

KOREA, FOCUS OF RUSSO-JAPANESE DIPLOMACY

(1898-1903)

I. H. NISH

THE ABORTIVE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH PRECEDED THE RUSSO-JAPANESE war, began in August 1903. In the previous five years, negotiations of a desultory kind had been going over Manchuria and Korea which have not received a systematic treatment from historians; it is the aim of this paper to examine them.¹

When Russia took a lease of the Liaotung peninsula in March 1898, the world expected Japan, which had formerly occupied it, to protest vehemently. Instead, the Japanese accepted the *fait accompli* since the Russians had offered them a settlement of the Korean question by way of the Nishi-Rosen agreement which put the interests of the two countries on an equal footing within a nominally independent Korea. When, however, the Russians were attempting in 1899 and 1900 to get a lease at Masampo, which was one of the finest harbors in the Far East (within 160 miles of Japan's shores), the Japanese opposed them tooth and nail. They were ultimately unsuccessful but they showed that they were determined to protect their position in southern Korea.²

With the outbreak of the Boxer disturbances in May 1900, the Russians were forced to ease out of Korea to concentrate on north China and Manchuria, where they were having trouble safeguarding their railway lines. In these circumstances, Japan took a surprising initiative. The new Japanese Minister to Russia, Komura Jutarō, found Lamsdorf, who became Foreign Mi-

¹ The most illuminating works in Russian are still B.A. Romanov, *Rossiia v. Man'chzhurii, 1892-1906* (Leningrad, 1928) and *Ocherki diplomaticheskoy istorii Russko-Yaponskoy voyny, 1895-1907* (Moscow, 1947). In English, the standard treatments are in A. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern policy, 1881-1904* (Berkeley, 1958) and (until 1901) W. L. Langer, *The diplomacy of imperialism* (New York, 1951). One difficulty is that the Russian published material is not sufficient to piece together a satisfactory account of the negotiations; but it is now possible, using Japanese materials, to describe the negotiations which took place and check them against Russian sources. For the last part of this period, this task has been well done in J. A. White, *The diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese war* (Princeton, 1964).

² In January 1900 Count Muraviev, the Russian foreign minister, circulated a memorandum containing a comprehensive review of foreign policy in which he advised against warlike actions in Korea. But Admiral Tyrtov, the navy minister, who had criticized the inadequacy of Port Arthur, wrote that it was necessary to acquire Masampo with Kargodo island as a "supporting station" in south Korea, in order to maintain Russia's naval position in the Pacific Ocean and prevent Japan's predominance there; as the time was not ripe for forcible measures, it should be acquired by diplomacy and purchase. "Tsarskaya diplomatiya o zadachakh Rossii na Vostoke v 1900," *Krasnyy arkhiv*, XVIII (1926), 15-16, 20-21. (Quoted hereafter as KA.)

This casts doubt on Malozemoff's view (*op. cit.*, 122) that "neither an act of aggressive policy nor a secret move to infiltrate into a strategic position" was intended. For further detail on the Masampo incident, I. H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese alliance* (London, 1966), chapter 3.

nister in June, to be ready to make a fresh approach. His analysis of the situation on 22 July was that "the situation in Manchuria and the difficulty of protecting the Manchurian railway having made Russia appreciate more fully the weakness of her position in the Far East, she appears to be really anxious to remove, if practicable, every possible cause of conflict with Japan." He reported that it was an opportune moment to come to an understanding with Russia on a safe and permanent basis: since the Russian occupation of Manchuria would become an accomplished fact and the possibility of conflict with Russia would retard Japan's industrial enterprise in Korea, the best course would be to prescribe spheres of influence, that is to say, Japan and Russia should have a free hand in Korea and Manchuria respectively and each should guarantee commercial freedom to the other in its sphere of influence.³ On 26 July Viscount Aoki, the Japanese Foreign Minister, authorized Komura to go ahead and sent him the draft of a treaty on these lines. Komura seems to have had three interviews with Lamsdorf on the subject but on 4 August he proposed that Japan should defer presenting her draft.⁴

It is not known what it was in the Russian reaction that caused Komura to withhold his overture. Perhaps it was because Kuropatkin, the war minister, had been saying that Russia would not tolerate Japan's supremacy in Korea and would make war on her rather than accept it.⁵ In any case, Lamsdorf had told the French on 1 August that he was deeply distrustful of the Japanese who were being tempted by the British to support them.⁶ All in all, the auguries were not favorable for a Japanese initiative at that moment. Japan was in a weak bargaining position and, when the government changed in October, no attempt was made to follow it up.

There is no indication that the Russian leaders took the proposal seriously. Lamsdorf was even less inclined to do so when Izvolsky reported that Aoki had told him that Japan was content to observe the existing Nishi-Rosen agreement.⁷ Whatever the truth of this report, it played into Russia's hands because the 1898 treaty suited her interests. When Lamsdorf approached Witte on this matter, the Finance Minister was not convinced that there was any need to give up Russia's stake in Korea. On 22 August, Witte wrote to a friend that he was not disposed to accept the bargain proposed by Japan and that Russia should take Manchuria while Japan took Korea. Elsewhere, he warned against Russia occupying Manchuria because it would give the Japanese an excuse to take Korea for themselves. The Russians did not see why, in establishing their position in Manchuria, they should make any concessions to Japan in Korea. So they let the Japanese initiative lapse without achieving any result.⁸

³ Japanese ministry of foreign affairs, *Nihon gaiko bunsho* [Japanese diplomatic documents], XXXIII (Tokyo, 1955), No. 522. (Quoted hereafter as NGB.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 523. I. H. Nish, "Japan's indecision during the Boxer disturbances," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XX (1961), 449-458.

⁵ KA, XVIII (1926), "Pis'ma Witte k Sipyaginu (1900-1)," 39-40; S. Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniya* (Moscow, 1960), i, 184-185.

⁶ *Ministere des affaires etrangeres, Documents diplomatiques francais, 1871-1914* (Paris, 1930-1959), Ire serie, XVI (1900), No. 2580 (Quoted hereafter as DDF.)

⁷ NGB, XXXIII, Nos. 524-525.

⁸ KA, XVIII, "Pis'ma," 40, 38; A. K. Gal'perin, *Anglo-Yaponskiy soyuz 1902-1921* (Moscow, 1949), 61.

To secure the exclusion of Japanese power from Korea, the Russians thought it was in their interest to follow up proposals for Korea neutralization. At the outset of the Boxer troubles, Korea had asked to be placed under the guarantee of the powers. In September, the Korean ministers—at the instance of Russia—suggested making Korea a neutral country but were not taken seriously.⁹ On several occasions in November, Izvolsky, the Russian Minister to Japan, spoke to Kato Takaaki, the new Foreign Minister, who agreed to examine any concrete proposal which Russia would put forward. On 7 January 1901 the Russian Minister left an appropriate proposal with Kato. The Russians were told in reply that, in view of their temporary occupation of Manchuria, Japan felt it best to defer the neutralization plan until the situation returned to normal. Izvolsky was gravely disappointed with this reaction since he had been lobbying influential statesmen who had indicated that they were favorably disposed to the proposal. Thus the second proposal for solving the Korean problem did not reach fruition.¹⁰

The Japanese leaders were suspicious of the various sinister activities in which the Russians were engaged throughout 1901 in Manchuria and at the Chinese court. Some, however, thought that they offered an opportunity for a Russo-Japanese deal over Manchuria and Korea. Inoue Kaoru, one of the Elder Statesmen, was impressed by the fact that *Novoye Vremya*, a newspaper of wide circulation, was at this time deploring Russia's undue involvement with the Far East and was advocating reconciliation with Japan.¹¹ He converted Marquis Ito, the leading Elder Statesman, and Katsura, the Prime Minister, to the view that it was worth taking seriously. It was, therefore, agreed that Ito should extend to Russia the trip which he was already planning to make to the United States and have unofficial discussions there.¹²

On 18 September, Ito set off from Yokohama, accompanied by Tsuzuki Keiroku, the son-in-law of Inoue. Before he left, he met Izvolsky who invited him to go to St. Petersburg—an invitation which Ito was of course delighted to accept.¹³ The Ministry of Finance representative in Yokohama, K.A. Alekseyev, made a well-informed report on 14 September that the purpose of

⁹ NGB, XXXIV, Nos. 393, 396.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Nos. 399-401; KA, LXIII, "Nakanune Russko-Yaponskoy voyny," 7-11.

¹¹ Tokutomi Ichiro, *Koshaku Katsura Taro den* [Biography of Prince Katsura] (Tokyo, 1917), i, 1061-1062, Inoue to Katsura, 26 August 1901, "Recently there was in the Tokyo *Nichi-nichi* newspaper an article translated from the Russian newspaper, *Novoye Vremya*, which stated that the outbreak of war between Russia and Japan would be a disaster for Japan and there is a good opportunity not to be lost for a prominent man to visit Russia and open talks."

¹² Tokutomi, *op. cit.*, i, 1066. I reject the idea expounded in Romanov, "Proiskhozhdeniye Anglo-Yaponskogo dogovora 1902," *Istori cheskie zapiski*, X (1941), 54, that Ito's journey had been suggested by Witte's remarks to Chinda at the beginning of July. Knowing the financial troubles which had afflicted Japan for the past year, Witte hinted that he was always ready to arrange for a loan to Japan in Paris and that Russia and Japan might reach, some sort of agreement over Korea and Manchuria. It is clear from Japanese sources that Japan did not think of raising a loan in Russia.

¹³ Hiratsuka Atsushi (ed.), *Ito Hirobumi hiroku* [private writings of Ito], (Tokyo, 1928-30), I, 1-58; "Nichi-Ei domei to Nichi-Ro Kyosho" [Anglo-Japanese alliance and Russo-Japanese understanding], No. 5. (Quoted hereafter as IHH.) Cf. KA, LXIII, Nakanune, 37; DDF, 2me serie, I (1901), No. 399.

the visit was to "find out how Russia would respond to an offer of alliance with Japan."¹⁴

It was 4 November before Ito reached Paris from the United States and in the meantime the situation in Japan had markedly changed. On 21 September Komura took over as Foreign Minister. After his first interview with Komura, Izvolsky concluded rather dubiously that he looked at the question of Russo-Japanese relations with more restraint than his predecessor and "evidently wishes quite sincerely to find ground for closer relations with us."¹⁵ As against this, the Manchurian question erupted again in mid-October and only subsided with the death of Li Hung-chang. Lamsdorf had occasion to complain of the hostility of the Japanese Press and asked for the threatening movements of the Japanese fleet in Korea waters to be stopped.¹⁶ In view of the undoubted anti-Russian feeling, it was not surprising that the Japanese cabinet should on 28 November deliberately decide to go ahead with the alliance with Britain. The Japanese had significantly changed their ground since Ito left; but this was because of new steps taken by Russia.

When Ito reached Paris on 4 November, the Franco-Russian allies did not immediately take council about the attitude to be adopted towards him. Presumably this was because they expected that he would be engaged in seeking a loan from the bankers. They were soon enough disabused of any illusion that Ito was travelling for the purpose of raising a loan. In Paris, Delcasse who gave Ito every opportunity to talk finance, had to admit that he "had not made a single allusion to financial assistance of any kind." In St. Petersburg also, Lamsdorf and Witte reported that Ito had not raised the subject of a loan. They were genuinely surprised at this because they had been led to expect that this would be his prime object.¹⁷

It was not until 10 November that Delcasse invited Lamsdorf's opinion on Russo-Japanese relations. After taking the Tsar's approval, Lamsdorf prepared a note to serve as an aide-memoire for the interview which Delcasse was due to have with Ito. The sole point of difference, Lamsdorf argued, was over Korea, where the Russian government was ready to enter into an exchange of views with Japan to clarify or extend the agreement of 1898. Russia, which disclaimed any intention of annexing Korea, recognized as natural the commercial and industrial expansion of Japan in Korea but could not allow Korea to become a strategic center for Japan to the detriment of Russian interests; she further proclaimed that she had no intention to annex Manchuria and was ready to have that province evacuated of her troops, provided guarantees were obtained.¹⁸ This amounted to a brief for Russian Far Eastern policy down to 1903.

On 13 November, Ito visited the Foreign Ministry for discussions with Delcasse. Delcasse claimed that he could see no objection "if Russia and

¹⁴ Romanov, *Ocherki*, 145-146. Alekseyev's report is wrongly attributed to September 1902.

¹⁵ KA, LXII, Nakamune, 37-41; Romanov, *Ocherki*, 148.

¹⁶ Japanese ministry of foreign affairs, *Komura gaikoshi* [History of Komura's foreign policy] (Tokyo, 1953), I, 238. (Quoted hereafter as KG.) Romanov, *Rossiia*, 322; NGB; XXXIV, Nos. 326, 332.

¹⁷ DDF I (1901), Nos. 545, 548.

¹⁸ KA, LXIII, Nakanune, 42-43.

Japan were to join hands and France were to join in a coalition with them, since it would secure absolute supremacy, especially in the Pacific." Ito admitted that apart from Korea there were no places which were likely to give rise to trouble with Russia and seemed to invite French mediation; he thought the existing agreement was not the last word and Delcasse indicated that Russia was prepared to compromise. At their second meeting the following day, Ito said that he would be more than satisfied if Japan drew together with France in increasing friendship.¹⁹

Before Ito set off for Russia, he met Hayashi—the Japanese Minister to London—who had come to Paris especially to explain the progress which had been made in drawing up the agreement with Britain. The Tokyo government was in a predicament: it had no authority over Ito's movements and could not be sure that he would comply if he was asked to cancel his trip to Russia. So it suggested that he should set off as soon as possible and confine himself to an informal exchange of views with the Russian leaders. On 26 November, Ito reached St. Petersburg. He had an audience with Nicholas II, two days later, at Tsarskoye-selo palace and received the Gold Cordon of St. Alexander Nevsky.

At a meeting with Lamsdorf on 2 December, Ito said that it was necessary to clear up the misunderstandings which were besetting Russo-Japanese relations. Lamsdorf reminded him that Russia had presented a plan for Korean neutralization in 1900 but Japan had replied that the present agreement was quite satisfactory. Ito observed that this may have been so in January 1901 while the emergency still existed; but the existing agreement should not be thought of as definitive. "If we do not arrive at a more permanent settlement, there is the danger that misunderstandings will constantly recur. Since the Japanese are constantly afraid that Korea will be overrun by Russia, Russia should acknowledge that the Japanese have the greatest interests in Korea." Lamsdorf, however, advocated a joint policy towards Korea whereby they could act together towards that government. He eventually admitted that Russia would probably not have any objection to 'delegating' Korea to Japan if water-tight guarantees were offered against its military use and against communications being interrupted. When he asked whether a small portion on the south coast of Korea could be given to Russia, Ito was not encouraging. Each claimed to be speaking personally; and the interview ended by Ito's agreeing to draft his proposals in the form of a memorandum.²⁰

At his interview with Ito on 3 December, Witte claimed that he was not a specialist in foreign affairs but was in agreement with Lamsdorf and the Tsar on the question of the east. In his approach, he was more forthright than Lamsdorf: "Your country has always had considerable interests in Korea, mine has none; we must both agree not to occupy Korea and should not give up the equality between us which is stipulated in the present treaty."

¹⁹ IHH, appendix, Nos. 2, 5. This account corresponds closely to the summary given in DDF, I, Doc. No. 545 (1901), and KA, LXIII, Nakanune, 43-44.

²⁰ IHH, appendix, No. 26; Russian foreign ministry, *Obzor snoshenii s Yaponiei Koreyskim delam s 1895 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 68-70. (Quoted hereafter as *Obzor*.) According to *Obzor*, the first Ito-Lamsdorf meeting took place on 17 (30) November 1901, but this is disproved by other accounts.

Ito replied that this would not satisfy Japan which wanted to be supreme in the peninsula but would certainly guarantee that she would never injure Korean Independence or use its territory for military purposes against Russia or place installations on its coastline so as to close the Korean straits. Witte replied that, if Japan gave that threefold guarantee, Russia would not object to whatever else Japan did there and that, if required, Russia too could give guarantees. Although Ito was given every encouragement to air Japan's financial troubles, he did not admit that they were serious and made no mention of wanting a loan.²¹

It will be observed that Witte was inclined to play down Russia's stake in Korea in a way that Lamsdorf did not and may have been prepared to allow Japan a large say there provided she did not occupy the country and gave the threefold guarantee. He made no request for a station in south Korea, as Lamsdorf did. Neither of them made any mention of Manchuria except to say that Russia would certainly withdraw her troops. B.A. Romanov has criticized Witte for wrecking the discussions by taking the line that Russians wanted complete discretion in Manchuria but would only give Korea to Japan on certain conditions.²² The impression left by the Japanese documents is quite the reverse, namely that Witte was more conciliatory than Lamsdorf who took an especially cautious line.

On 4 December, Ito again met Lamsdorf and presented him with the draft of a Russo-Japanese arrangement by which Russia would grant Japan absolute freedom of action in Korea in return for various guarantees. At first glance, Lamsdorf complained that the document set out only Japan's interests and Russia's concessions; there would be great criticism in Russia that she would, by signing it, sacrifice her equal rights in Korea under the present treaty; this draft could not form the basis for an arrangement. Ito asked what compensation Russia would demand and Lamsdorf replied that, in return for giving Korea exclusively to Japan, Russia would expect freedom of action in north China, should anything occur. Since this was so vague, Ito asked that a note setting out Russia's major demands should be sent to him in Berlin. Lamsdorf said that he could not guarantee to answer within a fortnight, since he only saw the Tsar once a week and that on Tuesdays! The statesmen parted under the impression that a basis might be found for a bilateral agreement. Lamsdorf remarked that, while Komura had been minister in Russia, they had unofficially discussed whether Korea might be allotted to Japan and Manchuria, to Russia. While Ito asked for an urgent Russian reply, Lamsdorf seemed to be thinking of continuing the negotiations in Tokyo after Ito's return there.²³

Lamsdorf reported the conversations to the Tsar who commented that "Russia certainly cannot give up its previous right to keep as many troops

²¹ IHH, appendix, No. 27.

²² Romanov, *Rossiya*, 336-337.

²³ IHH, appendix, Nos. 30-31; KA, LXIII, Nakanune, 44-45. Malozemoff, *op. cit.*, 171, has thrown doubt on the value of these conversations because of the linguistic difficulties involved; but a comparison of the records indicates that there were few substantial misunderstandings.

in Korea as the Japanese station there."²⁴ Lamsdorf redrafted the proposals in consultation with Witte and Kuropatkin. They set out Russia's demands in Manchuria and also contained some concessions to Japan in Korea. In a letter to Lamsdorf, Witte explained that a war against Japan over distant Korea could not be justified; Russia needed to be free to concentrate on Manchuria.²⁵ The Russian reply was sent to Berlin by messenger and reached Ito on 17 December almost a fortnight after he had left St. Petersburg.

Though Russia's belated reply contained concessions, it continued to be based on the principle that both powers had rights in Korea. On most of the terms, there was substantial agreements between the Ito and Lamsdorf drafts. But the Russians had added two clauses:

6. Japan acknowledges Russia's superior rights in that part of the territory of the Chinese Empire adjoining the Russian border and undertakes not to infringe Russia's freedom of action in that area.
7. [On occasions when military assistance proves necessary for suppressing revolts] Japan undertakes not to send forces to Korea beyond the number which the situation dictates and to recall the troops immediately [after] the mission has been achieved and agrees that, having fixed clearly in advance the area of a zone adjoining the Russian frontier, the Japanese army will never cross that boundary.²⁶

Under article 6, Russia was claiming freedom of action in Manchuria, a matter which had not been raised in the conversations, though it is far from clear what Russia's true meaning was. In his accompanying letter, Lamsdorf played down this demand, saying that it only recapitulated the principles already accepted in the Nishi-Rosen memorandum of 1898 and in Komura's offer of 1900. Under article 7, Russia was again raising a new issue: that of a buffer state adjoining the Russian frontier, which was part of the thinking of the Bezobrazov group. The area involved was smaller than the Russian sphere of influence under the 1898 treaty; but it was nonetheless objectionable to the Japanese. The other provision of note was that Japanese troops could only be sent to Korea after Russia had given its approval.

Ito was neither enthusiastic about Lamsdorf's reply nor was he downhearted. He first contacted Tokyo, telling the Prime Minister that, while there were defects in the draft, "such details could all be amended to Japan's satisfaction"; such a favorable opportunity will not occur again in the near future. His was an attitude of restrained optimism. It is wrong for those like Romanov to argue that Ito left Europe with the conviction that it was impossible to talk to Russia.²⁷

On 21 December, the Japanese premier replied thanking Ito effusively for his good offices and professed to be in general accord with his views. But he reminded Ito that Japan had during 1901 given certain guarantees over Manchuria which she could not now neglect, even to obtain recognition of her position in Korea. Russia had asked that her position in Manchuria might be

²⁴ KA, LXIII, Nakanune, 44, note of Lamsdorf to Tsar, 5 December 1901.

²⁵ A. Yarmolinsky, *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (London, 1921), 117.

²⁶ IHH, appendix, Nos. 51-52; *Obzor*, 71-73; KA LXIII, Nakanune, 50-51. Text in Langer, *op. cit.*, 768-769.

²⁷ IHH, appendix, No. 53; Gal-perin, *op. cit.*, 768-776.

treated on a par with Japan's in Korea; but Japan could not countenance such a request. "You well know," Katsura concluded, "that I am not opposed to coming to an understanding with Russia but that in my view it must be reconciled with the obligations which Japan owes to others."²⁸ Irritated as Ito was to receive this admonition from Tokyo, he had no alternative but to reply to Lamsdorf rather icily. Writing from Brussels on 23 December, he admitted the conciliatory spirit of the Russian statesmen but saw little prospect of the two countries easily reaching an agreement of any permanence. He was doubtful whether the Russian draft could be used by the Japanese government as a basis for future negotiations, since it did not seem to bestow equal benefits on both parties.²⁹

Should the Russians have been more generous in their concessions to Ito? Contemporaries spoke of the "reserve" which Russia had shown towards him;³⁰ and historians have generally written critically of her fatal miscalculation. On the other hand, the Russians did not know that Japan was conducting secret negotiations with Britain and could not realize the weakness of their position. Moreover, Ito, though an important person in his own right, was known to be out of line with his home government; it would have been incautious to have become entangled in private negotiations with him. There was thus much wisdom in Lamsdorf's suggestion that discussions should be continued in Tokyo. The Russian response had to be official and to commit the tsarist government in future, whereas Ito's approach was personal and in no sense carried his government's authority. Considering the slender authority which Ito possessed, the attitude of the Russian statesmen is fully understandable.

Ito now embarked on the most important part of his planned itinerary: his visit to London, where he found the alliance on the point of being concluded. After his discussions in Russia, Ito's view was that "even though we join in a defensive alliance with Britain, there will still be room for us simultaneously to come to terms with Russia over Korea."³¹ When he met the Foreign Secretary, Ito drew from him the admission that he "saw no reason why His Majesty's Government should disapprove" of Japan obtaining Russia's recognition of her interests in Korea.³² This remark meant that the Anglo-Japanese agreement which was signed on 30 January 1902, would not be a barrier to continued Russo-Japanese negotiations.

On his way to Naples to join his ship for Japan, Ito spent a while in Paris where he met Kurino Shinichiro, Japan's Minister to France (1897-1901), who had just been appointed as minister to Russia.³³ While he had been on leave in Japan in October, Kurino had taken the opinion of the Elder

²⁸ IHH, appendix, No. 58.

²⁹ IHH, appendix, No. 60; *Obzor*, 74-75.

³⁰ DDF, II (1920). Doc. No. 84.

³¹ IHH, appendix, No. 48.

³² G. P. Gooch and H. W. V. Temperley, *British documents on origins of the war, 1898-1914* (London, 1926-38), II, No. 120.

³³ There is a considerable literature on Kurino and his attitude towards Russia: *Shishaku Kurino Shinichiro den* [Biography of Viscount Kurino] (Tokyo, 1942); Imai Shoji, "Nichi-Ei domei to Kurino Shinichiro" [Kurino and the Anglo-Japanese alliance], *Rekishu kyoiku* (February, 1962), 39-44.

Statesman, Inoue, on Japan's policy to Russia and prepared a memorandum on "settling Russo-Japanese problems in the east" which received the approval of the Premier and Foreign Minister. Kurino claimed that he made it a condition of taking up his new appointment and that he should do everything possible to further the cause of a Russo-Japanese agreement.³⁴ It was while he was in Paris in January en route for St. Petersburg that he heard from Ito that the British alliance was reaching its final stage and was naturally astonished that a policy so different from his own instructions had been adopted. He also attended the ceremony at the British Embassy in Paris at which Ito became a Knight Grand Cross of the Bath—an honor which was intended, Kurino believed, to soften the Marquis's feelings towards the alliance. Thinking that he would no longer be able to pursue the special policy in Russia for which he had been sent, Kurino proposed to cancel his journey to Russia and return to Tokyo. But Ito reminded him that he had the emperor's mandate and could not turn back.³⁵ Kurino did, however, inquire from Tokyo about his instructions and was told that "the premier and foreign minister desire to come to an arrangement with Russia over Korea; they do not propose to give final orders to conclude an agreement but merely to seek out the basis for such an agreement."³⁶ It would appear that in the Tokyo view the alliance with Britain would be merely the prelude to negotiations with Russia. Kurino proceeded to St. Petersburg, disgruntled but determined to work for a direct settlement with Russia.³⁷ Knowing that the British alliance was in the offing, Kurino made it one of his first acts to insure that the alliance was specially communicated to Lamsdorf with the fullest possible assurance. To this, Tokyo which was trying to avoid anything likely "to irritate the susceptibilities of the Russian government,"³⁸ readily agreed and an appropriate communication was made.

There can be no doubt that Lamsdorf and Izvolsky were disturbed by the news of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which reflected a failure in their conduct of Russia's Far Eastern policy. At the same time, Lamsdorf showed remarkable resilience. On 24 February he asked Kurino whether the Japanese government really wished to work for a friendly understanding with Russia to maintain peaceful relations in the Far East and safeguard their mutual interests. And later Lamsdorf inquired whether it was still possible to conclude a separate treaty between their two countries which would not be incompatible with clause IV of the Anglo-Japanese agreement. Kurino assured him that the agreement left all liberty to Japan to enter into a separate arrangement with Russia. Lamsdorf found this hard to believe.³⁹

Meanwhile Ito had arrived back in Tokyo towards the end of February and attracted a great deal of speculation. When Izvolsky met Komura on 13 March, he asked him whether the government shared the views which Ito

³⁴ Imai, *op. cit.*, 44.

³⁵ Kurino, "Nichi-Ro kyowa ni taisuru shian" [Proposals for a Russo-Japanese concord] in *IHH*, I, 349-354. [

³⁶ *IHH*, appendix, No. 71.

³⁷ *DDF*, II (1902), doc. No. 84.

³⁸ *NGB*, XXXV, No. 274.

³⁹ *KG*, I, 297; *DDF* III, doc. No. 194 (1903).

had expressed in his exchange of views with Lamsdorf. Komura replied that Japan had always wanted an understanding with Russia over Korea and no change had taken place in her attitude.⁴⁰ For his part, Ito discovered on his return that people in Tokyo were saying that he had made known to Britain what had transpired in St. Petersburg and had thus expedited the alliance. He, therefore, sent Tsuzuki to assure Izvolsky that this was untrue and that he had not disclosed his Russian conversations in London.⁴¹ The Japanese, whose hand had been so much strengthened by their new association with Britain, were clearly trying to follow up the earlier Ito talks by formal negotiations. These hopes suffered a setback when the Franco-Russian declaration of 16 March was published as a riposte to the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

On 7 July, thinking that the Russian military faction which opposed Witte and Lamsdorf had lost ground and the civilian faction had regained its strength, the Japanese Foreign Minister asked Kurino to inquire on his own responsibility and absolutely secretly whether the time was ripe to begin talks for an understanding. On 23 July Kurino took up the matter privately with Lamsdorf who replied that, since Japan was not prevented by the British alliance from negotiating, Russia was still as willing as before and that they could treat Ito's views and his own reply as the basis for the negotiations.⁴² On 4 August, therefore, Kurino—purely on his own initiative and without the sanction of his government—put forward a set of points as a sketch of the terms of a possible understanding. The so-called “private proposal on the Korean question” ran as follows:

1. Joint guarantee of the independence and territorial integrity of the Chinese and Korean empires.
2. Joint guarantee not to use for military or strategic ends any portion of Korean territory.
3. Russia, recognizing the superior interests of Japan in Korea, undertakes not to interfere in the affairs of Korea or in Japan's actions over the peaceful interests of that country and acknowledges that Japan may exercise the following rights in Korea:
 - A. freedom of action in advancing her commercial and industrial interests;
 - B. to give advice and help to Korea in fulfilling the obligations of good government;
 - C. when rebellion or internal disorder occurs and threatens Japan's peaceful relations with Korea, to send such troops as are necessary and to withdraw them immediately [after] their duties are completed;
 - D. to maintain the guard as well as the police forces already stationed for the protection of telegraph and railway lines.
4. Japan will recognize the lease of Port Arthur and Dairen which was announced by Russia to the Japanese government in 1898 as well as Russia's freedom of action to protect her rights and interests in Manchuria.

These terms would replace all existing arrangements over Korea.⁴³ It will be observed that they correspond with Ito's proposals and that they go beyond

⁴⁰ KG, I, 297-298.

⁴¹ Gal'perin, *op. cit.*, 174, quoting foreign ministry archives for 21 March (6 April) 1902.

⁴² KG, I, 298.

⁴³ *Obzor*, 78; KG, I, 299; R. Rosen, *Forty years of diplomacy* (London, 1922), i, 202.

them to meet Russian wishes. When Kurino saw Lamsdorf on 14 September, the Foreign Minister agreed to open talks if they were based on equal rights for Japan and Russia in Korea and Manchuria respectively. Lamsdorf also announced that Russia intended to appoint Roman Rosen again as Minister to Tokyo as a gesture of goodwill.⁴⁴ Everything was set fair for a fruitful period of negotiation. The situation was the more hopeful when the Russians withdrew in October the first batch of their Manchurian troops in accordance with their treaty with China.

The trouble was that Kurino's sketch had not been approved by his government. The French Ambassador to Russia suspected that Kurino was negotiating something but felt that he was liable to act and speak on his own authority.⁴⁵ In Tokyo, the cabinet had in October decided that government action and finance would be needed if Korea was to be developed as a Japanese sphere of influence. It was in these circumstances that Komura on 1 November communicated to Kurino five points to serve as the skeleton of an agreement with Russia although he did not take the approval of the cabinet beforehand. Since there is no sign that they were passed over to Russia, they need not be reproduced here.⁴⁶ They were, however, more demanding than those mentioned by Kurino and did not contain the "guarantees" which Ito had offered. They also included the additional demand that "Russia will not object to connecting a Korean railway with the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Newchwang Railway." On 20 November Komuro warned Kurino that his earlier "private proposals" had been presented too soon and indicated that they did not correspond on a number of points with Japan's desires.⁴⁷ Thus, no appreciable progress took place along this particular line.

This is not to suggest that the Russians were inactive. When Kurino's proposals were received in August, Lamsdorf admitted that he found them too demanding. They were referred to two diplomats with special experience of the Far East—Rosen and Pavlov. In his memorandum of 24 September, Rosen was critical of the effort which Russia had to make for the peaceful conquest of Manchuria at the expense of European Russia.⁴⁸ This was tantamount to a criticism of the policy of Witte who had just left to make an extended personal tour of Manchuria during the autumn. On his return, he wrote a long report for the Tsar in which he emphasized that it would be better to compromise with Japan over Korea. He then tackled Rosen's criticisms of his policy. On 10 January 1903 he prepared a reply to the memoranda of Rosen and Pavlov in which he again argued for an immediate agreement with Japan. It was largely at his instigation that a conference of diplomats to discuss Russia's Far Eastern policy was convened on 23 January.⁴⁹

This was the start of a series of conferences in the early months of 1903 where Far Eastern policy was subjected to exhaustive examination by the

⁴⁴ KG, I, 298.

⁴⁵ DDF, III (1903), doc. No. 194. For another example of Kurino's indiscretion, NGB 36/I, Nos. 397-398.

⁴⁶ KG, I, 298-299; translated in White, *The diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese war*, 350-357.

⁴⁷ KG, I, 300.

⁴⁸ Rosen, *op. cit.*, i, 202-207; Romanov, *Rossiia*, 403, Note 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 208-209; Witte, *Vospominaniya*, i, 227; Romanov, *Rossiia*, 416-420.

Russian ministers. The most important was probably that on 7 February which was attended by the foreign, war, navy and finance ministers as well as Russia's diplomatic representatives at Peking, Seoul and Tokyo. The two major issues for discussion were Russia's relations with Japan and the withdrawal of her troops from Manchuria. In particular, she had to decide how to respond to Japan's overtures of last autumn. Witte described her proposals on Korea as "exceedingly exacting" and seems to have gone back on his earlier views by calling for the neutralization of the Korean straits. Lamsdorf too was not prepared to pull out of Korea in view of the significance which it must in future have for Russian national interests. The conference reached complete unanimity on the desirability of some agreement with Japan over Korea but it was decided that the initiative should be left to the Japanese.⁵⁰ Since it was also decided not to withdraw the Russian troops from Manchuria unless the Chinese agreed to several further demands, the results of the conference were entirely negative. It committed the Russian government to a policy of inaction behind which the various groups interested in Korea and Manchuria could carry on their expansionist activities.

The Russians evidently hoped that they could avoid a major collision with Japan by this policy of procrastination. They chose to treat Manchuria as exclusively a Russian matter and gave no sign of yielding to the demands over Korea which the Japanese had put forward in 1902. The puzzling thing is that there are many instances where the Tsar, Lamsdorf and Witte, wrote in 1902 and 1903 that they were not prepared to risk a war over Korea and they were content to let Korea fall under Japanese influence.⁵¹ But, at the conferences, the presence of other ministers (who had the right to share in policy-making on the Far East) prevented milder counsels from prevailing. Lamsdorf took refuge in procrastination.

The Japanese also delayed in pursuing their demands. One reason for the delay was to wait for the coming of Rosen and Kuropatkin, both of whom were known to have taken part in the conference in St. Petersburg and were thought to be harbingers of a new approach. Rosen reached Tokyo as Minister in April but carried no special instructions. When it became known that Kuropatkin was proposing to visit the Far East on a tour of inspection, the Japanese on 23 March invited him to extend his trip to Japan.⁵² The Tsar gave his consent; Kuropatkin was briefed before his departure on how to improve relations with Japan without offering any concessions. Kuropatkin reached Japan on 12 June and was lavishly accommodated in the detached palace at Shiba. Komura tried to persuade Ito who was recognized as the most Russophil of the Japanese leaders to have a discussion with him. But Ito declined. Instead, Katsura and Komura both had conversations with the visiting War Minister who stressed that he had no official mission and could only speak privately. The Japanese spokesmen made it clear that the Russian occupation of Manchuria could not be permitted as it would lead to constant

⁵⁰ KA, LII, 1932, 34-124, "Pervye shagi russkogo imperializma na Dal'nem Vostoke, 1888-1903," especially 110-115.

⁵¹ Romanov, *Rossiya*, 436-437.

⁵² KA, II, 1923, "Dnevnik Kuropatkina," 28 March 1903; NGB, XXX/I, Nos. 784-786.

incursions into Korea and encourage the break-up of China. Kuropatkin replied that he personally wanted some understanding with Japan over Korea and was opposed to the division of China. He explained that it was necessary for Russia to insure the security of her railways, that their equipment and maintenance costs were heavy and that there were many problems about the withdrawal of her forces which were receiving government consideration.⁵³ In general, Kuropatkin made it clear that he was not entrusted with a mission to reconcile Russian differences with Japan but only came to give an account of Russia's actions. There was much talk in the world press of a Russo-Japanese secret agreement on Korea and Manchuria being concluded while he was in Tokyo.⁵⁴ It was, however, merely wild speculation. He left Tokyo on 16 June on his way to Port Arthur for continued conferences on Russian policy in the East. By judicious bribery of Russian officers there, the Japanese received accurate information about the decisions taken at Port Arthur.⁵⁵

On 23 June, within a week of Kuropatkin's departure, there was a major conference, held in the presence of the Japanese emperor, which was attended by four ministers and five Elder Statesmen. The situation had deteriorated: Russia had failed to evacuate its troops from Manchuria in April and had imposed fresh conditions on China; the Russians had moreover been pushing ahead to occupy Yonnampo (on the Korean side of the Yalu) and undertake timber and cable works in that area. These events were covered in detail in the press; public opinion became electrically anti-Russian. Kuropatkin's visit led the chief of the General Staff, General Oyama, to present a memorandum to the cabinet on 22 June, saying that now was the time to settle the Korean question once and for all while Japan had the strategic advantage. Against this background, the imperial conference passed a lengthy policy resolution. It agreed that negotiations with Russia should be opened up with the object of insuring the security of Korea and the supremacy of Japan's interests there and of keeping Russian activities in Manchuria within the limits of her treaties with China and preventing them from injuring Korean security.⁵⁶ Underlying this was the implication that Japan would not permit Russian forces to stay in Manchuria. The focus of Japanese policy, while still concerned with "Korean security," was moving more towards Manchuria. Assuming that this policy was upheld, it did not allow much room for maneuver, once negotiations were begun.

This tougher policy would have been communicated to Russia sooner, had it not been for a cabinet crisis. It arose from the fact that Ito had, at the imperial conference, advocated a milder policy and the cabinet resented his interference. On 25 June, the Premier decided to resign. There followed three weeks of crisis which only ended on 15 July when Katsura resumed the premiership and Ito was placed more out of harm's way. But Japan's approach to Russia was held up and her demands were not conveyed to Lamsdorf until 12 August. It is not necessary to follow through the Russo-Japanese nego-

⁵³ KG, I, 312, 321.

⁵⁴ London Standard, 28 July 1903.

⁵⁵ NGB, XXXVI, No. 804.

⁵⁶ Ibid., No. 1.

tiations. The diplomatic language of Japan's terms was largely unreal because it obscured the fact that Japan was already determined in the last resort to go to war.⁵⁷ This paper shows that for more than three years before the official Russo-Japanese negotiations began, the Japanese had been making overtures to Russia over Korea. This fact has not received much attention since the Japanese sources have only recently become available.⁵⁸ In essence, it was Japan's purpose to take advantage of Russia's preoccupation with Manchuria, to improve her position in Korea. The stronger Japan grew, the more rigorous her terms became. Initially, she would have been content for Russia to withdraw from Korea. By 1903, when her bargaining power was reinforced by the British alliance, she was resolute enough to call upon Russia to recall the Russian troops from Manchuria.

The policy which Russia adopted towards Japan seems to have been unyielding. Where possible, she avoided discussions of Manchuria and stressed the need for neutralization of Korea by international guarantee. This formula was merely designed to conceal the widely differing views within Russia. Witte cared so little for Korea that he was probably prepared to use it as a pawn in order to further his own objectives in Manchuria. The Tsar and Lamsdorf supported him from time to time. But Witte's views were opposed by Kuropatkin, Admiral Alekseyev and the group associated with the name of Bezobrazov. Neutralization was a compromise which was put forward to save Russia from making even minor concessions.

These various overtures broke down except at one point. This was during Ito's conversations in St. Petersburg. Ito's parleys have been described as a double-cross to Britain; this is not so because it was the journey of a private person putting forward private views which were not authorized by his government. It has been argued that it was a double-cross to Russia insofar as Ito's presence in London was followed by the signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance; this, however, is also untrue because the alliance owed nothing to Ito's trip to Britain. It has generally been said that Ito's conversations were a failure and were not pursued. This paper has tried to show that, while they were insignificant in their immediate results, his talks were not allowed to lapse and were taken up spasmodically by his government in the hope of improving Japan's position in Korea.

⁵⁷ Romanov, *Ocherki*, 236-237.

⁵⁸ This is partly accounted for by the fact that the basic Russian documentary source, "Nakanune Russko-Yaponskoi voiny" (KA, LXIII) ends in January, 1902.