid of other nations in defending the territorial integrity of the United States, nor did he intend to bind the United States to militarily defend the principle abroad. He simply wanted these new nations to adopt the principle for themselves and to declare it to the world as the United States had in 1823. Such declarations throughout Latin America could only serve to promote North and South American security interests alike.

Several representatives did understand and agree with this position. John Wurts of Pennsylvania felt that the arguments advanced by men like Wickliffe and McLane were

Not treating the question fairly. It is not proposed to go abroad to gather strength, or create inducements to defend our own soil. The colonization of any part of the continent of North America, within our territorial limits, by any Government, never will be permitted, so long as this Republic retains the power to prevent it. The stipulation, therefore, would bind us to no course other than that to which our feelings and our policy would prompt us, independent of it.

Rather, pursuing the noncolonization principle abroad “would be the mean by which we should obtain the security, so far as international stipulations can give it, that no part of the territorial dominion of the Southern Republics should pass, by cession or otherwise, to European Powers, who might prove to be troublesome and mischievous neighbors to both of us.”<sup>60</sup> Daniel Webster similarly stressed that such agreements with the South American republics could not impact America’s ability to defend the noncolonization principle at home. Instead, he argued, it would behoove the United States to encourage these new nations to “settle it, as part of their policy, not to allow colonization within their respective territories,” because it would provide for domestic security, and help to protect American commerce with these nations.<sup>61</sup>

These discussions of the Monroe Doctrine as a past and future pledge, as defending national interests and rights, and as advancing a useful or useless noncolonization principle reveal a great deal about the short-term legacy of the Monroe Doctrine. Congress could come to no consensus as to what the Monroe

---

59. Rep. Louis McLane, Delaware, 4 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2015–16.

60. Rep. John Wurts, Pennsylvania, 11 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2189.

61. Rep. Daniel Webster, Massachusetts, 14 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2271.

Doctrine would mean in the wake of John Quincy Adams's foreign policy. It was generally believed that the doctrine had been an appropriate response to the threats posed by Europe in 1823. By 1826, though, many felt that the doctrine had served its purpose and now belonged to the annals of history. Still, there were those who saw the doctrine as of perpetual importance as a statement of American principles and as an assertion of American rights. Very few saw it as an essential component of American foreign-policy thought. And certainly fewer would have predicted how the Monroe Doctrine would come to be seen and used in the decades to come. Not even the doctrine's staunchest congressional defenders would have described it in 1826 as Dexter Perkins did in 1963, when he labeled it the "most significant of all American state papers."<sup>62</sup>

A final strand of the House debate over the Panama Mission dealt with the legacy of Washington's farewell address. The overarching point of contention in the debate in both houses of Congress was the idea that the administration's policies flew in the face of Washington's wisdom. It is obvious from the language of the debates that those men opposed to the administration were motivated by an unwavering belief in the principles expressed by Washington, at least as Thomas Jefferson had understood them. James Buchanan argued that "a crisis has now arrived, in which it is the duty of this House to take a firm stand in favor of the ancient and the approved policy of the country. We should proclaim to the world, that it is our determination 'to preserve peace, commerce, and friendship, with all nations, and to form entangling alliances with none.'<sup>63</sup> In Buchanan's opinion, President Adams needed to reiterate these maxims as the correct policy of the United States in dealing with Latin America, and not veer away from them as the Panama Mission threatened to do. Buchanan did not agree with the distinction Adams attempted to make between U.S. interests in Europe and U.S. interests in Latin America; in his mind Washington's policy was clear: entangling alliances with *none*.

James Hamilton similarly feared how Adams was attempting to pervert "the spirit and meaning of the advice of Washington." He described the farewell address as the "warnings of a parting friend. Posterity has the reversionary interest; and it is not the sophistry of Mr. Adams that can deprive our children of the full benefit of this long enduring legacy. Founded on the then and ever enduring circumstances of our country, were these counsels. Sir, they rest permanently on our immutable condition, as a federative Republic."<sup>64</sup> Charles Wickliffe similarly declared, "There are certain great principles which never change; and among them I recognize those prescribed by the Father of his Country, in his Farewell Address to his beloved People, as the rule of our

---

62. Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine*, 28.

63. Rep. James Buchanan, Pennsylvania, 11 April 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 2172.

64. Rep. James Hamilton, South Carolina, 10 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2158, 2160.

conduct with and toward foreign nations.”<sup>65</sup> Hamilton and Wickliffe both believed that as long as the United States endured, Washington’s principles should remain forever absolute.<sup>66</sup>

All of the bitterness over the true meanings of Washington’s farewell address and the Monroe Doctrine in the context of the Panama Mission aside, at the root of these debates still rested the amendments of McLane and Rives. The central purpose of these proposed amendments was to force President Adams and his ministers at Panama to conform to these fundamental principles of foreign policy as defined by the mission’s opponents. Many in the House purported to believe in the spirit of these instructions but not in the power of the House of Representatives to actually issue them as, constitutionally, the House had no purview over foreign relations. With this in mind, on 18 April, James Buchanan proposed another amendment designed to “test the sincerity of those gentlemen who had declared, that their only objection to the amendments now before the committee, was, that they contained an instruction from this House to the Ministers which would be sent to Panama.” The amendment declared that the House of Representatives, in approving of the mission,

Do[es] not intend to sanction any departure from the settled policy of this Government, that, in extending our commercial relations with foreign nations, we should have with them as little political connexion as possible; and that we should preserve peace, commerce, and friendship, with all nations, and form entangling alliances with none. It is, therefore, the opinion

---

65. Rep. Charles A. Wickliffe, Kentucky, 6 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2085–86.

66. Such professions of loyalty to Washington’s farewell address even found their way into the private correspondence of Andrew Jackson, the putative head of the opposition. He believed that even if you “let the primary interests of Europe be what they may, or let our situation vary as far as you please from that which we occupied when the immortal Washington retired from the councils of his country, I cannot see, for my part how it follows that the primary interests of the United States will be safer in the hands of others, than in her own; or in other words, that it can ever become necessary to form entangling alliances, or any connection with the governments of South America which may infringe upon that principle of equality among nations which is the basis of their independence, as well as all their international rules. The doctrine of Washington is as applicable to the present as to the then primary interests of Europe, so far as our own peace and happiness are concerned, and I have no hesitation in saying so far as the true interests of South America are concerned.” Washington’s “last best gift” to the United States, the farewell address, had produced international peace, economic expansion abroad, and “great prosperity at home.” Jackson argued that “to abandon a policy so wise in itself, and so beneficial an experiment to our country displays a weakness of wickedness not paralleled [sic] in the history of any country. It is a bold game of ambition, that puts at once to hazzard [sic] our peace, our happiness, and for what is known may lead to the destruction of our liberty at last, and all this without the least apparent cause for a departure from that wise policy recommended by Washington, ‘peace with all nations entangling alliances with none.’” While Jackson’s intense dislike for Adams and his policies cannot be underestimated or overlooked, there is no reason to question his belief in the sanctity of Washington’s farewell address. Andrew Jackson to James Buchanan, 8 April 1826, in Andrew Jackson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, ed. John Spencer Bassett, 7 vols. (Washington, DC, 1926–1935), 3: 300; and Andrew Jackson to James K. Polk, 3 May 1826, in James K. Polk, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Herbert Weaver, 10 vols. (Nashville, 1969–), 1: 39–40.

of this House, that the Government of the United States ought not to be represented at the Congress of Panama, except in a diplomatic character, nor ought they to form any alliance, with all or any of the Spanish American Republics; nor ought they to become parties with them, or either of them, to any joint declaration for the purpose of preventing the interference of any of the European Powers with their independence or form of Government, or to any compact for the purpose of preventing colonization upon the continent of America; but that the People of the United States should be left free to act, in any crisis, in such a manner as their feelings of friendship towards these Republics, and as their own honor and policy may at the time dictate.<sup>67</sup>

Buchanan sought to maintain the spirit of the previous amendments, but to reframe them as clearly expressing an opinion rather than an instruction. He also used his amendment as a forum in which to not only reiterate the principles of Washington's farewell address, as he asserted should be done earlier in the debates, but to officially renounce the existence of any perceived pledge and to block any foreign agreements founded on the noncolonization principle. Buchanan was essentially attempting to strip the Monroe Doctrine from the mission. McLane accepted Buchanan's amendment, and Rives withdrew his entirely, believing that it was no longer necessary.<sup>68</sup>

On 20 April, voting on the Panama Mission commenced in the House. The first vote was on the Buchanan/McLane amendment, and the result could not have been closer, as 93 representatives voted in favor of the amendment and 94 voted against it; the amendment was defeated.<sup>69</sup> A vote was then taken on McLane's original amendment, which passed with 99 in favor to 95 opposed.<sup>70</sup> The following day, the amended resolution of the Committee of Foreign Affairs was voted down, with only 54 representatives in favor and 143 against. The House immediately moved to consider the bill of the Committee of Ways and Means appropriating funds for the mission. Debate on the bill was brief and largely focused on the specific monetary allocation for the mission. On 22 April a final vote was taken to approve the funding for the mission to Panama, which passed 134 to 60.<sup>71</sup>

---

67. Rep. James Buchanan, Pennsylvania, 18 April 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 2368–69.

68. Rep. Louis McLane, Delaware and Rep. William C. Rives, Virginia, 18 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2369.

69. 20 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2453. The House records fail to list the individual votes on the Buchanan/McLane amendment, making it impossible to compare the votes on that measure with any subsequent votes.

70. *Ibid.*, 2: 2457. While the final tally states that 95 representatives voted against McLane's amendment, the *Register of Debates* lists only 94 names as voting nay.

71. 21 and 22 April 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 2490, 2514. At first glance, it is not immediately apparent why 99 representatives voted in favor of amending the Foreign Relations resolution (McLane's amendment), yet the next day only 54 voted for the amended resolution. While historian Maurice Baxter asserted that "it is impossible to account for the switch," a close examination of the votes reveals an interesting pattern. Of the 99 representatives to vote in favor of McLane's



The appropriation bill then moved from the House to the Senate Committee of Finance. On 27 April the committee “reported the same [House bill] without amendment.” Despite the direct report, they were not completely satisfied with the bill. J. McPherson Berrien of Georgia was “instructed” by the Committee of Finance to offer what was essentially the Buchanan amendment to the House Foreign Relations resolution.<sup>72</sup> It was a last attempt by the Senate’s opponents of the mission to put some form of limitation, even if nonbinding, on the prerogatives of the president and his ministers in carrying out their diplomatic duties at Panama. The irony of this amendment was that it was originally introduced in the House to assuage the reservations of those representatives who felt that the House could not issue instructions to the president on diplomatic matters. If it was successfully attached to the appropriation bill and passed in the Senate, it would then be returned to the House, where, if approved, it would embody the very reservations it was designed to relieve: the House would be giving diplomatic instructions to the president. Such potential complications proved to be moot, though, as the amendment was rejected with 19 in favor to 24 opposed.<sup>73</sup> The unamended appropriation bill was passed the following day by a vote of 23 to 19.<sup>74</sup> On 3 May 1826 the mission to the Congress of Panama was finally approved.

Arguably the most important reason that the mission to Panama and the extensive congressional debate over U.S. participation in it is so little remembered today is that the Panama Congress itself was ultimately a failure, especially from the perspective of the Adams administration. As historian Theodore Burton has pointed out, the “belated approval of the recommendations of the President rendered participation in the Congress very difficult.” John Sergeant refused to travel to Panama at the height of the summer disease season and Richard Anderson died of said disease en route to Panama, making it impossible for the U.S. delegation to arrive at the congress before it adjourned.<sup>75</sup> Even this

---

amendment, 50 voted in favor of the amended resolution and 49 voted against it. Of the 50 who voted for the amended resolution, 43 also voted for the appropriation bill; however, of the 49 who voted against the amended resolution, every single one who cast a vote voted against the appropriation bill (one representative, James Hamilton of South Carolina, did not cast a vote on the appropriation bill). It seems clear that this second group favored placing limitations on the scope of the mission’s authority but also refused to sanction the mission by actually voting in favor of the amended resolution or the appropriation. On the other side, 87 representatives could be said to have voted the Adams line, voting against McLane’s amendment, against the amended resolution, and for the appropriation bill. The Baxter quote is from Maurice G. Baxter, *One and Inseparable: Daniel Webster and the Union* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 123. Voting data are taken from 20–22 April 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 2457, 2490, 2514.

72. Sen. J. McPherson Berrien, Georgia, 27 April 1826. U.S. Congress, *Register of Debates*, 2: 641–42.

73. 2 May 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 667.

74. 3 May 1826. *Ibid.*, 2: 671. As could be expected, every person who voted in favor of the Buchanan/Berrien amendment voted against the appropriation bill, with one senator from the previous day’s vote not participating.

75. Theodore E. Burton, “Henry Clay,” in *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, ed. Samuel Flaggs Bemis, vol. 4 (New York, 1928), 147–48; and Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings*, 365.

proved to be somewhat immaterial, though, as the Panama Congress was, to use Halford Hoskins's concise description, "a doleful fiasco" by most objective standards. Latin American historian Alonso Aguilar has argued that the main reason the congress failed was that "some countries did not attend and others failed to grasp the importance of the meeting." Of the nations in attendance, only Colombia's government actually ratified the work of the congress.<sup>76</sup> Once the Congress of Panama adjourned, any hope for a lasting impact ended with it.

The entire debate over U.S. participation in the Congress of Panama, especially as it pertained to the fundamental principles of U.S. foreign policy, had been predicated on the idea that the congress would ultimately do and mean something. The many fears of the Monroe Doctrine as a pledge were exacerbated by the idea that the United States would be putting itself in a situation where it could pledge itself to future action by its very presence at Panama. Even the basic questions about Washington's farewell address and the problems of foreign entanglement were founded on the premise that the South American republics were intent on achieving a singular policy and alliance; but this was ultimately not the case, as the congress fell apart almost before it began due to a lack of interest and participation from most of Latin America.

Even though the Congress of Panama was a failure and the United States achieved nothing by its abortive participation in it, it does not mean that the debates that led to the dispatching of a mission were without importance. The congressmen who took part in these debates had clear reasons for supporting or opposing the mission based not just on partisanship but also on their conceptions of the fundamental principles of U.S. foreign policy and how they related to a U.S. mission to Panama. In general, for all of the posturing and hand wringing that went on during the debates, the two sides were not that far apart in their interpretations of Washington's farewell address and the Monroe Doctrine (with the notable exception of the doctrine as a pledge). Instead, they disagreed as to what Adams's intentions were and how those principles would be affected by participation in the Panama Congress. The debate hinged on these differences. The similarity in basic belief is significant in witnessing the emergence and confirmation of clear-cut legacies for Washington's farewell address and the Monroe Doctrine from this debate over their contemporary meanings. The Jeffersonian interpretation of the farewell address continued to dominate American foreign-policy thought despite Adams's efforts to educate Americans on Washington's original meanings. Even his supporters shied away from arguing the Adams interpretation and instead argued that U.S. neutrality would not be threatened in the first place. The debate also represented the nadir of the Monroe Doctrine; while it can be inferred from the final votes that most

---

76. Halford L. Hoskins, "The Hispanic American Policy of Henry Clay, 1816-1828," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 7, no. 4 (November 1927): 475; Alonso Aguilar, *Pan-Americanism from Monroe to the Present: A View from the Other Side* (New York, 1968), 27; and Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings*, 365.

congressmen generally did not have a problem with the noncolonization principle as far as Adams wanted to pursue it internationally, it also became abundantly clear that Congress had no interest in seeing the doctrine of two spheres adopted as a universal principle. It is for all of these reasons that this debate was important; it allowed Congress to actively define the legacies of the fundamental principles of American foreign policy.