

Assessing the “Canning Agenda”: British foreign policy towards Latin America in the twenty-first century

In November 2010, the British Foreign Secretary William Hague delivered Canning House’s annual lecture on the topic of Britain’s relations with Latin America.¹ In his speech, Hague pledged to ‘halt the decline in Britain’s diplomatic presence in Latin America’. ‘It is now time’, Hague went on, ‘for an advance to begin’.² In thus launching the so-called “Canning Agenda”, Hague acknowledged both the steep decline in Britain’s status in Latin America over the course of the twentieth century and a new determination to reverse this process at the opening of the twenty-first.

Britain certainly has experienced a significant loss of power and influence in Latin America in modern times. From a position of hegemony in the nineteenth century, Britain’s economic interests and its political influence in Latin America dwindled from the First World War onwards. This decline occurred for a number of reasons. British investment in Latin America was concentrated in public utilities, railways and sovereign debt – all areas that became unprofitable in the twentieth century. Britain’s export trade suffered too as demand in Latin America for traditional goods like coal and textiles gave way to a desire for new consumer products – such as household electrical goods and automobiles. In these sectors, Britain was unable to compete with imports from Germany and the United States.

British officials deferred to the US more willingly when it came to political influence in the region, recognising Latin America as part of the US sphere of influence in the Cold War. More generally, Latin America was often considered of secondary importance to Britain’s global interests in the post-World War II era. When British officials did focus on Latin America, they often struggled to formulate effective responses to the emerging forces of political nationalism that shaped the region in the twentieth century.³

Britain’s failure to accurately perceive the political forces at play in Latin America was confirmed when the UK was caught off-guard by Argentina’s invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982.⁴ Ironically, one consequence of that conflict – as well as the debt crisis of the same time – was a renewed interest in Latin America among British officials. There followed in the late 1980s and early 1990s a series of statements from government ministers promising to redress Britain’s disregard for Latin America of previous decades. As Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe put it in an earlier address to Canning House: ‘Now we can say, without any fear of contradiction, that the period of neglect is over’.⁵ This statement turned out to be

¹ Canning House describes itself as ‘the UK’s leading forum for informed comment, contacts and debate on Latin American politics, economy and business’. See <https://www.canninghouse.org/>.

² William Hague, ‘Britain and Latin America: historic friends, future partners’, 9 Nov. 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-and-latin-america-historic-friends-future-partners>.

³ Leslie Bethell, ‘Britain and Latin America in historical perspective’, in Victor Bulmer-Thomas ed., *Britain and Latin America: a changing relationship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1-24; Alan Knight, ‘Latin America’, in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis eds, *The Oxford history of the British empire, Volume IV, the twentieth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 632-42; Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Longman, 1993).

⁴ Hugh Thomas, ‘Preface’, in *The Thatcher years: Britain and Latin America* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1988), p. 6.

⁵ Quoted in Victor Bulmer-Thomas, ‘British relations with Latin America into the 1990s’, in Bulmer-Thomas ed., *Britain and Latin America*, p. 227. For references to further ministerial statements, see Louise Fawcett and Eduardo

somewhat premature. Latin America's diminutive status was confirmed in the opening decade of the twenty-first century with the closure of a number of diplomatic missions in the region.⁶

However, recent years have seen many of the trends that precipitated Britain's retreat from Latin America showing signs of change. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2007-8, a broad consensus emerged across the British political spectrum over the need to rebalance the country's economy by boosting overseas trade and investment. The focus of this effort has largely been on the so-called emerging economies, most prominently China and India, but also Latin American countries like Brazil and Mexico.⁷ The decision taken by referendum in June 2016 for Britain to leave the European Union has intensified this effort under the broad policy banner of 'Global Britain'.⁸ At the same time, the end of the Cold War and a general shift in the global balance of power in favour of the global South has seen Latin America emerge from beneath the shadow of the United States as a part of the world of increasing economic and political importance.⁹

Notwithstanding these developments, scholarly analysis of Britain's relations with Latin America remains sparse. While there is a small body of historical literature on British-Latin American relations in the twentieth century, students of contemporary international politics have largely ignored relations in the twenty-first century. The nearest things approaching scholarly analysis of the Canning Agenda were two commentaries on Hague's Canning Lecture by think tanks focused on British foreign policy. The first of these appeared in Chatham House's magazine, *The World Today*, in March 2011. The authors, Laurence Allen and Guy Edwards, take a dim view of the Canning Agenda, arguing that it fails to embrace the newly empowered Latin American countries as significant partners and ignores multilateral forms of diplomacy in favour of an outdated form of mercantilism.¹⁰ Peter Cannon of the Henry Jackson Society is only slightly less scathing. Similarly criticising the over-emphasis on commercial relations, Cannon argues that more importance should be granted to shared values of democracy and human rights, translating into strategic cooperation between Britain and the countries of Latin America.¹¹ While these commentaries

Posada-Carbó, 'Britain and Latin America: "hope in a time of change?"' (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996), p. 2.

⁶ Michael D. Kandiah and Thomas C. Mills eds, *British diplomacy in Latin America at the turn of the 21st century: witness seminar* (London: Institute of Contemporary British History, 2015), p. 15.

⁷ Michael Harvey, 'Perspectives on the UK's place in the world', Chatham House Europe programme paper 2011/01, Dec. 2011.

⁸ See, for example, the landmark speeches by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary: Theresa May, 'The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU: PM speech', 17 Jan. 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>; Boris Johnson, 'Beyond Brexit: a Global Britain', 2 Dec. 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/beyond-brexit-a-global-britain>.

⁹ Fareed Zakaria, *The post-American world* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, *What if Latin America ruled the world? How the south will take the north in the twenty-first century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

¹⁰ Laurence Allen and Guy Edwards, 'UK-Latin America: rearranging the deckchairs', *The World Today* 67: 3, 2011, pp. 29-31.

¹¹ Peter John Cannon, 'Britain's new outreach to Latin America', 5 July 2011, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2011/07/05/britains-new-outreach-to-latin-america/>. In addition to these publications, Canning House commissioned Latin News to prepare a review of the Canning Agenda for circulation among its members in 2015. Focusing primarily trade and investment, the report concluded that while notable efforts had been made by the coalition government of 2010-15, 'the full potential for achieving closer

in the immediate aftermath of Hague's speech hint at some of the shortcomings of Britain's policy towards Latin America, a more sustained analysis of the Canning Agenda seems warranted some eight years after its announcement.

In providing this assessment, this article argues that a renewed focus on Latin America in British foreign policy is certainly in evidence. Following Hague's speech in 2010, there has been a discernible policy, labelled the Canning Agenda by British government officials and observed by their counterparts in the region, aimed at rejuvenating Britain's relations with Latin America.¹² The most obvious outward signs of this policy include the re-opening of British embassies in the region, as well as a significant increase in the number of ministerial visits to Latin America.¹³ At the softer end of international relations, there has been an increase in cultural exchanges between Britain and Latin America in recent years.¹⁴ The British Royal Family has also been deployed to promote UK-Latin American ties with a visit to Brazil by Prince Harry in 2014 and state visits at Buckingham Palace granted to President Peña Nieto of Mexico in 2015 and President Santos of Colombia in 2016.

However, while the Canning Agenda may represent a renewed effort by Britain to improve relations with Latin America, it does not constitute a strategic reorientation of British policy towards the region. Indeed, the Canning Agenda still faces many of the same hurdles in its goal of rejuvenating Britain's economic and political standing in Latin America that impeded this ambition in the past. British commerce in the region is dwarfed by that of established powers like the USA – as well as new powers like China – and continues to lag behind other European countries. The focus on Latin America by the British government struggles to compete with the bigger economies in Asia, as well as the political energies consumed by Brexit against a backdrop of reduced government spending. Political relations with Latin American countries are complicated by the challenge to established norms of global governance posed by emerging powers like Brazil. In addition, old issues of contention – like the continued dispute with Argentina over the status of the Falkland Islands – remain.

As noted, the challenges faced by the contemporary Canning Agenda echo the issues confronted by Britain in Latin America throughout the twentieth century. In distilled form, these consist of: the decline in Britain's economic competitiveness; the challenges posed by the role of other external powers in the region; the significance granted to Latin America in Britain's global strategic priorities; and the difficulties encountered in responding to the political character and ambitions of Latin American governments. These categories will thus

relations and increased trade between the UK and Latin America is not yet being realized'. 'The Canning Agenda: a long way to go', Canning Papers, Sept. 2015.

¹² For example, in November 2016, Sir Alan Duncan (Foreign Office minister of state for Europe and the Americas) gave a speech to mark 'six years since the Government launched its Canning Agenda, which is our strategy to revitalise our historic relations with Latin America'. Sir Alan Duncan, 'The UK and Latin America – Latin America investment forum speech', 10 Nov. 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-and-latin-america-latin-american-investment-forum-speech>. Julian Ventura, the Mexican ambassador to the UK, describes 'a very sustained political and economic engagement' by Britain in Latin America over recent years. Author interview with Julian Ventura, 23 Jan. 2018.

¹³ 'Strengthening Britain's diplomatic network in Latin America and the Caribbean', 21 June 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strengthening-britains-diplomatic-network-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean>; Lord Howell, 'Making the most of our relations with Latin America', 22 March 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/making-the-most-of-our-relations-with-latin-america>.

¹⁴ See, for example, 'Mexican culture to be celebrated in UK schools', 3 March 2015, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/mexican-culture-be-celebrated-uk-schools>.

be used to assess the success – existing and potential – of the Canning Agenda in its aim of reversing Britain’s historic decline in Latin America in the opening decades of the twenty-first century.

Economic diplomacy

Promoting greater British commerce with Latin America has been the central theme of the Canning Agenda since William Hague announced the policy in 2010. As the Foreign Secretary put it in his speech to Canning House: ‘We will look for new economic opportunities, encouraging investment in the UK, working to raise the profile of the region with British business, and helping British business access markets in the region’.¹⁶

In seeking to achieve these aims, the government has predominantly looked to the kind of ministerial trade missions employed by British governments to try to arrest the country’s decline in Latin America throughout the twentieth century.¹⁷ Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg headed a trade mission to Mexico in 2011 and a further visit taking in Colombia, as well as Mexico, in 2014.¹⁸ Looking beyond the more obvious of Britain’s economic partnerships in Latin America, reciprocal trade missions have occurred between Britain and Cuba, in response to the economic liberalisation under way on the island.¹⁹ The Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond also led a trade mission to Argentina in August 2017 where opportunities to strengthen Britain’s economic links with the country were explored following the election of the pro-market President Macri.²⁰ Most recently, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made a tour of Argentina, Chile and Peru in May 2018 in an effort to improve post-Brexit trade with these countries.²¹

More formal mechanisms for building economic links have been established between Britain and Brazil. In 2015, the two countries established the UK-Brazil Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD). Covering topics from trade infrastructure to financial services, this forum has facilitated sustained economic cooperation between Britain and Brazil, with the second EFD taking place in July 2017.²² More generally, the strengthening of Britain’s

¹⁶ Hague, ‘Britain and Latin America’.

¹⁷ Knight, ‘Latin America’, pp. 632-3.

¹⁸ ‘Nick Clegg to lead UK charm offensive in Latin America’, *The Guardian*, 28 March 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/mar/28/nick-clegg-latin-america-business>; ‘Nick Clegg brings business delegation to Latin America’, 3 Feb. 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nick-clegg-brings-business-delegation-to-latin-america>.

¹⁹ ‘Philip Hammond becomes first foreign secretary to visit Cuba since 1959 revolution’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/28/philip-hammond-becomes-first-foreign-secretary-to-visit-cuba-sin/>. For more on Cuba’s liberalisation, see Julia E. Sweig and Michael J. Bustamante, ‘Cuba after communism: the economic reforms that are transforming the island’, *Foreign Affairs* 92: 4, July/Aug. 2013, pp. 101-114.

²⁰ ‘The Chancellor of the Exchequer will visit Argentina’, 1 Aug. 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-chancellor-of-the-exchequer-will-visit-argentina>.

²¹ ‘Boris Johnson to make first visit by British foreign secretary to Argentina for 25 years’, *The Independent*, 19 May 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-argentina-visit-first-foreign-secretary-25-years-falklands-brexit-a8359376.html>.

²² ‘Joint statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Finance Minister of Brazil after the inaugural UK-Brazil Economic and Financial Dialogue held in London on October 29, 2015’, https://www.gov.uk/government/.../20151029_UK_Brazil_EFD_joint_statment.pdf; ‘Chancellor in Brazil and Argentina to boost economic and trade ties’, 31 July 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-in-brazil-and-argentina-to-boost-economic-and-trade-ties>.

diplomatic presence in Latin America has facilitated greater government support for British businesses in Latin America.

It is clear from the above, then, that there have been significant efforts to strengthen Britain's economic ties with Latin America since the launch of the Canning Agenda in 2010. Undoubtedly, this has led to individual successes for British businesses. For example, Express Engineering benefited from a new consulate in Recife to make substantial inroads into Brazil's oil and gas extraction industry.²³ More broadly, Britain has improved its economic standing in specific countries. British direct investment in Brazil more than doubled in the period between 2010 and 2014 to a figure of £15 billion.²⁴ In Colombia, albeit from a low starting point, the value of British exports has increased markedly, and total trade between the two countries is now worth more than £1 billion.²⁵

Relative to its competitors in the region, however, Britain's economic standing in Latin America has not substantially improved. Britain's total share of the import market for goods in Latin America and the Caribbean has continued to hover around 1 per cent throughout the period since 2010, standing at 0.9 per cent in 2016. This figure is dwarfed by the major external economic powers in the region like the United States and China (which accounted for 32.7 and 18.4 per cent of the region's imports respectively in 2016). It is also some way behind more comparable European economies like Germany (which provided 4 per cent of the region's imports in 2016) and France (1.6 per cent). Britain's share of the goods export market for the region is slightly higher, standing at 1.1 per cent of the total in 2010, rising to 1.2 per cent in 2016. However, this compares with a 46 per cent share held by the United States, 9 per cent by China, 1.6 per cent by Germany and 0.8 per cent by France.

Neither has there been any marked increase in the importance of Latin America for Britain in relation to its other trading partners around the world. As a share of Britain's overall goods export destinations, Latin America and the Caribbean constituted just 1.9 per cent of the total in 2016, down from a peak of 3.3 per cent in 2012. Likewise, as a source of British imports, Latin America and the Caribbean represented 1.6 per cent of the total in 2016, down from 2.3 per cent in 2010.²⁶ Britain is generally stronger in the export of services. But here too, Central and South America represent a small fraction of Britain's total exports, lagging far behind other emerging markets like Asia.²⁷ Latin America is a more significant destination for UK foreign direct investment, representing 10 per cent of the global total in

²³ 'Minister of State speech at the Latin America investment forum'; 'Express Engineering takes full control of Brazilian Petrotec', *Subsea World News*, 8 July 2013, <https://subseaworldnews.com/2013/07/08/express-engineering-takes-full-control-of-brazilian-petrotec/>.

²⁴ 'The UK's trade and investment relationship with South America: 2016', 5 Aug. 2016, Office for National Statistics, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/uktradeandinvestmentwithouthamerica/2016>.

²⁵ Liam Fox, 'Liam Fox – 2017 speech in Bogota', 24 Aug. 2017, <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/liam-fox-2017-speech-in-bogota/>.

²⁶ Trade statistics sourced from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution, <https://wits.worldbank.org/Default.aspx?lang=en>.

²⁷ 'International trade in services by partner country, UK: January to March 2018', Office for National Statistics, 16 July 2018, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/internationaltrade/bulletins/exportsandimportsstatisticsbycountryforuktradeinservices/januarytomarch2018>.

2015. However, this is similarly far behind other regions, such as the EU (40 per cent) and North America (32.5 per cent).²⁸

The fact that Britain's economic performance in Latin America has remained broadly unchanged since the initiation of the Canning Agenda suggests the presence of structural impediments to greater UK-Latin American trade and investment. A full analysis of such factors would go beyond the scope of this article's focus on foreign policy. One factor worth noting in this regard, however, is the continuing frustration of British government officials at the performance of British companies in Latin America. This is a long-standing complaint. In 1929, following his trade mission to South America, Lord D'Abernon advised that Britain's 'methods of production, representation, advertising, marketing and sale require thorough revision'.²⁹ Echoing this sentiment, Sir Hugo Swire, who served as Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for Latin America between 2012 and 2016, complains that while 'there are huge opportunities' in Latin America, 'British companies have not done as well in the region as they ... should'.³⁰ These frustrations on the part of officials reflect underlying factors impeding Britain's economic relationship with Latin America over which they have limited control.

One of the ways that governments can substantially alter the conditions for trade and investment in the contemporary era is through the negotiation of free trade agreements. The primary economic bloc in Latin America – Mercosur – has long been in negotiations with the European Union to try to secure such an agreement.³¹ One of the principal questions that emerged out of Britain's decision to leave the European Union was whether the UK could strike free trade deals outside of the auspices of the EU following its departure. Theresa May's initial commitment to extracting Britain from the EU Customs Union suggested Britain would be at liberty to make such deals once it officially leave the EU.³² There were also clear statements from Latin American officials in the aftermath of the referendum – including those of Mercosur states – of their desire to secure free trade deals with Britain post-Brexit. As the Brazilian Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles stated in September 2017, 'we are ready to open discussions with the British Government'.³³ More recently, however, aspects of the government's 'Chequers proposal' – such as the 'common rule book' and the 'facilitated customs arrangement' – have cast doubt on Britain's ability to secure free trade agreements in the post-Brexit era.³⁴

²⁸ 'UK foreign direct investment: trends and analysis: summer 2017' Office for National Statistics, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/ukforeigndirectinvestmenttrendsandanalysis/summer2017#foreign-direct-investment-by-continent-and-industry>.

²⁹ Quoted in Rory Miller, 'The decline of Britain's interest in Latin America', *History Today* 41: 12, Dec. 1991, pp. 42-8. For more details of Lord D'Abernon's trade mission, see Roger Gravil, 'Anglo-US trade rivalry in Argentina and the D'Abernon mission of 1929', in David Rock ed., *Argentina in the twentieth century* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 41-65.

³⁰ Author interview with Sir Hugo Swire, 21 Feb. 2017.

³¹ 'The EU, Mercosur, and the two decade push for a free trade agreement', *World Politics Review*, 12 Feb. 2018, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/24173/the-eu-mercotur-and-the-two-decade-push-for-a-free-trade-agreement>.

³² May, 'The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU'.

³³ 'Brazilian Finance Minister attempts to woo the UK with free trade offer', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 Sept. 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/09/30/brazilian-finance-minister-attempts-woo-uk-free-trade-offer/>.

³⁴ Peter F. Allgeier, 'The Chequers proposal would prevent the UK regaining an independent trade policy', 30 Aug. 2018, <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2018/08/peter-f-allgeier-the-chequers-proposal-would-prevent-the-uk-regaining-an-independent-trade-policy.html>.

Doubtless, the precise terms on which Britain exits the EU will impact its future trading relations with regions such as Latin America. Another question that remains is how high a priority any trade deal with Latin American countries will be as Britain repositions its global role in the post-Brexit world.

Latin America as a strategic priority in British foreign policy

Britain's decline in Latin America throughout the twentieth century occurred, in part, because of broader global forces, such as the Great Depression and the two world wars. However, it was also the result of conscious decisions by successive British governments to focus their attentions and resources on other parts of the world. During the Great Depression of the 1930s Britain prioritised trade within the Empire at the expense of its economic interests in Latin America.⁴⁰ In the post-war years Britain focused its energies on its 'special relationship' with the United States and – particularly from the 1970s onwards – European integration.⁴¹

In the post-Cold War era Britain did seek to re-orientate its foreign policy to recognise a shift in the global balance of power towards countries of the global South – what William Hague referred to as a 'networked world'.⁴² This included efforts in the 2000s to strengthen Britain's relations with the two major emerging economies of Latin America – Mexico and Brazil.⁴³ However, attention increasingly shifted to other parts of the world – most prominently the Middle East and North Africa, as part of the US-led 'war on terror'. When Jeremy Browne became Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for Latin America in the coalition government in 2010, Latin America remained 'bottom of the league table' insofar as Britain's global priorities were concerned.⁴⁴

The Canning Agenda aimed to reverse this trend by broadening the focus from the two largest countries in Latin America to engage the entirety of the region in a more systematic fashion. There is evidence of success in this regard insofar as Whitehall now appears to approach policy towards Latin America in a more coherent fashion. From the inter-departmental Prosperity Fund to the appointment in April 2018 of a new Trade Commissioner for Latin America, there is now what Jeremy Browne refers to as a 'cross-government effort' to improve Britain's standing in the region.⁴⁵

The Brexit vote has increased the focus on engaging with emerging powers from the extra-European world. Theresa May expressed this sentiment in her Lancaster House speech, arguing that Brexit offers the opportunity 'to build a truly Global Britain ... that reaches out to old friends and new allies alike'.⁴⁷ In this respect, Britain's leaving the

⁴⁰ Bethell, 'Britain and Latin America in Historical Perspective', p. 17.

⁴¹ Robert Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), chapters 4 and 5.

⁴² William Hague, 'Britain's foreign Policy in a networked world', 1 July 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-s-foreign-policy-in-a-networked-world--2>

⁴³ Kandiah and Mills eds, *British Diplomacy in Latin America*, pp. 20-23.

⁴⁴ Author interview with Jeremy Browne, 23 Oct. 2017.

⁴⁵ Browne interview; 'New HM Trade Commissioners announced', 3 April 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-hm-trade-commissioners-announced>. For an explanation of Whitehall's previously disjointed approach to Latin America, see Bulmer-Thomas, 'British Relations with Latin America into the 1990s', pp. 215-16.

⁴⁷ May, 'The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU'.

European Union could create the impetus to strengthen economic and political ties with Latin American countries. As Jeremy Browne puts it, as part of 'a re-awakened global spirit and outlook', Brexit potentially creates an impetus for Britain to think in 'optimistic and positive terms about what new opportunities might arise in Latin America'.⁴⁸ Latin American officials, also, perceive the potential for greater ties with Britain arising from Brexit. Eduardo dos Santos, the Brazilian ambassador to the UK, is unequivocal: 'Brexit is an opportunity ... to increase our trade relations, to increase our cooperation with Britain'.⁴⁹ Similarly, Colombia's ambassador to the UK, Nestor Osorio, welcomes the sense conveyed in the aftermath of Brexit 'that Britain is in the mood ... to go global'.⁵⁰

Within the framework of Global Britain, however, Latin America competes for priority with other regions. And when moving from generalities to specifics, it is most commonly Asian countries – particularly China and India – that proponents of a Global Britain tend to highlight as the country's future partners. Thus when the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson advocated looking beyond Britain's 'immediate European hinterland' to embrace 'the rise of new powers', it was to 'China and East Asia' that he referred in particular.⁵¹ Official policy statements seemingly confirm Latin America's peripheral status. In a Foreign Office memorandum on the Global Britain strategy submitted to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Latin America is addressed only briefly under the sub-heading 'Other regions', following lengthy discussion of Britain's relations with the United States, Europe and the Indo-Pacific.⁵²

The government's aid policies further reflect Britain's global priorities in the post-Brexit era. Launched in April 2016, the Prosperity Fund aims not only to reduce poverty in developing countries, but also to 'create opportunities for international business, including UK companies'. The fund is targeted at just 23 countries where the government has determined 'development potential and the interest to the UK are the highest'. Of those countries, 11 are in Asia, 9 in the Middle East and North Africa, and 3 in Latin America (Brazil, Mexico and Colombia).⁵³

A persistent lack of interest in Latin America is also observable among the British business community. As British ambassador to Mexico from 2005 to 2009, Giles Paxman spent a lot of time trying to generate British interest in Mexican trade and investment opportunities. His experience was that it 'was just very difficult to get British companies to focus on going that far away from home'.⁵⁴ Following the launch of the Canning Agenda in 2010, Jeremy Browne encountered a similar reluctance by British business to engage with Latin America. Whereas British businesspeople would fear being marked out as 'gauchely parochial' should they admit to not having travelled in Asia, 'they probably would feel

⁴⁸ Browne interview.

⁴⁹ Author interview with Eduardo dos Santos, 23 Jan. 2018.

⁵⁰ Author Interview with Nestor Osorio, 23 January 2018.

⁵¹ Johnson, 'Beyond Brexit'.

⁵² House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Britain, sixth report of session 2017-19, 12 March 2018.

⁵³ 'Cross-government prosperity fund: background', 21 Dec. 2017,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cross-government-prosperity-fund-programme/cross-government-prosperity-fund-update>; 'The prosperity fund: annual report 2016/17', Dec. 2017,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/.../FCO-Prosperity-Report-2016-2017.pdf>. For the background of British aid to Latin America, see John Tanner, 'Private solutions: debt and development', in *The Thatcher years*, pp. 18-25.

⁵⁴ Kandiah and Mills eds, *British Diplomacy in Latin America*, p. 25.

fairly comfortable about admitting that they had never been to Latin America'.⁵⁵ Policy statements by the Confederation of British Industries and the Institute of Directors since the Brexit vote suggest the focus on European trade, and – to a lesser extent – engaging new markets in Asia, remains the priority.⁵⁶

Regardless of the priority accorded to Latin America in Britain's post-Brexit worldview, a broader criticism of the Global Britain strategy concerns the resources available to government to facilitate its implementation. As Britain negotiates its withdrawal from the EU – and seeks to strengthen old relationships with European countries on a bilateral basis – doubts have been raised as to whether it is possible to simultaneously establish new relationships with emerging powers in the wider world. This is a recurring theme of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Global Britain. As summarised in the report's conclusion, 'the Government must commit sufficient resources to achieve its ambitions around the world'.⁵⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote, the government's ability – or willingness – to do this seemed to be in doubt. In a hearing of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in December 2017, evidence from Foreign Office officials revealed plans to reallocate resources from Asia, Africa and the Americas to create 50 extra staff for European embassies.⁵⁸ This comes against a backdrop of cuts of approximately 40 per cent in overall funding for British diplomacy.⁵⁹ Trends such as this are a cause of alarm for those concerned with the furtherance of the Canning Agenda in the post-Brexit era. Hugo Swire sees a danger in this context of 'second and third tier countries [such as those in Latin America] slipping right down the agenda' due to a lack of resources.⁶¹

More recently, however, the Foreign Office has announced the creation of 250 new diplomatic posts, along with ten new sovereign missions, precisely to aid in fulfilling the Global Britain strategy in the post-Brexit era.⁶² Moreover, the Boris Johnson's recent trip to Latin America, as well as the forthcoming visit of the Prime Minister to Argentina for the 2018 G20 Summit, suggests the region is at least registering on the government's radar.

However, funding constraints and the diplomatic energies consumed by Brexit are likely to impact on Britain's relations with Latin America for some time. These internal constraints upon Britain's ability to strengthen its relations with Latin America are indicative of the broader limitations on the country's role in the world in the contemporary era. As much as Britain's global priorities in the post-Brexit era, its fortunes in Latin America will be

⁵⁵ Browne interview.

⁵⁶ See, for example, 'Making a success of Brexit: a whole-economy view of the UK-EU negotiations', Dec. 2016, Confederation of British Industries; 'Going global: trends in trade', April 2018, Institute of Directors policy report.

⁵⁷ HoC FAC, Global Britain.

⁵⁸ 'Boris Johnson's 'global Britain' claims mocked as UK cuts back embassies around the world to fund more EU diplomats', *The Independent*, 30 Dec. 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-eu-brexite-diplomats-foreign-office-global-britain-a8134506.html>.

⁵⁹ 'The Foreign Office has taken a massive cut in Philip Hammond's budget – bad news for Boris Johnson', *The Independent*, 23 Nov. 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/foreign-office-40-per-cent-almost-half-cut-budget-philip-hammond-boris-johnson-a8071621.html?amp>.

⁶¹ Swire interview.

⁶² 'Foreign Secretary announces 250 new diplomatic roles and ten new sovereign missions overseas', 21 March 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-announces-250-new-diplomatic-roles-and-ten-new-sovereign-missions-overseas>.

determined by the intentions and actions of other external powers with a presence in the region.

Relations with other external powers in Latin America

As Britain's interests and influence in Latin America declined throughout the twentieth century, those of the United States rose. In one sense, the US was the inadvertent beneficiary of Britain's retreat from Latin America. At times, however, the US consciously attempted to usurp Britain as the leading external power in the region. One such instance was during the Second World War, as US officials and businessmen sought to exploit opportunities created by the conflict to exclude British economic interests from Latin America.⁶³ In seeking to adapt to US hegemony in the region, British officials during the 1940s contemplated a new role for Britain in Latin America as an 'honest broker'. In this conception, Britain would act as an interlocutor between the US and its neighbours to the south: of worth to Latin American states as a counterweight to US dominance, and of use to the US in reconciling differences between Washington and Latin American governments.⁶⁴

This idea has persisted in various forms. Donald Lamont served as British ambassador to Venezuela at a time of intense animosity between the United States and the government of Hugo Chávez. 'Because of the bad state of relations between the US and Venezuela', states Lamont, 'one likes to think [Chávez] would get something from us' that he could not get from the Americans.⁶⁵ In the contemporary context, Hugo Swire believes that Britain benefits in its relations with Latin American governments 'from not being America ... with all the baggage' that US hegemony in the region entails.⁶⁶ More colloquially, Jeremy Browne envisions Britain as the 'emollient ... good cop' in Latin America, 'to the Americans' more strident ... bad cop'.⁶⁷

Britain's lack of an overbearing influence in Latin America has undoubtedly spared it much of the opprobrium directed towards the United States from the region throughout the twentieth century. In reality, however, Britain has – for the most part – mirrored US policy towards Latin America to such an extent as to make the role of an 'honest broker' in the region untenable. From Britain's acquiescence in US efforts to remove Cheddi Jagan from power in British Guiana in the 1960s, to Margaret Thatcher's support for the Reagan administration's policies towards Central America in the 1980s, Britain has largely failed to differentiate its policies from those of the United States in Latin America.⁶⁸

This trend continues to the present day. One contemporary example of an issue of contention in Latin America where both Britain and the US have a direct interest is the diplomacy concerning the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, since he took up residence in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in the summer of 2012. Ecuador granted Assange

⁶³ Thomas C. Mills, *Post-war planning on the periphery: Anglo-American economic diplomacy in South America, 1939-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ Mills, *Post-War Planning on the Periphery*, pp. 152-3.

⁶⁵ Kandiah and Mills eds, *British Diplomacy in Latin America*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Swire interview.

⁶⁷ Browne interview.

⁶⁸ Stephen G. Rabe, *US intervention in British Guiana: A cold war story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Ferguson et al, 'Under Attack'. A notable exception to this trend is the differing British and US attitudes towards Cuba during the Cold War. See Christopher Hull, *British diplomacy and US hegemony in Cuba, 1898-1964* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

political asylum when he was subject to an extradition request by Sweden on charges of rape. Assange feared that, should he travel to Sweden to face these charges, he would subsequently be extradited to the United States where he is under investigation for the release of diplomatic and military documents relating to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Swedish charges against Assange have since been dropped, and, following the election of President Moreno in April 2017, Ecuador has attempted various means to reach an agreement with Britain to secure Assange's release from the embassy.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly, British officials would like this issue resolved and for the source of conflict with Ecuador to be removed. As Hugo Swire puts it, 'the whole Assange issue [is] a running sore'.⁷⁰ At the time of writing, however, Britain has rebuffed all overtures by Ecuador towards this end, insisting that Assange would still be arrested should he leave the embassy for breaking the terms of his bail – whereupon he could potentially still face extradition to the US.⁷¹

It is of course true that in this complex case involving many actors there are various reasons why Britain should refuse to cooperate with Ecuador's attempts to resolve the situation. But the 'special relationship' with the United States is surely an important reason preventing Britain working with Ecuador to find a resolution to the impasse, given the strong US interest in seeing Assange brought to trial for his role in the leak of sensitive documents, as well as the pervasive influence of the 'special relationship' in British policy-making.

However, while the US presence in Latin America is undoubtedly predominant, its interest in the region has waned in recent decades. George W. Bush focused primarily on the Middle East as part of his 'war on terror', Barack Obama sought a 'pivot to Asia', and Donald Trump appears to be embarking upon a form of neo-isolationism, putting 'America First'.⁷² The US neglect of Latin America may – in one sense – provide greater latitude for Britain, both to formulate an independent political approach to the region and enhance its economic standing as US interests retreat. However, Britain clearly does not have the resources – or indeed the desire – to fill any void left by the US in Latin America. Moreover, while the 'special relationship' with the US may have placed certain constraints on British policy-making in Latin America, there is no sense that the Canning Agenda has met with opposition in Washington. As William Hague states, the US government was 'certainly conscious' of the policy, 'but in no way hostile to it'.⁷³

The one country that could potentially challenge US hegemony in Latin America is China. Chinese trade and investment in Latin America has increased exponentially in the post-Cold War era. While initially focusing primarily on purchases of raw materials to fuel its impressive economic growth, China's economic interests in Latin America have recently

⁶⁹ 'Julian Assange: a legal history', *New York Times*, 13 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/02/04/world/europe/julian-assange-timeline.html>.

⁷⁰ Swire interview.

⁷¹ 'Ecuador gives Assange citizenship, worsening standoff with Britain', *New York Times*, 11 Jan. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/world/europe/julian-assange-ecuador-embassy.html>.

⁷² Russell Crandall, 'The post-American hemisphere: power and politics in an autonomous Latin America', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 3, May/June 2011, pp. 83-95; Richard F. Feinberg, 'What Trump's "America First" means for Latin America', *Americas Quarterly*, 12 Oct. 2017, <http://americasquarterly.org/content/what-trumps-america-first-means-latin-america>.

⁷³ Hague interview.

diversified, with a marked growth in direct investment.⁷⁴ Following Xi Jinping's ascendancy to the Presidency in 2013, political relations between China and Latin American countries have also strengthened. 2015 saw the inaugural China-CELAC summit aimed at institutionalising political cooperation, and more recently, President Xi invited Latin American states to join the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, stating that 'Latin America is the natural extension' of the global infrastructure project.⁷⁵

China's rise in Latin America may not bode well for the Canning Agenda. Whereas the United States generally promoted a liberal economic order in Latin America, inviting greater trade and investment from external powers, it is not clear that China would act along similar lines. As British ambassador to Brazil during the 2000s, Peter Collecott observed Chinese economic expansion in that country with some trepidation. As he recalls, China was, 'in certain fields, quite aggressive commercially'.⁷⁶ More generally, while in the United States, Britain was dealing with a regional hegemon in Latin America with which it had a long-standing close relationship based on shared values, the same cannot be said of China.

The role of great powers like the United States and China in Latin America shapes the broad environment in which Britain operates. In terms of competitors in the region with a similar scale of economic and political interests, it is other European countries – such as Germany, France, Spain and the Netherlands – that are most relevant. When William Hague announced the Canning Agenda in 2010, Britain was of course part of the European Union alongside these nations, with no apparent prospect of leaving. Indeed, in the years that followed, Britain often pursued its quest for greater trade with Latin America through EU mechanisms, such as EU-CELAC summits. In the post-Brexit era, Britain will pursue its goals in Latin America not in partnership with EU member-states, but as a rival.

As noted above, the extent to which Britain can diverge from the EU in negotiating future free trade agreements in Latin America will depend to on the terms of any Brexit agreement. What is clear is that, from the perspective of Latin American countries, negotiating solely with Britain would have advantages over attempting to secure deals with the EU. The principal obstacle to a Mercosur-EU trade deal has been the protections for agriculture demanded by certain EU states – particularly France.⁷⁷ This form of protectionism is much less pronounced in Britain. As the Brazilian ambassador in London puts it, whereas 'the European market is very closed' to agricultural exports from Brazil, 'Britain is a free trade country'.⁷⁸ At the same time, the desire to increase agricultural exports would be one of the major prizes of any trade deal for Latin American states.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Rhys Jenkins, 'Latin America and China: a new dependency?', *Third World Quarterly* 33: 7, Oct. 2012, pp. 1337-58; Ronaldo Avendano, Angel Melguizo and Sean Miller, 'Chinese FDI in Latin America: new trends and global implications', Atlantic Council/OECD, 2017.

⁷⁵ Lei Yu, 'China's strategic partnership with Latin America: a fulcrum in China's rise', *International Affairs* 91: 5, 2015, pp. 1047-68; 'As America withdraws from Latin America, China steps in', *The Diplomat*, 4 Jan. 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/as-america-withdraws-from-latin-america-china-steps-in/>. CELAC is the Spanish acronym for the Community of Caribbean and Latin American States.

⁷⁶ Author interview with Peter Collecott, 25 Nov. 2016.

⁷⁷ Dieter Konold, 'Farm interests as bargaining chips: France in the EU-Mercosur free trade negotiations', *Journal of Public Policy* 30: 3, Dec. 2010, pp. 321-43.

⁷⁸ Santos interview.

⁷⁹ 'After Brexit, can the UK build its trade ties with Latin America?', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Aug. 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/08/14/after-brexit-can-the-uk-build-its-trade-ties-with-latin-america/>. For the background of Latin American relations with the European Union's predecessor organisations, see

The attitude of Latin American states on key issues like this remind us of the central role played by the region's governments in Britain's pursuance of the Canning Agenda. Whereas in the nineteenth century era of British hegemony, these former colonial states struggled to exert agency to influence events, the twenty-first century has seen Latin American countries emerge as important regional – and in some cases international – powers.

Political relations with Latin American countries

One of the criticisms of the Canning Agenda has been that it merely harks back to a lost era of British imperialism.⁸¹ Clearly conscious of the potential for such a charge, Hague sought to make clear in his address announcing the policy that Britain sought to re-launch its relations with the region, not on the basis of imperialistic exploitation, but on a 'modern footing' of 'equal partnerships with countries in Latin America'.⁸² Has the Canning Agenda lived up to this promise?

Certainly, it would be wrong to characterise the Canning Agenda as wholly a British construct without input from Latin American governments. When formulating the policy as Shadow Foreign Secretary, Hague met with Latin American ambassadors in London and received a clear message that the countries wanted 'more of Britain' in the region.⁸³ The Mexican ambassador to Britain, reflecting on the Canning Agenda in practice, is clear that 'it has not only been a UK-driven approach', but rather 'a bilaterally agreed upon strategy'.⁸⁴

Cooperation between Britain and Latin American states has been in evidence across a number of political and strategic fronts. For example, in recent years Britain has provided aid, as well as military and diplomatic support, to the Colombian government's efforts to end its long-running conflict with the FARC rebels.⁸⁵ Greater strategic cooperation has also been established between Britain and Brazil. In September 2010, the two countries signed a Defence Cooperation Treaty laying the basis for technology transfers, joint military exercises, and intelligence sharing.⁸⁶ One example of the kind of collaboration envisaged in the treaty came in 2014 when the Commander of the Brazilian Navy visited the UK to discuss collaborative training activities and tour British naval facilities.⁸⁷ The defence treaty was supplemented in 2012 by the inauguration of the UK-Brazil Strategic Dialogue. In this forum, the Foreign Ministers of the two countries have met on an annual basis to discuss

Laurence Whitehead, 'Britain, Latin America and the European Community', in Bulmer Thomas ed., *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 83-100.

⁸¹ See reference to Allen and Edwards in fn. 10 above.

⁸² Hague, 'Britain and Latin America'.

⁸³ Hague interview.

⁸⁴ Ventura interview.

⁸⁵ 'UK Welcomes President Santos for Colombia state visit', 30 Oct. 2016,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-welcome-president-santos-for-colombia-state-visit>; 'UN Verification Mission in Colombia', <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/about>. FARC is the Spanish acronym for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

⁸⁶ 'Agreement between the government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and the government of the federative Republic of Brazil regarding defence cooperation', Rio de Janeiro, 14 Sept. 2010.

⁸⁷ 'UK-Brazil relationship promoted with high-profile visit', 26 Feb. 2014, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2014/february/26/140226-head-of-brazilian-navy-visit>.

cooperation on global issues of joint concern, ranging from nuclear non-proliferation to Middle East peace.⁸⁸

It is clear, then, that political relations between Britain and Latin American states have broadened in scope and proceeded on the basis of mutual respect in recent years. This reflects an acknowledgement on Britain's part that Latin American countries are increasingly playing a greater role in international politics, reflected in the UK's support for Brazil gaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.⁸⁹ However, British political and strategic objectives in Latin America are constantly at risk of being jeopardised by the ongoing dispute with Argentina over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.⁹⁰ Long a source of friction in relations between the UK and Argentina, the dispute also has potential implications for Britain's broader efforts to enhance its political relationships in Latin America.

Under the Kirchner governments (2003-15), Argentina adopted the strategy on the Falklands issue – with a large measure of success – of ensuring that Latin American governments adopt a united front in favour of its position in international and regional forums.⁹¹ More substantively, Argentina sought to hinder British relations with other Latin American states by winning commitments from its neighbours to limit political and strategic cooperation with the UK. Again, these efforts met with some success, for example in the bans upheld by Brazil and Uruguay on Royal Navy ships docking in their ports.⁹² In this way, the Falklands dispute represented a hindrance for Britain in its aim of establishing closer relationships with Latin American governments. Hugo Swire expresses this frustration, describing how throughout his experience of seeking to improve Britain's ties with Latin America, the Argentine government 'would do their level best, whenever we were making headway elsewhere in the region', to remind other governments of the importance of 'Latin American solidarity' over the Falklands issue.⁹³ Similarly, Peter Collecott recalls that when meeting with UK ambassadors serving throughout the Southern Cone countries of Latin America, the general view 'was that the Falkland conflict was the elephant in the room every time they talked to their corresponding Government'.

Collecott's own experience in Brazil, however, was that the Falklands issue was not a major impediment to strengthening bilateral relations. As he explains it, 'the Brazilians were very adept at having a rather nice dual policy'. This consisted of publically supporting Argentina over its claims to the Falkland Islands, while at the same time pursuing 'a private

⁸⁸ 'UK and Brazil commit to developing enhanced foreign policy relationship', 18 Jan. 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-brazil-commit-to-developing-enhanced-foreign-policy-relationship>.

⁸⁹ 'Security Council reform: The UK supports new permanent seats for Brazil, Germany, India and Japan, alongside permanent African representation', 12 Nov. 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/security-council-reform-the-uk-supports-new-permanent-seats-for-brazil-germany-india-and-japan-alongside-permanent-african-representation>.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the dispute, see Klaus Dodds, 'Stormy waters: Britain, the Falkland Islands and UK-Argentine relations', *International Affairs* 88: 4, 2012, pp. 683-700.

⁹¹ See, for example, the resolution of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization: 'Special Committee on Decolonization approves text reiterating peaceful negotiated settlement as only solution to Falklands Islands (Malvinas) question', 23 June 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/gacol3298.doc.htm>.

⁹² 'Royal Navy's Falklands ship turned away by Brazil', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 Jan. 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/falklandislands/8251130/Royal-Navys-Falklands-ship-turned-away-by-Brazil.html>. See also Dodds, *Stormy waters*, pp. 687-90.

⁹³ Swire interview.

policy which was much more accommodating to the British on practical things'.⁹⁴ Latin American officials support this view. For example, Eduardo dos Santos acknowledges that while Britain's conflict with Argentina is 'not very helpful', 'as far as Brazil is concerned, we don't see that as an impediment' to closer relations with Britain.⁹⁵ Julián Ventura remarks in similar terms, that while Mexico supports the 'regional consensus' on the Falkland Islands, 'it is not an issue that is part of a bilateral agenda' between the UK and Mexico.⁹⁶

Moreover, since the 2015 election of President Macri in Argentina, much of the poison of the Falklands issue has been taken out of UK-Argentine relations. While there has been no formal change in Argentina's stance on the Falklands (indeed, its claim to sovereignty is written into the country's constitution), it is clear that the new president does not wish to define relations with Britain solely in the context of the dispute in the way that his predecessors did. Indeed, when the Foreign Office Minister Alan Duncan visited Buenos Aires in September 2016, the UK and Argentina agreed to cooperate on a host of issues in global politics, and to collaborate in exploration for hydrocarbons in the South Atlantic.⁹⁷ Boris Johnson further reinforced the rapprochement in UK-Argentine relations when he laid a wreath to commemorate those who died in the Falklands war on his recent trip to Buenos Aires.⁹⁸

Macri's election in Argentina was emblematic of a broader political shift in Latin America away from the so-called 'pink tide' leftist regimes that won office throughout the region in the first decade of the twenty-first century, towards more centre-right, pro-market leaders.⁹⁹ British officials have generally welcomed this development insofar as it leads to a greater sense of shared values between the UK and Latin American countries, more likely to facilitate political cooperation. As Jeremy Browne comments on the ideological reorientation of Latin America, many countries have 'progressed in a direction which makes them more compatible with Britain in terms of the way we work together'.¹⁰⁰

Notwithstanding this apparent alignment of values between the UK and Latin America, there remains a lingering frustration on the part of British officials at the way in which Latin American countries approach international politics. On key international issues of recent years, leading Latin American countries have often been at odds with Britain. In the build-up to war in Iraq in 2003, neither of the two Latin American countries then on the UN Security Council (Chile and Mexico) were willing to side with Britain and the United States in backing military action.¹⁰¹ Similarly, when the UK (along with France and Lebanon)

⁹⁴ Kandiah and Mills eds, *British Diplomacy in Latin America*, pp. 31-2.

⁹⁵ Santos interview.

⁹⁶ Ventura interview.

⁹⁷ 'UK and Argentina joint communiqué: 13 September 2016', 14 Sept. 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communique-between-argentina-and-the-united-kingdom/uk-and-argentina-joint-communique>; 'Foreign Office minister Sir Alan Duncan visits Argentina', *The Guardian*, 11 Sept. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/11/foreign-office-minister-sir-alan-duncan-visits-argentina>.

⁹⁸ 'Boris Johnson lays wreath in Argentina for Falklands soldiers', *The Guardian*, 20 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/may/20/boris-johnson-lays-wreath-argentina-falklands-soldiers>.

⁹⁹ Omar G. Encarnación, 'The rise and fall of the Latin American left', *The Nation*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-ebb-and-flow-of-latin-americas-pink-tide/>.

¹⁰⁰ Browne interview.

¹⁰¹ Heraldo Muñoz, *A solitary war: a diplomat's chronicle of the Iraq war and its lessons* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008), pp. 7-78.

proposed the UN Security Council resolution that led to intervention in Libya in 2011, Brazil was among the countries to abstain from the vote.¹⁰²

The reluctance of Latin American countries to join Britain in these types of interventions leads Peter Collecott to observe that while Latin American countries 'ought to be part ... of the Western world' they 'have been very loath to see themselves like that'.¹⁰³ William Hague expands on this point, noting that while the countries of Latin America share democratic values with countries like Britain, they 'come from a different historical standpoint' as former colonies. As a result, 'they often have a very different understanding of what a global role is.'¹⁰⁴

This different approach reflects the fact that emerging powers in Latin America (and elsewhere in the world) do not wish to simply mimic the kind of global role played traditionally by Britain and other Western countries. Rather, they intend to fashion a world-role for themselves reflective of their own interests and values – and indeed to reshape the international order according to their differing perspectives. As Harold Trinkunas has written in reference to Brazil, the principal emerging power in Latin America, 'Brazil would like to be a rule shaper rather than a rule taker' when engaging in global governance.¹⁰⁵ More broadly, Latin American countries' enthusiasm for China's Belt and Road Initiative can, on one level, be seen to endorse the Chinese description of the policy as a means of promoting 'economic globalization that is open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all', with all the implied criticism of the current global economic system that such a statement implies.¹⁰⁶ It is clear, then, that while aligned with Britain in some respects, the emerging powers of Latin America are likely to take a divergent view on major issues of global governance.

Conclusion

In assessing the Canning Agenda, William Hague is surely correct to caution that 'any initiative of this kind is only really successful if pursued over decades', and, as such, it is 'too early to say ... how successful it has been' at this stage.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. It is clear that a policy of strengthening Britain's relationships with Latin American states has been pursued across government with a reasonably clear focus and undoubted enthusiasm in many quarters since 2010. This article has, however, identified substantial impediments to the success of the Canning Agenda across the range of areas discussed. The good news for those pursuing the Canning Agenda is that none of these challenges is insurmountable. The more sobering assessment is that overcoming them will require some fundamental changes in Britain's world role.

¹⁰² 'Security Council approves 'no-fly zone' over Libya, authorizing 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians, by vote of 10 in favour with 5 abstentions', 17 March 2011, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>.

¹⁰³ Collecott interview.

¹⁰⁴ Hague interview.

¹⁰⁵ Harold Trinkunas, 'Brazil's rise: seeking influence on global governance', Latin American Initiative, foreign policy at Brookings, April 2014. For broader discussion of the impact of emerging powers on global governance, see Kevin Gray and Crain N. Murphy eds, *Rising powers and the future of global governance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ 'As America withdraws from Latin America'.

¹⁰⁷ Hague interview.

Improving Britain's economic performance in Latin America will require – at the least – a substantial reorientation on the part of British business to embrace commerce with the region, along with a more general improvement in Britain's export trade capabilities. Ensuring Latin America is granted sufficient attention in British foreign policy-making will require not only that the necessary resources are allocated to deliver on the rhetoric of Global Britain, but also that Britain's approach is truly global, rather than limited to the principal emerging powers in Asia. Achieving Britain's objectives in Latin America will also be dependent on managing relations with other external powers in the region in a pragmatic fashion, while also retaining a clear-eyed focus on Britain's independent goals. Finally, managing political relationships with Latin American states will require both sensitivity in dealing with issues of contention like that of the Falklands dispute, and also a willingness to acknowledge and embrace the changing conceptions of a global role pursued by countries like Brazil.

Britain's impending departure from the European Union necessitates bold thinking about the role the country plays in the world. While creating many challenges for Britain, Brexit also creates opportunities, including the possibility of strengthening relations with parts of the world of increasing economic and political significance, like Latin America. If the Canning Agenda is to be a success, this moment of change must be harnessed towards achieving the goals set out by William Hague in 2010.