Sir Ernest Satow in Tokyo, 1895-1900: from Triple Intervention to Boxer Rebellion

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Explanatory Note

This paper is intended as a first working draft for a paper to be included in a future issue of Diplomacy and Statecraft, an international journal which is published by Frank Cass Publishers (see http://www.frankcass.com/jnls/dip.htm) and read by all those who have a professional or general concern with international history and the contemporary conduct of international affairs.

Sir Ernest Satow (1843-1929) arrived back in London from his brief posting as Minister in Morocco (September 1893-May 1895) at the end of May 1895. He was almost 52 years old, with the prospect of at least ten more years service before retirement. He had received a telegram from the Liberal foreign secretary Lord Kimberley (1826-1902) on 2 May 1895 offering him the Legation at Tokyo. This was not a chance that Satow would or could reasonably pass up: he had trained for this appointment more than any other, since as a member of the Consular Service he had spent the best part of twenty years in Japan (September 1862-December 1882, with two home leaves) successively as student interpreter, interpreter and Japanese Secretary to the Legation.1)

The subsequent ten years (1884-94) had been something of a roller coaster: appointment as Consul-General in Bangkok had been quickly followed by elevation from the Consular to the Diplomatic Service early in 1885, when he was made Minister. Yet he did not care for Siam: he had tried in vain to help the Siamese find a way out of the shackles of extra-territoriality.2) Bouts of malarial fever rendered him ineffective, so that from June 1887 to October 1888 when he was offered his next post in Uruguay, he was on sick leave in England.3) Uruguay was 'an earthly paradise in which he found nothing to do' according to his friend in retirement, the diplomatic historian Harold W.V. Temperley,4) though it may be presumed that the Foreign Office was wisely seeking to avoid overtaxing Satow after his long lay-off. The move from Uruguay to Morocco was quite unexpected, but came as the result of an offer from Lord Rosebery early in June 1893.
Morocco provided a challenge similar to Siam. Britain had by this time no further desire to increase its colonies, and sought instead to encourage Morocco to maintain her independence rather than become the colony of one of her European rivals (France, Germany, Spain and Italy). After relations had been strained by Sir Charles Euan-Smith's pressure on the Sultan to accept a commercial treaty, Sir West Ridgeway had been sent in January 1893 to restore good relations. It fell to Satow, who arrived from England on 29 August 1893, to promote gradual internal reform through tact and patience. This he succeeded in doing, earning the praise of Sir Thomas "Lamps" Sanderson, the new Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, for his ability to get the European ministers to recognise the new Sultan, and for meeting him in October-November 1894. He had received the K.C.M.G. by the end of May 1895.

New Japan: The Background

There had been several major changes in Japan since Satow had left in 1883. Following the establishment of a cabinet system in 1885, a new constitution (the "Constitution of the Empire of Japan", known as the Meiji Constitution) had been promulgated in 1889, replacing the prototype Seitaisho (the first "constitution") of 1868. It was an ambivalent and ambiguous charter, poised between the two contradictory principles of imperial sovereignty and parliamentary government. Yet it was clearly a step forward: the judiciary was made independent of executive interference; the Diet was given authority to initiate legislation, and approve all laws and the budget; and individual rights were introduced, including habeas corpus, the right to a fair trial, and freedom of religion, speech and assembly, although these rights were subject to modification or curtailment by the Diet.

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation had been signed in London on 16 July 1894, providing for the abolition of extra-territoriality with regard to British subjects with effect from 17 July 1899 and the immediate introduction of an ad valorem tariff. This revision of the first of the 'unequal treaties' was a huge advance for Japan in its relations with the foreign powers who followed Britain's lead, and the necessary precursor to the Anglo-Japanese alliance concluded in January 1902. Professor Nish regards it as an important turning-point, both in Japanese history and in Britain's attitude towards Japan.

Also the First Sino-Japanese War had been won by Japan, leading to the Treaty of Shimonoseki being signed on 17 April 1895, only for it to be drastically modified after the pressure-in the form of 'friendly advice'-applied by the Dreibund powers Russia, France and Germany (the so-called Triple Intervention) on 23 April. Japan
was thereby forced to give up the newly ceded territory of the Liaotung peninsula in the southern tip of Manchuria which included Port Arthur (Lushun). It was therefore triumph followed by humiliation which Japan had experienced in the interim while Satow had been elsewhere, with the latter being the most wounding and recent experience. The Japanese would wait ten years to avenge this humiliation at the hands of Russia, steadily rearming and winning the first large-scale conflict of the twentieth century (the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5).

Satow in England (May-June 1895)

On 28 May Satow went to the Foreign Office and received a briefing from Sanderson, who with Salisbury's private secretary Eric Barrington was one of the two permanent officials most friendly to Satow. They discussed three questions regarding the Far East: the nature of compensation that Japan would receive for withdrawing from the Liaotung Peninsula; the apparent non-acceptance of Japanese reforms in Korea; and the Japanese annexation of Formosa, where the Chinese seemed to be supplying arms secretly to the anti-Japanese element. There was a risk of war breaking out again if China was indeed backing the rebels, the 'semi-savage Hakkas, adept at guerilla warfare'. Satow concluded in his diary that Japan was 'probably more exhausted than is usually thought.' Sanderson told Satow that he should leave as soon as possible for Japan. The chargé d'affaires, Gerald A. Lowther, was doing well enough, but without Japanese language skills he was dependent on the legation interpreters, John Harrington Gubbins (who was then Japanese secretary, and thus chief interpreter) and the second secretary Ralph Spencer Paget. Satow himself would of course suffer from no such handicap.

Satow also had meetings with Lord Kimberley on 31 May and 28 June. At the former Kimberley described Japan as 'our natural ally, as against Russia.' At the second and final briefing Kimberley stated that he regarded China as both 'unreliable and useless'. Britain should remain friendly to her, but not rely on her as a counterweight to Russia. Moreover, Aoki Shūzō, the Japanese minister in London the previous summer, had explained Japan's going to war with China as a case of 'now or never'. The intention had been to prevent China falling under the influence of Russia by giving her an 'awakening blow', but this policy had failed. Kimberley also remarked that he thought the English newspapers at Yokohama did much damage to Anglo-Japanese relations. Japanese vanity should be humoured, and their goodwill cultivated. In an oblique reference to Sir Harry Parkes, British minister in Japan 1865-83, he added: 'It was no longer possible to treat them as semi-civilised and to bully them; they must be treated on a footing of equality...'
Yet a change of government from Liberal to a Conservative-Unionist coalition occurred in June 1895, and Lord Salisbury as both prime minister and foreign minister was more sceptical about Japan's capability and reliability than Kimberley had been. When Satow wrote to him from Tokyo asking for instructions on 15 August, he received an oft-quoted reply dated 3 October in which Salisbury doubted whether the Japanese were capable of preventing Russia from obtaining an ice-free port on her eastern seaboard, which she could easily take by marching overland from Siberia, and mistrusting Japanese motives. Satow was told instead to concentrate on the promotion of trade in the face of German rivalry.

China

The main problem with regard to China from American, British and Japanese viewpoints in the period under study was how to prevent her partition among the European powers and thus preserve the 'Open Door' to free trade. This problem would become all the more acute after the Boxer Rebellion. Contrary to its proud and inflated self-image, the country was backward and impoverished and had difficulty in paying the Japanese war indemnity, especially the additional 50 million taels (7.5 million pounds sterling) in consideration of Japan vacating the Liaotung Peninsula, which was reduced later to 30 million. Satow wrote to Sir Nicholas O'Conor, then minister in Peking, on 3 September 1895 that he supposed Salisbury's views would be the same as Kimberley's 'that China has shown she can never be of any use to us as an ally' and agreed in a conversation with Admiral Buller later that month 'that China is hopeless in the matter of reform.' Her government system was 'thoroughly rotten'.

When Satow saw his old friend Itô Hirobumi, the prime minister, on 26 September he was told that Japan had tried desperately to come to an agreement with China over a sound system of government for Korea, but she had refused to cooperate, leading to the Sino-Japanese war. Satow himself told Count Inoue Kaoru of Chôshû (1836-1915), the former foreign minister (1879-87) and minister to Korea (October 1894-September 1895) on 4 October that he thought Japan was a much better country than China to lead Korea's modernization. On the same day foreign minister Count Okuma Shigenobu denied that Japan had tried to pick a quarrel with China; the Japanese had been anxious about the Chinese navy with its powerful ships and foreign officers, but the Chinese army was poorly trained and led. Itô had told Satow that beating China had been easy, and Satow had expressed the same view in a letter dated 18 April to his friend Frederick Victor Dickins before leaving Morocco, when he had likened it to cutting through a mouldy cheese.
In 1899 two Chinese commissioners visited Japan. On 27 July Satow mentioned them in a private letter to Salisbury, commenting that they were unlikely to achieve anything significant:

Japan does not wish to be tied to a corpse, nor to undertake the defence of China against Russia. Her chief care is for the maintenance of her position in Corea, and nothing but a Russian attempt to swallow up the Peninsula will in my opinion turn her aside from her present policy of lying low till her armaments are completed in 1903.¹⁵)

After the commissioners left Satow reported again to Salisbury on 5 October that the foreign minister Aoki had talked to him 'in a very aggrieved tone' about the behaviour of the commissioners:

By the way in which they went on they had made it impossible to have any serious negotiations with them. He added of course there had been no question of an alliance [between Japan and China], but only of a friendly understanding, which was frustrated by their conduct here. One of them had even entered relations with Sun Yatsen, the revolutionist who was kidnapped [for 13 days in 1896] by the Chinese Legation in London, and is now in Japan... ¹⁶)

Korea

Korea had for centuries been a vassal of China within the Confucian hierarchy, and attempts by Japan to displace the latter were in general much resented. Korean hatred of the Japanese could also be traced back to the invasions by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1592 and 1597.

On 1 August 1895 Satow recorded in his diary that he went to see Itō for the first time. He now held the post of Minister President, which he was to do on four occasions. Itō asked Satow if Britain had any interest in Korea, to which Satow replied that it was of no great commercial importance, but that the British had a similar interest to the Japanese in preventing Russian annexation of the peninsula. Satow then asked if Russia was planning to extend her railway down through Manchuria to a port in Korea:

He answered that what they aim at is something much greater than a port...The gist was that Russia expected Japan to conform her acts to her declarations as to the independence of Corea, and asserting that the [Korean]
King [Kojong] is anxious to make reforms, but fears authority will be weakened by Japanese interference.\footnote{17}

Satow remarked that the communication was couched in very polite terms, to which Itō responded that that was the Russian method, of beginning very mildly, and then gradually increasing in peremptoriness. Satow then asked whether Kato, the Japanese minister at London, had reported his conversation with Kimberley about adopting an earlier British proposal for a guarantee of Korean independence. Itō confirmed that he had. Then Satow observed that other powers besides Russia and Britain should be invited to guarantee Korea's independence. The two men agreed that 'neutralization' was a better term to employ than 'independence' as the latter would allow Russia to deal directly with Korea and so 'obtain her aims more easily'.

On 25 August Satow informed Salisbury that Viscount Miura Goro of Chōshū had left for Korea as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. Describing his background and character Satow reported: 'He is credited with moderate views respecting the introduction of reforms into Corea, being opposed to heroic measures, and holding that the work must be carried out slowly and steadily.'\footnote{18} This assessment proved quite inaccurate, as within two months Miura was to show the very antithesis of a slow and steady approach to reforms in Korea.

On 26 September Satow discussed Korea with Itō Hirobumi, and reported to Salisbury:

His Excellency said that recently, troubles having broken out at Sang Won, in the Province of Phyöng-an-do, the Corean Government had requested the aid of Japanese troops in suppressing them, but that General Miura, the present Minister at Sōul, had refused, considering it preferable that such assistance should not be afforded until the Corean Government had exhausted all the means at their disposal. The present force stationed in Corea amounted to six battalions, or about 4,800 men, and this it was shortly intended to reduce to a material extent.\footnote{19}

Itō further stated that Korea was 'quite incapable of reform from within, and those which Japan had endeavoured to introduce seemed a long way off of being realized.'

Satow told Ito that he thought Japan had gained two advantages by the Sino-
Japanese war. Formosa had been annexed, and Korea was no longer the vassal of China. Ito responded that Korea was incapable of being an independent sovereign state, and would either have to be annexed or become the protectorate of another nation. When Satow asked him which nation might annex Korea, he simply said 'the strongest'.

When Satow suggested that the aim of the war had been to prevent the completion of the Siberian railway, Ito strongly denied this, saying that in that case it would have been totally unjust. He continued:

The sole object with which Japan had despatched troops to Corea had been the suppression of the Tong Hak insurrection and the subsequent reform of the Administration, and she had made every exertion to come to an agreement with China for equal participation in the establishment of a sound system of government. Unfortunately her endeavours had not met with success, and the war had been the consequence of China's refusal to cooperate. It was true, of course, that Japan had despatched a larger force to Corea than China, but the reason for that was the disadvantage in which she had been placed on a former occasion by her forces being numerically inferior to the Chinese. However, had the Chinese Cabinet agreed to the proposals made by Japan, the latter would have withdrawn, and there would have been no war.21)

Satow concluded from what Ito said that Japan would not stand in the way of the annexation of Korea by Russia, even though this would radically transform the political map of East Asia. This was the result of the perceived inferiority of the Japanese navy, which had already forced Japan to give way with respect to the Liaotung peninsula. Ito seemed to feel that Japan at this time could do nothing to prevent Russia from seizing Port Arthur.

On 4 October Count Inoue Kaoru called on Satow. They discussed Korea, and Satow told him that he thought Japan was a much more suitable country than China to lead Korean modernization, as Japanese and Koreans were much more similar than Chinese and Koreans. Inoue observed that in 1869 Kido Koin (1833-77), then chief spokesman of Choshu in the new Meiji government, had favoured a war with Korea as a way of uniting Japan, but Saigo Takamori (1827-77), the great Satsuma leader, had opposed him. Later in October 1873 the two men had reversed their stances.
On 8 October 1895 a coup d'état occurred in Seoul. It was engineered by the new minister Miura Goro, and the Korean Queen Min Bi was assassinated in hideous circumstances: as Satow discovered on 14 October, she had been beheaded. On the following day Satow observed in a letter to his friend F.V. Dickins that Korea would be 'another Morocco, a rotten fruit which no one may touch, and which will be carefully propped up lest it should fall into some one's hands of whom the others would be jealous to the point of fighting.' In a despatch to Salisbury Satow elaborated on recent events:

The Japanese Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs [Saionji] informed me today, confidentially, that there were reasons for supposing that Japanese subjects were concerned in the affair, and, as it was a matter of the gravest import, he had this morning despatched Mr. Komura [Jutarō], the Head of the Political Bureau, to Seoul to inquire into all the circumstances. The Japanese Government would view with the greatest displeasure the participation of Japanese subjects in a treasonable conspiracy against the Sovereign of a friendly State.

In a further despatch Satow observed that the choice of Miura had been 'a great blunder' as he had no experience of diplomacy, and criticised the proposal of the American Minister to Japan, Edwin Dun, for Korea to be governed by Switzerland or Denmark for the Powers jointly as impractical. On 23 October Satow told Ito privately that Japan had no option but to withdraw from Korea. Three days later he wrote to O'Conor that he was sure that 'the Japanese are anxious to get out of Corea, if they can do so decently'. On 7 November he wrote to Salisbury that it had been announced that Japanese troops would withdraw from Korea. On 20 December he told Ito that Korean affairs 'should be left to quiet down'.

On 8 May 1896 when the Russians began to make a move for dominating Korea, Satow wrote to Salisbury:

There is no question the Japanese are so profoundly interested in as keeping their hold over Corea. It is a part of their national history from the very earliest times. It is their Alsace-Lorraine.

On 4 June Satow talked about Korea with Viscount Fukuba Bisei (1831-1907):

He observed that Inouye's work in Corea was an attempt to substitute the new civilisation that Japan had adopted from Europe for the Chinese form,
but it would seem that Corea was not able to receive it. I said that the
Coreans were intelligent enough, but Inouye [Inoue Kaoru] had been in too
great a hurry. It must be recollected that the first 9 or 10 years of Japanese
intercourse with Europe had passed without any change. But perhaps one
judged the Corean mind too favourably, from the superior specimens of that
nation which visited this country. It was impossible I thought to predict the
turn affairs are likely to take in Corea, with Japan and Russia contending for
the mastery.26)

On 18 February 1897 Satow spoke with the foreign minister Count Okuma
Shigenobu, who had instructed Katō to ask whether Britain had any plans to
establish a legation in Korea, as the other powers had done. Okuma pointed out
that Korean commerce was growing and had increased at the same rate as Japan's
had in the early days. He also argued that the step would increase British influence
in the East. Satow replied that he had no instructions, but thought it unlikely that
the British government would agree to the proposal:

Since the year before last Japan and Russia had agreed to treat the Corean
question as one interesting themselves alone, and had come to an
arrangement which they had agreed to keep secret...It would probably excite
umbrage in the minds of the Russians if we suddenly without any apparent
reason converted our Consulate General into a Legation.27)

Okuma admitted there was an agreement between Japan and Russia signed in
June 1896 (the Yamagata-Lobanov protocol) which set up two spheres of influence
in Korea.28) It was superseded by the Nishi-Rosen agreement signed on 25 April
1898 in which both nations agreed to refrain from intervention in Korea's domestic
politics. Russia explicitly recognized Japan's special position, i.e. her economic
interests, in Korea, while Japan implicitly recognised Russia's sphere of influence in
Manchuria.29)

When on leave in England in May-October 1897, Satow discussed Korea with
Salisbury on 6 October. Salisbury did not think the Russians wished to be very
active there for the time being. When he observed that Germany wanted a port in
Northeast Asia, Satow replied that a port in Korea would be no use. He also stated
that he did not believe the Russians would take Port Arthur as Japanese forces
would lie between there and Vladivostock. Salisbury continued:

...as long as the Russians only looked for commercial advantages out there,
we should not interfere, but if they contemplated any military movements we should have to take corresponding measures. In the meantime we should not egg on the Japanese against them, but rather counsel them to get on happily with the Russians. I replied that the Japanese could easily be stirred up by their own Government at any moment, but Port Lazareff [Wonsan, on the northeast coast of Korea] in Russian hands would cause great popular commotion.30)

The Germans took a 25 year lease of the port of Kiaochou in the province of Shantung on 6 March 1898. In response to this the Russians took a 25 year lease of Port Arthur and Talienwan on 27 March, and on 4 April Britain secured a lease of Wei-hai-wei, 100 miles south of Port Arthur on the other side of the Gulf of Pechili.31)

Back in Japan Satow reported to Salisbury on 27 January 1898 that there were no signs of a good understanding between Russia and Japan as regards Corea; in spite of the assertions of certain Russian papers to that effect. On the contrary I imagine that the appearance of our squadron at Chemulpho [Inchon] and the visit of some of our ships to Port Arthur gave a good deal of pleasure here. The newspapers had articles headed 'the sleeping lion bestirs himself' ...32)

A British squadron under Rear Admiral Charles C.P. Fitzgerald had been sent to Chemulpho to lend moral support to John McLeavy Brown, the British chief commissioner of the Korean Customs, who had been in danger of being ousted by the Russian Admiral and General Alexeieff.33)

On 2 March Satow was visited by a prominent Korean in exile, Pak Yong Hyo (1861-1939) who told him that the fickle character of the 47 year old King was at the root of Korea’s troubles. There was no hope unless he could be persuaded to abdicate in favour of the Crown Prince.

He asked whether England would not take a more active part in Corea. I said that England had no direct interests there. Only Russia and Japan had. But the latter neither spoke nor acted. Coreans must be patient for a few years. France of course...merely worked in the interests of Russia.34)

On 25 June Satow was visited by the Korean Minister to Japan. "Yu Ha-yung the Corean Minister came, and unbusomed himself of a great deal. Seems to be far
more intelligent than one is usually inclined to take him for...Japanese much disliked by Coreans; nevertheless necessary to make friends with them....”

On 30 March 1899 Satow spoke with Aoki Shūzō, then Foreign Minister:

He spoke very strongly about Russia in Corea. There is an idea of bringing a railway from Vladivostock through North Corea to a port on the Gulf of Pechili. If Russia has Corea Japan cannot sleep in peace. Unfortunately the interests of England there are not sufficient to make it worth her while to support Japanese policy. But if Russia gets command of the peninsula she will have a great and damaging position as regards commercial nations. I observed that Japan would not be ready till 1903. He replied that she might be obliged to act before.35

Satow saw Aoki again on 12 October. They talked about the port of Masanpho on the south coast of the Korean peninsula, west of Pusan. Russia had been attempting to secure it as a way of policing the Straits of Tsushima between Korea and Japan:

He says Rosen [Russian minister to Japan 1897-1900, 1903-4] is a nice fellow to deal with, but the Russians are always trying to grab something. I remarked that they were like a tree that was always putting out branches over the neighbour's wall. Then sounded him out about Deer Island [Kojedo island near Masanpho ?], Masanpho being merely a blind, and suggested they were like the bamboo, that sends its rootstock along under ground, and then suddenly comes up where you least expect it.36

On 28 December Satow wrote to Salisbury that the Japanese government still feared the possibility of a Russian move towards Masanpho, even though the Japanese had by then bought up the land that they had desired. He concluded:

On the whole I think the Japanese will stand a good deal before they draw the sword against Russia, and that even if they saw Corea being absorbed they would be too timid to act alone. Only material aid from us would nerve them to the task. They are not ready.37

On 24 January 1900 Satow discussed the possibility of war with his staff. Lt. Col. Arthur Churchill, the military attaché from 1898 to 1903, said that he thought the Japanese would avoid war at almost any price, and doubted whether Russia wanted
war with Japan, "unless she thinks the navy of the latter is getting too strong and that it would be wise to crush it without delay. The strategical value of the Siberian railway has been exaggerated; it could be used to mass troops previously, but would not suffice for transport of provisions and munitions during a war.

The Japanese might perhaps succeed in a first campaign, but it would be only a campaign, as Russia would go on, and never make peace until she had defeated them..."

Satow concluded: "On the whole I think Itō, Yamagata and Matsugata between them will try to keep from going to war, and I do not see the man who is capable of turning them out and heading a warlike cabinet."38)

Satow saw Itō for the last time on 2 May 1900 before returning to England. When Satow observed that all seemed quiet in the Far East, Itō replied that no one could tell how long it would last, and expressed the hope that the Anglo-Boer war would end soon.

As to war, I said no one could suppose it was to the advantage of Japan to fight Russia. Yet many people talked about it. Japan and Russia as to Corea like England and France as to Siam, a pretty woman with two suitors; no need however to come to blows. One thing however seemed clear, Russia regarded Japan as the only obstacle to her designs in the Far East.39)

Itō agreed with Satow's observations, but hinted that there was a strong sentiment in Japan in favour of war with Russia among the 'non-responsible classes'.

**Anglo-Japanese Alliance**

The seminal work on the first and second Anglo-Japanese Alliances of 1902 and 1905 remains *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1894-1907* by Professor Ian Nish (Athlone Press, University of London, 1966). In his introduction he examines Anglo-Japanese relations before 1894, and in Part 1 the background to the Alliance (1894-1900). The following should be seen as supplementary to that study.

On 26 May 1896 Satow was visited by his regular informant Asaina Kansui, and noted in his diary for the following day:

Asaina told me yesterday that seven or eight out of ten political people consider that only by the help of England can the peace of the East be
maintained, and that Japan must strengthen her navy in order to prove to us that it is worth our while to combine with them.40

Japan was therefore in the position of eager suitor, and she determined to make use of British-built ships to strengthen her navy. The two new battleships Fuji and Yashima were ordered from Britain in this period.41

On 19 November 1896 Satow and prime minister Matsukata Masayoshi talked about Japanese naval and military expenditure. Satow repeated what he had said to Okuma about the “apparent needlessness of an army of 500,000.” Matsukata’s reply hinted at an alliance, in terms which echoed the thinking of Kimberley: “...England and Japan ought to be on the best of terms, and that as we could not bring the troops to this part of the world, a large Japanese army might one day prove useful.”42 Yet when Satow saw Curzon, under secretary at the Foreign Office in London on 13 October 1897 he recorded in his diary that Curzon “thinks the Japanese untrustworthy, difficult to have an alliance with them.” After his return to Japan on 26 November Satow told Asaina that “we thought the moment had not come for joint action, and till then a formal alliance [was] undesirable, but in [the] meanwhile to cultivate the closest possible understanding.”43

When Count Pimodan, the French military attaché, observed on 6 January 1898 to Satow that Japanese troops were no match for Europeans, and that in case of an alliance with a European power they could only be useful if officered and led by European staff, Satow replied: “I thought the days of alliances of European powers with the yellow race had gone by.” (Perhaps this was a smoke screen put up by Satow to cover what he really thought might happen at some stage in the future.) 44

The Japanese, however, continued to explore the idea. On 14 January 1898 Satow was at a dinner given at the German Legation:

After dinner had a talk with Hijikata [Hisamoto, then Minister of the Household], who remarked that in England there had been a good deal of talk about alliance [between Britain and Japan]. I replied that even if there were no alliance in black and white, it was a good thing to let the world believe we had a close understanding. He said Great Britain had wonderfully assisted the Imperialist party before the Restoration, while the French Legation had foolishly supported the Tokugawa [shogunate].45 I asked what made the Japanese so quiet in regard to Corea. He replied ‘we are fostering our military strength’ and added that they would not fear the fleet of either
Russia, France or Germany, but were uncertain as to encountering the three combined. But there was one thing of which there could be no doubt, that the Japanese fighting man, if once set in motion, would fight to the death with the greatest intrepidity, as was shown by the torpedo boats at Weihaiwei [during the Sino-Japanese war].

In reporting this conversation which had been held in Japanese by private letter to Salisbury dated 27 January, Satow observed that Hijikata had been the only Japanese present and only he had the linguistic ability to talk to him. He added that the Japanese press had published lists of the British and Japanese squadrons, showing how greatly they outnumbered those of Russia, France and Germany. He noted: "There is not a dissentient voice in the press as to the desirability of an alliance with England. To people who have pressed me on the subject I have said 'the time is not yet come'..." 47)

Satow felt that Salisbury and Curzon were lukewarm about the idea of an alliance, so he was unable to do more than report Japanese desires, as expressed in the press. Again on 24 February he wrote to Salisbury that there was a lull in the newspaper attention to the matter, "but every now and then appears an article dwelling on the evident nature of the understanding between Russia, Germany and France, and the necessity of opposing it by the 'strongest eastern power' and the 'greatest maritime power in the world'." 48)

On 6 April 1898 Satow wrote privately to Salisbury again, that he had the impression that the Japanese calculated that they would not be ready with their military and naval preparations until 1902. Then they expected a large-scale conflict with Russia. He continued:

Until that time arrives the present men desire that Japan should preserve a watchful attitude, and abstain from opposing the plans of Russia by any overt diplomatic action. Unless it took the form of a defensive alliance, I do not think they would accept any proposition for joint action of any kind from our side...

Satow added that the Japanese generally felt they were still not strong enough to offer Britain an equivalent for her alliance, but without it they could not run the risk of offending any of the Dreibund powers by giving diplomatic support to Britain. Yet Japan clearly wished to remain on good terms with Britain and regarded her as a friend. 49)
Signs of the closeness of the understanding between Britain and Japan were evident in the harmonious transfer of Wei-hai-wei from Japanese occupation to British in April 1898. The Japanese had held the port after taking it in the Sino-Japanese War. They had continued to keep it until the indemnity settled at the Treaty of Shimonoseki was paid by China through an Anglo-German bank loan for £16 million agreed on 1 March 1898. Acting on instructions from A.J. Balfour, Satow asked Ito on 16 March point-blank whether Japan would evacuate on the indemnity being paid, and was given a clear affirmative answer. On 12 April Satow heard from Asaina that the Japanese cabinet were delighted that the British were going to Wei-hai-wei: `That keeps the army and navy quiet. They will withdraw their troops according to Treaty, punctually.' Britain had her own reasons for taking Wei-hai-wei: as already noted Germany, more or less on the whim of the Kaiser, had seized the port of Kiaochou in Shantung province at the end of 1897, and Russia had thereupon persuaded China to give her a 25-year lease of Port Arthur in March 1898. Britain obtained China's willing consent to a lease in the same month. These were the 'corresponding measures' of which Lord Salisbury had spoken on 6 October of the previous year.

**Japan and the British Colonies**

On 6 July 1896 Viscount Enomoto Takeaki, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, spoke to Satow about Australia. He had received letters from J. Langdon Parsons, later appointed honorary Japanese consul in Adelaide, about extending the intercourse between Australia and Japan. Satow said that 'down there alarm was felt lest Japanese labour should come in like a flood.' Count Mutsu Munemitsu, the foreign minister, had shown Satow a letter from Parsons suggesting that the Japanese government or Satow himself should give a public assurance that this was not to be feared. Satow had replied that the best way to remove the apprehensions of the Australians was to give them the Treaty for 18 years instead of just one.

When Satow spoke to Saionji Kinmochi, the acting foreign minister, on 17 August 1896 he told him that New South Wales and Victoria were not inclined to adhere to the Treaty unless they got liberty to restrict immigration and that they probably would want to insert 'artizans'. When Saionji asked why, Satow replied that various incidents at Guadeloupe, on the Siberian railway and elsewhere had created the impression that Japanese labourers were 'given to combinations against authority', and that their low wages caused alarm. Komura Jutarō told Satow on 20 August that Japan would give way about the artizans. 'As they were starting a
line of steamers to Australia, it was most desirable that the principal colonies should come in to the Treaty. Thought the Australians had mistaken ideas about the matter because of Hawaii, but in that case there was a special treaty.  

On 2 October Okuma Shigenobu, the new foreign minister in the Matsukata-led cabinet, told Satow that he knew there had been agitation against unrestricted immigration of Japanese into Australia and Canada, and that in the latter country petitions had been presented to the government seeking to have a $500 tax imposed on Japanese, Chinese and other Mongolians. The Japanese government would therefore endeavour to divert Japanese emigration to countries where their presence was desired and even clamoured for, in South America. Japan 'had not a large surplus of population, parts of the North and Hokkaido were still insufficiently populated, and the increase of wages resulting from the establishment of factories would keep them at home.' Satow replied that it seemed that all the colonial governments desired was to have the power to legislate in reserve, to calm any agitation that might be started.

On his way back to Japan from leave in England during which he attended Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, Satow spoke to Lord Aberdeen, the Governor General of Canada, on 1 November 1897. Satow told him he thought the real reason why Canada had declined to adhere to the Treaty was not the labour question, but the most favoured nation clause. The next day Satow saw Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Canadian prime minister:

I suggested that when the Belgian and German treaties expire next year, the question whether Great Britain is a 'foreign nation' in tariff matters will have to be settled, and till then m.f.n. [most favoured nation] clause's effect will be uncertain...I also suggested that if Canada has no Treaty, the position of Canadians and Canadian sealers after 1899 will be doubtful: as they do not join the Treaty, power to do which was reserved to them, they will be in the position of subjects of a non-Treaty Power. He seemed inclined to dispute this. Told him I thought Canada might export timber to Japan, but nothing else I could see.

Japanese emigration to Australia was abruptly halted by the Immigration Restriction Act of February 1902, which introduced a dictation test in a European language. It was memories of the unequal treaties and these restrictions which caused Japan to propose a racial equality clause in the League of Nations charter in 1919. Bitterly opposed by Australia, it was not adopted.
Japanese Domestic Issues relating to Treaty Revision

Satow was obliged to deal with many internal Japanese issues during his service as minister in Tokyo. Most of them were connected with the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty of 1894 and the abolition of extra-territoriality. The treaty was opposed ab initio by the Yokohama branch of the China Association as an undue sacrifice of British interests. It argued that it was premature to rely on the judicial system "of a nation whose recently promulgated laws are in many respects at variance with its ancient customs and disapproved by the Parliament of the people", and expressed a lack of confidence that the new laws would be properly understood or administered by the judges. The only concession on the Japanese side was perceived to be a further opening of the country, which would not benefit British interests to an extent commensurate with losses likely to be inflicted on individuals by other parts of the treaty.

Nevertheless, when Satow saw Itō on 1 August 1895 he congratulated him on the successful conclusion of treaty revision, which had begun with the Iwakura Mission in the early 1870s. It was a relief that this long-standing question between the two governments had been settled satisfactorily.

The condition of prisons, courts, leases and other matters were mentioned by the editor of the *Kobe Chronicle* (Robert Young) in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*. Satow discussed prisons with Vice-Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō on several occasions. He told Satow that foreign experts would be hired to aid in the treatment of foreign prisoners. Satow reported to Salisbury that consuls would be present at trials, prisons were being improved, and consular prisons in the ports might be used. He thought that the spirit of the treaties would be carried out, and there was no reason to alter the 1894 treaty radically.

Regulations affecting businessmen included certificates of origin for imports, taxes on land and land transfers, and the press law prohibiting foreigners from owning and editing newspapers. Satow forwarded a petition from a group at Kobe and Nagasaki in May 1898, in which they protested regulations regarding land tenure, press laws, and prisons. The certificates of origin were discussed by Satow with British businessmen at Yokohama in November 1898. Some businessmen complained that Japanese consular agents in Great Britain, who were authorized to issue the certificates, were rivals in trade.

A serious problem affecting all foreigners was the treaty regulations regarding
land leases and taxes on land and buildings. The new treaties did not give foreigners the right to own land in Japan, but previous leases of property were confirmed. Problems arose when the Japanese government attempted to put a time limit on perpetual leases in the old foreign settlements.

Satow told Foreign Minister Nishi Tokijiro on 3 March 1898 that only he and Itô understood the terms of the Kobe leases, as they had both been there when they had originally been negotiated:

Went to Nishi. Asked him about Kobe hill lots leases limit. He said they had made inquiry of the Government but thought there would be no objection to fixing a limit of time for leases under the new Treaty as in the case of the sites of certain legations! I rejoined that under the new Treaties foreigners would have the same rights as the law gave to Japanese and hence no need for fixing a limit. As to Kôbe I would wait till he got his information, but hoped he would eventually see that the Governor ought not to have fixed a limit on his own account when the agreement between the Japanese government and foreign ministers left everything to be arranged between the owner and the lessee. He talked about 'usage' and was evidently quite in the dark, so I told him Itô and I were the only people who really understood the question, having been present when it was arranged.62)

On 13 September 1899 Satow discussed the taxation question with Foreign Minister Aoki, and commented that many foreigners would not accept the conversion of perpetual leases into ownership even if permitted, because they would be taxed on the full selling price, while the Japanese had to pay taxes on a lower valuation.63) Another problem arose with regard to the imposition of a house tax on buildings on leased land. When Satow met Aoki at a dinner at the imperial palace celebrating the implementation of the new treaties, Aoki said he could not get a delay in the tax, but the owners could refuse to pay. Satow replied that it was not proper, and he advised them to take it out of the ground rent.64) A discussion with Itô on 28 December 1899 included the Yokohama land reclamation question which had been settled by a recent imperial edict as a result of Ito's talk with Aoki and Yamagata.

The regulation prohibiting foreigners from owning or publishing newspapers was settled more easily. Satow reported in February 1899 that an amendment to article six of the Press Law of December 1887 enabled foreigners to become publishers, editors and printers of newspapers in Japan.65)
On 27 July 1899 Satow wrote privately to Salisbury that Japan had apparently consulted Germany about how to treat resident foreigners, "and the result has been a set of minute regulations prescribing reports to the police with regard to residence, inmates of each household, and so forth, which are particularly irksome to English people." It was impossible to object as the Japanese were subject to equally, if not more, harassing regulations. Satow hoped that English residents would get used to the new regime, but acknowledged that it would be difficult after 40 years of greater freedom from control than in England.

He continued:

The Japanese on their side are a little too eager to exercise their newly acquired authority, and are disposed to make a difference between the subjects of Treaty powers and others. If they are not cured of this, it will show that the antiforeign spirit is very strong still, and when the new Treaties come to an end in 1911 they will put more restrictions on foreigners than are now possible.66

Satow urged Japan, now that she was admitted into the comity of nations, to model her international conduct on that of the most liberal countries, such as England and the United States.

Return to England

On 29 March 1900 Satow suddenly and unexpectedly received a telegram from Lord Salisbury informing him that the Peking post was likely to be vacant soon in view of concerns about Sir Claude MacDonald's health. Salisbury expressed a strong desire to appoint Satow 'as I am sure I could not leave possibly in better hands'.

Satow telegraphed a reply that he was "greatly pleased at this mark of Your Lordship's confidence" and accepted the post. In a letter dated 12 April he thanked Salisbury for the kind language of his telegram and added: "I am conscious that the work there is difficult, and I can only say that I should do my best, and try to deserve your confidence."

When Satow said goodbye to Tanaka Mitsuaki, the imperial household minister, on 3 May he was told that both Tanaka and Itō "agreed that my not returning here was much to be deprecated on Japan's account. I said that there were several vacancies, and I did not know whether I should be sent back here or not, but I was only the faithful representative of the friendly feeling of England, and whether I
came back or not, would make no difference." 67)

On 31 May Satow went to the Foreign Office where he met Sir Francis Bertie, Sanderson and others. He was told that the exchange of posts between himself and MacDonald was settled, and that MacDonald would go to Japan in September. Sir Francis Bertie (Head of the Asiatic Department, 1898-1902) regarded the news of the Boxer rebellion serious, “and that the Powers will have to use such strong measures against the Empress as will bring China to the ground and hasten on partition.” 68)

An Assessment of Satow as Minister at Tokyo

Satow was the first British minister to have a profound, scholarly understanding of Japanese culture gained over many years of residence. Of his predecessors, only the first envoy Sir Rutherford Alcock (1859-64) made a serious attempt to learn the language. Sir Harry Parkes (1865-83) was competent in Chinese and had served as an interpreter in China, but apparently relied on Satow and other legation interpreters to a great extent in his dealings with the Japanese. The next three ministers (Sir Francis Plunkett 1883-87; Mr Hugh Fraser 1889-94; Hon. Power Henry Le Poer Trench 1894-5) were not long enough in the post, and made little impact on Anglo-Japanese relations beyond maintaining them at a friendly level. Of his successors, Sir Claude MacDonald (1900-12, ambassador from 1905), and Sir Conyngham Greene (1912-19) were not scholars, and the latter had no experience of Asia. Sir Charles Eliot (1919-31) was a formidable academic and oriental scholar 69), but it was not until the return of Sir Francis Lindley on the eve of the Manchurian incident in 1931 that Britain was represented by another diplomat with real experience of the country.70)

Professor Nish has suggested that the appointment of Satow was in itself a significant act. When he returned to Japan the men in power were those he had known as junior officials. He ‘came closer to statesmen whose national character tended to make them secretive, than any other diplomat of the time. Beyond this, he was a careful and painstaking organizer of the everyday functions of the legation; and his dispatches and private letters are a model of conscientiousness and acute observation. His coldness of manner did not mar his services to Britain or to Japan.’ 71) Satow’s intimacy with the Japanese statesmen certainly helped prepare the ground for the Anglo-Japanese alliance, though he himself recorded in a retirement letter to Lionel Berners Cholmondeley, the former chaplain of the British legation: ‘I wish I were in command of the British Legation at Tokio now. How many Japanese between 1895 and 1900 talked to me of their desire to see an alliance
between England and Japan and I had nothing to offer them.’ 72)

NOTES

1) Another most private but nonetheless compelling reason for Satow to return to Japan was to look after his Japanese family, Takeda Kane and their two sons, Eitarō and Hisayoshi (Hisakichi). Eitarō had been born in 1880, and Hisayoshi in 1883. They were therefore fifteen and twelve years old respectively when Satow returned to Japan in 1895. Lightly coded references to Satow’s Japanese family are interspersed throughout his diaries, using other languages such as Latin, Italian and Spanish. For example on 26 March 1898 Satow wrote: “Dined at Totsuka with tutti e tre.” The three here were Takeda Kane, Eitarō and Hisayoshi.

2) In a letter to his former Japan colleague and friend W.G. Aston, provisionally appointed Consul-General in Korea, dated 27 June 1884 Satow wrote enviously: ‘The work must be very interesting, and you have a teachable people to deal with.’ Satow Papers, PRO 30/33/11/3

3) The long leave was the low point in Satow’s diplomatic career, but he made good use of his time, visiting family and friends (A.B. Mitford, William Willis), reading in libraries (in Oxford, Rome, Madrid and Lisbon) and getting confirmed in the Anglican faith on 29 October 1888.


7) Ian Nish, The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, (London: The Athlone Press, 1966) p.11. In Japan there had been growing pressure for repudiation of the old treaties, so that the process of renegotiation may have been an attempt by the Western Powers to keep Japan within the ‘comity of nations’ and prevent her sliding back into ‘sakoku’ isolation (see N. Brailey, ‘Ernest Satow and Japanese Revised Treaty Implementation’, a paper delivered at STICERD on 9 July 1999).


10) It was quite common for Japan to be described as Britain’s ‘natural ally’ by shrewd observers on both sides in the 1890s. (Nish, p.11, quoting S.Gwynn (ed.), The letters and friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice, 2 vols, London, 1929, volume i, pp.145-6, Rice to Ferguson, 28 May 1893: ‘In England we regard [Japan] as a practical joker...The general feeling in Japan is that England is her natural ally.’)

11) Satow Papers, PRO 30/33/5/2
The Tonghak Insurrection or Rebellion was the Korean peasant uprising which was the immediate cause of the Sino-Japanese war of 1895. Leaders of the Tonghak religious cult rallied peasants and marched on Seoul in 1893 to petition King Kojong for reforms. The Tonghak cult had been suppressed by Kojong's father (the Taewongun) in the 1860s. The uprising escalated and Kojong turned to China for military aid. Chinese forces arrived in June 1894, and were attacked by Japanese troops in July. Japan used the Rebellion as a pretext to further its aggressive designs on Korea.

For more in detail, see Mutsu Munemitsu, Kenkenroku, Chapter 1.

Kido was the most prominent early advocate of sei-Kan, the policy of subduing Korea.

"In short, Kido linked a military adventure in Korea to the solution of what he thought to be the most critical internal political problem: how to end the fragmentation of loyalty and authority inherited from the bakuhan [shogunate and clan] system." (Peter Duus, The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910, University of California Press, 1995, p.33)

See Duus, p.111. "The hideous event, crudely conceived and brutally executed, was not the product of policy made in Tokyo. It was purely the outcome of Miura's own 'diplomatic methods.' Indeed, Miura attempted to conceal the real facts not only from the diplomatic community in Seoul but from his own government."

In January 1896, the trial of those implicated in the murder of the Korean queen resulted in the acquittal of the seven in the military trial on the grounds that they had acted under orders. The 48 civilians, including General Miura, were released on grounds of lack of evidence. The failure to punish those involved caused the King and the Crown Prince to flee to the Russian legation on 11 February 1896. C.O.Jan, pp.173-4.

See Duus, p.112-4. See also 'Komura to the Rescue' (Duus, pp.112-4).
"Instead of establishing a Russo-Japanese protectorate, the Yamagata-Lobanov agreement [of 9 June 1896] merely stated a joint intention to encourage fiscal reform in Korea, promote the formation of modern police and military forces, and maintain telegraph lines. Secret clauses, however, provided (1) that both countries, after mutual agreement, could move troops into separate spheres within the country; (2) that the king could remain in the [Russian] legation until a reliable Korean palace guard had been organized; and (3) that the troop strength agreed in the Komura-Weber memorandum would remain in force until adequate Korean military and police forces were organized."

The secret memorandum between Komura and Weber (the Russian minister in Seoul) had been concluded on 1 May 1896. For details see Duus p.120 and Jan p.179.

29) See Duus p.126. Russia agreed (article 3) not to obstruct the development of commercial and industrial relations between Japan and Korea.

30) PRO 30/33 16/1


32) PRO 30/33 14/10

33) See Duus, p.123. "When Alexeev, the Korean government's new financial adviser, arrived in October [1897], Speyer [the Russian minister] immediately began a campaign to have him appointed director of the Korean Customs Service, a powerful and influential position...Despite his dismissal, the incumbent customs director, McLeavy Brown, ...refused to leave his post. Confident that he had the backing of his own government, he calmly continued at his duties, bolstered by the protestations of the British consul in Seoul. In late October the impasse was resolved after a squadron of eight British warships under Admiral Buller put in at Inchon to remind the Russian minister that his policy depended on more than an inside track at the Korean court. A compromise was reached: Brown was reinstated, and Alexeev was placed under him."

34) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1

35) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/2

36) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/3

37) Letter book. PRO 30/33 14/11

38) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/3

39) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/3

40) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1

41) On 23 May 1896 Satow noted in his diary: "Sir Andrew Noble told me that Japanese anxious with regard to Russia, and the real object of his visit is to agree with them about increase of their navy beyond what is sanctioned by Parliament. Armstrongs to build ships ostensibly not for Japan, and to keep them in stock, as it were. Particularly desirous to have a ship that can beat Rurik. Has told them he can build one 2000 tons less, with less coal-capacity, which they do not need to be so large as that of Rurik, 3 knots more speed and 18 broadside guns instead of 15, so that they would have the weathergage of her. The Japanese want to be strong enough to cope alone with Russia."

42) On 28 June 1895 Kimberley told Satow that he had spoken privately to the Japanese minister Katō about the need for a closer understanding between Britain and Japan, but he had not written this in despatches to G.A. Lowther in Tokyo. He also opposed the idea of the Russians occupying Wonsan or any part of Korea, and said that Britain should seek "a closer alliance
with Japan.” The British and Japanese fleets would easily contain the Russians, while the Japanese army would be “most useful”. (Diary, PRO 30/33 15/17)

43) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1
44) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1

45) Britain had been officially neutral in the struggle before the Meiji Restoration of 1868, but had provided covert help to the anti-shogunate clans (Satsuma and Chōshū) in the form of guns and ships supplied mainly by Thomas Blake Glover from Nagasaki. Also Satow himself had written three anonymous articles in the “Japan Times” of 1866 calling for the restoration of the Emperor. These were translated into Japanese and widely read under the title “Eikoku Sakuron” (British Policy). Two of the three articles are published in Grace Fox, Britain and Japan 1858-83 (Oxford, 1969) Appendix II, pp.566-75.

46) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1
47) Letter book. PRO 30/33 14/10
48) Letter book. PRO 30/33 14/10
49) PRO 30/33 14/10

50) Balfour to Satow (no.9), 15 Mar. 1898, British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914, i. no.28. Balfour was temporarily in charge at the Foreign Office while Salisbury was in poor health.

51) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1
52) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1
53) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1

54) For a useful and detailed treatment of the issues raised in this section see J.E. Hoare, Japan’s Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements: The Uninvited Guests 1858-99 (Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1994).

55) A copy of the memorandum of protest of the Yokohama Branch of the China Association is contained in the Satow papers, PRO 30/33 5/5.

56) Robert Young, ‘The Case of the Foreign Residents in Japan’, Nineteenth Century, no.42 (August 1897), pp.305-316
57) Diary, June 8 and 23, 1898, quoted in C.O. Jan, p.136.
58) Satow to Salisbury, (no.114), June 27, 1898, FO 410/38/70, quoted in ibid., p.137.
59) Satow to Salisbury, (no.87), May 18, 1898, FO 410/38/46 quoted in ibid., pp.137-8.
60) Diary, November 11, 1898.
61) Satow to Salisbury, (no.177), November 18, 1898 in FO 410/39/1, quoted in C.O. Jan, p.138.
62) Diary. PRO 30/33 16/1
63) Diary, September 13, 1899 quoted in C.O. Jan pp.139-40
64) Diary, October 28, 1899
65) Satow to Salisbury, (no.34), February 8, 1899, in FO 410/39/95 quoted in C.O. Jan p.142
66) PRO 30/33 14/11
67) PRO 30/33 16/3
68) PRO 30/33 16/3