

Roca-Runciman Revisited: Anglo-American Relations and Argentina during the 'Infamous Decade', 1933-1943

A few years ago, this writer had the pleasure of meeting the late Garry Runciman, the 3rd Viscount Runciman of Doxford, for tea at the British Academy, of which Lord Runciman was then President. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the ill-fated mission to Prague in the summer of 1938 of his grandfather, Walter Runciman, to whom the government of Neville Chamberlain had given the forlorn task of trying to avert a European war over the German-speaking Sudetenland, in what was then Czechoslovakia. Runciman's mission to Prague came at the end of a long and distinguished career during which, amongst other things, he had served as President of the Board of Trade in the Liberal Government of Herbert Asquith from 1914 to 1916 and again during the National Government of Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin from 1931 to 1937. At one point during our conversation, Lord Runciman remarked that his father, the 2nd Viscount, Leslie Runciman, had told him that there were two places in the world where a Runciman might not be very welcome. One was the Czech Republic, in view of the fact that Walter Runciman's mission was followed by the notorious Munich agreement to dismember Czechoslovakia. The other was Argentina. ¹

The 'Infamous Decade'

The Roca-Runciman agreement of May 1933 has a similar notoriety in Argentina to the Munich settlement in Europe owing to its association with the so-called 'Infamous Decade', a period located between two military coups – the first in September 1930 and the second in June 1943 – during which Argentina was ruled by a much-reviled Conservative-led coalition, the *Concordancia*. 'For thirteen years conservatives ruled Argentina', Peter Bakewell has written. 'They did so by manipulating elections and relying on military backing', he continued, echoing commonly-held views amongst Argentine historians. 'Far from everything was negative', he added, but the 'conservative elite' suffered from growing political opposition, especially in the cities and above all in Buenos Aires. 'It was with the support of these urban workers that Colonel Peron rose to national prominence between 1943 and 1945, then to dominate Argentina as president from 1946 to 1955'. ²

Another element of the 'Infamous Decade' was the accusation that Britain had taken advantage of its strong economic position in regard to Argentina to force the one-sided

Roca-Runciman agreement upon that country. The agreement essentially guaranteed Argentina's largest market for the export of chilled beef in exchange for very favourable financial and commercial terms for British coal and manufactured goods. Whatever its economic effects, the Roca-Runciman agreement is generally seen as a powerful stimulant for the rise of Argentine nationalism in the 1930s, culminating in the military coup d'état of June 1943 and the subsequent rule of Juan Peron. While the agreement was defended by the Argentine government in 1933, and especially by Vice President Julio Roca who had led the delegation to London that negotiated it, Roca-Runciman was attacked by the opposition parties, especially supporters of former President Yrigoyen, overthrown in September 1930. They regarded the Roca-Runciman agreement as a corrupt sell-out to the British Empire that favoured British-owned businesses such as the Anglo Meatpacking Company or *Frigorifico Anglo del Uruguay*, owned by the very wealthy Vestey family, which sold large quantities of Argentine beef in Britain under its *Fray Bentos* brand. ³

One of the main critics of the agreement was Senator Lissandro de la Torres who headed a Senate committee to investigate the meat trade and especially the meat packing companies which he accused of making large and unjustified profits at the expense of the Argentine people. On 25 July 1935, at the end of a heated debate in the Senate chamber during which de la Torres bitterly attacked the Roca-Runciman agreement, he was struck by Luis Duhai, the Minister of Agriculture. Shots were fired from the gallery and although they missed de la Torres they hit another opposition Senator who died of his injuries later the same day. De la Torres was also challenged to a duel by the Minister of Finance, Federico Pinedo, which took place soon after but did not result in any further bloodshed. However, the fallout from the Roca-Runciman agreement continued to reverberate around Argentine politics for the rest of the 1930s and beyond, not least in the accusations by Peronists that it had made Argentina into a British colony. ⁴

Alongside its significant role in relations between Britain and Argentina, the Roca-Runciman agreement also played an important part in Anglo-American relations during the 1930s and the Second World War. It was not well received in the United States and, in particular, it attracted the ire of Cordell Hull, FDR's Secretary of State for most of his presidency, who was a zealous free trader and therefore an opponent of exclusive commercial and financial

deals such as the Ottawa agreements of 1932 based on 'Imperial Preference' and the Roca-Runciman agreement in 1933. His criticism of British policy towards Argentina was compounded by his belief that the British government was undermining US policy in Latin America by encouraging the Argentine government in its uncooperative, not to say antagonistic, policy towards the USA and its 'Good Neighbour' initiatives. In his Memoirs

Hull argued that Britain's trade policy had put narrow self-interest before the larger goals that he had pursued. He further claimed that British policy had handicapped both his attempt to promote a more liberal international trade philosophy in Latin America in the 1930s and his campaign to pressure Argentina to abandon its links with the Axis powers during the Second World War.⁵

Taking Hull's criticisms as its starting point, this paper aims to assess the extent to which the Roca-Runciman agreement influenced the broader Anglo-American relationship during Roosevelt's presidency, up to and including the US joining the Second World War in December 1941. It tackles this question in three main parts. Firstly, it examines the origins of the agreement in the context of Anglo-Argentine relations after the First World War and the onset of the Great Depression from 1930. Secondly, it discusses the nature of the agreement, the State Department's criticisms of it and the British response. Thirdly, it assesses the place of the agreement, and Britain's relationship with Argentina more generally, within Anglo-American relations during the period 1933-1943, with particular reference to Runciman's subsequent visit to Washington in January 1937 and FDR's desire to cooperate with Britain to help counter the threat posed by Nazi Germany in the late 1930s.⁶

The historiography of the Roca-Runciman agreement

Before exploring the origins of the Roca-Runciman agreement it would be useful to examine the historiography of this event, which has been the subject of a great deal of academic and polemical writing in English, as well as Spanish, regarding its impact on the Argentine economy and its place in Argentine history. According to Gordon Bridger: 'In the demonology spread about colonialism and imperialism, this agreement was its culmination'. When the agreement was signed in 1933, he says, 'it was quite hysterically denounced by nationalists and the left as a betrayal by the cattle-owning oligarchy who were sacrificing

local industry in order to secure their beef market in Britain'. David Rock argues that the negative impact of the Roca-Runciman agreement on Argentina's economy was exaggerated by its opponents. But 'affronted Argentines denounced the 1933 treaty as a rich cattlemen's charter devised by an unrepresentative regime in tow to British imperialists. They objected to being considered part of the British Empire whatever the advantages it gave them'. Winthrop Wright, has also raised doubts about the view that the Roca-Runciman agreement was bad for the Argentine economy - but there is little doubt that it contributed to the growth of Argentine nationalism and Anglophobia in the 1930s.⁷

In contrast to its importance in the history of Argentina in the 1930s, the Roca -Runciman agreement has received relatively little attention from historians of Anglo-American relations in this period. Rock's most detailed treatment of the agreement focuses very largely on its economic significance and says very little about its effect on Anglo-American relations more broadly. Benjamin Rowland's study of the commercial relations between Britain and the United States that culminated in the Anglo-American trade agreement of 1938 uses the Roca-Runciman agreement as a case study of the problems raised for Britain and the United States by the Ottawa agreements, but it does not assess the agreement's role in Anglo-American political relations. Similarly, Patricia Clavin's work on international economic diplomacy during the early 1930s points out the negative perception of the agreement in the United States, but it does not refer to its longer-term significance for US relations with Britain. Beyond these brief and largely economic treatments there is no mention of the agreement in the main books on Anglo-American relations in the 1930s by historians such as David Reynolds and Brian McKercher. Nor is there much reference in works on US foreign policy and Argentina in the 1930s.⁸

The origins of the Roca-Runciman agreement

Relations between Britain and Argentina at the start of the 1930s were generally very good. Britain was a major market for Argentine agricultural produce, especially beef, amounting to £80 millions per year. Britain also exported various manufactured goods to Argentina, especially textiles, amounting to some £30 millions per year. The balance of trade was therefore very much in favour of Argentina, although earnings from 'invisible exports' such as interest on loans and shipping freights narrowed this deficit. The nature of the trading relationship meant that, in the words of the British Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina

‘was, to some extent, an economic dependency of Great Britain’, more akin in its commercial relationship with Britain to one of the Dominions than to a foreign country. Politically, the Argentine government was also quite favourable towards Britain at this time. President Yrigoyen, who had been re-elected to a second six-year term in 1928 despite being 75 years old, referred to the close relations between Argentina and Britain that he argued had helped to make Argentina a prosperous nation. He also regarded Britain as an important counterweight to US influence in Latin America, as he demonstrated by his warm welcome to the trade mission of Lord D’Abernon, a former British ambassador to Germany, in August 1929.⁹

This relationship was strengthened by the Hawley-Smoot tariff act of June 1930 which raised US tariffs to record-high levels. Nor was it seriously impaired by the revolution that overthrew President Yrigoyen in September 1930 and was later seen by its critics – especially supporters of the ousted President - as the start of Argentina’s ‘Infamous Decade’. Indeed, the British embassy felt that the revolution ‘may be said to have raised the prestige of the Argentine Government in the eyes of foreign nations, which had been impaired by Senor Irigoyen’s neglect of foreign affairs and inaccessibility to foreign representatives’. The new government under General José Félix Uriburu was quickly recognised by the South American Republics and, after a short delay, by Britain, the United States and the European powers. The new government also announced that it was abandoning the rather aloof policy of President Yrigoyen towards Pan-American affairs and it was hoped in London that it would revive Argentina’s dormant membership of League and become more active in the League Assembly.¹⁰

These positive relations were confirmed by the success of the British Empire Industries Exhibition in Buenos Aires in February-March 1931, and the visit of Edward, Prince of Wales (and later Edward VIII), and Prince George, later Duke of Kent, to open the exhibition. Edward had previously visited Argentina in 1925 and he received a good reception from the government on his return, especially when he delivered part of his speech at the exhibition in Spanish. However, the growing impact of the Great Depression in 1931 led Uriburu’s government to introduce exchange controls and a ten per cent emergency tariff. The British embassy in Buenos Aires maintained a generally positive attitude toward the new

government despite these measures and its resort to dubious tactics to keep in power, for example by vetoing the candidature of Dr Marcelo Alvear, a former President of the Republic and leader of the Radical party in the general election of November 1931. The embassy was also pleased with the election of General Augustin Justo as President, who it described as 'a moderate and sensible man, who enjoys the support of the army and navy'. According to the embassy, Justo's election was 'undoubtedly the best thing that could have happened for the country'.¹¹

However, the embassy reported that Anglo-Argentine relations 'suffered a distinct set-back during the latter part of 1932', mainly because of 'resentment felt towards British fiscal policy' and 'restrictions placed on Argentine exports to UK as a result of the Ottawa Conference' in August 1932. The onset of the economic depression had led to the formation of the National Government in Britain in August 1931 and the introduction of an Import Duties Act in March 1932 which imposed a ten per cent *ad valorem* tax on imports into the UK. The main Argentine exports such as chilled meat, grain and wool were exempted from this tax and it was hoped in Buenos Aires that, despite pressure from the Dominions, the British government would not put any duties on Argentine chilled meat and wool and no major restrictions on Argentine wheat, maize, dairy products and frozen meat. When it became clear after the Ottawa conference that there might be restrictions the Argentine government decided to send a mission to the UK led by Vice President, Dr Julio Roca – to return the visits by Edward, the Prince of Wales, in 1925 and 1931 and to follow up trade talks begun by the Argentine ambassador in London, Dr Manuel Malbran.¹²

The Roca mission arrived in Britain on 7 February 1933 and was met by the Prince of Wales in person. The Prince hosted Roca over the next few days before the opening of official negotiations on 15 February followed by the first meeting of the delegations, which was chaired by Walter Runciman as President of the Board of Trade. The negotiations proved difficult and complicated and there were frequent rumours that they were about to be broken off. There were various issues involved but, above all, there loomed the question of imports of Argentine meat, especially beef, following the onset of the depression and the Ottawa agreements. Roca and his mission required some kind of guarantee regarding the level of meat imports by Britain. From the British perspective, a major fear was that of being

supplanted by the United States in the Argentine market for manufactured goods. Most of the detailed work in the negotiations was obviously undertaken by Board of Trade officials, led by Leslie Burgin, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, but Runciman had a significant role to play in getting the agreement through its Cabinet discussions and the House of Commons.¹³

In fact, it was at Runciman's request that, on 15 March 1933, the British Cabinet discussed the Argentine negotiations. He said that the Board of Trade was asking for authority to meet the Roca Mission's concern regarding a possible reduction in the British import of chilled beef from Argentina over the following three years if there were to be a decrease in prices. Runciman wanted to be able to assure Roca that any such reduction would not be greater than 10 per cent in any one year. However, the Minister of Agriculture – Walter Elliott – objected to this on the grounds that it would adversely affect home producers of beef and could have political repercussions. He suggested fifteen per cent instead and was supported by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Sir Godfrey Collins, and the Home Secretary – a former Secretary of State for Agriculture – Sir John Gilmour. Runciman argued strongly that Britain needed an agreement as it had £450 million invested in Argentina, including railways, roads, docks and other public works. An agreement would also free up credits frozen by the Argentine government that were required for trade. The coal industry, especially in South Wales, was largely dependent on orders from Argentina, he continued, and an agreement would also aid British manufacturing and textiles.¹⁴

According to the Cabinet minutes, Runciman said that the desirability of an agreement with Argentina was evident during the Ottawa Conference. If the current negotiations failed Britain would have missed a great opportunity to unfreeze credits and promote trade. It would also be more difficult to reach agreement with other countries. 'From the first he had considered the tariff policy of the National Government to be a pivot round which negotiations were to be opened up. If these negotiations were now to be abandoned, his usefulness would come to an end and he could not continue in such circumstances'. This thinly veiled threat by Runciman to resign if he was not allowed room to manoeuvre to make the agreement with Argentina was especially significant as he was a Liberal National and a key player in the government at this time. This may have been one reason why he received the powerful support of Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who

said that he 'could not put too strongly his sense of the disaster that would result from a breakdown in the Argentine negotiations' as this 'would put in question the whole of our foreign trade policy'.

15

Runciman therefore got his way and this facilitated the second meeting of the delegations on 28 March chaired by his deputy, Leslie Burgin - also a Liberal National. But progress towards concluding an agreement remained slow as Roca had the habit of putting off negotiations from day to day so that time was running out before the mission was due to leave at Easter, in the middle of April. On 6 April 1933 the Foreign Office discovered that Runciman was apparently planning to go on a fortnight's holiday to the Mediterranean on 11 April, regardless of the state of the trade negotiations. Foreign Office officials expressed astonishment, with Vansittart minuting: 'I understand that the negotiations will come to a head on the 11th. It is surely impossible for the President of the Board of Trade to go away on that very day. In any case it would seem impossible for him to go away without saying anything to Dr Roca who is, after all, Vice President of a considerable country.' However, in the end Runciman made only a brief trip to Scotland. ¹⁶

Agreement in principle with the Roca mission was reached on 27 April and announced by Runciman in the House of Commons on the same day. The agreement was finally signed by Roca and Runciman on 1 May at the third and final meeting of the full delegations. Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, was also due to sign but was indisposed. The agreement consisted of three main parts. Firstly, in Article 1 Britain agreed to maintain imports of Argentine beef at no less than 390,000 metric tonnes of refrigerated beef per year, which was the equivalent of the 1932 level. In addition, 85 per cent of the beef exports were to be made through foreign meat packers, thus maintaining the grip of the Vestey family on the meat-packing process. Secondly, in Article 2 the Argentine government agreed to reserve twelve million pesos for British holders of Argentine currency engaged in trade for which import or export permits had not been obtained. This freed up large sums frozen in Argentine banks by foreign exchange restrictions. ¹⁷

Article 3 provided for the negotiation by August 1933 of a Supplementary Tariff Agreement. Negotiations took place in Buenos Aires from June and were very slow as the Argentine side was reluctant to agree to tariff requests made by Britain. Indeed, at a Cabinet meeting on 28

July Runciman sought permission to threaten to denounce the main agreement, signed on 1 May 1933, unless tariff concessions were finalised promptly. This request was granted but in the end the threat was not necessary. The deadline was extended and the Supplementary Agreement was eventually concluded on 26 September 1933 – just in time for approval by the Argentine Congress at the end of its session. The agreement provided for the reclassification or reduction of duties on 388 tariff items. Coal remained on the free list and was therefore untaxed and the Argentines agreed to buy 100% of their coal needs in Britain. The Argentine government also declared its intention not to maintain its ten per cent surcharge on imports except in the case of strong financial necessity and, even then, to give special consideration to British goods.¹⁸

The Roca-Runciman agreement and its critics

The Roca-Runciman agreement replaced the long-standing commercial treaty of 1825 and its 'most favoured nation' treatment of other trading partners, such as the United States. It had many critics at home in addition to the violent opposition that it encountered in Argentina. Some of these criticisms were voiced in a long debate in the House of Commons on 10 May 1933. The Argentine agreement was strongly defended by Runciman, who opened the debate, but it was attacked by the Opposition parties, especially Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Liberal leader. Apart from concerns that the Roca-Runciman agreement might harm domestic agriculture and imperial preference for the Dominions it was also pointed out by Sinclair, amongst others, that the agreement could complicate the British position at the forthcoming London Economic Conference and that it might upset the Roosevelt administration as it was not in keeping with the spirit of the tariff truce favoured by Cordell Hull. He also questioned whether his former colleague, Runciman, previously an ardent free trader, really believed in the principles underlying the agreement with Argentina.¹⁹

The day after the Commons debate, Sir Ronald Lindsay, the British ambassador in Washington, sent a dispatch to London outlining the response of the US press to the Roca-Runciman agreement, which generally took the view that Britain had secured exclusive advantages from Argentina at the expense of the United States. The agreement had had 'a bad reception' in the US, reported Lindsay, and had been 'assailed in headlines, news and leading articles'. No blame was attached to Argentina, said Lindsay. Rather, 'in the background of these press reactions has been the ancient suspicion that Great Britain,

unless watched, will take some unfair advantage of the United States, combined with the peculiar sensitiveness to European rivalry with United States trading and other interests in South America'. Lindsay also noted: 'Criticism was undoubtedly more severe, and the prominence given to it was greater, owing to the concurrent United States-Argentina discussions in Washington on the World Economic Conference and the reports of delays in the Anglo-American discussions in London on the proposed tariff truce'.²⁰

A detailed report by the British Information Office in New York elaborated upon American criticisms. 'The majority of the press cables from London have been provocative, and their tenor has been exaggerated by the headlines given them' it said. In New York, the *Herald-Tribune* indicated that the United States 'unquestionably would retaliate' and called the agreement 'Great Britain's corner on Argentina's foreign exchange'. The *Wall Street Journal's* headlines included 'Argentine Pact, British Victory' and 'Agreement leaves little Foreign Exchange for Trade with the Rest of the World'. While the Hearst newspaper chain, a strong supporter of high tariffs, contrasted the agreement with the United States efforts to secure a tariff truce'. Even the more liberal journals in the United States took a similar line, but there were some friendly comments. The *New York Times*, for example, said that, although American trade might be damaged by the Anglo-Argentine agreement, this would be the result of US policy. 'If the United States had followed England's example by buying heavily in Argentina, it could probably persuade the latter into a similar agreement, but the Hawley-Smoot tariff and artificial administrative restrictions had caused United States trade in the Argentine to fall off more than that of its competitors'.²¹

The British Foreign Office took a dim view of American complaints. 'All this adverse comment by the United States is really rather silly' wrote one official. 'There is no question of our "cornering the peso": the exchange agreement merely promises us the value of our purchases (which is surely reasonable) less – and this has been conveniently overlooked - a deduction towards the payment of the foreign debt payable to other countries, including the US'. American alarm had arisen because the US policy of high tariffs had caused other countries to seek different markets. The Americans, he added, were beginning to realise that 'their tardy progress towards a better bargaining position has caused them to miss the Argentine bus which at one time – after Ottawa – was loitering temptingly past them. We on our side have no cause whatever to reproach ourselves or to make excuses'. Similar

views were expressed by other officials. 'The agreement must be a great disappointment to the numerous Americans who confidently predicted that our days in South America were numbered', noted one, while Robert Craigie, the head of the American Department, added: 'A lot of ill-informed and ill-natured criticism. We need not take all this very seriously, but it is interesting as showing how near to the surface all the old anti-British prejudices still lurk'.

22

While Hull was restrained about the Roca-Runciman agreement in public he expressed concern in private, for several reasons. Firstly, the Roca-Runciman agreement was signed in the lead up to the London Economic Conference which opened at the end of May 1933. Hull was in London as the head of the US delegation and he was trying to negotiate a tariff truce with Britain and other participating countries. The Roca-Runciman agreement appeared to be against the spirit, if not the letter, of the tariff truce and did not augur well for his aim to promote trade liberalisation during the conference. Secondly, he was keen for the US to negotiate trade agreements with the countries of Latin America, including Argentina, as part of the administration's Good Neighbour policy, and this task would be made more difficult if the Roca-Runciman agreement played into the hands of domestic opponents, especially Republicans, who advocated a hard-headed trade policy rather than a more liberal one. Thirdly, he believed that the agreement was partly a result of the Ottawa accords and the system of imperial preference which he felt had the effect of 'greatly injuring our trade with the United Kingdom and the Dominions'. The trade agreement he most desired was an Anglo-American agreement and he deprecated any move by Britain that might make this more difficult.²³

Apart from these broad considerations of policy Hull and the State Department were especially concerned about the exchange provisions of the Roca-Runciman agreement, and the advantages that they gave to Britain. Shortly after the agreement was announced Norman Davis - the American representative on the Organising Committee for the London Economic Conference - received a message from Hull saying that 'this Government desires to express the judgment that the proposed treaty, certainly as a consequence of the exchange arrangements which are laid down and possibly as a consequence of its tariff features, contains elements of discrimination in favour of British trade which are inconsistent with the aims of world cooperation which alone can give meaning to the

Economic Conference and to the preliminary conversations in which the American Government is engaged'. Hull expressed his fear that the agreement might undermine his attempts to secure a tariff truce during the conference and would encourage other countries, such as Nazi Germany, that were pursuing restrictive policies.²⁴

The State Department also complained about the Roca-Runciman agreement to Argentina's ambassador in Washington who said that his government was helpless to prevent its exchange provisions as Britain was the main consumer of Argentine beef. A formal US protest was made to Argentina regarding the implementation of the exchange provisions of the Roca-Runciman agreement on 26 June, but the agreement was passed by both chambers on 1 August and this was followed by the Supplementary Tariff Agreement between Britain and Argentina in September. By this time the 'Roosevelt Bombshell' message to the London Economic Conference criticising its preoccupation with currency stabilisation had effectively brought it to an end, along with the dimming prospects of a tariff truce. But there were also other issues, apart from exchange controls, causing tensions between Washington and Buenos Aires, including the difficulties in the way of a US-Argentine trade agreement. A Congressional ban on the importation of meat from Argentina because of foot-and-mouth disease did not help relations, especially as livestock in the Patagonia region were entirely free from the disease. In fact, a US trade agreement with Argentina was not finally concluded until October 1941.²⁵

The exchange issue continued to be a bone of contention between the US and Argentina after the Roca-Runciman agreement and throughout FDR's first term, especially as the Argentine government was determined to negotiate a renewal of the agreement before the end of its expiry date in 1936. The US ambassador in Argentina, Alexander Weddell, reported in June 1936 that 'the Argentines are fully aware of their present advantage and are leaving no stone unturned to persuade us to come to a trade agreement with them. At the moment they are negotiating with the British for a renewal of the Roca-Runciman Agreement and will throw everything they can to the British to facilitate that end'. Indeed, the Argentine government had already agreed to the Anglo-Argentine Convention of 1935 that resulted in a five per cent decrease in Argentine chilled beef shipments to Britain and allowed the Dominions, especially Australia, to increase their exports of chilled beef to the mother country. On 26 November 1936 Runciman announced in the House of Commons

that a new agreement had been reached with Argentina. This was signed on 1 December by Malbran, the Argentine ambassador, and Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary. The Eden-Malbran agreement was even more favourable to Britain than its predecessor and in the words of one historian it became 'the cornerstone of relations between Britain and Argentina' until 1948.²⁶

It was not only the economic aspects of Britain's relationship with Argentina that bothered Hull and the State Department. They also felt that it strengthened Argentina's determination to pursue a foreign policy that was ostentatiously independent of the United States and aimed at fortifying its self-identity as the preeminent state in South America. This approach was typified by Carlos Saavedra Lamas, the Argentine foreign minister from 1932 to 1938. While generally cooperative with Hull during the Montevideo conference in December 1933, when the Roosevelt administration consciously disavowed the Monroe Doctrine, he was much more combative during the Pan American Conference at Buenos Aires in December 1936. This behaviour outraged Hull, who led the US delegation, as Saavedra Lamas had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, for which Hull had recommended him. The main issue of disagreement was the State Department's idea of a neutrality pact across the Americas. The US view was that this would support and strengthen the League of Nations, whereas Argentina took the view that it could potentially weaken the League by adopting a strict arms embargo modelled on recent US neutrality legislation rather than using discretion to favour the victims of aggression. Furthermore, according to the *New York Times*, there was some suspicion on the US side that Argentina had been encouraged to oppose the American plan by Britain.²⁷

Runciman visit to Washington, January 1937

Given Hull's frustrations towards British trade policy during Roosevelt's first term, and not least his exasperation with the Roca-Runciman agreement, the visit of Walter Runciman to Washington in January 1937 at the personal invitation of the President was likely to provide a litmus test for Anglo-American relations at the start of FDR's second term. The visit was arranged by Arthur Murray, Lord Elibank, a British friend of the President's from his time as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the First World War. Hull and the State Department inevitably saw Runciman's visit in terms of trade relations and a memorandum drawn up by the Department presented the British minister in a rather unflattering light. 'He is at present

extremely nationalistic, as has been evidenced by his promotion of and subscription to policies calculated to gain unfair advantage over American interests in many parts of the world', read the State Department memo. 'His apparent unfriendliness to us may be due to indifference, supreme nationalism or, as his family have long been leaders in British shipping, he probably resents American aid to shipping lines'.²⁸

This briefing paper, while rather overstated, did contain some truth. As one of the architects of the Ottawa agreements Runciman had abandoned his lifelong adherence to the Liberal doctrine of free trade, although he maintained that this had been necessary in the economic conditions of 1931-32. He also argued, not without justification, that he had moderated the high tariff aims of Tories like Neville Chamberlain in the National Government. Even the Roca-Runciman agreement, in the form of its Supplementary Tariff Agreement in September 1933, had resulted in tariff reductions. It must have been rather trying for Runciman, a disciple of Gladstonian liberalism - a creed that he was still advocating as late as 1931 - to have to listen to Cordell Hull's lectures on the virtues of free trade. Indeed, Hull's constant blandishments about free trade and his campaign for an Anglo-American trade agreement were referred to by officials in the Board of Trade as the 'Frothblower's Anthem', after a popular song of the time.²⁹

Runciman arrived in Washington on 23 January and, accompanied by Lindsay, called on Hull at the State Department. 'Mr Hull was pleasant and genial, and he soon gave us to understand that his mind was centred on his liberalised trade policy', recorded Runciman. The British minister referred to his own trade agreements since Ottawa as having broadened world trade. Hull, for his part, repeated the doctrines he had been preaching for several years. 'The peace of the world, he declared, could only be secured by obliterating the obstacles to international trade which at present gave rise to friction', Runciman recorded. 'While not sharing his exaggerations, I told him that I thought his aspirations were well founded, even if expressed in language that went further than what I would use myself'. After dinner on the 23rd, Runciman met Roosevelt and found him much less critical of British policy than Hull. According to Runciman, 'while describing Mr Hull's attitude and speaking warmly of his perseverance, he, the President, was more sympathetic towards our point of view and understood more clearly our difficulties than Mr Hull had done earlier in the day'.³⁰

During his visit Runciman observed that Roosevelt was much less concerned about trade issues than Hull. 'Fiscal questions are not the chief interest of the President', he noted, 'and it is only in connection with their bearing on the maintenance of peace that he discussed these questions at all'. Runciman continued: 'The risks of war in Europe are present in his mind, and he returns repeatedly to his statement that the dictators are the danger. The only safe guardians of peace are the Parliamentary countries'. While somewhat disappointed over his trade talks with Hull, Runciman regarded the visit as very worthwhile, and he now gave his full support to concluding a trade agreement with the United States. 'My impression is that for the next four years President Roosevelt's Government will be more than friendly, provided one or two points of friction are overcome', Runciman wrote to Baldwin. 'The President is obviously anxious to maintain a degree of intimacy with the British Government ... I hope that we shall lose no chance of collaborating with him promptly and candidly'.³¹

The Runciman visit showed that Roosevelt was primarily concerned at this time about the European crisis, which had dominated his conversations with the British minister. He also expressed his fears about Japanese aims but Latin America was less of an issue at this time. Runciman's visit proved to be the harbinger of a period of growing US involvement in international affairs that was highlighted by FDR's 'Quarantine speech' in October 1937. A central feature of US policy included Anglo-American financial and economic cooperation in terms of currency stabilisation, trade negotiations and war debts – all areas that had bedevilled relations following the 'Roosevelt Bombshell' message to the London Economic Conference in July 1933. The Tripartite Currency Agreement of September 1936 with Britain and France was renewed several times until 1940, despite the growing weakness of the franc. The Anglo-American Trade Agreement pursued by Hull was eventually signed in November 1938 and the war debts issue was pushed into the background. For example, the regular war debt note to the British government that was due in June 1939 was sent earlier in the year so as not to coincide with the Royal Visit to the USA in that month.³²

Mounting evidence of cooperation between the US and Britain during Roosevelt's second term led the inveterate isolationist Senator, William Borah, to accuse the administration of seeking a 'tacit alliance' with Britain against the 'dictator states' of Germany and Japan. As

well as a speech in the House of Common by the British foreign secretary that hinted at a closer relationship with the US than was being publicly acknowledged the revelation that secret naval talks had taken place in London in January 1938 greatly alarmed Borah and his fellow isolationists in the Senate. So too did the President's attempts to revise the neutrality laws in favour of Britain and France after Runciman's mission to Czechoslovakia was followed by the Munich crisis in September 1938. Borah was able to prevent the revision of the Neutrality laws in July 1939 but once war had broken out the US arms embargo was replaced with a 'cash and carry' policy that greatly aided Britain as the strongest financial and naval power in Europe. Similarly, the Roosevelt administration successfully aided Britain with the Destroyer-Bases deal of September 1940 and the Lend Lease Act passed in March 1941, both prior to American entry into the war as a combatant in December 1941.³³

Conclusions

Notwithstanding Hull's devotion to a more liberal trade policy and his trade agreements programme, not to mention what Sumner Welles termed his 'violent antipathy' towards Argentina, the Roca-Runciman agreement and its successors in 1936, 1939, 1942 and 1945, did not prove to be a major impediment in Anglo-American relations during FDR's presidency. Growing concern in Washington about Nazi ambitions in Europe, and increasingly in Latin America, and the need to support Britain, far outweighed the frustration felt by Hull about British policy towards Argentina, especially when the fall of France in 1940 left Britain as the main resistance to Germany and Italy in Europe. However, British trade with Argentina, especially beef imports, continued to be an irritant in Anglo-American relations, especially once the US joined the war and Hull tried to force Argentina to abandon its status as a neutral – a status that contradicted American policy towards Latin America but that was very convenient for wartime Britain as it kept open Argentina's position as the main supplier of chilled beef and *Fray Bentos* products to the British armed forces and the general population.³⁴

The colonial nature of the continuing trade relationship between Britain and Argentina was rather more than an irritant to Argentine nationalists, especially in the military, who regarded the Roca-Runciman agreement and its legacy as anathema and who helped to bring about the military coup of June 1943, thus ending what they regarded as an 'Infamous Decade' of corrupt conservative rule. The Anglo-Argentine trade agreement was renewed in

1945 but it ended in 1948 during the presidency of Juan Peron and was replaced by several successive short-lived and unsatisfactory agreements. The same era of growing nationalism also witnessed the sale of British-owned railways and tramways in Argentina as well as the rise of the Falklands issue in relations with Britain as the historic Argentine claim to 'the Malvinas' became a key symbol for critics of British colonialism, ultimately resulting in the Falklands War of 1982. As was the case some fifty years before, Argentina again became a major issue in Anglo-American relations and with a similar outcome – unease in Washington about the legacy of British colonialism but ultimately strong support for Britain resulting from more significant geopolitical and ideological considerations.³⁵

¹ For the Runciman Mission see Paul Vysny, *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938: Prelude to Munich* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Tony McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938: a New Perspective on Anglo-American Relations in the Era of Appeasement', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 1.2, Autumn 2003, 152-174. For the late Lord Runciman see, 'A Tribute to Viscount Runciman', 11 December 2020, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/a-tribute-to-viscount-runciman>.

² Peter Bakewell, *A History of Latin America*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 526-527.

³ Gordon Bridger, *Britain and the Making of Argentina* (Southampton: WIT Press, 2012), 139-141; David Rock, *The British in Argentina: Commerce, Settlers and Power, 1800-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 282-286. See also David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 112–24.

⁴ For the Senate shooting see David Rock, *The British in Argentina*, 283-284. See also reports in *New York Times*, 24, 25, 26 and 27 July 1935.

⁵ Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, Volumes I and II (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), especially 352-356, 378-385, 519-526, 1409-1422. See also Irwin Gellman, *Good Neighbour Diplomacy. United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1979); Randall Bennett Woods. *The Roosevelt Foreign-Policy Establishment and the 'Good Neighbor': The United States and Argentina, 1941-1945* (Lawrence, KA: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979).

⁶ For detailed analysis of FDR's policy towards Nazi Germany at this time see Tony McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance: Franklin Roosevelt and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' Before Churchill, 1937-1939* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

⁷ Gordon Bridger, *Britain and the Making of Argentina*, 139; David Rock, *The British in Argentina: Commerce, Settlers and Power, 1800-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 282; Winthrop Wright, *British-Owned Railways in Argentina: Their Effect on the Growth of Economic Nationalism, 1854-1948* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1974). See also Peter Smith, *Politics and Beef in Argentina: Patterns of Conflict and Change, 1900-1946* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1969); Daniel Drossdoff, *El Gobierno de las Vacas, 1933-1956. Tratado Roca-Runciman* (Buenos Aires, Ediciones la Bastilla, 1972); Edwin Frank Early, 'The Roca-Runciman Treaty and its significance for Argentina', University College London, PhD thesis, 1981; Roger Gravil, *The Anglo-American Connection, 1930-1939* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁸ David Rock, 'The Roca-Runciman Treaty of 1933: Defending Which British Interests?', in Thomas C. Mills and Rory M. Miller, *Britain and the Growth of US Hegemony in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 162-189; Benjamin M Rowland, *Commercial Conflict and Foreign Policy: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1932-1938* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1987), 68-93; Patricia Clavin, *The Failure of Economic Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, France and the United States* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 6, 112-114; David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (London: Europa Publications, 1981); B. J. C. McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; paperback, 2006). David Sheinin, *Argentina*

and the United States: An Alliance Constrained (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press 2006), mentions Roca-Runciman, 71-73,

⁹ UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, FO/371/14196, A4727/4727/2, Eugen Millington-Drake (Counsellor) to Foreign Office, 24 May 1930: Annual Report on Argentina for 1929, 2-4. For D'Abernon's trade mission see Gaynor Johnson, 'The D'Abernon Trade Mission to South America, 1929: Context and Reappraisal' in Thomas C. Mills and Rory M. Miller, *Britain and the Growth of US Hegemony in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 137-160.

¹⁰ UKNA, FO/371/15057, A2359/2359/2, Sir Ronald Macleay (Ambassador) to Foreign Office, 28 February 1931: Annual Report on Argentina for 1930, 2-6.

¹¹ UKNA, FO/371/15799, A1156/1156/2, Sir Ronald Macleay to Foreign Office, 31 January 1932: Annual report on Argentina for 1931, 2-6.

¹² UKNA, FO/371/17475, A1698/1698/2, John Leche (Counsellor) to Foreign Office, 6 February 1934: Annual Report on Argentina for 1933, 6-8.

¹³ For Roca and Prince of Wales see reports in *New York Times*, 7, 8, 11 and 13 February 1933. For report on Roca-Runciman negotiations see UKNA, CAB/23, 18 (1933) item 3, 15 March 1933: statement by Runciman.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, contributions by Runciman, Elliot, Collins and Gilmour.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, contributions by Runciman and Chamberlain.

¹⁶ FO/371/16532, A/2812/48/2, Foreign Office minutes by P. Mason, 6 April 1933; R. C. Craigie, 6 April 1933; Sir R. Vansittart, 8 April 1933.

¹⁷ UKNA, FO/371/17475, A1698/1698/2, John Leche (Counsellor) to Foreign Office, 6 February 1934: Annual Report on Argentina for 1933, 6-8 (for details of articles 1 and 2 of the agreement).

¹⁸ Ibid, Annual report on Argentina for 1933, 8-9 (for details of article 3 and the Supplementary Trade Agreement).

¹⁹ *Hansard*, House of Commons debate, 10 May 1933: speeches by Runciman and Sinclair.

²⁰ UKNA, FO/371/16532, A3945/48/2, despatch from Sir Ronald Lindsay to Sir John Simon, 11 May 1933.

²¹ Ibid. enclosure on 'Anglo-Argentine Trade Agreement: United States Press Comments', prepared by British Library of Information in New York.

²² Ibid. Foreign Office minutes by P. Mason, 24 May; D. V. Kelly, 24 May; R. C. Craigie, 26 May 1933.

²³ Hull, *Memoirs*, I, p. 355. For Hull's general philosophy regarding international trade see chapters 26 and 27, 352-377. For his desire for an Anglo-American agreement see Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 519-530.

²⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1933, Volume IV, Doc 730, Secretary of State to the Chargé in Great Britain (Ray Atherton), 5 May 1933, for Norman Davis.

²⁵ *FRUS*, 1933, IV, Doc 746, Acting Secretary of State (William Phillips) to Chargé in Argentina (John Campbell White), 13 June 1933, re discussion with Argentine ambassador; Doc 748, Phillips to White, 26 June 1933, re formal US protest to Argentina. See also Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 497-498 and *Memoirs*, II, 1140. For the 'Roosevelt Bombshell' message of 3 July 1933 see Clavin, *Failure of Economic Diplomacy*, 129-138. See also Herbert Feis, *1933: Characters in Crisis* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1976).

²⁶ *FRUS*, 1936, V, Doc 170, Alexander Weddell (US ambassador) to Secretary of State (Hull), 1 June 1936; Doc 179, Weddell to Hull, 10 December 1936; *Hansard*, House of Commons, statement by Runciman, 26 November 1933; Drossdoff, *El Gobierno de las Vacas*, p. 92.

²⁷ See Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 325-341 for relations with Saavedra Lamas at Montevideo conference; for Pan American conference at Buenos Aires see Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 493-503; see also David Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of US Strategic Thought, 1936-1940* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); *New York Times*, 13 December 1936.

²⁸ US National Archives, State Department file 033.4111/13: memo on 'Right Honourable Walter Runciman', 22 January 1937; see also McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance*, 40-47; for a fuller account of the Runciman visit see Tony McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman visit to Washington in 1937: Informal Diplomacy and Anglo-American Relations in the Era of Munich', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 4.2, Autumn 2006, 211-240; also Richard Harrison, 'The Runciman Visit to Washington DC in January 1937', *Canadian Journal of History*, 19 (August 1984), 217-39.

²⁹ University of Newcastle Library, Runciman Papers, Box 250, letter from Walter Runciman to his constituents, 29 September 1932; UKNA, PREM/1/291, Runciman to Baldwin, 8 February 1937. See also McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman visit to Washington', 218-220.

³⁰ UKNA, PREM/1/291, Runciman to Baldwin, 8 February 1937: Runciman memo; McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance*, 43.

³¹ UKNA, PREM/1/291, Runciman to Baldwin, 8 February 1937: Runciman memo; McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance*, 44-46.

³² McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance*, 281-299.

³³ McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance*, 3-21 and 266-280.

³⁴ For Welles quote see Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of US Strategic Thought*, 37. See also Sumner Welles, *Seven Major Decisions* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951). For the Argentine meat issue in 1942-44 see Hull, *Memoirs*, II, 1409-1419; see also Rock, *The British in Argentina*, 295-300.

³⁵ For Anglo-Argentine relations during the Peron era and the Falklands war see Rock, *The British in Argentina*, 303-338 and 358-366. For US policy see Christoph Bluth, 'Anglo-American Relations in the Falklands Conflict' in Alex Danchev (ed), *International Perspectives on the Falklands Conflict* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 203-223; Sally-Ann Treharne, *Reagan and Thatcher's Special Relationship: Latin America and Anglo-American Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).