

Russia's Policy Towards Korea during the Russo-Japanese War

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The period between the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries was one which saw Russia and Japan come into conflict with one another in East Asia. However, because of its economic and financial problems and of its inferior military numbers in the Far East, the Russian government was unable to use the opportunity provided by the period leading up to the Russo-Japanese War to put in place the preparations needed to resolve the Korean peninsula problem in a manner advantageous to it. Further compounding matters was the fact that no common perception emerged amongst Russian policymakers with regards to the direction which East Asian policy should take. On one hand the Russian Finance Minister Sergei Witte and his followers wanted to adopt a 'peaceful' course of action that would allow Russia to extend its economic hegemony over Korea and all of East Asia. Meanwhile, another more influential group consisting of conservative forces adhered to a stance which was based on an aggressive policy towards East Asia, a stance which was for the most part in line with that of Tsar Nicholas II. Because its nominal leader was A.M. Bezobrazov, this group is usually referred to as the Bezobrazov group. The significant influence which this group wielded over Russian foreign policy emerged as an important cause of what would become a turning point in Korean history and Russo-Korean relations, namely, the

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outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War.

However, the fundamental cause of this war was Japan's desire to secure political and economic hegemony over the Korean peninsula. Japanese diplomats had begun as early as 1900 to pursue this objective by trying to use the anti-imperialist 'Boxer Rebellion' in China to further its own advantages. The Japanese diplomats began to let it be known to their Western counterparts that as the Chinese 'Boxer Rebellion' and the 'Righteous Armies' in Korea were in essence based on the same unified anti-imperialist structure, the Japanese military would have to step in if any signs emerged that this movement was spreading to the Korean-Manchuria border area.

The Korean Emperor Kojong feared that if foreign troops were dispatched to Korea, the country would find itself in a situation similar to that which Qing China experienced following the entrance of foreign powers to subdue the Boxer Rebellion. To remedy this and offset the Japanese efforts to subjugate the peninsula, Kojong attempted to adopt a policy of turning Korea into a neutral power. Kojong's attempts to assure the neutrality of Korea continued unabated until the end of the Russo-Japanese War. The Russian Foreign Ministry, which supported Korea's neutrality, at a certain point ordered its chargé d'affaires to Korea Aleksandr Pavlov to open negotiations with the Korean government under the pretext that Russia would intervene to protect Korea's neutrality and that this neutrality policy was the best way to keep Japanese ambitions in check.

Moreover, during these negotiations the Russian government conveyed its position to the Korean Emperor that should he indeed decide to officially announce Korea's neutrality, Russian support should be sought in getting this position accepted by the rest of the international community. During this period, the Russian Foreign Ministry also instructed the Minister to Japan, Aleksander Izvolskii to open discussions on the conditions related to the neutralization of Korea with the Japanese government.¹

However, the Korean government delayed giving Pavlov an answer to

his proposal. This delay was in many ways linked to Japan's negative attitude towards the neutralization of Korea. The Japanese government announced its position that as long as the Russian troops which had first come to crush the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 did not withdraw from Manchuria, it would refuse to even hold any discussions over the possibility of a neutral Korea. In this manner the Japanese government effectively linked the Korean situation with that of Manchuria. This kind of attitude on the part of the Japanese government not only served to make the Korean problem a touchier one, it made its resolution even more difficult to bring about. For its part, the Russian government regarded the issue of Manchuria as one that concerned only itself and the Chinese government.

During his trip to Tokyo in late April and early May of 1900 Pavlov held a meeting with Ito Hirobumi in which the latter let it be known that the Japanese government would prefer to reach a new Russo-Japanese agreement that would effectively divide the Korean peninsula into two spheres of influence, one Russian and the other Japanese, than to discuss the establishment of a neutralized Korea.² However, the negotiations over such an agreement ground to a halt in June 1901 when Hirobumi was replaced as Prime Minister by the former Minister of War Katsura Taro, who belonged to a faction that adhered to a more aggressive stance towards the Korean situation. These negotiations were reopened in November 1901, with Ito dispatched to St-Petersburg to discuss the Korean situation, as part of the Japanese government's attempts to play the Russians off against the British in order to get the latter to agree to sign an agreement with Tokyo.

On November 30, 1901 Ito, after long drawn out negotiations with Russian Foreign Minister Vladimir Lamsdorf, submitted a draft of an agreement that included a proposal for the joint guarantee of Korean independence. This draft also contained a clause which called on both countries to agree to promise not to use the Korean peninsula for their own strategic purposes and avoid building any military facilities along the Korean coast which could threaten free passage through the Korean

Straits. Moreover, Russia should recognize Japan's special freedom of action in Korea in matters industrial, commercial, and political, and its exclusive rights to provide assistance to Korea by providing advice whenever necessary, including the provision of military aid, in order to suppress any civil disturbances which might emerge in Korea.³ The proposal put forward by Russia during these negotiations also called for the guarantee of Korea's independence, for both sides to restrain from using the Korean peninsula for their own strategic purposes, and the assurance of free passage through the Korean Straits. Moreover, while the proposal put forward by the Russian side made possible the Japanese provision of military aid to Korea, such aid could only be rendered after a negotiated agreement had been reached with Russia. Article 6 of the Russian proposal stated that in return for the above, the Japanese side should recognize Russia's preponderant rights in the territory of the Chinese Empire adjoining the Russian border.

During his review of the Russian proposal Witte expressed his opinion that more emphasis should be placed on the reaching of a new Russo-Japanese Agreement, claiming that such an agreement would allow Russia to complete the Manchuria Railway, carry out a large-scale migration to the Far East, and complete the fortification of the Amur Military Base near Vladivostok and Port Arthur. Witte felt that Russia ran a strong risk of being forced into an unwanted military confrontation with Japan if such an agreement were not reached in a peaceful manner. Such a denouement, he believed would not be favorable to Russia. In a letter he sent to Lamsdorf Witte pointed out the following:

Russian public opinion will not be favorable should we engage in a war with Japan over our desire to occupy the far-off land of Korea. This situation could also result in greatly increasing the opposition to Russia's East Asian policy and create significant social unrest as well as undesirable phenomena within Russian society itself. As such, all of these factors should be taken into consideration.⁴

Ito headed for Berlin without even waiting to hear the Russian answer to his proposal. Moreover, on December 23, 1901 Ito let it be known that he had told his home government that he did not regard the Russian proposal as one that was worth opening negotiations over. In other words, Ito in reality would have had no interest in any proposal which Russia would have put forward, as the main purpose of his trip to St-Petersburg was in effect a smokescreen which allowed the Katsura Cabinet to gain more leverage in its negotiations with England, negotiations which were completed with the announcement of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on November 1, 1902.

This alliance treaty completed on November 1, 1902 emerged as a serious setback before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War to Russian efforts to have itself recognized as the protector of Korean independence and of its territorial integrity. In this Anglo-Japanese treaty, the independence of both Korea and China was recognized. However Article I of the Anglo-Japanese treaty stated that:

“The High Contracting parties, having mutually recognized the independence of China and Korea, declare themselves to be entirely uninfluenced by aggressive tendencies in either country. having in view, however, their special interests, of which those of Great Britain relate principally to China, whilst Japan, in addition to the interests which she possesses in China, is interested in a peculiar degree, politically as well as commercially and industrially in Korea, the High Contracting parties recognize that it will be admissible for either of them to take such measures as may be indispensable in order to safeguard those interests if threatened either by the aggressive action of any other Power, or by disturbances arising in China or Korea, and necessitating the intervention of either of the High Contracting parties for the protection of the lives and properties of its subjects”⁵

As the ‘other power’ referred to in this article is clearly Russia, this treaty can be understood as making evident England’s support for Japan’s

plan to subjugate Korea. As such, this treaty facilitated Japan's future imperialistic plans to encroach on Korea's sovereignty. On July 20, 1902 Izvolskii submitted a report to Lamsdorf in which he claimed that, "This treaty will allow these two countries to emerge as the dominant powers in East Asia and result in not only China, but Korea and Siam becoming 2nd class nations under the hegemony of England and Japan."⁶

When Kojong met Pavlov on February 4, 1902 he conveyed to the latter that Japan had since the end of 1901 pressured Korea to sign a secret anti-Russian pact with Tokyo. According to Kojong, the Korean envoy to Japan Park Chesun met the Chairman of the Upper House Konoe Atsumaro while in Tokyo, and that the latter had emphasized the point that the purpose of this proposed Korea-Japan treaty was to remove Russian influence from the Korean peninsula and strengthen Korea-Japan relations. The main contents of the secret treaty drafted by Tokyo were the following:

1. Should a military conflict break out between Korea and Russia in which Korea is unable to defend herself, the former should request the assistance of Japan.
2. Should Korea experience financial problems that require the injection of foreign loans, it should turn to Japan for help.
3. The Japanese government agrees to return all political exiles currently residing in Japan to Hanyang (Seoul).⁷

In response to Pavlov's report of these Japanese movements with regards to Korea, the Russian foreign ministry stressed that Kojong should be advised to reject these entreaties from the Japanese, as Russia did not have any intention of displaying any kind of aggressive behavior towards Korea.⁸

Nevertheless, the chicanery of Japanese diplomats continued unabated in Korea. The Japanese Minister in Korea Hayashi Gonsuke passed on an official letter from the Japanese government to Park Chesun in which he proceeded to explain the contents and nature of the Anglo-Japanese treaty to Park. This treaty, he claimed, was designed to ensure the cooperation of

the British and English militaries in repelling Russian encroachment in Manchuria and on the Korean peninsula. Moreover, Hayashi attempted to force Emperor Kojong and his entourage to sign a secret treaty with Japan by emphasizing the fact that the initial result of this Anglo-Japanese alliance would be Japan's declaration of war on Russia.⁹

As mentioned above, another obstacle which emerged with regards to the improvement of Russo-Korean relation during this period of growing tension between Russia and Japan at the beginning of the 20th century was the activities of the so-called Bezobrazov group. This group established the East Asian Development Company, and would later go on to also establish the Yalu Timber Company.

The background to the establishment of this company can be traced back to 1896. At that time the Korean government and a Russian merchant from Vladivostok named Iulii Briner reached an agreement to establish a timber company in Korea. This company secured the exclusive rights to exploit the timber tracts on Ullŭng-do along the East Sea (Sea of Japan), and to the areas along the Tumen and Yalu River for a period of twenty years.¹⁰ This agreement stated that the Korean government would own 1/4 of the assets of this company and be entitled to 25% of its profits in exchange for guaranteeing that no taxes or tariffs would be levied on this company's activities. Finally, the company had to launch operations within a year of the agreement coming into effect.

The founders of this company were convinced that this enterprise would grow to become a large-scale corporation. However, their expectations were in the end dashed. Although warned on numerous occasions by the Korean government that operations would have to be commenced within a year of the contract coming into effect, Briner, short on the necessary capital, proved to be unable to start operations by December 1898.¹¹

In 1898 the newly appointed Minister to the Russian Legation in Korea N.G. Matiunin started to take an interest in Briner's company. Matiunin eventually told a man by the name of Colonel Vonliarskii about this company, who in turn got Bezobrazov involved with this company as well.

Furthermore, Bezobrazov was able to get members of Tsar Nicholas II's inner circle such as Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, Counts Vorontsov and Dashov, Prince Yusopov and Admiral Abaza on board as well with regards to this project. These individuals, unlike the group led by the likes of Witte, Lamsdorf, and Kuropatkin who wished to see Russian expansion stop in Manchuria, strongly advocated the extension of Russian influence on the Korean peninsula.¹² Bezobrazov and Counts Vorontsov and Dashov persuaded Nicholas II that it would be in Russia's interest to take over Briner's concessions in the Yalu and Tumen River areas and establish an East Asian development company there. As such a move would not only help to facilitate the expansion of Russian influence in Korea, but also serve as an obstacle to Japanese efforts to extend their own influence on the peninsula, Nicholas agreed with the plan to have the Russian government buy up a huge private company in Korea.

From 1900-1901 the Bezobrazov group set about establishing the East Asian Development Company (investing about 2 million rubles in capital). This company's activities were by no means limited to Russia proper, but also involved a large timber concession on the Korean side of the Yalu River, another one along the Tumen River, and a wide range of other timber concessions. Moreover, this company was also able to reach an agreement with the Korean government to have the original period in which activities had to be commenced on the Korean concessions extended until the spring of 1903. This company, which hoped to grow to become one the largest private enterprises in the three northern provinces of Korea; set out to become as competitive as American companies in the international timber industry.¹³

Having secured the exclusive rights to the Korean side of the Yalu River, the Bezobrazov group attempted to obtain similar rights for themselves on the Chinese side of the river. At the same time as Bezobrazov was putting his own plans into action, the issue of timber concession rights in the Yalu River area was increasingly being discussed at the government level. The two rounds of a special conference called to discuss this issue (first round was held on April 8, 1903, and the second

on May 20 of the same year) led to the establishment of the so-called 'New Course' in terms of Russian policy towards Manchuria and Korea. The main tenets of this new course policy were as follows: First, in order to maintain its predominant position in Manchuria, Russia would not only refuse to withdraw the troops who had first entered the region to put down the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, but increase their numbers; second, Russia would not allow any foreign influence or capital to enter Manchuria; and third, Russia would use its timber concessions on the Yalu River as a pretext to strengthen its position in Korea.¹⁴

In June 1903, the Yalu River Timber Company was established with the goal of exploiting the forests of Korea and Manchuria. This company's board of directors consisted of members of the aristocracy and of the Tsar's inner circle. The company's charter stated that the goals of the corporation were to develop timber concessions, mining, hunting and fishing, maritime transportation, and commercial trade in Korea, Manchuria and the Maritime province of Siberia. To facilitate communication between this company and the Russian government, the Tsar appointed Bezobrazov as a state secretary.¹⁵

The appointment of Bezobrazov to such a position of power allowed him to put in place certain political and military plans to facilitate the achievement of the objectives he had set for his company. These plans included the dispatch of Russian troops and 3 bands of Chinese raiders to the Korean border. Once there, these forces changed into Korean attire and proceeded to engage in tree felling activities on the Korean side of the Yalu River. To provide support for these activities the Russian government also arrayed four groups of hunters and 600 cavalrymen along the Yalu River area. The managers of the timber company also began to buy surrounding land owned by Koreans with the goal of establishing a lumber mill in the area. What's more, telegraph poles began to be set up from Yongamp'o and Ŭiju. As a result, Korean and Japanese historians have tended to refer to this series of incidents as the 'Russian military occupation of Yongamp'o.'¹⁶

This was the manner in which Russia's new course towards Korea and

Manchuria was put into effect. However, the Korean government was very wary of Bezobrazov and his group's activities along the Yalu River, with the appearance of Russian troops around the timber concession areas seen in an especially negative light. The Korean government made the sale of land to Russians illegal, demanded that Russia stop its construction of telegraph poles in the area, and requested that the Russian troops be withdrawn from the Korean side of the Yalu River. The Japanese government's perception of the Bezobrazov group's activities in Korea as a threat to their economic hegemony in the area caused the situation to become even more volatile. England, which was actively trying to coax Japan into a war with Russia, also perceived these activities as a potential threat. As a result, with the support of England, the Japanese government officially demanded in April 1903 that the Korean government open its ports in Ŭiju and along the Yalu River to international trade as a form of compensation for its decision to grant Russia timber concessions in Korea. Thus, this area became another source of conflict between Russia and Japan.

Kojong, expecting Russian support, refused to accept the Japanese demands. The Korean Emperor conveyed his hope to Pavlov that Russia would not abandon Korea should the latter come into conflict with Japan over its decision to refuse to open up its ports in the Yalu River area to international trade. It was amidst such circumstances that a special meeting was held between Kuropatkin, Pavlov, Admiral Evgenii Alekseev, and Bezobrazov in Port Arthur in July 1903. During this meeting the following was agreed upon: 1) on the issue of the support that should be provided to Korea over its decision to refuse to open its ports along the Yalu River to Japan, a decision was reached that Russia should provide all necessary support short of going to war with Japan; 2) As the opening of the Yalu River ports to Japan is not in Russia's interests, the Russian government should make it clear to its Japanese counterpart that an appropriate response will be taken should this indeed come to pass.¹⁷

While the Port Arthur meeting served to make clear Russia's support for Korea's decision to refuse to accept the Japanese demand that the Yalu

River ports be opened up for trade, the Russian government also made it clear that it was not making any promises to come to the Korean Emperor's defense should Japan choose to push the issue even further.

For its part, the Japanese government once again repeated its demand that Korea open up its ports in the Yalu River area in August 1903. On August 12 Kojong privately informed Pavlov of the details of the demand which he had received from the Japanese Minister to Korea Hayashi Gonsuke regarding the issue of the Yalu River ports. Hayashi claimed that the Russian activities in the Yalu River area and the strengthening of its military posture in Manchuria had forced the Japanese government to come to the conclusion that Russia was preparing for a full-fledged invasion of Korea. To counter this and preserve the territorial integrity of Korea, the Japanese government requested the right to dispatch 45,000 of its own troops to the Yalu River area and the right to assume the protection of Korea's coastlines in such areas as Inchŏn, Pyŏngyang, Ŭiju and along the Yalu River. Two days later, Hayashi submitted another list of demands to the Korean government, which included Japan's claim that as it strongly opposed Russia's timber activities, if the Korean government did not cancel its recent decision to provide Russia with further concessions in the Yongamp'o area, Japan would have no choice but to occupy an area of the same size.¹⁸

The agreement which Hayashi was referring to was reached between the director of Korea's forestry department Cho Sŏnghyŏp and the representative for the Russian timber company G.G. Ginsburg on July 20, 1903. However this agreement was later somewhat amended by Pavlov and his Korean counterpart Yi Toche. This revised draft of the agreement was then taken to Kojong for his approval. Yi had planned to have the agreement finalized by August 27, 1903.¹⁹

However, the above-mentioned Japanese demands in this regards resulted in shaking the Korean position on this issue. Soon thereafter, Yi Toche informed Pavlov that the Emperor was now faced with a situation in which he had no choice but to acquiesce to the Japanese demand regarding the opening of the port of Ŭiju in order to soothe the Japanese

apprehension over the Korean decision to give a concession to Russia in Yongamp'o.

Per Nicholas' instruction, Lamsdorf sent a telegraph to Pavlov on August 22, 1903. This telegraph made it clear that the Russian government considered it to be in its best interests to make sure that Japan did not establish a diplomatic enclave for itself in the port of Ŭiju. Kojong, when made aware of the contents of this telegraph by Pavlov, retorted that while Korea had yet to finalize its decision to open up the port of Ŭiju to Japan, it would have no other option but to do so if Russia failed to guarantee that it would support Korea. Pavlov replied that the best Russia could offer to Korea was its eternal friendship and moral support.²⁰

This ambiguous attitude on the part of the Russian government with regards to this issue resulted in increased dissatisfaction with Russia within Kojong's inner circle. Upon Ginsburg's arrival in Korea on August 27, 1903 to finalize the agreement which had been reached with regards to the Korean government's ceding of land to the Russian timber company in the Yongamp'o area, Cho Sŏngghyŏp let it be known that he was unable to affix his signature to the agreement in question because he had yet to receive final approval from Yi Toche.²¹ Meanwhile, Kojong told Pavlov that that he had decided to put off the final decision regarding the signing of this agreement for a few days. Let us now take a closer look at some of the important details involved in this issue. At the same time that he was telling Pavlov about his decision to postpone the signing of the agreement, Kojong was sending out a member of his inner circle to the Japanese Legation with a message for Hayashi in which he let it be known that he wanted the Japanese to submit a letter of protest over the agreement with Russia to the Korean court at once. Kojong's intention was to use such a letter to strengthen his reasons for in the end refusing to sign the agreement with Russia. This usage of the conflict between Russia and Japan to protect Korea's own interests can be perceived as having been a very astute approach on the part of Kojong. Hayashi wasted no time in submitting the letter in question. In this letter, Hayashi claimed that if the Korean government went ahead with its plans to cede land to a

Russian timber company in the Yongamp'o area, Japan would have no choice but to demand that Korea open up the port of Yongamp'o, which is situated right next to the proposed Russian concession, to the Japanese. Hayashi also stated that should such an agreement be put in place, Japan would break off diplomatic relations with Korea and demand that the latter open its doors wide open to other foreign powers.²²

In September 1903 the Korean government informed Pavlov that the final decision regarding the ceding of land in the Yongamp'o area would have to be taken by the State Council (*Ŭijŏngbu*). Pavlov responded to this news by stating that as the agreement was being held up through no fault of the Russian timber company in question, the Russian government had concluded that this agreement was a done deal and would allow its company to begin operations in the land in question regardless of the final decision which the State Council might reach, or whether the actual agreement was signed or not.²³ Be that as it may, the agreement was never signed.

For their part, the Japanese continued their aggressive campaign to force the Koreans to open up the port of Ŭiju. On October 15, the Japanese side went one step further and demanded that the port at Yongamp'o be immediately opened to Japanese traffic. Kojong also entrusted the deliberations over this issue to the State Council. However, on the day the deliberations were scheduled to be held, per Kojong's secret orders, all the state councilors suddenly took ill and the meeting in question was never convened. As a result, the issue of the opening of the port at Yongamp'o remained an unresolved matter. The Japanese government decided to use a different tract to obtain their objectives. The Japanese Legation informed Kojong that the Japanese government had reached a decision that as the Russians had failed to abide by their decision to withdraw their troops from Manchuria, Japan would dispatch a large number of troops to northern Korea in order to protect its own interests.

The issue of the opening of the ports along the Yalu River remained unresolved until the end of August 1903. Just as had been the case with

the issue of the Russian timber company, the negotiations between Japan and Russia over the fate of Korea and Manchuria had a great influence on the resolution of the port issue.

Following the above-mentioned meeting in Port Arthur, the Tsar decided to support the position adopted by Bezobrazov. In August 1903 Nicholas decided to install Alekseev as Viceroy of the Far East, a position which would thus put the Viceroy of Priamur (Vladivostok), the Military Office of the Russian Maritime Province, and the ground and naval forces stationed in the Russian Far East under his command. The Viceroyalty was also expected to be responsible for diplomatic affairs with China, Japan, and Korea as well as the civil administration of the local population. Nicholas also established a special commission charged with the East Asian question, with himself as the head, that was to serve as a higher body than the Viceroyalty.

These measures undertaken by Nicholas in effect represented the victory of the foreign policy line advocated by the Bezobrazov group. Those who opposed the Tsar and the Bezobrazov group's activities, led by Witte, Lamsdorf, and Kuropatkin, attempted to exercise their influence by presenting the Tsar with several new options. At the behest of these three individuals, a special meeting was held on August 14, 1903 between the finance, foreign, and defense ministries to discuss Russia's policy towards Manchuria and Korea. The three main individuals in this meeting concluded that in order to resolve the Manchurian situation in a manner advantageous to Russia, the Russian government should refrain from undertaking any policy in Korea that ran the risk of putting Russia in conflict with Japan. However, they were also of the mindset that the agreements put in place in Korea should be respected and that Russia should do its part to ensure the independence of Korea. The decision was also made during this meeting to not remove any Russian troops from Manchuria, a decision which went against the agreement reached with China on April 8, 1902 to remove all the troops which had been sent to put down the Boxer Rebellion by September 1903.

Moreover, as far as the activities of the Russian timber company in

Korea were concerned, the decision was made that the government should limit its support to the provision of commercial assistance, while ceasing all forms of political and military support. Moreover, they also felt that it was in Russia's best interests that the company be changed into a private company that nevertheless received support from the government.²⁴

The decisions made during this special meeting convened on August 14, 1903 show that although the three above-mentioned ministers were originally against the new course policy advocated by Nicholas II and Bezabrazov's group, they in the end wound up advocating a policy line that was for all intents and purpose similar.

The Russo-Japanese negotiations over the Manchurian situation proved to be the most influential factor affecting the direction of Russia's Korea policy in the period immediately before the Russo-Japanese War. These negotiations began in earnest with the Japanese Minister in St-Petersburg Kurino Shinichiro's submission of a new draft proposal related to the Korean question to the Russian government in January 1903. In May 1902 Kurino had attempted to have Lamsdorf reopen negotiations over the matters that had been left unresolved from the earlier round of talks held with Ito during the latter's visit to St-Petersburg in 1901, and which had come to an end with the signing of the Anglo-Japanese treaty in 1902. In early 1903, Kurino submitted the above-mentioned draft relating to Korea to the Russian foreign ministry. This proposal contained two old notions, that Korea's independence and territorial integrity should be respected and both sides should refrain from using Korea to advance their strategic objectives, as well as two new concepts: 1) Japan should have the right to dispatch its troops to Korea and reinforce this military presence there whenever necessary; 2) the section of the previous agreement between the two countries dealing with Korea should be abrogated.²⁵

After its review of Kurino's proposal, the Russian foreign ministry came to the conclusion that although Russia was ready to open negotiations with Japan by making certain concessions with regards to the Korean issue, the preferential rights which had been secured through

previous negotiations with Japan from 1896-1898 should not be ceded under any circumstances. A diplomatic dispatch sent out by the foreign ministry to the Russian minister in Japan Baron Roman Rosen clearly spelled out the details of the negotiation strategy that Russia would employ. Russia would declare itself willing to allow Japan to take control of Korea's internal affairs and to construct and operate railroad, postal, and telegraph systems in Korea. In exchange Russia would demand that Japan abide by concessions made to Russia in previous agreements, namely, Russia's right to maintain an equal number of troops in Korea as Japan and the securing of a mutual guarantee of Korea's independence and territorial integrity. In addition, the Russian foreign ministry also instructed Rosen that the previous agreement to not use Korea for strategic purposes had to be included in any new concord between Russia and Japan.²⁶

These instructions to Rosen were intended to prevent any possibility of war with Japan by granting the latter the maximum amount of special privileges possible in Korea. Nevertheless, Japan's desire to go to war with Russia as soon as possible resulted in dooming these Russian attempts to avoid conflict to failure.

On August 12, 1903 Kurino presented to the Russian foreign minister the Japanese outline of an agreement between the two countries that contained the following six clauses:

1. Mutual engagement to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Chinese and Korean empires and to maintain the principle of equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations in those countries.
2. Reciprocal recognition of Japan's preponderating interest in Korea and Russia's special interest in railway enterprises in Manchuria and of the right of Japan to take in Korea, and of Russia to take in Manchuria, such measures as may be necessary for the protection of their respective interests as above defined, subject however, to the provisions of Article 1

of this agreement.

3. Reciprocal undertaking on the part of Russia and Japan not to impede the development of those industrial and commercial activities respectively of Japan in Korea, and Russia in Manchuria, which are not inconsistent with the stipulations of Article 1 of this agreement. Additional engagement on the part of Russia not to impede the eventual extension of the Korean Railway into South Manchuria, so as to connect with the Chinese Eastern Railways and Shanhaikwan-Newchwang lines.
4. Reciprocal engagement that in case it is found necessary to send troops by Japan to Korea or by Russia to Manchuria for the purpose either of protecting the interests mentioned in Article 2 of this agreement, or of suppressing insurrection or disorder calculated to create international complications, the troops so sent are in no case to exceed the actual number required, and are to be forthwith recalled as soon as their missions are accomplished.
5. Recognition on the part of Russia of the exclusive right of Japan to give advice and assistance in the interest of reform and good government in Korea, including necessary military assistance...
6. This agreement will supercede all previous agreements between the two countries regarding the Korean question.²⁷

The Russian foreign ministry deemed that this proposal proved that Japan was willing to grant Russia special rights to develop the railway in Manchuria in exchange for the latter recognizing Japan's preponderant influence over Korea, and that Japan's eventual intention was to connect the Korean Railway with the Chinese Eastern Railways once Russia had completed the construction of the latter all the way to the Chinese side of the Yalu River. Moreover, the Russian side reached the conclusion that the articles contained in the Kurino proposal proved that Japan desired to do away with the Moscow agreement reached in 1896 which limited Japan's

activities, as well as to ensure the recognition of its free hand in Korea and of its right to interfere in Manchuria. Based on their belief that Japan should acknowledge that Manchuria lay outside their sphere of influence, the Russian side presented a counter-proposal which dealt solely with the Korean question. The proposal submitted by Rosen in September 1903 is clear evidence of the mindset of Russia regarding these issues:

1. Mutual engagement to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Korean Empire.
2. Recognition by Russia of Japan's preponderating interests in Korea, and of the right of Japan to give advice and assistance to Korea tending to improve the civil administration of the Empire without infringing the stipulations of Article 1.
3. Engagement on the part of Russia not to impede the commercial and industrial undertakings of Japan in Korea, nor to oppose any measures taken for the purpose of protecting them, so long as such measures do not infringe the stipulations of Article 1.
4. Recognition of the right of Japan to send, for the same purpose, troops to Korea, with the knowledge of Russia, but their number not to exceed that actually required, and with the engagement on the part of Japan to recall such troops as soon as their mission is accomplished.
5. Mutual engagement not to use any part of the territory of Korea for strategical purposes, nor to undertake on the coasts of Korea any military works capable of menacing the freedom of navigation in the Straits of Korea.
6. Mutual engagement to consider that part of the territory of Korea lying to the north of the thirty-ninth parallel as a neutral zone into which neither of the contracting parties shall introduce troops.
7. Recognition by Japan of Manchuria and its littoral as in all respects lying outside her sphere of interest.

8. This Agreement shall supersede all previous agreements between Russia and Japan Regarding Korea.²⁸

As seen in the above articles Russia emphasized its willingness to allow Japan to gain preponderant rights in Korea, but refused to allow any role for Japan in Manchuria, a problem which they considered to be the sole responsibility of Russia and China. The Japanese counter-proposal to this Russian offer which contained eleven articles was in many ways very different from the previous one. The most important aspect of this new Japanese proposal was that while it continued to assert the inherent correlation between the Korean and Manchurian problems it also distorted Russia's offer regarding the establishment of a neutral zone. Japan proposed establishing a neutral zone on the Korean-Manchurian frontier, with the Yalu River serving as the recognized border, which would extend fifty kilometers on each side. This article would allow Japan to station troops in Korea while Russian troops could come no closer than 50 kilometers from the Yalu River. Russian military specialists perceived this new Japanese proposal as having contained only one true concession on the part of Japan, that of not building any military facilities capable of threatening the freedom of navigation in the Korean Straits.

After having reviewed the Japanese proposal, the Russian foreign ministry decided to send another proposal to Japan that was for all intents and purposes similar to the one it had originally submitted to Japan. On December 11, 1903 Russia forwarded its counter-proposal to Tokyo. This new counter-proposal once again reaffirmed Russia's position that Manchuria and Korea were two separate issues. The following eight articles were included in this new proposal:

1. Mutual engagement to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Korean Empire.
2. Recognition by Russia of Japan's preponderating interest in Korea, and of the right of Japan to assist Korea with advice tending to improve her civil administration.
3. Engagement on the part of Russia not to oppose the

development of the industrial and commercial activities of Japan in Korea, nor the adoption of measures for the protection of those interests.

4. Recognition by Russia of the right of Japan to send troops to Korea for the purpose mentioned in the preceding Article, or for the purpose of suppressing insurrections or disorders liable to create international complications.
5. Mutual engagement not to make use of any part of the Korean territory for strategical purposes, and not to undertake on the Korean coast any military facilities capable of menacing the freedom of navigation in the Korean Straits.
6. Mutual engagement to consider the territory of Korea to the north of the thirty-ninth parallel as a neutral zone, within the limits of which neither of the contracting parties shall introduce troops.
7. Mutual engagement not to impede the connection of the Korean and Chinese Eastern Railways, when those railways shall have been extended to the Yalu River.
- 8 Abrogation of all previous agreements between Russia and Japan respecting Korea.²⁹

Russia's second counter-proposal was reviewed at length by the leading Japanese policymakers during a meeting held on December 16-17. Japan decided to alter the second article of the last proposal sent by Russia so that it read 'Recognition by Russia of Japan's preponderating interest in Korea, and of the right of Japan to give Korea advice and assistance tending to improve the administration of the Korean Empire'; and also called for Article 5 to be changed to, 'Mutual engagement not to undertake on the Korean coast any military facilities capable of menacing the freedom of navigation in the Korean Straits'; while calling for Article 6 to be removed altogether.³⁰

On February 6, 1904 per Komura Jutarō's instructions, Kurino informed Lamsdorf that the Japanese government had decided to cease

negotiations over this issue and to break off diplomatic relations with Russia, thus officially putting an end to all negotiations between the two countries. Documents related to these negotiations clearly prove that St-Petersburg remained up until the end willing to make concessions to Japan in order to avoid a war. Russia's proposal forwarded to Tokyo on February 3, 1904 was purposely held up by the Japanese government at the Nagasaki telegraph office and only came into Rosen's possession on February 7. This telegram stated the Russian government's willingness to now discuss Manchuria as part of the Russo-Japanese negotiations (the Russian government had previously limited its negotiations with Japan to the issue of the Korean peninsula because they felt that Manchuria was outside of Japan's sphere of interest). What's more, the Russian foreign ministry also acquiesced to the Japanese demand that Russia recognize Japan's preponderating interest in Korea, not oppose the development of the industrial and commercial activities of Japan in Korea, and acknowledge Japan's right to send its troops to Korea. This new proposal also did not include Article 6, but rather included an article pertaining to Manchuria as Japan had required.³¹

With regards to the Russo-Japanese rivalry in East Asia, while it is obvious that both sides never really attempted to reach a peaceful settlement to the problems which divided them, it is also evident from the negotiation process that Russia did more to forestall the onset of war than did the Japanese side. By the time the negotiations broke down, Russia had shown itself willing to acquiesce to all Japanese demands regarding the Korean problem. The only issue on which Russia was unwilling to yield any ground was on that of the first article which called on both parties to guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of Korea.

Let us finally look at the actions which Emperor Kojong took to remove Korea from any potential conflict between Russia and Japan. Kojong was of the mindset that the negotiations between Russia and Japan would not yield results that would be advantageous to Korea. In this regards, he perceived Korea's maintenance of amicable relations with Russia in order to counter any Japanese efforts to impose its will on

Korea as his nation's top priority. Kojong also believed that in order to forestall any Japanese encroachment on Korean sovereignty, Korea's neutrality would have to be recognized by the international community. On January 14, 1904 the royal envoy Hyōn Sanggōn paid a visit to the Russian Legation to inform Pavlov that Korea wanted the world to know that it would remain neutral in any conflict which might break out between Russia and Japan. Hyōn Sanggōn also asked Pavlov to have this message conveyed to the outside world through the Russian and French legations in Shanghai.³²

Pavlov accepted Kojong's entreaty and forwarded Korea's message of neutrality to world capitals, including Tokyo, by telegraph. However, the Japanese government refused to accept Korea's neutrality and began its final preparations to conquer Korea. In January 1904, the Japanese Navy launched an attack upon the Russian vessels Varyag and Korietz and began to dispatch troops to Chemulp'o. On the night of February 8 the Japanese launched a sneak attack upon the Russian Fleet anchored at Port Arthur. Soon thereafter, the Japanese invasion of Seoul marked the official onset of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

Notes :

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- 2 Очет по первому Департаменту МИД за 1900 г.//АВПРИ. Фонд Очеты МИД. 1900. Дело 128. Лист 89.
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- 5 Гальперин А.Л. Англо-японский союз. М., 1948. С. 420-421.
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 - 8 Проект секретной телеграммы А.И.Павлову в Сеул от 28 января(10 февраля) 1902 г.//Фонд Китайский стол. Опись 491, 1902 г. Дело 37. Лист 29.
 - 9 АВПРИ. Фонд Японский стол Опись 493, 1902 г. дело 12. Листы 37-38.
 - 10 Текст соглашения См.: АВПРИ. Фонд Японский стол. Опись 493, 1896 г. Дело 170. Лист 4. См. также: Чосон тхонса(Общая история Кореи). Т. 2. Пхеньян, 1958. С.122; Ли Сонгын. Хангукса(История Кореи). Т. 6. Сеул, 1971. С.781.
 - 11 Коджон сидэса. Т. 4. С. 364.
 - 12 О борьбе между этими двумя группами подробнее см.: Пак Чон Хё. Русско-японская война 1904-1905 гг. и Корея. С. 80-83.
 - 13 См. В.Я.Аварин. Империализм в Маньчжурии. Т. 1. С.66-67.; Ку Хангук вёгё мунсо. Т. 18. С. 303.
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- 21 Ку Хангук вэкё мунсо. Т. 18. С.681-684.
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- 24 Проекты секретной телеграммы генерал-адъютанту Е.И.Алексееву в Порт-Артур от 10(23) августа 1903 г.//АВПРИ. Фонд Японский стол. Опись 493, 1903 г. Дело 42. Лист 60.
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Корея. С. 133.

- 30 Японская Белая книга. Маньчжурия и Корея... С.121.
- 31 См. подробнее: Б.Д.Пак. Россия и Корея. Издание второе, дополненное. М., 2004. С.352-361.
- 32 Донесение российского посланника в Сеуле Павлова министру иностранных дел Ламздорфу. Сеул. 12 января 1904г.// Б. Д.Пак(сост.). Ли Бомджин. М., 2002. С.43-44.