

British Policy in China and Russo-Japanese Rivalry in the Far East

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By the end of the 19th century Great Britain had to deal with new serious problems in the Far East. The position of its international rivals – especially Russia – rose considerably during the 90s. This was quite apparent in the northern part of Qing Empire – Manchuria where the Russians gained important concessions and a naval base of Port Arthur. Britain therefore tried to utilize the deepening of the Russo-Japanese rivalry, which was apparent since the second half of the 19th century. After new Russian pressure ensuing the Boxer revolution, London started direct negotiations with Tokyo. Their result was the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which ended the era of British “Splendid Isolation”. Thanks to this development and naval and economic cooperation of both countries, Japan was able to soundly defeat Russia in the Russo-Japanese war. This was a considerable success of the British diplomacy, which was able to stop its main opponent without going to war itself. On the other hand, the rise of Japan as a Great Power meant, that the Land of the Rising Sun became a key factor in the British position in China. Britain started to be increasingly dependent on its support in next years.

[Great Britain; China; Japan; Russia; diplomacy; international relations; Russo-Japanese War; Anglo-Japanese Alliance]

China’s defeat¹ in the war with Japan (1894–1895) and the subsequent fight for concessions between the Great Powers and China’s response in the form of the anti-foreigner movement culminating in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899–1900 led to a marked change in the balance of power in China, which began to be called “*the Sick Man of the Far East*” by

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certain observers.² The international resolution to the Boxer Rebellion definitively demonstrated that Chinese issues were no longer under the sole control of Great Britain as they had been for most of the 19th century. The weakening of China as a result of external pressure and the erosion of the central government's power had led to the gradual erosion of British influence and prestige throughout the region. The main catalyser of change in the Far East was the Sino-Japanese War, which transformed the balance of power in Asia in a fundamental way.³ In subsequent years, a large number of Great Powers forced new concessions which represented the foundations for their influence in China. Between 1895 and 1902 alone, Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy and also representatives of the Habsburg monarchy and Belgium acquired concessions in Tianjin. Germany (Jiaozhou),⁴ Russia (Dalian and Port Arthur) and France (Guangzhouwan) then acquired major leased territories which significantly helped them to promote their interests in the Middle Kingdom and create their own spheres of interest which were meant to secure them trade penetration of the crumbling Qing Empire. As such, Britain's concept of free penetration of China, which reached a peak in the period after the Second Opium War,⁵ essentially collapsed despite the fact that Britain still retained its clear dominance of Chinese trade.⁶

As such, London had to pay a lot more attention to the Chinese issue following the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion than it had done in the prior period. In the years following the signing of the Boxer Protocol, Britain (as the country with the most significant economic interests in China) and the other Great Powers had to deal with a number of fundamental issues of Chinese policy. From London's perspective,

² D. SCOTT, *China and the International System, 1840–1949*, New York 2008, p. 152.

³ S. C. M. PAINE, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895*, Cambridge 2003, p. 370.

⁴ T. G. OTTE, "Great Britain, Germany, and the Far-Eastern Crisis of 1897–8", in: *The English Historical Review*, 110, 439, 1995, pp. 1157–1159. Britain responded to the German presence in Jiaozhou and the Russian presence in Port Arthur by leasing the Weihaiwei base. Modern historians have come to the conclusion that this step was motivated by an intention to neutralise Germany's entry into China rather than an attempt to balance Russia's position. Ibidem, p. 1177.

⁵ J. K. FAIRBANK, *Dějiny Číny*, Praha 1998, p. 237.

⁶ The National Archives, London, Kew (further only TNA), Foreign Office (further only FO) 405/171, General Report on China for the year 1906, p. 21, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 1. 6. 1907.

two issues were particularly important: the policy of the other powers in China, and internal developments in the Middle Kingdom, which had to deal with the failure of its previous policies. Looking at the first issue, a primary problem for Britain was Russia's sudden penetration of northern China which threatened Britain's overall position in the region. In terms of China's internal affairs, the issue of reform of the formerly powerful empire and the problems related to this – loans, concessions and foreign trade – played a key role. Great Britain thus had to carefully monitor all aspects of Far East Policy more than ever before in order to be able to continue to control the course of events there and maintain its interests and position within China.

Rivalry of the Great Powers in Northern China and the Establishment of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

As has already been noted, it was the entry of the other Great Powers onto the Chinese stage which represented a fundamental problem for Britain's policy in the Far East from the 1880s. London may have seen the main threat in Russia's penetration of northern China.⁷ The failure of Chinese reforms then made the Middle Kingdom a stage for a new struggle between the Great Powers to expand their interests and spheres of influence. A fairly young power (of only regional importance at this time) in the form of Japan's regime of Meiji period reformers, however, got involved in this conflict, and its dynamic entry into Chinese politics and its protectorate, Korea, had a fundamental impact on the development of the situation here in the form of Japanese–Russian rivalry,⁸ whose roots can be traced back to the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, when the Russians expressed marked interest in the islands of Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands claimed by Japan.⁹ Russia had even governed the island of Tsushima in the Korea Strait for a short time in 1861, before they were forced out following emphatic British protests.¹⁰ In 1875,

⁷ A. MALOZEMOFF, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1958, p. 36.

⁸ PAINE, pp. 94–95.

⁹ M. B. JANSEN, *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge – London 2000, pp. 258–264; for more on the beginning of Russia's penetration of Japan and the Far East, see G. A. LENSEN, *The Russian Push Towards Japan. Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697–1875*, Princeton 1989.

¹⁰ M. R. AUSLIN, *Negotiating with Imperialism. The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of*

St Petersburg forced the government in Tokyo to sign a treaty which secured Russia control of Sakhalin.¹¹ Further Russian claims subsequently persuaded Japan that satisfying Russian demands only led to further demands. As such, Tokyo, at the time mainly dealing with internal reforms, endeavoured to find a way to secure itself against possible Russian aggression.

One of the ways for the leaders of the recent Meiji Revolution represented by the slogan “fukoku kyohei” (enrich the state, strengthen the military) to achieve their goals was for Japan to expand its territory along the model of the Western Powers. In this regard, Tokyo was quick to imitate the form of their expansion, as demonstrated during the expedition to Formosa in 1874, and in particular two years later when Japan used the threat of warfare to force Korea to open up through signature of the Gangwa Treaty.¹² Japan’s penetration of the peninsula, however, led to strong rivalry between Japan and China, which the European powers also got involved in (mainly Russia and Great Britain,¹³ culminating in 1894 in the outbreak of a war between the two countries in which China was heavily defeated to the surprise of the European public (though not to the diplomats present there). As such, the Middle Kingdom found itself on the edge of calamity.¹⁴ The outcome was the signature of the Treaty of Shimonoseki (17 April 1895) which awarded Formosa, the Pescadores islands, the Liaodong Peninsula and 200 million taels (25 million pounds) in war reparations to Japan.¹⁵ These profits, however, were in direct conflict with Russian ambitions in the Far East, which aimed to acquire an ice-free port in

Japanese Diplomacy, Harvard 2006, pp. 80ff.

¹¹ LENSEN, p. 458; details also in J. L. McCLAIN, *A Modern History of Japan*, New York – London 2002, p. 288.

¹² P. DUUS, *The Abacus and the Sword. The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895–1910*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1995, pp. 46–48; J. KOČVAR, “The Opening of Korea until 1876”, in: *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 2009, pp. 209ff; H. CONROY, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea – 1868–1910*, Philadelphia 1960, pp. 65–66.

¹³ For more on British policy in Korea before the Sino-Japanese War, see A. SKŘIVAN st. – A. SKŘIVAN ml., “Velká Británie a ‘hra o Koreu’. K vývoji na Dálném východě před první čínsko-japonskou válkou”, in: *Historický obzor*, 25, 9/10, 2014, pp. 207–215.

¹⁴ At the end of the war, even its capital city was at the mercy of Japan’s weapons. D. TWITCHETT – J. K. FAIRBANK (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 11, London – New York – New Rochelle 1980, p. 273.

¹⁵ PAINE, pp. 271ff.

the form of the Port Arthur base on the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula. As such, with the support of France and Germany, Russia placed itself at the head of the so-called Triple Intervention which forced Tokyo to give up Liaodong and the Pescadores Islands in exchange for a further 30 million taels in war reparations.¹⁶ Just two years later, a Russian fleet overwintered in Port Arthur, and St Petersburg forced Beijing to sign a treaty leasing the port to the Russians.¹⁷ The subsequent Sino-Russian agreement on construction of a railway line from the port to the then built Trans-Siberian Railway,¹⁸ clearly testifies to the importance Russia gave this region, and the level of its engagement in the Far East.

Britain was, of course, aware of the serious threat Russia's penetration represented to its interests.¹⁹ London anticipated that approval of the construction of the Russian railway in Manchuria was just another of Russian Finance Minister Sergei Yulyevich Witte's steps to acquire a dominant position not just in Manchuria, but the whole of northern China.²⁰ This fact naturally brought it closer to Japan, for whom Russian expansion also represented a serious threat and which could not forget the humiliation it had experienced during the Triple Intervention which had deprived it of its sweetest fruits of victory. Even before the conflict and during the war, a number of Britain's representatives in the Far East had expressed fairly open sympathy with Japan.²¹ The victory of the Land of the Rising Sun was subsequently considered by some observers as proof of Japan's entry to the club of "civilised" countries, something also evidenced in an article by the *News Chronicle* newspaper correspondent, Sir Henry Norman, who

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 289; cf. D. KEENE, *Emperor of Japan. Meiji and His World, 1852–1912*, New York 2002, pp. 506–508; A. SKŘIVAN st. – A. SKŘIVAN ml., "Soumrak říše Čchingü. Čínsko-japonská válka, 1894–1895", in: *Historický obzor*, 25, 11/12, 2014, pp. 255ff.

¹⁷ T. G. OTTE, *The China Question. Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894–1905*, New York 2007, p. 139. It is interesting that a number of Russian naval commanders did not consider Port Arthur an ideal base because of geographical conditions and doubted that it would meet naval needs. MALOZEMOFF, p. 100.

¹⁸ MALOZEMOFF, p. 112.

¹⁹ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/1, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 4. 5. 1896.

²⁰ A. L. ROSENBAUM, "The Manchuria Bridgehead: Anglo-Russian Rivalry and the Imperial Railways of North China", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 10, 1, 1976, p. 44.

²¹ I. NISHI, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894–1907*, London – New York 2012, pp. 11–14.

wrote that, “the war with China [...] will at last force foreigners to see Japan as she is. The Japanese are a martial and proud race, with marvellous intelligence, and untiring energy and enthusiasm”.²² Following the Triple Intervention, Britain assured Tokyo that Britain did not approve of this development and it never planned to deprive Japan of the “reasonable fruits of her victories, although they would have much preferred no disturbance of the status quo”.²³ Britain’s favourable position towards Japan, however, did not automatically signal possible collaboration between the two countries, although it did herald a change in London’s approach to the country which until recently had been perceived as an “uncivilised” state at the level of China. Britain, whose policy during the conflict was focused on ensuring its status in China and Japan was not damaged (which was quite difficult), as such hoped that their non-participation in the Triple Intervention would allow for future collaboration with the island empire.²⁴

Russian strategy in the second half of the 1890s, however, aroused ever greater fears in Britain regarding St Petersburg’s intentions. The greatest worries were induced by the fact that Russia had, through a combination of promises and pressure, been able to exploit the Chinese government’s weaknesses and the fact that at that time China “was not a centralized state like France but a group of loosely federated satrapies”, which gave the Russia the opportunity to govern China’s outlying territories, over which the imperial court had mere formal control.²⁵ This reality expressed itself above all following the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion, which also affected Russia’s sphere of interests in Manchuria,²⁶ and on the pretext of maintaining order it allowed Russia to more than double its military presence in the region. At the end of November 1900, St Petersburg was able to sign a treaty with Beijing in which it was able to keep its forces in Manchuria for as long as it considered necessary.²⁷ This development convinced many

²² PAINE, p. 17.

²³ OTTE, *The China Question*, p. 70.

²⁴ SKŘIVAN – SKŘIVAN, “Soumrak říše Čchingů”, p. 257; for more on Britain’s stance on the Treaty of Shimonoseki, see F. Q. QUO, “British Diplomacy and the Cession of Formosa, 1894–95”, in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 2, 2, 1968, pp. 141–154.

²⁵ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/4, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 8. 10. 1901.

²⁶ J. A. WHITE, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, Princeton 1964, p. 5.

²⁷ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/4, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 14. 12. 1900; MALOZEMOFF, pp. 153–155.

observers that Russia had basically created its own protectorate in Manchuria and that it was planning to annex the northern part of Manchuria, including Harbin.²⁸ Britain's envoy in Beijing, one of the absolute leading experts on Far East issues, Sir Ernest Mason Satow, said of this whole situation that because Russia had managed to convince the imperial court that it was its best friend it had increased its influence in the Far East significantly.²⁹ The British diplomat considered Russia's objective to be the acquisition of a dominant position in China to the detriment of Great Britain.³⁰ As such, Russian policy represented a deadly threat to London's key interests, for which trade with China was more important than with any other part of the British Empire. Bringing together political and economic issues in its Far East policy meant that Britain's political position and influence in Beijing was closely associated with its economic interests. These were now at threat due to increasing pressure from Russia.

As such, British policy endeavoured to force Russia to commit itself to withdrawing its forces from Manchuria – the territory of a foreign country – by a certain (specific) time. For a long time, St Petersburg refused to acquiesce to these demands, and once it had begun negotiations with Beijing on withdrawing its units, its intention was clear – to avoid a clear commitment in this regard and force China to make the greatest concessions possible. One such concession, for example, was the agreement that China would not allow any other country than Russia mining rights in Manchuria. When the agreement on evacuating Manchuria was finally signed in 8 April 1902, it was merely a response to the collapse of previous negotiations with China and the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.³¹ By this time, most Chinese, including Li Hongzhang, who had died in November 1901, had realised that Russia's previous friendly policy had been solely motivated by its expansive intentions. Although China attempted to gain the support of the Great Powers (with Britain advising it not to compromise),³² during subsequent negotiations it was almost impossible

²⁸ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/4, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 25. 10. 1901; I. NISH, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, London – New York 1985, pp. 91–93.

²⁹ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/4, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 25. 11. 1901.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ MALOZEMOFF, p. 175.

³² TNA, PRO 30/33/16/5, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 11. 1. 1902.

to resist Russian pressure. This allowed St Petersburg to force the inclusion of a clause in the withdrawal agreement which stated that withdrawal would only occur if there was no disorder or if it was not prevented from doing so by the measures of other Great Powers, something which essentially made the agreement redundant.³³

In the mean time, Russia's position not just in Manchuria, but also in Korea, was fundamentally boosted. Not just Britain, but also Japan which perceived Korea as key for its interests and security, were significantly disturbed by the activities of the Russian company headed by Yulii Mikhailovich Briner which acquired the right to mine in the basin of the Yalu River forming the border between Manchuria and Korea.³⁴ This measure was then linked to the placement of 2,000 soldiers on the Chinese side of the border with Korea.³⁵ Russia had thus evidently set out on a path to further territorial expansion in the Far East. Russian Finance Minister Sergei Yulyevich Witte's opinion cautioning Tsar Nicholas II and promoting economic penetration of the region was suppressed by a pressure group around the Tsar's key advisor, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bezobrazov.³⁶ The success of this reckless political adventurer³⁷ can be explained by Tsar Nicholas II's dwindling willingness to listen to Witte, who had been a key figure in Russian politics for a whole decade. It was Bezobrazov who managed to convince the Tsar of the economic benefits of logging in the Yalu river valley. His influence led Nicholas II and a number of leading members of the Russian nobility to invest a few million roubles in the business. As such, Briner's company was then also easily able to serve as pretext for Russia's military presence in the region.³⁸

Besides Great Britain, it was Japan which felt its interests were most threatened, considering Korea a potential "dagger pointing at Japan's

³³ WHITE, p. 10.

³⁴ MALOZEMOFF, p. 181.

³⁵ WHITE, p. 44.

³⁶ MALOZEMOFF, p. 177.

³⁷ For more on this figure and the policy of his clique at the imperial court, see I. V. LUKOIANOV, "The Bezobrazovtsy", in: J. W. STEINBERG – B. W. MENNING – D. SCHIMMELPENNINCK VAND DER OYE, *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective. World War Zero*, Leiden – Boston 2005, pp. 65–86.

³⁸ Y. PARK, *Korea and the Imperialists. In Search of a National Identity*, Bloomington 2009, p. 60.

heart".³⁹ Tokyo's attempts at reaching an agreement with Russia regarding Japanese interests in Korea and forcing it to limit any further expansion, however, collapsed to a certain extent through Russian intransigence. As such, the situation was perceived to be serious. The imperial government, however, was painfully aware of Japan's weaknesses and isolation. Its recollection of the Triple Intervention further clearly demonstrated what Japan's chances would be if it had to face the power's pressure alone. As such, Japan's Prime Minister, Itô Hirobumi, and his successor, Katsura Tarô (he held the role from 2 June 1901), came to the conclusion that Japan on the one hand would have to continue in its negotiations with Russia, but at the same time would have to secure strong support from another Great Power which could help it resist St Petersburg. Due to France and Germany's limited interests in the region and their long-term support of Russian policy, only Great Britain and the United States seemed possible partners, and they welcomed Japan's proclamation regarding support for the Open Door Policy.⁴⁰

Of these two options, a connection with Great Britain appeared most hopeful, a country which had long been a model for Meiji era statesmen. In this regard, the situation was favourable for Japan. Like Japan, Britain felt itself in the defence, and it perceived Russia's penetration as a threat to its vital interests. At the same time, it regarded the method which St Petersburg exploited its problems in South Africa very negatively. Also important was the fact that Britain had begun to realise that if it did not activate its policy and provide Japan with support, then the island empire would have to come to an agreement with Russia at any price.⁴¹ This, however, would mean Britain remaining essentially isolated in the Far East.⁴² Britain's long-term sympathy towards Japan also played an important role, Britain sharing similar interests and also being one of the key countries which had helped the Meiji government in implementing its reforms. As such, voices calling for closer co-operation between the two countries were nothing new.⁴³ In 1901, London was thus pleased to acknowledge Japan's pos-

³⁹ NISH, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, pp. 97ff.

⁴⁰ OTTE, *The China Question*, p. 286.

⁴¹ ROSENBAUM, p. 62.

⁴² OTTE, *The China Question*, p. 286.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

itive response to its probing on possible collaboration.⁴⁴ Despite divisions in Japan's government with some politicians supporting a link with Britain and a second section of the cabinet proposing compromises with Russia and an agreement with St Petersburg at any price, in April 1901 the Japanese envoy in London, Count Hayashi Tadasu, made a proposition to Britain's Foreign Secretary Lansdowne, "to make a permanent agreement for the maintenance of peace in the Far East".⁴⁵

Due to disputes within Japan's cabinet regarding the further direction of foreign policy, further convergence between the two countries did not occur until October 1901 when Japan's Foreign Minister, Komura Jutaró, outlined to British envoy, Sir Claude MacDonald, the opportunity for an agreement based on the principles of preserving Korea's integrity, an Open Door Policy in China and ensuring that should one of the parties get into conflict with a third country then no other power would intervene.⁴⁶ Japan hoped that Germany would also sign a similar agreement.⁴⁷ In the meantime, Britain was anxiously monitoring the discussions taking place between Japan and Russia. If they were to come to a successful conclusion before they themselves could reach agreement with Tokyo, then Britain would remain isolated in Asia, something which would have fundamental consequences for its further interests. As such, Envoy MacDonald informed Japan at the beginning of November that the British government agreed with the political framework outlined by Komura.⁴⁸ Britain, however, remained somewhat cool to the idea of Germany getting involved in the Anglo-Japanese agreement, as such an agreement would have had a fundamental impact on Britain's position in Europe. Although Anglo-German negotiations had been taking place since 1898 in which both Germany and Britain were attempting to create closer ties between the countries, their course had been interrupted by a number of fundamental factors. In particular, these included London's attempt to avoid overcommitments on the continent, the beginnings of Germany's arm-

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 46/563, Whitehead to Salisbury, 14. 8. 1901; cf. NISH, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, pp. 143ff.

⁴⁵ A. M. POLEY (ed.), *The Secret Memoirs of Count Tadasu Hayashi*, Vol. 2, New York 2002, p. 121.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO 46/563, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 24. 10. 1901.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ TNA, FO 46/563, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 6. 11. 1901.

ing of the navy and unfortunate statements made by Chancellor Bülow.⁴⁹ At the time when Japan was beginning to pursue relations with Britain, London began to lose interest in agreement with Germany. From their perspective, Japanese support in the Far East was much more useful than German support. As such, MacDonald informed Komura that Britain preferred negotiations with Japan only in that their two countries were closer to each other than Britain was with Germany.⁵⁰ As such, in the end, Japan had to abandon its idea of Germany joining the planned Anglo-Japanese Alliance.⁵¹

Lansdowne, however, was aware he needed to hurry. The situation in Tokyo was continuing to deteriorate through Russian pressure. Marquis Itó was known for preferring an agreement with Russia and at this time was visiting first Berlin, then in November 1901 also St Petersburg where Witte assured him that Russia had no special interests in Korea.⁵² Although these concurrent Japanese discussions aroused a certain suspicion in London, they did force Britain to make a final decision. The danger of isolation should Japan settle its disputes with Russia was a real one. As such, Britain submitted its proposal for a formal alliance to Hiyashi.⁵³ Katsura's new government did not discuss it, however, until the beginning of December. Since its negotiations in St Petersburg had become deadlocked, it seemed to government members that an alliance with Great Britain was the only way out of their difficult position. An alliance with Britain would strengthen Japan's negotiating position towards Russia. Should the disputes between the two countries grow into military conflict, the support of Britain and its loans would be key for its successful conduct.⁵⁴ In Britain, a number of British politicians wanted more of a loose tie with Japan, but they were aware that without adequate support it would be difficult for

⁴⁹ A. W. WRAD – G. P. GOOCH, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783–1919*, Vol. 3, Cambridge 1923, pp. 276–286.

⁵⁰ TNA, FO 46/563, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 20. 11. 1901.

⁵¹ TNA, FO 46/563, Hayashi to Lansdowne, 19. 12. 1901.

⁵² KEENE, p. 579.

⁵³ TNA, FO 46/563, Draft treaty between the British and Japanese governments, November 1901.

⁵⁴ Britain had provided the first large loan to Japan in 1899, which was one of the measures which contributed to the rapprochement between the two countries. NISH, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, p. 77.

them to resist Russia alone.⁵⁵ As such, a shared resistance to Russian expansion was the catalyst which led Britain not just to abandoning its policy of “Splendid Isolation”, but also to concluding the first equal treaty of alliance with a non-European power.

Thus, on 10 December, Komura was able to inform MacDonald that the British proposal had received the support not just of the government, but also of the Emperor himself.⁵⁶ As such, discussions could move on to the next phase of negotiations over the details of the prepared treaty. One of these points, for example, was Japan’s demand that Britain maintain a sufficiently strong fleet in the Far East such that in the event of a wider conflict both countries would have a numerical advantage over Russia, France and Germany.⁵⁷ Britain, however, wanted to avoid such a commitment. They were nevertheless aware that Tokyo in particular worried of a possible French intervention should a war break out with Russia. As such, London was forced to take a clear position and accede to the Japanese proposal that the signatories would be required to come to their partner’s aid in the event of getting into conflict with two other powers.⁵⁸ Another of Britain’s concessions was to recognise Tokyo’s entitlement to reserve its right to act independently against Russia in Korea such that it could protect its interests.⁵⁹

As such, the first weeks of January 1902 saw the gradual finalising of the treaty between the two countries. Although Britain had to make concessions to Japan in a number of issues,⁶⁰ it did leave itself the freedom to act as it saw fit should war take place between Japan and Russia. This compromise definitively opened up a path to concluding this key treaty for both countries. 30 January 1902, when the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance took place in London, represented a real turning point which heralded the end of one era in the history of international relations. Because of the key position which

⁵⁵ TNA, PRO 30/33/16/5, Ernest Mason Satow diary, 12. 2. 1902.

⁵⁶ The final decision followed quite a long debate which was affected by the fact that Itó wanted to reach an agreement with Russia, and his supporters in the government perceived negotiations with Britain as breaching the policy of the former Prime Minister at a time when he could not speak out on the issue. KEENE, p. 575.

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 46/563, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 11. 12. 1901.

⁵⁸ TNA, FO 46/563, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 19. 12. 1901.

⁵⁹ TNA, FO 46/563, Lansdowne to MacDonald, London, 7. 1. 1902.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 46/563, Lansdowne to MacDonald, London, 22. 1. 1902.

China still held within British policy and its imperial system, it is no surprise that it was the Chinese question which led the British cabinet to reassess its previous political course, one it had held continuously since the Congress of Vienna with the exception of the Crimean War. On the other hand, however, the little impact that the treaty had in regard to British interests in Europe has led a number of historians not to perceive it as the definitive end to Britain's policy of "Splendid Isolation", but rather as a matter of regional policy which had an impact only on the Far East, and not on the direction of Great Britain's foreign policy as a whole.⁶¹

What was, however, important from a practical perspective was the fact that although the treaty assured Britain of Japanese support against a third power (and vice-versa), it did not commit it to direct engagement should the disputes between Japan and Russia culminate in war. In this case, Britain would be obliged to maintain benevolent neutrality. Only if another country were to get involved in the conflict against Japan (which was not very likely) would Britain be obliged to intervene at the side of the island empire. Articles 1 and 4 of the treaty were also important points. In the first of these, Japan recognised Britain's "special" rights and interests in China, and Britain recognised Japanese interests in Korea. In Article 4, both countries undertook not to conclude any separate agreement with other powers which would breach the articles of the treaty of alliance being concluded.⁶² As such, not only had Britain managed to prevent any Japanese capitulation to Russian pressure which would lead to Russian dominance in northern China, and likely also Korea, but it had also got Tokyo on its side. Japan was thus to serve as a kind of barrier against Russian advance, its task being to protect Britain's interests in China. On the other hand, Japan had pierced its isolation and acquired a strong ally which would allow it to face up to Russian pressure much more vigorously than it had in recent years.⁶³

⁶¹ OTTE, *The China Question*, p. 325.

⁶² TNA, FO 46/563, Treaty between the governments of Great Britain and Japan, London, 30.1. 1902. The full wording of the treaty can be found at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/anglojapanesealliance1902.htm> [2016-08-03]; cf. POLEY, p. 323an.

⁶³ WHITE, p. 94.

In terms of the international situation in the Far East, the treaty represented a marked change in the balance of power. Two countries which until then had been isolated and defensive, joined forces to defend their interests against new arrivals. Although the report on the agreement from London raised concerns in Russia, Russia's general approach to Japan did lead to an underestimation of the country. The Japanese were perceived essentially as distant barbarians, and the only information the public knew about them comprised second-hand realities and stories.⁶⁴ As such, few realised that the treaty which had been concluded would be one of the key moments which would help stop Russian expansion in Asia. The mood in Germany was more one of disappointment regarding the treaty, because it meant the end of hopes of co-operation with Britain. German policy subsequently focused on supporting Russia which through its engagement in Asia was meant to be kept outside of European affairs.⁶⁵

The Consequences of the Russo-Japanese War

Complex negotiations took place over the following two years between Tokyo and St Petersburg whose objective was to stop the Russian advance in Manchuria. Russia's intransigence and the further expansion of its military presence in Manchuria, however, meant that at the end of 1903 Tokyo came to the conclusion that war was unavoidable and if Japan was to have any hope of victory it would have to attack before Russia fortified its position any further.⁶⁶ The outcome was a severance of relations between the two countries⁶⁷ and the subsequent surprise attack by the Japanese navy on the Russian base in Port Arthur. The conflict which broke out was to permanently change the face of Far East politics. While Britain responded at the beginning of the war as if it was a necessity for Japan to defend its interests in Korea,⁶⁸ from the beginning of the war German diplomacy was more supportive of Russia.⁶⁹ This fact can be demonstrated in German's as-

⁶⁴ LENSEN, p. 464ff.

⁶⁵ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes, Berlin (further only PA AA), China No. 1, R 17677, Mumm von Schwarzenstein to Bülow, Peking, 31. 5. 1902.

⁶⁶ NISHI, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 200.

⁶⁷ WHITE, p. 128.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO 46/577, MacDonald to Lansdowne, Tokyo, 6. 2. 1904.

⁶⁹ PA AA, Japan No. 20, R 18757, Arco Valley to Bülow, Tokyo, 7. 2. 1904.

sistance in supplying Russia's 2nd Pacific Fleet heading to battle in Tsushima and Emperor Wilhelm II's proposal to conclude an agreement on European affairs shortly before the end of the war.⁷⁰

Although a recap of the conflict cannot be given at this point, suffice it to say that the Russian advance southwards (to Manchuria and northern China) was ended for good. Thanks to its victory, Japan, despite its economic weakness, became the first non-Western country to join the group of world powers. This fact can indisputably be considered one of the fundamental outcomes of British policy in China, because there is no doubt that Japan's victory was dependent on British support in many regards. This support was seen both in British assistance in quickly building up an extensive Japanese fleet,⁷¹ and in particular generous loans from British bankers, who also became key "purchasers" of Japanese government bonds which Tokyo used to fund its war efforts.⁷² Without this British assistance, Japan would not have been in the position not just to win the war, but to wage it at all.

London considered these British investments in Japan's war efforts to be of great benefit, because besides the economic gains they ensured that Britain could eliminate its greatest rival in China without having to be involved in battle itself. But stopping Russia and supporting Japan also had its disadvantages: "Japan's victories over Russia at sea and in Manchuria had profound implications for Britain and the other Powers. Within the Far Eastern subsystem of international politics, Satow noted somewhat uneasily, 'the rise of Japan has so completely upset our equilibrium as a new planet the size of Mars would derange the solar system'; while Maurice Paléologue, sous-directeur for political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, likened Tsushima to the defeat of Philip II's 'Invincible Armada' and 'a marqué la fin de la domination russe en Asie'."⁷³ Thus Japan became one of the key factors in Far Eastern politics with whom the other powers would from now on have to calculate. Although Britain remained the

⁷⁰ D. WARNER – P. WARNER, *The Tide at Sunrise. A History of the Russo-Japanese War 1904–1905*, London – Portland 2002, pp. 403, 528.

⁷¹ D. C. EVANS – M. R. PEATTIE, *Kaigun. Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy 1887–1941*, Annapolis 1997, pp. 60–66.

⁷² E. S. MILLER, "Japan's Other Victory: Overseas Financing of the Russo-Japanese War", in: J. W. STEINBERG – B. W. MENNING – D. SCHIMMELPENNINCK VANDER OYE, *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective. World War Zero*, Leiden – Boston 2005, pp. 470ff.

⁷³ OTTE, *The China Question*, p. 322.

dominant power in China, from now on it would be to some extent dependent on Japanese support. As such, London would have to endeavour to maintain the best possible relations with Tokyo. Its policy in China was thus heavily linked in with its stance on Japan. Following the Russo-Japanese War, Britain was forced to extend its alliance with Japan (originally agreed for five years) in order to ensure its position in China could be maintained.⁷⁴ Paradoxically, the outcome of Britain's attempts to stop Russia, leading to the Russo-Japanese War, thus transformed Britain's position in the Far East in a major way. Although it retained its interests in China, the era of its dominance was over for good despite the fact its principal rival had been fundamentally weakened. This paradoxical situation was a result of the fact that Britain helped Japan achieve the position of a Great Power, and accepted it as an equal participant in Chinese policy. Other factors limiting Britain's position in China were the deteriorating situation in Europe which averted Britain's attention from the Chinese issue, and the strengthening of Germany and the USA's economic interests in the Far East. Although to a certain extent London remained arbiter of Far Eastern politics, from now on it would have to accept limitations to its power which would bring it to make bigger concessions than it had done previously.

Japan's growing importance for British policy in the Far East meant that Britain's position in China depended on the Russo-Japanese settlement following the end of the Russo-Japanese War, and also on the earliest possible taking of profits from the conflict and their subsequent economic use.⁷⁵ The Treaty of Portsmouth, which forced Russia to recognise Japanese interests in Korea, evacuate Manchuria, return leased territories (Port Arthur and Dalian) to China and give Japan the southern part of Sakhalin, could not form a long-term basis for further relations between both powers. Beyond its effects on Japanese domestic policy where public dissatisfaction with the outcome of peace negotiations led to the fall of Katsura's government,⁷⁶ both countries had an understandable interest in securing their interests in the re-

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 323.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 405/171, General Report on China for the year 1906, pp. 10–11, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 1. 6. 1907.

⁷⁶ R. KOWNER, "The war as a Turning Point in Modern Japanese History", in: R. KOWNER (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, New York 2007, pp. 39–41.

gion through mutual discussions. The British government supported this attempt to a certain extent, because it hoped that a contractual confirmation of the outcome of the Portsmouth peace treaty would lead to a definitive calming of the situation in Asia at a time when it had to concentrate its attention on Europe. This meant that during its negotiations with Russia, Tokyo could assume London's support. In exchange for this favourable approach, Japan accommodated Britain in regard to customs collection in Manchuria, as this issue fell within the competence of the Imperial Maritime Custom Service which was formally controlled by the Chinese government, but which was in fact controlled by Britain, represented by the Custom Service's Inspector-General, Sir Robert Hart.⁷⁷

Thus at the end of July 1907, an agreement was signed in which St Petersburg finally recognised Japan's special interests in Korea and southern Manchuria, while Japan did the same for Russia's status in northern Manchuria (where a major section of the Trans-Siberian Railway led) and in Outer Mongolia.⁷⁸ This agreement was meant to ensure that both countries would respect each other's territorial integrity and China's independence, although this did not really dissipate the suspicions of Beijing, which was observing at the same time how Japan was limiting the independence of Korea despite its prior guarantees.⁷⁹ This agreement was the first step towards a cautious co-operation between the two former enemies. Since Japan had also concluded an agreement recognising its interests with the French at the same time, its policy in China was perceived with marked suspicion. Beijing was afraid that this activity might be a precursor to the creation of a bloc of powers which would act as one and which would prevent it from exploiting disputes between powers to defend its own special interests. It was China's experience that it was much less dangerous to deal with one power than a combination of powers.⁸⁰ This could explain the rise in the popularity of Germany which it appeared found itself

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 405/175, Agreement on establishing an office for the collection of maritime custom in the Far East, Peking, 30. 5. 1907.

⁷⁸ M. MATSUI, "The Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907: The Causes and the Progress of Negotiations", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 1, 1972, p. 33.

⁷⁹ TNA, FO 881/9229, General Report on China for the year 1907, p. 20, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 18. 4. 1908.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO 405/175, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 21. 8. 1907.

isolated in China. But because it was the only power (with the exception of the USA) not contractually bound to any other power, it kept open the opportunity for independent action in the eyes of China.⁸¹ German representatives in the Far East were well aware of this fact. Germany's ambassador in Japan, Alfons Mumm von Schwarzenstein, was at this time endeavouring to correct the damage which Germany had inflicted in the eyes of China through its actions during the Boxer Rebellion. On the other hand, however, it was bitterly aware that the agreement with Russia and France involved Japan in the nascent Agreement and markedly increased its status in the Middle Kingdom.⁸²

The deepening of this trend could be seen two years later when America's attempt to implement the Open Door Policy in Manchuria and neutralise the Manchurian railway (which the British envoy had termed shameless),⁸³ forced Tokyo and St Petersburg to debate on restricting American influence and securing their spheres of interest. In July 1910, a new convention was signed which confirmed most of the points in the previous agreement and bound both countries to maintain the status quo in Manchuria. This agreement, which was somewhat worrying from a British policy perspective, in contrast to the agreement of 1907 did not contain a clause stating that both powers recognised China's territorial integrity.⁸⁴ It was mainly China and America, however, which criticised this fact.⁸⁵ On the other hand, however, Britain recognised the interests of both countries in their

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² PA AA, China No. 1, R 17693, Mumm von Schwarzenstein to Tschirschky, Tokyo, 5. 8. 1907; for more on the impact of the Russo-Japanese War and subsequent developing in German politics, see M. S. SELIGMANN, "Germany, the Russo-Japanese War, and the Road to the Great War", in: R. KOWNER (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, New York 2007, pp. 109–123. The author here develops a theory that it was contempt for the performance of the Russian army that led the head of Prussia's General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen to rework Germany's war plans. Ibidem, p. 120.

⁸³ TNA, FO 881/9867, General Report on China for the year 1910, pp. 37ff, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 5. 3. 1911; for American policy on the railway in Manchuria, see also TNA, FO 46/200, Bryce to Müller, 24. 7. 1910.

⁸⁴ TNA, FO 405/200, statement of the Chinese government on the Russo-Japanese Agreement, Peking, 21. 7. 1910; P. BERTON, "From Enemies to Allies: The War and Russo-Japanese Relations", in: R. KOWNER (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, New York 2007, p. 80.

⁸⁵ TNA, FO 405/200, Müller to Grey, Peking, 27. 7. 1910.

spheres of influence and was more welcoming of the agreement as it fell within their long-term policy of maintaining an alliance with Japan and an entente with Russia, a policy whose objective was to maintain Germany's isolation even in the Far East, as Germany appeared to be an ever greater rival to British power.⁸⁶ The Germans were undoubtedly well aware of this fact. As such, German policy endeavoured to support American demands in Manchuria⁸⁷ and the Open Door Policy.⁸⁸ Berlin justifiably feared that conclusion of the agreement would allow Russia to pursue an active policy in the West.⁸⁹ Germany's attempt to keep Russia occupied in the Far East (which was entirely obvious before 1904) thus definitively collapsed at this moment. The impacts of the Russo-Japanese agreement on practical policy in the Far East, however, were almost immediate. It allowed Japan to declare its annexation of Korea. Russia then supported the establishment of an independent Mongolia⁹⁰ and in the next agreement with Japan divided up spheres of influence with it in Outer Mongolia. British policy's benign attitude meant that the United States remained alone in their attempt to force the other powers to maintain the Open Door Policy, and over the course of five years, a large part of East Asia was divided up between Russia and Japan.⁹¹

In no way, however, did conclusion of the Russo-Japanese agreement mean that all memories of the Russo-Japanese War had been buried for good. In Russia (and also in London), the agreement was perceived as quite unequivocally beneficial for Japan, allowing it to boost its influence in Manchuria and China. St Petersburg feared that Japan's next objective would be to acquire a dominant status in Manchuria, which would weaken its maritime defence significantly. Russia considered that the principal objective of any Japanese aggression would be Vladivostok. This is one reason why the presence of the

⁸⁶ A large section of the Chinese press saw the agreement in a similar way. TNA, FO 405/200, Appendix to the report of 27 July 1910, Peking, 27.7.1910.

⁸⁷ J. LEPSIUS – A. MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY – F. THIMME (eds.), *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette* (further only GP), Berlin 1926, von Treutler to Bethmann-Hollweg, Bergen, 13.7.1910, p. 123.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, Bethmann-Hollweg to Emperor Wilhelm II, Hohenfinow, 16.7.1910, p. 125.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, Pourtalès to Bethmann-Hollweg, St Petersburg, 19.7.1910, pp. 126–127.

⁹⁰ TNA, FO 881/10072, General Report on China for the year 1911, p. 31, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 27.3.1912.

⁹¹ BERTON, p. 81.

Russian armed forces in the area was again boosted around 1910. As such, Russian garrisons were heavily fortified.⁹² On the other hand, however, the actual situation forced St Petersburg to co-operate with Tokyo. As early as 1911, the two governments collaborated in blocking the American proposal for a loan to China, and their single voice was clear to see after the Chinese Revolution broke out when mutual support allowed both countries to strengthen their position in their spheres of interest.⁹³

This rise of Japan led to London paying great attention to its penetration of the Asian continent. Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War secured it a major sphere of influence in northern China, from whose hands it had definitively torn away any kind of influence in Korean affairs. It was likely for this reason that relations between Tokyo and Beijing were palpably tense, particularly when Beijing was forced to essentially watch powerless as Japan pursued its demands in Manchuria, which it was guaranteed in the agreement of both countries of December 1905.⁹⁴ The prevailing opinion in China's imperial court was that Japan was exploiting China's weak position and trying to acquire as many gains as possible on the continent before it reformed into a modern state.⁹⁵ China also resented the growing influence of its Asian neighbour in Manchuria, which furthermore had taken a certain paternalistic stance on Beijing when Japan's Foreign Minister, Count Hayashi, advised China to avoid Korea's fate and rather, "*to take a warning from Korea and set her house into order*".⁹⁶ Such statements from the Japanese minister, however, merely added fuel to the fire, as at this period there were disputes between the two countries over the railway in southern Manchuria, which was also fed by the scandal regarding Japan's Tatsu Maru boat which was seized by Chinese officials in Canton in February 1908 for allegedly smuggling weapons.⁹⁷ This

⁹² Just during 1910, the eighty-thousand strong Vladivostok garrison was enlarged by 50 %. TNA, FO 881/9867, General Report on China for the year 1910, p. 43, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 5. 3. 1911.

⁹³ BERTON, p. 81.

⁹⁴ TNA, FO 881/9229, General Report on China for the year 1907, pp. 17–18, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 18. 4. 1908.

⁹⁵ PA AA, China No. 1, R 17694, Rex to the Foreign Office, Peking, 31. 10. 1907.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 881/9466, General Report on China for the year 1908, p. 17, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 26. 3. 1909.

⁹⁷ TNA, FO 405/182, Grey to Jordan, London, 22. 2. 1908.

resulted in a forceful Japanese protest, which then caused a retaliatory boycott of Japanese goods in southern Chinese towns.⁹⁸ Thus, the first half of 1908 was marked by ever deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations which didn't even improve after Hayashi was removed from his ministerial role and his successors, Terauchi Masatake and Komura Jutaró endeavoured to improve China's relations with Japan.

Britain's envoy in Beijing, Sir John Jordan, however, only noted drily of this attempt: *"but in spite of these demonstrations of friendliness Japan has still the misfortune to be regarded with suspicion by China, and it is a strange irony of fate that the only nation in the Far East which succeeded in working out its own salvation on modern lines should win the admiration of Western Powers and fail to gain the confidence and respect of its neighbours in the East"*.⁹⁹ Not even 1909 was to bring more fundamental change. Japan and China got into protracted disputes over Japan's entitlement to concessions which Tokyo was meant to receive on the basis of the Peace Treaty of Portsmouth which ended the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁰⁰ Although these disputes were solved at the end of 1909 by a Sino-Japanese agreement, Beijing's distrust of Tokyo's intentions had in no way disappeared.¹⁰¹

In contrast to the strengthening Japan, Russia was markedly weakened by its defeat in the war with the island empire, and its influence in China was significantly reduced. As such, it had to pursue a fairly conciliatory policy towards Beijing in an endeavour to protect what was left of its interests in northern China. As such, the St Petersburg government determined to take a step which it had long avoided before the war – to withdraw its military forces from Manchuria (which was logical under the chaos which had broken out in Russia as a result of the revolution). This compromise was received positively in China, and created space for the Russians to undertake successful negotiations on the mining concessions which its citizens had received pre-

⁹⁸ In the end, the dispute was resolved through British mediation. TNA, FO 405/182, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 17. 3. 1908.

⁹⁹ TNA, FO 881/9466, General Report on China for the year 1908, p. 17, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 6. 3. 1909.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FO 881/9657, General Report on China for the year 1909, pp. 20–26, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 30. 1. 1910.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 881/9867, General Report on China for the year 1910, p. 37, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 5. 3. 1911.

viously.¹⁰² Subsequent to 1907, when Russia concluded its convention with Japan assuring the status quo in the Far East, St Petersburg's influence was essentially limited to northern Manchuria and Mongolia, where neither Great Britain nor its subjects, as Jordan noted, had any major interests.¹⁰³ As such, Britain essentially decided not to interfere in disputes between Russia and China over concessions in Russia's sphere of interests, and was basically satisfied with the palpable weakening of Russia's position in the Far East, which was demonstrated, for example, in the fact that in its endeavours to implement its railway concession in northern Manchuria, St Petersburg had had to rely on support from Tokyo.¹⁰⁴ At least to begin with, however, Japan came into conflict over Russian railway projects, as it feared they might serve as a front for future Russian expansion, as had happened before the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁰⁵ However, since it was mainly British companies which were to be involved in railway construction in northern China, supplying the necessary know-how and funding, Japanese resistance met with protest. On the other hand, it should be noted that Britain tried to accommodate Tokyo to preserve good relations, and blocked a number of Russian proposals.¹⁰⁶ As such, subsequent to 1905 Russia did not present a major threat for Britain in China, and this can be demonstrated in the fact that the volume of Russian trade with China came to just under half a percent of British trading with the Middle Kingdom (including British colonies and other dependent territories).¹⁰⁷

In this regard, one can state in conclusion that British policy proved an unqualified success in regard to its rivalry with Russia. Britain had managed to force its rival out of a large part of China, and ward off

¹⁰² TNA, FO 405/171, General Report on China for the year 1906, p. 11, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 1. 6. 1907.

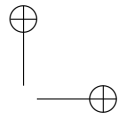
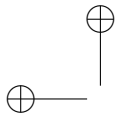
¹⁰³ TNA, FO 881/9466, General Report on China for the year 1908, p. 21, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 26. 3. 1909.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO 881/9657, General Report on China for the year 1909, p. 29, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 30. 1. 1910.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, FO 371/410, Memorandum on the Japanese Government's Protest against Construction of the Northern Railways, Peking, 8. 1. 1908.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, FO 371/410, Memorandum of the Pauling Company Limited, Peking, 4. 2. 1908.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO 405/171, General Report on China for the year 1906, p. 21, Jordan to Grey, Peking, 1. 6. 1907.



Russia's threat to its interests. On the other hand, however, from a long-term perspective this success was somewhat of a Pyrrhic victory, as a strengthened Japan was to become a significant rival to British interests in China. The requirement to rely on the support of the island empire meant for London that it often had to accept Japanese gains on the continent despite the fact the affected its special interests. The weakening of Britain's position at a global level as a result of the First World War, however, could not be anticipated at the time these events unfolded. As such, it can be stated that British diplomats' adept policy managed to effectively secure Britain's prominent position in the Far East prior to 1914.

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