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Transatlantic studies association roundtable on *Tacit Alliance: Franklin Roosevelt and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' before Churchill, 1937-1939*

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Featuring Tony McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance: Franklin Roosevelt and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' before Churchill, 1937-1939* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022; paperback, 2023).

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Introduction—Luca Ratti

Today, the formative years of an Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ continue to be primarily identified with the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during the central years of the Second World War. Historians and political scientists have somehow grown accustomed to the strength of Anglo-American ties which, despite their periodic ebbs and flows, continue to represent the quintessence of the transatlantic partnership. Nonetheless, Anglo-American relations have not been immune to undercurrents, as during the Suez Canal crisis, the Vietnam war, the final stages of the Cold War or, in more recent times, as a result of the US rebalancing towards the Indo-Pacific.¹ For London, this partnership has arguably brought more significance than for Washington. Tony McCulloch’s *Tacit Alliance* sheds light on a less celebrated but certainly no less crucial period of Anglo-American relations, focusing on the unfolding of the US–UK ‘special relationship’, as he carefully assesses the efforts of the second Roosevelt administration to bolster the resolve of the British government led by Neville Chamberlain in the run-up to, and in the immediate aftermath of, the eruption of World War II in Europe.

Contributors to this roundtable organised by the Transatlantic Studies Association and hosted by Lancaster University are all distinguished senior historians and political scientists with remarkable expertise in Anglo-American relations. Their analyses provide meaningful insights about the book’s objectives, rationale, structure, strengths, and key findings. They also highlight, however, with remarkable cognitive honesty its potential weaknesses and possible pitfalls. All of the discussants agree with the author that the late 1930s oversaw a significant rapprochement between the US and the UK, although they provide somewhat different interpretations of Roosevelt’s second term, that pre-dated the formal establishment of an Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War.

All participants in the roundtable also concur that the Roosevelt administration in general acted in the interests of the UK and France, as far as it could, given the strength of isolationist feelings in Congress and the need to avoid spooking US public opinion, while the repeal of the arms embargo clause in the Neutrality laws was debated. Much of the US government’s pro-British activism was deliberately played down so as not to arouse the wrath of Idaho’s senator William Borah—who coined the expression ‘tacit alliance’—and of his fellow isolationists, which would risk inflaming US public opinion against the revision of the Neutrality laws and any sign of deepening Anglo-American cooperation. Roosevelt and members of his administration were also careful not to acknowledge openly the partiality of revising the Neutrality laws in favour of the UK and France after the war had begun. Last but not

¹ William D. James and Greg Kennedy (eds), *Transatlantic Storms in Anglo-American relations* (Georgetown University Press: 2026); Luca Ratti, ‘The Anglo-American Special Relationship and West Germany’s Eastern Policy from ‘Bridge-Building’ and Vietnam to Ostpolitik’, *The International History Review*, Volume 43, Issue 3 (May 2021): 614–637; Alan Dobson and Steve Marsh, ‘Anglo-American Relations: End of a Special Relationship?’, *The International History Review*, Volume 36, Issue 4 (September 2014): 673–697; Alex Spelling, ‘A Reputation for Parsimony to Uphold’: Harold Wilson, Richard Nixon and the Re-Valued ‘Special Relationship’ 1969–1970’, *Contemporary British History*, 27 (2), 2013, 192–213.



least, all contributors to this roundtable acknowledge that, while this is a diplomatic history book, it represents a good example of the intersection between international history and international relations theory—as McCulloch implicitly delves into the strengths and weaknesses of neo-realist alliance theory—and of the synergies they can provide in making account of alliance patterns in world politics.

More specifically, the manuscript is a powerful reminder of the interaction between systemic dynamics—the unfolding background of international affairs in Europe and Japan’s revisionist strategies in the Far East against which the Anglo-American relationship was evolving—and unit-level and domestic variables, including the role of public opinion and decision-makers’ preferences, thus engaging also political scientists and international relations scholars. However, pure international relations theorists, particularly neo-realists, viewing alliances only as systemic outcomes, would not alone be able to capture the complexities of the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’. McCulloch’s historical analysis helps provide a much more sophisticated account, demonstrating how historical analysis which does not dogmatically eschew theory can help yield important outcomes also for political scientists. Among the variants of the realist analytical framework neo-classical realism is best suited to foster mutually reinforcing synergies between diplomatic history and international relations theory. Unlike neo-realism, neo-classical realism incorporates unit-level variables, and thus domestic politics, into a predominantly systemic framework, providing a more nuanced explanations of systemic outcomes, including patterns of alliance formation and evolution, as in the case of the US–UK relationship.² This variant of the realist analytical paradigm, shying away from neo-realism’s rigid analytical structures, indirectly provides a framework that accounts also for the impact of soft power, identity policies, public representations, and discursive practices on Anglo-American alliance dynamics.³ McCulloch’s book beautifully highlights the interplay and intricacies between the international and domestic variables, as he debates the hybrid strategies of the Roosevelt administration to accommodate the UK’s requirements in the face of the threats posed by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan, emphasising the role of personalities, such as the President himself and his advisors Sumner Welles, Henry Morgenthau, and William Leahy as well as the role of Canada’s Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, who worked hard to support the rapprochement between Washington and London. The role of public opinion in the UK is also discussed. In contrast with Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt was generally popular in Britain when war broke out because of his growing criticism of the ‘dictator states’ during the late 1930s.

² Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016); James Sperling, ‘Neo-classical realism and alliance politics’, in Mark Webber and Adrian Hyde Price (eds), *Theorising NATO: New Perspectives on the Atlantic Alliance*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–92; Gideon Rose, ‘Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy’, *World Politics*, 51 (1), 1998, 144–172; Michael Foulon, ‘Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities’, *International Studies Review*, 17 (4), 2015, 635–61.

³ Steve Marsh, ‘Public faces of the Anglo-American special relationship’, *Contemporary British History*, 40 (1), 2026, 155–176; Steve Marsh, ‘Anglo-American Relations and Soft Power: Transitioning the Special Relationship’, *The International History Review*, 2021, 43(3), 2021, 525–546; Srdjan Vucetic, ‘British national identity and the Anglo-American special relationship’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 14 (3), 2016, 272–292.



The UK's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain also played an important role, particularly in the aftermath of the Munich crisis and Germany's dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in early spring 1939. At the end of March 1939, FDR supported the British guarantee to Poland because it was a sign that Chamberlain was at long last focusing on deterrence rather than appeasement and thereby taking the kind of steps to 'quarantine the aggressor' that the President had called for in his Chicago speech in October 1937. Having robustly rejected a putative 'peace offer' from Hitler in the aftermath of Germany's invasion of Poland, Chamberlain wrote to Roosevelt on 8 November 1939 to thank him for securing the revision of the Neutrality laws, which the British had been seeking ever since they were first introduced in 1935, and which the Prime Minister acknowledged owed much to FDR's 'personal efforts and goodwill'. In conclusion the book will appeal to both diplomatic historians and political scientists, providing a powerful example of how history and political science, rather than competing methodologically, can supplement one another by fostering deeper understanding of complex social and political phenomena.

David Mayers (Roundtable Chair)

An internationally admired scholar, Professor Tony McCulloch has long been recognised on both sides of the Atlantic for his sure command of the history of Anglo-American–Canadian relations, World War II, US foreign policy, W. L. Mackenzie King's diplomacy, Great Britain at war in 1939–1945, and the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. On these inter-connected topics, McCulloch has produced numerous chapters in edited books and articles in learned journals. Pursuant to my own research/writing, and with absolute confidence in his judgement, I have looked to his findings, particularly on London–Washington dealings in the period before the Pearl Harbor attack swept the USA into the violence that had already scorched nations in Africa, Asia, and Europe.⁴ Needless to elaborate, several distinguished scholars have examined this and related subjects, among whom are Robert Dallek, Akira Iriye, Warren Kimball, Arnold Offner, David Reynolds, Mark Stoler, and D. C. Watt.⁵ All are rightly appreciated for the excellence of their work, but none is superior to

⁴ For example, David Mayers, *FDR's Ambassadors and the Diplomacy of Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵ Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979 and 1995); Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (London: Routledge, 1987); Akira Iriye, *The Globalizing of America, 1913–1945*. Volume III of *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Warren Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939–1941* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933–1938* (New York: Norton, 1968); Arnold Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War: American Foreign Policy and World Politics, 1917–1941* (New York: Praeger, 1975); David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937–41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Mark Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940–1945* (Lexington, Mass: Plunkett Lake Press, 2022); D. C. Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938–39* (London: William Heinemann, 1989).



McCulloch who has kept pace with this company, exemplified by his *Tacit Alliance*. Only recently published (paperback in 2023) by the prestigious University of Edinburgh Press, this monograph is the culmination of investigations that have informed McCulloch's publications through the years. This book has been worth the wait.

Tacit Alliance combines these elements: thorough research in archival collections (British, American, Canadian) and published government documents (including German); mastery of World War II historiography and literature; probing analyses; proper regard for IR theory; and crisp prose devoid of jargon and social science obfuscation. As to the book's central thesis, McCulloch's handling of FDR's perception of dangers congregating in Europe and the need for a sturdy Anglo-American working relationship (foreshadowing Churchill's famous 'special relationship' formula) is expertly done and convincing. The book's depiction of the June 1939 visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to the USA—ramifications and implications, and the impresario role assumed by Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King—is wonderfully drawn by McCulloch and adds texture and psychological depth to our understanding of the evolving Anglo-American relationship in the months before Germany's Polish invasion.

Quite apart from any author's intention, books have lives of their own (as an anonymous reviewer of one of my manuscripts recently noted). Invariably, readers make demands of a writer, which if realised by the author, would much amend, or even wholly alter, the book. With this in mind, the below comments are offered, made with respect for the breadth of coverage, richness of detail, and interpretative clarity that mark *Tacit Alliance*.

Woven into the book's fabric is McCulloch's assessment of Anglo-American relations as seen by German diplomats (posted to Washington and London) and senior veterans in Berlin's foreign ministry. Anxiety soared among these people as they viewed the successive stages of British-US cooperation ('tacit alliance'), itself the cumulative response to Nazi-orchestrated outrages (e.g. *Kristallnacht*) and Berlin's challenge to the international status quo. In contrast with the professional diplomats, who worriedly monitored the formation of Anglo-US feeling against Germany, was the galloping recklessness of Berlin ideologues; they disparaged the English-speaking democracies ('decadent') and dismissed as fanciful any idea that they (along with France) could combine effectively to check Germany. While McCulloch drills deep into this bundle of questions, he is less attentive to the equally fascinating matter of Japanese discernment/diagnosis of the Anglo-American arrangement as it developed in response to turbulent events in the Pacific and East Asia. The book would have possessed a somewhat greater geographical balance were more attention paid to the confrontation of the British Empire/USA with Imperial Japan and the way(s) in which Japanese diplomats thought about the budding 'tacit alliance'. For purposes of this round table, might McCulloch say a bit more about the nature of Anglo-US means and aims in the vast Asia/Pacific while Imperial Japan ventured ever deeper into a misbegotten land war (China, 1937 onward) and Tokyo bolstered its military/air assets and naval reach.

One of the impressive features of McCulloch's book is its close tracing of shifts in FDR's thought/policy as international emergencies cascaded. Installed in 1933 in the White House on the strength of voters' eagerness to escape the Great Depression,



Roosevelt by the end of his second presidential term was trying to nudge his reluctant compatriots into a firm stance (short of outright war measures) to contain immediate Axis aggressions and discourage future trespasses. In an important sense, in McCulloch's telling, FDR is the discerning and wise statesman who did far more than any of his British counterparts to stabilise Anglo-US relations and move them forward at the critical time. Fair enough, plausible enough, but I do have some concerns about this viewpoint. It is, to my thinking, too centred on FDR and does not adequately encompass the following.

American foreign policy in the late 1930s, as the case in every moment in US history, was inter alia the product of multiple forces (some underlying, others ephemeral), personalities, and ideas. Foreign policy was not then, or ever, coterminous with any one person, not even so looming a presence as FDR. Plainly, he played a giant role, but he was ultimately one actor among others who also had voices in conceptualising, making, and implementing policy. Moreover, FDR for all his political gift and infectious optimism, was not a systematic or deep thinker. The New Deal for which he tirelessly campaigned amounted to a series of improvisations and experiments, but it was not rooted in any blueprint or essential design devised by Roosevelt. Indeed, one of the traits of his personality, and attested to even by his thin paper trail, is the elusiveness of his mind. He was intellectually nimble, had a set of reflexes honed by experience (assistant secretary of the Navy in the Great War, governor of New York), and a general orientation, but he was not by temperament or education prone to asking and answering fundamental questions in the domestic or international arenas. This meant that he relied upon other people to help inform and sustain national policies, including those that dealt with security and diplomacy in the darkening 1930s. But *Tacit Alliance* gives short shrift to those people—the anti-isolationists—who were vital to the sculpting of a foreign policy that took seriously the dilemmas posed by Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany to Anglo-US–Canadian wellbeing. Roosevelt certainly gets due justice in McCulloch's narrative, but he was not alone in thinking about grand strategy or making sense of rapidly changing circumstances that impinged on the military, economic, social, and diplomatic careers of the West.

McCulloch does at times touch upon Sumner Welles, Henry Morgenthau Jr., and William Leahy, and the influence that they and their ideas exerted upon Roosevelt. But this is done rather lightly, not in a sustained analysis. Prominent public intellectuals at odds with the isolationists, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, do not appear in *Tacit Alliance*, and Walter Lippmann has only a cameo (p. 101). An excavation into the theories and concepts that circulated in contemporaneous think tanks, in high military/naval circles, leading political science departments, and among the likes of Lippmann and Niebuhr would reveal, I believe, something about the deeper origin of ideas that trickled into the White House and seeped into Roosevelt's outlook. He did not live in splendid isolation. Whence came his convictions about the balance of power, naval and air force innovations/technology, alliance formations, and the connective tissue between industry/economy and the distribution of usable power among nations?

Admittedly, to delve deeply into such questions would push the *Tacit Alliance* in directions tangential to McCulloch's main agenda. Such a dive into the intellectual



underpinning of FDR's international thought is, upon reflection, another book altogether. What McCulloch has done in his is to tell an intricate and significant tale with utmost authority and deftness. Still, in this roundtable he might speculate a bit about the underlying assumptions and varied sources that played upon FDR as he presided over US policy and as Germany and Japan strained to reshape the global order.

Gaynor Johnson—discussant

It has been my pleasure to know both Tony McCulloch personally and be familiar with his work for more than ten years. We are both scholars of British foreign policy between the two world wars, and few have done more than he has to remind us that the history of this period is about so much more than assessing the impact of the rise of fascism on Britain's role as a world power. That said, this is exactly what his new book is about, or at least one centrally important strand of that, Britain's relationship with the USA. We also share an interest in the career of the British ambassador to Washington during the entire 1930s decade, Sir Ronald Lindsay (1877–1945), about whom we have had many interesting informal conversations.⁶ And given that my colleagues on this round table have focused their attention on Professor McCulloch's view of the broad sweep of the Anglo-American relationship, it seems entirely in keeping with our academic exchanges if I focus instead on the microcosmic rather than the macro.

Lindsay's long stint—almost ten years—as British ambassador to the USA, came at the end of a long and varied diplomatic career, including a period as ambassador to Berlin (1926–1928) and Foreign Office Permanent Under Secretary (1928–1930).⁷ Few were more qualified therefore than he to represent British interests in the corridors of power of the world's newest Great Power. His tenure also broadly corresponded with the first two-thirds of the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, through the years of the New Deal and the growing diplomatic crisis in Europe and in the Far East. No foreign diplomat had greater access to Roosevelt during this period or possessed such a nuanced understanding of what made this most complex politician tick. Yet, apart from Professor McCulloch's book and my own work, little has been written about Lindsay's activities and thinking during this period. One of the main strengths of *Tacit Alliance* is that it does so much to explain the complex context to Lindsay's developing ideas about the future direction of the Anglo-American relationship.

⁶ Gaynor Johnson, 'Royal diplomacy: British preparations for the state visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to the United States, June 1939', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 32, Issue 2 (June 2021): 330–350.

⁷ The nearest we have to a biography of Lindsay is B.J.C. McKercher, 'Sir Ronald Charles Lindsay' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34545> On his period as Foreign Office Permanent Under Secretary, see T.G. Otte and K. Neilson, *The office of Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854–1946* (London: Routledge, 2008), pages various.



One of the most striking features of the portrayal of Lindsay in *Tacit Alliance* is the consistency of his style of diplomacy. His official role, of course, was to act as a conduit between the British and American governments and to proffer his opinion only when asked for it. One reason why Lindsay was so trusted by both governments was because he could be relied upon to be candid and frank. This comes across, especially in his discussion with Roosevelt in the wake of the *Panay* crisis (pp. 97–98). Parallel to this approach was Lindsay's frequent reference to continuity of approach over time and continuity in thinking. Again, in the wake of the *Panay* incident, which could have led to an escalation in military tension in Europe and in the Far East, Lindsay was keen to emphasise that Roosevelt's processing of the situation was calm and consistent. That he had been a supporter of the Allied cause in the years before the United States had entered the First World War, and that the President held similar opinions about the present escalating international crisis (p. 98).

Professor McCulloch's analysis also reveals that every time there was an increase in the diplomatic and military tension between the European Great Powers and the fascists dictators, there was often a brief crisis of confidence, especially in London, about the strength of Roosevelt's likely resolve should hostilities break out. The *Panay* crisis again. Here, we see further evidence of Lindsay's candour. He realised that in London, the President was viewed as 'mercurial and naïve' but that he was ultimately 'full of goodwill'. Lindsay, of course, realised, that the presence of goodwill on its own was likely to be of little comfort to the British government so he offered the Foreign Office some strategic advice on how to persuade the President to agree to offer more concrete American assistance. Gentle pressure applied consistently over time would, in Lindsay's view would yield positive results. But one point that *Tacit Alliance* does not make here is that Lindsay also knew how to present a strategy that would be acceptable to the Foreign Office and to the Foreign Secretary. At a time when the British government was proceeding with extreme caution in its dealings with its allies and potential enemies alike, advice from Washington that reinforced the advisability of this course of action was especially welcome. Lindsay was as much a Foreign Office 'man' as he was a serving member of the Diplomatic Service. On the one hand, he fully realised the British government's desire to secure a concrete promise of assistance from the USA in the event of the outbreak of another war in Europe. But he was also aware that the details of any agreement, should it be forthcoming, would have to be considered at length before agreement could be secured.

Another dimension to Lindsay's Washington embassy was the way he courted and reported the American press. *Tacit Alliance* touches on this point on a number of occasions, but perhaps more could have been made here of this aspect. In December 1937, Lindsay sent an editorial written by the influential American journalist, Walter Lippmann, in the *New York Times*, to the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden (p. 101). Lindsay was keen to dispatch it because the contents suggested that there were considerable synergies between British and American thinking about the growing crisis in Europe. But this was an unusual position for Lippman to take. Indeed, most of the American press, especially during the second half of Lindsay's embassy was openly hostile to the British government and to its diplomatic policies in Europe. For example, the portrayal of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth,



especially the latter, at the time of their State Visit to Washington in the summer of 1939. The American press corps would have much preferred a visit from the King's predecessor, his brother Edward VIII. Not least because his image was more attractive and because, in Wallis Simpson, he had a glamorous American wife.

The book is an absolute model of clear structure and fluently articulated prose. It is both erudite and engaging to read, and scrupulously researched. In the chapters, the prose is carefully signposted by subheadings that are always appropriate and helpful, and never intrusive. I also liked that *Tacit Alliance* frequently uses the same headings across a sequence of chapters, making it especially easy for any reader dipping into the book to locate material on a particular topic not only to find it but to be able to map the development of that theme or issue in the analysis. The one that particularly caught my eye was 'The View from Berlin'. Clearly, a book that is about the international relations of the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Second World War does not need to explain why the German perspective is important. That is not to imply a criticism of the author, he is not trying to teach his readers how to suck eggs. But the presence of that heading across several of the chapters did make me wonder what he made of the vista from other important capital cities at the time.

In particular, *Tacit Alliance* would have benefitted from more attention to the view from Paris, and possibly Moscow. I realise that this book is very specifically about the Anglo-American relationship, and that probably constraints of space did not allow for a consistent, wider contextualisation. But in some cases, it does need to be there, even in passing. One of the main reasons why the British government wished to curry favour in Washington for the policy of appeasement was because of the complex and often unsatisfactory relationship with France. Just how great an ally would France be should war break out again in Europe? And time would prove, that was, indeed, a very salient concern. The policy of appeasement, whether it is understood how it is described here as a policy of redressing legitimate grievances, or more widely drawn, was, for Britain, primarily either about French security needs or the maintenance of the *Entente Cordiale*. Neither the British nor the French governments felt willing, arguably able, to take a stand against the fascist dictators without the support of the other. Likewise, a reason for some of the British reluctance detailed in this book was the need to reassure the French of continued British support in the event of a closer rapprochement between Britain and the USA.

The 'View from Berlin' also had a particular relevance to Lindsay. Reference has already been made to the consistency of his approach during his Washington embassy; but that characteristic can be seen over a longer period of time. Lindsay had been ambassador to Berlin, 1926–1928, albeit several years before the rise of the National Socialists.⁸ During those years, he had warned the British government against taking a complacent view of German foreign policy, particularly how it related to the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles. In his view, the new Weimar constitution, while committed to democracy, was operated by politicians

⁸ Gaynor Johnson, 'Sir Ronald Lindsay and Britain's relations with Germany, 1926–1928', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 25, Issue 1 (March 2014): 77–93.



who still had a not always very secret hankering for the pre-1914 days of nationalist, authoritarian rule, and wished to see its return. As far as Lindsay was concerned, events of the following decade had proved him right. *Tacit Alliance* recounts several occasions when the strength of his views became apparent, despite the professional detachment that he was obliged to adopt officially. The most important is his reaction to the signature of the Hoare-Laval Pact in December 1935 (p. 29). Professor McCulloch is right in stating that it was a public relations disaster for the British government, and for the Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, in particular, as it could easily have ended his career in public life. And it is significant that not even the most revisionist historian writing on appeasement has attempted to pick over the bones of that sequence of events.

Lindsay's reaction to the Hoare-Laval Pact illustrates two important points. The first is that it marked him out as at best sceptical about a policy of appeasement, if not openly hostile to it. Second, that he believed that appeasing Mussolini was as wrong-headed and ill-advised as trying to appease Hitler. A reason why his position in Washington was so tenable was because there were important figures in London as well as on Capitol Hill who agreed with him, or should it be said that he agreed with them? In London, the most famous critic of the policy of appeasement was, of course, Sir Winston Churchill, but still in his 'wilderness years' on the periphery of British political life during Lindsay's embassy in Washington. Of greater significance to Lindsay were the views of the Foreign Office Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Robert Vansittart, who was trenchant in his opposition to appeasing Hitler, in particular. The views of Lindsay and Vansittart were central to influencing the thinking of the then Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that led, ultimately, to his resignation in 1938. *Tacit Alliance* mentions this dynamic in relation to the Hoare-Laval Pact, but only in passing elsewhere (pp. 41–42; 51; 66).

Importantly, Lindsay also found that Roosevelt shared many of his views about a policy of appeasement towards the fascist dictators. Although, he recognised that, while smoothing the path of many of his conversations with the President and the Secretary of State, especially Cordell Hull, this was not a line of argument that the Chamberlain government in London wished to hear. And there were occasions when Roosevelt was openly critical—often stridently so—of British policy towards the fascist dictators. For example, his response to the Munich Conference, when the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia was ceded to Germany. Indeed, it was the American government's response to this development that cemented the idea of a state visit from King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Both events are alluded to by Professor McCulloch, but more could have been made of their individual and collective significance.

The portrayal of Lindsay in *Tacit Alliance* has other points of significance. Like all diplomatic postings, his was a complex balancing act, especially as the government to which he was accredited took a different view of the deepening European crisis than the British government. A matter made more complex by his greater sympathy for the American position. The result from Lindsay was a far more nuanced exegesis of Roosevelt's diplomatic and political thinking than most other contemporary observers possessed, a matter also made possible by his close and regular access to the President. The fact was, Lindsay and Roosevelt got on; they liked and



trusted each other. *Tacit Alliance* makes this very clear. Lindsay knew that it was unlikely—even unthinkable—that Roosevelt would abandon Britain to fight the fascist dictators alone, or with the aid of the French. This can be seen especially in his reporting to London his various discussions about the different iterations of the American Neutrality Act. The concept of neutrality is clear and set out in international law, there is nothing ambiguous about whether a country is officially neutral or not, or intends to be, in the event of a war. Yet Lindsay consistently argued that even if the Act were passed, Roosevelt would not allow himself to be stymied by it should the British government require American economic or military assistance (p. 29). By March 1937, Lindsay was prepared to offer a definition of potential American neutrality that was *reductio ad absurdum*. It was, he argued, ‘of many colours’ (cited on p. 50). If a European war did occur, Lindsay believed that the American Neutrality Act would be amended if not scrapped altogether—one wonders why he thought the Act was necessary in the first place then, if that was the case.

A further point that Professor McCulloch makes is that, while the United States believed that American pressure could not prevent a war from occurring, scope was seen for a rather different role in the international crisis. That was a philosophical/ideological position as the power in the vanguard of those nations committed to democracy and to democratic ideals. I would be interested in knowing more about this line of argument. It is consistent with the justification for the United States involvement in the First World War and in the creation, at least, of the League of Nations. That is an important point of continuity but, as is well known, beyond that point, direct American commitment to uphold the democratic principles of the peacemakers at the end of that war becomes much more difficult to trace. Was that situation likely to occur for a second time? And in terms of Lindsay’s involvement in Anglo-American diplomacy in the years immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War, it is certainly a line of argument for which he had some sympathy (p. 50).

That said, Lindsay also believed that the situation within Washington was so finely balanced on this point that only the most careful handling from the British government was likely to yield concrete results from which Britain would directly benefit (p. 51; p. 108). However, diplomatic stability was not something that existed for long at that time. The Shanghai incident in January 1938 briefly contained the potential for a declaration of war by the United States on Japan. When the Foreign Office asked Lindsay for his view on the matter, he replied that he thought it unlikely. But he also said that, if an alternative course of action was contemplated in Washington, it would not be taken without first consulting the British government (p. 120). Another development that had the potential to upset Lindsay’s delicate diplomatic equilibrium was the emergence of Sir Neville Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin, as an apparent apologist for the German National Socialist government (p. 108; p. 121).

Quite apart from how we analyse Lindsay’s role in shaping Anglo-American diplomacy in the two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, it is important, in the final analysis, to return to the title of the book and the idea of a tacit alliance between Britain and the USA. The meaning of the word tacit is clear, the word alliance much less so. Historically, an alliance almost always involved some form of



military agreement. While undoubtedly there were those on both sides of the Atlantic who would have wished for that to be the case, most did not believe it possible, even necessary at this time. During this period, the character of the Anglo-American relationship had much in common with the first decade of the *Entente Cordiale* rapprochement with France. Scholars have struggled to define that term, but there is no satisfactory direct translation in English. Friendly agreement or understanding is about as close as it gets. Britain also concluded an *entente* with Russia in 1907. Could not the same description be applied to the Anglo-American relationship in the late 1930s? As was certainly the case in the French parallel, this notion of friendliness was not to imply that the relationship between Britain and France was always harmonious. The opposite was often the case, and if one reads the literature, there were occasions when the British *entente* with France appeared to cease to exist. But it never actually managed to break down completely. This was because the British and the French and the British and the Americans were ultimately united by more than divided them, and what united them were the kinds of issues Lindsay alluded to when discussing the idea of the USA as a bastion of democracy.

Christopher Kirkey—discussant

Tacit Alliance, by Tony McCulloch of University College London, asks readers to re-consider the timing and the primacy and role of key decision-makers in effectively shaping what came to be known, following Churchill's Fulton speech of 1946, as the so-called 'special relationship'. Challenging longstanding historical and political scholarship, McCulloch argues that the burgeoning, indeed deepening, relationship between the UK and the USA can be traced well prior to the onset of the Second World War on September 1, 1939, and that the critical figure in propelling the geostrategic courtship forward was President Franklin Roosevelt.

In support of his argument, McCulloch closely draws on the 1937–39 period, with special attention dedicated to efforts by the UK to enhance the London–Washington relationship, while noting changes in American, especially Roosevelt's, view of ever-increasing threats on the European continent posed by Nazi Germany. While there exists, as the author acknowledges, a 'veritable treasure trove of primary material relating to Anglo-American relations in the years 1937–39' (p. 300), it is clear that *Tacit Alliance* draws on an extensive array of impressive primary and secondary sources. The manuscript is simply not an overview or re-hash of historiography advanced by leading scholars (e.g. Kershaw, Steiner, Weinberg) but instead represents a fresh, original statement.⁹

⁹ Ian Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler* (London: Penguin, 2009); Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, I, Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933–36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, II, Starting World War II, 1937–39* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).



The remarks that follow, reflecting on the manuscript, are largely driven by one overarching consideration: how did, in the author's view, American policy towards the UK evolve, shift, or accelerate as a result of one singular (albeit, with multiple acts) event—namely, the partition and absorption of Czechoslovakia between September 1938 and March 1939. In sum, how was American policy towards the UK impacted by this critical development? More than any other issue or micro-period examined in the book, the question of the fate of Czechoslovakia should have been key to influencing the direction of UK–US relations.

The American response, postMunich agreement, McCulloch chronicles, can be best characterized in three ways. Recognizing that Neville Chamberlain's approach to dealing with Adolf Hitler's Germany was not sustainable, FDR and Washington were convinced that a heightened probability of war was in the short-term more likely than not. This recognition moved Washington to increasingly focus on the need to increase American domestic defence capacity and production. The third post-September 1938 prong of American policy was to move more closely to support or indeed align itself with London, including a November 1938 Anglo-American trade agreement. America's relationship with the United Kingdom in the post-March 1939 window, consistent with a desire to side with the UK, demonstrated a clear expression of America's commitment to the health and welfare of the United Kingdom (in an extended conversation on the evening of June 10) during the course of the Royal visit to see FDR at Hyde Park, NY. As noted by Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who participated in the talks, 'His [i.e. FDR's] whole conversation with the King was to the effect that every possible assistance short of actual participation in war could be given' (p. 218).

McCulloch's book makes a strong case that September 1938—as opposed to March 1939—proved to be the critical period in accelerating the growth in the UK-US tacit alliance. The author's narrative also sets forth a compelling argument that the London-Washington relationship, especially from September 1938 to the summer of 1939, is best understood as part of a larger evolving continuum, one that worked to cement the tacit alliance. The manuscript keenly observes that to a significant degree, the strength of the UK-US tacit relationship was a direct byproduct of 'Roosevelt's attitude to the worsening international situation' (p. 192). In short, geopolitical developments for Roosevelt shaped foreign policy choices.

Tacit Alliance arguably would have further benefitted from consideration and inclusion of existing scholarship in two areas. First, while macro geopolitical events, foreign policy considerations and diplomatic initiatives of 1938–39 are covered, greater attention—in other words, more detail—could have been paid (against which the UK–US relationship was evolving) to the unfolding background of international affairs in Europe. In addition to the accounts of Kershaw, Steiner, Weinberg and others, the manuscript would have proven more compelling had it considered Williamson Murray's account. More than anything, Murray provides a moving overview of the Czechoslovakian crisis that allows one to more fully understand Chamberlain's motivations and ultimately how the US White House view on the growing prospect for conflict—and the need to support the UK—was shaped. Chamberlain's actions and decisions were, in Murray's view, fundamentally responsible for accelerating the European crisis that gripped international politics in 1938–39. Chamberlain,



committed to diplomatic initiatives and ‘solutions’, Murray maintains, flatly ‘refused to acknowledge the inevitability of war with Germany... Chamberlain became enamoured by the illusion that diplomacy could deter Germany’.¹⁰ In addition, the *World Politics* essay offered by Alan Alexandroff and Richard Rosecrance, ‘Deterrence in 1939’, advances an exemplary short analytical account of the deteriorating international political environment in Europe in 1939. Of the strategic choices confronting the UK in late March 1939, the one opted for—i.e. the British guarantee to Poland on 31 March 1939—proved, in the view of the authors, to be an abject failure.¹¹ Britain’s lack of clarity in pursuing a meaningful deterrent policy vis-à-vis Germany helps explain its ever-increasing reliance on the UK–US ‘special relationship’.

The second area that would have advanced the arguments in *Tacit Alliance* would have been to draw on and incorporate the rich body of international politics scholarship devoted to examining the concepts of multipolarity and alliance formation. This is not a simple disciplinary quibble. Any comprehensive and persuasive study that principally focuses on the diplomatic history of foreign policy decision-making, which *Tacit Alliance* does, should also consider the importance of broader theoretical and empirical contextual influences—i.e. the prevailing number of great powers, balance of power considerations, and the incentives and constraints that impact the establishment and cohesion of alliances—that ultimately shape and impact the actions of nations. Indeed, the efforts by UK leaders to deepen America’s commitment to the bilateral relationship (one, a waning great power, the other a clearly emergent force) are symptomatic, in many respects, of state behaviour in a multipolar international environment.¹² Britain’s movement to strengthen ties with the USA was, in a multipolar world populated by several great powers, decidedly predictable.

The uncertainty and unpredictability of a multipolar environment—in the absence, up until September 1939, of an unequivocally defined threat and military aggressor to the balance of power on the European continent—also help to explain the unwillingness of the USA to enter into a deeper embrace with the UK. A multipolar world only further reinforces and incentivises the pre-existing predisposition of states who live in an anarchically structured world to shy away from cooperative partnerships. As Joseph M. Grieco observes, at their core ‘states are fundamentally disinclined to cooperate’.¹³ Alliance formation, especially the theoretical and empirical contributions of Stephen Walt, also suggests that what emerged between the UK and the USA between 1937 and 1939, could hardly be labelled a true

¹⁰ Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938–1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 283, 284.

¹¹ Alan Alexandroff and Richard Rosecrance. ‘Deterrence in 1939’, *World Politics* April 1977, 29 (3): 404–24, especially 409–414.

¹² See, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley, 1977), 161–72. A second useful contribution is Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹³ Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 6.



alliance, tacit or otherwise.¹⁴ A growing relationship, yes, but not—at least from the perspective of political science—an alliance. Such an alliance, F.H. Hinsley reminds us, only fully and ultimately materialised ‘because of his [i.e. Hitler’s] refusal to modify his policy of exploiting the international unbalance for aggressive ends’.¹⁵

David Haglund—discussant

Sometimes you can learn a lot about causality by examining chronology. By this I mean that the timing of a thing’s occurrence can tell us a good deal about *why* it occurred. The case of the Anglo-American alliance, the subject matter of Tony McCulloch’s fine book, *Tacit Alliance*, is apposite, in two senses.

First, is what timing has to tell us about who deserves to be considered the *real* moving spirit behind what may well have been the most important geostrategic institution in modern international relations, the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ (or, AASR).¹⁶ For nearly all scholars (and others) who have approached it—whether approvingly or otherwise—the AASR is associated with the memorable address delivered at Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946 by Britain’s wartime prime minister, Winston Churchill.¹⁷ And because Churchill gave it its name in Fulton, it follows to many that he must have been its creator, as well. Not so to Tony McCulloch; for him, it is *America’s* not Britain’s wartime leader who deserves to be remembered as the one who did the most to bring into existence the AASR.

The second, even more original and important, argument made in this book is that the AASR emerged a few years earlier than it is almost always thought to have emerged. And if we understand properly its chronology, we will have a better grasp of its cause; this, at least, is how I interpret the core thesis of McCulloch’s book.

Opposed to this is the ‘standard’ view, if one can so label it: that the AASR took shape only *after* the onset of the Second World War. How soon after September 1939 it appeared, remains a matter of debate, but for most adherents to that standard view (and I count myself among them) its origins have to be dated from either 1940 or 1941. McCulloch’s book bids us to rethink this chronology; for he holds the AASR not just to have been the work mainly of FDR, but also to have been something that began to see the light of day in the early months of 1937 and was more or less ‘culminated’ (p. 295) by the President’s prevailing upon Congress to lift the arms embargo in November 1939.

¹⁴ In particular, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), vi–49. An additional useful source is George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), chapter 1.

¹⁵ F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 334.

¹⁶ On this importance, see Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

¹⁷ See Alan Dobson and Steve Marsh, eds., *Churchill and the Anglo-American Special Relationship* (London: Routledge, 2017).



And this gets us to the most interesting critique of the book, starting with its title. The title is an appropriation of the disparaging comment made on 1 February 1938 by Idaho's isolationist senator William Borah, who was disturbed to learn that secret discussions were underway between American and British naval officers—discussions he took to be proof positive that the Roosevelt administration was in the process of forging a 'tacit alliance' with the British. Borah worried that this would guarantee a repeat of the mistake (as he and most Americans at the time saw things) made by Woodrow Wilson when he took the US into the First World War in April 1917.

That which so troubled Borah comes as a great comfort to McCulloch: what the senator disparaged, the scholar applauds. Agreeing with Borah on what was happening, McCulloch puts a positive rather than a negative spin on both FDR's words (mainly) as well as on a few of his actions. Yes, FDR *was* getting the US into a tacit alliance, and a good thing, too!

Now, while I agree with McCulloch that it was a very good thing that the two countries entered into an alliance during the war years and have remained, ever since NATO's founding in 1949, strong allies, I am not sure that the case for the AASR's establishment prior to the war is as solid as he wants it to be.

Consider that very Borah-esque title of his book. In most dictionaries, 'tacit' refers to something that is being 'expressed or carried on without words or speech'. But, of course, most of the 'action' McCulloch invokes as evidence of an alliance *ab ovo* consists in words not deeds—almost always the president's words, delivered in various settings and interpreted in various ways by listeners at the time. Now one can make the case that words *are* 'acts' (think of John Searle's speech-act theory),¹⁸ but one can also make the argument that in the crisis years between the onset of Roosevelt's second administration and the outbreak of the war, words never did prove to be enough, and that what the British really wanted from Washington, but had difficulty believing they would ever get, was *action*¹⁹ construed as the kind of policy behaviour that Stephen Walt sees as proof of alliance. For Walt, alliances do not need to be (and usually are not) brought into existence through treaties, but they do need to involve the reciprocal exchange of tangible benefits, rather than simply of words.²⁰

In the case of the AASR, those benefits began to appear in 1940, especially with the Destroyers-for-Bases 'deal', and in 1941, especially with Lend-Lease and, subsequently, convoying.

Perhaps a better choice of title for the McCulloch book might have been the 'latent alliance'. Again to revert to standard dictionary definitions (in my case

¹⁸ John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁹ This theme comes through 'loud and clear' in a book that takes a decidedly different position from the one advanced by Professor McCulloch—David Reynold's *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937–41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

²⁰ 'I define *alliance* as a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states. This definition assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties', Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 1.



Webster's Ninth New Collegiate), latent refers to something that has 'not yet come forth but may emerge and develop'. This seems an accurate enough way of capturing what was happening during the 1937 to 1939 period.

Of course, words were not all the Roosevelt administration was marketing; there was one very important 'act', which McCulloch takes as having been the culminating moment in the creation of the tacit alliance. That act was the lifting of the arms embargo in November 1939, enabling American weapons and other war matériel to reach the allies. The problem I have with construing this action as somehow proof of *alliance* is that between August 1914 and April 1917 there had been *no* American arms embargo in place to lift, and yet no one, and certainly not in British governmental circles, was imagining that the flow of American weaponry and other matériel made of the US an 'ally'. Relations were not good between the British and American governments prior to April 1917, and President Woodrow Wilson was hardly a revered figure in Britain, much less an ally, 'tacit' or otherwise.²¹

On a final note, of minor importance yet still something worthy of correction, McCulloch tells us (p. 32) that FDR's trip to Canada on 31 July 1936 was the 'first by an American President' to the country. This is not true, and I say this not to be captious but rather because in some ways it speaks to those knee woes of mine that have kept me from attending the conference in Lancaster at which the review of the McCulloch book initially took place. When in my earlier and less rational years I first became addicted to the joint-destroying practice of jogging, I would every afternoon run six miles along Vancouver's Stanley Park seawall and then plunge into the cold Pacific waters. Daily on my ordeal I would espy what I took then to be a curiosity: an elaborate memorial to America's twenty-ninth president, Warren G. Harding, near Coal Harbour. It was to me a curiosity, because this was not a president whom Americans themselves had made any fetish of memorialising. Outside of his birthplace of Marion, Ohio, no one in the USA has bothered to erect any monument to Harding. But Vancouverites did see fit to do so, in recognition of the president's address in their city on 26 July 1923, a week before his sudden death, in San Francisco.

Tony McCulloch response

I was naturally gratified when David Haglund proposed that a roundtable discussion should be held at a Transatlantic Studies Association conference to discuss my book, *Tacit Alliance: Franklin Roosevelt and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'*

²¹ For British views on Wilson's leadership during the neutrality period, see Sterling I. Kernek, 'Distractions of Peace During War: The Lloyd George Government's Reactions to Woodrow Wilson, December 1916–November 1918', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 65 (April 1975): 7–27; Kernek, 'The British Government's Reactions to President Wilson's 'Peace' Note of December 1916', *Historical Journal* 13 (December 1970): 721–66; and Wilton B. Fowler, *British-American Relations, 1917–18: The Role of Sir William Wiseman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).



before Churchill, 1937–1939.²² A distinguished international panel was duly assembled from the UK, the US, and Canada—and the roundtable took place at the TSA conference held at Lancaster University in July 2024. It was chaired by David Mayers and commentaries were also provided by Gaynor Johnson and Christopher Kirkey as well as David Haglund. I have found each of the points made by the discussants to be very useful insights and I am bearing them all in mind while finalising a prequel to *Tacit Alliance* that examines Anglo-American relations during FDR's first term as President, provisionally entitled *Bombshell Diplomacy: Franklin Roosevelt and the Hidden Origins of the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship', 1933–37*.²³

The panel of discussants comprised two historians—Professors Johnson and Mayers; and two political scientists—Professors Haglund and Kirkey. As I see it, the main criticism of the book, primarily by the political scientists, was my use of the term 'tacit alliance' to characterise the rapprochement between Washington and London that took place in the late 1930s. They did not think that the term was justified by the state of the Anglo-American relationship at that time and argued that I should have made use of 'alliance theory', especially Stephen Walt's definition of an alliance as 'a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states'.²⁴ I am leaving my response to this point until the end, although I should point out early on that 'tacit alliance' was the term used by Senator William Borah in February 1938 to describe what he suspected was a secret understanding between the Roosevelt administration and the British government of Neville Chamberlain to co-ordinate their response in the event of conflict with Japan. I decided to adopt it as the title of the book as I felt then, as I still do now, that while somewhat wide of the mark in February 1938, it had become a valid assessment by November 1939 when the arms embargo element of the US Neutrality laws was finally repealed—an action that was very much in favour of Britain (and France) and that the Roosevelt administration had been pursuing for several years (pp. 289–296).

Turning to the other points made by the discussants and starting with the historians, I was pleased that David Mayers, who chaired the Lancaster University roundtable, pointed out the significant Canadian dimension in *Tacit Alliance*. I have been of the opinion for many years that Canada's role in Anglo-American relations during the 1930s has been under-estimated and often ignored—especially by historians outside Canada and sometimes even by those within.²⁵ As *Tacit Alliance* makes clear, the part played by Canada and especially William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister from 1935 until 1948, in facilitating the rapprochement

²² Tony McCulloch, *Tacit Alliance: Franklin Roosevelt and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' before Churchill, 1937–1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022; paperback, 2023).

²³ The 'Bombshell' reference is to the so-called Roosevelt 'Bombshell' message sent by FDR to the London Economic Conference in July 1933 which had a major influence on Anglo-American diplomacy for the remainder of his first term.

²⁴ Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 12–13.

²⁵ A notable example of a leading work that largely ignores the Canadian role in Anglo-American relations in the 1930s is Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, which does not mention Mackenzie King before June 1940 and refers to Canada—in the general context of the British Empire—only once before that date.



between London and Washington in 1937–39 was important in several ways. Firstly, following his re-election in October 1935 he quickly finalised a trade agreement between Canada and the United States that opened the way for the later Anglo-American trade agreement in November 1938. Secondly, he used his position as the Prime Minister of the senior British Dominion and the leader of the United States northern neighbour, to act as a ‘bridge’ between London and Washington on divisive issues such as appeasement as well as trade relations. Thirdly, he was instrumental in notifying Roosevelt of the planned British royal visit to Canada in the summer of 1939 which resulted in a royal detour to Washington D. C. and New York in June 1939 and significant personal meetings between FDR and George VI at the Roosevelt family home at Hyde Park, in upstate New York. Mackenzie King was present during these meetings, which he recorded in great detail in his diary, as was his custom (pp. 285–287 and 301).²⁶

Professor Mayers also noted the attention paid in the book to what I called the ‘view from Berlin’, meaning primarily the attitude of the *Auswärtiges Amt*—the German Foreign Ministry—as informed by the despatches from the German Embassy in Washington during the ambassadorships of Hans Luther (1933–37) and Hans Heinrich Dieckhoff (1937–38). From January 1937 these reports warned that the US President was deeply hostile to Hitler’s Germany and was doing his best to persuade the British government that a more robust stand had to be taken against Nazism. Furthermore, they realised that Roosevelt was committed to a revision of the US Neutrality laws in favour of Britain by securing the repeal of the arms embargo. The German Foreign Ministry also feared that FDR was aiming for a strategic understanding or ‘tacit alliance’ with the British government, but Hitler showed little interest in such views until Britain and France declared war in September 1939. After that, German policy towards the United States was to avoid any action that might allow Roosevelt to abandon American neutrality (pp. 287–288).

The focus on German policy in *Tacit Alliance* was an important part of my argument that FDR wanted the German government to believe that there was a secret understanding between London and Washington and that the United States would sooner or later enter a war in Europe, as it had done in 1917. But the attention that I devoted to this important point undoubtedly reduced the space available for the discussion of the attitudes of the other major powers during the late 1930s. Professor Mayers would have liked greater attention to the role of Japan and the importance of the Far East in Anglo-American relations at this time. This is a very fair point and, if space had permitted, I would have included much more about the ‘view from Tokyo’ and the way in which Anglo-American differences in outlook towards the perceived threat from Japan were gradually reduced, especially after the London Naval Agreement in March 1936 which Japan refused to join. I agree that Imperial Japan was an important player in the foreign policy outlook of both the Chamberlain government and the Roosevelt administration, although not as important as Nazi Germany which, I believe, was regarded as the number one threat to international peace in Washington as well as in London. *Bombshell Diplomacy* will include a much fuller

²⁶ See also Tony McCulloch, ‘A royal visit revisited: Mackenzie King and the British royal visit to the USA, June 1939’, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 36, no. 1 (spring 2024): 73–98.



examination of the role of Japan in Anglo-American relations during Roosevelt's first term, from the aftermath of the Manchurian episode in 1931 until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, than the brief discussion provided in *Tacit Alliance* (pp. 71–74 and pp. 85–87).

Professor Mayers also thinks that I have focused too much on FDR and ignored to some extent both his weaknesses and his reliance on others, especially the 'anti-isolationists' who advised him and influenced his thinking. While he notes that the book includes reference to the parts played by Sumner Welles, Henry Morgenthau and William Leahy, he points out there is little mention of Walter Lippmann and none of Reinhold Niebuhr. I certainly agree that Welles, Morgenthau and Leahy all played important roles in their specific areas of concern—diplomacy, finance and naval power—and I would have liked to have said much more about all of them. The deeper dive into the intellectual underpinnings of internationalist thought in the United States in the 1930s will have to wait until *Bombshell Diplomacy* or another book. As regards the role played by Lippmann, who was obviously one of the most significant commentators on US foreign policy during Roosevelt's presidency, I decided instead to focus on the views of the prize-winning journalist Arthur Krock, as—unlike Lippmann—he specifically discussed Borah's accusation that Roosevelt was forming a 'tacit alliance' with Britain in several of his columns for the *New York Times* (pp. 118–120). I am less convinced about Niebuhr's influence on Roosevelt in the 1930s as he did not support FDR's foreign policy until after the Munich crisis and, more especially, after the outbreak of war. However, I agree that he played an important part in the intellectual opposition to Nazi Germany from the early 1930s, which is a topic I will explore further in *Bombshell Diplomacy*.²⁷

I appreciate that the focus in *Tacit Alliance* on FDR's personal role in US foreign policy during his second term might give the impression that I am subscribing to the 'great man' view of history. This was certainly not my intention, although like many of my peers I regard Franklin Roosevelt as one the great US presidents, if not the greatest, especially in terms of his foreign policy and wartime leadership.²⁸ But there were many influences at work upon his foreign policy, both domestic and international, some of which dated back to his experience in Wilson's administration during the First World War, when he was an early advocate of greater US preparedness before 1917. *Tacit Alliance* refers to the influence on Roosevelt of several key players in the administration, especially Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State and Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, who along with Henry Morgenthau, the Treasury Secretary, I see as the main influences on the President's thinking from within his cabinet. The Republicans Henry Stimson and Frank Knox were also influential as anti-isolationists, even before they joined his cabinet in 1940. So too were Roosevelt's various ambassadors, as Professor Mayers has himself eloquently

²⁷ On Niebuhr's outlook in the 1930s see William Imboden, 'The Prophetic Conflict: Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism, and World War II', *Diplomatic History*, Volume 38, Issue 1 (January 2014): 49–92.

²⁸ Tony McCulloch, 'Simply the Best: FDR as America's Number One President' in Michael Cullinane and Claire Elliott (eds), *Perspectives on Presidential Leadership: An International View of the White House* (London: Routledge, 2014), 113–131.



explained, and *Tacit Alliance* especially mentions the roles of Norman Davis (ambassador-at-large), William Phillips (Rome), and Robert Bingham—Joseph Kennedy’s predecessor in London.²⁹

The book also points out the significance of FDR’s wider international network amongst foreigners, whether old friends or recent acquaintances. As well as the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King and John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor General of Canada, this network included several well-connected British friends from the First World War, such as Arthur Willert, who was the chief US correspondent of the London *Times* from 1910 to 1920 and acted as the secretary of the British War Mission in Washington, and the representative of the British Ministry of Information, after the US entered the war. Especially important was Arthur Murray, another friend from the First World War, who was a member of the British embassy in Washington when Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Wilson administration. Murray was a former Liberal MP and had been the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary at the outbreak of the war. It was Murray who arranged for his former Liberal colleague, Walter Runciman, the British Trade Secretary, to make a highly significant visit to Washington in January 1937 (pp. 40–47).

Gaynor Johnson has written extensively on Anglo-American relations in the interwar period, especially the role of Sir Ronald Lindsay who was ambassador to Turkey, 1925–26 and to Germany 1926–28 before returning to the Foreign Office as the Permanent Under-Secretary, 1928–1930, and serving as ambassador in Washington 1930–39. We both agree that Lindsay’s significance in the formulation of British foreign policy between the wars was exceptional and was influenced by his time in Berlin and as Permanent Head of the Foreign Office as well as his very long tenure as Britain’s ambassador in Washington. We also agree that his influence was invariably positive, although Professor Johnson would like more focus on his skilful reporting of FDR’s actions and policies to London and the close attention he paid to the US press, including the views of Walter Lippmann. I would only add that Lindsay was a very reserved character who was not always at ease with the public relations side of diplomacy, especially dealing with the American press, although he appears to have risen to the occasion when the royal visit attracted huge attention in Washington and New York in June 1939 (pp. 221–223).

Like David Mayers, Professor Johnson notes the detailed attention paid in *Tacit Alliance* to the ‘view from Berlin’. But whereas he points out that the role of Japan merited more attention she would like the view from Paris and Moscow to receive more analysis. Again, this is a very fair point in a work of international history and, in the case of Paris, one echoed by Andrew Williams in his review of the book in *The Round Table*.³⁰ Of course, there is a limit to how many different government

²⁹ Mayers, *FDR’s Ambassadors and the Diplomacy of Crisis*.

³⁰ Andrew Williams, *The Round Table*, Volume 114, Issue 2 (April 2025), 208–210. Other reviews of *Tacit Alliance* include those by Hector Mackenzie, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Volume 35, Issue 1 (March 2023), 89–90; and Christopher Catherwood, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 35, Issue 1 (March 2024), 225–226.



perspectives can be included in any one monograph and my focus on the ‘view from Berlin’ as well as the viewpoints of London, Washington DC and Ottawa inevitably reduced the space available for more detailed examination of French, Soviet and Japanese policies. Having said which, the book did include analyses of the international context of Anglo-American relations during episodes such as the Spanish Civil War, the Sino-Japanese War and the Nazi-Soviet pact (pp. 71–74, 74–78, 240–242).

As befits a political scientist, Christopher Kirkey devotes most of his review of *Tacit Alliance* to an examination of the Anglo-American relationship in the late 1930s from the perspective of alliance theory. In less theoretical terms, he would have liked the book to pay greater attention to the background of international affairs in Europe’ against which the Anglo-American relationship was evolving. Again, I am happy to concede this point, and the secondary sources he mentions that examine the evolution and outcome of Chamberlain’s policy during the Munich crisis would no doubt have been useful additions to my analysis of Anglo-American relations in the wake of Munich. However, as *Tacit Alliance* makes clear, the brittle nature of the Munich Agreement and the view in Washington that it would not last were both evident long before the German invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 (pp. 169–187).

In the book, I explain in some detail how, immediately after Munich, Roosevelt held crisis talks with members of his administration such as William Bullitt who travelled to Paris to make contact with the French authorities while the President asked his trusted Scottish friend, Arthur Murray, to meet on his behalf with Chamberlain himself to reassure the Prime Minister of Roosevelt’s support in the event of war. FDR favoured the British guarantee to Poland at the end of March because it was a sign that Chamberlain was at long last focusing on deterrence rather than appeasement and thereby taking the kind of steps to ‘quarantine the aggressor’ that the President had called for in his Chicago speech in October 1937. So while I agree with Professor Kirkey and the other discussants that, space permitting, it would have been useful to include more context on the international situation in Europe and the Far East I do not think that I could have said much more about the significance of the Munich crisis in *Tacit Alliance*, especially as I have discussed this topic several times in other publications.³¹

David Haglund also brings the perspective of a political scientist to his assessment of *Tacit Alliance*. But, like Professor Kirkey, he has a keen eye for historical detail as well and he points out an error on my part when that I said that FDR’s trip to Quebec City on 31 July 1936 was the first by an American president to Canada, whereas Warren Harding had visited Vancouver in July 1923, as part of his ‘Voyage of Understanding’ tour. After departing from Alaska on the USS Henderson and stopping off in British Columbia, Harding gave a speech in Vancouver, before continuing to Seattle and San Francisco, where he died suddenly on 2 August. In my defence, I referred to FDR’s 1936 trip to Canada as the first ‘official visit’ by an American president but, strictly speaking, Harding’s was also an official visit, albeit at the provincial level and without meeting the Governor-General or Prime Minister.

³¹ For example, Tony McCulloch, ‘Mackenzie King and the North Atlantic Triangle in the Era of Munich, 1937–39’, *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, Volume 36. 1 (Autumn 2021), 3–29.



Even so, a message from Mackenzie King, who had first become Prime Minister in December 1921, was read out before Harding made his own speech. However, FDR's was the first 'state visit' by an American president to Canada and he met both the Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir, and the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King while in Quebec (p. 32).

This brings us to the issue of alliance theory and whether 'tacit alliance' is an appropriate term for the closer relationship between London and Washington that had developed between January 1937 and November 1939. All of the discussants accept that there was indeed a rapprochement between the two governments during Roosevelt's second term that pre-dated their alliance during the Second World War. The two historians appear to be more convinced, although Professor Johnson believes that 'entente' would be a better description than 'tacit alliance'. However, Professor Kirkey dismisses the term altogether while Professor Haglund suggests that 'latent alliance' would be a better term. As their starting point, both political scientists refer to Stephen Walt's definition of an alliance as 'a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states'. I am well acquainted with Walt's work which has featured in my classes at UCL on the Anglo-American relationship for many years, alongside other well-known works such as Glenn Snyder's *Alliance Politics*. In fact, I included a section on alliance theory in my original book proposal for *Tacit Alliance* to Edinburgh University Press, but the reviewers did not consider it to be necessary in what already promised to be a very detailed work.³²

I remain convinced that the term 'tacit alliance' to describe the nature of the Anglo-American relationship in November 1939 is perfectly compatible with Walt's definition of an alliance, especially as he goes on to say that he deliberately does not distinguish between formal and informal alliances and that he uses the terms 'alliance' and 'alignment' interchangeably throughout his book. Another reason I believe that Walt's view of alliances supports my interpretation of Anglo-American relations during Roosevelt's second term is that, unlike Kenneth Waltz for example, he argues that alliances are primarily a response to the 'balance of threat' rather than 'the balance of power'.³³

In the context of the 1930s, this theory suggests that an alliance to contain the rising power of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan—the 'Axis powers'—would have started to form when the threat that they posed was first perceived by the democratic powers. In the case of Germany, the threat posed by the Nazi regime was clear to some contemporaries, notably Churchill, from 1933 but it became clearer still after the announcement of rapid German rearmament and the introduction of conscription in March 1935, not least in Washington DC where Roosevelt confided to William Phillips, the Under-Secretary of State, that the USA might need to intervene against Germany in the future. It became very clear, even to the Chamberlain government, after the annexation of Austria, the Munich crisis and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938–39. In my opinion Walt's 'balance of threat'

³² Walt, *Origin of Alliances*; Snyder, *Alliance Politics*.

³³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.



argument provides a strong theoretical underpinning for my thesis of an Anglo-American ‘tacit alliance’ evolving between January 1937 and November 1939.³⁴

Walt’s definition of an alliance, whether formal or informal, ‘assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties’. Professor Haglund challenges my argument that the repeal of the US arms embargo in November 1939—rather than, say, the ‘destroyer-bases’ agreement in September 1940—should be regarded as the first major action accomplished by the Roosevelt administration that signalled the arrival of what Churchill later called the ‘special relationship’. He doubts that this event was significant enough to justify the term ‘tacit alliance’ as there had been no arms embargo in place from August 1914 to April 1917 and ‘no one, and certainly not in British governmental circles, was imagining that the flow of American weaponry and other matériel made of the US an “ally”’. In addition, he says, Anglo-American relations were very strained during the First World War before April 1917, and Wilson was not a popular figure in Britain, ‘much less an ally, “tacit or otherwise”’.³⁵

However, I do not think that the comparison between 1914–1917 and 1937–1939 supports this interpretation. The absence of a wartime arms embargo from 1914 to 1917 meant that it was not a major issue in Anglo-American relations at that time in contrast to the period 1937 to 1939 when British involvement in a European war was becoming increasingly possible. Moreover, unlike Wilson in 1917, Roosevelt was generally popular in Britain at the start of the Second World War because of his growing criticism of the ‘dictator states’. Furthermore, unlike Wilson in August 1914 FDR said that he could not ask Americans ‘to remain neutral in thought’ as well as in action as ‘even a neutral has a right to take account of facts’. Nor do I agree that Roosevelt’s partiality was largely confined to words. That may have been true of the period before September 1939 but from the outset of the war he acted in various unneutral ways—ways that were by no means confined to his efforts to repeal the arms embargo or to his secret message of support to Chamberlain, as well as to Churchill, at the outset of the war—the former message often being overlooked (pp. 251–259).

For example, Roosevelt’s neutrality proclamations in September 1939 called for an increase in US armed forces, especially the navy, and the redeployment of about 40 decommissioned destroyers. These ships were to form the backbone of the ‘destroyer-bases’ deal with Britain in September 1940. US destroyers and cruisers patrolling the Atlantic also provided intelligence to British warships on the whereabouts of several German raiders in the early days of the war. The Roosevelt administration in general acted in the interests of Britain and France, as far as it could, given the strength of isolationism in Congress and the need to avoid spooking US public opinion while the repeal of the arms embargo was being debated. While German interests received hostile treatment from various US departments, Cordell Hull and the State Department set about establishing ways to reduce potential points of

³⁴ Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, vi–viii and 5–11, for Walt’s emphasis on the ‘balance of threat’ being more important than the ‘balance of power’ for alliance formation.

³⁵ Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 1, for alliance commitment and mutual benefits.



friction resulting from the British naval blockade which proved to be largely successful in making the blockade much less of an issue than it had been during the First World War. Hull also refused a request from the German embassy to join with the other neutral states in complaining about the British blockade (pp. 257–260).

Further evidence from across the Atlantic of an evolving ‘tacit alliance’ can be seen in the fact that a British purchasing commission arrived in Ottawa on 1 October, following approval by the War Cabinet shortly after the declaration of war. The head of the commission, John Greenly, also made an unofficial visit to Washington DC in the middle of October where he met Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury, who had been appointed by Roosevelt to be in charge of the US side of the purchasing process which, following the repeal of the arms embargo in November 1939, was to take the form of ‘cash and carry’. Morgenthau made it clear that the British commission should keep its account at the Federal Reserve Board, rather than a private bank such as J P Morgan and Co which was used in the First World War, and that the President wanted to be kept informed on a weekly basis. Once the arms embargo was repealed it was announced that a British Supply Board was being established to oversee purchases in Canada and the United States. Arthur Purvis, a Canadian businessman, was appointed as the Director-General of Purchases in the United States. Morgenthau and Purvis quickly developed an excellent working relationship, despite the small number of British arms purchases before April 1940 (pp. 270–274).

The description ‘competitive cooperation’ coined by David Reynolds is accurate enough for some periods of the Anglo-American relationship, but it is an inadequate guide to the rapprochement that was taking place between the governments in Washington and London—and indeed Ottawa—in the late 1930s.³⁶ Much of this activity was being deliberately played down so as not to arouse the wrath of Borah and his fellow isolationists which would risk inflaming US public opinion against the revision of the Neutrality laws and further Anglo-American cooperation. As Arthur Krock pointed out during the debate in Congress on the repeal of the arms embargo, Roosevelt and members of his administration were being careful not to acknowledge openly the partiality of revising the Neutrality laws in favour of Britain and France after the war had begun, even though it was obvious to all—not least in Berlin—that this was the case (pp. 269–270). Indeed, after the lifting of the arms embargo a despatch from the German Foreign Ministry to the embassy in Washington complained that the United States, ‘while posing as a neutral country, had in practice abandoned neutrality’ (pp. 276–278).

Equally, British ministers and officials were for the most part very careful not to celebrate the repeal of the arms embargo in public, so as not to provide ammunition for isolationist senators like Borah, although British newspapers were less circumspect in pointing out that the arms embargo repeal was very much in the interests of Britain and its allies. In contrast to Labour and Liberal MPs, who were generally optimistic about future support from Roosevelt, many of these government ministers and officials—although by no means all—had been sceptical about the prospects of

³⁶ Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 283–294.



anything practical emanating from the United States prior to September 1939. The most sceptical of all was Chamberlain himself. But, having robustly rejected a putative ‘peace offer’ from Hitler a month earlier, he wrote to Roosevelt on 8 November 1939 to thank him for securing the revision of the Neutrality laws, which the British had been asking for ever since they were first introduced in 1935, and which the Prime Minister acknowledged owed much to FDR’s ‘personal efforts and goodwill’ (pp. 266–267). Over the next six months there were to be many more examples of the personal efforts and goodwill of Roosevelt and his administration on behalf of the British during what Borah misleadingly called the ‘phoney war’. Borah’s warning of an Anglo-American ‘tacit alliance’ had also been somewhat misleading in February 1938, but by November 1939 it was fully justified.

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