
Background to the News

The imperial designs behind Moscow's revival of the Baron Rio Branco

by Lorenzo Carrasco

As part of the Soviet Union's diplomatic efforts toward Ibero-America, and Brazil in particular, the Soviet Academy of Sciences published in its monthly organ, *América Latina* (1986, No. 3) an article by Boris Martinov under the title: "The 'Enigma' of Baron Rio Branco." Apart from the bowing and scraping of those who hang around the aristocratic Itamarati (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations), *América Latina's* praise of the policies and person of the Baron Rio Branco, exposes the imperialist underpinnings of Soviet strategy towards Ibero-America today.

José María de Silva Paranhos, known by the title of Baron Rio Branco (which he was awarded by Brazil's Emperor Pedro II) was, as foreign minister from 1902 to 1912, the architect of Brazilian foreign policy in the 20th century. He adapted Brazil's historic role as a continental "policeman" for European financial interests, to the needs of the nascent Anglo-American alliance under the "big stick" of President Theodore Roosevelt.

As today, the strategic issue then facing the Western Hemisphere, was debt collection versus sovereignty. Did international financial interests, then largely based in Europe, have the right to forcibly collect debts, or did nation-states represent sovereign bodies, protected by natural law against such acts of war? The Anglophile Roosevelt chose debt collection, turning U.S. law on its head with his infamous "Roosevelt Corollary," the doctrine which claimed a U.S. prerogative over debt collection in the Western Hemisphere. Against Roosevelt, was Argentine Foreign Minister Luis María Drago, who upheld the original intent of the Monroe Doctrine to block European imperial designs in the hemisphere, and organized continental unity around the principle of sovereignty.

Rio Branco, as foreign minister, brought Brazil into the creditor's league, turning his country against its Hispanic neighbors. His attempt to create the famous "ABC Alliance" of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, hoped to expand the countries defending the interests of foreign powers, in the name of a false "integration." The baron backed the Roosevelt Corollary, and blocked every attempt to organize unified action around Drago's Doctrine of economic sovereignty.

The parallels with today are striking. Striking, too, is the

Soviet decision to identify the baron and his policies as the kind of "nationalist" who serves Moscow's interests today.

Baron Rio Branco's entry into government in Brazil guaranteed that the old imperial diplomacy remained after the republic was founded in 1889, with its "living frontiers" border and geopolitical policies, and especially its amoral principles packaged as the most flagrant pragmatism. In the future this policy would be sheltered by the pro-monarchist Brazilian diplomatic corps lodged in Itamarati Palace.

It should not be overlooked that Rio Branco, as Brazilian imperial delegate to the St. Petersburg exposition of 1884, worked for closer diplomatic ties with Czarist Russia. There, he first set out the parallels between Russian and Brazilian culture and society. In those days, some European diplomats already catalogued Brazil as the "Tropical Russia." On leaving Moscow, Rio Branco wrote, "The success we obtained here was immense and I suppose that no Brazilian exposition had ever made such a thunderclap."

It so happens that while Rio Branco was in power in Brazil, the so-called "Trust" was put together by the European oligarchic families controlled from Venice and allied with the Anglo-American-Russian apparatus. The "Trust," among other things, launched the plans for the Bolshevik Revolution. It is a little known fact that Theodore Roosevelt himself was one of the most fervent sympathizers and propagandists of that Revolution.

Soviets urge revival of Rio Branco's work

América Latina's Martinov was well-informed of Rio Branco's imperial links: He acknowledges that the Russian diplomatic archives of that period provided one of the main sources for his article. Martinov emphasizes the tremendous sympathy Rio Branco enjoyed with the Russian envoys to South America, citing the declarations of Czarist envoy to Brazil, Maximov, upon Rio Branco's death in 1912. "With the death of Rio Branco, Brazil lost its most brilliant politician," the envoy had written.

Martinov declares from the outset that his purpose is to clear Rio Branco's name of any taint of having been "pro-imperialist," in order to promote renewed "interest in the political-ideological heritage" of Rio Branco today. From

Moscow's viewpoint, such a job has become necessary to counter "foreign analysts," who identify the baron as "a fervent supporter of Teddy Roosevelt's diplomacy" whose "principal objective was to achieve a 'harmony of interests' with the 'great brother of the North': the U.S.A." Such characterizations, argues Martinov, are "rather superficial," put out for "frankly tendentious" reasons.

For Martinov, Rio Branco is no enigma. Rio Branco is hailed as the founder of Itamarati, the man who determined the outlines of Brazil's relationship to Latin America, Europe, and the United States for decades, one of a small group of men who led Brazil through a "revision of values." "Undoubtedly, Rio Branco is an outstanding representative of Brazilian diplomacy," Martinov wrote. "His activity in the interest of Brazil had the character of actively responding to the demands of development on the continent."

The only limitations of Rio Branco as a nationalist, Martinov asserts, came from the fact that he "expressed the interests of the nascent national bourgeoisie," which "could not find broad support amongst the dominant classes." The baron was an "elitist," he wrote, but this was "objectively conditioned."

English agent

Like his father, the Viscount Rio Branco, himself an important political figure of the Empire, the younger Rio Branco was an agent of the Baring Brothers banking house. His career was shaped, from beginning to end, by British colonial policies. The viscount and his scion both stood for the legacy of the Holy Alliance, the power directly responsible for the creation of the Brazilian empire in 1822. Their purpose was to build a beachhead for the European oligarchies from which to launch innumerable operations inside the Western Hemisphere to undermine its republics, especially the United States. Since then, all attempts to re-establish monarchies in the rest of the hemisphere—the U.S. Civil War, the plots against Lincoln, and those against Juárez in Mexico, including the adventure by Archduke Maximilian and Carlota—all went through Brazil.

Young Rio Branco cut his teeth on anti-republican operations in 1871 through his entry into the Scottish Rite masonic lodge of which his father was Grand Master, the "Grand Orient of Brazil." As Grand Master of the Brazilian Scottish masons, the Viscount took his orders from English minister Lord Palmerston, the supreme leader of Scottish masonry in the world. The viscount, at the time, was chief of the Brazilian imperial cabinet.

During his 1859-65 tenure as prime minister, Palmerston had run the Second Opium War in order to maintain control of world trade and profits from narcotics traffic, in company with the Barings. Together with the English Secret Intelligence Service, Palmerston also coordinated the secession of the American slave states and the formation of the Confederate Secret Service, in which future Presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt took their first steps in

political treason. These Presidents were the ones who later gave Rio Branco his most important diplomatic "successes."

With these origins, until the 1890s, the monarchist circles to which Baron Rio Branco belonged never considered the United States as anything other than "barbarism against civilization" and "cruel imperialism." His scarcely hidden hatred of the American political and economic system—a hatred which extended to the Hispanic American republics—flowed from the recognition that the "American System" was the most serious threat to the interests of the European oligarchic families whom he served. Although the baron did not descend from any noble family, he never brooked any doubts about the purity of his Portuguese blood.

In the months between the 1888 abolition of black slavery and proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889, Rio Branco wrote,

The old molds which the new generation imprudently wants to break today gave us 40 years of peace, prosperity and glory which will be reckoned with in the future when the works of our fathers is compared with the results of the reforms which the new generation is going around proclaiming. . . . *I live in Europe and I can assure that the governments and the enlightened classes of this old world today hold Brazil in the highest esteem. We are valued more here than all the Hispanic American republics and the United States.* [emphasis added]

Rio Branco never tired of praising the English parliamentary system, which had been imitated by Brazil.

. . . The parliamentary monarchy is a more advanced form of government than the republic; and it was not for the benefit of the Braganza family, but for benefit of the country, that the Andradas, Vasconcelos, Feijos, Evaristos, sought Brazil into an exception in the Americas. . . . And wouldn't it be good to also show what is Canada, Australia, the English possessions under the parliamentary regime? They are young countries, but a citizen of these countries is a free man.

It was only at the beginning of the present century, when the Anglo-American alliance was being set up and the Trust was formed by Venetian-controlled families, that the baron, after extensive consultation in Europe and always from a British perspective, decided to change his opinions on the United States and leave aside his hoary affection for monarchical parliamentarism, to open the way for a new and final passion: Teddy Roosevelt. Before the cock crowed thrice, the Baron, now metamorphosed into a "republican," was ready in 1902 to return to his country after having spent 26 uninterrupted years as consul in Liverpool, to become minister of foreign relations. This was one year after Roosevelt had become President, upon the assassination of McKinley.

Roosevelt-Rio Branco alliance against the Drago Doctrine

Despite abundant evidence and the confession of both principals, the Soviet *América Latina* author turned somersaults to cover up the embarrassing Roosevelt-Rio Branco alliance. Rio Branco was no “fervent partisan of the diplomacy of Th. Roosevelt,” Martinov insists, because he was consistently an enemy of the United States from the start of his diplomatic career.

As we have demonstrated, this is true. But it does not contradict the unqualified support of Rio Branco for Roosevelt and his “Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.” Roosevelt’s 1904 dictum was penned to destroy the original republican spirit of the Monroe Doctrine, by turning it into a weapon against not only the Hispanic American republics but against the United States itself. Instead of leading the defense of sovereignty in the hemisphere, the United States under the Roosevelt doctrine abrogated to itself the right to “exercise of an international police power,” against any nation which failed to “act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, . . . keep order, and *pay its obligations*.” (emphasis added).

The truth is that as Brazil’s foreign minister, Rio Branco articulated a hemispheric alliance with the United States, to present Teddy Roosevelt’s policies as his own and to wreck every intent at legitimate hemispheric unity. The Roosevelt-Rio Branco alliance was easily accomplished, given the loyalties of both to England, particularly to the banking House of Baring.

In the framework of that hemispheric alliance, Rio Branco wrote a newspaper article, “Brazil, the United States and Monroeism,” which was circulated widely in both countries to justify alliance with what had previously been the hated United States. Now, the labels “barbarism,” or “cruel imperialism” which were quite valid for Teddy Roosevelt’s politics and his corollary, would give way to encomiums which he lacked the courage to sign except with his name disguised under the pseudonym, “J. Penn.” Rio Branco wrote:

The manifestations of reciprocal appreciation and friendship between the governments in Rio de Janeiro and Washington have been in recent years sometimes censored with much injustice and passion by some odd Brazilian publicists who presumed themselves to be genuine interpreters and propagandists of the political thinking of the statesmen of the Empire. [Self-criticism?—L.C.]

closer relations which Presidents Rodrigues Alves and Theodore Roosevelt promoted between Brazil and the United States. The censors showed themselves on several occasions to be disdainful of the Monroe Doctrine.

Throughout the document, Rio Branco strives to dem-

onstrate, deceptively, to his own pro-monarchic friends that there is a continuity between the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and the interventionist “Corollary” introduced by Theodore Roosevelt.

What this means concretely was made clear in 1902, when Venezuela was militarily threatened by a show of “gunboat diplomacy” by European powers to force it to pay its foreign debts. Rio Branco coordinated with Teddy Roosevelt to lead a counter-attack against the position of Argentine Foreign Minister Luis María Drago, who, resurrecting the original spirit of the Monroe Doctrine, organized a league of South American countries to defend Venezuelan sovereignty.

Against the Drago Doctrine, Rio Branco claimed it was not necessary to defend Venezuela, since the snares set by the European powers did not entail territorial conquest, but only were temporary measures to collect the debt. In a March 18, 1903 telegram, he reaffirmed his orientation to the ambassador of Brazil in Washington: “We must not enter into this as it is the desire of the President (Rodrigues Alves) and also my own for us to always be in agreement with the Washington government.”

From that time on, Brazilian foreign policy, headed by Rio Branco, became the keystone for the defense of the Roosevelt Corollary. In one of his dispatches to Washington in 1905, Rio Branco says:

I see no motive for the three nations of South America—Brazil, Chile and Argentina—to be bothered by the language of President Roosevelt and the former Secretary of War, his personal friend. Nobody will be able to say with justice that they are among the number of those misgoverned or turbulent nations which do not now have to make “good use of their independence,” or those on whom the stronger should apply “the right of expropriation against incompetent peoples,” a right proclaimed some time ago by the current President of the United States. The other Latin American republics which feel threatened by the “international policy” of the United States have the remedy in their hands: trying to choose honest and far-sighted governments and, through peace and efficacy in their labor, progress with riches and force.

The Brazilian posture against the Drago Doctrine persisted, so much that in the Third International American Conference, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1906, Rio Branco maneuvered the agenda to exclude any discussion of it, while stripping the meeting of any deliberation. On March 10, 1906, on instructing his old Anglophile and monarchist friend, Joaquim Nabuco, now Brazilian ambassador in Washington, on the Conference’s agenda, Rio Branco turned the offensive against Drago’s principles and in favor of Roosevelt:

We think that Monroeism will in general be accepted in order to declare all united around the idea

Drago's Financial Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine

The debt crisis of the turn of the century reached its climax in December 1902, when Germany, Italy, and Great Britain sent gunboats to blockade the ports of Venezuela, after Venezuela announced that it was unable to meet payments on its foreign debt on time. On Dec. 29, 1902, Argentine Foreign Minister Luis María Drago outlined, in a letter to Argentina's ambassador in Washington, "considerations with reference to the forcible collection of the public debt." These principles have since been incorporated into Western Hemisphere law as "the Drago Doctrine." Drago himself called the principles "the Financial Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine." Excerpts follow:

... The capitalist who lends his money to a foreign state . . . knows that he is entering into a contract with a sovereign entity, and it is an inherent qualification of all sovereignty that no proceedings for the execution of a judgment may be instituted nor carried out against it, since this manner of collection would compromise its very existence, and cause the independence and freedom of action of the respective government to disappear.

Among the fundamental principles of public international law which humanity has consecrated, one of the most precious is that which decrees that all States, whatever be the force at their disposal, are entities in law, perfectly equal one to another, and mutually entitled by virtue thereof to the same consideration and respect.

The acknowledgement of the debt, the payment of it in its entirety, can and must be made by the nation without

diminution of its inherent rights as a sovereign entity, but the summary and immediate collection, at a given moment, by means of force, would occasion nothing less than the ruin of the weakest nations, and the absorption of their governments, together with all the functions inherent in them, by the mighty of the earth. The principles proclaimed on this continent of America are otherwise. "Contracts between a nation and private individuals are obligatory according to the conscience of the sovereign, and may not be the object of compelling force," said the illustrious [Alexander] Hamilton. They confer no right of action contrary to the sovereign will.

... What has not been established, what could in no wise be admitted, is that, once the amount for which it may be indebted has been determined by legal judgment, it should be deprived of the right to choose the manner and time of payment, in which it has as much interest as the creditor himself, or more, since its credit and its national honor are involved therein.

This is in no wise a defense for bad faith, disorder, and deliberate and voluntary insolvency. It is intended merely to preserve the dignity of the public international entity which may not thus be dragged into war with detriment to those high goals which determine the existence and liberty of nations.

... If [forcible debt collections] were to be definitely adopted they would establish a precedent dangerous to the security and the peace of the nations of this part of America. . . . Such a situation seems obviously at variance with the principles many times proclaimed by the nations of America, and particularly with the Monroe Doctrine, sustained and defended with so much zeal on all occasions by the United States, a doctrine to which the Argentine Republic has heretofore solemnly adhered.

of impeding any colonial expansion or effort at European conquest on the continent, *making an exception from Monroeism the case of any temporary bellicose occupation as a reprisal and in defense of the offended honor or legitimate interests of any European nation.* We believe that not even the United States itself with its immense resources could efficiently exercise the friendly or paternal policy which it would like to exercise, except in the Sea of the Antilles.

Rio Branco against Ibero-American integration

In the same March 1906 communication to Nabuco, Rio Branco expressed his ideas against any action which would institute principles of sovereignty on the Ibero-American subcontinent:

The idea of an arbitration tribunal composed of Americans to oppose that of The Hague—where Americans do and could take part—seems unacceptable to us. It would suppose that America formed a world apart from Europe. To solve problems between the nations of South America, arbitrators chosen in North America and in Europe offer greater guarantees of impartiality. . . . With Hispanic-American arbitrators, Brazil, Chile and the United States would always come out badly. . . .

A general agreement of all the American nations is even more impossible than among the Europeans. The European concert is only now forming among the so-called great powers. We think that for an agreement in the general interest to be viable, it should only be tried between the United States of America, Mexico,

Brazil, Chile and Argentina. Since [they are] many, we would be supplanted by the many whenever any resolution had to be made.

Instead of a legitimate political and economic integration based on the principles of sovereignty and independence like that which several of the Hispanic American republics desired, Rio Branco promoted a geopolitical agreement which would be called the ABC Alliance, oriented not towards any positive principle whatsoever, but only to make permanent the new territorial borders in South America, which Rio Branco's previous efforts had shifted, consistently to the aggrandizement of Brazil. "I have already constructed the map of Brazil," he said. "Now my program is to contribute to unity and friendship among the South American countries."

His proposal for "A Treaty of Cordial Political Intelligence and Arbitration between the United States of Brazil, the Republic of Chile and the Republic of Argentina" (ABC Treaty) was presented in Petropolis on Feb. 29, 1909. It is an agreement for Rooseveltian détente two of whose articles read:

Article 4 . . . If the top contracting parties cannot reach agreement on choosing an arbitrator or arbitrators, the question under litigation will obligatorily be submitted to the arbitration of the Swiss Federal Council.

Article 7. None of the three contracting Republics can form with a fourth power an alliance against other signatories of the present treaty.

And who was behind the accord—which shows the true strength of Rio Branco's convictions—can be seen in the following declaration:

Brazil guarantees that there will not be discord in South America, nor protest in Peru (in relation to the matter of the Acre territory, claimed by that country); and that the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, and his minister, Mr. Root, will specially invite the Presidents of the ABC to accompany them with his presence in the coming inauguration of the Panama Canal.

It is useful to note here that Rio Branco was the architect of the recognition of Panama among the Hispanic American states. The mediation attempted by ABC during the Mexican Revolution in 1914 was rejected by the constitutionalist forces commanded by Venustiano Carranza as soon as he discovered the interventionist character of the ABC conferences at Niagara Falls.

'Uti Possidetis': a Soviet diplomatic enigma

But what makes Rio Branco most fascinating to today's Soviet imperial diplomacy, as shines through in the Martinov article, is his application of the principle of "uti possidetis," which permitted first the Viscount and then the Baron Rio

Branco to settle border conflicts with Brazil's neighboring countries. "Uti possidetis" is an immoral doctrine originating in Roman law, which Rio Branco applied without distinction to defend the thesis that the "natural" occupation of territory by Brazilian nationals was sufficient cause for decreeing to it the territory under litigation. This is absolutely congruent with the ideas that he held since he was a student, that there is an absolute separation between law and morality. "Kant," the Baron said, "made external freedom the basis of right and based morality on the internal."

What "uti possidetis" meant for Rio Branco, was sharply revealed when the Acre territory, belonging to Bolivia and recognized as such by Brazil, was decreed under litigation and its 200,000 square kilometers eventually incorporated into Brazil with the Petropolis agreement of 1903. Acre was critical for Anglo-American interests, since it produced 60% of all the rubber exported from the Amazon to Europe and the United States. Rio Branco put together separatist movements of Brazilians who had recently, in flight from the misery and hunger of Brazil's Northeast, emigrated to Acre to work in the rubber fields. For his plans, he made use of the cooperation of the Bolivian Syndicate, an Anglo-American company, which, as may have been guessed, was associated with the interests of the Roosevelt family and the House of Baring. And clearly, there was no lack of threats of total war against the weak Bolivian republic. Brazil cut off transit on the Amazon river, the only access route for Acre and much of Bolivia.

Perhaps the theft of Acre was the gift Roosevelt bestowed on Rio Branco (its state capital is now named Rio Branco) in exchange for his valuable services as a traitor to the Ibero-American cause. The Acre affair poisoned Brazilian relations with Hispano-America, bringing forth suspicions which last to the present day.

Yet Martinov defends the Brazilian annexation of nearly 600,000 square kilometers of land ("territory equivalent to the state of France," he acknowledges), as an "anti-imperialist" action, writing that "the policy, which throughout 14 years resolved border problems which had existed from colonial times, deprived the U.S. of an important instrument of domination!"

The "uti possidetis" doctrine developed by Rio Branco fits to a tee Soviet justification of the historic Russian territorial advance, even more so now given the current Western economic crisis as a new opportunity for the imperial expansion of Matushka Rus to achieve the dream of coming to be the Third Rome before the end of the second millennium of the Christian era.

Russian diplomatic flirting with Brazil, and the Martinov article is a characteristic part of that, seeks to achieve a rapprochement so that Brazil accepts cooperation with the Soviet "uti possidetis" in Africa, which would give it control over strategic minerals. Perhaps here is where the "enigma" of Soviet diplomacy is located and the cause of so much reverence for Theodore Roosevelt's little agent, Rio Branco.