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Document 39: “We advanced wherever we could, and halted when it was necessary to stop.” “Triple Intervention,” Japanese foreign minister Mutsu Munemitsu, explaining Japan’s acceptance of demands by Russia, Germany, and France that it return lands that it had just won in the Sino-Japanese War, 1895.

[The Japanese people] suddenly gave vent to all of the feelings of irritation and discontent that had been welling up within them during this period. Where earlier they had been puffed up with excessive pride, they now felt that they had been subjected to intolerable humiliation. Their sense of disaffection varied in direct proportion to the degree to which each citizen felt his pride had been insulted; but human nature being what it is, everyone eventually sought to console themselves by directing their anger and frustrations outward against some scapegoat. The Lower House parties and factions, in keeping with their usual posture of opposition to the government, soon took note of this national sentiment and sought to reap political benefit from it. They launched a sweeping attack on the government’s foreign policy, blaming us for all of the humiliation and setbacks Japan had suffered. Soon the air was filled with charges that the fruits of victory gained on the battlefield had now been lost at the negotiating table. . . .

The only thing that the public and, indeed, even many officials wanted was ever larger concessions from China and ever greater glory for Japan. Indeed, when I first presented my peace treaty draft, . . . some protested that the better part of Shantung Province should be demanded in addition to the Liaotung peninsula. Naturally, many others also wanted the cessions to be extensive, and some even insisted that peace talks be deferred until our military

headquarters had been transferred to the Chinchou peninsula and our armies had marched into Peking. It was a time when the entire nation seemed delirious with victory, when ambitions and vain hopes ran at a fever pitch. Imagine how chagrined the public would have felt if the peace treaty had omitted that one clause relating to the cession of the Liaotung peninsula, an area taken at cost of so much Japanese blood! The nation's feelings might well have run beyond chagrin; quite possibly, the prevailing spirit of the moment would have prohibited the implementation of such a treaty.

It was extremely difficult to harmonize the requirements of our foreign policy with these popular sentiments, for the two were essentially incompatible. If we had tried too hard to reconcile them at the time, we would inevitably have faced a domestic reaction of such scope and intensity that it would have been far more menacing than any conceivable international incident. No one can say, therefore, that we left any stones unturned in the conduct of our foreign policy. In dealing with vexing internal and external problems, the government always made a careful evaluation of which matters were most urgent and important, and dealt with them before taking up less pressing business. So far as possible, we strove to mitigate both our domestic problems and our diplomatic differences. And when we found ourselves unable to prevent the occurrence of crises in our relations with other nations, we at least made every effort to delay the moment when problems might occur. . . .

In considering the revision made in the Treaty of Shimonoseki, it may appear from today's perspective that Japan . . . caved in to foreign pressures. But actually, our problems arose because we had to give prior concern to *domestic* pressures. The core of the matter is that the triple intervention came upon us just as we were approaching the day to exchange the instruments of ratification for the Sino-Japanese peace treaty. The government considered every



conceivable means of dealing simultaneously with treaty ratification and the intervention, but finally adopted a policy of resolving each issue separately. We thus reaped the fullest fruits of victory in dealing with the Chinese, while preventing the intervention of the three great powers from disrupting the peace in the Far East which had but recently been reestablished. In short, we advanced wherever we could, and halted when it was necessary to stop. . . .

It is entirely due to the government's having seized and made the most of opportunities as they arose that within a mere fortnight, these complex diplomatic issues were resolved, an impending crisis was averted, and the fruits of our military victories were harvested just as they appeared to be slipping from our grasp. And the government's success was achieved by nothing less than a strict obedience to a proclamation in which the Emperor declared that "under these circumstances we do not consider that the honor and dignity of the empire will be compromised by resorting to magnanimous measures and by taking into consideration the general situation of affairs."

Source: Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95*. Ed./trans. Gordon Berger. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1982, 248-249, 251-252, 254.

Context.

The Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), the first major conflict that Japan fought as a modern nation, had a monumental impact on the country's development. Just two weeks after defeating and taking significant territory from China, for centuries Asia's dominant power, the Japanese were pressured by Russia, Germany, and France to give back a major acquisition, the southern tip of Manchuria, called the Liaodong Peninsula. While the Russians said this was necessary to preserve peace in East Asia, they actually were motivated by their own designs on that region. This "triple intervention" hit the Japanese public like a thunder bolt, causing both anger and humiliation. When the Japanese officials gave into the Western powers (fearing that Russia might attack Japan if they did not), the public exploded in anger. One result was a massive postwar military buildup that prepared Japan to take Russia on, victoriously, in the Russo-Japanese War a decade later.

Questions.

1. Why were the Japanese people so angry about both the Europeans' demands and their government's conciliatory approach?
2. Explain Mutsu's rationale, both for demanding Liaodong in the peace negotiations and for the government's decision afterward to submit to the foreign demands. Might both actions be called *realpolitik*?
3. What did the Emperor mean by "resorting to magnanimous measures" and "taking into consideration the general situation of affairs"?



Terms.

Shantung, Liaotung. There are old spellings for Shandong, the large peninsula that lies between Beijing and Shanghai, and Liaodong, the strategically important peninsula that makes up southern Manchuria. It was the latter that Japan was forced to give back in the Triple Intervention.

Chinchou Peninsula. This was another name for the Liaodong Peninsula, the site of a major Japanese victory in this war. Nationalists thought that having Japan's military headquarters there would strengthen Japan's bargaining position.

Treaty of Shimonoseki. The negotiations that ended the war were held at Shimonoseki, the port city on the western tip of Japan's major island, Honshu. They resulted in Japan securing Taiwan (which it did not have to give back), Liaodong, significant treaty rights in China, and an indemnity large enough to pay for the war's costs. In exchange for giving Liaodong back, Japan received an even larger indemnity, amounting to nearly 3.5 billion yen. The acquisition of Taiwan marked the beginning of Japan's colonial empire.