



GREAT BRITAIN, THE GREAT POWERS, AND THE SHIMONOSEKI INCIDENT

Roman Kodet

Department of Historical Sciences, Faculty of Arts,
University of West Bohemia, Plzeň, Czech Republic;
e-mail: kodet@khv.zcu.cz.

Abstract.

The Shimonoseki Incident was a major diplomatic conflict between the Great Powers and Japan. It was initiated by the Chōshū Domain, which tried to block the Shimonoseki Straits for the foreign shipping after an Imperial edict to expel the “barbarians” was issued. Chōshū batteries attacked three foreign vessels in June and July 1863. The reaction of the Great Powers involved in the Japanese policy was harsh. The Americans and French sent ships to bombard the enemy positions. However, these attacks did not stop the construction of new batteries and obstruct the safe passage through the Inland Sea, which considerably affected international trade with Japan. Only after the British representatives in Japan united the powers for a joint action could the problem be solved. The allied fleet forced Chōshū into submission, and the British diplomacy forced the Japanese military government (the Tokugawa bakufu) to accept the terms under which an indemnity was paid. The incident results had a serious impact on the future policy of Great Britain in Japan and its involvement in the coming Meiji Restoration.

Rezumat.

Incidentul de la Shimonoseki a fost un conflict diplomatic major între Marile Puteri și Japonia. A fost inițiat de Domeniul Chōshū, care a încercat să blocheze Strâmtoarea Shimonoseki pentru transportul maritim străin, după ce a fost emis un edict imperial de expulzare a „barbarilor”. Bateriile Chōshū au atacat trei nave străine în iunie și iulie 1863. Reacția marilor puteri implicate în politica japoneză a fost dură. Americanii și francezii au trimis nave pentru a bombarda pozițiile inamice. Cu toate acestea, aceste atacuri nu au oprit construcția de noi baterii și au oprit trecerea în siguranță prin Marea Interioară, ceea ce a afectat considerabil comerțul internațional cu Japonia. Numai după

ce reprezentanții britanici în Japonia și-au unit puterile într-o acțiune comună a putut fi rezolvată această problemă. Flota aliată i-a forțat pe Chōshū să se supună, iar diplomația britanică a forțat guvernul militar japonez (bakufu Tokugawa) să accepte condițiile în care să fie plătită o indemnizație. Rezultatele incidentului au avut un impact grav asupra viitoarei politici a Marii Britanii în Japonia și asupra implicării acesteia în viitoarea Restaurare Meiji.

Keywords.

Japan, Great Britain, diplomacy

On one peaceful June night of the year 1863, an extraordinary event happened at Japan's coast. On 25 June afternoon, a small U.S. merchant vessel SS *Pembroke* anchored at Dan no Ura close to the Shimonoseki Straits.¹ Although the ship had hoisted the American flag as was led by a Japanese government pilot, it was suddenly attacked at one o'clock in the morning by the two men-of-war belonging to the Chōshū domain. These were the brig *Lanrick* and the bark *Daniel Webster* recently purchased by the domain's authorities from the Americans.² Soon afterward, the shore batteries constructed by Chōshū manned by some fifty radical samurai led by Kusaka Genzui opened fire.³ The merchantman was taken entirely by surprise. One of the Japanese ships was so bold that it approached *Pembroke* and its seamen started shouting taunts at the American crew.⁴ Luckily *Pembroke's* boilers were fired, and the merchantmen could use the tides to quickly escape into the Bungo Channel between Kyūshū and Shikoku with only several hits and minor damage to the hull and superstructure.⁵ Although this incident was only one of a long series of xenophobic attacks and provocations by samurai radicals attached to the sonnō jōi movement against the foreigners, it was a beginning of a severe diplomatic crisis between the Great Powers and Japan.

The Shimonoseki Incident roots laid in the development of the recent years and the rise of the sonnō jōi and its slogan “*revere the emperor, expel the barbarians.*” Its beginnings can be traced to the evolution of the Mito School of

¹ Yokohama Archives of History (henceforth YAH), Yokohama, General Records of the Department of State (R.G.59)-Diplomatic Despatches Japan (N.A.M.133), Ca4 01.4 19, Pruynto Seward, July 24, 1863.

² <http://www.navyandmarine.org/ondeck/1863shimonoseki.htm> [28. 11. 2020]; compare with DENNEY, John, *Respect and Consideration. Britain in Japan 1853–1868 and Beyond*, Leicester 2011, p. 152.

³ HILLSBOROUGH, Romulus, *Samurai Revolution. The Dawn of Modern Japan Seen Through the Eyes of the Shogun's Last Samurai*, Tokyo, Rutland, Singapore 2014, p. 237.

⁴ YAH, General Records of the Department of State (R.G.59)-Diplomatic Despatches Japan (N.A.M.133), Ca4 01.4 19, Pruynto Seward, July 24, 1863.

⁵ Ibid.

thought, which was the basis of modern Japanese Imperial loyalism, and to the consequences of Japan's opening to foreign shipping and subsequent conclusion of the unequal treaties. The "humiliation" of Japan by the intrusion of the foreigners and the apparent inability of the Tokugawa bakufu to deal with this threat activated the young discontent samurai into the opposition against the ruling regime.⁶ Many of them were influenced by an important thinker and political theorist, Yoshida Shōin, who claimed that "*the shogun was merely an Imperial agent commissioned by the Emperor to protect the country from foreign invasion. But since the shogun had upset the Emperor by failing to expel the barbarians, he no longer warranted his title.*"⁷ Their demands were simple – to topple the current military rule of the Tokugawa family, reinstall the Emperor as the true political leader of the country and abolish the treaties with the "barbarians," which according to their opinion violated the sanctity of the Land of the Rising Sun. In many cases, their motivation was not based solely on these ideals per se, but also on the fact that during the Edo Period, the economic situation of the samurai from the lower echelons of the military class gradually worsened, which was underlined by the hardships of the Tenpō famine of the 30s of the 19th century.⁸

This fact contributed significantly to the country's politicization (mostly the young and poverty-stricken samurai, but also the members of the Court, clergy, and even the commoners) and the radicalization of those who felt suppressed by the current regime and who hoped for change.⁹ The ideas of sonnō jōi then provided legitimacy for their demands and deeds, which soon turned into domestic violence and political terrorism.¹⁰ Its beginnings can be traced to the assassination of the all-powerful tairō (the president of the bakufu's Council of Elders the rōjū) Ii Naosuke on 24 March 1860.¹¹ It was a consequence of Ii's signing of the unequal commercial treaties with the foreign powers and the Ansei Purge, during which he persecuted his political opponents and the adherents of the imperial loyalism. After this attack, the political violence quickly spread throughout Japan. Especially the capital city of Kyōto became the hub, where the discontent radicalized samurai (the so-called shishi – men of high purpose)

⁶ BEASLEY, William G., *The Meiji Restoration*, Stanford 1972, p. 142.

⁷ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 94.

⁸ JANSEN, *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge, London 2002, p. 109.

⁹ TOTMAN, Conrad, *Early Modern Japan*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1995, p. 543.

¹⁰ UMEGAKI, Michio, *From Domain to Prefecture*, in: JANSEN, Marius B., ROZMAN, Gilbert (eds.), *Japan in Transition. From Tokugawa to Meiji*, Princeton 1986, p. 93.

¹¹ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, pp. 128–129; the contemporary description of the attack provides the chronicle of Baba Bunyel. BABA, Bunyel, *Japan 1853–1864: Or, Genji Yume Monogatari – Primary Source Edition*, Tokyo 1905, pp. 36–38.

concentrated terrorizing its population and regularly attacking the bakufu officials.¹²

The anger of the sonnō jōi movement also befell on the foreign residents in Japan. Already before the death of Ii Naosuke, the radicals started their attacks against the Westerners. A young officer and a sailor of the Russian navy were killed in Yokohama's streets on 25 August 1859.¹³ Other assassinations soon followed: '*Fatal attacks took the lives of servants of the French embassy, Dutch sea captains, the Japanese interpreter of the British Consulate and, in January 1861, of Harris*' [Townsend Harris – the American minister to Japan 1859–1862] *secretary, Henry Heusken.*¹⁴ However, the brunt of the attacks was directed primarily on the most active Great Power on the Japanese soil – Great Britain. The shishi were so daring that they concentrated directly on the building of the British legation. A group of assassins tried to kill the British Minister to Japan, Sir Rutherford Alcock, on the night of 5 July 1861. Only luck saved his life on that day. Two members of the legation staff were, however, injured during the attack.¹⁵ A similar serious incident occurred on 27 June 1862. This time corporal Richard Crimp was killed by a silent assassin directly in front of the door of the British minister's office to Japan, colonel Edward St. John Neale, who acted as deputy of Alcock during his leave to Britain.¹⁶

However, the most significant of these murderous incidents occurred on 14 September 1862, when a British merchant Charles Lennox Richardson was murdered in broad daylight by the members of the retinue of the daimyo of the Satsuma Domain Shimazu Hisamitsu on the Tokaidō Road near Kawasaki.¹⁷ This incident differed from the previous attacks because this time, the culprits of the assassination could be clearly identified and connected with a particular domain, while masterless samurai (rōnin) committed the previous attacks. Therefore, the British government could demand not only an indemnity for the attack, as was the case after the preceding murderous incidents, but also extradition of the

¹² HILLSBOROUGH, Romulus, *Shinsengumi. The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps*, Tokyo, Rutland, Singapore 2005, p. 33.

¹³ LENSEN, George A., *The Russian Push Toward Japan. Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697–1875*, Princeton 1959, pp. 381–382; ALCOCK, Rutherford, *The Capital of the Tycoon. A Narrative of Three Years Residence in Japan*, vol. I, London 1863, p. 240.

¹⁴ TAMARIN, Alfred, *Japan and the United States. Early Encounters 1791–1860*, New York 1970, p. 232.

¹⁵ The National Archives (henceforth TNA), London, Foreign Office (henceforth FO) 46/12, Alcock to Russel, July 7, 1861.

¹⁶ TNA, FO 46/23, Neale to Russel, July 3, 1862.

¹⁷ FLETCHER, Robert S. G., *The Ghost of Namamugi. Charles Lennox Richardson and the Anglo-Satsuma War*, Folkestone 2019, pp. 4–5; the murder and its circumstances are described in a report given by colonel Neale to the British Government. TNA, FO 46/24, Minutes of evidence touching the death of Mr. C. L. Richardson, September 15, 1862.

assassins.¹⁸ However, the British demands for the arrest of the culprits, punishment of Satsuma, and payment of 100,000 pounds as an indemnity¹⁹ were met by a staunch resistance by the bakufu, which tried to play for time and reduce the British demands.²⁰ Only after a stiff pressure and a demonstration of the preparedness to use force, the shogunate gave up and, in July 1863, paid the requested indemnity.²¹ However, the Satsuma Domain refused to yield and continued in its resistance against the requests for further compensation from the British.²² This eventually led up to the Anglo-Satsuma War and the bombardment of the city of Kagoshima in the middle of August 1863.²³

Therefore, the attack on *Pembroke* occurred during a severe diplomatic and military crisis between Great Britain and Japan. It was nevertheless profoundly connected with the turbulent domestic situation of the Japanese Islands. The arrival of Perry's Expedition in July 1853 caught the bakufu quite unprepared to challenge the foreigners. The previous decades of famine and subsequent efforts to promote reforms left the regime weakened. Although it had a prior warning of the American expedition, it was not ready either to accept Perry's demands or openly oppose them by force. Therefore, its negotiators were playing for time and were able to convince the Americans to temporarily leave before they would be able to deliver an answer to the letter of the U.S. President Millard Fillmore, which was demanding the opening of the Japanese ports to foreign shipping.²⁴ Under these pressing circumstances, the leaders of the shogunate decided for an unprecedented step. The president of the Council of Elders (rōjū) Abe Masahiro invited the daimyo and some of bakufu's leading councillors to express their opinion on the revision of the policy of the closed country (sakoku) practiced since the 30s of the 16th century.²⁵ For the first time in history, the bakufu invited the lords of the feudal fiefs to participate in a crucial decision in the national questions. Especially the tozama lords (those daimyos who were not close allies or were direct enemies of the Tokugawa before the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, who were viewed with considerable suspicion by the

¹⁸ TNA, FO 46/24, Neale to Russel, September 15, 1862.

¹⁹ TNA, FO 46/20, Russel to Neale, November 28, 1862; compare to DENNEY, pp. 134–136.

²⁰ TNA, FO 46/24, Neale to Russel, October 21, 1862.

²¹ TNA, FO 46/35, Neale to Russel, July 12, 1863.

²² HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, pp. 187–191.

²³ See DENNEY, pp. 166–202.

²⁴ See McOMIE, William, *The Opening of Japan, 1853–1855. A Comparative Study of the American, British, Dutch and Russian Naval Expeditions to Compel the Tokugawa Shogunate to Conclude Treaties and Open Ports to their Ships*, Folkestone 2006, pp. 92–131.

²⁵ AKAMATSU, Paul, *Meiji 1868. Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Japan*, New York 2011, p. 93–94.

ruling regime) were summoned to serve the bakufu in this way for the first time in its history.

This step proved to be a great mistake on the part of the shogunate because it cast doubt on its ability to govern the nation and protect it against the pressure of the Western Powers – which was confirmed by the fact that the shogunate accepted not only American conditions in 1854 but also succumbed to the pressure of the other powers and opened several of Japanese ports to their ships.²⁶ This impression of the weakness of the bakufu in the face of the foreign threat was deepened after the conclusion of the unequal treaties in 1858. Especially in the eyes of the opponents of the country's opening. The Edo government multiplied its error in undermining its political authority by consulting (or more precisely defined, notifying) the Imperial Court in Kyōto on the question of the opening of the country.²⁷ For the centuries of the Tokugawa rule in Japan, the Emperor and his Court were subjugated to strict regulations by the military regime, although the shoguns were, in theory, his mere subjects.²⁸ The Tokugawa used the Emperor's prestige and "divine" origin to legitimize their own rule (the shogun was officially invested in his position by the sovereign) but strictly controlled his revenue and conduct and denied him any signs of political power.²⁹ By inviting the Emperor to the decision-making process in the question of the opening of Japan, the bakufu partially acknowledged his political importance and encouraged the position of the imperial loyalists who claimed that "*the shogunate had already been disloyal to the emperor by surrendering to Western pressure.*"³⁰ All in all, this step made the imperial Court deeply involved in the national policy for the first time since the 15th century. Consequently, the loyalty to the Emperor and the criticism of the Tokugawa became the rally point for the opponents of the regime and its open country policy.

At the beginning of the 60s of the 19th century, Emperor Kōmei and his Court came under the strong influence of the xenophobe faction. The courtiers sympathetic to the sonnō jōi influenced the sovereign to pressure the shogun Tokugawa Iemochi to expel the barbarians.³¹ Their position was strengthened by the financial and political problems of the bakufu, which was not able to calm the growing tension in the country manifested by the attacks of the shishi against the foreigners and the growing violence against the bakufu supporters in the

²⁶ SANSOM, George, *A History of Japan 1615–1867*, Stanford 1963, p. 234; BEASLEY, pp. 96–97.

²⁷ KEENE, Donald, *Emperor of Japan. Meiji and His World, 1852–1912*, New York 2002, p. 18.

²⁸ TOTMAN, Conrad, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu*, Cambridge 1967, p. 34; WEBB, Herschel, *The Japanese Imperial Institution in the Tokugawa Period*, New York, London 1968, p. 59.

²⁹ JANSEN, Marius B., *Warrior Rule in Japan*, Cambridge 1995, p. 168.

³⁰ WEBB, p. 239.

³¹ KEENE, p. 69.

capital city. The leaders of the sonnō jōi movement turned Kyōto into a “*sea of blood*” under their slogans of imperial loyalism (kinnō) and divine punishment (tenchū).³² In the spring of 1863, when the shogun was to visit Kyōto, the Court, under the pressure of the loyalists, demanded that the bakufu declare the expulsion of the foreigners as soon as possible. At the end of 1862, the Court informed the shogunate’s officials that it considered the expulsion of the foreigners as the means “*the bakufu will give unmistakable evidence of its remorse for having opposed the Emperor’s wishes since 1858.*”³³ The shogun yielded to this pressure in June 1863, during the peak of the crisis with Great Britain caused by Richardson’s murder (The Namamugi Incident). Although the bakufu was under severe pressure and had to yield to British demands and pay the indemnity, it simultaneously (24 June) informed the Great Powers’ representatives of its intention to close the treaty ports.³⁴

The foreign ambassadors were informed about this decision by the member of the rojū Ogasawara Nagamichi, who demanded that the foreigners should start the preparation for their leave from Japan, although he must have been aware that his government does not have the power to force the expulsion by force. The reaction of the Great Powers was one of consternation and indignation. The British minister to Japan, Colonel Neale, labelled the Japanese note as “*offensive and hostile*” and considered it almost parallel to the declaration of war.³⁵ He blamed the bakufu for this development, which he viewed as another example of “*the series of frauds, stratagems, and deceptions practiced by the Tycoon’s [shogun’s] Government.*”³⁶ He was nevertheless prepared to force the Japanese to follow the treaty obligations and started preparing defensive measures for the case of violent escalation.³⁷ The reaction of his colleagues was quite similar. The French ambassador Gustave Duchesne, Prince de Bellecourt, considered the Ogasawara’s communique as a violation of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and Japan of 1858. He declared his preparation to cooperate with his colleagues to force the Japanese to fulfil their obligations.³⁸ On the same day he received the Japanese note, Neale sent the bakufu a letter in which he warned that “*both the Spiritual and Temporal Sovereigns of this country are totally ignorant of the*

³² HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 151.

³³ Matsudaira Keiei to bakufu, December 4, 1862, BEASLEY, William G., *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868*, New York, Toronto 1955, p. 229.

³⁴ Ogasawara Nagamichi to bakufu, July 27, 1863, BEASLEY, William G., *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868*, New York, Toronto 1955, p. 256; KEENE, p. 74.

³⁵ TNA, FO 46/35, Neale to Russel, June 24, 1863.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Archives du ministère des affaires étrangères (henceforth AMAE), Correspondance politique, Japon 9, Bellecourt to Drouyn de Lhuys, June 24, 1863.

*disastrous consequences which must arise to Japan by their determination thus conveyed through you to close the open Ports.*³⁹ He stressed, that the Japanese decision to abrogate the treaties unilaterally is an unparalleled step in the history of relations between “civilized or uncivilized nations” at that it can be considered as a declaration of war against all of the Treaty Powers.⁴⁰

This harsh and prompt reply by the British caused considerable concern in Edo. Although some of the officials favoured the expulsion, others, like the guardian of the shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (also known as Hitotsubashi Keiki), were strongly opposed to the idea of the open confrontation with the foreigners. The inevitable defeat in such a struggle would mean a fatal blow to the shattered prestige of the bakufu. Thus, they either favoured the abandonment of the expulsion policy or wanted to promote only the “verbal jōi” to appease the Imperial Court and, on the other hand, play for time in negotiation with the foreigners. After a heated debate, the decision was made that the closing of Yokohama and other Treaty Ports must be postponed, while the bakufu officials were to be sent to Kyōto to ascertain the situation there and explain to the Emperor the impossibility to proceed with the expulsion order.⁴¹ The situation in the capital was complicated with the proponents of the sonnō jōi movement in power and the rise of the Chōshū Domain, which aspired to control the Imperial Court.⁴² To appease these radical elements, the shogunate, therefore, issued an order to the daimyo to forcefully drive the foreigners away “*if they should attack.*”⁴³ This was deemed as a compromise by the proponents of “verbal jōi,” who formally wanted to show the willingness to drive the “barbarians” away.

On the other hand, the bakufu realized that this was impossible under current circumstances and did not want to start an open conflict. However, the radicals at the Court interpreted the sending of the note to the representatives of the Powers and the shogunate’s orders as a start of the expulsion. They were ready to act to prove their loyalty to the Emperor.⁴⁴ Especially Chōshū demonstrated its preparedness to challenge the foreigners. Its daimyo moved from his coastal residence in Hagi to more protected Yamaguchi. The domain amassed one thousand men to fortify the Shimonoseki Strait and to build coastal batteries in this area, which was vital for foreign shipping. As soon as the official order to expel the foreigners was issued, the leaders of the domain decided for

³⁹ TNA, FO 46/35, Neale to Ogasawara, June 24, 1863.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ TOTMAN, Conrad, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868*, Honolulu 1980, pp. 85–86.

⁴² Ibid., p. 84.

⁴³ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 236.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 236–237.

action.⁴⁵ The result was SS *Pembroke's* shelling, which was the start of the serious diplomatic and military incident between Japan and the West.

The news of the attack caused considerable concern among the representatives of the Great Powers. It came only several days after Ogasawara handed them the Imperial decision to close the ports. However, the American ambassador was assured that only the Chōshū Domain was solely responsible for initiating the attack in its misguided belief that it was following the Imperial order. The bakufu denied any responsibility for this act of violence and simultaneously declared that it could not force Chōshū into submission.⁴⁶ In other words, its policy was similar to the solution of the Namamugi Incident – to give the foreigners a free hand to deal with the dissenting fiefs themselves in the hope that this will weaken the jōi faction and help the shogunate to reassert its domestic power.

However, the attack on SS *Pembroke* was not an isolated incident of this sort in the Shimonoseki Strait. A French steamer *Kieanchang* heading from Yokohama to Shanghai was damaged by the Chōshū batteries on 8 July 1863.⁴⁷ Only three days later, the Chōshū ships and batteries fired at a Dutch corvette *Medusa* (a military vessel of 16 guns). The Dutch consul who was aboard was aware of the previous attacks but presuming that his country had a long-standing friendship with Japan, he thought that the passage through Shimonoseki was safe. Despite flying the Dutch flag, the ship was hit thirty-one times with the most damage to its mainmast and funnel. Its captain François de Casembroot ordered to return the fire and under full steam escaped with four dead and five wounded on the deck.⁴⁸ The information about this serious incident reached Yokohama two days later and caused an uproar among the foreign community. However, the British were kept busy by the preparation for their naval expedition against Satsuma as a reprisal for the Namamugi Incident and therefore were not prepared to act by force. For the time being, the British minister had to limit his activity to

⁴⁵ CRAIG, Albert M., *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford 2000, p. 200.

⁴⁶ YAH, General Records of the Department of State (R.G.59)-Diplomatic Despatches Japan (N.A.M.133), Ca4 01.4 19, Pruyn to Seward, July 24, 1863.

⁴⁷ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 9, Bellecourt to Drouyn de Lhuys, July 12, 1863; LAROCHE, Frédéric, *Bakumatsu la fin des Shogun. Le temps des orages et des passions au Japon de 1853 à 1878*, Paris 2018, p. 297; MEDZINI, *French Policy in Japan During the Closing Years of the Tokugawa Regime*, Cambridge 1971, p. 45; some sources claim that the event occurred on June 28, but this is clearly mistaken according to the archival sources – DENNEY, p. 153.

⁴⁸ DENNEY, p. 153; HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 237–238; <http://www.navyandmarine.org/ondeck/1863shimonoseki.htm> [10. 1. 2021].

issue a warning against using the straits by British ships.⁴⁹ It was up to the affected powers to cope with the situation by themselves.

The first to react was the American consul Robert H. Pruyn who issued a protest to the Japanese government and demanded a reparation of 10,000 dollars be paid as an indemnity. The Japanese played for time, but the American minister was in favour of military action in order to preserve the American honour and prevent other similar actions (the information about the attacks on the French and Dutch ships arrived only after this decision was made). Pruyn, therefore, decided to send a screw sloop *USS Wyoming* to the Shimonoseki Straits with an order to capture the enemy ships and bombard the shore batteries. He was so keen to deal with this offense against U.S. colours personally that he even considered to lead the expedition himself. But due to his poor health at the time, he had to reconsider this idea.⁵⁰ Therefore, the ship left for Shimonoseki under the command of Commander David McDougal on 13 July 1863. *USS Wyoming* came near the Shimonoseki Strait only two days later, receiving information on the other attacks during its voyage. McDougal was lucky that the Chōshū positions were severely weakened in the previous days. One of the strongest proponents of the expulsion policy at the Imperial Court, Anegakōji Kintomo, was assassinated on 5 July, and several of the domain's best and most experienced officers left for Kyōto to save Chōshū's position there. The batteries at Shimonoseki were therefore left without their best leaders.⁵¹

On the morning of 16 July, *USS Wyoming* entered the straits and, by a bold manoeuvre using the channel's uncharted part, came close to the Chōshū ships. An intense fight started shortly before 11 AM. During a close-quarter gunnery duel, the Americans were able to sink the brig *Lanrick* (renamed by the Japanese as *Kosei*) and an armed steamer *Lancefield* (*Koshin*). The bark *Daniel Webster* was severely damaged as well as some of the batteries and the houses near the shore.⁵² During the fighting, the American ship was hit eleven times by the enemy (the most dangerous moment came at the height of the battle when *Wyoming* ran aground in the unknown waters but was able to extricate itself). Four of its crew were killed, another seven wounded (one of them died after the battle).⁵³ Although it was only a minor encounter, the Americans scored a significant victory. Pruyn could inform the State Department that the expedition was successful in reducing the threat to foreign shipping and that he recommended

⁴⁹ TNA, FO 46/36, Neale to Russel, July 22, 1863.

⁵⁰ YAH, General Records of the Department of State (R.G.59)-Diplomatic Despatches Japan (N.A.M.133), Ca4 01.4 19, Pruyn to Seward, July 24, 1863.

⁵¹ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 242.

⁵² <http://www.navyandmarine.org/ondeck/1863shimonoseki.htm> [10. 1. 2021].

⁵³ DENNEY, p. 156.

McDougal was rewarded for his service.⁵⁴ But *Wyoming's* action was not the only immediate foreign response to the attacks in the Shimonoseki Strait.

The French minister to Japan, Prince de Bellecourt, was outraged by the attack on the steamer *Kieanchang* which arrived at Yokohama around the same time as the news of the *Medusa* incident. On 15 July, he, therefore, ordered a retaliation by French ships commanded by Admiral Benjamin Jaurès, who was prepared to sail on the same day in the afternoon.⁵⁵ He left Yokohama on the next day with his flagship – a screw frigate *Sémiramis* – and an aviso *Tancrède*. These ships arrived at Shimonoseki on 20 July and started to methodically bombard the Chōshū batteries. After that, around 250 French marines landed on the coast, met with only a sporadic defence by the samurai guarding the guns. Although they were proud warriors, most of the defenders fled, facing the enemy's superior firepower. The French troops were, therefore, able to easily capture the batteries and a nearby military camp. They tossed most of the guns to the sea, along with the stocks of gunpowder, shells, small firearms, and traditional Japanese weapons such as swords and spears.⁵⁶ The French occupied the batteries until 24 July, destroying other military instalments near Shimonoseki and burning the local village, which was abandoned by its terrified inhabitants. From the military point of view, the French action was a complete victory and a deep humiliation of the proponents of the expulsion policy in Chōshū.⁵⁷ On the other hand, it caused a serious problem for Bellecourt.

Two days before the French attack on Shimonoseki (18 July), the French minister of foreign affairs Édouard Drouyn de Lhuys sent a new set of instructions for Bellecourt concerning the Far Eastern policy. He stressed that France had to concentrate its interests on other problems than Asia and urged him not to commit France to any serious problems whenever necessary. In an overall stance, France should cooperate closely with Great Britain and conduct no important steps without previous agreement with the British. He also declined to send more military forces to Japan and warned against escalating any conflicts.⁵⁸ Bellecourt, therefore unconsciously acted directly against his orders from Paris, although he received them only in September. His ruthless act by sending French ships to Shimonoseki was, however, considered as an act of unnecessary aggression that could damage the French position in the Far East. Therefore, the ambassador tried to defend his decision by claiming that “*the*

⁵⁴ YAH, General Records of the Department of State (R.G.59)-Diplomatic Despatches Japan (N.A.M.133), Ca4 01.4 19, Pruyn to Seward, August 13, 1863.

⁵⁵ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 9, Jaurès to Bellecourt, July 12, 1863.

⁵⁶ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 9, Bellecourt to Drouyn de Lhuys, August 13, 1863; LAROCHE, p. 298.

⁵⁷ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 243.

⁵⁸ MEDZINI, pp. 46–47.

Japanese atrocities” against the foreigners grew out of any proportion and that only a decisive action could force the dissenting daimyo and the shogunate to respect their international obligations. He also stressed that he consulted his steps with the British ambassador Colonel Neale, who was not opposed to the French Expedition.⁵⁹ Although this explanation was accepted in Paris, it did not diminish the fury of Drouyn de Lhuys, who viewed Japan as a secondary theatre of French diplomatic activity in the Far East (compared to China) and did not want to involve France in local problems as much as possible. Although Bellecourt acted without prior knowledge of his new instructions, he was deemed too rash and inexperienced for his position. Shortly after the news of the expedition to Shimonoseki arrived, a decision was taken to replace Bellecourt by an experienced diplomat and long-standing consul general in Tunis Léon Roches, who was named to be the French minister to Japan on 7 October 1863.⁶⁰ Bellecourt remained to perform his duties in Yokohama until 27 April 1864, when Roches arrived and took over his responsibilities in Japan.⁶¹ The incidents at Shimonoseki had, therefore, a serious impact on French diplomacy in Japan, which changed considerably under the new and active leadership.

While these dramatic events unfolded, the British policy in Japan remained unchanged. Its primary goal in the summer of 1863 was to force Satsuma to pay the indemnity for the Namamugi Incident and to give up the culprits of Richardson’s murder. The commander of the British naval squadron in Japan, Sir Augustus Leopold Kuper, was preparing his expedition to Kagoshima to submit the defiant Satsuma daimyo and considered the actions by the Americans and French against Shimonoseki as sufficient. Nevertheless, he expressed his readiness in the case Chōshū continued its hostile actions against the foreigners.⁶² His superior, Colonel Neale, was of a similar opinion. He condemned the attacks on foreign shipping and sought it necessary to force the shogun’s government to deal with the dissenting daimyos. In this way, he linked Chōshū’s anti-foreign policy to Japan’s internal difficulties and the inability of the bakufu to deal with the situation.⁶³ On the other hand, he realized the consequences of the closure of the Shimonoseki Straits fort merchant shipping and was prepared to remove such a threat by force in cooperation with the other affected powers.⁶⁴ Together with the representatives of France, the United States, and the Netherlands, he, therefore, pressured the bakufu to ensure the safety of

⁵⁹ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 10, Bellecourt to Drouyn de Lhuys, October 23, 1863.

⁶⁰ LAROCHE, p. 299.

⁶¹ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 11, Roches to Drouyn de Lhuys, May 15, 1864.

⁶² TNA, FO 46/36, Kuper to Neale, July 23, 1863.

⁶³ TNA, FO 46/36, Neale to Kuper, July 27, 1863.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the passage through the Inland Sea (via Shimonoseki).⁶⁵ However, for the time being, the British could not act more actively because, in the mid of August, their fleet was engaged in the bombardment of Kagoshima, the possible action against Chōshū had to be therefore postponed.⁶⁶

Although it was soundly defeated in the previous engagements at Shimonoseki and its batteries were destroyed,⁶⁷ Chōshū's determination to adhere to its expulsion policy was indefatigable. The only reflections the proponents of the jōi policy made was the necessity to reform the domain's military forces according to the Western lines. A radical samurai Takasugi Shinsaku known for his Western learning and personal experience with the foreigners (he visited China and experienced the western superiority in fighting against the Taiping Rebellion), was charged with rebuilding Chōshū's military.⁶⁸ The radicals also sent a message to anyone who was helping the foreigners against the jōi policy. A head of a Japanese pilot in U.S. pay was found in a public lavatory on the Tokkaidō road near Kanagawa with a message: "*This is the head of a Pilot who went on the American Ship-of-war to Shimonoseki on the 13 July and fought against his own countrymen on the 16th of the same month. There are five more men at large who are to be served in the same fashion.*"⁶⁹ During the second half of 1863 and the first half of 1864, Chōshū reconstructed the batteries in the Shimonoseki Straits and even strengthened its position by seizing territory of the domain of Kokura on the southern side of the channel.⁷⁰ The interpreter at the British legation in Japan Ernest Mason Satow commented this development in his memoirs: "*The batteries had been destroyed, but as soon as the foreign men-of-war quitted the scene, the Chōshū men set to work to rebuild the forts, to construct others, and to mount all the guns they could bring together. So, the hornet's nest was after no long interval in good repair again, and more formidable for attack and defence than before. That no foreign vessels could take their way through the straits of Shimonoseki, [...] was felt to involve a diminution of western prestige.*"⁷¹ The question of the Shimonoseki Straits was therefore open and had to be dealt with.

⁶⁵ TNA, FO 46/36, Neale to Kuper, July 29, 1863.

⁶⁶ TNA, FO 46/36, Neale to Russel, August 26, 1863.

⁶⁷ The chronicle of Baba Bunyel which is very favorable to the cause of expulsion and its adherents describes the events a little bit differently claiming, that the Chōshū forces pushed the foreigners into the sea and forced them to retreat. This is a huge contradiction to the Western sources, which in this case are much more reliable than Baba's narrative. BABA, p. 97.

⁶⁸ CRAIG, p. 201.

⁶⁹ DENNEY, p. 157.

⁷⁰ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 289.

⁷¹ SATOW, Ernest Mason, *A Diplomat in Japan. The Inner History of the Critical Years in the Evolution of Japan When the Ports Were Opened and the Monarchy Restored*, Berkeley 2006, p. 92.

The British were aware of the growing threat of the daimyos, who adopted the expulsion policy. Therefore, Colonel Neale took active steps to make the procurement of modern arms by the hostile domains as difficult as possible. Because of that, he restricted the import of military equipment from Singapore and Hong Kong (territories under direct British control). He was nevertheless aware that the traders could use the Chinese ports such as Shanghai or Ningbo to sell arms to Japan, and he tried to arise his government's awareness of this problem.⁷² The unrestricted selling of arms to Japan could only escalate the country's internal situation and contribute to the looming civil war, which Neale predicted was going to erupt. This would have a negative impact on British trade interests in the country.⁷³ The other serious issue was the question of the Imperial edict ordering the shogunate to enforce the expulsion of the foreigners. Although the bakufu did not proceed with this policy, the fact that there were powerful forces inside Japan questioning the validity of the treaties with the West was a serious peril for Britain's position in Japan.⁷⁴ The xenophobic movement's strength was demonstrated again in October when a French lieutenant was killed near the Tokkaidō road by discontent samurai.⁷⁵ Inevitably, the British policy's goal was to defeat the forces opposed to the treaty system and secure British rights in Japan.⁷⁶

As for the situation in Japan, Neale sent gloomier and gloomier reports to London: *"To revert to the actual situation of affairs in this country, I may state that nothing short of a revolution, actual warfare, and strife between the Tycoon [shogun], Mikado [Emperor] and the rival daimyo can surpass the intrigues, troubles, and disorders which actually prevail."*⁷⁷ In this complicated situation, he adopted a cautious and somewhat hesitant attitude. This could be caused by the fact that he was aware that he was only a temporary replacement for the consul general in Japan, Sir Rutherford Alcock, who was only on his leave from Japan and was deemed to return in the spring of 1864. Neale, therefore, did not want to take steps that would complicate the British position. As for Alcock, he was preparing for his return to Japan since summer 1863 and was planning a much more active policy in the face of the difficult situation in the country.⁷⁸ In his memorandum to

⁷² TNA, FO 46/37, Neale to Russel, September 29, 1863.

⁷³ Neale was particularly concerned about the disruption of trade by shishi samurai, who were attacking Japanese traders dealing with the Westerners. TNA, FO 46/37, Neale to Russel, September 30, 1863.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 46/37, Neale to Russel, October 14, 1863; AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 10, Bellecourt to Drouyn de Lhuys, October 14, 1863.

⁷⁶ FOX, Grace, *Britain and Japan, 1858–1883*, Oxford 1969, pp. 122–123.

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 46/37, Neale to Russel, October 31, 1863.

⁷⁸ TNA, FO 46/37, Memorandum on Japanese Affairs, November 5, 1863.

Foreign Secretary Russel, he expressed the opinion that Japan is a potentially friendly country and that it is only a small minority of radical daimyos, samurai, and court officials who are opposed to the presence of the foreigners. The defeat of these forces was necessary to ensure the treaty system and open more trade ports in Japan. Therefore, he was prepared to support the bakufu, in this case, providing it will show goodwill towards the Western powers. As for the Chōshū question, he was prepared to take independent action if its anti-foreign sentiments and armaments in the Shimonoseki Straits prevail.⁷⁹

Alcock arrived in Japan on 2 March 1864. The situation was even more difficult than he has perceived. The shogun and his councillors were in Kyoto at that time, confirming that they were prepared to continue with the expulsion policy.⁸⁰ Japan's military leader was for a month under constant pressure from the Court, influenced by the adherents of sonnō jōi. The Emperor himself reminded him that he should concentrate to *“fulfill the ‘barbarian-subduing’ [the translation of the term shogun is “the barbarian subduing generalissimo”] duties of your office.”*⁸¹ The shogunate's consent to these propositions can be considered as a political manoeuvre to gain time and strengthen its position in the capital city, which it was able to achieve during spring and the beginning of summer 1864.⁸² These events, however, remained obscured to Alcock. After assessing the complicated and unclear situation on the spot, he started to run out of his patience. In his opinion, the Great Powers' policy in the recent years was of *“conciliation and concession despite great provocations and long series of political murders and acts of violence from which the Legations in Yedo were by no means exempt.”*⁸³ Because of that, he was convinced that only a joint action of the Great Powers and a policy of no new concessions could hinder more significant conflict and secure the adherence of the Japanese to the treaty system.⁸⁴ As for the Shimonoseki Straits situation, he considered it intolerable and was prepared for a decisive action.⁸⁵ Therefore, Alcock's return can be considered as a critical turning point in the British position towards the Shimonoseki question.

In April Alcock concluded, that only little can be achieved by diplomatic means, and only a decisive action can restore the prestige of the Great Powers and force the Japanese to respect the treaty system.⁸⁶ This conviction only

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ FOX, p. 127.

⁸¹ Emperor Kōmei to shogun Iemochi, February 28, 1864, BEASLEY, William G., *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868*, New York, Toronto 1955, p. 264.

⁸² TOTMAN, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868*, p. 107.

⁸³ TNA, FO 46/43, Alcock to Russel, March 31, 1864.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ TNA, FO 46/44, Alcock to Russel, April 14, 1864.

strengthened when he found out about the proceedings in Kyōto and the bakufu's vow to fulfil the expulsion policy.⁸⁷ The situation was so bad that he claimed that it is only the British naval squadron's power at the coast of Japan, "*which could at any moment inflict terrible reprisals,*" that hinders the bakufu from moving against the foreign community.⁸⁸ The bakufu tried to appease the British by insuring them that they will adhere to the promise to reopen the Inland Sea to foreign vessels, which it made in July 1863. Still, Alcock did not believe this statement's sincerity and doubted that the shogunate has enough power to enforce such a thing.⁸⁹ He was inclined to demonstrate the Great Powers' resolution by a military action, which would secure safe passage through the Shimonoseki Straits and weaken the jōi faction in Japan.⁹⁰ The concentration on this limited objective was caused by his effort to avoid a broader conflict with Japan. The successful action against Chōshū would provide a proof of "*utter futility of their [Japanese] most formidable preparations either for attack or defence*" and remove the threat to merchant shipping once and for all.⁹¹

Alcock, however, did not want to act unilaterally but in the agreement with other powers. The action against Chōshū should be an international one, to demonstrate the unity of the Great Powers.⁹² In securing the cooperation of the other nations involved in the problem, Alcock encountered no serious trouble. On the contrary. The representatives of France, the United States, and the Netherlands viewed the situation very similarly. American consul general Pruyn demonstrated his preparedness to support the British policy on 13 May. The French minister Roches followed only several days later, explaining to Paris that only a joint military expedition can force Chōshū into submission.⁹³ Thus the bakufu's obstruction and ambivalent policy and Chōshū's belligerence helped to create a broad accord among the Western Powers.

At that time, Chōshū was deeply involved in the Kyōto politics planning to take over the capital in order to force the Court to enforce the expulsion policy. But the domain's position deteriorated rapidly since the summer of 1863. The assassination of Anegakōji was the first sign of the declining fortunes in the capital city. During the autumn, the domain's reputation was harmed when its soldiers had sunk a bakufu steamship Nagasaki-maru, which its representatives claimed to be mistaken as a foreign vessel.⁹⁴ This step alienated others up until

⁸⁷ TNA, FO 46/44, Alcock to Russel, May 13, 1864.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 46/44, Alcock to Russel, May 21, 1864.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ FOX, p. 129.

⁹² TNA, FO 46/44, Alcock to Russel, May 21, 1864.

⁹³ AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 11, Roches to Drouyn de Lhuys, May 19, 1864.

⁹⁴ CRAIG, p. 219.

then neutral domains against Chōshū. What was more important was the fact that at the end of September 1863, the domain's forces were expelled from Kyōto. Since then, the capital city was dominated by the units of the Aizu and Satsuma clans, which at that time were supporting the bakufu's moderate policy.⁹⁵ This led the extremists in Chōshū, together with several radical court nobles, to press the domain's government to mount a military expedition to the capital to reassert their lost political position.⁹⁶ The simultaneous possibility of war with the Great Powers was the last thing the radicals wanted to happen when their attention was focused on Kyōto. This opinion was supported by the return of several Chōshū young samurai, who secretly left Japan for Britain in the summer of the last year. Among them were Itō Hirobumi (in that time called Shinsuke) and Inoue Monta. They were previously adherents of the shishi and went abroad to gain intelligence on the foreigners to find a way to defeat them. Their personal experience with the West was, however, eye-opening. Soon they realized that there was absolutely no chance that Japan can stand against the military and economic might of the Great Powers. As soon as they learned about the planned British expedition against Chōshū, they rushed back home to convince the domain's authorities to avoid a possible conflict.⁹⁷

Thus, while Alcock was preparing for military action in cooperation with Admiral Kuper and the commander of units of the 20th Regiment (which arrived from China) Colonel Brown,⁹⁸ the Chōshū leadership started to seek a way out of the direct conflict with the foreigners. Itō even travelled to Yokohama in an attempt to appease the British. But to Alcock's dismay, he only brought with him a plea from the daimyo of Chōshū Mōri Takachika to postpone the attack so that he had time to convince the Emperor about the impossibility of the expulsion policy.⁹⁹ This was viewed as only an effort to gain time by Chōshū and an unsatisfactory answer to the letter Alcock sent to the domain's leadership several days before in which he demanded the adherence of the treaty system and opening the Inland Sea for free shipping.¹⁰⁰ In his discussion with his French, American, and Dutch colleagues, Alcock demonstrated his determination to take "*decisive steps to maintain the Treaty rights.*"¹⁰¹ The situation could not be solved in another way than by a demonstration of force.¹⁰² With that in mind, he sent Admiral Kuper a set of detailed instructions and ordered him to prepare for

⁹⁵ AKAMATSU, p. 171.

⁹⁶ CRAIG, p. 226.

⁹⁷ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 294.

⁹⁸ TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Russel, July 12, 1864.

⁹⁹ FOX, p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 132–134.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Russel, July 22, 1864.

¹⁰² TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Browne, July 23, 1864.

action. The planned expedition aimed to destroy the enemy batteries and secure such conditions that would hinder their construction in the future and thus open a safe passage for commercial vessels through the Straits of Shimonoseki. To achieve this, Alcock expected that temporary occupation of the coast and stationing of the part of the fleet near Shimonoseki would be necessary.¹⁰³

The expedition's planned commencement was postponed several times during the summer due to the pleas from the bakufu to put off the expedition and its promises to deal with the situation domestically. The state of affairs became even more complicated when two bakufu's envoys returned from France, where they were trying to convince the French to agree with the closing of Yokohama. When they found out that something like that was out of the question, they promised to secure the opening of the Shimonoseki Straits.¹⁰⁴ However, this effort proved useless because the Edo government did not agree with the French demand of reparations of 35,000 dollars,¹⁰⁵ so as soon as the ambassadors returned from Paris, the Convention they concluded with the French was annulled.¹⁰⁶ When Alcock received another memorandum from the bakufu, asking for time to make a final decision on the question of Shimonoseki,¹⁰⁷ his patience was exhausted. He concluded that further negotiations are only a waste of time and that the moment of decisive action has come.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, it was already too late for further discussions because the allied fleet was already at sea heading for Shimonoseki.

The force sailing to Chōshū was really impressive. It consisted of nine British ships (headed by Kuper, who was in overall command on the deck of the frigate *Euryalus*), five Dutch, three French, and one American men-of-war. Additionally, to 3,000 sailors aboard, the fleet also carried 2,000 mainly British soldiers with all necessary equipment.¹⁰⁹ The fleet arrived near Shimonoseki on 4 September and in the morning of that day proceeded towards the Straits formed in three columns: *"It was a beautiful show as the allied squadrons steamed in the consciousness of irresistible strength calmly across the unruffled surface of this inland sea, which*

¹⁰³ TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Kuper, August 16, 1864.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Russel, August 19, 1864; AMAE, Correspondance politique, Japon 12, Roches to Drouyn de Lhuys, August 17, 1864; FOX, p. 135; The Paris Convention, June 20, 1864, BEASLEY, William G., *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868*, New York, Toronto 1955, pp. 273–274.

¹⁰⁵ Ikeda Nagaaki, Kawazu Sukekuni, and Kawada Hiroshi to bakufu, August 18, 1864, BEASLEY, William G., *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868*, New York, Toronto 1955, p. 275.

¹⁰⁶ FOX, p. 135.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO 46/45, bakufu to Alcock, August 21, 1864.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, FO 46/45, Alcock to Russel, August 25, 1864.

¹⁰⁹ DENNEY, p. 255; SATOW, p. 100.

lay before us like a glassy mirror in its framework of blue hills.”¹¹⁰ At this last moment, when everything was ready for action, Chōshū finally came to a conclusion that direct conflict must be averted, and the domain authorities sent one of the returnees from Britain, Inoue Kaoru, to negotiate with the foreigners.¹¹¹ They had a good reason for this. On 20 August 1864, the Chōshū forces unsuccessfully tried to attack and gain control of the Imperial Palace in Kyōto. However, this effort was soundly defeated by the bakufu forces joined by Aizu, Satsuma, and other domains.¹¹² The position of Chōshū on the home scene collapsed. By attacking the sacred seat of the Emperor, the domain was labelled as a traitor to the Court¹¹³ and found itself completely isolated and abandoned by most of its allies. The confrontation with the foreigners would be disastrous under such circumstances.

Inoue, therefore, tried to convince the British that “Chōshū had fired on the foreign ships in the previous year in obeisance to an Imperial command and Bakufu orders, the letter [handed by Inoue] promised that in the future foreign ships would have unimpeded passage through the strait.”¹¹⁴ But for Kuper and his fleet it was late to negotiate, and the Chōshū’s pledge did not seem credible enough. Satow could only inform Inoue, that “the time for a peaceable agreement had passed.”¹¹⁵ On 5 September, the allied fleet started to methodically bombard the Chōshū batteries. They utilized the fact that their guns had a longer range than those of the enemy, and from a relatively safe distance, systematically destroyed Chōshū positions sailing up and down the straits. The bombardment continued on 6 September with considerable results. The allied gunners silenced most of the enemy fire and prepared ideal conditions to launch the landing parties to the coast.¹¹⁶ In the afternoon, 1,900 soldiers landed at Shimonoseki (1,350 British, 350 French, and 200 Dutch) and started to dismantle the enemy’s batteries and destroy their guns and supplies.¹¹⁷ At first, they were met with little opposition – the defenders retreated inland in order to shelter themselves against the bombardment. After they recovered from the initial shock, they counterattacked but were driven by the fire of the small arms of British marines. Their forces were, however, exhausted by 8 September, so they sued for the

¹¹⁰ SATOW, p. 101.

¹¹¹ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 295.

¹¹² CRAIG, pp. 228–230; BABA, pp. 166–186; WALTHALL, Anne, STEELE, William M., *Politics and Society in Japan’s Meiji Restoration. A Brief History with Documents*, Boston, New York 2017, pp. 99–104.

¹¹³ BABA, p. 188.

¹¹⁴ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 295.

¹¹⁵ SATOW, p. 104.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106; DENNEY, p. 256.

¹¹⁷ SATOW, p. 106.

armistice. Kuper sanctioned this, but the Western soldiers remained ashore, dismantling the batteries and other military facilities for more than two days. The allies suffered eight killed and 48 wounded casualties, two ships were slightly damaged (three soldiers were awarded Victoria Cross for bravery in this action).¹¹⁸ On the other side, the human cost of Chōshū must have been much higher, although the sources did not provide credible numbers. What was more important than this fact was that all of its forts were utterly destroyed and eliminated as a threat for foreign shipping at a minimal cost. The jubilant Alcock could report to London that “the allied squadrons in the Straits of Shimonoseki achieved a great triumph.”¹¹⁹

As soon as the scale of the defeat was clear, the leader of Chōshū’s military, Takasugi Shinsaku, accompanied by two other officials and Itō Hirobumi as an interpreter, rushed to the scene to negotiate a settlement with the foreigners.¹²⁰ They carried documents providing information and proof that Chōshū acted on the orders from the Imperial Court and the bakufu.¹²¹ This greatly unsettled Kuper, who viewed this as an example of bakufu’s ambiguousness and treachery. But the British admiral took this in no case as an excuse for the acts of the Chōshū Domain and refused to be content only with verbal assurances, that the forts will not be reconstructed, and no harm would be made to the ships passing Shimonoseki.¹²² Chōshū had to be neutralized as a future threat, and the new conditions had to be based on a treaty concluded with its representatives.¹²³ In the face of the allied military superiority and its defeat, Takasugi could not change any of the conditions that Kuper put forward. On 14 September, he signed a peace treaty designed on three essential points: “1st that all ships henceforth shall freely navigate the Straits be treated in a friendly manner and allowed if necessary, to coal and purchase provisions; 2nd that the batteries shall not be repaired or rearmed, and no new ones built; 3rd that a ransom shall be paid for the town of Shimonoseki which has been spared, although it fired upon the ships and therefore might have been destroyed. He further engaged to pay the whole expanses of the expedition; agreeing to abide by the decision of the Foreign Ministers at Yedo, with regard to those two points.”¹²⁴

The only questions that remain to be solved were to force bakufu to sanction this agreement and set the size of the demanded indemnity on the conference of the Great Powers’ representatives. It was decided that bakufu

¹¹⁸ DENNEY, pp. 256–269; TNA, FO 46/46, Kuper to Alcock, September 12, 1864.

¹¹⁹ TNA, FO 46/46, Alcock to Russel, September 28, 1864.

¹²⁰ CRAIG, p. 233.

¹²¹ TNA, FO 46/46, Kuper to Alcock, September 12, 1864.

¹²² TNA, FO 46/46, Kuper to Alcock, September 14, 1864.

¹²³ TNA, FO 46/46, Kuper to Alcock, September 17, 1864.

¹²⁴ TNA, FO 46/46, Alcock to Russel, September 28, 1864.

should guarantee the free passage through the Inland Sea and the payment of an indemnity of 3 million dollars by Chōshū or agree to the opening of Shimonoseki to the foreign trade.¹²⁵ Because the shogunate had to deal with Chōshū internally and did not want to provide it an opportunity to enrich itself through foreign trade, it opted for the second option. However, it was aware that the indemnity cost would have to be paid from its own treasury.¹²⁶ Even though Alcock was quite sceptical about bakufu's sincerity,¹²⁷ the final agreement was signed on 22 October with the specification that the indemnity will be paid quarterly in six instalments of 500,000 dollars.¹²⁸ The Shimonoseki Incident, which lasted for more than a year, was finally settled.

However, this agreement did not mean that all of the problems the Great Powers challenged in Japan were settled. The main question of the ratification of the treaties concluded at the end of the 50s by the Emperor remained open, but a major step was undertaken to defeat the jōi party in Japan. Its position was severely undermined by the victorious British campaign against Satsuma, the defeat of the Chōshū forces in Kyōto, and finally by the disaster at Shimonoseki. Even the staunchest adherents of the expulsion policy in Chōshū had to reassess their position towards the idea of jōi (especially in the time when bakufu was preparing a military expedition to chastise Chōshū for its previous actions). In the coming month, the domain leaders decided to abandon the case of jōi in favour of a new political idea of *tobaku* (overthrow of bakufu).¹²⁹ Their new policy became one of modernization and unification in order to come to equal terms with the foreigners. Of course, the idea of jōi was not forgotten but was abandoned by its staunchest proponents, and it gradually lost its importance.

As for the British, the Shimonoseki Incident meant a critical turning point in their relations with Japan. They were able to secure their trade position in the country and were on their way to get the final recognition of the treaty system. What was, however, more important was the changing attitude of the British towards the bakufu. While in the summer of 1863, they were prepared to support the shogunate against its enemies who embraced the idea of expulsion, the events of 1864 showed quite clearly, that the bakufu played a double game in the case of the Imperial edict to expulse the foreigners.¹³⁰ Thus, the shogunate discredited itself in the British eyes, especially when its inability to control the country was demonstrated quite clearly. For the first time, Alcock started to question the

¹²⁵ TNA, FO 46/46, The Minutes of the Conference of the Representatives of the Treaty Powers, September 27, 1864.

¹²⁶ HILLSBOROUGH, *Samurai Revolution*, p. 298.

¹²⁷ TNA, FO 46/46, Alcock to Russel, October 5, 1864.

¹²⁸ TNA, FO 46/46, Alcock to Russel, October 28, 1864; FOX, p. 143.

¹²⁹ CRAIG, p. 235.

¹³⁰ TNA, FO 46/46, Alcock to Russel, October 15, 1864.

bakufu as a partner representing the whole country and started to entertain the idea to reach directly to the Imperial Court, which seemed to enjoy greater prestige than the antiquated military regime, whose unreliability was demonstrated by recent events.¹³¹ The roots of later British support to the forces standing behind the Meiji Restoration of 1868 can be traced precisely to this time. Therefore, the Shimonoseki Incident played a vital role in the future, shaping not only the British policy but the history of the Japanese Islands as a whole.



¹³¹ Ibid.