21 The Russo-Japanese War

After the Boxer Rebellion and the progress Russia had made in Manchuria, Great Britain briefly saw in Germany a partner in trying to prevent the partition of China and to halt a Russian expansion in Asia. Such a pact would have had the additional advantage that Great Britain would have found a European ally that could put pressure on the Russian western frontier; thus pinning down troops there that otherwise could be deployed for a further Russian military advance in northern China and along the frontiers of Afghanistan.

In London one of the people looking for a rapprochement with Berlin was Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. In doing so, Chamberlain made no friends in France, where one author, Darcy (1904: 22-3), presented him as the quintessential British politician out to harm the interests of France all over the world. One of the reasons was Chamberlain's 'intemperance of language', as Darcy put it. He had offended the French by airing the opinion that for better relations between the two countries it was necessary that France stop obstructing and embarrassing Great Britain all over the world as it had done for so many years. Nowhere, Chamberlain maintained, had the French shown any consideration for British sensitivities and interests, including, in his observation, Thailand and China (ibid.: 23). In March 1898 Chamberlain had already confided to the German ambassador in London, Paul von Hatzfeldt, that the days of British splendid isolation were over and had suggested that London and Berlin should find a solution for the 'few little colonial differences' they had.[1] Berlin had not warmed to the idea, doubtful as German politicians were that Great Britain would honour an Anglo-German defence treaty, if Germany were to be attacked.[2] Chamberlain renewed his efforts during Wilhelm II's visit to Windsor. With Salisbury conspicuously absent, he discussed with Wilhelm II and Bülow an alliance of Germany, Great Britain and the United States. Nothing came of it. The German government, Bülow told Chamberlain, did not want to antagonise Russia, with which it shared an extensive border (Massie 1993: 267). Chamberlain was not deterred. After the Kaiser and his entourage

1 Hatzfeldt to German Foreign Office 29-3-1898 (E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Vol. III, The Growing Antagonism, 1898-1910; www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/Kiao-Chou.htm).

2 Bülow to Hatzfeldt 30-3-1898 (E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Vol. III, The Growing Antagonism, 1898-1910; www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/Kiao-Chou.htm).

had left, he raised the topic of a 'new Triple Alliance between the Teutonic race and the two great trans-Atlantic branches of the Anglo-Saxon race' in a speech at Leicester at the end of November (Taylor 1971: 389; Massie 1993: 268).

Still, a deal was struck, albeit a feeble one. In October 1900, in the Anglo-German Agreement, Berlin and London pledged 'that the ports on the rivers and the littoral of China should remain free and open to trade and to every other legitimate form of economic activity for the nationals of all countries without distinction' and agreed 'to uphold the same for all Chinese territory so far as they can exercise influence'. Neither Great Britain nor Germany would 'make use of the present complications to obtain for themselves any territorial advantage' and would 'direct their policy towards maintaining undiminished the territorial conditions of the Chinese Empire'.[3]

Those in favour in Germany had their own specific motives for entering the agreement: to safeguard German mercantile activities in the Yangtze Valley; which some British, like Colquhoun (1902: 45), were sure was the object of a stealth German penetration. In July 1900 Eduard von Derenthall, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, had stressed this point in a telegram to Bülow: 'The question which governs everything is the Yang-tze. Since we cannot count on monopolising it – at least for a long time to come – we should at least aim at preventing England from doing so'.[4] Reflecting this view, the treaty was referred to by Bülow, who was attributed with having coined the phrase, and other German politicians as the Yangtze Agreement.

Germany secured its Yangtze object but did not want to risk a confrontation with Russia. Initially, Berlin had even tried to exclude Manchuria altogether from the scope of the Anglo-German Agreement. The formula chosen was, in the end, vague. As the British envoy in Tokyo, Claude Maxwell MacDonald, noted, not mentioning Manchuria by name had resulted in 'manifestations of hostility' in Japan, where there was a suspicion that should it come to a dividing up of China in exclusive spheres of influence, Japanese trade and investments could well be barred in the Russian, German and French zones[5] (Temple 1902: 286). The way Berlin had wanted to phrase the treaty, on the other hand, had been unacceptable to London. It might have sparked off a new scramble for China, which Great Britain could

3 Agreement between Salisbury and Hatzfeldt 16-10-1900.

4 Derenthall to Bülow 27-7-1900 (German diplomatic documents, 1871-1914, selected and translated by E.T.S. Dugdale, Ch. VIII, The Boxer Rebellion, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/boxer.htm).

5 MacDonald to Lansdowne 9-4-1901 (PRO FO 539).

not and would not take on. According to the initial draft, Great Britain and Germany would not try to stop the Russians in Manchuria. Were Russia to occupy Manchuria, then the two would 'hold themselves absolved and prepare to take steps to safeguard their interests in other quarters without troubling about Manchuria in which their interests are but small'.[6] Within six months, in March 1901, Bülow, speaking in the Reichstag, left no doubts that his country did not feel committed by the Anglo-German Agreement to act to defend the integrity of Manchuria (and certainly would not act as a counterweight against a French fleet coming to the assistance of Russia, as politicians in Great Britain and Japan initially had concluded).[7] In London Eckardstein had a similar message. He informed British Foreign Secretary Lansdowne that Berlin 'would regard with disapproval the establishment of a Russian Protectorate over Manchuria, [but] did not consider the German interests in that part of China were sufficiently marked to justify Germany in going to war in order to protect them'.[8] As the German envoy in Japan was also to state, 'Manchuria was nothing to Germany but everything to Japan'.[9] China was made to understand that for every concession it made to Russia in Manchuria, Germany expected a similar compensation in Shandong.[10]

Publicly, the British government stressed a different interpretation. In the same month that Bülow made his statement the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Viscount Cranborne, said that the second clause of the agreement regarding the territorial integrity of China was 'without qualification'.[11] Nevertheless, by that time there was a tendency, also in Great Britain, to accept Russian control over Manchuria as a fait accompli. It even seemed that the British had lost interest in the Far East. Attention focused on South Africa and the Boer War; though some politicians felt compelled to point out that from the perspective of British trade China was of 'greater importance than ever the South African question had been'.[12]

The United States and Japan were other options. They shared with Great Britain the desire for unobstructed trade in China. Or, as Colquhoun

6 MacDonald to Lansdowne 23-1-1901 (PRO FO 539).

7 Lansdowne to MacDonald 16-3-1901 (PRO FO 538).

8 Ibid.

9 MacDonald to Lansdowne 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 539).

10 Lessar to Foreign Ministry 2-12-1903 (cited in Soroka 1911: 68).

11 Cranborne in House of Commons 19-3-1901 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1901/mar/19/anglo-german-agreement-and-manchuria).

12 Ashmead-Bartlett in House of Commons 10-12-1900 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1900/dec/10/british-interests-in-china).

(1902: 45) warned, at a certain point in the future their commerce might be confronted with 'a Russian China, a German China, a French China, all under protective tariffs which must effectually put an end to any hope of the open door'. In view of such shared interests Chamberlain had already, in February 1898, suggested concerted Anglo-American action to uphold free trade in China. Washington had reacted with sympathy, but had not committed itself (LaFeber 1998: 358). China was also discussed in the margins of the Samoa talks, but Washington, as adverse to concrete pacts as London had been for so long, and not happy with Germany's new foothold in China, preferred to stay clear of international agreements. Manchuria made the United States not averse to forging closer ties with Great Britain and Japan, but as Hay's Open Door Notes would show, Washington preferred an appeal to endorse free trade over a formal treaty and the commitments this might entail.

It was Japan and Great Britain, both still without formal allies, who found each other in their shared concern over Russia's plans in north Asia. Japan viewed with apprehension Russian efforts to gain military or political hegemony in Manchuria; an anxiety further fortified by belligerent words from St Petersburg. 'Russia has been made, not by diplomacy, but by bayonets … and must decide the questions at issue with China and Japan with bayonets and not with pens', the new Russian Minister of the Interior, Dmitry Sipyagin, appointed in 1900, was to state (Hopkirk 1994: 509).

Preparing for war

St Petersburg 'pouring troops into Manchuria', as Beresford (1899: 61) phrased it, made London look all the more impotent in defending the interests of its merchants and investors in north China. The latter, from their side, already considered Manchuria to be a Russian province in all but name (ibid.: 40-2). In Japan the Russian military build-up in Manchuria in the closing years of the century made an equally worrying impression, if only because it gave Russia a menacing presence not only with regard to China but also vis-à-vis Korea and, on the opposite side of the Sea of Japan, Japan itself. Tokyo indicated that Japan could live with a Russian Port Arthur, but that Russia should not occupy Manchuria. After all, Russia's position in Port Arthur was temporary, and did not, as Manchuria did, touch the frontier of Korea.[13] Still, military circles and the press in Japan called for war.

13 Paper submitted by Japanese Minister in London 29-1-1901 (PRO FO 538).

There was a feeling that Japan had to strike quickly. It could hardly afford the costs involved in expanding its armed forces for a considerable time, while the longer Japan waited the more reinforcements Russia could send from Europe to the Far East over its Trans-Siberian and Trans-Manchurian Railways. Similar financial considerations made others in Japan hesitant to go to war, aware as they were that Japan did not have the money to sustain a prolonged armed confrontation. He was confident, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Kato Takaaki confided to MacDonald in March 1901, that the Japanese army and navy were strong enough to deal a blow to the Russian armed forces, but, he continued, 'that would be the end of our tether – and it certainly wouldn't be the end of the war'.[14]

Russia refused to withdraw its army. St Petersburg persisted that the Russian presence in South Manchuria only concerned Russia and China and that Beijing still held suzerainty over South Manchuria. It also claimed that in view of the rampant disorder in South Manchuria Russia had every right to send in troops. This was even presented as an act of goodwill. Russian Foreign Secretary Lamsdorff, himself in favour of avoiding war with Japan, informed the Japanese government that Russia would not exercise, what he called, its 'right of conquest' in Manchuria.[15] Troops were only temporarily deployed to protect Russian economic interests and Russian lives and property and would be withdrawn once order had been restored and St Petersburg and Beijing had come to an arrangement over the protection of the Russian railways and other matters, i.e. mining concessions.[16] No other power should interfere. The British ambassador Charles Scott was told that a Russian occupation of Manchuria 'might be permanent if obstacles were placed by other powers in the way of the Emperor's intentions'.[17]

Lamsdorff's pledge of a future withdrawal of Russian forces defused some of the tension. Tokyo indicated that the immediate cause of 'solicitude' had been removed and it was willing to enter into negotiations once the situation of before November 1900 had been restored.[18] One sensitive point remained: the Shenyang agreement of Alexeiev and the Chinese commander in Manchuria of November 1900. Tokyo informed Beijing and London that its ratification would be 'a source of danger' to the Chinese government. China should refrain from transferring territorial rights anywhere in its

14 MacDonald to Lansdowne 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 539).
15 Paper submitted by Japanese Minister 29-1-1901 (PRO FO 538).
16 Ibid.; Soroka 2011: 31-2.
17 Scott to Lansdowne 7-3-1901 (PRO FO 800 140).
18 Paper submitted by Japanese Minister 29-1-1901 (PRO FO 538).

territory to any of the powers.[19] Should it give Russia preferential treatment in Manchuria, Japan would seek similar concessions elsewhere in China.[20] In a similar vein, London – claiming to have 'important interests in certain parts of Manchuria' – warned the Chinese government not to conclude 'separate agreements of a political, commercial or financial nature' that were detrimental to the interests of other powers (and expected Germany, in view of the Anglo-German Agreement, to do the same, which it did not).[21] Russia did not press on. In April 1901 London and Tokyo were informed that there would be no Shenyang treaty.

The Russian assurances did not remove the threat of war. Japan sounded out London and Berlin on how they would react should it come to an armed confrontation. Berlin indicated that Germany would stay out of such a war and introduced the term 'benevolent neutrality'. The phrase bewildered British and Japanese politicians alike. The Japanese ambassador in Berlin took it to mean that Germany had pledged to 'keep the French fleet in check', an interpretation that was initially taken over by his government.[22] In London Lansdowne also did not know what to make of it, but had doubts about the Japanese interpretation: 'Benevolent neutrality was an expression the precise import [of which] was not evident to me. An attitude which would keep the fleet of another Power in check could scarcely be described as neutral'.[23] As it turned out, Berlin had only intended to convey that it would observe strict neutrality.

Berlin's stand much annoyed London and Tokyo. Great Britain's hope was definitely dashed that its October 1900 agreement with Germany could halt a further Russian penetration in north Asia. In Tokyo there had been high hopes about the benevolent neutrality Berlin had promised. Berlin's reaction, Kato Takaaki told MacDonald, showed that 'Germany wants us to fight Russia, and she would then act the part of the honest broker and pick up the pieces'.[24] Despite the German reluctance to take sides, Tokyo continued to sound out Berlin and London to come to some kind of agreement. In April 1901 the Japanese ambassador in London, Hayashi Tadasu, who denied having received any instructions from his government to this effect, approached Lansdowne and Eckardstein and suggested drawing

19 Lansdowne to MacDonald 5-2-1901 (PRO FO 538).

20 MacDonald to Lansdowne 29-1-1901, 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 538, 539).

21 Scott to Lansdowne 6-8-1901 (PRO FO 800 140), Lansdowne to MacDonald 12-2-1901, 27-2-1901 (PRO FO 538).

22 MacDonald to Lansdowne 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 539).

23 Lansdowne to MacDonald 16-3-1901 (PRO FO 538).

24 MacDonald to Lansdowne 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 539).

up a formal understanding in support of China's territorial integrity and against preferential trade arrangements. Lansdowne refused to commit himself without having been presented with 'some substantive proposal'.[25] Similar to Bülow, he did not look forward to complications with Russia and considered the developments of the previous year, which had led to the Anglo-German Agreement concluded by his predecessor Salisbury, a 'misunderstanding'. As he wrote to MacDonald:

> I had never concealed from myself that the position of Russia in Manchuria was exceptional and so long as she did not take advantage of it to interfere with the integrity of China or the interests of the other Powers I did not see why we should object to her making her own arrangements with the Chinese as to the conditions of withdrawal [of the Russian troops].[26]

In Japan Ito Hirobumi had resigned as Prime Minister in May and was replaced after a short interval by General Katsura Taro, an advocate of a pact with Great Britain. Nevertheless, some kind of understanding with Russia was not yet precluded. In October, when formal negotiations with Great Britain were already underway, Ito Hirobumi visited Yale University to accept an honorary degree. From there, and on his own account – though he did inform Katsura Taro about his plans – he travelled on to St Petersburg to try to come to an agreement with Russia over Korea (Nish 2002: 2-3). Had he succeeded, this would have left Great Britain almost powerless in the Far East. Such a prospect suited Germany well. In Berlin there was apparently much speculation about an isolated Great Britain in the Far East. Indeed, Wilhelm II had cooperation between the United States and Japan in mind, Bülow that of Japan and Russia.[27]

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance

On 30 January 1902 a pact between Great Britain, where people were well aware of Ito's mission, and Japan became a reality. It had come about,

25 Lansdowne to MacDonald 17-4-1901 (PRO FO 538).

26 Lansdowne to MacDonald 18-7-1901 (PRO FO 538).

27 Memorandum Wilhelm II 23-8-1901, Bülow to Metternich 13-3-1902) (E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Ch. X, The Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 1901-02, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/japan.htm).

Bülow in Berlin was sure, because of Great Britain's fear of a Russo-Japanese partnership.[28]

In Great Britain a possible cooperation with Japan had been a topic of speculation since Japan had been forced to withdraw from the Liaodong Peninsula and especially after Great Britain had failed to prevent Russia from taking hold of Port Arthur. The ill feelings over Rosebery's policy during the Sino-Japanese War, his refusal to provide Japan with diplomatic backing, had lingered on in Japan for some time, but waned when Tokyo and London found common ground in their aversion to Russian dominance in Manchuria. Both also experienced the financial stress of having to maintain a strong navy; making both the British First Lord of the Admiralty and the Japanese Minister of the Navy proponents of an Anglo-Japanese alliance (Nish 2002: 4). Newspaper reports, also in the United States, putting Russia's hold over South Manchuria in a bad light and praising the achievements of Japan, also prepared the way for an Anglo-Japanese arrangement (Millard 1906 8-14).

In their treaty, to be in force for five years, Great Britain and Japan – 'actuated solely by a desire to maintain the *status quo* and general peace in the extreme East'[29] – recognised the independence of China (which the British government left no doubt included South Manchuria) and Korea. Concurrently, and at Tokyo's request, Japan's special interests in Korea were recognised. The scope of the treaty was limited to threats to British and Japanese interests in China and Korea by the 'aggressive action of any other Power' or by 'disturbances arising in China or Korea' and the measures each could take for the 'protection of the lives and properties of its subjects'.[30] Should Japan or Britain become involved in war with one power because of complications over China and Korea, the other was to 'maintain a strict neutrality'.[31] Should a situation arise in which one of them was confronted with more than one enemy, the other had to come to its assistance and 'conduct war in common'.[32] The treaty did not include, as the British had suggested, a similar stipulation for an attack on the British position in India; the colony the British worried about so much and felt so vulnerable about might Russia press forward. The text only spoke of the special interests of two countries in the Far East 'of which those of Great

28 Bülow to Metternich 13-3-1902 (E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Ch. X, The Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 1901-02, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/japan.htm).

29 Anglo-Japanese Treaty, 30-1-1902, Preamble.

30 Ibid., Art.1.

31 Ibid., Art 2.

32 Ibid., Art 3.

Britain relate principally to China, whilst Japan, in addition to the interests which she possesses in China, is interested in a peculiar degree, politically as well as commercially and industrially in Korea'.[33]

For some in Great Britain the treaty came too late. It should have been concluded, one Member of Parliament stated, when 'Russia ordered our ships of war out of Port Arthur'.[34] Others worried about the implications, wondering what would happen if Japan and Russia were to go to war over Korea and Manchuria. Balfour, who within months, in July 1902, would become Prime Minister, dreaded that one day Great Britain might have to fight for its 'existence in every part of the globe against Russia and France'.[35] Others, equally apprehensive about war, could understand that Great Britain could be dragged in because of Manchuria, but Korea was a different matter. Korea was only of importance to Japan. It was 'a worthless country, with a grossly corrupt and incompetent Government' and, worse still, 'in a most dangerous and unstable position'.[36] There were also people to whom the Alliance was an outrage. Such an opinion was especially vented in the British Pacific colonies where many, for reasons of race and defence, could not understand why London had forged such close ties with Japan, a potential aggressor. When in 1894 Great Britain concluded a Treaty of Commerce and Navigation with Japan (replacing an earlier one of 1854), which allowed for the freedom of their citizens to settle in each other's country, London – aware of such racial feelings – had included a stipulation that the treaty was not in force for India and most of the other British colonies, except when they wanted it to be so. Only Queensland did. Such racist sentiments had seriously complicated Anglo-Japanese negotiations when, little more than a month before Japan and Great Britain concluded their treaty, Australia had promulgated its Immigration Restriction Act (Bennett 2001: 93-4).

In London Lansdowne defended the Alliance in the House of Lords as essential for the status quo in the Far East, the Open Door in China and peace in Asia. Its aim, he said, was 'to protect Japan against … the greatest peril that might menace her … a coalition of other powers'. Japan could cope with a war with one power but a fight with more than one would put it, in

33 Ibid., Art 1.

34 Walton in House of Commons 20-3-1902 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1902/mar/20/situation-in-china-general-observations).

35 Balfour to Lansdowne 12-12-1901 (cited in Nish 1902: 6).

36 Norman in House of Commons 13-2-1902 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/1902/feb/13/anglo-japanese-agreement).

the words of Lansdowne, in 'imminent peril'.[37] Equally, other proponents in Great Britain hailed the contribution the treaty would make to the maintenance of peace. In fact, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance gave Japan the backing it needed to take on Russia. In St Petersburg, British ambassador Scott could deny in his talks with the Russian Foreign Minister that the treaty was directed against Russia. But in fact, as Lamsdorff observed, this was 'a conclusion generally drawn'.[38] Scott also described the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as having 'an essential pacific and unaggressive object', but he was far from convincing.[39] The alliance put a damper on the hopes of Russian protagonists of a further advance in north Asia of any assistance (in word or deed) of the French navy in a confrontation with Japan.

In March France and Russia, in reaction to the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, issued a joint declaration on China; pledging that they also had the independence and territorial integrity of China and Korea in mind. St Petersburg put on a brave face. In a separate statement the Russian government assured the world that it had 'received with the most perfect calm' the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and that peace and furthering of commerce and industry in the Far East had always been what Russia had aspired to. As an example of this intent, the beneficial effect of the 'great Siberian Railway, together with its branch line through Manchuria towards a port always ice-free' was mentioned (*New York Times* 21-3-1902). In a joint note St Petersburg and Paris also warned Great Britain and Japan that should action by a third power or new unrest in China threaten their interests, Russia and France would consider measures to safeguard these.[40]

Russia responded by rekindling the old British fear of an assault on India. Shortly after London and Tokyo had signed their treaty, a Russian journal published a belligerent speech that the Russian Minister of War, General Kuropatkin, had made a few months earlier in Turkistan. In it he had impressed upon the Russian soldiers present that they might have to fight 'Afghan and English troops, armed and trained as European troops are', warning them that this was an enemy very different from 'the irregular masses of Bokhara and Khokand'.[41] A few months later, to add to the pressure, Kuropatkin had it leaked through the German ambassador in

37 Lansdowne in House of Lords 13-2-1902 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1902/feb/13/anglo-japanese agreement).

38 Scott to Lansdowne 3-3-1902 (PRO FO 539 81).

39 Ibid.

40 E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Ch. X, The Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 1901-02, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/japan.htm.

41 Scott to Lansdowne 3-3-1902 (PRO FO 539 81).

St Petersburg that he intended to improve the Russian railway link to the Afghan frontier to speed up the transportation of troops enabling Russia to 'strike a crushing blow at England in the event of complications' with that country.[42]

Germany informed Russia and France that its policy 'in the Far East was one of entire reserve and only concerned trade' and that Berlin did not support 'the aspirations of England and Japan in Manchuria and Korea', stressing, as Berlin had done before, that Germany had no intention at all of becoming involved in a conflict in 'those far-off regions'.[43] Germany's stand caused some unintended irritation in St Petersburg because Berlin had ignored a suggestion by Nicholas II who had wanted Germany to join the Franco-Russian note about the measures that might be taken to safeguard their interests in China.[44] Wilhelm II reacted remarkably sedately. He congratulated King Edward 'on the conclusion of a new alliance, which we all look upon as a guarantee for peace in the East'.[45] Behind closed doors the mood was different. From London the new German ambassador, Paul Count Wolff Metternich zur Gracht, had reported home that the 'departure from isolation' had given the British 'increased self-confidence'.[46] Bülow wondered against whom this new élan would be directed and did not exclude that the new Alliance partners might act to the detriment of German ambitions in the Far East. He also did not rule out that the United States might come out in favour of an Anglo-Japanese undertaking.[47]

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance strengthened Tokyo's case for having the Russian army evacuate South Manchuria. In the Russo-Chinese Convention with regard to Manchuria, signed on 8 April (or 26 March according to the Russian calendar) 1902 – drawn up 'with the object of re-establishing and confirming the relations of good neighbourhood, which were disturbed by the rising in the Celestial Empire of the year 1900', as the preamble claimed[48] – Russia promised to withdraw its troops within one and a half years and have Chinese authority re-established in Manchuria. However,

42 Scott to Lansdowne 27-5-1902 (PRO FO 539 81).

43 Memorandum Bülow 20-3-1902 (E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Ch. X, The Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 1901-02, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/japan.htm).

44 Ibid.

45 Wilhelm II to Edward VII 26-2-1902 (cited in Massie 1993: 340).

46 Bülow to Metternich 13-3-1902 E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, Ch. X, The Anglo-Japanese Agreement, 1901-02, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/dugdale/japan.htm).

47 Ibid.

48 Convention with regard to Manchuria (www.chineseforeignrelations.net/node/240, accessed 10-1-2011).

St Petersburg would decide how many soldiers China would be allowed to station in Manchuria after such a Russian retreat. It was only

> natural that the maintenance in the above-mentioned district of an over large number of [Chinese] troops must necessarily lead to a reinforcement of the Russian military force in the neighbouring districts, and thus would bring about an increase of expenditure on military requirements undesirable for both States.[49]

China would also not be allowed to construct any railways in South Manchuria without Russian consent (mention in this respect was made of the Anglo-Russian Railway Agreement of 1899, in which London had promised not to build railways north of the Chinese Wall). In return for Russian troops leaving South Manchuria, the Chinese government had to pledge to protect the Manchurian Railway and to guarantee the safety of the Russians living and working in Manchuria. Another condition for the withdrawal of the Russian army was that no disturbances would arise. Finally, no doubt was left that Russia would stay on 'might the action of other Powers' prevent an evacuation of its troops.[50]

The Korean question

Korea had, not without reason, been mentioned in the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Treaty and the Russo-French Declaration on China that came in its wake. In the decade after the Sino-Japanese War, Russia and Japan had become entangled in a struggle for hegemony in Korea; as was manifested by the frequent visits of their warships, also keeping a watch over Korea's open ports. To the Japanese, already witnessing how stealthily Russia was taking control of South Manchuria, it was vital that Korea did not fall into Russian hands. A Russian Korea not only implied an incursion into a region Japan wanted to fall within its own sphere of political and economic influence, it also posed a threat to Japan's own security, near as Korea was to its own shores. In 1901 Kato Takaaki had already informed MacDonald that the Japanese government would not go to war over Manchuria but that Korea was a different matter: 'If Korea is touched, our existence is threatened and

49 Ibid., Art. III.
50 Ibid., Art. II.

to save our lives we must go to war'.[51] In its negotiations with Russia, Japan also stressed that Korea was 'an important outpost in Japan's line of defence' and that Japan considered Korea's independence 'absolutely essential to her own repose and safety' (cited in Millard 1906: 81).

Russia continued to press on. In 1899-1900 a crisis had loomed when Russia purchased land to secure a coaling station in Masan, near Busan on the southeast coast of Korea. Tokyo could hardy allow this, if only because such a base might give Russia control over the southern entrance of the Sea of Japan; a position it already had at its northern entrance when it had annexed Sakhalin in 1875. Japan threatened to act. Russia could only reach an agreement that in Masan no land in the harbour would be ceded or sold to any foreign power, but Japan would circumvent the stipulation by using Japanese settlers as front men and buying land to establish a foreign settlement. It succeeded in turning Masan into an almost exclusively Japanese port, stationing a police force there to protect the Japanese in the city (Hamilton 1904: 199). Another source of Russo-Japanese friction was a Russian lumber concession in north Korea on the bank of the Yalu River, right across the border with Manchuria. Tokyo accused St Petersburg of using the concession to strengthen its economic and military presence in Korea.

Co-players in the background were the United States, France and Great Britain. Around the turn of the century, American commercial interests in Korea were considerable. Instrumental in the American success had been American missionaries, who were 'closely associated with the more important export houses in the leading industrial centres of America' (ibid.: 265). The most prominent among them was Horace Newton Allen. In 1884 he had come to Korea as one of the first of a fast growing number of American missionaries. He learned to speak Korean fluently and developed excellent relations with the Korean court. Starting as secretary of the American legation in Seoul, Allen was appointed American envoy in 1897. In the past, Allen's dealings had brought him in conflict with Japan and the pro-Japanese faction in the Korean government, but he had to change course after the Russian occupation of Port Arthur and the need for goodwill for the annexations of Hawaii and the Philippines made Washington move closer to Japan. In Seoul Allen, ordered by Washington not to block Japanese interests in Korea, began to present Russia as the greatest threat to American mercantile presence in Korea, betting on an Anglo-Japanese or Anglo-American alliance to protect American commerce in Korea.

51 MacDonald to Lansdowne 21-3-1901 (PRO FO 539).

France also had a role to play. It did so, mirroring the international relations of those days, as it did in China, in concert with Russia. In early 1901 the Russian ambassador in Seoul, A. Pavlov, backed by his French colleague, tried to undermine the position of McLeavy Brown for a second time. In planning his move he also gained the cooperation of the Korean Minister of Finance, an avowed opponent of foreign control of customs revenue, and a partly British, partly French company, the Syndicat du Yunnan. Registered in London, its capital was provided by British as well as French investors and, as its name indicates, its primary object had been Yunnan, where the company was after mining concessions. The British government had been asked to plead in favour of the Syndicat du Yunnan interests in Beijing but had remained aloof, having doubts about the loyalties of the syndicate and believing that firms with mixed French-British capital served French rather than British interests (Chandran 1977: 320-2). McLeavy Brown threatened to become the victim of what Hamilton (1904: 96) described as the 'abnormal extravagance at the Court'. He had irritated the Korean government by refusing to furnish money from the Customs Office as security for a loan offered by the Syndicat du Yunnan to Emperor Kojong in return for mining concessions.

The scheming in Seoul put an end to any doubts that London might have had in mediating for the Syndicat du Yunnan in Beijing. Lansdowne informed Satow that the company had not been 'altogether straightforward' about its business in Korea and had been 'more inclined to follow French advice than British and refused to have to do anything anymore with the syndicate'.[52] McLeavy Brown succeeded in maintaining his position. He had the support of the American and Japanese envoys in Seoul, but what tipped the scale was the decisive response of the British government, highly suspicious as it was of any joint Franco-Russian move in Asia. Four British warships were directed to Chemulpo, while in Wei-hai-wei preparations were made for the embankment of British troops. International relations and its experience in China had dictated the British response. There was British prestige to consider as well as the rivalry with Russia and France. 'We have', the British journalist Hamilton (1904: 96) wrote, 'little material interest in Korea, but it must not be forgotten that our position in the kingdom should be superior to that of France, and equal to that of Russia' (ibid.: 96).

52 Lansdowne to Satow 30-4-1902, Minute by Lansdowne to Sanderson 25-4-1902 (cited in Chandran 1977: 321).

The Russo-Japanese war

Notwithstanding the Russo-Chinese Convention of the previous year, Russia no longer had any intention of withdrawing its troops from Manchuria. Between May and August 1903 the moderates in the government, Lamsdorff and Witte, who both rejected an aggressive forward strategy in Manchuria and Korea, had to give way to a powerful military group whose aggressive policy found favour with Tsar Nicholas. Lamsdorff became a lame duck when the Tsar made Alexeiev – soon to be appointed as the first Russian Viceroy of the Far East – and not him responsible for Russia's policy in China. He tendered his resignation in May, but was told to stay on. In August, his views no longer being in favour, Witte was forced to relinquish his position as Minister of Finance.

Negotiations between Tokyo and St Petersburg about their respective positions in Manchuria and Korea came to nought and on 6 February 1904 Japan, fearing a Russian military build-up in Manchuria, severed diplomatic relations. Two days later, in the night of 8 February, hours before Japan formally declared war on Russia, surprise attacks on Russian warships in Chemulpo and Port Arthur signalled the start of the Russo-Japanese War.

In Korea Emperor Kojong declared 'the strictest neutrality', but shortly after war had started Japanese troops disembarked at Chemulpo to march to Seoul. On 11 February 1904 Russia protested with the other powers that by invading Korea Japan had attacked a nation of which the independence had been recognised by the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of January 1902 and the Franco-Russian Declaration on China of March of that year. Response was tepid, with Great Britain and the United States tending to sympathise with Japan. On the British side, the traditional anti-Russian mood was coupled with a sense of relief now that Russia had to deploy its army in Manchuria and, for the moment, had to abandon any intent with regard to India. As Lawton (1912: 226) wrote, the war 'would remove, at least for a considerable time, the uneasiness felt in regard to the Indian Frontier'. American politicians and business circles had a different motive: the Russian policy in Manchuria and its impediments for American trade, which it was hoped would be removed after a Japanese victory. The position of Washington and London was reflected in the financial world. Loans to assist the Japanese war effort, popular because of the first Japanese military successes, were raised in Great Britain and the United States, and significantly not in France (Drea 2009: 103). Japan had won the war 'largely through Anglo-American moral support and Anglo-American gold', Putnam Weale (1908: 518) would conclude a few years later.

Korea had no option other than to yield to Japan. At the end of February 1904 the Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs had to sign a protocol that virtually turned his country into a Japanese protectorate. In return for a Japanese promise to protect Korea's independence and its monarchy, Korean had to allow Japan to reform its administration and should refrain from a foreign policy that was contrary to the 'principles' of the protocol. Another stipulation was that when foreign aggression or domestic disturbances threatened Korea or its monarchy Japanese troops should be allowed to occupy strategic positions in the country.[53] The next step came in August when the Emperor and the members of the Cabinet were forced to sign a diktat in which they accepted the appointment of a Japanese adviser to the Ministry of Finance and a foreign expert recommended by Japan to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Contracts concluded with foreigners in future needed Japanese approval. Finally, in February 1905, Japan took control of Korea's diplomatic corps while the appointment of foreign advisers became subject to Japanese consent.

The attack on Port Arthur had given Japan superiority at sea. In response, the Russian Baltic fleet, commanded by Admiral Zinovy Petrovich Rozhestvensky, less well-equipped and of older make than its Far Eastern counterpart, set out on its journey to the Far East as the Second Pacific Squadron in October 1904. In 1902, when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had been concluded, Russia had turned to Germany in an effort to revive the Far Eastern Triple Alliance of 1895. Berlin had declined and had taken a wait-and-see attitude. As the principal adviser for foreign affairs, Friedrich August von Holstein, had put it in a memorandum to Wilhelm II: '[I]t is in our interests to keep our hands free, so that His Majesty will be able to claim appropriate compensation not only for eventual support, but even for remaining neutral'.[54] Berlin continued on this course throughout the Russo-Japanese war. Shortly after the outbreak of war, Bülow explained in a memorandum to Wilhelm II that Germany faced two dangers: one was a deterioration of relations with Russia, the other that of being 'pushed forward by Russia against Japan or still more against England'.[55] Having Russia and Japan fighting it out was not that bad from a German perspective; it weakened Japanese military strength in Asia, and that of Russia in Asia and Europe.

With Wilhelm's sympathies clearly with Russia and not Japan the moment had come to practice benevolent neutrality, the term that had so

53 The Japanese-Korean Protocol of 23-2-1904.

54 Memorandum by Holstein 24-3-1902, in: Taylor 1971: 403.

55 Memorandum by Bülow 14-2-1904, in Taylor 1971: 420.

Figure 31 Funeral procession of a Japanese officer at Yokohama

Source: Tyler 1905

confused the international community in 1901. Albert Ballin, director of the Hamburg-Amerika Linie and a close friend of Wilhelm II, earned his shipping company a contract to organise the fuelling of the Russian fleet en route to East Asia; making Lawton (1912: 247) conclude that Germany had wholeheartedly supported the Russian war effort. Such support had the blessing of Wilhelm II who, rabidly anti-Japanese as he was, urged Nicholas II on (Bernstein 1918: 62).

One of the consequences for Great Britain had been that shortly after the outbreak of the war the only British trading house in Vladivostok had been forced to leave due to what Putnam Weale (1908: 33) described as 'the spy mania and the unfortunate assumption that British and Japanese had become identical terms'. In London both government and opposition took a low profile, not wanting to become involved in war. As the Liberal Member of Parliament, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, said: '[I]n the present state of Europe, with the Russo-Japanese War proceeding, and with our engagement towards Japan', the House of Commons should refrain from discussing Great Britain's relations to the other powers. Acting otherwise 'might easily cause harm ... and silence seemed ... to be the best course'.[56] Nevertheless, as

56 Dilke in House of Commons 9-6-1904 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1904/jun/09/class.ii).

Germany provided some assistance to the Russian war effort, so did Great Britain. It bought two warships to prevent that they would end up in Russian hands, facilitated the purchase by Japan from Argentine of two cruisers just built in Genoa (commanded on their way to Japan by British captains) and closed its ports to the Baltic fleet. Britain had also seen to it that its treaty partner had entered the war as well prepared as it could. British experts had been sent to Japan to advise on the building of warships and Japanese shipbuilders had been allowed to observe state-of-the-art techniques at British shipyards (Steeds 2002: 4; Lawton 1912: 598).

Rozhestvensky's fleet reached the battle zone in East Asia after a chaotic voyage of seven months, to be defeated there by the Japanese navy in the sea battle of Tsushima, fought in the Strait between Korea and Japan on 27 and 28 May 1905. Parts of Russian warships were destroyed, others surrendered. Rozhestvensky ended up as a prisoner of war. On land Japanese troops had also progressed. They had taken Dalian in June 1904 and Port Arthur in January 1905, but by the spring of 1905, when Japan had conquered about half of South Manchuria, a stalemate had developed (Drea 2009: 109). Outside Manchuria, Sakhalin was occupied in July 1905. There, almost immediately, Tokyo carried through a Japanification with Russian geographical names being replaced by Japanese ones.

The resistance put up by the Russians impressed Edward Grey, soon to become British Foreign Secretary, and probably others too. In 1908, speculating about what would have happened when, in the Russo-Japanese war, Tokyo and St Petersburg had come to some kind of early agreement and the Russian army would have been redirected towards Persia, he ventured that in that case Great Britain would have 'been faced with the horrors of a land war of a colossal character'.[57]

Russia was far from defeated. It could bring in reinforcements and heavy artillery from European Russia by rail, while, as Kato Takaaki had admitted in 1901, Japan could not sustain a prolonged war. Its army was confronted with an increasingly serious shortage of troops, had suffered heavy losses and large numbers of its soldiers suffered from beriberi and other diseases. Overextended lines of supply, failing logistics and a shortage of ammunition only made matters worse (Drea 2009: 105-20). Finance was another case in point. The war had burdened the country with a huge debt, with financiers abroad becoming hesitant to provide new loans when the Japanese land offensive came to a standstill (Lawton 1912: 847-8). Russia also had acute

57 Grey in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russian-convention).

financial problems. Overconfident that the war would be brief and victorious, St Petersburg had failed to seek loans on the international market to finance a continuation of war (Wcislo 2011: 205). On top of this came the '1905 revolution' with strikes and demonstrations all over the country and discontent in the army and navy culminating in the Potemkin mutiny of June 1905.

Peace was mediated by the United States. Russian and Japanese negotiators met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. At the Peace Accord signed on 5 September (or 23 August) 1905, Japan and Russia promised to return Manchuria to China and to evacuate their troops within one and a half years. An exception was made for the Liaodong Peninsula. Its lease – pending the consent of China it was hypocritically promised – was transferred to Japan (which raised some questions about the British position in Wei-hai-wei, leased for the duration that Port Arthur would be Russian). Port Arthur was renamed Ryojun, Dalian became Dairen. Further, Japan took over the southern section of the South Manchurian Railway, the line between Changchun and Port Arthur, including the coal mines which belonged it; giving Japan control of that part of the region, where it proudly flew its own South Manchuria Railway flag.

Both countries promised that the railways they operated in Manchuria (including the Chinese Eastern Railway) would in future only be used for commercial and industrial purposes, not for strategic, military ones. Japan and Russia preserved the right to have soldiers guard their part of the

Figure 32 Peace talks at Portsmouth (the third person from the left is Witte)

Source: Tyler 1905

railway. In its section Japan would continue the Russian tradition of ordering railway material in the United States and not in Great Britain (Lawton 1912: 364). Similar to Russia, the effort by the Japanese South Manchuria Railway Company to develop its railway zone embittered the Manchurians; among others by expropriating land said to be needed for its enterprises. This would also lead to protests abroad. The South Manchuria Railway Company engaged in a wide range of activities, ranging from mining and urban development to running dairies and loss-making but excellent hotels in cities where the trains stopped (Wertheimer 1913: 41). In its zone the Japanese levied taxes and encouraged the settlement of compatriots. To justify all this Tokyo referred to the Chinese Eastern Railway Conventions concluded between Russia and China in 1896 and 1898 (Lawton 1912: 1176). Southern Sakhalin became Japanese. Both countries promised to build no fortifications on their part of the island. Korea remained independent, but in the Portsmouth treaty Russia recognised that Japan had 'paramount political, military and economic interests' in Korea and promised that it would neither 'obstruct nor interfere with measures for guidance, protection and control' which Japan might find necessary to take.[58]

Japan and Russia both had to deal with anti-war sentiments among the population. In Russia unrest spread to Vladivostok in October, where mutinying soldiers and sailors briefly gained hold of the city in January. In Japan the peace terms drew bitter reactions and created widespread discontent, fanned by the press. This resulted in days of rioting in Tokyo, culminating in the Hibiya incident of 5 September 1905. Martial law had to be declared. Those opposing the peace treaty made much of the fact that Japan had not gained the whole of Sakhalin, which Japan had so reluctantly turned over to Russia in 1875. Another complaint was that Japan had abandoned demands for a war indemnity; Japanese insistence on this point Nicholas II had made clear from the start would be a reason for Russia to resume war (Wcislo 2011: 205). In giving in, Tokyo would have left it to the Japanese population to bear the costs of war by heavy taxation and perhaps by even bringing the country to the brink of bankruptcy. Anti-Western feelings were also vented. The British and American loans provided gave those opposing the Peace Accord the argument that Japan had been fighting America and Great Britain's war to end Russian hegemony in South Manchuria, in which Japan had furnished the men and the United States and Great Britain the money.

At Portsmouth the voice of the Chinese had been ignored. The Chinese government had asked to be allowed to attend the peace negotiations, but

58 Treaty of Portsmouth, Art. II.

Japan had said no. Afterwards, China protested about the number of soldiers Russia and Japan were allowed to station in Manchuria. It also regretted that the matter of full restoration of Chinese authority in South Manchuria had not been discussed. China was too weak to persist. In the Sino-Japanese Treaty dated 22 December 1905 relating to Manchuria (also referred to as the Manchurian Treaty or the Beijing Treaty), China consented to the gains the Portsmouth Treaty had brought Japan. In an Additional Agreement Japan, in turn, committed itself to returning Chinese public and private property it had 'occupied or expropriated on account of military necessity … no longer required for military purposes'. The rest of the Chinese property would be handed back after Japanese troops had left Manchuria.[59] In return, in one of the secret protocols addended, the Chinese government pledged 'for the interest of the South Manchuria Railway, not to construct … any main line in the neighborhood of and parallel to that railway or any branch which might be prejudicial' to that line.[60]

The outcome of the Russo-Japanese war for the time being put an end to a further encroachment of the European powers in China. Russia had to recover from the blows it had received, Germany paid the price for the sympathy it had shown to Russia, and France was on its own in the Far East. As Satow saw it: the war 'seemed to knock on the head all Russian schemes of territorial acquisition'.[61] Russia was defeated, but in Great Britain the spectre of Russia as an aggressive power had not disappeared, nor had the awe in which its army was held. Russia had acquired an image of great resilience, of a country that 'only draws back so as to jump better' (Putnam Weale 1908: 230). Or, as Lawton (1912: 431) put it, and he and Putnam Weale certainly were not alone in their fear: history had shown that while Russia had 'experienced severe reverses from time to time, never has she been thrown back on her original position. Even her defeats have ended in gain, and after each of these she has waited her opportunity, and prepared her way for yet another step forward'. In Japan, the fear of Russia seeking revenge became one of the arguments of maintaining a strong army (Drea 2009: 126-7).

Russia began by consolidating what it still had, a determination that found its symbolic expression in the building of the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Harbin; though the cathedral, built after the Russo-Japanese War and still built of wood, was less impressive than the present-day building completed in 1932. In that part of South Manchuria still under Russian control, it

59 Additional Agreement, Art. IV (in: Manchuria 1921: 80-1).
60 Secret Protocols (in: Manchuria 1921: 83).
61 Satow to Grey 31-3-1906 (PRO FO 800 44).

intended to stay, treating its part of the railway and the land surrounding it as Russian territory (making for a kind of partnership with Japan, which had a similar intent in its part of Manchuria). As Putnam Weale (1908: 234-5), who visited the region in early 1907, observed: 'The railway is everything, and now that war is over and the military have dispersed, the great railway bureaux resume their old position of absolute masters. Chinese officialdom rules only the agriculturists and nothing more'. With the South Manchurian Railway after the Portsmouth Peace Treaty no longer available for the transportation of armament and troops, work was started on the construction of a new railroad, the Amur Railway, with Vladivostok as terminus. In Vladivostok the fortifications were strengthened. St Petersburg would also claim – in vain – that Article VI of the Chinese Eastern Railway Convention of September 1896 permitted it to turn Harbin (at present a large metropolis which owes its existence to the railways) and a number of other places along its railroads in Manchuria into a kind of Russian-dominated foreign settlements with their own municipalities independent of Chinese control.