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Visit of Itō Hirobumi to Saint Petersburg in 1901

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Abstract

The Russo-Japanese war had a dramatic aftermath for Russia, and both contemporaries of the period and historians speculated what was the key moment for Russo-Japanese relations to be improved and to prevent the war. The visit of Itō Hirobumi to St. Petersburg in 1901 is often mentioned as such a moment.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Japan was looking for allies among Western powers to continue its expansion in the Far East. Japanese diplomats in London had consultations considering the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. However, Japan had not made the choice yet, as there were supporters of the idea of an alliance with Russia, with Itō Hirobumi and his *Seiyūkai* political party as one of the most noticeable.

After his resignation as Prime Minister in May 1901, Itō Hirobumi announced his trip to Europe and visit to Saint Petersburg. Even though the trip was claimed to be unofficial, political circles in Europe expected Itō to discuss the project of a Russo-Japanese agreement with the Russian government. At the end of November, Itō indeed went to Saint Petersburg and consulted with Russian ministers about the Korean problem – the main contradiction in the two empires' relations. However, the visit was unsuccessful. Itō left St. Petersburg and went to London, where, on January 30, 1902, the Anglo-Japanese alliance was signed.

Even though there were opinions expressed by minister Witte and ambassador Izvolsky that Itō's mission was a real chance to set the controversies and prevent the war, the analysis of the negotiations in Saint Petersburg and such evidence as the memoirs of Hayashi Tadasu, the Japanese ambassador in London, allow us to assert that Itō had given up the idea of a Russo-Japanese alliance before he came to the Russian capital. Even though it does not exonerate the Russian government for its failure to prevent the Anglo-Japanese alliance, it cannot be blamed for Itō's mission failure; by that time, the possibility of an agreement had been missed.

Keywords: Itō Hirobumi, Meiji period, Russo-Japanese war, Russo-Japanese relations, Sergey Witte, Anglo-Japanese alliance.

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The author declares the absence of the conflict of interests.

Визит Ито Хироbumи в Санкт-Петербург в 1901 г.

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Аннотация

Русско-японская война 1904–1905 гг. имела для России крайне тяжелые последствия, поэтому неудивительно, что многие – как современники, так и историки – пытались ретроспективно найти момент, когда траекторию развития отношений между двумя империями было можно изменить. Визит Ито Хироbumи (1841–1909) в Санкт-Петербург в 1901 г. часто называют одним из таких моментов.

На рубеже XIX–XX вв. Япония стремилась найти союзника среди западных держав, чтобы продолжить экспансию в дальневосточном регионе. С апреля 1901 г. японские дипломаты вели переговоры с Лондоном о возможном заключении англо-японского союза, но это не означало, что японское правительство сделало окончательный выбор. Так, Ито Хироbumи, один из главных политиков Японии своего времени, был сторонником сближения с Россией, того же внешнеполитического курса придерживалась образованная им в 1900 г. партия Сэйюкай.

После сложения полномочий премьер-министра в мае 1901 г., Ито Хироbumи объявил о своей поездке в Европу с посещением Санкт-Петербурга. Несмотря на подчеркнуто частный характер путешествия, в политических кругах Европы многие были уверены, что Ито намерен обсудить проект русско-японского соглашения. В конце ноября 1901 г. Ито действительно встретался в Петербурге с ведущими членами российского правительства

и обсуждал с ними возможность решения вопроса о Корее – главного противоречия в отношениях двух держав, однако переговоры зашли в тупик, и уже 30 января 1902 г. Ито присутствовал при подписании Англо-японского союза.

Многие, включая непосредственных участников событий С. Ю. Витте и А. П. Извольского, позднее утверждали, что визит Ито был возможностью заключить соглашение с Японией и избежать войны, однако анализ хода переговоров и другие свидетельства, такие как воспоминания японского посланника в Лондоне Хаяси Тадасу, позволяют утверждать, что Ито отказался от идеи русско-японского соглашения еще до приезда в Петербург. И хотя это не снимает ответственности с царского правительства за то, что оно не смогло вовремя предотвратить сближение Токио и Лондона, его нельзя винить за провал миссии Ито в 1901 г. – к тому моменту возможности для соглашения были упущены.

Ключевые слова: Ито Хиробуми, эпоха Мэйдзи, русско-японская война, Сергей Витте, Хаяси Тадасу, Англо-японский союз 1902 г., русско-японские отношения.

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Конфликт интересов

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Introduction

The article is devoted to the visit of Itō Hirobumi (Japanese: 伊藤博文, 1841–1909), one of the most significant statesmen of the Meiji period (1868–1912), to Saint Petersburg in 1901.

During his visit to the Russian capital, Itō Hirobumi met the leading members of the Russian government and discussed the possibility of the conclusion of a Russo-Japanese agreement that, arguably, could prevent the war between the two empires in 1904–1905. This makes Itō's visit a significant episode in the history of Russo-Japanese relations before the war, and, therefore, it is interesting to analyze why the idea of the treaty failed.

This article is an attempt to examine the history of the visit, assess its significance for Russo-Japanese relations, and analyze the reasons for its failure, based on the diplomatic correspondence, press publications, and memoirs of the participants to the events. The article also studies the reflection of Itō's visit to Saint Petersburg in Russian, British, and Japanese media, as well as the attitude of the public opinion in these countries toward the idea of a potential Russo-Japanese alliance.

Background of Itō Hirobumi's visit

One of the most important foreign policy challenges that the Japanese Empire faced at the beginning of the 20th century was establishing new colonies and broadening the sphere of its economic and political influence. In order to achieve this goal, the Japanese government had to find external military and financial support. Therefore, Tokyo was set to conclude an alliance treaty with one of the powerful Western countries [Ayrapetov 2014, p. 340]. Having a strong ally behind it could help Japan defend its interests in the Far East much more effectively.

Since April 1901, Japanese diplomats had been holding consultations considering the possibility of concluding an Anglo-Japanese alliance. However, this did not mean that Tokyo policymakers had already chosen Great Britain as an ally. Japanese politicians were in doubt. During the whole of 1901, the Japanese Empire was trying to decide whether to conclude a treaty with the British Empire or to join the Russo-French alliance that appeared in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

In May 1901, Itō Hirobumi, one of the most prominent Japanese politicians of the Meiji era, resigned from the position of prime minister. Despite his origins in peasantry, Itō managed to gain a good education, and he was among the first Japanese students who studied abroad in the 1860s. Itō Hirobumi was one of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration and a keen supporter of the Emperor's rule and modernization in Japan. Furthermore, Itō is known as the first (as well as the fifth, the seventh, and the tenth) Prime Minister of Japan and the author of the first Japanese constitution's project [Takii 2014, p. 11].

After his resignation, Itō went on a trip to Europe as a private person, planning to visit "the most important European capitals" like Paris, Berlin, and Saint Petersburg [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 37]. Even though the trip was unofficial, it was taken in close coordination with the actions

of the Japanese government and the Anglo-Japanese negotiations being conducted at the time [Lukoyanov 2008, p. 284].

In the beginning of the 1900s, Itō Hirobumi was known as a politician who supported the idea of rapprochement between Japan and Russia. In 1900, he founded the political party *Rikken Seiyūkai* (Japanese: 立憲政友会, Association of Friends of Constitutional Government), one of the leading political parties in Japan. The idea of Russo-Japanese entente (Japanese: 日露協商論 *nichiro kyōshōron*) in the first years of its existence might be considered as its foreign policy program [Shirokov 2018, p. 557].

The Russian government was informed about Itō Hirobumi's intention to visit the capital of Russia and discuss the possibility of a Russo-Japanese treaty. Russia's ambassador to Tokyo, Alexandr Izvolsky (Russian: Александр Петрович Извольский, 1856–1919), wired Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Lamsdorf (Russian: Владимир Николаевич Ламсдорф, 1845–1907) on September 3 that Itō Hirobumi was going on a trip and that “even though the journey is presented as a private one, it undoubtedly has political significance and is undertaken in order to acquaint closely with the positions of the European governments”. Izvolsky also noted that “retired Marquis Itō is still playing an outstanding position among the eldest statesmen, enjoying the Emperor's confidence, and the result of his journey may significantly affect the course of Japanese foreign policy” [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 37].

Itō Hirobumi in Saint Petersburg

On November 25, Marquis Itō Hirobumi arrived at Varshavsky Railway Station in St. Petersburg.¹ In his journey, Itō was accompanied by his secretary, Tsuzuki Keiroku (Japanese: 都筑馨六, 1861–1923), an ex-deputy minister of foreign affairs of Japan,² a son-in-law of Inoue Kaoru (Japanese: 井上馨, 1836–1915), *genrō*, one of the leading Japanese politicians during the Meiji period [Shirokov 2018, p. 555]. At the station, the Japanese statesman was met by the deputy chief of mission, Sugimura, and the members of the Japanese Legation, as well as the official of the Asian department of the Russian Foreign Office, Dmitri Sementovskiy-Kurillo (Russian: Дмитрий Константинович Сементовский-Курилло,

¹ *Peterburgskiy listok*, № 312, 13(26) November 1901.

² *Pravitel'stvennyy vestnik*, № 251, 16(29) November 1901.

1859–1911).³ *The Homeward Mail* wrote that “the reception that had been accorded to the Marquis Itō in St. Petersburg has been more flattering. On the occasion of his arrival at the Warsaw Station (*Varshavsky Railway Station – author’s note*) on Monday, he was met not only by M. Sugimura and the members of the Japanese Legation but also by a representative of the Foreign Office, an unusual attention that is not paid even to ambassadors.⁴ After his arrival in Saint Petersburg, Itō Hirobumi stayed at the Evropeyskaya Hotel,⁵ which is known as Grand Hotel Europe and is still in use today. The fact that Itō stayed in a hotel, not in the legation, was to emphasize the informal, unofficial and private nature of his visit [Nish 2001, p. 87].

The next day, November 26, Itō Hirobumi paid a visit to the minister of foreign affairs, Count Vladimir Lamsdorf, visited the Japanese Embassy, and went sightseeing in the city. On November 28, Itō was granted an audience with Czar Nicolas II at Tsarskoe Selo.⁶ According to newspapers, the Japanese statesman set off for the Emperor’s residence at one o’clock in the afternoon by the Tsarskoe Selo railroad train and returned to the capital at four o’clock.⁷

Later that day, Count Lamsdorf gave a banquet of 32 covers last night at the Foreign Office in honor of Marquis Itō. Among the other guests were secretary Tsuzuki, all members of the Japanese Legation, and the highest dignitaries of the Russian Empire, such as Sergei Witte (Russian: Сергей Юльевич Витте, 1849–1915), Minister of Finance, General Aleksey Kuropatkin (Russian: Алексей Николаевич Куропаткин, 1848–1925), Minister of War, Konstantin Pobedonostsev (Russian: Константин Петрович Победоносцев, 1827–1907), Procurator-General of the Holy Synod, and others.⁸

The main difficulty in Russo-Japanese affairs was the Korea problem [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 42]. At the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century, Japan focused on the Korean Peninsula as the territory that could potentially become the object of Japanese colonization [Ayrapetov 2014, p. 340]. However, Korea was the territory where Japanese ambitions

³ *Novoe vremya*, № 9231, 14(27) November 1901.

⁴ *The Homeward Mail*, № 1638, 9 December 1901.

⁵ *Novoe vremya*, № 9231, 14(27) November 1901.

⁶ Russia and Japan. *The Homeward Mail*, № 1638, 9 December 1901.

⁷ *Peterburgskiy listok*, № 312, 13 (26) November 1901.

⁸ *Pravitel'stvenniy vestnik*, 251, 16 (29) November 1901.

collided with the interests of the Russian Empire, which did not want to lose influence in the region close to its borders. Itō Hirobumi's visit to St. Petersburg in 1901 was an attempt to settle this collision.

On November 30, Itō and Lamsdorf held the first conversation, in the course of which the Japanese politician introduced his vision of a Russo-Japanese agreement. According to it, Russia should recognize Japan's exclusive rights to "help with advice" to Korea and to bring troops into the kingdom if needed. Japan also wanted to be assured that the Russian government did not plan to invade the Korean peninsula. Japan, in its turn, promised not to build fortifications on the south coast and not to threaten Port Arthur (today known as Lushun Port); however, this obligation should be mutual. Lamsdorf, having heard the suggestions of the Japanese politician, replied that such conditions could be favorable only for Japan. According to Lamsdorf, the agreement in the form in which it was offered by Itō was against the interests of Russia, which did not want to give up the influence that it enjoyed in Korea, and, therefore, could not be accepted by the Russian side [Lukoyanov 2008, p. 288].

The second meeting of Itō and Lamsdorf, which took place on December 4, was more defined. Itō introduced a project called the five-point agreement. According to the project, both countries, firstly, mutually offered a guarantee of Korea's independence; secondly, assumed an obligation not to use any part of the country for strategic plans against each other; and, thirdly, assumed an obligation not to undertake any military activities on the Korean Peninsula that could jeopardize sea traffic in the Korea Strait [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 46]. In addition, a separate point of the agreement's project fixed Japan's freedom of action in political and economic terms and gave it the right to send troops in case of any "rebellion or uprisings that can spoil the relationships between Japan and Korea." Finally, the fifth point of the project stated that the document replaces all regulations and agreements that had been concluded before [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 46].

Having heard the Japanese statesman, Lamsdorf noticed once again that the project is just a list of broad preferences that Japan is trying to get, rather than a mutually advantageous agreement [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 48]. He also added that the agreement implies not only concessions but also equal rights and obligations of the parties, while Itō's project considered only Japanese preferences. Itō Hirobumi recognized the fairness of Lamsdorf's remark and agreed to wait until the Russian

government formulates its demands that it finds sufficient compensation for the rights that Japan was seeking in Korea. As far as Itō was going to leave Russia that day, it was settled that Marquis would wait for the Russian response in Berlin, the next stop of his journey.

The conversation between Itō Hirobumi and Sergey Witte, Minister of Finance, that took place after the first meeting between Itō and Lamsdorf, had a somewhat different character. The Minister of Finance was much more yielding than his colleague and expressing his vision, according to which Saint Petersburg could accept Japanese conditions if Tokyo would grant Russia some rights in Manchuria (the region that held key importance as a part of the Trans-Siberian railway passed through there). However, Itō avoided the proposal, noticing that Manchuria could become the object of the next agreement [Lukoyanov 2008, p. 290]. It is interesting to mention that, a decade later, years after the Russo-Japanese war, Witte implied in his memoirs that he was the only member of the government that spoke in support of accepting Japanese conditions that, allegedly, could help to avoid the war and its catastrophic aftermath for the country [Witte 1924, p. 184].

After the departure of Itō Hirobumi, the Russian government discussed his project of an agreement, but the proposed conditions, in general, caused a negative response. Only Witte did not reject it completely. He basically accepted Tokyo's project but tried to amend it. Thus, he rejected the point that gave Japan the unrestricted right to introduce troops into the kingdom and to control and lead its inner affairs. In exchange for those concessions, according to Witte, Russia should demand the recognition of its rights in China's territory close to its borders [Lukoyanov 2008, p. 290].

However, other ministers were more vague and less accommodating. The highest officials of the Russian government did not believe that Japan would risk declaring war, so concluding an unfavorable agreement was unnecessary. In the end, the opinion expressed by the Minister of War, Aleksey Kuropatkin, won: "The new Russo-Japanese agreement should not be purchased at a costly price. The concession of Korea in Japan's favor would be such a price" [Erukhimovich 1934, p. 49].

A week after Itō's urgent departure from St. Petersburg, the Russian version of the agreement's project was sent to a Japanese statesman in Berlin. Apparently, the counterproposals disappointed the Marquis. He answered that points 4 and 6 (including the prohibition to bring Japanese troops into Korea without the approval by Russia and Japan's recognition

of Russia's rights in North China) "give him sufficient reason to doubt whether there is the relevance to recommend a Russian project to the Japanese government as a basis for a future agreement" [Romanov 1928, p. 339]. Meanwhile, Britain expressed concerns over Itō's visit to Saint Petersburg and the delay in Anglo-Japanese negotiations. It could not be postponed any longer; Itō departed for London, where the Anglo-Japanese alliance was signed on January 30, 1902 [Ayrapetov 2014, p. 341].

The results of the visit

Russian ministers, who met "the high-ranked guest politely but rather coldly" [Ayrapetov 2014, p. 341], are often blamed for the failure of Itō's mission to Saint Petersburg in 1901. Sergey Witte, the direct participant in those events, wrote in his memoirs that, despite his own readiness to conclude the agreement, other members of the government "hesitated and made various objections". According to Witte, it was the Russian government's hesitation that made Itō abandon the idea of the Russo-Japanese agreement, even though he had tried to conclude a treaty with Russia and prevent the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance [Witte 1924, p. 184]. One can find the same vision of Itō's mission in 1901 in the memoirs of Alexandr Izvolsky, Russia's ambassador to Tokyo at the time. He claimed that the success of Itō's visit might prevent the Russo-Japanese war in 1904–1905, and that the Russian government was to blame for its failure. Izvolsky also noticed that he strongly recommended meeting Japan's demands in Korea and Manchuria and concluding the agreement [Izvolsky 1924, p. 14].

The Russian government might be reproached for its excessive self-confidence and political rigidity in terms of the violent change of power balance in the Far East and the strengthening of the Japanese Empire. Russian ministers also underestimated Britain's readiness to sign an alliance with Japan. Perhaps the Russian government should have analyzed the foreign-policy situation much more carefully and acted more compliantly. However, that became clear only years later; therefore, judging the ministers for their political inflexibility too harshly seems unfair. What is more, it is difficult to say whether Itō Hirobumi could significantly influence the political course of Japan in the case of successful negotiations in Saint Petersburg in 1901. Undoubtedly, the ex-prime minister enjoyed influence on Japanese politics, and his opinion

had significant weight, but one should mention that, at the time of Itō's visit to Russia in 1901, Anglo-Japanese consultations had already lasted more than six months and were at their final stage. Besides, many members of the Japanese government sympathized with the idea of an alliance with Britain, while the idea of a treaty with Russia was anticipated both by the Japanese political elite and society.

Moreover, there is still a big question about whether Itō Hirobumi himself believed in the success of his mission. Anglo-Japanese consultations, as is known, had been underway since the spring of 1901, and Itō had been well informed about their progress. What is more, before the visit to the Russian capital, Itō received a cable from Prime Minister Katsura that read, "Your visit to Russia is due to take place during the first half of December. I ask you to set off for St. Petersburg as soon as possible. Please bear in mind that the negotiations for the British alliance have made such progress that they have reached a point where we cannot retract without incurring great national dishonor" [Nish 2001, p. 87]. That means that, even before the visit to Russia, Itō Hirobumi knew that Japan was about to sign an alliance with Britain. So, the question is: what was the point of Itō's mission to Saint Petersburg?

The answer can probably be found in the memoirs of Hayashi Tadasu (Japanese: 林董, 1850–1913), a prominent Japanese diplomat and Anglophile who served in 1901 as Japanese ambassador in London and made a great effort for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to come true. His memoirs, *The Secret Memoirs of Count Tadasu Hayashi*, that were published after his death by Jiji Press and were translated into several European languages, shed light on the events related to Itō's visit to Saint Petersburg and the signing of the Alliance. According to *The Secret Memoirs*, at the early stage of the negotiations, Hayashi recommended that Tokyo pretend that Japan is interested in an agreement with Russia in order to accelerate the Anglo-Japanese negotiations: "I therefore telegraphed to my government that, as the British Government was nervous of a possible alliance between Japan and Russia, if my government would hint that Japan and Russia would combine if there were no prospects of the successful conclusion of the proposed Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the British Government would be stimulated into making a favorable agreement" [Hayashi 1915, p. 324].

When Itō Hirobumi went to Europe, Hayashi met him and his diplomatic assistant, Suzuki, and revealed the details of the Anglo-Japanese consultations. Hayashi wrote that "Marquis Itō was much

puzzled” because “he had no idea that the negotiations with Britain had progressed so far” [Hayashi 1915, p. 145]. However, according to Hayashi, Marquis realized that the negotiations with Great Britain had reached such a point that the Japanese government could not withdraw. “So after further discussion, it was arranged that he should support the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in principle. It was further agreed that he should continue his visit to Russia, as his coming had already been announced by the Russian Government” [Hayashi 1915, p. 145].

Hayashi’s memoirs point out that Itō’s mission to Saint Petersburg was doomed even before the marquis’ departure to Russia. That explains why Japan’s project of the agreement was far from being mutually profitable and, therefore, acceptable for the Russian party – Itō did not have an intention to conclude the Russo-Japanese Alliance. His government had already made another choice, and Itō, no matter what he personally felt about it, supported its policy. What is more, from the Japanese point of view, Itō’s mission was rather fruitful – it made Britain, which was rather annoyed by Itō’s visit to Russia, accelerate concluding an Anglo-Japanese agreement on mutually favorable terms.

Itō Hirobumi’s visit to Saint Petersburg and its reflection in Russian, British, and Japanese media

Itō Hirobumi’s visit to Saint Petersburg in 1901 was widely reported in the Russian, British, and Japanese press. From the very beginning of Itō’s mission to Russia until his departure, Russian newspapers informed their audience about every step of the “Japanese visitor, ex-Prime Minister”. Materials dealing with the visit of the Japanese politician were published in such periodicals and newspapers as *Peterburgsky Listok*, (Russian: «Петербургский листок») *Novoe Vremya*, (Russian: «Новое время»), *Birzhevye vedomosti*, (Russian: «Биржевые ведомости»), *Pravitel’stvenniy vestnik*, (Russian: «Правительственный вестник»), and others.

The Russian press was not limited to the official chronicle of Itō’s visit. *Peterburgsky listok* and *Novoe vremya*, for example, published several small articles that were to introduce the prominent Japanese statesman to a Russian audience. In this articles, Itō was called “Japanese Bismark”⁹ and

⁹ *Novoe vremya*, № 9231, 18 (1) November 1901.

“one of the most outstanding and popular statesmen in Japan”.¹⁰ Moreover, periodicals pointed out that Itō played an important role in Japan’s transformation “from a backward country to a civilized state”.¹¹

However, the most significant research articles were published in *Novoe Vremya* and *Birzhevye vedomosti*, as they provided the audience not only with the details of Itō’s mission but also attempted to analyze it.

On November 18, 1901, *Novoye Vremya* published an article titled “Russia and Japan.” The author of the article doubted that Itō’s Western trip was of a private nature and wondered what the true meaning of Itō’s visit to the Russian capital was. The author admitted that Russia and Japan were too far from reaching any agreement at the time, as “the concluding of an agreement demands finding certain constant interests that would be shared by both nations.” At the same time, in the article, there was an expressed opinion that Itō would find in the government circles of St. Petersburg a commitment to peace and a “lack of interest in political adventures.” Besides, *Novoe Vremya* assured readers that the Russian people, as well as the Japanese, are striving for peace, and Russia is warning politically “young, immature, and quick-tempered” Japanese society from “well-wishers’ intrigues” that would benefit from Russo-Japanese conflict.¹²

Even though *Novoye Vremya* believed that the conclusion of a Russo-Japanese agreement would not happen in the immediate future, other newspapers expressed more daring opinions, claiming that the time for a Russo-Japanese alliance had come. On November 20, 1901, *Birzhevye vedomosti* published an article titled “The Idea of a Russo-Japanese Alliance.” It said that Itō’s visit became the reason for a “heated discussion” of a Russo-Japanese agreement by “all significant media.” The author claimed that Russia’s aim to conclude an agreement with Japan was not motivated by the intention to make Japan’s army and navy an instrument for the attainment of its own purposes, but on the contrary by the ambition to gain mutual benefits. Japan, as the article stated, had just joined “the family of civilized nations” with the object of achieving two major goals: to become a great naval power and to build a strong industry. According to the article, that corresponded with Russian intentions in its Far East policy: strong industry and navy could help Japan shield itself from its “natural enemy, which intends to draw Japan into a war with Russia, in order to

¹⁰ *Novoe vremya*, № 9231, 16 (29) November 1901.

¹¹ *Peterburgskiy listok*, № 317, 18 (1) November 1901.

¹² *Novoe vremya*, № 9231, 18 (1) November 1901.

weaken the Asian nation and transform it into an instrument for its own policy (an unambiguous allusion to the British Empire). More than that, Russia, which just finished the costly Trans-Siberian railroad, could not help but be interested in Japanese industrial growth".¹³

After listing the benefits of a future Russo-Japanese agreement, *Vedomosti* speculated on the conditions of the possible treaty: "Russia does not demand anything besides unconditional recognition of Korea's independence" on the grounds of the strategically important geographical position of the Korean peninsula (the author meant the seaway between Port Arthur and Vladivostok). In exchange, "keeping in mind Japan's 'colonizational entrepreneurialism'", Russia could grant Japan freedom of colonization activities in South and North China and in islands south of Taiwan.¹⁴ Therefore, an examination of Russian periodicals from the time of Itō's visit to Saint Petersburg makes it clear that the arrival of the prominent Japanese politician in the Russian capital became a significant event in the political and social life of Saint Petersburg. It is even possible to say that the mission gave Russian society hope of signing a Russo-Japanese agreement in the near future that would stabilize the situation in the Far East.

Itō Hirobumi's ten-day stay in Saint Petersburg was covered not only in the Russian newspapers but also in the British media. Several British newspapers published brief articles dedicated to Itō's visit to Russia. They assured readers that Itō's visit was far from being as politically important as it was stated in Russian newspapers. On December 9, 1901, *The Homeward Mail* published a brief article telegraphed by the Saint Petersburg correspondent of the *Times* that said: "It is not only in the Russian press that the visit of the Marquis Itō has given rise to political speculation. In diplomatic quarters here, there has been a tendency to attach political significance to the presence of the Japanese statesman in St. Petersburg. On the other hand, I am informed by excellent authority that the Marquis Itō's tour has no diplomatic object whatsoever. After 30 years of hard and continuous work, he has felt the need for rest and change. He has undertaken his present journey in order to get rid of the cares and responsibilities that it was impossible for him to throw off so long as he remained in Japan. He hoped, moreover, that his visits to the

¹³ *Novoe vremya*, № 9235, 18 (1) November 1901.

¹⁴ *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, № 313, 20 (3) November 1901.

different capitals would familiarize him with the latest results of Western progress. In St. Petersburg, I am told, his intercourse with the official world has been of an exclusive social character. It is even stated that up to the present, politics have not even been mentioned in his conversations with Russian statesmen”.¹⁵ So, British media covered the visit as a private trip of a retired Japanese nobleman that could hardly threaten a future Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Besides, British periodicals rather coldly commented on publications in the Russian press and their optimistic expectations for Itō's visit. On December 5, *The Globe* published an article on “Russia and Japan. The Marquis Itō's visit.” It said: “It is painted in glowing colors the advantages of such an alliance in Japan and endeavors to convince the Japanese that Codlin is the friend, not Short”.¹⁶ British journalists also struck back their Russian colleagues' speculations about “Japan's natural enemy”: “The St. Petersburg *Viedomosti* expresses the hope that the Marquis Itō will realize what a difference there is between Russia and the Powers of Western Europe. The Powers of Western Europe are dangerous, commercial and political rivals of Japan, whereas Russia is neither in the commercial nor the political sense a competitor of the Japanese Empire”.¹⁷

London's newspapers also stated that Japanese public did not pay any attention to Itō's visit. *The Globe* wrote, that “the Marquis Itō's visit to St. Petersburg is regarded by the Japanese Press with complete indifference. Evidently public opinion attaches no political significance to the visitor and does not believe in the efficacy of any Russo-Japanese agreement from which England should be excluded, even assuming that Japanese reluctance and distrust were overcome”.¹⁸

In general, one can say that the British media paid close attention to Itō Hirobumi's visit to Russia. Even though papers continuously stressed the non-official character of Itō's trip, this fact itself shows London's concerns about the visit ahead of the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. At the same time, the Japanese media ran a campaign aimed at discrediting Itō and his visit to Saint Petersburg. Newspapers owned by political opponents of Itō Hirobumi published articles that were distinctly negative or even hostile to Itō and his mission to Russia.

¹⁵ Russia and Japan. *The Homeward Mail*, № 1638, 9 December 1901.

¹⁶ Russia and Japan. The Marquis Itō's visit. *The Globe*, 5 December 1901.

¹⁷ Russia and Japan. Korea's independence. *The Morning Post*, 10 December 1901.

¹⁸ Russia and Japan. The Marquis Itō's visit. *The Globe*, 5 December 1901.

Yomiuri Shimbun pointed at “Itō’s innate tendency to Russia” and noticed that decoration that was given to Itō in Russia “is always given only for special services for Russia itself” and, hence, made the conclusion that Itō’s visit to Russia would have adverse consequences [Samoylov 1998, p. 59]. *Asahi Shimbun* claimed that the very fact of Itō Hirobumi’s visit to Russia is “extremely sad” and suspected the politician of his readiness to serve Russia by concluding a “far from being patriotic” treaty [Samoylov 1998, p. 59].

So, the Japanese press was not only pessimistic about the possibility of a Russo-Japanese agreement but even fiercely criticized Itō for his pro-Russian policy. The Japanese media’s reaction to the visit and Itō Hirobumi’s personality assessment were significantly different from what was written in Russian newspapers.

Thus, a cursory review of the Russian, British, and Japanese press at the end of 1901, when Itō Hirobumi visited Saint Petersburg, demonstrates the difference in public reception of the idea of a Russo-Japanese alliance with Russia, Great Britain, and Japan. The Russian public met the idea of a potential agreement between the Russian and Japanese Empires with enthusiasm. Russian periodicals of the period published admiring articles about Itō and proposed naïve projects for the future agreement. At the same time, British newspapers that closely followed Itō’s trip to the Russian capital were skeptical about the very idea of an alliance between Russia and Japan, assuring their readers that Itō’s visit was of a private nature. Finally, Japanese media were indignant with the idea of a Russo-Japanese alliance, blaming Itō Hirobumi for betrayal of national interests.

Conclusion

Itō Hirobumi’s mission to Saint Petersburg was an important episode in the history of Russo-Japanese relations before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904–1905. The mission is often considered a key moment when Russia had an opportunity to change the trend in relations between the two nations and prevent the war that had a dramatic aftermath for the Russian Empire. That version was later expressed by some Russian policymakers who were directly involved in the described events. However, despite all the hopes that were placed on the visit (or anxiety for those who were against the Russo-Japanese alliance), they were not to come true.

The futility of Itō's mission to Russia was caused by several factors. Firstly, the Korea question was a fundamental contradiction in the relationships between two empires – both of them were not ready to give up that territory. Secondly, the analysis of Japanese periodicals of the time shows a strong opposition to the idea of a Russo-Japanese alliance. And, finally, at the time of Itō's arrival in Saint Petersburg, Japan and Great Britain were in the final stages of negotiations on the conclusion of an alliance, and that almost excluded the possibility of a Russo-Japanese agreement.

What is more, there is some evidence that allows us to doubt that Itō's real mission was to negotiate with the Russian government, as some Russian participants in the events stated afterward. Such references as the memoirs of Hayashi suggest that Itō's real intention during the visit was to examine the Russian government's readiness to give way to the Japanese empire in Korea. What is more, the visit could also be a sophisticated trick in order to make the British government nervous and to conclude the alliance with Japan on better terms for the time being. If that version is true, one could not say that Itō Hirobumi's mission to Saint Petersburg failed; on the contrary, the goals that the Japanese government allegedly set were completed. Japan made sure that Russia would not give up its interests in Korea and gained the support of Great Britain to take Korea by force.

The visit of Itō Hirobumi to Saint Petersburg could not end with the signing of the Russo-Japanese agreement; there were too many factors against it. What is more, it seems that Itō did not even have this task. Even though some of the Russians, such as Finance Minister Witte or Russian Ambassador to Tokyo Izvolsky, indulged in wishful thinking, Itō Hirobumi's visit to Saint Petersburg should not be regarded as a real attempt to resolve contradictions and prevent war between the two nations. Itō Hirobumi came to Saint Petersburg when the chance to conclude a Russo-Japanese agreement had already been missed, and neither Itō nor the receiving party could possibly change it.

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