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The USA's Attitude Towards the Russo-Japanese Conflict in View of Reports from Arthur Cassini, Russian Ambassador to Washington

USA wobec konfliktu rosyjsko-japońskiego w świetle doniesień rosyjskiego ambasadora w Waszyngtonie Artura Cassiniego

Abstract

The article presents the perceptions of Russia and Japan during the dispute about the areas of influence in the Far East and the Russo-Japanese War by the American authorities and society in the period from January to September 1904. The American government's position and the public opinion were presented on the basis of selected reports from the Russian ambassador to the USA, Arthur Cassini. They allow for a statement to be made that both before and during the initial phase of the conflict, Americans sympathised with Japan. Apparently, this resulted from the pragmatic approach taken by the American government, as well as from the activity of Japanese diplomats, thanks to which American press published information that was favourable for the Japanese and disadvantageous for Russia. However, when Japan gained advantage in the conflict, the feeling slowly shifted. The grounds for this was that the American public became aware of the threat to American industry and trade, related to Japan's reinforced position in the Far East. It may also be observed that excessive weakening of Russia and strengthening of Japan at its expense did not correspond with the idea of global balance of power and the concept of the appurtenant spheres of influence, advocated by the president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt.

Abstrakt

Artykuł ukazuje postrzeżenia Rosji i Japonii w trakcie sporu o strefy wpływów na Dalekim Wschodzie oraz konfliktu rosyjsko-japońskiego przez władze i społeczeństwo amerykańskie w okresie styczeń – wrzesień 1904 r. Stanowisko rządu amerykańskiego i opinii publicznej zaprezentowano w oparciu o wybrane doniesienia rosyjskiego ambasadora w USA Artura Cassiniego. Na ich podstawie można stwierdzić, że przed wybuchem konfliktu, jak i w jego początkowej fazie, sympatia Amerykanów znajdowała się po stronie Japonii. Miało to być efektem pragmatycznego podejścia rządu amerykańskiego, a także działalności dyplomatów japońskich, dzięki czemu w amerykańskiej prasie pojawiały się informacje przychylne Japończykom, a niekorzystne dla Rosji. Kiedy jednak w trakcie konfliktu przewagę zdobyła Japonia, nastroje uległy powoli zmianie. Podstawą tego było dostrzeżenie przez amerykańską opinię publiczną zagrożenia dla handlu i przemysłu amerykańskiego, jakie niesło za sobą wzmocnienie Japonii na Dalekim Wschodzie. Zauważyć można także, że zbytne osłabienie Rosji i wzmocnienie jej kosztem Japonii nie korespondowało z ideą globalnej równowagi sił i koncepcją przynależnych stref wpływów, których zwolennikiem był prezydent Stanów Zjednoczonych Teodor Roosevelt.

Keywords: Far East, Russo-Japanese War, USA, public opinion, Arthur Cassini

Słowa kluczowe: Daleki Wschód, wojna rosyjsko-japońska, USA, opinia publiczna, Artur Cassini

The Russo-Japanese war broke out in February 1904. It was underlain by a conflict of interests between the two countries in the Far East, especially in Manchuria and Korea¹. Russia, which kept getting more and more involved in China since the end of the 19th century (e.g. Mongolia, Manchuria), forced it to give concessions to lease seaports, build railways and grant privileges for

¹ See: И. Рыбачёнок, *Закат великой державы. Внешняя политика России на рубеже XIX-XX вв.: цели, задачи и методы*, Москва 2012, pp. 505-535; В. Шаццлло, Л. Шаццлло, *Русско-японская война 1904-1905*, Москва 2004, pp. 33-43.

Russian trade². In this area, it encountered counteraction from Japan, which obtained similar benefits from China at the same time. Interests of both countries, as it was mentioned above, clashed most intensively in Manchuria and Korea, which Japan regarded as its area of influence.

It must be added that other world powers, also became involved in the Far East, trying to gain as much influence here (especially in China) as possible. These included Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States of America. The latter country was trying to undermine the European influence and open the Chinese market to American industry and trade³. In the process, it was interested in the development of a situation created in the early 20th century, related to the Russian-Japanese relationships and their impact on American interests. In the analysed period, the USA was also interested in granting loans to Japan, and at the same time it attached importance to how the conflict would develop – whether or not it would threaten the economic relations of the United States with both Japan and China.

The aim of the article is to present the way Russia and Japan were perceived during the dispute over the area of influence in the Far East and the Russo-Japanese conflict, by the American authorities and society in the period between January and September 1904. The caesura includes the time before military operations started and the moment when the Japanese army gained advantage on the maritime and land front.

² For more information see: П. Мульгаули, *Внешняя политика Императора Николая (1894–1917)*, Москва 2013, pp. 217-253; И. Рыбачёнок, *op. cit.*, pp. 478-504; О. Айрапетов, *Внешняя политика Российской империи (1801–1914)*, Москва 2006, pp. 441-455, 464-465.

³ This can be illustrated with the Open Door Policy, the main guidelines of which were presented on 6th September 1899 by Secretary of State John Hay, in notes to world powers which fought over the division of spheres of influence in China. The idea was born the moment when the United States, having ensured its domination in the Pacific, decided to begin expansion to Far Eastern markets. In order to facilitate that, Hay formulated three postulates, the first of which stated that individual powers were not to infringe the interests of other countries in their spheres of influence, the second – concerned the introduction of harmonised customs duties, and the third – equal rates of fares and tariffs for all countries, irrespective of whose sphere of influence the goods would be transported through. The American secretary of state's proposal was aimed at providing the United States with equal opportunities of economic expansion in China, without the need to acquire its own sphere of influence. Since the above American proposals were not either clearly rejected or supported, Hay regarded them as accepted; see: W. Dobrzycki, *Historia stosunków międzynarodowych 1815-1945*, Warszawa 2004, p. 276; also see: В. Шаццлло, А. Шаццлло, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

As the basis for the article, selected reports from the Russian Ambassador in the USA, Arthur Cassini were used⁴ (*Телеграмма А. П. Кассини в МИД о нейтралитете США в случае войны России с Японией; Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о японофильской позиции правительства США и росте в стране антирусских настроений, Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о реакции вашингтонского кабинета на разрыв русско-японских отношений, Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу об изменении американского общественного мнения в пользу России*)⁵, which were sent to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reports constituted a form of summary of conversations which Cassini had with the American Secretary of State, John Hay⁶. They concerned the American response to the possibility of the Russo-Japanese conflict and its outbreak, increased anti-Russian feeling in the initial period of the war, and its change at the height of the military action.

Just before the outbreak of the war, in a telegram of 29th December 1903 to 11th January 1904, Cassini informed the minister of foreign affairs, Vladimir Lamsdorff⁷, that in the event of a conflict between Russia and Japan, the American government would adopt a neutral stance⁸. It followed from the conversation he had with the American Secretary of State, Hay that the latter had

⁴ Artur Cassini (Arturo Paolo Nicola Cassini, Marchese de Capuzzuchi di Bologna, conte de Cassini; 1835-1919) Russian diplomat, entered the service in 1854. Since 1884 he was the chargé d'affaires, and since 1888 – Minister Resident at Hamburg. Since 1891 envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the Russian Empire to China, since 1897 envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, and since 1898 Ambassador to the United States of America. Since 1905 Ambassador to Spain. In 1909, he retired.

⁵ See: *Россия и США. Дипломатические отношения 1900-1917*, ed. Г. Н. Севостьянов, Дж. Хэзлем, Москва 1999, pp. 49-53, 64-66.

⁶ John Milton Hay (1838-1905) American politician and official. In the years 1879-1881, Assistant Secretary of State, in the years 1897-1898 United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom, in the years 1898-1905 US Secretary of State.

⁷ Vladimir Lamsdorff (1844-1907). In 1872 he was the second, and since 1875 the first secretary of the Chancellery of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1882 he was appointed as the head of the Chancellery of MFA. In 1886 he took the position of senior counsellor of MFA, and since 1897 he fulfilled the function of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the years 1900–1906 he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, see: Д. Шилов, *Государственные деятели Российской империи 1802–1917. Библиографический справочник*, Санкт-Петербург 2002, pp. 402-403.

⁸ *Телеграмма А. П. Кассини в МИД о нейтралитете США в случае войны России с Японией*, [in:] *Россия и США. Дипломатические отношения 1900-1917*, ed. Г. Н. Севостьянов, Дж. Хэзлем, Москва 1999, p. 49.

been informed by a representative of Japan in Washington about exacerbating disputes between Russia and Japan⁹. Moreover, Hay was aware that this might lead to war. On the other hand, Cassini, on behalf of the Russian government, ensured that Russia was doing everything to prevent this. Despite these assurances, the American Secretary of State stated that he believed in the possibility of the outbreak of a local war between Japan and Russia in the nearest future. However, if it came to it, as we can read in the telegram: *In such an event, the United States of America will preserve far-reaching neutrality*¹⁰. Moreover, Hay informed Cassini that the American Pacific Squadron was given orders to relocate to a bay near Manila, which kept it at a distance from the probable theatre of military operations. In the quoted telegram, Cassini also informed the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the feeling present in the American society. He wrote: *At the present critical moment the local public opinion favours Japan thanks to incessant insinuations from the Anglo-Jewish press, although I still receive numerous letters from Americans who are offering their service and expressing their warm feelings of fondness for Russia*¹¹.

As follows from the above fragment, the American public opinion was divided in their preferences. However, supporters of Japan clearly outnumbered the other side. A conclusion also arises that it was mainly owing to press reports, which were supposedly inspired by Great Britain¹².

In his subsequent report of 14th/27th January 1904, Cassini touched upon the question the pro-Japanese attitude of the American government and the increasing anti-Russian feeling among Americans. At the beginning he mentioned, since the very beginning of the crisis, Japan tried to ensure moral, if not material, support from the American government. To this end, it informed the USA about the ongoing Russian-Japanese talks and tried to present everything in a favourable light. *In semi-official announcements, placed by a Japanese MP in the local newspapers, wrote Cassini, Japan was presented as a perfect ideological fighter for the Open Door Policy, promoted by the United States; the principle which, according to the claims of the Japanese representative, was the main, if not*

⁹ It referred to the dispute over the division of spheres of influence in Manchuria.

¹⁰ Телеграмма А. П. Кассини в МИД..., р. 49.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² It is indicated in their work by Russian historians: Viacheslav and Larisa Shatsillo, who wrote that the possibility of increasing the Russian presence in Northern China was deliberately exaggerated by the English propaganda; see. В. Шаццлло, Л. Шаццлло, *op. cit.*, р. 36.

*the only, subject of conflict between Japan and Russia, which the latter does not want to recognise*¹³. It can be concluded from further information from Cassini, that similar statements were supposed to induce favourable attitude of the American government, and especially Hay, who regarded the Open Door Policy he proclaimed as the basis for his diplomatic activity. In addition, the statements were supposed to arouse Japanophile feeling. Cassini indicated that such an approach from Hay resulted in the USA's failure to notice that it was being played by Japan and oriented, as it were, at joining the English-Japanese alliance. Taking the above actions of Japan into account, the Russian ambassador stated that the American Secretary of State *Captured by his English-Japanese liking, does not notice the dangerous character of such a serious issue as our current dispute with Japan...*¹⁴. Cassini astutely observed that such an attitude resulted, among other things, from mistakes made by the Russian diplomacy, and particularly from Russia's failure to keep its promises concerning the freedom of American trade in Manchuria. This was scrupulously used against Russia by Japan and Great Britain. Further, Cassini stressed that despite his strenuous effort to dissipate Hay's anxiety regarding the conciliatory attitude of the Russian government towards the issue of reaching an agreement with Japan, the latter remained distrustful. The distrust increased due to the efforts of *The Japanese and English, very interested in breaking our traditional friendly relationships with the United States*¹⁵. In Cassini's opinion, the distrust was fuelled by publications in press organs close to the American Secretary of State. The not very favourable attitude of the USA towards Russia, according to the Russian ambassador, was also confirmed by the fact that despite Hay's declarations that the only aim of *The United States in the Far East is the development of trade relationships, which is impossible without a firmly established peace...*, part of the society had the feeling that it was Russia which was responsible for the friction in the Far East. In this connection, Japan might have seen nothing else, but encouragement for war in the attitude of the American government and society¹⁶.

¹³ *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о японофильской позиции правительства США и росте в стране антирусских настроений*, [in:] *Россия и США...*, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*. It can be added that what the Russian Ambassador to Washington concluded from conversations with the American Secretary of State, and from the American public's attitude, was

The following fragment from a Cassini's report could be used as a summary of the entire situation: *The United States' attitude towards us is becoming more and more negative and distrustful each day, and because such an ambitious man has the helm of the state as President Roosevelt¹⁷, whose uncontrolled assistant for foreign policy is such an overt Anglo- and Japanophile as Mr Hay, one might expect serious complications should it become impossible to satisfy the United States' aspirations ...*¹⁸.

Another report from the Russian representative in Washington is from 28th January /10th February 1904, i.e. already after the military operations had started¹⁹. Cassini informed Lamsdorff that Japan's decision to break the talks and diplomatic relations and to recall the entire mission from Petersburg resulted in a considerable surprise and disapproval on the part of the American government. In the further part of his report, Cassini presented the American authorities' position with respect to the conflict and a broader political context, presented by the Secretary of State, Hay²⁰. It is worth quoting a longer fragment of the letter: *To my remark that such an ill-considered step from Japan, which can have consequences not only for the two directly-involved superpowers, but also for everybody who does business in the Far East, should be largely attributed to Japan's belief in the supporting attitude of the United States, the belief which Japan drew*

implemented by the American diplomacy. In January 1904, the American government assured the Japanese side that in the event of war its policy would favour Japan. Also in January, during his visit to Japan, the Minister of War, and the later US President Wiliam Taft, informed the Japanese side that in the event of a conflict, the USA would support Japan, if France and Germany should side with Russia, see: В. Шаццало, А. Шаццало, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt (US president in the years 1901–1909) was an advocate of the idea of spheres of influence, according to which each superpower should have control over a large area of the world assigned to it, and the so-called global balance of power. Owing to this, he was concerned about the increasing Russian influence in Asia and, therefore, he supported Japan. He was happy about its victories, believing that Russia should be weakened, but not excluded from the balance of power. According to him, the forces of Russia and Japan should balance each other out, see: Н. Киссинджер, *Дипломатя*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 42-44.

¹⁸ *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о японофильской позиции...*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁹ *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о реакции вашигтонского кабинета на разрыв русско-японских отношений*, [in:] *Россия и США...*, pp. 52-53.

²⁰ Cassini reserved that the conversation with Hay took place on 27th/9th February, when he most probably knew about the attack of Japanese destroyers on Russian warships, stationed in Port Arthur.

from the information in American press, Mr. Hay, unwilling to clearly focus on the question I raised, expressed his regret that Japan decided to break its relations with us so unexpectedly, but he also added, clearly trying to justify the Japanese government, that it was forced to do so due to the increasing national agitation, caused, according to Mr Hay, by the slowness with which we conducted the negotiations, as well as by the conviction that nothing can be achieved in this way.

Next, Mr Hay, clearly concerned with the possibility of dragging other superpowers into our conflict with Japan, told me that he had just sent, through American ambassadors, a circular letter to several world powers most interested in the Far East with an offer, the essence of which comes down to restricting the theatre of military operations to a predefined area. At the same time, Mr Hay mentioned China's neutrality, i.e. what, in my view, is the main subject of his concern and the reason behind all the current actions. Mr Hay is plainly afraid that in the event of a slightest hostile movement on China's part, we can use it to annex Manchuria, which would evidently deal a strong blow to hopes for the development of American trade in this territory, by depriving it of all the privileges negotiated on the basis of the most recent treaty with China²¹.

Taking into account the fragment quoted above, it can be concluded that the American government favoured Japan. In a way it was reflected in the words of the Secretary of State, who justified the Japanese. He was also noticeably concerned about the possibility of the conflict spreading, which would be disadvantageous for American business. An equally disadvantageous situation would be if Manchuria was incorporated into the Russian territory. Americans probably thought that Russia's activity constitutes more of a threat for their interests, and particularly the Open Door Policy, than Japan's policy in that region²². Consequently, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war resulted in the fact that the American government offered to neutralise China and declared

²¹ *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о реакции вашингтонского кабинета...*, pp. 52-53.

²² It can be indicated by granting credits to Japan during the war, about which the Russian MFA was also informed by Cassini; see: *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о значении первого японского займа в Америке*, [in:] *Россия и США...*, pp. 57-59; *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о втором японском займе в США*, [in:] *Россия и США...*, pp. 68-69; *Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу об очередном японском займе в США*, [in:] *Россия и США...*, pp. 77-78.

that the United States would maintain a strict and friendly neutrality during the conflict. As a supplement, one can add that Cassini was under the impression that *the federal government, having received the first unfavourable for us [i.e. for Russia – author's note] news from the theatre of war and having decided to immediately cause obstructions to us on the basis of the Manchurian issue, will undoubtedly not miss an opportunity to create obstacles also in the future, especially if we do not gain a quick and definite advantage in the war*²³.

As time showed, not only did Russia not gain an advantage, but it also suffered a number of defeats on land and at sea. It was Japan, initially doomed to failure, which turned out to be the winning side and, as a result, its position in the Far East was consolidated. At that time, a shift in moods in the American society could be observed towards the Russian side. Cassini reported on that in his letter to Lamsdorff of 7th/20th September 1904.²⁴ Referring to his previous reports, he noted: *Plenty of times, I have had the opportunity to draw Your Excellency's attention to this Japanophile trend, which has dominated some of the local public opinion at the very beginning of the current events in the Far East. Japan's friends have tried to explain these sympathies with the fact that Japan is, to a degree, a sort of US' apprentice, where a lot of the Japanese received university or military education and acquired knowledge or technology, thanks to which Japan – until recently a third-rate country – managed to become an equal and dangerous rival for the world's superpowers. [...]*

The news on the first Japan's victories have been received by a large portion of the local public opinion with genuine admiration. The voices of protest, which could be heard against such a state in the name of tradition, justice and even ordinary interests of the United States, were deafened by the significant part of the local press which, serving the English or Jewish cause and sincerely hating us, made every effort to impose their feelings and opinions on the local community, to kill the strengthening liking for Russia, and to artificially inspire fondness for Japan, whose real goals and tasks since the beginning of the war had been imagined by Americans in a completely different way.

²³ Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу о реакции вашингтонского кабинета..., р. 53.

²⁴ Донесение А. П. Кассини В. Н. Ламсдорфу об изменении американского общественного мнения в пользу России, [in:] Россия и США..., pp. 64-66.

Without doubt, at the beginning of the war Japan had a beautiful base here but, exhilarated with success, was not able to exercise moderation and soon showed its real character. Arrogance of the Japanese, very often shown by them recently, their complete disregard for the established international customs as well as foreign interests, have sobered Americans. Now, even those who humbly kowtowed to Japan and wished it full success not so long ago are beginning to ask themselves what will happen should Japan become the master of the situation in the Far East, and in what way Japan's victory might influence the future of American interests in such circumstances²⁵.

As can be concluded from the above fragment, the American public started to slowly shift their attitude towards Russia, which the Japanese doubtlessly contributed to through their actions. As follows from Cassini's letter, Japan's increasing importance made the United States realise the threat it posed for American interests in the Far East. All the more so because Japan had so far been regarded by the United States as an advocate of the Open Door Policy. Thus, activities of the Japanese raised doubts in the American public as to the truthfulness of their assurances to date. Consequently, Japan began to lose the fondness that the American society had shown for it.

Another noteworthy piece of information from Cassini's report is that the American government, who faced the threat for American interests in the Far East, did not want to renounce the Japanophile feeling, which is more of a question of pride since, as can be concluded from the ambassador's letter, the belief in Japan's reliability had been shaken.

Cassini also stresses that in the USA, there are still numerous authorities who have not forgotten about the traditional bonds of friendship, which have connected the United States and Russia for a long time. *Many, notices Cassini, regardless of the difficulties we have faced in this war, know Russia's strength and the patriotism of its people, and understand our firm resolution to lead to absolute victory in our conflict with Japan. Obviously, this cannot be without effect on inspiring the feeling of respect towards us, which is already a sign of a shift in the sympathies to our side²⁶.*

The Russian ambassador in Washington also believed that numerous symptoms indicated that Americans began to understand that their interests in the

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 64-65.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

Far East would be easier to reconcile with the influences of agricultural Russia than those of industrial Japan in this region. It was exactly because of its industrialisation that Japan would be the United States' main rival in the area of trade and industry.

The documents discussed above, without doubt show the attitude of the American government and society to Russia and Japan before and during the Russo-Japanese war. It can be seen that already before the outbreak and during the initial stage of the conflict, American sympathies were with Japan. We can say that this results from the policy of the American government, who was guided first of all by the interests of American industry and trade and tried to take advantage of every opportunity to reinforce the United States' position in the Far East. On the other hand, taking into account the reports from the Russian ambassador in Washington, it was also an effect of the actions of Japanese diplomats and their support from Great Britain, thanks to which information in favour of the Japanese and against Russia was published in American press. However, when the conflict reached its apogee, the moods slowly shifted, which was also noticed by Cassini. As a basis for the change, he pointed to the fact that the American public noticed the threat to American trade and industry carried by the strengthened position of Japan in the Far East. Another factor which contributed to the shift in sympathies was the Japanese's arrogance and disregard for international customs and interests of other countries. It can also be noticed that excessive weakening of Russia and reinforcing Japan in this way, did not correspond to the idea of global balance of force and the concept of spheres of influence, which were advocated by President Theodor Roosevelt.

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