

## ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY PLOT AGAINST SAIONJI KINMOCHI'S SECOND CABINET

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### Overview

Saionji Kinmochi tendered resignation of his government to Emperor Taishō on December 5, 1912, amidst the most severe constitutional crisis up to that date. The peculiar feature about this particular cabinet collapse was that it occurred as a consequence of an intrigue, orchestrated by a group of high-ranked officers convinced that under Saionji's leadership the army's interests were not adequately served. The primary reason behind this plot was to secure the prime ministerial post for General Terauchi Masatake. Admittedly, the conspirators managed to force Saionji and his ministers to resign *en masse*, but the main goal of the plot remained unfulfilled. The fall of the government sparked a political upheaval, nowadays remembered for two cabinet changes within merely two months, and mass protests against Saionji's successor, Katsura Tarō, that quickly spread nationwide and prompted Katsura's resignation during the events referred to as the "Taisho Political Crisis," or *Taishō Seihen* in Japanese.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of previous studies covered the problem of the Taisho Political Crisis during the span of the last five decades. These include: Yamamoto Shirō, *Taishō Seihen no kisoteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1970), Banno Junji, *Taishō seihen–1900 nen Taisei no hōkai* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 1994), Sakurai Ryōju, *Taishō seiji shi no shuppatsu–Rikken Dōshikai no seiritsu to sono shūhen* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1997), Stewart Lone, *Army, Empire and Politics in Meiji Japan: The Three Careers of General Katsura Tarō* (London: Macmillan, 2000), and Kobayashi Michihiko, *Katsura Tarō–yo ga seimei ha seiji de aru* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2006). The frequent practice in describing the origins of the crisis was to concentrate on the military's power to influence the composition of the government, set up by the requirement that only an active military officer in the top two ranks could serve as army or navy minister. This limitation was formally introduced by the Yamagata Aritomo's administration in May 1900, but rather than establishing a

Focused specifically on the plot against Saionji and his cabinet, this article reexamines numerous sources pertaining to the event to give a possibly detailed description of the conspiracy, and the political mechanisms its participants tried to employ to achieve their goal. It particularly highlights discrepancies between information given in different sources, which show how the strategy to bring down the government evolved, and how misinformation was used in the conspirators' favor. Increased attention is given to factors behind the failure of the plan to replace Saionji with Terauchi as prime minister, providing an insight on the political process in pre-World War I Japan. This helped to demonstrate that in the early twentieth century, the oligarchs, who wielded power in the country throughout the Meiji period, still constituted the center of Japanese politics, despite pressure from the political parties on one side, and the military on the other.

#### **Japan at the Turn of Taishō**

When the Taishō period started in July 1912, the ruling class of bureaucrats – as a dominant political force in Japan with strong ties to the military – had divided according to their place of origin into domain cliques.<sup>2</sup> Out of the four leading domains of Chōshū, Satsuma, Tosa, and

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completely new procedure, it simply formalized the existing custom, rooted deeply in the politics of Meiji Japan, that had been in use since the formation of the first Japanese cabinet led by Itō Hirobumi. This requirement allegedly gave the army and the navy a serious advantage in their clashes with the civil government, as it equipped them with power to topple cabinets by withdrawing their ministers and hinder the formation of any new government by refusing to supply their candidate.

<sup>2</sup> This new ruling class consisting mostly of former *samurai*, that emerged during the early Meiji period and led Japan through the process of modernization and westernization throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, is known as “Meiji oligarchy,” though in Japan the more direct term “domain cliques” is preferred and commonly used. The divisions into the domain cliques existed among the top-rank bureaucrats, as well as military officers. Many of them, including important dignitaries like Yamagata Aritomo, Katsura Tarō, and Ōyama Iwao, had military background, but their careers in the army or the navy were followed by years of civil service as elite bureaucrats. Thus, it can be said that the “Meiji

Hizen that had become a driving force in the country forty years earlier at the dawn of the Meiji period, the first two in particular had succeeded in establishing themselves at the forefront of Japanese politics. They also secured their leading positions in the army and the navy respectively, although this correlation often exceeded the domain boundaries with some prominent army officers hailing from Satsuma, and vice versa.

At the moment of transition between the Meiji and Taisho eras, it was the Chōshū clique that seemed at the height of their powers. Their leader was Field Marshal Prince Yamagata Aritomo, one of the pivotal figures in Japan's military and political modernization, who served as prime minister twice. In 1912, Yamagata was president of the Privy Council, an advisory body to the Throne. He was also the most powerful among the informal, yet very influential group of elder statesmen known as *genrō*, constituting the *de facto* highest echelon of Japanese politics.

When Emperor Taishō succeeded the Throne, the number of *genrō* consisted of five, three of which were from Chōshū.<sup>3</sup> Apart from Yamagata,

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oligarchy” constituted a complicated network of intra-faction rivalries and reciprocal interdependencies between the bureaucrats, the army, and the navy.

<sup>3</sup> The *genrō* were a small group of powerful statesmen within the oligarchy who served as advisers to the Throne on the most paramount matters of state, particularly responsible for recommending to the emperor prime minister candidates, which in effect gave them power to select them. Since the title is unofficial and not mentioned in the constitution or any other law, scholars may give different number of *genrō*, the moot point being whether Katsura Tarō should be viewed as one. Out of the first seven *genrō*, namely Itō Hirobumi, Kuroda Kiyotaka, Ōyama Iwao, Inoue Kaoru, Saigō Tsugumichi, Matsukata Masayoshi, and Yamagata Aritomo, only four (Ōyama, Inoue, Matsukata, and Yamagata) were still alive in 1912. The above seven, together with Saionji Kinmochi who joined in at the end of 1912, after his resignation as prime minister, raise no doubts among historians whether they should be counted as *genrō*. Fukumoto Gentarō and Murai Ryōta note there are views that Katsura, or even Ōkuma Shigenobu, should be added to that list. See Fukumoto Gentarō and Murai Ryōta, “Senzen Nihon no naikaku ha sonzoku suru tame ni dare no shiji ga hitsuyō to shita ka—Gikai, gunbu, kakuryō, shushō ninteisha,” *Gakushūin Daigaku Hōgakukai zasshi*, 47/1 (2011), 78. Opinions of other historians on that

there was Marquis Inoue Kaoru and General Prince Katsura Tarō. Marquis Inoue Kaoru is the former minister of agriculture and commerce, home minister, and finance minister, also remembered as Japan's first minister of foreign affairs; General Prince Katsura Tarō, widely considered the "number two" of both the Chōshū domain and the army, whose political career, like in the case of Yamagata, included two terms as prime minister. Satsuma was represented by Marquis Matsukata Masayoshi, who also had been named prime minister twice, but was known, first of all, as a long-time finance minister, and Field Marshal Prince Ōyama Iwao, leader of the Satsuma faction in the army, former army minister in several cabinets, and former Chief of the Army General Staff.

Among the front-page politicians was also Marquis Saionji Kinmochi, a member of the court nobility, prime minister and president of the *Rikken Seiyūkai* (*Constitutional Association of Political Friendship*, often abbreviated to *Seiyūkai*), the most successful political party in Japan through the first four decades of the twentieth century. Since its inception in 1900, the *Seiyūkai* quickly came into prominence as one of the main political powers, and Saionji held office from 1906 until 1908, and again from 1911, in both cases succeeding Katsura Tarō. The party also cooperated with the government during Katsura's second administration, which allowed them to influence Japanese politics of three consecutive cabinets. The *Seiyūkai* contributed to the political scene with some notable figures, including Matsuda Masahisa, minister of justice, and Hara Takashi, home minister, famous as the first commoner to be named prime minister six years later, in 1918. The party had the largest representation in the Lower House of the Diet, and even bolstered its position in the election of May 1912, winning the majority of seats. Thus, Saionji's government may be described as "partisan" or "semi-partisan," in contrast to previous bureaucratic, or transcendental, cabinets.

Saionji's predecessor, Katsura Tarō, had a well-established position in political circles. His prime minister ship was notable due to the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, the victory over Russia in

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matter are divided. While Chiba Isao makes a clear statement Katsura was a *genrō*; see Chiba Isao, *Katsura Tarō—soto ni teikokushugi, uchi ni rikken shugi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2012), 178. Itō Yukio claims he was not; see Itō Yukio, *Genrō—kindai Nihon no shidōsha tachi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2016), 113.

the war of 1904–05, and the annexation of Korea in 1910, with the events that elevated Japan to the position of East Asian superpower. Katsura was perceived as Yamagata's successor and a future Chōshū leader. However, at that time he seemed to have fallen from Yamagata's favor.<sup>4</sup>

Disunity between the two statesmen originated in Katsura's desire to create a completely new political platform centered around his own party, in opposition to both the *Seiyūkai* and Yamagata. These plans were publicly unknown when Katsura left for Europe in July 1912. The journey, planned as an opportunity to meet and exchange views with European statesmen and old acquaintances, was ended abruptly by reports about the grave illness of Emperor Meiji. A few days after reaching Saint Petersburg, Katsura and his entourage decided to head back to Japan but arrived in Tokyo already after the emperor's demise. The new monarch was of poor health, inexperienced and, unlike his predecessor, completely unfamiliar with military matters. Yamagata used the fact that the emperor needed a tutor, a politician experienced and influential but younger than Yamagata himself, and recommended Katsura, the most suitable choice, at the Imperial Court as Grand Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal, leaving him virtually no margin to protest.

The vacuum caused by Katsura's absence was soon filled in by General Viscount Terauchi Masatake, the first Governor-General of Korea and the "number three" in Chōshū, with an ambition to assume the mantle of leadership in the faction at a future time. Soon, he had an opportunity to make his first step. Before his appointment to the Court, Katsura was a patron of the *Jukkinkai* (literally: *Society of Ten Gold Coins*), an informal secret group of most important Chōshū bureaucrats within the House of Peers, including Yamagata's protégé Hirata Tōsuke, and a former minister in the Katsura administrations Ōura Kanetake. When the *Jukkinkai* convened to deliberate on Katsura's retirement from politics on August 19, 1912, they made Terauchi their new patron instead.<sup>5</sup>

This promotion within the Chōshū faction was believed to spur Terauchi's political advancement as well. The fact is, in political circles he became commonly considered the most probable candidate to replace

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lone, *Army, Empire and Politics*, 176–177, Sakurai, *Taishō seiji shi*, 168–70; and Kobayashi, *Katsura Tarō*, 263–64.

<sup>5</sup> Shōyū Kurabu, Hirose Yoshihiro, ed., *Den Kenjirō nikki* (hereafter *Den nikki*), vol. 2 (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō Shuppan, 2008), 197.

Saionji in case the *Seiyūkai* administration collapsed. Ozaki Yukio, a *Seiyūkai* politician and a member of the House of Representatives,<sup>6</sup> who played a pivotal role in the resignation of Katsura Tarō in 1913, described this outcry of opinions around Terauchi's candidature in his article published in *Taiyō* in September 1912:

These days, if you ask about the name of the successor in case developments regarding the political situation topple the current government, the vast majority of responses would certainly be "Count Terauchi." However, the reason behind these opinions is not Terauchi's career, nor his abilities, nor even his brilliance, but the mere fact he hails from the Chōshū faction. More than that, as the result of the victories in two great wars with China and Russia, soldiers are subliminally perceived by the public as men of great authority. It is this intangible powerful group that soldiers form, that made Count Terauchi what he is today. He owes his fame only to protection provided by the clique bureaucrats and support offered by the army.<sup>7</sup>

Critical of the *Seiyūkai's* rule, Terauchi was infuriated by an informal alliance between the *Seiyūkai* and the Satsuma faction within the navy and its new emerging leader, Admiral Count Yamamoto Gonbee, a former navy minister. Accordingly, the cabinet gave the navy favorable treatment in budget negotiations, which led to the rise of anti-*Seiyūkai* sentiments among a number of army officers. In order to ease the country's huge indebtedness, the government introduced a strict retrenchment policy and ordered each ministry to reduce their budgets. The only exception was made for the Navy Ministry, and large sums were allocated to purchase new vessels.

The battle over military budget escalated after completion of the imperial defense plan, developed in 1905–07. The plan, sketched over two years following the Russo-Japanese War, came up as a response to the

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<sup>6</sup> One of the central figures in the Movement to Protect Constitutional Government (*Kensei Yōgō Undō*) during the Taishō Political Crisis.

<sup>7</sup> Ozaki Yukio, "Risō jitsugen ha izure no hi," *Taiyō* 18/14 (1912), 231.

heavy losses the Japanese had suffered during the conflict, and was intended to rationalize and unify the country's overall defense strategy.<sup>8</sup>

The plan not only failed to resolve the differences between the army and the navy, but also deepened the division between them. The services reached no agreement concerning even the hypothetical enemy, with the army focused on Russia, and the navy on the United States. Consequently, they had their own separate strategies and financial plans and, with the central budget strained to its limit, were compelled to compete about their share of military funds.

The defense policy approved in April 1907 by Emperor Meiji set requirements for 25 standing army divisions on active duty, an increase by three. The plan also called upon the expansion of naval force to eight battleships and eight heavy cruisers in service by 1928. Due to Prime Minister Saionji's fierce resistance, caused by the lack of funds and a serious possibility of bankrupting the state, the promised number of new divisions was soon curtailed to two with the increase postponed by three years, and the commission of new vessels postponed by six years.

The formal annexation of Korea incited another strife between the cabinet and the army, with the army leaders pushing for the new divisions to augment their positions in the newly acquired territory, and the civilian government trying to limit their expenditures to keep the budget in check.<sup>9</sup> The decision of the second administration of Saionji to purchase the new vessels may have been necessary to maintain Japan's defensive ability.

After the commission of HMS Dreadnought in 1906 sparked a global arms race in battleship building, the Japanese fleet found itself

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<sup>8</sup> As Stuart Lone suggests, many army officers, including Yamagata Aritomo, aware that although victorious, the wars with China (1894–95) and Russia (1904–05) exposed a number of weaknesses and limitations of the Japanese army, causing them to be gripped by fear of possible revenge wars with either of the continental powers. These fears were exacerbated after the annexation of Korea that imposed on the army the obligation to defend the new colony. Realizing that the army expansion would drown Japan in a mountain of debt, Yamagata nonetheless lobbied for more troops year after year, completely ignoring the fiscal condition of the state. Lone, *Army, Empire and Politics*, 185–186.

<sup>9</sup> Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 125–130.

obsolete and in dire need of modernization. Nonetheless, the army felt compelled to react, and brought back their plan of two additional infantry divisions, which Saionji once again rejected. This gave rise to a conflict that tormented the Japanese political scene over the next few months.

### **Beginnings of the Anti-Cabinet Plot**

Being the Governor-General of Korea, Terauchi Masatake resided in Keijō (Japan's colonial name for Seoul), but the death of Emperor Meiji granted him an opportunity to keep up with Tokyo's mainstream politics. He had arrived at the Japanese capital on official matters at the end of June,<sup>10</sup> however, the situation in the country allowed him to prolong his stay. He was in Japan when new army minister, Lieutenant General Baron Uehara Yūsaku, in office since April, addressed the cabinet on the issue of the new divisions in August 1912.<sup>11</sup> Uehara hailed from Satsuma, but enjoyed Terauchi's support and soon proved to be his trusted follower.

The collection of Terauchi papers deposited in the National Diet Library contains a set of documents on the problem of two new divisions, but one among them attracts particular attention: a carbon copy titled "Memorandum on Issue of Two Additional Infantry Divisions," drawn up circa September 1912 on four sheets of standard ruled paper used by the army.<sup>12</sup> The memorandum is virtually a full manual explaining how to replace the Saionji's government with a new administration led by Terauchi.

Historian Yui Masaomi, who first brought this document to light, suggested it had been drafted by a group of top-level army officials, the most important among them being Army Minister Uehara and the director of the Military Affairs Bureau at the Army Ministry, Major General Tanaka Giichi.<sup>13</sup> Yui's claims were based on the contents of the correspondence

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<sup>10</sup> Entry for June 27, 1912. Yamamoto Shirō, ed., *Terauchi Masatake nikki—1900–1918* (hereafter *Terauchi nikki*), (Kyoto: Kyōto Joshi Daigaku, 1984), 559.

<sup>11</sup> Entry for August 9, 1912. Hara Keiichirō, ed., *Hara Kei nikki* (hereafter *Hara nikki*), vol. 3 (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1981), 244.

<sup>12</sup> "Niko shidan zōsetu mondai oboegaki" in Yamamoto Shirō, ed., *Terauchi Masatake kankei monjo—shushō izen* (hereafter *Terauchi monjo*), (Kyoto: Kyōto Joshi Daigaku, 1984), 583–86. An English translation of the document can be found at the end of this article.

<sup>13</sup> Yui Masaomi, "Niko shidan zōsetu mondai to gunbu," *Komazawa shigaku*, 17 (1970), 12.



between Tanaka, Uehara, and Terauchi. The quoted letters<sup>14</sup> demonstrate clearly that Tanaka and Uehara were aware of the plan to overthrow the cabinet, approved of it, and most likely were involved in its development. While the document's authorship has not been identified beyond doubt, it is safe to assume Tanaka Giichi and Uehara Yūsaku as the most probable candidates.

At its beginning, the document refers to the temporary alliance of the *Seiyūkai* cabinet and the navy, formed under the banner of fiscal and administrative reforms. It suggests the main purpose of this alliance is to suppress the army's demands of the new divisions or, in case they remain unwithdrawn, to pin the responsibility for the reform failure and a probable cabinet collapse onto the army, in order to create resentment towards the army among the public.

The document predicts Saionji to finalize negotiations on the budget cuts with any other minister before opening talks with Uehara. If the cabinet sees no possibility of the Army Ministry's demands being renounced, or at least postponed, they are likely to intensify attacks on Uehara, requesting his dismissal. Saionji may also ask for Yamagata and Katsura's help in the clash with his army minister.

The authors of the memorandum recommend that at this point the army should avoid making direct requests to the cabinet and wait for an invitation to negotiations instead. After the talks commence, the public should be informed that the disturbing situation in the East Asia, particularly in Russia and China, provides enough reason for the new divisions to be formed. Uehara should fend off any attacks and requests from the fellow ministers on the pretext "the national defense is in direct responsibility of the emperor, and not a matter of army minister's arbitrary decisions."<sup>15</sup> Saionji might attempt to resort to Yamagata's help, yet in these circumstances Yamagata has no capacity to act either as *genrō* or as field marshal, unless ordered by the emperor himself. Analogically Katsura, now serving at the Court, also should be disinclined to engage in the conflict.

The document suggests that Uehara inform the emperor about the threat to national security and make arrangements to convene the Supreme War Council. When Saionji requests for the imperial judgment, the emperor,

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<sup>14</sup> The letters quoted by Yui are described further in this article.

<sup>15</sup> "Niko shidan" in *Terauchi monjo*, 584.

likely to consult his decision with Grand Chamberlain Katsura, should be advised that “the government’s job is not to bother the new emperor with problems of this sort, but to competently settle a unified defense strategy, and report it to the Throne.”<sup>16</sup>

This would certainly lead to the government’s resignation, followed by Terauchi’s nomination as the successor to Saionji. The memorandum speculates that Katsura is likely to name him as a candidate, and Yamagata, Ōyama, and Inoue will certainly support it. Subsequently, as the *genrō* of no military affiliation, Inoue should propose a debate regarding the “unity of national defense”<sup>17</sup> (*kokubō no tōitsu*, a term coined to assert the necessity of equal treatment of the army and the navy), which would help the new cabinet ease the political tensions and curtail pressure from the navy.

There also was an alternative scenario to the above plan, drawn up in a form of a short paragraph at the end of the memorandum: should the prime minister abandon his policy of the army’s discrimination and show some amicability in the negotiations, the army was ready to agree on an extension of time for establishing the new divisions from six years to eight, and look for an opportunity to move the completion schedule up to the original date in the following years. This scenario, however, was suggested in the document as unlikely.

What stands out in the memorandum is the prominence it gives to the role of the *genrō*, particularly Yamagata Aritomo, in the upcoming skirmish with the cabinet, a clear signal that, despite having at their disposal the requirement for army and navy ministers to be on active duty, the conspirators realized the nomination of prime minister was fully dependent on a sovereign decision of the Conference of Elders. They also assumed Yamagata had the final word regarding whether or not the army should name a successor in case of Minister Uehara’s resignation.

### **Escalating Political War over Army’s Budget**

In October 1912, the preparations for administrative and fiscal reforms entered the decisive phase. In his letter from October 1, Saionji ordered the cabinet ministers to summarize their opinions concerning the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 585.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 586.

reform project and submit them by October 15th.<sup>18</sup> At this point, Terauchi had already left Tokyo. He departed Japan on September 30th after a three-month long stay, and arrived in Korea on October 2nd.<sup>19</sup> Two days after the cabinet meeting, he sent a letter to Katsura to share his view that, with Russia's increasing activity in Mongolia and Manchuria, only establishing the new divisions would guarantee Japan protection of its interests on the continent. He consequently called for priority to military issues over budget reform policy, claiming that the nation's future was at stake.<sup>20</sup>

Tanaka, Uehara, and Terauchi achieved their first success when they managed to win the support of the most senior of the *genrō*, Inoue Kaoru. As Home Minister, Hara recounted in his diary on October 20th:

Inoue expressed his support to the organization of the new divisions, adding it would provide a perfect opportunity for a wide-ranging reform of the army. On my remark there was little hope for such reform, he replied the odds would be higher if both [the government and the army] developed better understanding of each other.<sup>21</sup>

Inoue continued his agitation for the new divisions, citing the complicated Russo-Japanese relations as the main argument. Hara suspected he had been instigated by the army, and noted in his diary that Inoue's point of view on the matter was the same as Yamagata's.<sup>22</sup> These words indicate that, according to Hara's knowledge, Yamagata Aritomo looked kindly on the proposed two additional infantry divisions. Thus, the only *genrō* openly opposing the army's plan was Matsukata Masayoshi, an advocate of tight fiscal restraint, who called for the budget cuts that exceeded even those proposed by the cabinet.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Saionji letter to Hara, October 1, 1912. Refer to *Hara nikki*, vol. 6, 208.

<sup>19</sup> *Terauchi nikki*, 559, entries for October 1 and 2, 1912.

<sup>20</sup> Terauchi letter to Katsura, October 11, 1912, in Chiba Isao, ed., *Katsura Tarō kankei monjo* (hereafter *Katsura monjo*), (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), 282–83.

<sup>21</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 257, entry for October 20, 1912.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 259, entry for November 1, 1912.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 257, entry for October 10, 1912.

The government's stance on the matter of the new divisions remained unchanged. When on October 18th, Hara visited Saionji to hand him the Ministry of Home Affairs budget cuts project, he heard the prime minister's pledge that there would be no changes in the government's retrenchment policy, with any eventual budget surplus incorporated into the navy expansion costs, financing reduction of taxes, and stimulating industrial production. As for the army's demands, Saionji suggested the cabinet should make it clear to Yamagata and Uehara that creating the new divisions was difficult, if not impossible, to proceed with, at least in the following fiscal year.<sup>24</sup> This was an apparent signal that the government definitively put a halt on the armaments expansion.

On October 22, 1912, the problem of the new divisions was dropped from the agenda during the next cabinet meeting.<sup>25</sup> Uehara immediately reported this to Yamagata, explaining it as a result of delays in work on the spending cuts projects in some ministries.<sup>26</sup> The fact Uehara misinformed Yamagata on this issue proves two important points. First, Yamagata was most likely unaware of any hidden meaning behind Tanaka and Uehara's actions. Second, Uehara found it more beneficial to keep Yamagata in his unawareness, which, on the other hand, implies the conspirators suspected that Yamagata, although supportive of the new divisions, would not approve of the plot.

Saionji eventually received most of the spending readjustment proposals from his ministers by October 27th, with the projects of Ministries of Agriculture and Trade, Communications and Transportation, and Education returned for amendments due to insufficient budget reductions. The only minister with no readjustment plan submitted yet, was Uehara.<sup>27</sup>

This delay in the submission of the draft was in line with guidelines contained in the memorandum. The document assumed Saionji

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., entry for October 18, 1912.

<sup>25</sup> Banno Junji et al., eds., *Takarabe Takeshi nikki—kaigun jikan jidai*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1983) (hereafter *Takarabe nikki*), 94.

<sup>26</sup> Uehara letter to Yamagata, October 23, 1912 in Shōyū Kurabu Yamagata Aritomo Kankei Monjo Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Yamagata Aritomo kankei monjo*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shōyū Kurabu, 2005) (hereafter *Yamagata monjo*), 221–22.

<sup>27</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 258, entry for October 28, 1912.

would start negotiations with the Ministry of Army after reaching agreements with all the other cabinet members. Uehara, by delaying the submission of his ministry's draft, guaranteed that this order would be maintained even in case of unexpected delays from other ministers.

The content of two letters quoted by Yui Masaomi, mentioned earlier in this article, confirms the above supposition, and clearly indicates Terauchi's involvement in Uehara and Tanaka's plot. In the first, sent to Terauchi on October 29th, Uehara informed him about delay in commencing negotiations between prime minister and the Ministry of Army, which was consistent with the "plan," and asked about his "decision." The "plan" was most likely the plan described in the memorandum on the two new divisions, and the "decision" presumably referred to Terauchi's expected acceptance of the post of prime minister had the current cabinet fallen.

The other letter was written by Terauchi on November 1st and addressed to Tanaka Giichi. Terauchi informed Tanaka he intended to return to Japan around November 12th or 13th, to participate in the annual army maneuvers and visit Tokyo afterwards. Due to high probability of the cabinet's collapse, he was ready to become an eventual replacement for Prime Minister Saionji. Providing he received the emperor's order to form a government, he "would assume it not earlier than after a meeting with prime minister and the *genrō* to discuss the current political situation, hear their opinions, and gain their approval for [the new government's] policy."<sup>28</sup> The letter concluded with instructions for Tanaka to provide assistance with all necessary preparations in case Terauchi obtained the nomination.

As the plan to replace Saionji with Terauchi was set in motion, Uehara's attitude toward other cabinet members became more uncompromising. He took a hard line in a row with Finance Minister Yamamoto Tatsuo, categorically demanding funds for the new divisions. Yamamoto invariably believed that only efforts in finding a compromising settlement would eventually allow the army to organize new units in the near future and, in the face of public opposition towards any increase in number of divisions, had no intentions to make concessions to Uehara.<sup>29</sup> Instead, he came up with a compromise proposition postponing the

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<sup>28</sup> Yui, "Niko shidan," 15–16; and Yamamoto, *Taishō seihen*, 163–165.

<sup>29</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 258–59, entry for October 30, 1912.

armaments expansion by one year, which was promptly rejected by the army minister.<sup>30</sup>

Discouraged by Uehara's attitude, Saionji attempted to resolve the problem by dealing directly with Yamagata Aritomo and visited him at his residence a day later.<sup>31</sup> Yamagata received him coldly. He firmly rejected Saionji's arguments about fiscal difficulties, bringing up the substantial sums to be spent on the navy rearmament against the army's moderate demands. He came up with a counterargument that the new divisions would require no additional financial support from the state budget, and what the army demanded was merely funds saved by the army itself through its budget cuts, i.e., the army's own assets. He also warned Saionji: "To favor the navy's rearmaments and deprive the army of its assets at the same time is not only unjust...It may bring about some serious trouble with unpredictable, grave consequences."<sup>32</sup> At this point, the situation was developing exactly the way it was predicted in the memorandum.

Meeting with Yamagata's firm refusal, Prime Minister Saionji found himself in dire straits. He realized that further conflict with the army would expose the government to an inevitable risk of collapse but was unable and unwilling to act against his own party, the *Seiyūkai*, whose members were almost unanimously against any increase in the strength of the army.<sup>33</sup>

Having little room for maneuver, Saionji sought help from Katsura Tarō, not without Home Minister Hara's scepticism. As Grand Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal, Katsura was *de facto* in charge of the imperial institution, and the memorandum's authors assumed he would avoid any action that would threaten involving the monarch in the conflict. Contrary to that prediction, Katsura made certain attempts to broker some form of agreement. He met with Hara on November 16th, and presented his own compromise proposal, as well as offered his support in persuading Terauchi

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<sup>30</sup> Utsunomiya Tarō Kankei Shiryō Kenkyūkai, ed., *Nihon rikugun to Ajia seisaku—rikugun taishō Utsunomiya Tarō nikki*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007) (hereafter *Utsunomiya nikki*), 160. See entries for November 1 and 2, 1912.

<sup>31</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 260–61, entry for November 9, 1912.

<sup>32</sup> Tanaka Giichi Denki Kankōkai, ed., *Tanaka Giichi Denki*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1981), 497.

<sup>33</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 261, entry for November 10, 1912.

whom he was planning to encounter at the army maneuvers, had the cabinet adopted his ideas. The idea Katsura suggested was to postpone financing the establishment of the new divisions by one year in the hope that the budget situation would improve, with only some small initial quota spent as soon as the following fiscal year.<sup>34</sup> Hara's response, however, was tepid, and Terauchi, seemingly surprised when confronted by Katsura during the maneuvers, avoided any topic related to the army expansion plans in their conversation.<sup>35</sup> The confidential talks between the *Seiyūkai* and Katsura continued until November 25th, but turned out fruitless, as Katsura's compromise proposal was met with cold reception from both sides of the conflict.<sup>36</sup>

On November 22nd, Home Minister Hara received a letter from Saionji, informing him that a day earlier he had met with Army Minister Uehara, and asked to explain the reasons of his demands to the fellow cabinet members.<sup>37</sup> As Hara wrote in his diary, when the army minister appeared at the cabinet meeting the next morning, he was rude and uncooperative, and refused to accede to the prime minister's request unless he was assured that the government would approve the formation of the new divisions. Only an intervention by the minister of agriculture and commerce, Baron Makino Nobuaki, prevented further escalation of the quarrel, but the explanation of the issue Uehara eventually offered to the cabinet was nonchalant, chaotic, and insufficient.<sup>38</sup>

Another description of the same events but based on Uehara's account, thus considerably different from what Hara wrote, can be found in the diary of Major General Utsunomiya Tarō. In 1912, Utsunomiya served as director of the Second Bureau of the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff Office. A native of Hizen, he kept good relations with the Satsuma faction within the army, including Minister Uehara. Abe Umaso, a secretary in the Ministry of Finance and a nephew of Finance Minister Yamamoto Tatsuo, was his old acquaintance from London, where Utsunomiya had served as military attaché in 1901–05. Their friendly relations were

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 262–63, entry for November 16, 1912.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 263, entry for November 18, 1912.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 264–66, entries for November 23, 24, and 25, 1912.

<sup>37</sup> Saionji letter to Hara, November 22, 1912; *ibid.*, vol. 6, 209.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 264, entry for November 22, 1912.

henceforth used as a means of contact between the two ministries on several occasions since September 1912.<sup>39</sup>

A supporter of the new divisions, Utsunomiya had been continuing his efforts to muster support for the armaments expansion plan through behind-the-scenes talks independently of army minister, and believed that winning concessions from the government was only a matter of time. Unaware of the severity of the conflict between Uehara and his colleague ministers, Utsunomiya called on him on November 21<sup>st</sup>,<sup>40</sup> and once again the next morning, to give him some advice on how to deal with negotiations during the cabinet meeting, and visited him again later that day to hear about its results. Uehara not only made him believe the negotiations proceeded smoothly, but also implied that the government was willing to make concessions to resolve the standoff.<sup>41</sup>

Utsunomiya's description gives a good hint on how Uehara acted on the case of the new divisions. He took a hard line in talks with the cabinet, attempting to corner Saionji and force him to resign. At the same time, he misled his subordinates by ensuring he was on the right track to reach an agreement with the cabinet. The reasons for such actions are easy to guess. Uehara, determined to have Saionji replaced with Terauchi, wanted to avoid any movement within the army independent of him and aimed at finding a compromise over the new divisions, so he needed to demonstrate that he had the situation fully under control. However, a compromise-oriented movement eventually occurred, and Utsunomiya became its central figure.

#### **Emergence of Pro-Compromise Group in the Army**

The movement started on November 24th, when General Viscount Takashima Tomonosuke, a former army minister, used his connections with vice minister of home affairs and a Satsuma compatriot, Tokonami Takejirō, to establish a dialogue between Uehara and Saionji. Utsunomiya wrote in his diary how surprised he was when he first heard about the government's possible rejection of the army's demands. It happened during his meeting with Takashima and Kabayama Sukehide, a former government official and

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<sup>39</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 147–150. See entries for September 7, 8, and 18, 1912.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, entry for November 21, 1912.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–67, entry for November 22, 1912.



Takashima's son-in-law, also from Satsuma. Disillusioned Utsunomiya, who had been certain the agreement was imminent, realized the opposite was true.<sup>42</sup>

On the same day, on Takashima and Kabayama's request, Tokonami met with his superior minister Hara Takashi to sound out possibilities of a meeting between Saionji and Uehara. Hara had no objections and passed a proper request to prime minister.<sup>43</sup>

Despite giving a green light to the meeting, Saionji had no intention to carry on any further negotiations with Uehara. Hara made it clear while talking to Katsura on November 26th, when he refused to hear out any of the army minister's demands, reminding that Uehara had "confronted the prime minister in a defiant manner...and his refusal to speak in front of other cabinet members was nothing but scandalous."<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of the inauspicious conditions, Takashima and Utsunomiya continued their efforts to mediate some form of accord between the cabinet and the army. On November 26th, Utsunomiya met with Vice Minister Tokonami, who conveyed Saionji's new proposal. According to it, the expansion was to be postponed by a year, but Saionji declared to make a public promise to provide funding for the two new divisions in the next budget. Utsunomiya's reaction was generally positive.<sup>45</sup> Paradoxically, what he and the rest of the pro-compromise group in the army had to do was to convince Uehara to change his attitude towards the issue. Instead of the cabinet, they had to negotiate the compromise with their own superior minister.

Right after the conversation with Tokonami, Utsunomiya hurried to visit Uehara, and recommended him to accept Saionji's proposal. Uehara, adamant in his decision, rebuffed the plan and instead requested a certain sum spent on the army's expansion already in the following year. Utsunomiya remarked bitterly in his diary that his minister "had gradually become estranged from the other government officials, and closer in his views to the so-called 'Chōshū bureaucrats.'"<sup>46</sup> With Uehara deaf to all arguments, Utsunomiya attempted to talk the issue over with Terauchi

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 167, entry for November 24, 1912.

<sup>43</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 265–66, entry for November 25, 1912.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 167–68, entry for November 26, 1912.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Masatake, who was on his way to Korea. On November 27th, he boarded the train carrying Terauchi to the port of Moji, and explained to him his standpoint, but to no effect. The Governor-General of Korea replied he saw no possibility for any form of compromise.<sup>47</sup>

The next day's cabinet meeting brought another strife between army minister and the rest of the government. In the face of heavy criticism from the other cabinet members, the infuriated Uehara threatened that he would put a halt to the fiscal reform in his ministry. After the meeting was postponed, he spoke with Saionji in private declaring his will to resign, but eventually agreed to rethink his decision until the following day.<sup>48</sup>

Having little time left to act, the pro-compromise group hastily decided to send Viscount Takashima, who had an established position within both the army and the Satsuma faction, to talk to Uehara and dissuade him from taking any further unreasonable steps.<sup>49</sup> Early in the morning on November 29th, Takashima paid Uehara a visit that brought a surprising overturn. According to Home Minister Hara's diary, army minister agreed to accept the compromise proposal in front of Takashima. Hara claimed he had confirmed the authenticity of this information from two independent reliable sources, i.e., Vice Minister Tokonami and Prime Minister Saionji, whom Takashima visited after meeting Uehara. The government officials were so assured they were on the right track to reach the final agreement with the army, they failed to notice anything suspicious when Uehara appeared on a cabinet meeting that day, and asked for putting the discussion on the new divisions off, but mentioned nothing regarding the withdrawal of his demands.<sup>50</sup>

It soon became apparent Uehara's promise was merely a tactic, designed to avoid further pressure from the other cabinet members and Satsuma leaders. Utsunomiya's record of the events diverges greatly from Hara's version. Utsunomiya, who was a guest at Tanaka Giichi's residence late that night, and rushed to meet Uehara right afterwards, revealed in the diary that army minister had reached no compromise in talks with Viscount Takashima, and thus made a decision to confront the government.<sup>51</sup> These

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–69, entry for November 27, 1912.

<sup>48</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 267–68, entry for November 28, 1912.

<sup>49</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 169, entry for November 28, 1912.

<sup>50</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 268–69, entry for November 29, 1912.

<sup>51</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 169, entry for November 29, 1912.

discrepancies suggest that Uehara deliberately deceived Takashima and Saionji, yet kept this information to himself, while in front of other army officers he claimed no agreement had been achieved.

On November 29th, the conflict reached the point that even some prominent figures from Satsuma deemed it appropriate to intervene. The Satsuma faction, embedded in the navy, was actually the main beneficiary of the Saionji administration, providing that the government emerged victorious from the clash against the army. With Saionji's support for their plans of commissioning new warships, they remained relatively passive throughout the conflict, hoping prime minister would successfully suppress the army's demands on the one hand, and secure sufficient funds to fulfill his promise given to the navy on the other.

Some naval officers and bureaucrats from Satsuma, including Vice Minister of the navy and Admiral Yamamoto Gonbee's son-in-law, Rear Admiral Takarabe Takeshi, Executive Director of the Railway Bureau Yamanouchi Kazuji, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Commerce Oshikawa Norikichi, and Director of the Bureau of Commerce of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce Ōkubo Toshitake, reacted nervously when the news came to light about a possible compromise plan presented by their compatriots from the army, fearing it would weaken the government's financial abilities, and consequently undermine the plans to purchase the new vessels.<sup>52</sup> Takarabe even went as far as to pay visits to Saionji and Matsukata on November 26th, and strongly advise them to renounce any ideas proposed by Utsunomiya and Takashima.<sup>53</sup>

Merely three days later, in the evening of November 29th, the same party, accompanied by a shipbuilding engineer Suda Toshinobu, gathered in Takarabe's residence to deliberate on the current state of affairs. Having considered the matter in all its bearings, they all agreed that in this instance to accept the compromise proposal was the only way left to save the cabinet from collapse. After the meeting, Suda headed to Uehara's house to meet with the minister and persuade him against doing anything unwise that would result in toppling the government.<sup>54</sup> This change in stance reflects how strained the situation at that moment was.

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<sup>52</sup> *Takarabe nikki*, vol. 2, 105–106, entry for November 25, 1912.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–107, entry for November 26, 1912.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, entry for November 29, 1912.

On the morning of November 30th, Utsunomiya paid a call to Uehara and made one more attempt to influence his decision, but to no avail. Soon after his guest left, Uehara made visits to Takashima and Saionji to inform them he had no intention of assuming the compromise.<sup>55</sup> Startled, the Prime Minister immediately called in his closest subordinates, Home Minister Hara and Minister of Justice Matsuda, to give them the bad news.<sup>56</sup> As the cabinet was most likely beyond salvation, the only sensible decision was to ask the army for Uehara's successor or resign *en masse*, if their request was declined.<sup>57</sup>

### **Cabinet Resignation and Prime Ministerial Selection Process**

The conflict over the new divisions came to a head on December 2, 1912, when Uehara Yūsaku resigned in front of Emperor Taisho.<sup>58</sup> Soon after that, Grand Chamberlain Katsura was sent to Saionji with the emperor's question concerning the resignation. He also informed Saionji that the army minister had named no successor.<sup>59</sup> The Prime Minister visited the Imperial Palace the next day to report the circumstances surrounding Uehara's resignation, and afterwards he headed to Odawara to meet Yamagata in his villa. He was met with cold indifference, and advised to "attempt to settle the current state of affairs, rather than come and ask for successors, etc."<sup>60</sup> Irritated Saionji returned to Tokyo to open an urgent cabinet meeting, during which he ordered his ministers to write their

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<sup>55</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 169–70, entry for November 30, 1912.

<sup>56</sup> According to Hara's account, Uehara initially requested Saionji to have him dismissed, and only after the Prime Minister's firm refusal did he agree to resign himself on the pretext of health problems. This can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate to the public that any blame for the incoming collapse of the government should be put on Saionji's shoulders. A similar measure was suggested in the memorandum on the two new divisions. See *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 269–70, entry for December 1, 1912.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 269, entry for November 30, 1912.

<sup>58</sup> According to Hara's diary, Uehara tendered his resignation in a way different to the previous day's agreement. He presented it directly to the emperor, and not via the Cabinet Office. He also failed to mention health problems as a reason. This infuriated Saionji, who perceived it as a breach of promise. See *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 270, entry for December 2, 1912.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 270, entry for December 3, 1912.

resignation letters by the following day. He was to hand them to the emperor in person, together with his own resignation, on December 5th.<sup>61</sup>

At this moment, Terauchi had already left Japan for Korea and Tanaka Giichi acted as his eyes and ears in Tokyo.<sup>62</sup> On December 4th, he wired Terauchi to inform him that Katsura had recommended him as the succeeding prime minister. Supposedly, Yamagata was still hesitant, nonetheless Tanaka believed that Katsura's mediation would effectively dispel his doubts.<sup>63</sup>

The *genrō* were requested to return to Tokyo, and on December 6th, the Conference of Elders (*Genrō Kaigi*) was inaugurated to advise the emperor on the nomination of the next prime minister. On the evening preceding the conference, Tanaka telegraphed Terauchi again, to affirm that the events were developing as planned. The *Seiyūkai* purportedly wanted Katsura as Saionji's successor but, according to Tanaka's knowledge, since Katsura refused this offer and expressed his full support for Terauchi's candidacy, his nomination was simply a matter of time.<sup>64</sup>

The next telegram reached Terauchi on December 7th, right after midnight. Tanaka reported no decision had been made so far, mostly as a result of the absence of Matsukata Masayoshi, who remained in his residence in Kamakura due to ill health. The *genrō* agreed they ought to ask for Matsukata's opinion before making any decision, so the meeting was adjourned until the next morning. Inoue and Ōyama were requested to head to Kamakura and pay Matsukata a visit, before the talks were resumed.<sup>65</sup>

At this point, Terauchi may have still believed only a few hours separated him from the prime ministerial nomination. Unfortunately for him, the course of events had diverged completely from his expectations. The main purpose of Inoue and Ōyama's trip was to persuade Matsukata to form the next cabinet.

Tanaka failed to notice that Terauchi's candidature from the outset had no support from any significant political force outside the army. Katsura, believed by the conspirators to be an avid proponent of Terauchi's

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 270–71.

<sup>62</sup> *Terauchi nikki*, 568, entry for November 30, 1912.

<sup>63</sup> Tanaka telegrams to Terauchi, December 4, 1912, in *Terauchi monjo*, 587.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Tanaka telegram to Terauchi, December 5, 1912.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Tanaka telegram to Terauchi, December 7, 1912.

cabinet, not only opposed it,<sup>66</sup> but even advised Yamagata against such an idea. When Yamagata visited him immediately after Saionji's resignation, he was advised that, in the current political situation, no candidate related in any manner to the conflict between Uehara and the cabinet should be considered as the next head of government, also to avoid possible public resentment against the army.<sup>67</sup>

Many bureaucrats, including those hailing from the Chōshū domain, shared views similar to those of Katsura. Even the *Jukkinkai* members, who had made Terauchi their patron only four months prior, now decided to back Matsukata Masayoshi's candidature. Around December 1st, both Ōura Kanetake and Hirata Tōsuke reportedly expressed their support for Matsukata.<sup>68</sup> This support was endorsed at the *Jukkinkai* meeting of December 8, 1912.<sup>69</sup> A day earlier, Ōura and Hirata paid a visit to Matsukata in his residence in Kamakura, and tried to persuade him to accept the nomination.<sup>70</sup>

Before the name of Matsukata appeared in the debate, keeping Saionji in office was perceived among the elder statesmen as the best option. This would mark a complete failure of the plot and literally humiliate Uehara as, with Saionji reinstated as prime minister, the commotion he had caused would prove utterly futile, but some *genrō* seemed willing to sacrifice the army minister's reputation. The *Seiyūkai* president rejected the idea of his reinstatement definitely, though there were voices within his party, including Home Minister Hara, calling for the Prime Minister to accept an offer from the *genrō* had it been made.<sup>71</sup>

On December 6th, Yamagata was sent to negotiate but, notwithstanding the situation, he attempted to run his own game on Saionji. He offered him his post back, but refused any help with the new divisions problem. This only aggravated the strain between the *Seiyūkai* and the *genrō*, and Yamagata was forced to return to the Conference of Elders

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<sup>66</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 270, entry for December 2, 1912.

<sup>67</sup> See Saionji letter to Yamagata dated January 12, 1913 in *Yamagata monjo*, vol. 3, 413–14.

<sup>68</sup> *Takarabe nikki*, vol. 2, p. 109, entry for December 1, 1912.

<sup>69</sup> *Den nikki*, vol. 2, 235.

<sup>70</sup> Hirata letter to Katsura, December 7, 1912 in *Katsura monjo*, 323–24.

<sup>71</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 271–72, entry for December 6, 1912.

empty-handed.<sup>72</sup> In the fallout, the elder statesmen concentrated their efforts on persuading Matsukata to take the office. Seemingly, none of them considered Terauchi as a possible prime minister, neither was his name ever mentioned in this context.<sup>73</sup>

At the time Inoue and Ōyama were heading to Kamakura to meet Matsukata, the origin of the crisis was discovered by Utsunomiya who, to his astonishment, learned the truth about the plot. In his diary, he spared no harsh words against Terauchi and Tanaka:

Today, a certain Chōshū officer allowed me to peruse the secret correspondence wired to Terauchi. To my shock and anger, it stated clearly, they had schemed to take over the cabinet. Those perfidious bastards may put on their masks of allegiance, but are nothing more than hypocrites and rebels.<sup>74</sup>

Naturally, the Satsuma faction followed all the speculations regarding Matsukata's candidature with due attention, but far from enthusiasm. When Matsukata returned to Tokyo on December 8, Admiral Yamamoto Gonbee rushed to see him and persuade him against assuming the office. Takarabe Takeshi described this situation below:

In the present situation, when the Yamagata clique grew in influence at the Imperial Court, there is little doubt that even if Marquis Matsukata succeeded in forming a cabinet, it would quickly reach a deadlock. Hence, forcing his old body into the strenuous position of prime minister nowadays would be nothing but futile.<sup>75</sup>

On December 9th, Terauchi received another telegram from Tanaka Giichi, communicating that the odds of Matsukata taking the office had significantly increased, with Yamagata, Inoue, and Katsura unequivocally supporting his candidature. Tanaka speculated that the upcoming cabinet

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<sup>72</sup> Saionji letter to Hara, November 6, 1912, in *ibid.*, vol. 6, 209.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 272, entry for December 7, 1912.

<sup>74</sup> *Utsunomiya nikki*, vol. 2, 172, entry for December 7, 1912.

<sup>75</sup> *Takarabe nikki*, vol. 2, 114, entry for December 9, 1912.

would strengthen its ties with the navy and become a guarantor of “unity of national defense,” using exactly the same words that had been reserved in the memorandum on the new divisions for the would-be Terauchi administration.<sup>76</sup>

These speculations proved incorrect as well. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, Tanaka cabled Terauchi again, informing him that Matsukata had eventually rejected the nomination, which made Katsura the most probable candidate.<sup>77</sup> It can be safely assumed that the formation of Matsukata’s cabinet was suppressed by Admiral Yamamoto’s intervention. Yamamoto was afraid that the so-called “unity of national defense” would put a break on military expenses of both the army and the navy, which would menace the acquisition of new battleships, thus he wished no Satsuma politician involved in such decision. Given Matsukata’s poor health and advanced age, Yamamoto also feared that the new cabinet would be merely a puppet government, restrained by the influence of Yamagata, and the recent overtures of support from Ōura and Hirata, only magnified this fear.

Two other names, Yamamoto Gonbee and Hirata Tōsuke, were listed as possible candidates instead. Admiral Yamamoto refused immediately, citing more or less the same reasons he had given Matsukata to discourage him from assuming the office.<sup>78</sup> Hirata was more hesitant, but he finally realized that, as a Chōshū bureaucrat, he would have to face a severe bout of public backlash, and admitted he had no sufficient abilities to navigate the country through the crisis.<sup>79</sup>

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Hara was informed that the Conference of Elders had stalled the night before, as the *genrō* were left without any suitable candidates. The possibilities they were taking into account were limited to only two. The first, and preferable, option was to persuade Saionji to remain in office. Due to his categorical refusal of the other option, which was bringing Katsura back to politics, had to be considered. Katsura, who was the most experienced statesman in terms of prime ministership, could finally see the end of his seclusion out of politics.<sup>80</sup> Terauchi’s hopes

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<sup>76</sup> Tanaka telegram to Terauchi, December 9, 1912, in *Terauchi monjo*, 589.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See Tanaka telegram to Terauchi, December 10, 1912.

<sup>78</sup> *Takarabe nikki*, vol. 2, 115–116, entry for December 12, 1912.

<sup>79</sup> Matsukata letter to Yamagata, December 14, 1912 in *Yamagata monjo*, vol. 3, 126–27.

<sup>80</sup> *Hara nikki*, vol. 3, 273, entry for December 15, 1912.



to become the next prime minister were dashed, when on December 15th Tanaka informed him, that Katsura left the Court after receiving an imperial command to form the new cabinet.<sup>81</sup> This information was more accurate than the content of Tanaka's previous telegrams, and disappointed Terauchi was forced to put his political ambitions aside for an unspecified period of time. He wired Tanaka a reply and requested him to convey to Yamagata that from the beginning he had no intention to make any use of the current circumstances.<sup>82</sup> In a letter sent directly to Yamagata Aritomo on December 24th, he expressed his belief there was no organized plot behind the recent events, and thus denied any knowledge regarding the existence of the plan to remove Saionji from office.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

While the "Memorandum on Issue of Two Additional Infantry Divisions" alone cannot be cited as a solid proof of a plot against Prime Minister Saionji Kinmochi, there exists other evidence: (1) Uehara Yūsaku's letter to Terauchi Masatake from October 29, 1912 informing about the negotiations with the prime minister proceeding according to the "plan," (2) Terauchi's letter to Tanaka Giichi sent three days later, expressing his readiness to become prime minister, (3) the exchange of telegrams wired between Tanaka and Terauchi during the *Genrō Kaigi* regarding the latter's chances to take office, and finally, (4) the entry for December 7, 1912 in Utsunomiya's diary, reviling the conspirators. All of these combined with the fact Army Minister Uehara's actions regarding the negotiations on two additional divisions matched the contents of the memorandum, with only a few slight divergences, leave little room for doubt that Uehara's actions were the result of the conspiracy orchestrated against Saionji to replace him with Terauchi.

The memorandum emphasizes the importance of the *genrō's* support for Terauchi's prime ministership. In order to win it, the conspirators planned to persuade them that the country's military capability was deteriorating, and only the nomination of Terauchi could reverse this

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<sup>81</sup> Tanaka telegram to Terauchi, December 13, 1912, in *Terauchi monjo*, 590–91.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 592. See Terauchi telegram to Tanaka, December 16, 1912.

<sup>83</sup> Terauchi letter to Yamagata, December 12, 1912 in *Yamagata monjo*, vol. 2, 400–401.

process. They also used misinformation to keep the plot in secret, not only from the government or the *genrō*, but even from the fellow army officers.

Intended by its authors as an elaborate, meticulous analysis of the political situation that would pave the way for the upcoming Terauchi's administration, the memorandum eventually proved to be a rather unrealistic plan. It was based on the assumption that the new government would have the full backing of the most influential statesmen, with Yamagata and Katsura Tarō univocally approving of Terauchi's nomination.

Contrary to popular belief, the *genrō* in their decision attached considerable importance to the voice of the people, and a possibility of public resentment was a compelling reason to reject any candidate involved in the resignation of the *Seiyūkai* cabinet. Thusly, their options of preference virtually limited themselves to either reinstating Saionji to his post, which was firmly rejected by Saionji himself, or nominating Matsukata Masayoshi, who also dismissed the idea. This brought about a severe impasse that ended eventually with Katsura returning to politics and taking the office. Terauchi's nomination was never discussed.

Although a proponent of the new divisions, Yamagata was not a supporter of Terauchi's prime ministership. This became very clear after the cabinet's collapse. Realizing he was facing a potential outburst of public wrath, Yamagata opted for either leaving Saionji on the prime ministerial post or nominating Katsura rather than letting Terauchi take the office.

The plotters' conviction regarding Katsura's support for Terauchi was equally unaccountable. Katsura, engaged at the Imperial Court, briefly attempted to broker an agreement between Uehara and Saionji, but otherwise there were no signs indicating that he would want to risk involvement in any political contrivance, not to mention supporting Terauchi. On the contrary, in his conversation with Yamagata, Katsura openly opposed the idea of Terauchi's nomination.

The question remains open as to why the memorandum's authors made such a critical mistake. One of the explanations may be that they overestimated Terauchi's reputation among the *genrō*. Katsura and Terauchi, both influential army officers from Chōshū, both key figures in the faction, maintained a long-standing professional relation. Terauchi served as army minister in Katsura's first and second administration. Katsura was considered a friend and drinking companion of Terauchi.<sup>84</sup> Combined with

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<sup>84</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 104.

the prevailing belief that Terauchi was to be Saionji's successor, also quoted earlier in this article, this may have been the main reason why the plotters took Katsura's support for granted and simply neglected a proper consideration of his actual intentions.

The events of 1912 had another importance, as they demonstrated that the army command was not a united entity, and while the support for the new divisions was common among the officers, not all of them would sacrifice a civilian government to achieve it, and calls for a compromise were heard even from high-rank army officials. Apart from the conspirators, there existed the pro-compromise group concentrated around Utsunomiya Tarō. They acted to alleviate the conflict between Army Minister Uehara and Prime Minister Saionji and mediate an accord between the cabinet and the army, that would postpone the armaments expansion, but allow the army to form the additional divisions without straining the state budget.

While there was no support for giving office to Terauchi among the *genrō*, the public was infuriated, and even some circles within the army voiced disapproval. General Terauchi's chances to succeed to the prime ministerial portfolio at that moment turned out virtually nil. The situation developed into the progressing political crisis that hit the army the most, weakening their position against both the civilian government and the navy.

At the end it should be noted that, in contrast to their expectations, the *genrō*'s decision further escalated the political crisis. Katsura, though not directly implicated in the preceding cabinet's collapse, was highly unpopular among the public. His ill-fated, short-lived third administration was forced to resign only two months later, in February 1913, amidst nationwide protests. Katsura's successor, Yamamoto Gonbee, the first Satsuma politician since 1898 to become prime minister, and the first ever to hail from the navy, waived the requirement for army and navy ministers to be on active duty, mostly as a consequence of the events presented in this article (it was restored in 1936). The plans for the new army divisions were put aside for the time being, and revived by Yamamoto's successor, Ōkuma Shigenobu, only after Japan's entry into World War I.

### Memorandum on Issue of Two Additional Infantry Divisions<sup>85</sup>

As the demand for two additional infantry divisions is a vital issue regarding the government's policy, before giving his final opinion, the prime minister is expected to deal with the matter in the following manner.

1. The government intends to follow through on their campaign promises of [fiscal and administrative] reforms to enhance the reputation of the *Seiyūkai* government and strengthen the groundwork for party cabinets. For this reason, they temporarily joined hands with the navy in their plan to increase pressure on the army, suppress the army's demands, and demonstrate the prominence of the *Seiyūkai*.

2. If, due to the army's firm stance, the prime minister is unable to carry out his policies, he is likely to request the emperor's judgment. However, if the verdict differs from his expectations, he is believed to ask the monarch to accept the cabinet's resignation *en masse*, and consequently blame the army for the failure of his administrative reforms, naval armaments expansion, and tax reduction policy, thus complicating the situation of the succeeding government.

3. The prime minister will delay the realization of points 1 and 2 until right before the opening of Imperial Parliament. In case of the cabinet resignation, he will attempt to hinder the formation of the next administration.

The following measures are likely to be taken by prime minister in order to employ the above plan:

1. The prime minister will secretly conduct and finalize negotiations [regarding budget cuts] with any other

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<sup>85</sup> The Japanese text of the memorandum can be found, e.g., in *Terauchi monjo*, 583–86.

ministry, before entering talks with the army ministry and other army-governed institutions: the offices of Governor-General of Taiwan and Korea, and the Kwantung Army.

2. The prime minister will finally attempt to conduct formal negotiations with the army minister but, seeing no possibility of the demands being renounced or postponed, he will increase pressure on army minister during cabinet meetings. Circumstances may force him to call for the cabinet's unity, a veiled suggestion of the army minister's resignation.

3. The prime minister will make a complaint to Field Marshal Yamagata about the army minister's requests that jeopardize the cabinet's policy and bring the administrative reforms, naval armaments expansion, and tax reduction to a halt. He will demand that Yamagata exercise his power as the elder statesman and the top-rank army commander to suppress the issue. He may also appeal to General Katsura's friendship, in an attempt to obtain his advice and help.

As a countermeasure to the above tactics, the army should take the following steps:

1. The army minister should avoid rushing the prime minister into settling the issue of the army's demands. Instead, he should calm the commotion down and wait until prime minister invites him to negotiations.

2. After the negotiations commence, the minister should firmly stand by his demands, claiming the deficiencies in national defense threaten the sheer existence of the state.

3. The army minister should use criticism from other cabinet members as an opportunity to explain to his fellow ministers the disturbing situation in Russia and China, and how it affects the national defense. He should

particularly demonstrate how the defense strategy evolved since Meiji 39 [1906], and how the naval expansion at the expense of the standing army's combat value and its budget would undermine defensive abilities of the state. Even if the prime minister warns about the inevitable collapse of the cabinet, the minister should show no retreat from his stance, claiming the national defense is in direct responsibility of the emperor, and not a matter of army minister's arbitrary decisions.

4. The prime minister may approach Field Marshal Yamagata with a demand to suppress the disobedience of the army. [Yamagata] is bound to refuse, claiming that as an elder statesman he has no capacity to express his private opinions on matters of national defense, and neither can he take any responsibility for relaxing the army's demands as a field marshal, unless asked for an advice by the emperor himself. He may also express his personal displeasure regarding the army's budget cuts and countless flaws in national security they caused, and add that with the army minister being the proper person to discuss the matter, he [Yamagata] is not in a position to openly declare his private views [on this issue]. Even though in friendly relations [with Saionji], General Katsura will also refuse to engage in the debate due to his current position and duties.

5. As soon as he ascertains that the government is going to reject the army's demands, the army minister, accompanied by Chief of the General Staff, should report to the emperor a threat to national security and inform his majesty that the prime minister's claims are unacceptable for him as a person in charge of national defense. They should also request that the emperor consult this matter with the Supreme War Council, due to the potentially grave consequences it may have.

6. Once the idea is brought to the Throne, the preparations to convene the Supreme War Council should be started as early as possible.

The above steps should be discussed in advance with Chief of the General Staff. For the sake of mutual understanding, the councillors should previously arrange a secret meeting with the army minister and Chief of the General Staff to exchange and discuss opinions regarding convening of the Supreme War Council, hear how the affairs have progressed so far and how they are expected to develop from now onward, and understand the gravity of the deficiencies in national defense.

A text of the final resolution summarizing the conference of the Supreme War Council should be drafted in advance, and all the other necessary steps should be taken for the conference to proceed smoothly.

The current situation is not merely an issue of forming new divisions. What the government really attempts is to use it as an opportunity to lay ground for a partisan cabinet, and the plan of the new divisions is just a victim of this circumstance. This is indeed a critical time for our country, and during this decisive moment that will determine whether the Japanese Empire becomes a republic or remains a monarchy, an enormous effort, supported by [our] strong will and close cooperation, will be required.

1. Having met with refusal from Field Marshal Yamagata and General Katsura, the prime minister will have no choice but to inform the monarch that the army's demands obstruct the government's policy and request the emperor's judgment. However, when the emperor consults his decision with Grand Chamberlain Katsura, he should be advised to dismiss [Saionji's claims,] as the government's job is not to bother the new emperor with problems of this sort, but to competently settle a unified defense strategy, and report it to the Throne.

2. Once the prime minister submits the resignation of his cabinet for imperial approval, the emperor should summon the *genrō* to the court to hear their opinions. At this point, General Katsura should speak in favor of sanctioning the resignation and giving General Terauchi an imperial order to organize the next cabinet. With Field Marshals Yamagata and Ōyama's voices of support, and Marquis Inoue's approval, the final decision should be made [in Terauchi's favor], to provide realization of national policy imperatives.

3. After the Conference of Elders, held at the Imperial Court, ends with the conclusion that the imperial order to form the new government should be given to General Terauchi, the *genrō* of no military affiliation (i.e. Marquis Inoue) needs to propose a debate regarding the unity of national defense. This would be a good start for the General Terauchi's term, as it would facilitate the realization of his policy, curb ambitions of the navy, and ensure stability of national defense.

There are signs the prime minister intends to keep the cabinet in power as long as possible. Some might optimistically believe that, even in such situation, whether the army's demands are rejected is not yet determined, but they need to be prepared that the chances [for the new divisions] would be slight. If, nonetheless, the prime minister honestly shows some amicability in the negotiations, [the army] should recognize his good intentions and agree on an extension of time for establishing the new divisions (from six years to eight) in order to ease the expenses burden. Once the goal is achieved, seeking an opportunity to move the completion schedule up to the original date would be a wise strategy for the following years.