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British Policy Towards Japan in the Shadow of the Outbreak of World War II

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Abstract

In the summer of 1939, Anglo-Japanese relations were extremely tense. A major change in the situation occurred with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the outbreak of World War Two. These events completely remodeled the existing system of alliances. Britain and Japan started to seek the possibility of rapprochement. However, due to a conflict of interests in China, the anti-Japanese attitude of the United States and general distrust in both countries towards each other, a reset in Anglo-Japanese relations could not be reached.

Keywords

Britain – Japan – World War II – East Asia

Introduction

Great Britain's attitude towards Japan evolved substantially between the First and Second World Wars. The Great War-era alliance, which the United States opposed, ended with the signing of the Four-Power Treaty on December 13, 1921.¹ Despite this, relations between the two countries remained stable in the 1920s. In the 1930s, however, they had become significantly complicated. The Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931, was a prelude to the Japanese subjugating Manchuria and establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo.² For the British, who wanted to maintain the status quo that benefited them, this kind of expansion was worrying. The report prepared by the envoys of the League of Nations to the Far East (Lord Lytton Commission), caused a dispute that led to Japan withdrawing from the League of Nations in May 1933.³ These events made the British aware that both Germany and Japan were a threat to the Empire. The worst-case scenario was that they would become embroiled in a conflict with the two powers at the same time. Hence, from that moment on, Japan was seen as a potential enemy.⁴ During that time, the Great Crisis reigned in the world. The United States focused on saving its own economy and avoided engaging in global conflicts, although relations between Washington and Tokyo did not go well due to conflicts of interest in China.⁵ At the same time, the Soviet Union grew stronger. The Japanese expansion in Manchuria and the extension of the land border between the USSR and Japan clearly threatened Moscow's interests. Soviet-Japanese relations deteriorated further, which was an additional complication in the network of links in the Far East.⁶ Related to this was the accession of Japan to the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936.⁷ It demonstrated a significant Japanese-German rapprochement and was extremely dangerous for London. The political situation further changed in 1937, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. It was on this level that a direct conflict of interest between the British Empire and the Empire of Japan was outlined. The British pursued their economic interests in China and had favorable conditions for doing so – conditions which had been forced on the Chinese in the nineteenth century. War was a significant threat to the status quo that was beneficial for London.⁸ The following years were characterized by a progressive political drift pulling London and Tokyo apart and by growing tension between the two countries. The climax, which was even associated with the possibility of an open conflict between Brit-

1 NISH (2012), pp. 368–382.

2 FERRELL (1955), pp. 66–72.

3 WEN-WEI CHANG (2003), pp. 43–63.

4 NEILSON (2003), pp. 651–684.

5 FERRELL (1955), p. 67.

6 LENSEN (1974), pp. 361–445.

7 BOYD (1981), pp. 311–338.

8 KELLY (2013), pp. 27–43.

ain and Japan, came in June 1939 and was linked to the so-called Tianjin Incident.⁹ Just a few months before the beginning of the Second World War, British-Japanese relations had reached their worst since the alliance was dissolved.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of the change in international relations caused by German-Soviet rapprochement and the outbreak of Second World War on British foreign policy towards Japan in the initial phase of this conflict. To achieve this purpose, it is important to consider London's contacts with Tokyo before the war, as well as to study Anglo-Japanese relations between the German attack on Poland and Churchill's rise to the prime minister's office.

From the Tianjin Incident to the outbreak of War

The Tianjin Incident was defining for Anglo-Japanese relations in the last months before the Second World War. It was also the most significant source of escalation between the two countries. Tensions in Tianjin were already rising at the end of 1938. Part of this city included the British and French concessions, extraterritorial areas created under the treaties of the nineteenth century. For the Japanese occupying northern China, the status of these areas gave rise to many problems. Tokyo wanted to take over the silver deposited in the concession area that belonged to the Chongqing government. In addition, the concessions were a base for Chinese guerrillas, whose activities were favored by the Western powers. Tensions against this background arose in October 1938 and were the cause of the first blockade of Tianjin from December 1938 to February 1939. However, the situation could not be alleviated, and the Japanese government imposed economic sanctions on the British. In April, the inspector of Customs in Tianjin, who favored Japan, was murdered in the concession area. The Japanese demanded the surrender of the people accused of this act, but the British could not decide on a course of action. As a result, General Masaharu Homma, who commanded Japanese forces in the area, ordered a strict blockade of the concession on June 14, including the suspension of food supplies.¹⁰

For the British, this was the worst possible moment for a crisis on the periphery of the Empire due to the difficult situation in Europe. Therefore, Whitehall decided to begin negotiations with the Japanese, while preparing a bill to impose economic sanctions in the event that the negotiations failed. In July, talks began between the British ambassador to Tokyo, Sir Robert Craigie, and the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Hachiro Arita. The Japanese expected Britain to be benevolently neutral with regards to their actions in China. For London, this was unacceptable, but on July 24 Britain and Japan concluded a deal in which the British decided to remain neutral, but only concerning the activity of the concessions in China. These diplomatic subtleties were unnoticed by the Chinese and Americans, who were critical of the agreement. At the

9 In older literature it is known as the "Tientsin Incident"; however, in this paper the pinyin romanization system is used.

10 BEST (2014), pp. 71-74.

same time, on July 26, Washington began the procedure for terminating the US-Japan trade agreement. In London, people began to wonder whether a harsher course should be taken towards Tokyo. The Americans, however, did not pursue a coherent Far Eastern policy and Whitehall found it difficult to rely on them. Meanwhile, the British-Japanese negotiations on issues concerning silver stored in the concession and the Chinese currency, the *fapi*, went much worse than those on neutrality. The Japanese were trying to establish their own economic order in northern China, and the use of such money in the concession area was a big obstacle in this matter. The *fapi* was introduced in 1935 as part of a reform which introduced a financial system based on Western currencies, primarily on the sterling. It was very convenient, inter alia, for the Americans, and they would not accept any attempts to limit the possibility of using *fapi* in China. Due to the impasse, the negotiations were therefore broken off on August 20, which could have had very serious consequences for British-Japanese relations. However, due to international developments, Tianjin's problems had fallen into the background.¹¹

Nevertheless, during the last months before the outbreak of the Second World War it would seem that the worst nightmares of the British were coming true. Engagement in a war with two Powers would have been a disaster for Britain. The likelihood of such a development seemed real, because of increasing tensions in Europe happening simultaneously with the events in the Far East. In May 1939, the Italian-German Pact was signed, and in the summer the conflict over Gdańsk escalated. However, European problems, which may have been considered more important for the metropolis, did not completely dominate the forum of the British government. At eight out of nine cabinet meetings which took place between 14 June and 2 August, the situation in East Asia was discussed on a par with European matters.¹² Tianjin issues remained the most significant; however, there were other important problems. An example of this was the arrest of Colonel Spear, British military attaché in China, detained for illegally entering Japanese-occupied territories. Moreover, Japanese society had a rather negative attitude to Britain, as evidenced by the waves of anti-British demonstrations which swept through Japan in the summer.¹³

The British, threatened by Germany and Japan, turned with the French towards the Soviet Union. The first proposals for an agreement appeared in April. The negotiations dragged on, partly because of the different visions of both sides regarding the pact. In August they seemed to have reached a fairly advanced stage, as evidenced by the arrival in Moscow of the Anglo-French military mission. There was, however, some anxiety

11 BEST (2014), pp. 71–86; ROTHWELL (1975), pp. 147–169.

12 The National Archives London (TNA), Cabinet Papers (CAB) 23/99, Cabinet conclusions 32(39) 14 June 1939; TNA, CAB 23/100, Cabinet conclusions 33(39) 21 June 1939, Cabinet conclusions 34(39) 28 June 1939, Cabinet conclusions 35(39) 5 July 1939, Cabinet conclusions 36(39), 5 July 1939, Cabinet conclusions 37(39) 12 July 1939, Cabinet conclusions 38(39) 19 July 1939, Cabinet conclusions 39(39) 26 July 1939, Cabinet conclusions 40(39) 2 August 1939.

13 TNA, Foreign Office (FO) 371/23556, F 11422/176/23, Craigie to Halifax 16 September 1939; BEST (2002), p. 135.

about the German-Soviet talks that were taking place at the same time.¹⁴

Japan, on the other hand, found itself in a very difficult situation in international relations. As a result of the war in China, relations with the West remained strained. In addition, since May 1939, regular fights had broken out between Japanese and Soviet troops on the border between Manchukuo and Outer Mongolia. The escalation of the conflict was the result of the willful actions of the Kwantung Army and Mongolian troops, but this did not change the fact that Japan and the USSR were in a state of informal war. Relations with the Soviet Union therefore remained openly hostile. It seemed, that Tokyo only had stable relations with the signatories of the Anti-Comintern Pact. The government of Kiichirō Hiranuma decided not to transform the treaty into the military alliance proposed by the Germans. However, the Japanese still considered Berlin a close partner, mainly due to a shared aversion towards the Soviet Union.¹⁵

In this situation, on August 23, 1939, the non-aggression treaty between Germany and the USSR, called the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was signed. The British-French-Soviet negotiations against the Third Reich had become pointless. It became clear that Paris and London would have to face Germany without the support of the USSR. However, the German-Soviet rapprochement caused the greatest shock in Japan. The Germans failed to warn the Japanese about this change of policy; hence, Japan perceived the pact as a stab in the back. In addition, Berlin began to put pressure on Tokyo to conclude a similar non-aggression treaty with the Soviets. The Japanese authorities protested strongly against these dealings with Moscow. However, this was unable to have any effect and Tokyo found itself in need of re-evaluating its foreign policy. After a few days, diplomats noticed increased activity among the political elites of Japan, which usually heralded an upcoming change in the position of the head of government.¹⁶

Prospects for a reset in Anglo-Japanese relations

The Japanese government resigned on August 28. In an official statement, Hiranuma stated that in the face of the new international situation related to the German-Soviet pact and tension in Europe, a comprehensive change in Japanese foreign policy was necessary.¹⁷ On the same day, the Japanese Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mamoru Shigemitsu, met with the Foreign Secretary, Viscount Halifax, and suggested that the German-Soviet rapprochement could be a good opportunity to improve British-Japanese relations. Craigie held a similar position. At first glance, it actually seemed that these were circumstances favorable to a rapprochement between London and Tokyo; however, relations between the two countries remained complicated.

14 CARLEY (1993), pp. 303–341.

15 MOSES (1967), pp. 64–85; BARNHART (1987), pp. 140–143.

16 TNA, FO 371/23555, F 11405/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 30 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10295/176/23, Butler/Edwardes conversation 18 September 1939; NISH (2002), pp. 133–136.

17 TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9486/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 28 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9690/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 August 1939.

The Tientsin difficulties remained unresolved, and waves of anti-British demonstrations swept through Japan throughout the summer. It should be added that they gradually lost strength in August and disappeared almost completely after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Nevertheless, Colonel Spear, a military attaché in China, was still being held in custody for illegally entering Japanese-occupied territories.¹⁸

On August 31, a new government was officially appointed in Tokyo. General Nobuyuki Abe was designated as the new prime minister. He had not held any political position so far; his career had only had a military character. His private relationship with Prince Fumimaro Konoe, the head of one of the previous governments, was also known.¹⁹ The Japanese press was quite ambivalent about the new authorities. It was pointed out that it was necessary to adopt a new foreign policy based on isolating the country from foreign partners and building an independent position as a part of a “New Order in East Asia”. A program was announced on November 3, 1938, by Konoe, aimed at creating a political and economic coalition between Manchukuo, China and Japan. It meant a de facto attempt to impose Tokyo’s dominance in the East Asian region, which would be an obvious blow to the interests and influence of the Western Powers in China.²⁰ Thus, the prospects for a reset in British-Japanese relations may not have been as broad as Craigie thought.

In fact, the attitude of the new government seemed to indicate that attempts to reach an agreement on problematic issues would not be easy to achieve. At the first meeting of the new cabinet, Abe stressed the need to seek independence and maintain good relations with those countries that were ready to cooperate with Tokyo as part of such a policy. Independence in this context meant acceptance of Japan’s expansion in China. The picture resulting from official announcements and the press was not very favorable from London’s perspective. On the other hand, some of the changes seemed to confirm Craigie’s opinion about the prospect of a reset in British-Japanese relations. Despite pressure from Berlin, Abe announced that he would not seek to sign a non-aggression pact with Moscow.²¹ There were more civilians in the new government than in the previous one. According to the British, this meant that despite the fact that someone with a military background had become prime minister, the political influence of the army, a faction recognized as extremist and primarily pro-German, may have actually decreased. In addition, General Shunroku Hata had become the minister of war and he was considered a pro-British politician.²² Furthermore, one of the candidates for the post of foreign

18 BEST (2002), p. 135; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 9601/176/23, Shigemitsu/Halifax conversation 28 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11422/176/23, Craigie to Halifax 16 September 1939.

19 TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9691/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9693/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23555, F 11413/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 11 September 1939.

20 BEST (2014), pp. 63–64; TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9692/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 30 August 1939.

21 TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9695/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23554, F 11805/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 5 October 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10295/176/23, Butler/Edwards conversation 18 September 1939.

22 TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9692/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 30 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9694/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 30 August 1939.

minister of Japan was Shigemitsu, ambassador to the United Kingdom.²³

In the meantime, the situation in Europe was reaching a climax. On September 1, Germany invaded Poland, and two days later Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. The Japanese government decided to remain neutral.²⁴ The prime minister issued a statement in which he stated that the outbreak of war provided an opportunity for changes in relations with the main powers, that is, “the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and the United States”.²⁵

Such a change took place quickly with regard to relations with the Soviets. In the clashes on the border between Outer Mongolia and Manchukuo, the Japanese suffered significant losses. The Kwantung army prepared for a counterattack in September. However, the government in Tokyo opened negotiations with Moscow on a ceasefire and a border agreement. The truce was signed on 15 September and was to enter into force the following day. At the same time, the Japanese government stressed that this was not a prelude to talks about a non-aggression pact between the two countries. It was feared that German, Italian or Soviet propaganda might take advantage of this, and such an image would be very negatively received in Japanese society. Meanwhile, the entry of the Red Army into Poland the day after the truce came into force fueled such assumptions in the press. The Japanese, however, tried to cut off all speculation by firmly denying that there were any negotiations with the Soviets.²⁶

Japan’s position was therefore ambiguous. On the one hand, it had become clear that the current political line had not worked. Close relations with Germany were nominally based on antagonism towards the Soviet Union. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact created common British-Japanese interests against the same background. On the other hand, the policy direction aimed at good relations with Great Britain was not very popular in Japan. The pro-German faction temporarily faced difficulties caused by the Soviet-German rapprochement, but its influence was still significant.²⁷ In the period between the outbreak of war in Europe on September 1, 1939, and the German attack on France and the Low Countries, Neville Chamberlain, considered to be generally sympathetic to Japan, was in charge of the government in London. In Tokyo, on the other hand, the post of prime minister was held by General Abe until January 14, 1940, whose goal was, among others, to improve relations with Great Britain. He was later replaced by Admiral Mitsu-masa Yonai, minister of the navy in the Hiranuma and Konoe governments. He became famous as an opponent of the alliance with Germany and an advocate of rapprochement with London and Washington.²⁸ Among the British political elite there were also supporters of improving relations with Japan. As has already been stated, one of them was

23 TNA, CAB 23/100, Cabinet conclusions 46(39) 30 August 1939.

24 TNA, FO 371/23554, F 9695/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 August 1939; TNA, FO 371/23555, F 11805/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 5 October 1939.

25 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10295/176/23, Butler/Edwardes conversation 18 September 1939.

26 *Ibid.*; YOUNG (1967), pp. 91–92; MOSES (1967), pp. 79–83.

27 TNA, FO 371/24724, F 625/23/23, Craigie to Howe 15 December 1939.

28 BARNHART (1987), pp. 140–141; TNA, FO 371/24723, F 429/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 17 January 1940.

Chamberlain, who wanted to persuade Tokyo to cooperate in the Far East.²⁹ Another supporter of rapprochement with Japan was Robert Vansittart, Alexander Cadogan's predecessor as permanent undersecretary of state in the Foreign Office, the current chief diplomatic adviser to the government.³⁰ In his case, a favorable approach towards Tokyo resulted from an anti-German attitude. In turn, Richard Butler, undersecretary of state at the Foreign Office, believed that the British could not distance themselves from the Soviet Union and Japan at the same time.³¹ An agreement with one of these countries was a necessity. London's open support of China, the pro-Chinese attitude of British society and Washington's policy significantly hindered any open British-Japanese rapprochement.

Looking for common ground

Thus, despite the seemingly favorable circumstances for a reset in British-Japanese relations, the situation was not so simple. The most important problem was London's support for the Kuomintang's government in Chongqing led by Chiang Kai-shek, when at the same time Tokyo was attempting to create a Chinese puppet regime, headed by Wang Jingwei.³² The British were providing material assistance to Chongqing through the Burma Road, which was one of the main supply routes for the Chinese. London's abandonment of Chiang and the closure of the Road was invariably expected by the Japanese as a basis for rapprochement.³³ In addition, the presence of British military garrisons in northern China and silver stored in the British concession in Tianjin remained problematic. The silver issue had the best chance of a positive resolution, because the British wanted to use it to organize relief for the concession which was affected by flooding in the last days of August. Even in this case there were complications, due to the fact that it was necessary to obtain approval from the owner of the silver, that is, Kuomintang, for its use. The Japanese also wanted recognition of the future Wang Jingwei government by the United Kingdom. This was, however, rejected by the British, as well as the idea of withdrawing support for Chongqing, for it would have had a fatal effect on the Chinese resistance and on British-American relations. Washington also backed the Chiang government and expected the same from Britain.³⁴

However, due to the change in the international situation, some politicians in London started to express their opinion about the need to re-evaluate the current Far Eastern policy. One such person was the aforementioned Richard Butler, undersecretary of state in the Foreign Office. In his opinion, relying on the Americans would be unprofitable,

29 McKERCHER (2008), pp. 391–442.

30 TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2054/23/23, Vansittart minute 21 March 1940.

31 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10710/176/23, Butler minute 22 September 1939.

32 BOYLE (1970), pp. 267–301.

33 FORD (2006), p. 27.

34 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10295/176/23, Butler/Edwardes conversation 18 September 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11063/176/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 13 October 1939.

because regardless of the circumstances, they would not be directly involved in the conflict in East Asia. Butler strongly disregarded the significance of Chinese resistance, citing as an example how they had ceded Guangzhou to the Japanese without any organized defense. In addition, he pointed out that the formation of Wang Jingwei's government could lead to the outbreak of civil war in China. Supporting one side in this kind of conflict would be a mistake and would lead to a deepening of differences between Britain and Japan. With the British engaged in a war with Germany in Europe, the Far Eastern flank of the Empire remained particularly vulnerable. According to Butler, the only way out was to seek a rapprochement with Tokyo.³⁵

This way of thinking appealed to some of the elites of the British Empire. These included sir John Wardlaw-Milne, chairman of the Committee on National Expenditure, and Hugh Dalton, one of the Labour Party leaders. A better relationship with Tokyo was supported by Stanley Bruce, former Australian prime minister and current Australian high commissioner in London. It should be noted, however, that he also opposed the withdrawal of the British from China. Australians looked anxiously towards Japan, which is why they endorsed a *détente* in relations with the Japanese along with a strong military presence of the British Empire in East Asia. Since London could not engage more serious forces in the Far East whilst the war in Europe was in progress, it had to strive to establish good relations with Tokyo.³⁶

Butler formulated a plan on how to achieve *détente* in relations with Japan. First of all, the Tianjin crisis had to be resolved, which should be followed by the withdrawal of British garrisons from the northern part of China. The next step was to conclude a trade agreement. Finally, it was necessary to alter London's policy towards Chongqing – from maintaining resistance to trying to mediate a peace agreement. In this regard, it was particularly important to contact Chiang Kai-shek directly to see if there was a readiness on the Chinese side to do so and whether the Chinese leader was aware of the risk of civil war. According to Butler, the Japanese, freed by the peace treaty, would then turn against the Soviet Union. Washington's potential unease could be reassured with visions of ending the war and sharing the position of mediators in the conflict with the British.³⁷

Butler's proposals met with a measure of support among some officials in London. Generally, however, the Far Eastern Department, the section of the Foreign Office dealing with East Asian matters, was wary of Japan. The prevailing view was that the main effect of concessions to Tokyo would be such that it would demand further appeasement. In addition, some of Butler's assumptions remained difficult to accept. Peace in China did not necessarily mean that Japan would turn against the USSR. The current problems in relations with Germany, as well as the truce concluded on September 15 with Moscow, had reduced the likelihood of such a development. In addition, the British assumed that Japan had adopted the doctrine of southern expansion. In this context, maintaining the conflict in China was stopping Tokyo from potentially expanding towards the Empire

35 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10710/176/23, Butler minute 22 September 1939.

36 *Ibid.*; GOOCH (2003), pp. 424–426.

37 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 10710/176/23, Butler minute 22 September 1939.

and the Dominions. In relations with the Americans, Butler had considered only the prospect of their direct involvement in the Far East, which at that moment was in fact rather improbable. However, there were other forms of support, for example, economic aid or military equipment, which could be granted by Washington. Thus, the attempts to change Chinese policy, which would have had a negative impact on relations with the US, were a risk difficult to accept for London at the time.³⁸

Despite the distrustful attitude towards Japan that prevailed in the Far Eastern Department, the Foreign Office generally took a more conciliatory line than other ministries. The Board of Trade and Treasury were reluctant to appease Tokyo. An even more intransigent attitude was represented by Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Chamberlain himself was considered a pro-Japanese politician. British society, on the other hand, sympathized primarily with the Chinese. Hence, the idea of rapprochement with Japan was treated with reluctance among the British. A good example of this was the reaction to an interview given by Chamberlain, on October 30, to a journalist of the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. During the conversation, the prime minister assured the journalist that he backed the idea of improving relations between the two countries and was a supporter of it even before he took over the post of head of government. The journalist suggested that in this case it would be advisable for the United Kingdom to take the initiative in this matter, pointing specifically to cooperation with Tokyo on the issue of China. Chamberlain evasively replied that if Japan recognized British interests in that country, London would be ready to cooperate.³⁹

This interview caused some controversy, despite the fact that no binding declarations were made. During the November parliamentary session, Philip Noel-Baker and Sir Geoffrey Mander asked about the meaning of the prime minister's words. The latter expected a declaration that London's policy towards China would not change. There was also some anxiety in British society. For example, the Lord Advocate of Scotland, Thomas Cooper, received a letter from a concerned voter, for whom the prime minister's statement could be seen as an expression of dishonesty towards China. Thus, despite the belief among some of the British elite that there was a need for a reset in relations with Japan, pro-Chinese sentiment was still much stronger. Such affinities were not only the result of sympathy for the invaded nation, but also of economic interests and a significant amount of money invested in China by many British citizens.⁴⁰

Economic issues were also important for Japan. In September 1939, it found itself in a particularly difficult situation, threatened with the loss of access to many markets due to both the World War and also to the US decision in July to terminate the 1911 Treaty of Commerce. Hence, on September 23, the Japanese commercial counselor of the Em-

38 Ibid.; DOLLERY-SPINDLER-PARSONS (2004), pp. 135-155; TNA, FO 371/23559, F 10219/347/23, Seeds to Halifax 16 September 1939.

39 BEST (2014), pp. 94-96; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11920/176/23, Noel-Baker Parliamentary question 15 November 1939.

40 TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11728/176/23, Noel-Baker Parliamentary question 8 November 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11920/176/23, Noel-Baker Parliamentary question 15 November 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11833/176/23, Cooper to Butler 9 November 1939.

bassy in London, Yasuto Shudo, came up with a proposal to conclude a British-Japanese trade agreement. This issue became the subject of a meeting of representatives of various British ministries. The idea of a treaty *in the strict sense* was rejected, but the idea of facilitating commerce in the form of some *modus vivendi* was considered beneficial. At the same time, London hoped that Tokyo would limit the economic restrictions imposed on British citizens in China. Those ideas were presented to Shigemitsu on October 6. The Japanese ambassador was skeptical that his government would comply with those expectations, but the proposal for commercial *modus vivendi* was accepted, as a basis for negotiations. Eventually, however, the British themselves temporarily abandoned the idea of trade negotiations with Tokyo, mainly due to resistance from the Board of Trade and Treasury. The Japanese returned to the issue of a trade deal at the end of December. Butler then drew Shigemitsu's attention to the problems with British exports due to the war and presented the idea of a technical arrangement on making payments in trade between the two countries. It was a *modus vivendi*, in a form that could be approved by other ministries. A nod from the British was Butler's announcement of permission for Japan to purchase machinery, which the Japanese had been trying to order for some time.⁴¹

Gaining the goodwill of Tokyo was important for London at that time, due to the issue of the economic blockade of Germany. On the one hand, the possibility of importing goods from the Reich by neutral states was limited by the Allies. For this reason, in November, an act was passed in the United Kingdom, allowing the interception of goods exported by Germany. On the other hand, Paris and London attempted to limit Berlin's ability to make purchases in foreign markets. To circumvent the blockade, the Germans wanted to import the raw materials and goods they needed through neutral countries, and in particular, Japan. They would be delivered to the Reich through the port of Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian Railway. The British wanted to prevent this, but they had to ensure cooperation from Japan and the USA. A return to the idea of a trade treaty was considered, for which they wanted to obtain Tokyo's cooperation in the blockade of Germany. Meanwhile, the blockade hit Japanese interests hard without temporarily giving anything in return. For example, three Japanese ships, *Azuma Maru*, *Sanyo Maru* and *Mito Maru*, with cargo from Germany were detained in the port of Rotterdam. In addition, the transport of machines ordered by the Japanese in Great Britain was suspended. On November 27, Shigemitsu filed an official protest on the issue. This indirectly became the cause of another misunderstanding at the turn of November and December. The *Miyako* newspaper published an alleged statement by a Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, which claimed, that ignoring the Japanese complaint would put Singapore, Hong Kong and Indochina in a state of immediate danger. This was a veiled threat to the British and French. The statement was officially denied, but the original news was quickly repeated in the international press, which showed how strained relations were in the face of the suspension of trade with Germany.⁴²

41 BEST (2014), pp. 92–97; TNA, FO 371/23556, Pratt to Clarke 14 November 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 21 December 1939.

42 BEST (2014), pp. 94–95; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 12631/176/23, Foreign Office minute 7 December 1939.

On the other hand, as it has already been pointed out, German-Soviet rapprochement gave the prospect of improving the Anglo-Japanese relationship. After the conclusion of the treaty of borders and friendship between Moscow and Berlin on September 27, it became clear that, along with Germany, the Soviets were the greatest threat to the British Empire. At the same time, after signing the truce ending the border fights with the Soviets, Japan was under pressure from Berlin to work out a broader agreement with the USSR. However, due to Soviet support for Chiang Kai-shek, it seemed that there could not be a more serious rapprochement between Tokyo and Moscow. According to Shigemitsu, the Soviets posed the greatest threat to both Japan and Britain, and this could be the basis for a rapprochement between the two countries. In addition to portraying the USSR as a common enemy of London and Tokyo, the ambassador had regularly pointed to Moscow's growing political influence in China. To confirm this position, he shared data collected by Japanese intelligence about the concentration of Soviet troops in the Caucasus and their infiltration of Xinjiāng. Later, Shigemitsu also emphasized the involvement of soldiers paid directly by the Soviet Union among Chiang Kai-shek's troops. The goal of both Great Britain and Japan was therefore to save China from communism. In this context, both countries appeared to be natural allies. London, however, remained wary of this narrative, *inter alia*, because of the ongoing Japanese-Soviet negotiations on economic issues. However, the Japanese assured the British that they did not concern political issues or the non-aggression pact.⁴³

The Soviet factor gained more importance at the end of November 1939 in the face of the Red Army's attack on Finland. British-Soviet relations could even be described as in a state of undeclared war, as evidenced by, amongst other things, British and French plans to bomb Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus. There were also ideas of initiating joint action with the Japanese, and even the concept of forming an anti-Soviet coalition. The first proposal of this kind was made on October 21 by Thomas Snow, the British representative in Finland. Then, in the face of the anticipated Soviet invasion of the country, he proposed to conclude an alliance with Japan against Moscow. This idea was debated in the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, but it was considered unrealistic. The Chinese factor was decisive, as it was considered that such a treaty with Japan would push Chongqing into the hands of Moscow.⁴⁴ On December 17, Snow renewed his proposal to establish a pact against the USSR, along with Italy and Japan. It was once again rejected, but the very idea of cooperation with Tokyo aroused some interest among Foreign Office officials, such as Sir Horace Seymour and Sir Orme Sargent. Still, a more cautious line prevailed, which was represented by Halifax, Cadogan, and at that moment, even Butler himself. Interestingly, the problem of the alliance with Ja-

43 MOORHOUSE (2014), pp. 66–67; TNA, FO 371/23559, F 10219/347/23, Seeds to Halifax 16 September 1939; TNA, FO 371/23559, F 10382/347/23, Lothian to Halifax 21 September 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 11063/176/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 13 October 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 13005/176/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 21 December 1939; TNA, FO 371/24725, F 3255/23/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 7 May 1940.

44 CRAIG (2005), pp. 76–78.

pan was also considered in the War Office, and in this case the idea did not gain much support.⁴⁵

The Japanese, meanwhile, were in a difficult economic situation, threatened with being cut off from many markets due to the ongoing world conflict. Hence, despite their dislike of the Soviets, they negotiated with them on, *inter alia*, a trade agreement. The British government, fearing a Japanese-Soviet rapprochement, proposed to open another round of negotiations on Tianjin. Churchill was opposed to starting talks on this issue, but Halifax's arguments convinced the rest of the cabinet at its December 4 meeting. The Americans themselves were in talks with the Japanese about opening the Chang Jiang River, so there was no fear of criticism from that side. It was decided that Craigie would prepare a draft settlement on the silver issue, and at the same time the consultation process with Chongqing began. The concept presented by the British ambassador assumed the transfer of silver in a deposit to a neutral bank, and a part worth 100,000 pounds was to be reserved for food aid for the concession in Tianjin. On December 13, the Foreign Office received a response from Chiang Kai-shek, who strongly opposed the sale of silver for food. It was decided to continue to pressure him in this matter, but for the time being negotiations were suspended. Meanwhile, it turned out that the negotiations between the Americans and the Japanese on the opening of the Chang Jiang had quickly broken down. Despite this, Tokyo announced the opening of the Zhu Jiang and the Chang Jiang Rivers to Nanjing in February. In London, this information was well received because their opening would significantly facilitate trade, which was the postulate of British business circles.⁴⁶

Washington, in addition to terminating the trade agreement, was preparing further sanctions targeting the Japanese economy. Henry Morgenthau, the US secretary of the Treasury, signaled that President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to prohibit the export of ferroalloys to Germany, the Soviet Union and Japan in cooperation with Great Britain and France. Another element of anti-Japanese economic policy was Roosevelt's call for a "moral embargo" on war materials for that country. This was associated with air raids carried out by the Japanese air force on civilian targets in China. As a consequence of the president's appeal, a formal restriction was imposed on the export of equipment and technology needed to produce aviation fuel to countries whose air forces were involved in actions against civilians. It was a step directed primarily against Japan, which relied heavily on fuel imports. The British, however, did not think that Washington would be consistent in its intentions; hence, the Foreign Office was against antagonizing Tokyo. It turned out later that they were right, because the Americans largely withdrew from these projects. At that time, however, London had to coordinate its own actions with the US, in order to maintain the best possible relations with that country. However, this meant moving away from seeking a rapprochement with Japan.⁴⁷

45 *Ibid.*, p. 99; BEST (2014), pp. 100–102; BEST (2012), pp. 205–225.

46 BEST (2014), pp. 95–97; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 625/23/23, Craigie to Howe 15 December 1939; TNA, FO 371/23556, F 13005/176/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 21 December 1939.

47 BEST (2014), pp. 97–98; SALTZMAN (2012), pp. 141–142; MITTER (2013), pp. 205–207; F 13005/176/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 21 December 1939.

Meanwhile, there seemed to be a significant *détente* in Soviet-Japanese relations. On December 31, 1939, a treaty was signed that settled some contentious issues, such as the problem of fisheries and payments for the takeover of the East China Railway by the Japanese. Negotiations had been underway since January 7, 1940, to establish a border line between the Soviet Union and Manchukuo. On January 10, talks on a Soviet-Japanese trade agreement also began in Moscow. Craigie expressed concern that this could be a prelude to the division of China between the two countries, although London hardly believed in such a possibility. In Japan, the pro-Soviet direction, especially after the outbreak of the Winter War, did not enjoy much popularity. The British therefore expected that Tokyo would adopt a more anti-Soviet attitude in the near future.⁴⁸

In line with British hopes was an unexpected initiative from Italy, whose ambassador to Tokyo officially communicated to the Japanese that the improvement of Soviet-Japanese relations would result in a deterioration of Italian-Japanese relations. The counsellor of the Italian embassy informed his British counterpart of this on January 10. He also came up with a proposal for a joint *démarche* of the United Kingdom, USA, France and Italy to Japan in order to persuade Tokyo to adopt an anti-Soviet attitude. To the British, this proposal seemed interesting, but its importance was seen primarily in relations with Rome. For Tokyo, the attitude of the Italians, who occupied the British fleet in the Mediterranean, was most important. Hence, their initiative would have the greatest possible effect. In the Foreign Office, it was believed that for Japan, London's participation would not matter much. However, given the prospect of improving relations with Italy, it was decided to consider the proposed action. Thus, a process of consultation began with the Southern Department of the Foreign Office and the British ambassador to Rome, Sir Percy Lorain, as well as with the French and Americans.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, in mid-January, General Abe was replaced as prime minister by Admiral Yonai. In London, he was seen as a continuator of the political line outlined by Abe; hence, it was expected that he would seek an agreement with the US and also with the United Kingdom. However, Anglo-Japanese relations were put to a serious test at the beginning of the new government's term. On January 21, the Japanese ship *Asama Maru* was detained by a British ship in order to intercept German sailors on board. The whole event took place near the coast of Japan and caused a significant diplomatic incident. The Japanese were outraged and filed an official protest. Craigie quickly worked out an agreement with Japan's foreign minister, Arita. The British were to stop controlling Japanese ships and return some of the detained Germans. In return, the Japanese undertook not to carry German soldiers and sailors anymore. This did not change the fact that the Japanese government had to face a wave of criticism in parliament for too lenient treatment of the British. The *Asama Maru* crisis had a negative impact on the perception

48 TNA, FO 371/24723, F 429/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 17 January 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 1569/22/23, Craigie to Halifax 18 January 1940.

49 TNA, FO 371/24729, F 270/66/23, Craigie to Halifax 10 January 1940; TNA, FO 371/24729, F 431/66/23, Clarke/Roche conversation 17 January 1940.

of the United Kingdom in the eyes of the Japanese, which was not a good omen for any attempts to improve relations.⁵⁰

On January 26, after the six-month notice period, the US-Japan trade agreement was terminated. This was a big blow to Japan, which relied on imports from the United States. The economic situation was becoming difficult and Tokyo badly needed trading partners. Hence, the economic blockade of the Reich was viewed rather unfavorably there. The Japanese authorities had repeatedly requested extraordinary exemptions for their ships with cargo coming from Germany. The British often acceded to these requests, wanting to win over the Japanese to cooperate in the economic blockade. However, this was against the recommendations of the Ministry of Economic Warfare. In addition, also at the request of Tokyo, implementation of the blockade was postponed until January 1, 1940. However, when in April 1940 the Japanese government asked that eight ships carrying cargo with an estimated value of £13,250,000 be allowed through the blockade, the British authorities thought it was too much. As a gesture of goodwill, permission was given to one of them to sail to Japan. Further concessions were dependent on Tokyo's cooperation in blocking German trade in the Far East.⁵¹

Soviet-Japanese relations, after the improvement associated with the signing of the agreement at the end of December, deteriorated somewhat in mid-February. Negotiations on establishing the border between the Soviet Union and Manchukuo collapsed. At first glance, that seemed to be connected to Italy's January notice to the Japanese government aimed at stopping potential rapprochement between Tokyo and Moscow. However, neither Craigie nor officials of the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, such as Esler Dening, believed that Rome's initiative could actually negatively affect Soviet-Japanese relations. At the same time, the British also decided to accept the Italian proposal of a joint *démarche* together with the USA and France in order to persuade the Japanese authorities to adopt an anti-Soviet attitude. This step, however, was taken primarily to improve British-Italian relations. The authorities in London believed that the participation of the United Kingdom in the initiative would have no effect on Japanese policy towards the USSR. This assessment was soon confirmed. According to Craigie's report of February 20, the negotiations were stopped by Moscow, which came as a surprise to the Japanese themselves. If Rome was not able to influence Tokyo's policy through appeals, the British would not have succeeded, which was in line with the Foreign Office's assumptions.⁵²

50 BEST (2014), pp. 98–99; TNA, FO 371/24723, F 334/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 15 January 1940; TNA, FO 371/24723, F 755/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 1 February 1940; TNA, FO 371/24723, F 804/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 2 February 1940; TNA, FO 371/24723, F 816/17/23, Craigie to Halifax 3 February 1940.

51 BEST (2014), pp. 94–104; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 625/23/23, Craigie to Howe 15 December 1939; TNA, CAB 65/5, Cabinet conclusions W.M. 53(40) 27 February 1940; TNA, CAB 67/5, W.P. (G.) 88(40), "Contraband Control in the Far East" Halifax memorandum 26 March 1940; TNA, CAB 67/6, W.P. (G.) 112(40), "The Control of Enemy Exports" Cross memorandum 27 April 1940; TNA, FO 371/24725, F 3255/23/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 7 May 1940.

52 TNA, FO 371/24729, F 270/66/23, Halifax to Craigie 13 February 1940; TNA, FO 371/24729, F 1255/66/23, Craigie to Halifax 20 February 1940.

The signing of the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty on March 12 negatively affected the perception of the United Kingdom in Japan. It caused a wave of criticism to fall on the Allies for providing insufficient aid to Finland. At the suggestion of Tadeusz Romer, the Polish ambassador in Tokyo, the British decided to take propaganda action, publishing data on the size of the support provided to the Finns.⁵³ Tokyo feared the consequences of the release of Moscow's forces from direct involvement in the war, especially as Soviet-Japanese relations were deteriorating further. In addition to the suspension of negotiations on the delimitation of the border, talks on a trade treaty and a new fisheries convention also came to a standstill. The Japanese demanded that the Soviets stop supporting Chiang Kai-shek, destroy the Chinese Communists, and recognize Manchukuo. For their part, they offered recognition of the independence of Outer Mongolia and the acceptance of growing Soviet influence in Xinjiang. Moscow, in turn, demanded recognition of the annexation of Polish territories, the signing of a non-aggression pact and the delimitation of the border with Manchukuo. In the sphere of economic relations, the Japanese wanted to obtain oil, coal and manganese, as well as facilitate the transport of goods from Germany. In return, they offered, amongst other things, soy, sulfur, magnesium and fruit. The Soviets, on the other hand, were ready to give fish and salt in exchange for the services of Japanese industry in the production of ships and rails with materials provided by the USSR. In the face of an inability to reach an agreement, the talks froze. In addition, Tokyo feared that the Soviets, after ending the Winter War, might be planning some moves in Asia. Therefore, it became all the more important for Tokyo to end the conflict in China as soon as possible and to look for trade partners.⁵⁴

In the face of deteriorating relations with Moscow, Tokyo offered the British a new formula for cooperation. A Japanese journalist gave Craigie a proposal from General Heisuke Yanagawa, director general of the China Development Council, to conclude an Anglo-Japanese agreement to protect the two countries from the Comintern. The ambassador expressed cautious interest in the matter and informed the Foreign Office about it. It is worth emphasizing that the proposal came from circles associated with the army, and the journalist who gave it was known for his anti-British views. The initiative aroused Halifax's interest, but generally London was skeptical about signing a formal agreement. The War Office pointed out that an unofficial system for exchanging information between Great Britain and Japan about Soviet Union activity functioned from 1926 to 1929. It was dropped on the initiative of the British, due to the poor quality of the data received. In 1935, the Japanese proposed a revival of the arrangement, which at that time would concern the activity of the Soviets in Xinjiang. The British rejected this proposal because it was considered an attempt to sow discord between London and Moscow. At the beginning of April 1940, however, the situation was different. The Foreign Office, which had been reluctant to sign any official pact, seemed ready to consider an informal arrangement. It was only necessary that an agreement should not concern Soviet activity in China, as its disclosure threatened to cause disaster for relations with the

53 OSBORN (2007), pp. 131–169; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 1662/22/23, Craigie to Halifax 6 March 1940.

54 TNA, FO 371/24724, F 1877/22/23, Craigie to Halifax 15 March 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 1959/22/23, Roche/Clarke conversation 18 March 1940.

government in Chongqing. A procedure of consultation with the ministries concerned on a return to the mechanism of 1926–1929 was therefore initiated. According to the War Office's opinion of April 24, the army did not believe that it would be possible to obtain useful information from a military point of view. If, however, for political reasons such an arrangement turned out to be beneficial, the War Office was ready to agree to it. Therefore, the Foreign Office decided to suspend the implementation of the project for the time being. The other ministries sent their opinions in the last days of May, when the strategic situation was completely different. However, the Admiralty, Home Office and India Office, like the War Office, were not very sympathetic to this initiative. Therefore, at the end of May, it was decided to completely abandon the idea of creating an informal mechanism for exchanging information with Tokyo, concerning the activities of the Comintern. In the last days of April, this idea had not yet been completely abandoned.⁵⁵

Also in April, it seemed that it would finally be possible to reach an agreement on silver from Tianjin. Earlier, it had been agreed that a part worth £100,000 would be used to help the concession. The rest, with a value of about £700,000, was supposed to be deposited with a neutral bank and sealed so that neither party could use it. In this respect, however, the matter was not yet fully accepted by both parties. However, concluding this preliminary agreement would favor the commencement of joint negotiations on a trade agreement and ensure Tokyo's cooperation on the issue of Germany's economic blockade. At the beginning of April, the Japanese proposed an agreement under which the British were to commit to abstaining from stopping Japanese ships with cargo from Germany. In return, Tokyo was ready to guarantee that rubber obtained from the Dutch East Indies would not be re-exported to the Reich.⁵⁶

The British, however, wanted far-reaching cooperation in blocking German imports through the port of Vladivostok. Their acceptance of Tokyo's demands on a trade deal depended on it. In addition, they did not consider a general release of Tokyo from the blockade, but only regarding the extraordinary passage of Japanese ships with cargo from the Reich. In response, the Japanese raised another demand at the beginning of May. They made cooperation with London on the blockade conditional on whether the United Kingdom would be willing to suspend support for Chongqing. From the British perspective, however, these were completely different matters and there was no room for such a discussion.⁵⁷

This issue did not prevent the planned opening of negotiations on the blockade of Germany and the trade agreement. The Ministry of Economic Warfare withdrew, to

55 TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2169/23/23, Craigie to Halifax 31 March 1940, Butler to Halifax 1 April 1940, Clarke minute 5 April 1940, Clarke to War Office 8 April 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2406/23/23, Hammond to Howe 4 April 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2942/23/23, War Office to Foreign Office 24 April 1940, Home Office to Foreign Office 23 May 1940, Admiralty to Foreign Office 25 May 1940, India Office to Clarke 25 May 1940, Clarke minute 30 May 1940; TNA, FO 371/23574, F 10699/10166/23, Tokyo Chancery to Foreign Office 31 July 1939.

56 TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2351/23/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 4 April 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2387/23/23, Howe minute 6 April 1940; TNA, FO 371/24724, F 2576/23/23, Ministry of Information to Foreign Office 11 April 1940.

57 TNA, FO 371/24725, F 3255/23/23, Butler/Shigemitsu conversation 7 May 1940.

some extent, objections to concessions to Japanese imports from the Reich. In fact, the ministry's position was still to "avoid granting exemptions for purely political reasons".⁵⁸ However, the government opted for a more conciliatory approach, which was in line with current Foreign Office policy. The restrictions were to cover only a few specific types of goods and raw materials. This mechanism did not take the form of any official agreement, as this would cause problems from a legal point of view. It was agreed that Japanese ships would be detained only occasionally, in the event that the British had strong evidence of their violation of the accepted rules. What was particularly important was the possibility of gaining the support of the Americans for the negotiations with Japan. Talks on economic issues were soon to begin on May 10 in the Ministry of Economic Warfare; political issues remained in the domain of the Foreign Office. On the same day, however, the entire political and strategic situation of Great Britain changed completely.⁵⁹

Conclusions

At the beginning of May, criticism of the British government over the defeat of the Allied forces in Norway was growing. Chamberlain had to step down and was replaced as prime minister by Winston Churchill on 10 May. On the same day, the German invasion of the Low Countries began. A few weeks later, France capitulated. Britain, embroiled in a lonely, deadly struggle in Europe, deprived of French assistance and dependent on Washington's support, had to further limit its own policy in East Asia and subordinate it to the Americans. In addition, Churchill was far less sympathetic to Japan than his predecessor. Therefore, British-Japanese relations were entering a much more difficult period.⁶⁰

The conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent outbreak of war in Europe significantly remodeled the existing system of international alliances. Japan's ties with Germany were rooted primarily in antagonism towards the Soviet Union, which was expressed in the Anti-Comintern Pact. The United Kingdom in turn was looking for an ally in Moscow against Berlin. The unexpected German-Soviet rapprochement, which determined the beginning of the war in Europe, seemed like a good opportunity for a reset in British-Japanese relations. However, as the above arguments show, this was a very illusory perspective. Relations between London and Tokyo were very tense before the outbreak of the Second World War. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact caused some activity in both countries in the search for a rapprochement, above all in the context of common antagonism towards the USSR. However, even in the case of a common enemy, the British treated Tokyo with distrust, as Craigie expressed: "we have not been blind to the obvious Japanese game of using the Russian bogey to frighten democratic

58 TNA, CAB 67/6, W.P. (G.) 112(40), "The Control of Enemy Exports" Cross memorandum 27 April 1940.

59 BEST (2014), pp. 106–107; TNA, CAB 65/6, Cabinet conclusions W.M. 97(40) 19 April 1940; TNA, CAB 65/6 Cabinet conclusions W.M. 100(40) 22 April 1940.

60 DILKS (1978), pp. 61–86.

countries”.⁶¹ It was equally difficult to reach an agreement on other issues. Negotiations on economic matters, which began on 10 May, were quickly limited to talks on a payment settlement and it was soon clear that reaching an agreement was impossible. The British also failed to win Japanese cooperation in the blockade of Germany. On June 19, they only managed to conclude an agreement on some of the problems arising from the Tianjin crisis, concerning, inter alia, the question of silver.⁶² However, the general Anglo-Japanese rapprochement proved impossible to achieve under the existing conditions. The reason for this was the completely different and often opposing political goals of the British Empire and the Empire of Japan. It mainly concerned the Sino-Japanese War and the support given to Chongqing by the British. In addition, the pro-Chinese attitude of the Americans, whose support London needed in the face of the war, meant that Whitehall could not afford too conciliatory politics. It is also worth noting the large amount of mutual distrust in British-Japanese relations, both on the part of societies and the elites. This meant that in both countries there was basically no will for, or possibility of, a more serious rapprochement.

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61 TNA, FO 371/23559, F 12087/347/23, Craigie to Halifax 22 November 1939.

62 BEST (2014), pp. 107–109.

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