

On the Periphery of the Russo-Japanese War  
Part III

Utsunomiya's Views on British Army Reform

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Could the Russo-Japanese War have been prevented by British  
Diplomacy?

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## Preface

This discussion paper is a continuation of the two previous pamphlets which appeared under the title, 'On the Periphery of the Russo-Japanese war'. A special symposium on this topic was held in the Morishima Room on 8 March 2008.

The first paper is by Mrs Oyama, a researcher on Anglo-Japanese relations who is currently co-operating in a project to publish the papers of General Taro UTSUNOMIYA, the Japanese military attache in London, 1901-5. Utsunomiya observes the plight of the British army after the South African war and takes part in the debate in army circles about introducing universal military service.

The second paper deals with the controversial topic of whether Japan went to war with Russia in 1904 because of her own national interest or was pushed into the war by her ally, Britain. It answers the question in the negative and argues that the British government were maintaining a policy of neutrality, both before and during the war. The paper was presented at the Fifty Year Anniversary Conference of *Kokusai Seiji Gakkai* (Japanese Association for International Relations, JAIR) which was held at Kisarazu, Japan in October 2006. It has already appeared in Japanese translation.

### Keywords

Oyama paper: General Utsunomiya; Lord Roberts; Anglo-Japanese alliance, *The Morning Post*; Imperial Defence; Repington; Russia; Joseph Morris; Afghanistan

Nish paper: Manchuria, Korea; Russia; Balfour; Selborne; Lansdowne; Hayashi; Komura; Chilean Battleships; Argentinian cruisers

# UTSUNOMIYA'S VIEWS ON BRITISH ARMY REFORM, 1905

Mizuyo Oyama

## Introduction

One of the historical sources that has become available to researchers in Japan is the archive of General Taro UTSUNOMIYA, the military attache at Japan's London legation from 1901 to 1905. His diaries have been published in Tokyo by Iwanami Shoten, in three volumes (1). Sadly that portion of his diaries which cover his posting in London during 1904-5 are missing; and so his important role as attaché during the Russo-Japanese war is unclear. It is, however, fortunate for researchers that the Utsunomiya archive includes boxes of his miscellaneous belongings and records, such as personal letters addressed to him, his hand-written drafts on various subjects, mainly military matters, counterfoils of the chequebooks which he used in London. (2)

Utsunomiya (1861-1922) was an officer from the Saga (Nabeshima) clan at a time when most senior Japanese staff officers were drawn from the Choshu clan. He was in competition with the mainstream from Choshu throughout his military career. He attended Military College for two years from November 1888 and completed the course as one of the best graduates.

After some years' service in India, China and Taiwan and with the Japanese armies in China during the Boxer Uprising of 1900, Colonel Utsunomiya was posted to London as military attaché in 1901. He was therefore a witness to the signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance on 30 January 1902 and played a role in the military-naval talks between Britain and Japan held at Winchester House, London, in July 1902. There he worked in association with General Yasumasa FUKUSHIMA who had come from Japan specially for these top-level talks and was to become a major force in the Japanese army during the Russo-Japanese war.

Some of the materials in the Utsunomiya archive depict his comings and goings in the Japanese campaign for subverting the Russian war effort carried out by Colonel Motojiro AKASHI. They suggest that his involvement in that campaign was more important than has been widely believed. He travelled several times to the continent to meet European activists who were working against Russian tsarism. (3)

During his posting in London, Utsunomiya became embroiled in the various debates on the reform and manning of the British army following the South African war. These were common in military and political circles in Britain and found their way into the columns of the newspapers. One of his closest friends was Charles a Court Repington, a military correspondent for *The Times*, to whom he was 'a constant visitor', according to Mrs Repington's memoir. (4) He was broadly in favour of the Japanese system of universal military service being introduced into Britain. Repington was also an advocate of universal service and openly suggested in *The Times* that a universal service system would be the best solution for the troubled British army in those days. Utsunomiya seems to have felt that he had some right,

because of the existence of the Anglo-Japanese alliance to make some suggestions in the British debate. (5)

Utsunomiya's promotion of this idea consisted of letters he sent to the London newspaper, *The Morning Post*, which appears to have had a large number of ex-officers and serving officers among its readers. His letters to the editor were irregular and were written under a pseudonym. (6) Some sources suggest that it was Joseph Morris who played a role as a bridge between Utsunomiya and the newspaper. Morris had been an employee of the Meiji government (*o-yatoi gaikokujin*) as a telegraph engineer in the 1870s when he had evidently acquired a good knowledge of the Japanese language. He became one of the correspondents for *The Morning Post* during the Russo-Japanese war. After the war Utsunomiya asked the Japanese government to honour Joseph Morris for his contribution to Japan during the war, not only as the author of a number of pro-Japanese articles but also as a translator and editor of Utsunomiya's English-language writings. (7)

We reproduce the main part of his lengthy letter of 28 August 1905 to *The Morning Post*. A word should be said about the circumstances in which the letter was written. The revised Anglo-Japanese agreement, the so-called second alliance, had been signed on 12 August 1905 but was not disclosed to the public until the peace treaty between Japan and Russia had been concluded the following month. It is clear from references in the letter that Utsunomiya was aware of its terms and the fact that it had been extended to Afghanistan. But he is discreet in mentioning it only as a possibility. He sees army reform as important for the fulfilment of the second Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Utsunomiya did not survive in his London post for long after the letter and was recalled to Japan on 5 October 1905. He had been absent from his family much longer than had been expected because of his activities during the Russo-Japanese war. With the war ended and the peace settlement completed, there was no reason why his return to his homeland should be delayed.

While Utsunomiya was on his homeward voyage, he received a letter from his successor, Colonel Saburo INAGAKI which enclosed a cutting from *The Daily Chronicle* dated 10 October 1905 with the caption: "The New 'National Army' – Quarter of a Million Men for Foreign Service – the Army Council's scheme". He also added his own comment: 'We hope that this scheme may be proclaimed as soon as possible'. Still Utsunomiya had to wait another couple of years before he actually heard of the introduction of Territorial Army legislation by the War Minister of the Liberal government, Richard Burdon Haldane, in 1908. (8)

Utsunomiya never returned to the UK. His career ended with his appointment to the important post of army commander in Korea from July 1919 to August 1920. He could not recover from the illness which he contracted in Korea and died within a year.

NOTES

1. *Nihon rikugun to Ajia seisaku – Rikugun Taisho Utsunomiya Taro Nikki*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007. Vol. I (1900, 1907-11); Vol. II (1912-16); and Vol. III (1918-21)
2. The counterfoils of chequebooks from March to June 1903 and from March to June 1905 are missing.
3. Apart from the Utsunomiya papers, there are Utsunomiya's notes and letters to the Polish socialist, Josef Pilsudski, in London in 1904-5 preserved at the Pilsudski Institute of North America in New York. Pilsudski later became the first Polish President (1918).
4. *History of The Times*, Vol. III, p. 419, pp 462-6. Mary Repington, *Thanks for the Memory*, London : Constable, 1938, p. 246 We may see Utsunomiya's influence in Chapter I of *The Times History of the War in the Far East* (London: John Murray, 1905). That history was largely written or edited by Repington as military correspondent of *The Times*.
5. See *The Times*, 1 April 1905. Professor John Chapman has drawn attention to Utsunomiya's plan in May 1903 for a 'joint system of secret service'. This did not find favour with the War Office. See Chapman in JWM Chapman and Inaba Chiharu (eds.) *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 138-9
6. It is confirmed that at least five letters were written by Utsunomiya in 1905 under the pseudonym 'Foreign Observer': 1, 8 April; 2, 19 June; 3, 13 July, 4, 3 August and 5, 28 August
7. There are a couple of Utsunomiya's drafts which recommended Joseph Morris for a Japanese government decoration after the Russo-Japanese war.
8. EM Spiers, *Haldane: An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1980), ch.8

THE MORNING POST, 28 AUGUST 1905

“FOREIGN OBSERVER” on ARMY REFORM

[Preamble omitted] I observe that at the present moment a powerful warning that reflects throughout both patriotism and prudence has been uttered in some of the most influential quarters of the land, the patriots having Lord Roberts at their head. In view of the many thoughtful opinions expressed by them it must seem that the views expressed by me are superfluous; yet I cannot refrain from coming forward once more because I fear that most of the proposals made have been in a somewhat half-hearted, temporising manner, as though the writers were unwilling to speak out boldly, and a pure and perfect system of universal service in the truest sense of the words has not been advocated, and because I earnestly trust that they will go one step further and soon be commending universal service, root and branch, to their fellow-countrymen. If the rumour should prove true that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance will be continued and extended, your country may again feel at rest and the public mind and interest may again sink to sleep, and the present brief awakening will be of no more effect than that which followed for a time the South African War.

A *propos* of the Anglo-Japanese Agreement, an extended alliance is certainly in itself a very desirable thing. If a new alliance, as rumoured, be established it will contribute a great deal towards the peace and tranquillity of the world at large, and it will be indeed an immense boon to the whole of humanity, not to mention the benefits to be derived from it by the contracting parties themselves. But let us think for a moment what it means. The real tie between nations is precisely like that between individuals. To speak plainly, the strong chain which binds the allied countries is composed of nothing else than reliance on and confidence in each other, and these bonds can only be formed and strengthened by the fact that both parties are in possession of the means of self-defence suitable to their position, so that if circumstances require both are able to fully discharge their respective duties toward each other.

My earnest hope, therefore, is that you will at once commence the great task of Army reform, seizing this opportune moment – when Russia has been weakened as a result of the Far Eastern War (and must inevitably remain so for at least ten years to come) – for the perfecting of a universal service system requires twelve years in all, and you will thus be able in the ensuing decade, no matter what may come of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, to effect almost completely an extensive and thorough reform while your minds are free from anxiety regarding the immediate future. Let us suppose that by virtue of an extended alliance the defence of the North-Western Frontier of India is assured, you will still have to think of other points of the compass if you want to render India safe against blasts from all the four winds. Suppose again that a new grouping of Powers should take place, you will have to prevent any other Power or Powers acquiring a naval base in the Persian Gulf or anywhere on the northerly coasts of the Indian Ocean, so long as you do not mean to abandon your territory and trade lying beyond the Suez Canal, and you will further be obliged to protect the Canal itself against any threatened danger coming to it on land from the direction of Syria.... What the country wants is a military force sufficiently small in peacetime to adapt its needs to the economical requirements, and which can yet expand and develop in wartime to the dimensions which the national military necessities demand, with ample ‘staying power’ to last through a struggle that

extends over a term of years. The capacity to meet these wants can only be secured in full by the adoption of universal military service. The vital flaw in your existing system is that you have an Army too large for your needs in time of peace, and which is yet utterly inadequate to your requirements when you have to go to war. This is why I always advocate the reorganisation of the Army, and eagerly hope for the adoption of the system in question.

I now proceed to state the essential features of my arguments, and I will place them in order as follows:

- I. THE HIGHEST IDEAL MUST BE AIMED AT IN RESPECT OF THE NATIONAL ARMAMENT OF THE ENTIRE BRITISH EMPIRE ....
- II. AN OUTLINE OF THE REQUISITE NATIONAL ARMAMENT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN FURTHERANCE OF THESE AIMS....

(2) The fundamental principle of the military armament of the British Empire will be found in a perfect and efficient defence of India, which is the most vulnerable and yet the most important portion of the land front of the British Empire. All other military questions of less importance will easily and at once be solved by the adequate settlement of Indian defence. To adequately perform these duties, a standing Army must be kept on the spot in India in time of peace – (a) to keep order in the interior of India; (b) to check any minor invasion of a hostile force at any stage of the war, and to countermarch northward and to occupy certain points, which are important from a political as well as a strategical point of view; (c) to maintain strict control over Afghanistan and the adjoining States, so that the tribes may be unable to revolt or to approach the enemy with a treacherous object; (d) thereby to cover a concentration of the main force of the National Army of the British Empire....

- III. THE REQUIRED STRENGTH OF THE SEA AND LAND FORCES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

#### 1. *Sea Force*

It is all important to keep up the existing "relative standard." To maintain this standard the United Kingdom should use its utmost efforts, and at the same time let all the self-governing dependencies of the Empire contribute their shares according to their respective capacities. That all dependencies should assist, according to their means, the Mother Country, especially in naval and military preparations, for the maintenance of the common peace and prosperity is as important a principle as it is just....

#### 2. *Land Forces*

That the foundation of the military armaments of the British Empire must be laid in the absolute defence of India has been set forth already. Now, in order to determine the military force necessary for the British Empire, it is imperative that we should estimate, first of all, the strength of probable combatants in the field; that is to say, that can be brought by Russia into Afghanistan. This estimate, however, like many

other calculations, must, after all, be more or less guesswork, however competent an expert it may be who makes it. Lord Roberts has suggested lately, and with perfect justice, that there is no reason whatever why Russia, which can keep up an Army of five hundred thousand in Manchuria, cannot maintain the same number, or even more, in Afghanistan, which is much nearer and connected by two lines of railway with the base. That this half-million of men in Manchuria was not an excessive estimate is to be seen from the fact that in the latter part of June this year Russia had four hundred and ninety battalions of Infantry in Manchuria. In estimating an enemy's strength I would have it rather over-estimated than under-estimated, because I should like you always to be on the safe side. An under-estimate of the strength of the available arms of the enemy was the main cause of defeat to one party in the war of 1870, and also in the Sinico-Japanese War [of 1894-5]. And so it is with the present war. In planning a perfect defence of India it will be most advantageous to estimate the enemy's available strength of combatants in the field as at least five hundred thousand, then we shall not be far from the mark....

The possession of India has everything to do with the future of the two great Empires. But some of your contemporaries argue that Russia, in fear of the commercial competition of England, may eventually abandon the policy of extending her railway communication. I shall not attempt to criticise these arguments, for I deem it wholly superfluous to do so. I hope you will remember that the railroad is always essential to Russian policy, and that they never abandon a scheme as you did in the case of the Burmo-Yunnan line. If these points do not fail to appeal to the national spirit of Britain, I do not think that there will be in your country anyone who will be willing to give up India. No, on the contrary, I believe there are many prudent men whose minds are fully awake to the future and to the possible danger just referred to.

The speeches of public men are always guarded for those whose words carry the weight of a nation's responsibilities have not much opportunity of speaking their minds outright in consideration of the exceedingly delicate points of international diplomacy. The speech of your esteemed Premier [Balfour] concerning Imperial Defence, for instance, must be carefully read and appreciated by comparing it with the creation of this special Defence Committee itself. Do we not hear in the sentences of his well-expressed speech the voice of his patriotic resolve, fully conscious as he must be of the situation which presents itself now and looms in the future? I am not, therefore, about to preach my doctrine to those who are the best judges of these national questions of importance, but I wish to plead the cause that I have espoused once again before the general public.....Remember that the establishment of a real Army for your defence requires a period of at least twelve years and, above all, remember that Britannia expects that everyone will do his duty!

August 26

A FOREIGN OBSERVER

## COULD THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR HAVE BEEN PREVENTED BY BRITISH DIPLOMACY?

Ian Nish

What did Japan expect of Britain in the run-up to the Russo-Japanese war? In general, the impression given is that Japan wanted Britain to keep her distance. Both belligerents wanted their policies in Manchuria and Korea to be treated as local issues. Russia argued that Manchuria was a matter between herself and China and that Japan need not be consulted, far less other countries. So far as Korea was concerned, she was ready to discuss with Japan but with no one else. Japan, for her part, saw Manchuria and Korea as particular concerns in which she had a special interest, Korea more than Manchuria. She was ready to negotiate on both with Russia and was infuriated when Russia tried to exclude her from discussions over Manchuria. Japan made clear to Britain that some international settlement in which the European powers would take part would not be acceptable to her. She distrusted any solution which offered the powers the opportunity to act as honest brokers like the Congress of Berlin of 1878 or the international involvement of the powers in east Asian problems in 1895 and 1900.

What could Britain be expected to do in order to prevent war breaking out in east Asia? She had had singularly little success in dealing with Russia in the previous decade. There was an underlying antagonism between the two countries and there was little scope for restraining Russia, a major power, in Asia. In the case of Japan, Britain could *in theory* have told Japan not to fight, urged her to present moderate terms and treat Russian counter-drafts seriously, could have acted as mediator between Russia and Japan, either on her own or as part of an international grouping, and could have used her influence to restrain Japan by restricting financial assistance or withholding armaments etc. It will be the task of this paper to see which of these theoretical steps (if any) were taken and with what effect.

We present in this paper Britain's perception of the last few weeks before the Russo-Japanese war broke out. We should insert a caution that what have sometimes been presented as certainties in the last few years appeared as very much less certain to contemporaries. It has been stated many times in recent years that the outcome of the war was inevitable and that Japan's victory at sea was assured. Certainly the British cabinet members pondering the issue in December 1903 did not see it that way. True, they were not Japan experts, though they were certainly pro-Japanese and anti-Russian. True, they were looking at events from the standpoint of British national interests, not Japan's. But they had genuine doubts about the outcome and had to take account of the possibility that it would not be so favourable to Japan as it proved.

The British cabinet which had to grapple with the crisis of late 1903 was led by Arthur Balfour who became leader of the Conservative party in July 1902 after the resignation of Lord Salisbury as prime minister. In the aftermath of the South African war which had only ended in 1902, the Balfour cabinet had many domestic problems, financial and political. Its strongest members were Lord Lansdowne as

foreign secretary, the initiator of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, and Lord Selborne who as first lord of the Admiralty was the cabinet minister most affected by the prospect of war breaking out in the east. Another important figure was Austen Chamberlain who had taken over as chancellor of the Exchequer and had to confront the financial deficit left over by the war. These ministers operated on the advice given by Sir Claude MacDonald, minister in Tokyo, and Hayashi Tadasu, Japan's minister in London, both of whom had held office since 1900. (1)

The negotiations between Japan and Russia over Manchuria and Korea which had been proceeding since August 1903 came to a head late in December when cabinet members were out of London. They expressed their views in writing in the notes and letters they exchanged at this critical time. Prime Minister Balfour was particularly interested in the security aspects of international affairs as his memoranda on the developing crisis in east Asia show. The Conservative ministry liked Japan and was well aware of its obligations under the Anglo-Japanese alliance which was at this stage its major achievement in foreign affairs. If war came and Japan fought alone, Britain would remain neutral; but if Russia was joined with another power, Britain would be required to join in on Japan's side. This would entail obligations of support not so much on land as at sea. Here the major consideration was the financial cost of the Royal Navy about which the chancellor of the Exchequer was complaining. Chamberlain wrote : 'I see no way out of our financial hole at present' (2) So there was a general reluctance to get dragged into the initial stages of the war and Britain firmly declared neutrality. But there was also the long-term contingency that, if the war went badly for Japan, Britain might find it hard to avoid being called in at a later stage. This would not take place under the terms of the alliance, but under an unstated feeling of moral obligation towards a political partner.

It should not be assumed that, because Britain and Japan were allies, their national interests were identical. Britain was a global and imperial power and was sometimes affected in east Asian matters by factors from other parts of the globe. From July 1903 onwards the Foreign Office had been wooing France; and negotiations were in train in the autumn which (in spite of interruptions) would lead to the formation of the Entente Cordiale in April 1904. (3) France was allied to Russia and it was the Foreign Office's view that the opportunity should be taken to pursue similar steps with Russia in order to resolve disputes in Asia. Ambassador Jules Cambon proposed some sort of rapprochement with Russia; and the Russian Ambassador in London, Count Aleksandr Benckendorff, was responsive and claimed to have his government, or at least the Russian Foreign Ministry, behind him. So relations were improving though not as fast as with France. From November 1903 steps were being taken towards this rapprochement. (4) As Lansdowne expressed it, he was working out the 'basis of a live-and-let-live understanding' with Russia. It was intended not as an alliance or a treaty of friendship but as a settlement of old outstanding grievances. (5)

Even when we come to the specific geographical areas which were the subject of the Russo-Japanese disputes, Korea and Manchuria, there were differences of interest between Britain and Japan. Britain had no ambitions in either quarter. On Korea, Balfour said 'we care little for Corea except as it affects Japan'. (6) On Manchuria, the three north-eastern provinces of China, Britain had entered into an exchange of notes with Russia in April 1899 whereby Britain would not seek railway concessions

north of the Great Wall while Russia would not seek similar concessions in the Yangtse area. It is true, of course, that the underlying hope that the railway compact would solve Anglo-Russian tensions in the area was eroded after Russia's activities after the Boxer emergency of 1900 when Russian troops occupied the vital arteries of Manchuria. In particular Britain resented Russia's virtual takeover of the treaty port of Nyuchuang (Newchwang) whose trade was almost exclusively with American, Japanese and British companies. Russia took over the customs revenue and local administration of the port; and the powers sent gunboats to the port in order to try to uphold the international regime there. Britain regarded herself as the custodian of the treaty port system. (7)

## PROBLEMS OF MEDIATION

The crisis in Russo-Japanese negotiations came to a head in the Christmas holiday period in December and cabinet members were dispersed to their homes. They exchanged urgent notes and letters at this critical time and historians are the beneficiary because they can assess their individual thinking. Prime Minister Balfour on 22 December received a pouch from his foreign secretary 'suggesting that we should get out of the Russians, with the help of the French and the Americans, something which the Japanese could accept about Manchuria', and that we should then 'tell the Japanese distinctly that they must be content with the best bargain they can get as to Corea'. This was in effect a proposal of mediation on the part of Lansdowne and the Foreign Office team. But Balfour's response was negative. If Britain were to intervene, 'we should be giving diplomatic assistance to Russia in her attempt to weaken Japan's position in Corea; we should profoundly irritate the sentiments of the Japanese people; and we should transfer to ourselves the unpopularity which they now very justly lavish upon *their own incompetent Government.*' [my italics]. (8) Evidently Balfour was aware that the Japanese Diet had passed a motion of no confidence in the unpopular Katsura government on 10 December and its conduct of negotiations. It was in fact a devious piece of political party manoeuvring. But it suggested that Britain would do well to keep out of a delicate political situation. (9)

Balfour concluded that Britain should 'let the negotiations go on or break off as the parties principally interested think fit.... [If Japan] asks for our mediation with a view to a settlement, I would do all that I could to help her. But I certainly would not thrust myself into a quarrel not my own, in which I am expected to aid an unfriendly Power, and to put pressure upon an ally...' Lansdowne agreed in his response two days later: 'we ought not to give Japan advice to which she might afterwards point as having involved her in war. I do not think that such advice as we have given her up to the present is open to this criticism. Nor would I tell her that she must reduce her demands calculated to wound the *amour propre* of the people, but I doubt whether her diplomacy is very adroit, and I think we ought to help her if we can to get out of the *impasse* in which she finds herself.... The most promising exit from the present situation would be found in an arrangement under which Russia might enter into an engagement, not with Japan only, but with all the Powers having Treaty rights in Manchuria, to respect those rights in any agreement which she may make with China.' The problem with adopting mediation was that mediation meant delay and delay played into the hands of Russia. (10)

Basically Britain was not totally confident that Japan could win and was aware that the contingency might well arise where she might be called on later to help. Lansdowne on 24 December wanted Britain 'to try its hand as a mediator, or at all events as a friendly counsellor, rather than wait until it can appear on the scene in the role of 'deliverer' at a later stage'. Selborne mistrusted "the role of 'deliverer' in this case, but saw great dangers in that of a 'mediator'". He still thought that 'we may help her in her manner of presenting [her demands] if she welcomes and desires our aid'. (11)

Balfour summed up the cabinet's position in an extremely long and difficult memorandum, dealing not so much with mediation as with the likelihood of Britain becoming dragged in at a later stage. Balfour rejected emphatically any idea that the alliance treaty could be 'so stretched as to imply something like a moral obligation [on us] to help Japan whenever she seems likely to be beaten by Russia.' Overall his attitude was not so much one of moderate optimism as of limited pessimism.

Britain viewed the situation to a large extent from a naval standpoint and had a fixation on Masampo, the anchorage on the south coast of Korea, which was vital to both Russia and Japan in asserting their claim to command of the Tsushima straits. Balfour concluded that Japan would not be crushed, even if she lost Masampo though he did not underrate the enormous strategic advantages attaching to its possession. Moreover, the possession of Korea by Russia, if it came about, would be a great financial burden on that country. (12)

So Britain which had in 1894 tried and failed to mediate between Japan and China now observed the developing situation closely. But she gave up for the time being any idea of unilateral mediation, that is, trying to reconcile by herself the positions of Russia and Japan since she shared most of Japan's views. In their state of indecision the ministers favoured the easier course of involving others, either France or the United States.

## BRITAIN'S STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Underlying this exchange of views, the aspect of the forthcoming war which interested and affected Britain most was the naval war. There was unanimity that Russia could not invade Japan but there were doubts whether Japan could send a force to the continent for naval reasons. Much turned on naval power and command of the seas in the Yellow Sea. Britain's naval assessment was that Japan was weaker in battleships than Russia but was stronger in fast cruisers. She had only 6 first class battleships to Russia's 7, but she had 3 second class to Russia's nil and 6 armoured cruisers to Russia's 4. (13) But there was the question of reinforcements sailing from Europe to the east. Lansdowne thought that 'even when the Russian ships now in the Mediterranean have reached the Far East, Japan will still be stronger than Russia ... By next autumn Russia might be mistress of the situation and might impose terms on Japan which would wipe the latter out as a military power and obliterate her fleet.' Selborne's view was that 'Russia ought [on paper] to win now but Japan might still win by good tactics and good shooting, in short, superior efficiency. ... I agree that there is a real risk of Japan being so badly defeated as to upset the balance of power in the Far East altogether'. Despite these pessimistic qualifications, Selborne could not foresee the annihilation of the Japanese fleet. (14)

Britain was preoccupied by the problem of upholding an open-handed approach to the purchase of war supplies like coal by the potential belligerents. But towards the end of 1903 her analysis of naval strength was such that she suggested to Japan the purchase of two Chilean battleships of 2000 tons which were then building in British yards and had been on offer for some time. (15) The British embassy in Tokyo reported in October that the Japanese naval attache in London, Captain Kaburagi Makoto, was urging their purchase by the Japanese Ministry of Marine. On 25 November Russia brought matters to a head by making an offer to Chile's agent in London. Japan refused to show comparable interest. The Admiralty decided, therefore, that it would buy the ships instead for £1,750,000 and made an offer on 2 December which was successful. Thus Britain violated her monetary principles and her neutral image. She was not a little annoyed with the Japanese standpoint. A Japanese account speaks of Britain buying them as an act of kindness (*koiteki ni*) to Japan. This is to under-state the degree of Britain's annoyance. While Selborne saw his action as a move to add to Japan's naval strength, he was very irritated by Tokyo's response:

'I did all I could to get the Japanese to buy those two battleships but they made a sad mess of the business and we had only just time to step in and buy them out of the very mouth of the Russians which alone was no mean service to Japan '(16)

London's action was as much anti-Russian as pro-Japanese. To compound its offense, the Japanese government made a complete volte face and asked on 17 December whether she could purchase them from Britain, now that the Diet had been suspended and its approval was no longer needed. Britain which had with difficulty received parliamentary approval decisively said No. As the possibility of war drew ever closer, such a sale would have compromised her neutrality. Understandably the Russians protested. Lansdowne wrote 'Russia was offended by our purchase of the Chilian [sic] ironclads.' For Britain the end-result was that the

addition of the Chilean vessels to the Royal Navy allowed the Admiralty to send a first class battleship to the China Station. (17)

Doubtless Japan, which had a reputation for not making hasty decisions, declined the purchase on account of price and technology. The Tokyo government hesitated because of the Ministry of Finance's doubts about being able to raise such a large sum of money with the consent of parliamentarians. There were also a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the navy minister, Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyoe, about the appropriateness of the Chilean technology. But the fact that the naval establishment later changed its mind over the Chilean vessels suggests that their initial refusal was mainly due to indecisiveness in decision-making. (18)

By the end of the year the tension in Japan was mounting even higher. Attention now turned to the two armoured cruisers which were being built in Genoa on behalf of Argentina. Japan entered into secret negotiations and completed the contract of purchase on 30 December through the British brokers. The Russian government made a similar offer but it came one day too late. The Japanese wanted to register the cruisers as British ships but the consul-general at Genoa was instructed to disallow this. The ships sailed on 9 January 1904 with British senior officers in a generally Italian crew of 120. The British company, Armstrongs, acted as guarantor, which assumed contractual responsibility to see that the vessels reached destination within 35 days.(19) The Admiralty's assessment on 11 January was that 'the cruisers bought by Japan in Italy ought to reach the Suez Canal unless intercepted successfully by the Russian destroyers...At the present moment Japan is a little the stronger but, when both Russian and Japanese reinforcements now in the Mediterranean have reached the scene of action, the paper preponderance will have just passed to the Russians.' (20)

There was a great deal of naval activity in the eastern Mediterranean at the time. Five Russian destroyers called at Malta and were involved in an incident there. The battleship *Oslibia* and two accompanying cruisers, one the world famous *Aurora*, preceded the Genoa cruisers to Port Said. So there was the possibility of a clash. It was this danger of a preliminary encounter at sea either before or after any declaration of war which induced Japan to spin out the negotiations with St Petersburg. MacDonald estimated that Japan was deliberately deferring the declaration of war until the ships reached Singapore at least. On arrival there during a strike, they were instructed to take on enough coal for the journey to Japan, to sail by 4 February without delay and to take a course outside the Taiwan Straits in order to avoid attack by Russian cruisers. It was only when they had reached the safety zone that Japan was prepared to declare war. The cruisers did not reach Yokosuka till 16 February when they were renamed *Kasuga* and *Nisshin* and went almost immediately into service. In battles in April they showed off their up-to-date state of the art technology. The British minister reported that the angle of elevation of their guns 'worked considerable havoc in Port Arthur at the enormous range of over 20,000 yards.' (21)

Russia complained through Benckendorff in January about Britain's partisan act of allowing British naval officers to take charge of these vessels. Lansdowne had to reassure him that the works at Genoa was in effect a branch of Armstrong's establishment at Elswick near Newcastle. It was natural, therefore, that, though they

were sailing under the Japanese merchant flag, the captains should be British and the crew partly British and partly Italian. He did, however, admit that the two officers in command were on the emergency list of the Royal Navy and held commissions, facts which had not been originally disclosed to the Admiralty during the panic of their departure. But, on hearing of their appointments, the Admiralty had at once cancelled their commissions in order to indicate that they went as private individuals. (22)

Japan had several long-term concerns. Minister Hayashi asked on 11 January whether Japan might count upon Britain's 'good offices' over the passage of the Black Sea fleet through the Dardanelles on its way to the Far East. Lansdowne replied that his government would regard such an eventuality as a grave violation of treaty engagements entered into by Russia with the various powers. In conveying this tactfully to the Russians, Lansdowne added that 'nothing is further from our intentions than to encourage Japan to proceed to extremities'. This view was later endorsed by the cabinet on 27 January. (23)

In a situation where Russian vessels, and especially ships of the Russian Volunteer fleet, were seeking outlets to the east, the ports of the British Empire were important. In particular Britain's special position in Egypt was crucial. There was considerable difficulty in interpreting neutrality in dealing with naval vessels seeking to pass through the Suez Canal. This also applied to vessels trying to purchase coal to stoke up for the journey eastward. But Japan was explicitly given the right to use British telegraph offices overseas, a facility not allowed to the Russians. Britain genuinely tried to adhere to the principle of what holds good for the Japanese holds good for the Russians; but it is not clear how this worked out in practice and it is possible that these restrictions may have been interpreted in favour of Japan. But, even if Britain had not been Japan's ally, she might still have adopted the same procedures. (24)

The tricky situation in the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea eased soon after the war was declared. The battleship *Oslabria* and the two cruisers, intended as reinforcements to Port Arthur and Vladivostok, were recalled when the news of Japan's actions at Port Arthur on 8 February was received.

## FINANCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE IMPENDING WAR

One of the imponderables for the British cabinet was to know whether Japan had the financial strength to sustain a war with Russia and for how long. MacDonald conveyed his general impression that Foreign Minister Komura 'seemed confident in Japan's strength so far as her army and navy were concerned. If she were defeated, it would be from lack of financial vitality and, if Russia knew that she was financially strong [as the result of British financial support], it would be a great guarantee for peace.' (25) When such arguments were flying around, it was little surprise that Japan should ask Britain for financial assistance. Naturally, the Japanese did not use the words 'war loan'. They asked instead for 'some private arrangement of finances' on about ten occasions between 30 December and 14 January. They also pulled all manner of strings through merchant bankers to secure the London government's blessing for a loan of some sort.

The British cabinet was divided. Lansdowne was in favour of finding money for Japan, arguing that she needed it at least for the purchase of the two Genoa cruisers. But the chancellor, who was already in trouble over the navy estimates, told Minister Hayashi of Britain's absolute inability to render financial help of any kind. His unhelpfulness came from the fact that no banker would offer a loan in current circumstances without a British government guarantee and a government financial guarantee for a situation about which it had doubts would be a risky venture. The moment was not opportune for raising any new loan in the London market. Moreover, it would at this stage be regarded around the world as a breach of neutrality. Balfour summed up the discussion by confirming that for Britain to offer Japan money would be to flout her professions of neutrality. Lansdowne replied to Hayashi that 'we were actuated [over the loan] by political as well as financial considerations. There could be no doubt that, if a Japanese loan were guaranteed by His Majesty's Government or a large sum lent by them to Japan at the present moment, the impression would be created that we were departing from our neutrality and, in effect, giving active encouragement to Japan.' (26)

Japan was hardly convinced by this. While recognizing that Britain did not want to increase her borrowings or add to her liabilities, the Japanese saw the earlier purchase of the Chilean battleships as an indication that, if London had really wanted to help, the money could have been found. Nonetheless Komura gave instructions on 14 January to stop all loan applications, saying that Japan's reserves were adequate to tide her over the first year of any war. This suggests that what Japan was seeking was a safety cushion for the latter stages of the war. To the extent that Britain withheld monetary help, she was in effect urging caution on Japan. (27)

#### "GOOD OFFICES AND SEDATIVE ADVICE"

As the bilateral diplomacy between St Petersburg and Tokyo was failing in mid-January, the Russian and French governments through their ambassadors in London tried to persuade Lansdowne at the eleventh hour to put pressure on Japan for a peaceful settlement. This approach was based on the assumption that Britain had some influence over Japan's decisions because of the existence of the alliance. The Japanese had made it abundantly clear to all parties earlier in the month that they would not entertain international mediation, or international conferences, to resolve the situation. France's Paul Cambon, however, used his persuasive powers on 27 January to urge not mediation but 'good offices and sedative advice' on the part of Britain, France and the United States. Two days later Lansdowne talked matters over with Hayashi using the argument that 'the Powers owed it to themselves to make some effort to avert the calamity of war'. But Hayashi was not forthcoming (28) St Petersburg took an optimistic view of the possibilities of a last-minute settlement; it thought that Korea could be resolved easily; so far as Manchuria was concerned, they would not give China a treaty guarantee of her sovereignty or territorial integrity in the area but they were prepared to give a 'declaration' to the same effect. Would this have British support? Lansdowne felt that a mere 'declaration' was not tantamount to a long-term commitment and the Russian government would feel free to resile from it, when it did not suit them. His view was that only a formal treaty between Russia and China guaranteed by one or more of

the Powers could be recommended as a durable solution. Still Lansdowne continued his parleys over the following week without Japan or Russia altering their positions. Without knowing how imminent the outbreak of war was, Lansdowne made a genuine attempt to explore ways of conciliation. Ultimately the Russian proposals were placed before the cabinet which confirmed on 8 February that Britain would not recommend the 'declaration' suggested by Russia to the Japanese. (29) Komura announced that he was very grateful to Lansdowne for trying to assist in arriving at a solution. (30) 'Sedative advice' was no longer an acceptable prescription.

Time was running out. Everyone on the China coast was in suspense when the Russian fleet left Port Arthur. The Butterfield and Swire manager at Chifu some fifty miles from the base reported on 5 February that the entire Russian fleet consisting of about 17 ships and 22 torpedo-boats, seemingly at daybreak. Sir Robert Hart of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs reported similarly to London. They followed this up with a message that the fleet had returned to port at noon on the following day. These mysterious 'operations' were widely known around the globe. (31)

In Japan's case, the information reached Tokyo Navy Ministry at 7 p.m. on 3 February in a message from the intelligence office run by Consul Mizuno at Chifu by Commander Mori Gitaro. It reported that the Russian fleet had left Port Arthur, its destination being unclear. This was 'the war scare' and heightened the mood of tension that prevailed in Tokyo over what was a momentous decision for a small power. The Imperial Council meeting the following day decided on war and withdrawal of ambassadors. The Russian ships at Port Arthur withdrew into the outer harbour; but their appearance, if temporary, had seemed menacing to the Japanese. In the words of Admiral Yamamoto, it was the impetus needed for action. (32)

Clearly the scope for great power persuasion and mediation petered out with Japan's attack on the Russian fleet in Port Arthur. After the war was under way, there was little scope for calling it off. There was the risk that what started as a local conflict could have turned into a global confrontation but, despite the Dogger Bank incident, that outcome was avoided. With the succession of Japanese victories, Britain's fear of being drawn in never materialized.

## CONCLUSION

I believe that the new evidence that I have looked at in the compilation of this paper confirms the general view which I took in my book on the Anglo-Japanese alliance which covered the Russo-Japanese war incidentally. Britain did not tell Japan not to fight. She was neither encouraging nor discouraging for the purely selfish reason that she did not want to be drawn into the fight. She did not egg Japan on to go to war.

Britain was consulted during the negotiations to a reasonable extent. British ministers thought that the Japanese demands were moderate. But they were worried that the Japanese Foreign Ministry was inexperienced in high-level negotiations. Their attitude is reflected in the rather patronizing remark of Lord Selborne : 'we may help [Japan] in the manner of presenting [her case].' While Britain did not get involved in the negotiations with Russia or the policy debates in Japan, they asked to be consulted and were generally kept abreast of talks as they were proceeding. They

made drafting suggestions on a few occasions. But it is doubtful if Japan paid very much attention to them. (33)

Britain was an alert observer. Surprisingly the cabinet was following preliminary events very closely. It recognized that Japan did not want international mediation and Britain had no wish to offer it unless Japan specifically asked for it. As a matter of policy the British government did not make available financial help when she was asked six weeks before war broke out. But, as it turned out, this was not likely to influence Japan's decision for war or force her to rethink. The loan which Japan sought was to act as a cushion for the war if it lasted longer than she expected.

Britain's action over the warships was clearly critical and is even now not completely clear. These commercial transactions over the Chilean and Argentinian ships were conducted in secret and at speed. The government's general position was that it was not a party. But, if war came, Britain did not want Japan to lose. Hence the British purchase of the Chilean ships and approval of the Japanese purchase of the Argentinian ones, despite the complaint that it was a breach of neutrality. If Britain had let Russia have the Chilean battleships, the effect it would have had in preventing the war is imponderable. If Britain had prevented the sale of the Argentinian cruisers to Japan, it is again imponderable. It would probably not have affected Japan's decision for war. But the Navy Ministry carried a lot of clout and it might have at least insisted on some further delay.

Britain was suited by following a policy of inaction. After the South African war the ministers and the people wanted a time of peace and re-generation. There were few voices in favour of involvement, though there may have been the odd military/naval man who thought that Britain's ally deserved more assistance from Britain by way of military intelligence or strategic advice. (34) In a way Lionel James of *The Times* of London by allowing a Japanese naval officer on board his chartered ship, the *Haimun*, was collaborating with the Japanese war effort. There were still fewer who could be described as pro-Russian and anti-Japanese. Writings by authors such as Olga Novikov and Maurice Baring contain a warning to Britain not to desert the Russian Empire. But on the whole, public opinion was broadly favourable to Japan, because it was anti-Russian. (35)

Prime Minister Balfour was an unsentimental philosopher who believed in sublimated inactivity : 'I believe that if any war could be conceived as being advantageous to us, this is one. Both "before, during and after" its outbreak, it is likely to do wonders in making Russia amenable to sweet reason.' (36) The prediction of Balfour for the future proved to be accurate. Within two years of the end of the war, a chastened Russia had entered into treaties first with Japan and then with Britain.

## ENDNOTES

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