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FROM CONFRONTATION TO CIVIL WAR

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE
SATSUMA REBELLION, 1877**

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fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

The orthodox view of the outbreak of the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion characterises those actions of Japan's central government which provoked the insurrection as mistakes made in an effort to defuse the confrontational relationship that had developed between the government and Kagoshima prefecture. This thesis offers a critical reappraisal of this view, and examines the hypothesis—suggested by the Japanese historians Inoue Kiyoshi and Môri Toshihiko, as well as by the historical novelist Shiba Ryôtarô—that those actions were intentionally provocative, with the aim of promoting a military resolution of the confrontation. Rather than an accidental outbreak of violence, the Rebellion and the ensuing civil war are considered, in Clausewitzian terms, as “a continuation of (domestic) politics, with the addition of other means”, in which the transition from non-violent to military confrontation was, arguably, engineered by the government leadership (in particular by the de-facto leader of the Meiji oligarchy, Ôkubo Toshimichi), just as Bismarck engineered the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War by means of the Ems Telegram, in order to bring about armed conflict without taking the role of aggressor.

The thesis also examines the influence of unforced strategic error on the course of the civil war in its early stages. This leads to a reappraisal of the orthodox view that the imperial forces were never in danger of defeat, and to the conclusion that the Rebellion could well have succeeded but for major strategic error on the part of the rebel leaders.

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In apologising to anyone whose name I may have inadvertently neglected to mention, I would add, of course, that any errors in the resulting text are my own.

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A Note on Pronunciation and on Japanese Names

There are various approaches to the transliteration of Japanese into the Roman alphabet (a process often rather awkwardly referred to as “romanization”).

The method employed in this thesis (except in quotations from authors taking an alternative approach) is based upon the so-called Hepburn System, with the difference that long *o* and *u* are represented by the addition of a circumflex—as, for example, in the names Saigô and Kyûshû, not to mention Tôkyô.

Generally speaking, the vowels in the Japanese words and names that appear in the text may be pronounced more or less as in Italian or New Zealand Maori (preferably without the stress-accent that is a natural feature of English); and the syllable represented in the Hepburn System as *fu* should ideally be sounded like *hu* (a shortened version of *who*), with an initial expulsion of breath between relaxed and slightly parted lips. The vowels *i* and *u* usually become devoiced when they occur between voiceless consonants.

Japanese personal names that appear in the text are given following the Japanese convention whereby the family name precedes the given name.

INTRODUCTION

*War is simply a continuation of political intercourse,
with the addition of other means*

—Carl von Clausewitz: *On War*¹

This thesis reviews the process by which, and the political background against which, Japan's last civil war, the so-called Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, began. In doing so it examines, for the first time in English as far as this writer is aware², the hypothesis that in January 1877 the de-facto leader of the Japanese government set out to provoke a rebellion in order to crush it and free the government once and for all from the danger of being overthrown by armed force.

In the first, formative decade of Meiji Japan, the years 1873 (Meiji 6) and 1877 (Meiji 10) stand out in particular: 1873 as the year of the first major split in the oligarchy that had taken power in 1868 (ostensibly in a dispute over policy towards Korea—the so-called *Seikan-Ron* [征韓論]), resulting in the resignation of Army Minister Saigō Takamori and others; 1877 as the year of the seven-month conflict that is usually called in English the Satsuma Rebellion but which the Japanese call the South-West War (*Seinan no Eki* [西南の役] or *Seinan-Sensō* [西南戦争]), from which the government emerged in unassailable control of the country.

Of these two events, it is the former to which, on balance, English-language historians of post-Tokugawa Japan have accorded greater attention. An exception to this trend is Buck, whose unpublished doctoral thesis (Buck 1959) and later detailed study of the early stages of the war (Buck, 1973) focus more on the military than the political aspects of the war; another exception is Stephan (1965). In 1973, citing the contemporary account by Mounsey (Mounsey 1879)³, wrote that apart from that work

¹ Book 8, Chapter 6, part B. Clausewitz, Howard et al. 1976, p. 605.

² Were it not for the first time, one might expect some reference to this hypothesis in Beasley 1995; but there is none.

³ Mounsey's study of the political background to the war, as well as of the war itself, is a widely-quoted reference source—even being cited by Inoue (Inoue 1970, vol.2, p. 118).

there seemed to be “no detailed information on the rebellion available in a Western language” (Buck 1973, p. 428); the neglect he noted then appears to have continued, so that the situation is seemingly no different today.

Thus, for example, Beasley, in *The Meiji Restoration* (Beasley 1972), devotes several pages to the *Seikan-Ron* affair (op. cit., pp. 373-378) and only one paragraph to the rebellion (op. cit., p. 402). In *The Modern History of Japan* (Beasley 1973), both events are given broadly equal coverage (op. cit., pp. 114-115, 117-119, and two minor references to the Satsuma Rebellion on pages 146 and 147 respectively); however, in the reworking that produced *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Beasley 1995) references to the rebellion were reduced to a few lines (op. cit., pp. 64, 81, 105).

Reischauer and Craig (1979) devote three paragraphs to the 1873 crisis; the Satsuma Rebellion is given one paragraph, though one containing the significant conclusion that “The new government had met its last great domestic challenge. Henceforth it could... modernize Japan and build up its power against the outside world, free from any fear that reactionary forces would overthrow it at home” (op. cit., pp. 142-144).

Lehmann (1982), who devotes more than a page of *The Roots of Modern Japan* to a conventional *Seikan-Ron* presentation (op. cit., p. 187), is contrastingly cursory in his treatment of the Satsuma Rebellion. Thus, for example:-

There were, it is true, a number of han uprisings in the post Meiji Restoration years, such as the Saga (1874) and Satsuma (1877) rebellions, but although their immediate impact was considerable, seen from a longer historical perspective, their significance is negligible.

Lehmann 1982, p. 82

and:-

...in the immediate aftermath of this incident (i.e. of the *seikan-ron* split—PT) the government was faced with **a number of armed uprisings from dissident samurai**; these **culminated in the Satsuma revolt of 1877**. The latter was suppressed and Saigo died. While . . . the government was by no means rid of political opposition, following 1877 no concerted armed confrontation against the government occurred.

op. cit., p. 187 (emphasis added)

Lehmann's comments appear debatable on several counts. Firstly, insofar as he implies a sustained escalation of insurrectionary activity throughout the period from the Saga Uprising (early 1874) through to early 1877 (outbreak of the Satsuma Rebellion), he gives a distorted picture of the pattern of armed *shizoku* revolt. Gotô (1975) gives a time-chart analysis (in Ôishi et al. 1975, pp. 295-298) which shows, from the

suppression of the Saga Uprising through to October 1876, an extended period of relative calm, with only a sprinkling of comparatively minor disturbances, in only two of which do the number of participants exceed double figures⁴; then in October 1876 there is a sudden explosion of quickly-suppressed revolts in western Japan, followed by a lull at the turn of 1876-77 which ends with the outbreak of the Satsuma Rebellion in early February 1877.

Secondly, by positing the *seikan-ron* split as the implied cause of all these armed revolts, Lehmann takes no account of significant political developments during this period, particularly in 1876—a year which saw growing conflict between the central government and two distinct sections of Japanese society: on the one hand the *shizoku*, whose stipends represented a financially burdensome feudal legacy from which the government wished to find relief; on the other hand the agrarian community, a greatly more numerous sector of the population, on which the government depended for sorely-needed tax revenue.

Further, to lump together the Saga Uprising and the Satsuma Rebellion is to disregard what are arguably significant quantitative and qualitative differences between the two insurrections.

Quantitatively, it is to treat as equivalent, on the one hand a local *émeute* by no more than some 3,000 ill-equipped and poorly-organized men (which the forces sent to deal with it were able to suppress in ten days) and, on the other, a civil war involving tens of thousands of professionally-led soldiers on either side, which in the course of seven months ranged over much of Kyûshû, and which, in military expense alone (disregarding costs of post-war reconstruction), cost the government the equivalent of some three-quarters of its entire tax revenue for 1877 (Mounsey 1879, pp. 235-238).

The qualitative differences are of a greater order of significance. In the case of Saga, the insurrectionists were no more than an association of private individuals banded together to oppose (among other things) the ouster from government of Saigô Takamori and the group of ministers who had sided with him in the argument over policy towards Korea; there was no parallel rift in the institutional relationship between the central government and Saga prefecture (just as, in October 1876, the revolts in the prefectures of Fukuoka (*Akizuki no Ran*), Yamaguchi (*Hagi no Ran*) and Kumamoto (*Shimpûren no Ran*), were not paralleled by friction between the central government and the prefectures concerned).

In contrast, in the case of Satsuma/Kagoshima, long before the Rebellion occurred, dissident samurai had taken control of the prefectural administration (Beasley 1973, p.

⁴ These occurred in January 1875 in Nakatsu and Akizuki, northern Kyûshû, the former involving "several hundred", the latter four hundred and fifty.

118; Inoue 1973, vol. 2, p. 202; pp. 208~210; Mounsey 1879 *passim*), and, in open defiance of Tōkyō, were governing the prefecture on lines that sought to preserve the pre-Meiji feudal system that the central government was bent on eradicating. Thus, alone among the upheavals of the 1870s, the Satsuma Rebellion can be seen clearly as the military continuation of a pre-existing political conflict that was *institutional* in character: as the final, violent climax to a sustained confrontation not merely between two sharply conflicting views of what kind of society Japan should be and how it should be governed, but between the central government and a powerful local administration. It was a resolution by force of what was, in Beasley's words (Beasley, loc. cit.) "a situation that could not be tolerated indefinitely by a government careful of its authority"). Thus, in addition to the size of the Satsuma army and the scale of the assault it launched, there were issues at stake in the South West War that were not in contention in the earlier, and relatively minor, events.

Underlining this institutional aspect of the Rebellion, Mounsey writes that "the most direct and important consequence of its suppression was *the extinction of the last of the semi-independent states of Japan* and the extension of the direct rule of the Mikado's government over the whole empire" (Mounsey 1879, p. 252; emphasis added)—completing, almost ten years after the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shōgunate, the transformation of Japan from the patchwork of feudal baronies it had been for many centuries into a unified state.

Yet another significant political consequence is noted by Buck, namely the prestige and power that victory over the Satsuma rebels gave to Army Minister Yamagata Aritomo and to those associated with him:—

In part, at least, Yamagata's victory over Saigo determined the character of the leadership Japan was to have until the end of World War I -- and the impact of this leadership reverberated throughout the world a generation later.

Buck 1959, p. 244

Taking these various factors into account, in addition to the freedom from threat which the government was to enjoy as a result of its victory in 1877 (a point on which Lehmann appears to concur with Reischauer and Craig)⁵, it is, in the view of this writer, hard to see how the Satsuma Rebellion can be deemed to be, as Lehmann suggests, of "negligible" significance in any perspective, whether short or long. Indeed, rather than being on a par with the other *shizoku* risings of the 1870s, the South-West War is arguably at least comparable (*mutatis mutandis*), both in scale and in terms of what was at stake for the subsequent governance of Japan, with the Tokugawa Shōgunate's unsuccessful 1866 campaign against the rebel domain of Chōshū.

⁵ Not to mention the vindication of the principle of conscription as the basis for Japan's military development

In this connection it is surely significant that Japanese speakers, whether lay persons or professional historians, distinguish very clearly between the samurai risings of 1874 and 1876 on the one hand and what they call the South-West War on the other. They refer to the former as *ran* (乱), which may be translated as “disturbance”; but the latter is either an *eki* 役) or a *sensô* (戦争), either of which words, unambiguously, means “war”.

Viewed as a specimen of the genus of military conflict called civil war (what the Prussian military theorist Clausewitz might have called a continuation of domestic politics by other means), the South-West War is of interest on several counts—not least in terms of the political process that produced it, of how and why the South-West War actually began in the way it did, of who really began it and why they did so.

In the passage from which the quotation heading this Introduction is taken, Clausewitz argues that war, rather than being a violent discontinuity from the preceding “peace”, is “simply a continuation of political intercourse, *with the addition of other means*” (emphasis added). He was writing of war in the context of war between states—in other words, between political entities that are theoretically equal in terms of sovereignty; yet there is arguably no reason in principle for not applying his thoughts and arguments equally to war within states (i.e. civil war)—particularly in a case such as that of the Satsuma Rebellion (or, by the same token, the Biafran war or the American Civil War), in which a territorially defined, and to that degree politically distinct, part of a country is pitted against a government claiming authority over the country as a whole.

As is well known, the immediate source of impetus for the rebellion lay in two actions of the central government: the dispatch of undercover police agents to Kagoshima (where they were soon unmasked and arrested), and the attempt to remove arms and ammunition from government arsenals located in the prefecture; the provocative effect of these actions is generally presented as if, so to speak, while seeking to avert an explosion, the government inadvertently struck the fatal spark; thus, for example, Morris writes that the attempted collection of munitions was intended to “forestall trouble” but that the action, “far from solving any difficulties, triggered the disaster” (Morris 1975, p. 261), and Buck that “These two Government actions . . . merged to become the dual cause of the very Rebellion (they) were intended to prevent” (Buck 1959, p. 237). In other words: things blew up because the government blundered.

For reasons which will be discussed in this thesis, it may well have suited the Japanese government of the time, particularly its de-facto leader, Home Minister Ôkubo Toshimichi, for the “blunder” version of events to become generally accepted. A serious problem with this version, however, is that it raises, and fails to answer, the question of how the astute political manager Ôkubo is generally recognised to have

been could have made not one, but two, such crass errors of judgement.

Hints at a very different interpretation of events are found in the work of at least two Japanese historians: Inoue Kiyoshi and Môri Toshihiko. They both suggest (Inoue, it must be said, more directly) that Ôkubo wittingly set out to provoke some kind of insurrection. Inoue (1970, vol.2., p. 217—218) asserts very clearly: "Ôkubo provoked the Kagoshima samurai"⁶; and Môri (1969, p. 192), writing of the government's dispatch of secret police agents to the prefecture, comments: "It would be reasonable to interpret this as a form of provocation"⁷.

Inoue goes further. Citing Ôkubo's welcoming of the rebellion expressed in a letter to Itô Hirobumi early in February 1877, he portrays Ôkubo wearing "a faintly sinister smile at the *success of the provocation*" (emphasis added), and comments: "Here indeed is the epitome of the coldly cruel, unfeeling, absolutist bureaucrat". Even setting aside the emotionally extreme language, there remains in this characterization the image of a man who, once he had determined wherein lay the solution to a political problem, would pursue that solution with an adherence to *Staatsräson* and *Realpolitik* (here the language of Bismarck seems appropriate) from which more human considerations and feelings (*ninjô*) would not deter him; and Inoue is not alone in holding such a view of Ôkubo.

The historical novelist Shiba Ryôtarô, whose attention to historical accuracy is widely recognised, but who writes without the professional historian's obligation to circumspection, allows himself to be even more direct in *Tobu ga Gotoku* (Shiba 1980, vol. 7, p. 173: "...it was not a matter of provocation simply being the result of what was done, rather that Ôkubo acted decisively knowing full well from the outset that provocation was what the result would be"⁸). Although *Tobu ga Gotoku* is fiction, it is considered worth quoting here because it is a work carefully based upon historical fact and because of the generally recognised excellence of Shiba's historical analysis.

Both Shiba (ibid) and Iwai (1987, p. 136) portray Vice Minister of Marine Kawamura Sumiyoshi as warning Ôkubo that the action he proposed would provoke the local *shizoku*, and Buck (1959, p. 122) writes that the proposal to remove the munitions was initially opposed not only by Kawamura but also by army generals Yamagata Aritomo and Ôyama Iwao, on the grounds that it "would be certain to add to existing unrest"—warnings that, if indeed given, went unheeded. The implication is clear: Ôkubo was clearly aware of the likely effect of what he was about to do, and did

⁶ "Ôkubo wa Kagoshima shizoku wo chôhatsu shita..."

⁷ "issu no chôhatsu to kaishite yoi"

⁸ "...kono chôhatsu ga kekka toshite sô natta koto dewa naku, Ôkubo ga saisho kara chôhatsu ni naru koto wo shirinuitekô shita koto de aru..."

it in that knowledge—provoking a samurai uprising in Kagoshima which was then crushed with the superior military resources of the state⁹.

That is not automatically to suggest that Ôkubo expected or intended to precipitate conflict *on the scale that actually occurred*, with all of the attendant destruction of life and property (not to mention the impact of the war on the national treasury). Nevertheless, even without such an implication, the charge of deliberate incitement to rebellion, like an accusation of lighting matches in a gunpowder magazine, is serious enough to warrant scrutiny. It raises issues that do not appear to have been mentioned, let alone addressed, in any English-language writing on the South-West War.

Craig (in Craig & Shively et al. 1970, p. 306), identifies “the management of Satsuma and Saigô” as a “vitally important function of Ôkubo in the early Meiji government”, and spells out aspects of what that management task involved: “When making policy decisions Ôkubo had to balance government needs against Satsuma intransigence and his own ties to Saigô. He had to consider also the relations between the Satsuma clique in Tokyo and Satsuma leaders in the han.” Underlining how critical this responsibility was, Craig likens Satsuma to a ticking time bomb, the explosion of which Ôkubo had to prevent “until the government was strong enough to contain it”. It seems hardly likely that a man of Ôkubo’s character and calibre would have triggered the explosion of 1877 inadvertently; yet that is what the orthodox version of events necessarily implies.

An alternative view seems to this writer to be arguable: that, continuing Craig’s pyrotechnic vein of imagery, Ôkubo, having decided that the government was at last strong enough to contain the explosion of the Satsuma time bomb, opted for a more-or-less controlled detonation as a method of bomb-disposal. The main aim of this thesis is to explore critically both the orthodox view of events and this alternative interpretation implicit in the suggestions of Inoue, Môri and Shiba

There was a celebrated precedent for what these authors suggest Ôkubo did, with which Ôkubo would have been familiar since he had visited its architect in Berlin. It is known as the affair of the Ems Telegram. Described at greater length in, for example, Howard 1961, pp. 52-56 (and in any biography of Bismarck), the essentials are as follows:—

Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Prussia in 1870, had decided that Prussian interests required a war with France, and may have been hoping that an appropriate *casus belli* might emerge from the French reigning family’s dispute with the Prussian Hohenzollerns over the issue of succession to the Spanish throne. His problem was

⁹ Buck nevertheless adheres to the orthodox “provocation by mistake” view, as previously shown.

that his king wanted peace. The solution came to him in the form of a telegraphed report of conversations at the resort town of Ems between the King and the French ambassador (which, after parting, the King had declined to resume), with a suggestion from the King that it might be released to the press. The original was perhaps capable of being construed so as to imply that the King, finding the ambassador's approach irksomely importunate, had snubbed him; before acting on the King's suggestion, Bismarck slightly edited the report so as to make that interpretation inescapable. Amid the ensuing furore, the French government was in effect compelled by public opinion to declare war on Prussia—a war in which Prussia achieved a spectacular victory while being able to claim to have been the victim of French aggression. Thus Bismarck got the war that he wanted, all the while maintaining a façade of innocence.

Because of that striking precedent, the hypothesis that the Satsuma Rebellion was the result of provocation deliberately instigated by Ôkubo will sometimes be referred to in the following pages as “the Ems Telegram hypothesis”.

In scrutinising the hypothesis, the first problem is a seeming absence of direct documentary evidence. In itself that is perhaps not surprising; if Ôkubo acted as the hypothesis suggests he did, he would have known that his political (and possibly also his physical) life depended on keeping his tracks very well covered, as also would any confederate in such an enterprise; however, it means that the enquiry is dependent on indirect evidence, particularly evidence of motive and circumstance.

One may begin by taking stock of the point that relations between Satsuma/Kagoshima and the central government had reached by late 1876/early 1877, and the threat this posed to the new Meiji state that was still in a very early stage of development. The question has to be posed: if Ôkubo saw provoking an uprising as the solution to a problem, what was the nature of the problem as he is likely to have seen it?

Having defined what may perhaps be called “the Kagoshima Problem” the focus of enquiry logically moves to considering what other options might have been considered for solving it, and why Ôkubo might have rejected them. In particular, it is necessary to consider the options at the two extremes (on the one hand, doing nothing about the problem in the hope that it might somehow solve itself; on the other, initiating a pre-emptive intervention by force). It is also necessary to ask what else the government actually tried to do before embarking on a course that would lead to the outbreak of armed revolt.

Given the key rôle of Ôkubo as de-facto leader of the government, it has also to be considered whether or not the conduct suggested in the Ems Telegram hypothesis is

consistent with what is known of his personality and of his approach to the business of politics and government.

In addition to the orthodox view of the outbreak of the South West War, this thesis also addresses the orthodox view of its outcome—namely that the Satsuma Rebellion was from the outset a venture doomed to defeat. It will be argued that, rather than the government's material superiority, what made defeat of the Satsuma army virtually certain was an unforced strategic error made by the Satsuma military leadership, and that, since that error was unforced (in that the Satsuma leaders were free to choose an alternative line of action that arguably offered promise of success), the Rebellion was not necessarily the intrinsically hopeless enterprise that it is conventionally accounted as having been. In other words, arguably, the position of the government, and with it the future course of Japanese politics and policy, may have been more vulnerably in the balance than is generally thought. If this is so, then it adds considerably to the significance of the Rebellion and its defeat.

The enquiry conducted in this thesis is set out as follows:-

- **Chapter 1** sets the political scene, giving an overview of developments through the early to mid 1870s (particularly from the government split of 1873 to shortly before the Rebellion), and analyses the nature of the challenge posed by Kagoshima to the central government and its threat to the integrity of the Japanese state.

- **Chapter 2** examines in more detail developments in the critical year 1876, in particular the signs of growing unrest and of government countersubversion measures.

- **Chapter 3** addresses questions of motive, analysing the options open to the government as they may have appeared to Ōkubo in early 1877, and demonstrates why, in the circumstances, provoking the Satsuma *shizoku* into revolt might have appeared to be the most rational and practicable approach to resolving the Kagoshima problem in the interests of the Japanese state.

- **Chapter 4** examines and offers interpretations of circumstantial evidence relating to the Ems Telegram hypothesis.

- **Chapter 5** seeks to assess the degree of risk to which, assuming that he acted as the Ems Telegram hypothesis suggests he did, Ōkubo exposed the government (questioning the general assumption that the Satsuma Rebellion was from the outset a lost cause in that the government could never have been defeated).

- **Chapter 6** presents conclusions.

In Clausewitzian terms, this thesis may be seen as a study of a political process in which the pre-war state of affairs and the transition to war are seen as parts of a

continuum. It will be argued that that transition, far from occurring through government bumbling, as the orthodox view suggests, was in all likelihood quite purposefully managed, using a technique which Otto von Bismarck, to whom Ôkubo has been compared, had employed with such success in 1870.

CHAPTER 1: "THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO TRUE IMPERIAL RULE"

*"The arrogance of soldiers unchecked
is injurious to the cause of public order"*
—Kido Takayoshi¹⁰

Although Satsuma *han* had played a leading role in overthrowing the Tokugawa Bakufu and establishing the new government, and although Satsuma men continued to play a major part in government even after the 1873 split and the resignation of Saigô Takamori, it would be hard to dispute McLaren's observation concerning the Satsuma Rebellion that "whatever the immediate cause of the outbreak, the struggle between Satsuma and the Imperial Government seems wellnigh inevitable" (McLaren 1916, p. 102).

Central to any understanding of why that is so is an appreciation of the links between many of the most contentious reform issues of the first decade of Meiji on the one hand and certain basic facts of geography and demography — particularly the latter—on the other.

Many key elements in the modernization programme of the early to mid 1870s (e.g. the abolition of feudal domains and creation of prefectures (*haihan-chiken*—*廃藩置県*); the introduction of conscription; prohibition of the wearing of swords except by military and police personnel; commutation of samurai stipends) impinged in various ways upon those Japanese who were members of the traditional warrior class. Indeed, to modify slightly a phrase widely attributed to Josef Stalin, the liquidation of the samurai as a class may be said to have been one of the government's aims.

Samurai were not numerically negligible, in Mounsey's estimate "numbering with their families nearly 2,000,000" (Mounsey 1879, p. 59), of whom some 200,000 lived in Satsuma. Kido Takayoshi estimated their numerical strength at

¹⁰ Diary entry for 5 February 1877 (Translated in Kido, Brown & Hirota—*cited hereinafter as KBH, with volume numbers given in Roman numerals*). This citation appears in KBH III, pp. 435-436 (NB: on p. 434 the year is given incorrectly as 1876).

some 400,000 families (KBH III, p. 439) ¹¹.

These estimates are broadly supported by Gotô (in Ôishi et al. 1975, pp. 289-290), who shows that in the mid-1870s over ten percent (48,387 families out of a nationwide total of 407,883) lived in Kagoshima prefecture. No other prefecture approached that proportion; the nearest to it, Ishikawa (20,406 families), being followed by Yamaguchi (15,970) and Aichi (15,942), with Saga (14,459) completing the top five. It would seem to be hardly coincidental that the largest anti-government samurai revolts of the 1870s occurred in three out of these five prefectures: Saga, Yamaguchi and Kagoshima.

In terms of the proportion of samurai within the local population, Mounsey shows that this was higher in the Satsuma part of Kagoshima prefecture than elsewhere, accounting for 204,143 persons out of a total of 812,327, or some 25% (Mounsey 1879, p. 117) a percentage which Norman (1943, p. 44) describes as "unusually high"¹².

These figures alone make it clear that government policy vis-à-vis the samurai class was bound to impact on Satsuma with a force unparalleled anywhere else in Japan, in terms both of the gross numbers of persons affected and of the proportion of the local population that they represented.

The influence of geography is succinctly summed up by McLaren:—

...while the Han were nominally done away with when the Ken were created, clanism persisted, and though it was decreed that the Government should be completely centralized, sectionalism continued. *The degree of completeness with which old habits survived varied in different parts of the country, according to the strength of the Han and their remoteness from Tokyo.* Just as it had been under the Tokugawa Shogunate, so it was for some years after the Restoration; *the Government's power and influence reached its maximum intensity at the centre, gradually diminishing until at the circumference it*

¹¹ Cf. various estimates for the national population as at the year 1875, ranging between 34.8 million and 37.2 million (Source: Hayami, in Jansen, Rozman et al., 1986, p. 291); Mounsey gives "nearly 34 millions" as the population at the time of the Rebellion (Mounsey 1879, p. 116).

¹² Haraguchi, Sakai et al (1975) support the 25% proportion of Samurai in Satsuma, as well as its unusualness; they also explain it: "Satsuma's ratio of samurai to commoner, nearly 1:3, was the highest in the country. These samurai constituted the reservoir for the han bureaucracy. This domain was unique in that samurai were placed in charge of villages in the countryside whereas in other areas a measure of autonomy was the general rule."n (op. cit., p. 7). This meant that even lower-ranking rural samurai (*gôshi* or *tojôshi*, as they were variously called in Satsuma) had a key administrative role and that, however much they were despised by the *jôkashi* (castle-town samurai), they were, if not part of the ruling class, included operationally in the governance of the domain. NB: the proportion of 25% on which these authorities agree calls into question Craig's figure of 40% (in Craig and Shively, p. 306).

became almost nil.

McLaren 1916, p. 91; emphasis added

It was, of course, precisely at this circumference that the then south-westernmost prefecture of Kagoshima lay (the Ryûkyû islands, which now form the prefecture of Okinawa, were at that time still effectively under Satsuma control, as they had been during the Tokugawa period).

McLaren continues with pointed relevance:—

In the Tokugawa period an official of the Shogun's Government entered the territory of the Shimadzu (sic) family at peril of his life, and the same was almost as true of Satsuma until after 1877.

(ibid.)

The combined effect of these factors meant that the ability of the government to monitor and influence events was at its most ineffective precisely in that part of the country where adverse reaction to the government's policies and actions towards the samurai class was likely to be most massive. It is important to bear this aspect of the situation in mind when tracing the development of the confrontation that, in February 1877, turned into civil war.

Haihan-chiken had not left the old domain boundaries untouched; and the Kagoshima prefecture of 1877 comprised a combination of the old domains of Satsuma (薩摩) and Ōsumi (大隅) together with part of the former Hyûga (日向) *han* (Inoue 1970, vol. 2, p. 202). Within such a combination, however, Satsuma was bound to dominate, and it may be said that it was in Satsuma, rather than in the prefecture as a whole that the kernel of the problem confronting the central government was located.

Stated in stark essence, the problem was that, whereas prefectures were supposed to be broadly under the control of the central government, Kagoshima prefecture was increasingly becoming tantamount to a separate state within the Empire.

It may be said that there was nothing particularly new about this—that under the Tokugawa shôgunate also Satsuma's rulers had preferred to govern their fief very much as an *imperium in imperio* (J.H. Gubbins, writing in 1879—quoted in Iwata, p. 22)¹³. But one of the aims of *haihan-chiken* had been to do away with the

¹³ Mounsey (Mounsey 1879, p. 17) uses the same expression, adding a significant reference to "the old saying that each of (Satsuma's) inhabitants considered himself a Satsuma man first and then Japanese" — a saying which, he continues, "remained perfectly true up to the date of the recent Rebellion" (emphasis added).

feudal semi-autonomy of the *bakuhan* system and create a united, centralised polity; Kagoshima's separatist tendency challenged this concept. Moreover, the Kagoshima "state" was being governed on a basis that demonstrated hostility towards the social reforms that the central government had put in place in the rest of the country, embodying a view of what kind of society Japan should be that challenged the government on every substantive point: it was, in effect, a dictatorship of the feudal samurai class of the old domain of Satsuma (*kyû han-shizoku no dokusai-kokka* [旧藩士族の独裁国家]—Inoue loc.cit.)—or "Saigô's Kingdom" (*Saigô Ôkoku*—西郷王国), as Uno (in Ôkubo 1967, p. 169) is not alone in putting it.

Most seriously—and this was something that the Tokugawa Bakufu had been able to prevent until in its last years of weakness and waning authority—Kagoshima possessed an independent military power sufficiently strong to pose a significant challenge to Tôkyô; for instance, taxes due to the central government were not being remitted (Inoue loc. cit.), and the prefectural government was in a position to defy Tôkyô to come and collect if it dared. Already in 1871, Mounsey relates, when Iwakura Tomomi had visited Satsuma on behalf of the government, he had been perturbed to see the extent to which the domain was run on military lines (Mounsey 1879, pp. 37-38). By early 1877 the British ambassador Sir Harry Parkes, who had been resident in Japan since early in the Bakumatsu period, was to comment:-

"Although observing outwardly to some extent the recent decree of the government prohibiting the wearing of swords, the samurai of Satsuma have never been disarmed, and under the name of establishing schools for this particular class, they have formed and maintained among themselves a formidable military organisation."

Quoted in Harries & Harries, p. 22

What made this situation more broadly threatening was the way in which confrontation with Kagoshima prefecture interlocked with an escalating wider confrontation between the government and the samurai class as a whole. Although the history of that confrontation is well known, the essential points will be recapitulated here in order to highlight the nature of the threat the government faced.

Beginning in 1871 with *haihan-chiken*, the Meiji oligarchy, amid all the other wide-ranging and radical changes to which it was subjecting Japan, embarked upon a sustained assault on the status, privileges and perquisites of this class. As the figures given earlier in this chapter indicate, this amounted to making potential antagonists of wellnigh half a million men who not only were armed (the government

did not seek to emulate Hideyoshi's Sword Hunt and disarm the *shizoku*, but allowed its male members to keep their weapons) but also had been encouraged from an early age to become skilled in the use of the sword, and of whom many had gained practical military experience in the various conflicts that had culminated in the overthrow of the Tokugawa Bakufu. As also noted previously, some 10% of these potential antagonists were Satsuma men.

This was a course of action fraught with potential danger; but the government had no choice. The imperative need to create a state and a polity unified under imperial rule virtually dictated *haihan-chiken*, even though this step deprived samurai of their clan identity; the same need likewise dictated abolition of the vertical warrior-farmer-artisan-merchant stratification of society (*shi-nô-kô-shô* 士農工商), even though it took away the distinctive identity of the *shizoku* as the ruling class (see Lehmann 1987, pp. 183-184); as Lehmann observes: "A great national effort was called for; geographic and social solidarity were a vital prerequisite for success".

From the abolition of these classes it followed that the state should conscript its soldiers from among commoners no less than from samurai. Military conscription regardless of class origin was enacted into law in November 1872 and put into effect the following year (Norman 1943, p. 3). It is a commonplace of the period that this measure was widely resented by members of the *shizoku* class, since it destroyed at a stroke their distinctive *raison d'être*.¹⁴ and was, in the words of the contemporary observer Mounsey (p. 61), "evidently intended to destroy all clannish feeling, cohesion, and power, and to result eventually in the disarmament of all the Samurai".

As Norman shows (Norman 1943), the concept of employing non-samurai in the military was far from unprecedented and had a long history (most recently in the exploits of the *Kiheitai* of Chôshû). However, what is of particular relevance here is the response to the introduction of conscription from within the ranks of the Satsuma *shizoku*—especially since it was none other than Saigô Takamori who initially was responsible for overseeing the creation of the new conscript army.

Inoue's discussion of this issue (Inoue 1970, vol. 2, pp. 158—162) makes clear that the military modernization sought by Saigô and his colleagues had anti-feudal implications that extended beyond the anti-samurai nature of universal conscription, and implies that this very probably created, for a time at least, a serious division between Saigô and men who later were to be among his

¹⁴ For different reasons it was also resented by peasants, since it took away hands from the fields and thereby encroached on the living standards of farming families.

senior lieutenants in the Rebellion.

Inoue shows that, predictably, in the debate which followed the 1871 joint proposal of Saigô, Yamagata Aritomo and future Admiral Kawamura Sumiyoshi and preceded the promulgation of the universal conscription decree (*Zenkoku Bohei no Mikotonori* —全国募兵の詔) of 28 November 1872, intense criticism came particularly from such Satsuma men as Kirino Toshiaki and other officers of the Army Ministry¹⁵ whom Inoue refers to as "Saigô's band of retainers" (*Saigô-sokkin no renchû* —西郷側近の連中); he quotes Kirino as asking derisively what would be the good of Yamagata assembling peasants and trying to turn them into soldiers.¹⁶

What Saigô's own views on the issue might have been is unclear, Inoue continues, because he left no recorded opinion. However, he suggests that, while Saigô's views on the subject of social class might have inclined him towards the view that soldiering should be left to samurai while commoners should be encouraged to pursue agriculture, manufacturing and trade, by 1872 his practical experience of commanding the Imperial Guard¹⁷ would have led him to recognise that a modern army could not be created out of traditionally-minded samurai.

The reasons Inoue gives show that the anti-feudal nature of the military organisation that was to be created went far beyond the opening up of military service to commoners. In the Imperial Guard as initially organised¹⁸ (the *Shimpei*), there had been little difference between the pay of officers and other ranks, because all had been remunerated by reference to their stipends as samurai. But the reorganisation of the Guard into the *Konoe-hei* brought with it a pay-structure that was based not on feudal status but on military organisation, with the result that it became possible for officers of lower samurai rank to receive higher pay than private soldiers who were their superiors in the feudal pecking order. This sparked off widespread dissatisfaction and resulted in many resignations—in particular from Satsuma men (several hundred, in Inoue's reckoning, amounting to at least 20% of the entire force).

¹⁵ What had originally been the government's Military Department (*Hyôbu*—兵部) was divided in February 1872 into the Army Ministry (*Rikugun-Shô*—陸軍省) and Navy Ministry (*Kaigun-Shô*—海軍省).

¹⁶ *Yamagata wa dohyakushô wo atsumete hei wo tsukuru, hatashite nan no eki aranya?*
(山県は土百姓をあつめて兵を作る、果たして何の益あらんや)

¹⁷ *Shimpei* (親兵) — subsequently reorganised as the *Konoe-Hei* (近衛兵) —Inoue, p. 159.

¹⁸ Initially, since the force that had overthrown the Tokugawa Bakufu has consisted entirely of the troops of individual domains and the government had possessed no soldiers of its own, the three domains of Satsuma, Tosa and Chôshû had between them "lent" a total contingent of some 10,000 men (see, e.g., Westney, in Jansen, Rozman et al., 1986, p.176).

Worse followed when Saigô sought to replace the departed troops with *tojôshi* (外城士—the rural Satsuma equivalent of *gôshi*). Fights broke out between them and the castle-town samurai, who treated them contemptuously as *inaka-mono* (“country bumpkins”); the upshot was that Saigô eventually was constrained to transfer these new recruits into the police force.

The fact that the modern military ranking system was fundamentally at odds with feudal status gradations made it inevitable that similar disruptions occurred also among *Konoe-hei* members from the other two former domains of Tosa and Chôshû, with cliques being formed, fights breaking out, and a general deterioration in the cohesion necessary to the effectiveness of a military force. Matters were made worse still because, at the same time, the government embarked on its first attempt (voluntary commutation) to reduce samurai stipends. They reached their nadir in an episode that necessitated Saigô, who was escorting the Emperor on a tour of western Japan, being recalled to Tôkyô to resolve the situation.

The conclusion to which Inoue suggests these experiences brought Saigô was that there was no option but, in some way or other, to build Japan's new army around men who were unconnected with the old feudal class system; that, if nothing more, would have opened the way to the breaking of the samurai monopoly on military service¹⁹. In other words the move towards universal conscription was, to at least some extent, driven by purely military considerations rather than by a desire to attack the traditional status of the *shizoku* for its own sake.

Be that as it may, the introduction of universal conscription did nevertheless amount to a fundamental assault on what it was that had made the samurai class distinctive, since abolishing its unique warrior status opened the way to removing the economic perquisites that went with it. It is, however, of interest that none of the odium which the measure attracted in *shizoku* eyes appears to have attached to Saigô himself.

If “the meanest blow was the conscription of peasants” (Lehmann, p. 184), hardest-hitting of all, though from the government's standpoint equally dictated by necessity, was the attack on *shizoku* livelihood and living standards represented by the progressive commutation of samurai stipends — which, like the discontinued wearing of swords, was at first voluntary, then made compulsory in 1876. Having abolished the feudal domains of the Tokugawa era, the central government had taken over their financial obligations, including the traditional payment of stipends

¹⁹ Inoue, op. cit., p. 162: “*Nanraka no katachi no kokumin-kaihei-sei, shizoku no gunmu-dokusen haishi ni michi wo hiraku de arô*” (何らかの形の国民皆兵制、士族の軍務独占廃止に道を開くであろう)

to clan retainers, though at reduced rates (by approximately two-thirds— Reischauer & Craig, 1973, p. 139); even with such a reduction, these payments "proved to be a greater weight of debt than the government was able or willing to carry" (Beasley, 1995, p.62). Reischauer and Craig give a stark portrayal of the financial straits in which the new government found itself:-

"It had no sources of revenue *beyond those that had proved inadequate for the shogunate and the domains*, but it was burdened with the costs of the campaigns it had fought to come to power, the accumulated debts and indemnities of the shogunate and the domains, and many new costs involved in trying to modernize the country, as well as the normal expenses of government and the *payments to the daimyo and samurai*. Little help could be expected from customs duties because of their limitation to 5 per cent in the agreement of 1866, which had also saddled Japan with an expensive program of building lighthouses and setting out buoys and lightships.

The seriousness of the government's financial situation can be seen from the fact that *receipts in 1868 were hardly more than a third of expenditure...* The situation was only a little better in 1869, and the government had to resort to issuing large quantities of paper notes, which naturally fell in value and contributed to an already chaotic currency situation left over by the previous regime"

Reischauer & Craig 1973, pp. 139-140 (emphasis added)

Mounsey comments on the situation in 1872 and its implications for the *shizoku*:-

"To continue these pensions at their original rate and to furnish the requisite funds for the creation and maintenance of a standing army and for all the other novel requirements of a centralised administration, was a task which the treasury could not perform, and a burden which the country could not bear. The government therefore decided on capitalising all the pensions of the Daimiô (sic) and Samurai, and now offered to all those among them who desired to commute their pensions, marketable government bonds... This operation was...voluntary on the part of the Samurai, but they foresaw that it would, in all probability, ere long be made compulsory, and that when this was effected, they would not only suffer great and immediate pecuniary loss, but *would also eventually cease to be the governing class of the country.*"

Mounsey, p. 60 (emphasis added)

And indeed, "On 5 August 1876 what had been optional for some was made compulsory for all" (Beasley 1995, p. 63): a once-for-all payout in the form of government bonds to replace annual stipends. By reducing its obligation to the

interest on bonds that represented only a few years' stipend income, so that "the poorest ex-samurai received a good deal less than would support their families in even modest style"²⁰, the government "achieved a major economy, *reducing its budget for this item by approximately 30 per cent*" (emphasis added)²¹.

Mounsey (p. 90) suggests that this was a critical moment for the régime—that if discontented samurai throughout the country had been able at this time to unite around a common class interest and join in an armed rising against the government, they would in every likelihood have been able to overwhelm any force the government could have put against them, but that "The ties of clanship were stronger than class interests, and the opportunity for a rising of the whole body of discontented Samurai throughout the length and breadth of the empire passed, never to return"²².

Mounsey's allusion to the government's vulnerability in the face of any concerted military action by members of the *shizoku* class has an obvious bearing on discussion of what options lay open to the government for action to resolve this problem—a point that will be further addressed in Chapter 3.

By the mid-1870s the situation of the *shizoku* was parlous:—

"As their economic base was undermined, so were their social privileges under siege. From the leadership's perspective, the samurai, in terms of their traditional patterns of behaviour, their exuberant indiscipline, and indeed their physical appearance, were not only anachronisms in an age of modernity, but indeed a source of embarrassment vis-à-vis the Western community, which the government wished to impress by their civilisation, rather than amuse by their exoticism. For centuries the samurai had been taught to be proud; they were now being ridiculed as being relics of a bygone age."

Lehmann, p. 184

Not only was this situation one which "not unnaturally inflamed the passions of the noble warriors and moved them to anger" (Lehmann, *ibid*); anger

²⁰ McLaren notes that: "Pensions of 100 *koku*, or even less, upon which a samurai and his family could barely exist, became hopelessly inadequate when capitalized according to the Government's terms" (McLaren, 1916, p. 89)

²¹ Detailed analysis given by Norman (1973) and McLaren (*op. cit.*), the impact of which is discussed in Chapter 2 below, suggests a significantly higher proportional saving in the samurai pension portion of the budget than the 30% reduction mentioned by Beasley.

²² Jansen (in Jansen, Rozman et al., p. 82), quotes a Tosa ex-samurai as responding to suggestions that he and like-minded comrades join Saigō's rebellion by saying simply "We are Tosa men".

was bound to be sharpened by a sense of betrayal. Beasley (1972) makes an observation that goes to the crux of the matter:-

“The fact that most samurai unrest occurred in ‘loyalist’ domains (Satsuma, Chôshû and Hizen) tells us something about the character of the Meiji Restoration movement. Of the rank-and-file samurai who had contributed to the downfall of the Tokugawa, the great majority had not done so with the idea of introducing anything like the kind of program their leaders had adopted by the end of 1873.”

Beasley 1972, pp. 402-403

Lehman (p. 185) makes a similar point; Mounsey (p. 107, footnote) cites a contemporary comment in the same vein by “a Japanese statesman” (whom he does not name) to the effect that the South West War “might be looked upon as a struggle between the Satsuma men in the government aided by those of Chôshiu (sic) on the one side and the Satsuma Shizoku in general on the other. The latter consider that the men who went forward from the province a few years ago to take a share in the administration of the country, *in a certain sense as representatives of the clan, have acted in a manner completely at variance with their mandate*” (emphasis added).

In fact, as is well known, 1873 was a watershed year for the Meiji oligarchy: the year of the *seikan-ron* split, of Saigô Takamori's resignation from government and of his return to Kagoshima, from which he was to emerge only as titular commander of the Rebellion.

In a clear reference to the split, Fukuzawa Yukichi is quoted (Iwai 1987, p.117) as observing that the causes of the Rebellion lay far earlier in time than the day of Saigô's armed invasion of Kumamoto Prefecture (そもそも西郷が、兵器をたずさえて熊本県に乱入したるは、その乱入の日に乱をなしたるにあらず、乱をなすの原因は、遙かに前日に在りて存せり).

The intricacies of the *Seikan-Ron* affair lie outside the scope of this study, but it is important to note its bearing on subsequent events. Firstly: the resignation from office of Saigô, of Etô Shimpei and Soejima Taneomi (Saga), Itagaki Taisuke and Gotô Shôjirô (Tosa), opened the way to Ôkubo's rise to de-facto leadership as Home Minister (*Naimu-Kyô*—内務卿), a position formally lower than Prime Minister, but one in which Ôkubo amassed such power that the period from 1873 to his death is often referred to as *Ôkubo Dokusai* (大久保独裁)— the Ôkubo dictatorship (Craig and Shively 1970, p. 306). It should be noted, however, that the Satsuma presence in the reconstructed cabinet was in fact stronger than before, with five members out of the total of thirteen. (including the

former domain regent Shimazu Hisamitsu, as Minister of the Left)—Iwata 1964, pp 173-174..

Secondly, the affair was instrumental in Saigô's acquiring heroic status in the eyes of samurai both in Satsuma and elsewhere for his defeat in standing for a "strong" foreign policy that they saw as being in keeping with national pride and with their conception of national honour; this presumably eclipsed whatever odium he had earned through his responsibility in connection with the introduction of conscription. Early in the following year, *Seikan* became a rallying cry for the Saga insurgents (led by Etô Shimpei, who was captured and executed after having visited Saigô in the mistaken belief that the latter would support the uprising).

A third significant after-effect was the mass resignation from the army of many officers of Satsuma origin. Prominent among these were Shinohara Kunimoto²³ (who would fall to a sniper's bullet at Kichiji Pass on the first day of the battle of Tabaruzaka—Isami, p. 62), Kirino Toshiaki, Beppu Shinsuke (who would act as Saigô's *kaishaku* in the last battle at Shiroyama) and Hemmi Jûrôta; these men would be prominent, firstly among the teachers and leaders of the *Shigakkô* (Shinohara, for example, became head of infantry training), and later among the senior officer corps of the Satsuma army. The mass exodus of Satsuma officers and men represented a serious setback to the government in the early stages of creating its new conscript army²⁴; their presence in Satsuma is noted by Westney (in Jansen, Rozman et al. 1986, p. 183) as one of the factors contributing to a probable superiority of the Satsuma army over the government forces in terms of organization and training.

Above all, it was from the time of Saigô's return to Kagoshima and his establishing of the so-called "private schools" (*shigakkô* — 私学校) that the confrontation between the prefecture and the central government became institutionalised, the prefecture becoming "Saigô's Kingdom" (*Saigô Ôkoku*—西郷王国—Uno, in Ôkubo 1981, p. 169), with Saigô, willy-nilly, placed in the position of an unofficial monarch, and Governor Ôyama as his Prime Minister (Inoue 1970 vol. 2, p. 202)—a state in which the *shigakkô* organisation in effect took over the entire Satsuma bureaucracy and became a mechanism for ensuring

²³ 篠原国幹 In Mounsey, the reading of the family name is given as Shinowara, which may be the source of Buck's use of the same reading. However, other sources consulted by this writer unanimously use the reading Shinohara (e.g. Ueda et al. 1990)—as, in the writer's personal experience, do local residents of the Kichiji Pass, where this leading light of the Rebellion was killed.

²⁴ In this context it is noteworthy that Saigô's younger brother Tsugumichi remained in government service. According to Iwai, Takamori explicitly requested that he stay and help Ôkubo (Iwai 1987, p. 114). He was to play a key staff rôle in the Army Ministry during the quelling of the Satsuma Rebellion

that the “prefecture” (Inoue puts the word into quotation-marks) was run by and in the interests of the old feudal warrior class. Thus, for example, while elsewhere in Japan peasants were being given title to the land they worked, in Satsuma/Kagoshima the old *kadowari* system was maintained, whereby an agricultural village would be divided into collective units of households (*kado*), within which each household “was responsible for an allotment of land. *However, these peasants did not receive full title to the land, only the right and the obligation to cultivate it*” (Haraguchi, Sakai et al. 1975, pp.19-20; emphasis added)²⁵.

Thus, to samurai everywhere who felt threatened and betrayed by the actions of the government, Kagoshima offered hope. It was symbolized by Saigō Takamori (whether or not he wished to be drafted for that rôle); but the source of its attractive power was not limited to his or any one personality, for it embodied a living microcosm of Japan as many of the *fuhei-shizoku* (不平士族) doubtless wished it to be: a society in which samurai retained their warrior status and privileges and continued to be the governing class—and where, as Kido was to lament on the day news of the Rebellion reached him, there was no check on the arrogance of soldiers.

Kido’s diary gives evidence that the government was aware of the threat that this posed. In the entry for 5 February (the day news reached the government of the *shigakkō* student’s looting of munitions), he wrote:—

”Today the powerful reputation of Satsuma reverberates to all corners of the land; malcontented *shizoku* in more than ten prefectures are observing the movements of Satsuma. Once something happens, they appear to be ready to respond.”

KBH III, p. 435

Clearly the government had its sources of intelligence (Kido refers later in the same entry to “our investigation”), and these revealed how geographically widespread was the potential for unrest; Kido was able to name ten prefectures as “centres of dissension”: Kumamoto, Saga, Chikuzen, Bizen, Inaba, Tosa, Hikone, Kuwana, Shōnai and Aizu. Most of the names in this list echo the old feudal domains that had borne them, and have vanished from administrative Japan; only the first three were located in Kyūshū — the rest (with the exception of Tosa, situated in Shikoku) were in Honshū, ranging from Inaba (now part of Tottori prefecture in the Chūgoku region) to as far north as the Tōhoku region (Shōnai, in present-day Yamagata prefecture; Aizu, in modern Fukushima).²⁶

²⁵ The authors continue with the important observation that “Members of the *kado* were jointly responsible for submitting the annual rice tax to the government, as well as providing a month of labor service each year”. “Government”, in this context, means the pre-Restoration *han* government.

²⁶ Source: Papinot 1910

How the government intended to respond to this threat was becoming a critical public issue. Already in or shortly after April 1876, following former Satsuma regent Shimazu Hisamitsu from Tôkyô in the wake of the *haitô-rei* (廃刀令) restricting the wearing of swords to army and police personnel (Mounsey, p. 83), a newspaper article quoted by Mounsey had commented in part as follows (Mounsey, pp. 84-85; emphasis added):-

“There appear to be two great distinct parties in this country, one of which may be termed the party of the government, the other the Satsuma party. What must be the result of such a division? When two parties like these are in constant conflict, both cannot continue to exist for any great space of time; *should the government party be worsted in the struggle, the Satsuma men would take the reins, and this is clear to everyone.*
(...)

“There are minor parties in this country, such as those which contend for a return to the feudal system, but *their only chance of obtaining their wishes and aims is to unite with the Satsuma party. Thus we may expect that all the disaffected will be found in Kagoshima.*
(...)

“What is going on in Kagoshima? and what is Saigô doing? are the principal questions being asked by the people. If the government wishes to preserve peace in the country, what policy should it adopt? As we said before, *both parties cannot long exist.*”

Given the severe press restrictions prevailing at the time (on which, see Huffman 1980, pp. 104-105; McClaren 1914, vol. 2, p. 534), it may be seen as significant that an article such as this ever appeared at all, and the fact that it did may suggest that the piece had support from a highly-placed source within the Meiji oligarchy, with one faction in the oligarchy seeking to influence another through the press. Mounsey does not name the newspaper concerned; however, given the harmony between the passages cited above and concerns expressed by Kido Takayoshi, and the close relationship (Huffman, op. cit., pp. 94-95) that the *Nichi-Nichi Shimbun* and its editor Fukuchi Gen'ichirô enjoyed with Kido²⁷ and other Chôshû politicians such as Yamagata Aritomo, Inoue Kaoru and Itô Hirobumi, it could well have been the *Nichi-Nichi*.

²⁷ Kido's diary contains several references to Fukuchi as a visitor to his home, including one occasion not long before the newspaper article in question appeared. A biographical note re Fukuchi (1841-1906) appears in KBH II (footnote pp 47-8), stating *inter alia* that this former Bakufu official “accompanied Kido on the Iwakura Mission to America and Europe (1871-1873), and as editor of the *Tokyo Nichi-Nichi* after 1874 became a spokesman of the Kido faction of the Meiji oligarchy”. More details of this relationship can be found in Huffman, including the fact that Fukuchi, although initially at odds with the Meiji government, served in it for a time (Huffman op. cit., pp. 62-63).

Kido's diary (e.g. in the entries for 5, 8, 12 and especially 13 December 1876; again on 18 January and 5 February 1877, and even after the start of the war on 18 April) is angrily eloquent on the risks inherent in what he saw as the government's supineness in the face of the challenge from Kagoshima. Among these were: loss of moral authority through being seen to favour one particular prefecture and the clan associated with it (one of the most serious accusations made against the Tokugawa Bakufu in its last years had been that it put the interests of the Tokugawa clan before those of the country); the danger that, through being seen to tolerate local disregard of its authority, the government would imperil its authority over the country as a whole—with the likely consequence of other bids for local independence, perhaps even more armed uprisings. Above all he feared disastrous consequences if Kagoshima were to be perceived as receiving favourable treatment because of its military strength. Among all the prefectures of that time, he wrote on 18 January, Kagoshima “presents the greatest obstacle to true imperial rule”.

It was this military strength that was the most threatening factor. It was not merely a question of what that potential force was intended for, though that too must clearly have been a concern. A vital principle was at stake: namely that the possession and use of organised armed force should be the sole prerogative of the state. The government could not afford to appear to accept or even tacitly condone a breach of this principle. A local private army, simply through the fact of its existence, represented a powerful instrument of political leverage, and no government could accept a situation in which it could be threatened with force, or in which men might think that it had yielded to such a threat.

True, there was not, as far as could be seen, a formally embodied army in Kagoshima. But the necessary elements were present: weapons and munitions, their means of manufacture (Mounsey, p. 38; pp. 78-9; Buck 1959, p. 122), trained men, and an organisation operating what amounted to an ongoing military recruitment and training programme; and events were to show how quickly a large organised force could be brought into being (suggesting the possible existence also of some kind of contingency mobilization plan).

However, the dangers were not restricted to the arena of domestic politics. In the eyes of the foreign governments with which the Meiji oligarchy wished to renegotiate the unequal treaties forced on late-Tokugawa Japan, the government could not expect to be regarded as a credible negotiating partner if its authority were seen not to extend effectively throughout the whole of the country it claimed to govern; thus toleration of Kagoshima's de-facto independence, and of its feudal

microcosm of a Japan at fundamental odds with the kind of society the government wished to create, could not fail to prejudice achievement of the most cherished goal of the early Meiji leadership.

A man like British ambassador Parkes, who had been in Japan throughout the time of the Bakufu's collapse, would not be slow to see a parallel of sorts between the present situation and the Bakufu's embarrassment over Chôshû in 1865/66. If the leading foreign powers developed a sense that the new government was heading towards the same fate as the Tokugawa régime, and Japan towards another period of internal disorder, then there was reason for concern as to how they might seek to profit from the situation²⁸.

To remain inactive in the face of the Kagoshima situation was to surrender control over events. It was to run the risk of having to face a major uprising in Kagoshima coinciding with one or more Saga-style revolts elsewhere. It was to leave the government open to the question of whether it was prepared to countenance such a state of affairs indefinitely. And the longer that question remained open, the more the government would appear to have abdicated its responsibilities, and the more dangerous the whole situation would become.

²⁸ In an 1870 position paper quoted by Craig, Ôkubo wrote of "insatiable foreign powers watch(ing) for an opportunity to fatten themselves on Japan" (in Jansen, Rozman et al. 1986, pp. 54—55).

CHAPTER 2 : APPROACHING CRISIS

*...it could not reasonably be expected that the destruction
of a political system as old and as deeply rooted as that of
the feudal system of Japan would be accomplished
without some violent reactionary struggles*

Augustus Mounsey²⁹

The year 1876 was to see the government, against Kido's advice, escalate its pressure on both the *shizoku* and the agrarian community. In response, the autumn saw an explosion of insurrectionary activity, notably in Western Japan; but signs of threatening unrest were apparent long before then. It was a year in which such newspaper articles appeared as: "Overthrow Oppressive Government"; "Assassinate Tyrannical Officials"; "A Murderous Spirit (*sakki*) is the Basis for Establishing the Country"; and "Freedom Must be Bought with Fresh Blood" (Craig, in Jansen, Rozman et al. 1986, p. 61)

It was a year in which, ominously echoing such articles, assassination plots aimed at ministers (especially Ôkubo) were uncovered, and ministers were placed under military and police protection (Mounsey 1879, p. 97). As early as 9 January Kido received a letter from a fellow Chôshû clansman, Hayashi Tomoyuki, now serving under Ôkubo as a senior official in the Home Ministry, that an assassin named Kodama had been arrested — perhaps, Brown and Hirota suggest, a potential assassin of Kido himself (KBH III, p. 251).

March saw the promulgation of the *Haitô-rei* (廃刀令), the edict which forbade the wearing of swords by all except those who had official reason to do so (i.e. police and army personnel)—an measure highly offensive to traditionally-minded *shizoku*, for whom the wearing of swords, "the brightest emblem of honour in their eyes" (Mounsey, p. 83), was a cherished symbolic badge of identity.

An incident related by Kido gives clear evidence that at this time the government

²⁹ Mounsey 1879, p. 250.

was employing undercover agents to spy out potential trouble among dissident *shizoku*. In March Kido notes (KBH III p.273) a report from Yamaguchi prefecture (presumably from the prefectural authorities) that former Imperial Councillor Maebara Issei of Chôshû, his two brothers and two other confederates had been entrapped by a police *agent provocateur* into negotiations to buy weapons for a rebellion (the same incident is also mentioned by Uno in Ôkubo 1981, p. 168) and lured into discussing the sending of one of the conspirators to Satsuma to negotiate the supply of weapons (significantly, the police agent had posed as a Satsuma man).

This is the only such case mentioned by Kido (who had particular reason to record it, since it involved a personal acquaintance from his native prefecture), but there is no reason to suppose that it was the only such instance; indeed, his reference on February 5 1877 to "our investigation" having identified numerous "centres of dissension" [KBH III, p. 435] hints at a widespread system of undercover political police operations, and hence to a clear awareness among the government leadership of potential threats to security. It is of interest in several respects: firstly, in that it shows Ôkubo's Ministry employing provocation as a counter-subversion technique. Thus, if provocation were indeed employed to trigger the Satsuma Rebellion, it would not have been the first time.

Two further noteworthy points are that the police agent posed as a Satsuma man, and that Maebara and his accomplices evidently regarded Satsuma as a natural source of support for insurrectionary activity³⁰, to the extent that they found the idea that Satsuma sources would supply weapons for an uprising as in no way implausible. This gives a clear indication that, already in early 1876, Ôkubo's Ministry perceived Satsuma as a potential source of insurrection, and suggests also that they were aware that Satsuma was so perceived by would-be rebels in other parts of Japan. (A further reason for having the police agent pose as a Satsuma man could have been to ascertain whether or not Maebara already had contacts in Satsuma and if so to find out as much as possible about them and about what he knew of the situation in the prefecture).

Perhaps of greatest interest, however, is the authorities' treatment of the conspirators once they had unmasked themselves. The report from Yamaguchi, Kido writes, had as its main point "an entreaty to the government that it not enter into the matter at this moment, *so that the situation in the prefecture may quiet down*" (emphasis added). And indeed it seems that this plea was heeded, and that the would-be rebels were not arrested; instead, Kido noted in April, "Maebara then was caused to feel deeply ashamed for having led good men astray over his personal dissatisfactions, and he came to regret his actions deeply" (KBH III, p. 290).

³⁰ As had Etô Shimpei, erroneously, at the time of the Saga Uprising of 1874.

The decision not to arrest and prosecute Maebara and his fellow plotters, after they had been caught *in flagrante delicto* would have to have been taken at the highest level, which would mean almost certainly that it would have been referred to Ôkubo as Home Minister. It may thus be seen as indicative of Ôkubo's approach to the problem of *shizoku* subversion. In 1874, after the Saga uprising had been crushed, Ôkubo had made brutal use of judicial (or at least quasi-judicial) process to try, condemn and execute Etô Shimpei and other leaders of the revolt (Môri 1987, pp. 208-210); here, in contrast, Ôkubo was prepared to forego recourse to the process of law, letting the obviously guilty conspirators off with a no-doubt severe warning in the interests of not stirring up avoidable trouble.³¹ While conspiracy to rebel was undoubtedly criminal, to take measures against the conspirators in the absence of the overtly criminal act of rebellion itself seems to have been considered dangerously provocative.

In early April, no doubt to the relief of the government, Shimazu Hisamitsu left Tôkyô to return to Kagoshima, "convinced . . . at last", in Mounsey's account, "that his part in politics was completely played out". Mounsey portrays this as a reaction to the *haitô-rei*, which he suggests appeared to Shimazu "like the coup de grâce, the knell of all his hopes and dreams of a return to the old order of things in Japan" (Mounsey op. cit., p. 85).

It was at about this time that, as previously noted in Chapter 1, a newspaper article appeared suggesting the existence of "two great distinct parties . . . the party of the government . . . (and) the Satsuma party", and ending with the challenging declaration that "both parties cannot long exist".

Mounsey suggests that this last phrase expressed a concern which, "not without reason", was becoming increasingly widespread. "Satsuma, though quiet for the moment, was evidently preparing"; by this time, as noted previously, the *shigakkô* had grown apace. Nevertheless, "The struggle was . . . not yet to commence, and during the summer months of 1876 peace reigned in Japan" (Mounsey, op. cit., p. 87). It was to be the last significant such period until after the end of the Satsuma Rebellion in September of the following year. Mounsey suggests that it was the "state of tranquillity" of this summer interlude that encouraged the government to proceed in August with the compulsory commutation of samurai stipends—a measure which it appears likely was the only way in which the government could see its way to being able to reduce the land tax and placate the far more numerous farming sector of the population (numbering some 15,000,000, according to Mounsey—op. cit., pp. 88-89).

³¹ As will be seen, events later in the year were to show that this was a case of trouble merely postponed rather than avoided.)

However much this step may have been expected (Mounsey, op. cit., p. 60; p. 89-90), that did not mitigate its impact on *shizoku* living standards. The details need not be entered into³², but two aspects of the commutation scheme may suffice to indicate the overall effect on the great majority of *shizoku* families.

Firstly, figures given by Black (Black, Vol II, pp. 471-472) indicate the extent to which the government was reducing its liability (and by the same token, the extent to which the *shizoku* pensioners' circumstances would be straitened): a commitment to disburse ¥18 million per annum was to be replaced by a commitment to disburse approximately ¥235 million over 30 years, equivalent to an average ¥7.83 million per annum³³.

Secondly, the poorest ex-samurai, who in Beasley's words, "received a good deal less than would support their families in even modest style" (ibid.), constituted an overwhelming majority of the *shizoku* class: Mounsey gives a figure of 302,358 (out of 318,428) for pensioners who under the pre-commutation régime had been in receipt of annual pensions of ¥100 or less).

Black describes the various reactions to the measure: it was "extolled to the skies" by the press and welcomed by the common people (who, he suggests, "probably hardly understood it"), while in the eyes of foreigners it was "a great injustice done to a certain class, but undoubtedly under the pressure of expediency, and to the relief of the country at large". Of those against whom the "injustice" was committed, he observes that it was "not to be wondered at that those who were affected by the measure should exhibit some sort of dissatisfaction" (Black, loc. cit.).

McLaren comments :—

"Whatever may be said in justification of the government's policy, either on the score of the necessity for relieving the overburdened national treasury or the desirability of encouraging an idle class to enter upon the more honourable and useful career of industry, the fact remained that *the samurai regarded the measure as an act of injustice. Unjust it certainly was, when regarded from the point of view of those directly concerned* . . . Good faith was broken with the samurai in 1876, and *the Government was soon made to feel the*

³² A detailed breakdown of the 1876 pension commutation scheme can be found in Norman 1975, pp. 202—203. See also the analysis of the government's handling of the samurai pension problem from 1871 onwards in McLaren 1916, pp. 88—89.

³³ McLaren (op. cit., p. 89) differs from Black in detail but not in terms of the general magnitude of government savings, writing of "an expenditure in the form of interest of about one-third of the former cost of the pensions, which was in the neighbourhood of 20,000,000 yen" and of a "saving of 13,000,000 yen annually", equivalent to a reduction of total government expenditure by approximately one-third. Mounsey (pp. 247—249) also gives an analysis of the effects of the 1876 Commutation Act, with figures (in £sterling) which differ somewhat from Norman and McLaren as to the proportion of saving achieved.

consequences of its temerity."

McLaren 1916, pp. 89—90 (emphasis added)

Mounsey, while acknowledging the view of "those who represent the commutation of pensions as an act of unnecessary harshness and wanton spoliation", makes the following comment:—

"Before condemning this measure in such sweeping terms, it would seem to be incumbent on (those) persons to demonstrate that Japan could continue to follow the path of Western civilisation without it, and to show that the financial position of the country would have been more satisfactory than it now is, if it had not been carried out".

Mounsey, pp. 248—249

Be that as it may, in his reference to samurai exhibiting "some sort of dissatisfaction", Black understated matters. The year drew towards a close amid mounting signs of danger, the progress of which can be clearly traced in Kido's diary.

The last ten days of October 1876 saw no less than three *shizoku* risings: the *Shimpûren* (or *Jimpûren*) *no Ran* (神風連の乱; the group is also sometimes referred to as the Keishintô—敬神党 - Ôkubo 1981, p. 167), in which rebels briefly occupied Kumamoto Castle, but which was suppressed in a matter of days (a telegraphic report of its outbreak is noted in Kido's diary entry for 25 October [KBH III, 379-80], its suppression three days later [KBH III, p.382]); the almost simultaneous and even more short-lived *Akizuki no Ran* (秋月の乱) in Chikuzen (Fukuoka prefecture), whose outbreak and suppression Kido noted on 27 and 28 October respectively (KBH III, 381—2), and the rising in Hagi (*Hagi no Ran*—萩の乱), former castle town of Kido's native Chôshû han, led by the unregenerate Maebara Issei.

On 27 October, the day the Akizuki rising was reported by telegram, Kido reflected apprehensively on the state of tension that he perceived throughout the country:—

"It is my observation, as I survey the current scene, that everybody in the land is dissatisfied, whether he be peasant, merchant, or shizoku. Although the country has been quiet for a time, *it is not because the people were contented. It only means that tension has built up from their discontent.* The only completely satisfied people are the government officials. *The people, therefore, are set to revolt;* and if the riots in Kumamoto are not suppressed in a few days, they will inevitably spread, and *we shall have uprisings everywhere."*

KBH III, p. 381 (emphasis added)

While condemning insurrection and calling for its due punishment, Kido then turns to reflect on the causes of the discontent. It was, he was in no doubt, the government's high-handedness that had brought things to where they were, and unless it changed its ways worse could befall:—

"The government . . . has carried on its administration in an arrogant style, without consideration for the hard life in the remote areas, and without regard for traditions which date back several hundred years. Indeed, the government seems to have abandoned its role as a people's government. . . Only a few days ago I discussed the threatening situation with the Minister of the Right; and in no time at all the uprising in Higo occurred. If we should postpone action and miss our opportunity, the unhappiness to which we shall give rise is incalculable..."

ibid.

In forecasting more uprisings, Kido prophesied better than he knew, for the very next day he was diarising reported first signs of the *Hagi no Ran*, an event which Brown and Hirota (KBH III, p. 379, footnote 13) suggest was directly triggered by the Kumamoto revolt, and which caused Kido much distress (there had been an earlier *shizoku* rising in Chôshû in early 1870, which Kido had taken an active part in suppressing—as recounted in Volume 1 of the diary (KBH I, pp. 321—335); "now again", he wrote on 30 October, "unfortunately, Maebara has provoked disorder, and many youths are destined to die untimely deaths". He had harsh words for Maebara: "an absolutely unprincipled individual" who had taken advantage of current disorders "out of jealousy and dissatisfaction" to "stir up public feeling. In the end he has committed such a colossal blunder as this and, as a result, has misled these promising young men . . ." (KBH III, p. 384).

It was mid-November before the Hagi uprising was finally brought to an end—not before, on 8 November, a telegram reported that "sixty or seventy Saga men have risen in collusion with Maebara" (op. cit., p. 390). Maebara and the other ringleaders of the rising were executed on 3 December. Barely more than a week later, Kido is noting reports of "a peasant uprising in Ibaraki prefecture"; on 12 December he writes:

"Shizoku who are jealous and envious of the government and spread false rumours to instigate the people have themselves committed crimes; they are a hopeless lot. What I find so pitiable is that those who appeal to the government under the pressure of their difficult life, and finally rise in response to it, should be charged for the crimes of these shizoku.

KBH III, p. 404

There is a hint here of a possibility that would have had dire implications for the government had it become a widespread reality: that of *shizoku* exploiting agrarian dissatisfaction over the land tax in order to recruit farmers as foot-soldiers in pursuit of their own samurai agenda³⁴, or of members of the two classes seeking common cause against the government. That does not appear to have occurred in the case both of the Ibaraki *nômin-ikki* and of the others that were to occur in late 1876, Mounsey records: "In these riots the Samurai sided with the government, and they were easily suppressed" (Mounsey, op. cit., p. 97). But Ôkubo and his colleagues could hardly have been unaware of the danger in which the government would find itself if it ever had to face a combination of peasant masses organised and directed by professional warriors and stiffened by samurai steel.

Some ten days later another agrarian riot, in Mie prefecture, deepened Kido's unease, prompting further reflection on the plight of the people, as well as on the government's complacency which he held to blame for the frustration of his own past efforts to do something to alleviate their hardships. He had warned against too-speedy implementation of land tax reform, but the government had ignored him and pressed ahead (it appears that what had sparked off these agrarian disturbances was a new law requiring payment of land tax to be in cash rather than in kind), with the result that "all manner of hardships have derived from this land tax reform; and uprisings have occurred in several places because of it" (KBH III, p. 408). In addition to the Mie disturbance, a table in Ôkubo 1981 (Appendix, p. 21) records major peasant revolts in Aichi, Gifu and the then prefecture of Sakai. "Every time this has happened", Kido lamented, "many people have lost their lives. However, both the government and the populace generally regard this as the normal state of affairs, and do not question it."

His lengthy entry for 24 December shows that the theme of suffering and death among the people recurred in a conversation with Itô Hirobumi:-

"I told him that I have been moved to pity by the sight of people rising in revolt so often recently with the result that they die untimely deaths or lose their property. . ."

KBH III, p. 409 - 410

This entry contains numerous prescriptions for the health of the nation, some of which have a distinctly Western ring to them (e.g.: "It is essential to make clear that the law exists for the people, not the people for the law", as well as advocacy of the

³⁴ Norman also refers to "efforts of some *samurai* to harness . . . peasant revolt to serve their own ambition . . ." and to conscription as a measure which variously offended both peasants and "*samurai* who . . . were often in a position to set themselves at the head of a peasant uprising and direct its course against the government . . ." (Norman 1975., pp. 179—81)

principle that there be no local taxation without local representation). Two that had a very direct and explicit bearing on the situation at that time were: "to reconsider laws enacted rashly without observing the condition of the people" (a clear reference to government action with regard to both the land tax and *shizoku* pensions) and, with obvious reference to the problem of Kagoshima, "to make impartiality our objective, without discrimination between strong prefectures and weak prefectures. (Powerful prefectures have been permitted to do things that weak prefectures are not allowed to do)".

Again on the following day, after a visit to the emperor, he diarised:—

"If the peasant risings fail to bring about a change in government policy, and enforcement becomes more harsh still, there will be a national disaster, a situation beyond salvation. Because His Majesty, as a benevolent emperor, will never be able to rest easily on account of what is happening to his people, I reported to the Throne in some detail on the sources of the risings.

ibid.

It was in fact soon after this that the government showed some signs of awareness of the danger it faced of simultaneous confrontation on both the agrarian and *shizoku* fronts, and of a desire to defuse the situation to some extent.

On the agrarian front, in early 1877 it reduced the land tax from 3% of land value to 2.5%— a move which would suggest that the government wished to placate its agrarian opposition while preparing to deal with the dissident *shizoku*, but which, Mounsey observes, "would more certainly have gained its object if it had not been accompanied by stringent orders to collect the whole of the tax in money"³⁵.

Kido's thoughts on this mitigation of the farmers' tax burden went undiarised, but it may be supposed that he was not displeased at seeing at least one of his concerns reflected, at least to some extent, in government action.

On the *shizoku* front, a special concession had already been decided upon for Kagoshima samurai, whose protests against forced commutation had been loudest. Whereas the state bonds issued to samurai for the commuted capital of their pensions generally bore interest of either 5% or 7%, for Kagoshima the interest was raised to 10% (Mounsey 1879, p. 98; McLaren 1916, p. 89). This would appear to have been the subject of the "special edict" to which Kido refers at indignant length in his diary

³⁵ Mounsey adds a footnote, of which it seems worth quoting part because of the extent to which it echoes Kido's strictures on the speed of land tax and other reforms: "Like many recent legislative measures in Japan, this one regarding money payments was found to be premature; and a years' experience of its workings proved that it was unjust to the farmers. It was accordingly modified ..."

entry for 5 December (KBH III, pp. 400-401) as a "windfall", comparing the preferential treatment given to Kagoshima with the penury suffered by *shizoku* in his native Chôshû and elsewhere. Mounsey comments (loc. cit.):—

This promised concession had no effect on coming events, but it shows that the government still desired to conciliate Satsuma, and to continue their temporising policy, in the hope that time and the chapter of accidents might prevent an open rupture.

An alternative interpretation to that of Mounsey might be that Ôkubo had in fact given up hope of preventing such a rupture (or indeed that he had determined that there should be one), but did not wish it to occur yet (perhaps to give the proposed reduction in land tax time to have sufficient effect for him to be reasonably confident that, when dealing militarily with Satsuma, he was not also faced with peasant riots at the same time), and that his "temporising" was aimed simply at buying a little more time.

He had already tried in vain to press for change in Kagoshima. In July, amid mounting press criticism of the prefecture for its refusal to abandon the feudal order, as well as criticism of himself (both from the press and from within the government -i.e. from Kido) for according Kagoshima special treatment, Ôkubo had summoned governor Ôyama Tsunayoshi to Tôkyô to urge on him the need for personnel changes in the prefectural government and to order him to institute the reforms that had been implemented in the rest of the country. Not only was Ôyama resistant; the discussions were interrupted by the outbreak of the *Shimpûren no Ran*, and the attempt to bend him to the government's will seems to have been abandoned (Uno, in Ôkubo 1981, p. 171).

Following this failure it appears that, late in December³⁶, Ôkubo set in train a final attempt to bring the prefectural administration into line. It involved the dispatch to Kagoshima of Home Affairs Assistant Minister Hayashi Tomoyuki (the same official who early in the year had brought Kido news of the arrest of his suspected would-be assassin).

Uno refers briefly to Hayashi's being sent on a tour of Kyûshû (in Ôkubo op. cit., p. 169). Two brief passages in Kido's diary hint at the failure of this mission as far as Kagoshima was concerned. The first is in the entry for 4 February 1877:-

Hayashi Tomoyuki came to talk. Tomoyuki had gone to Kyûshû after the upheaval in Higo (Kumamoto—PT); and he stopped in Kyôto on his way back to Tôkyô. He briefed me on the current situation in Kyûshû."

(KBH III, p. 434).

³⁶Or perhaps early January; see Buck 1959, p. 120. Buck (who renders Hayashi's given name in Sino-Japanese style as Yuko) also relates the somewhat earlier dispatch to Kagoshima of a chief inspector of the Tôkyô police to "assess" the situation (op. cit., pp. 118-119).

The second was written but two days later, the day after telegrams had arrived reporting the plundering of government munitions by Kagoshima *shizoku*; Kido writes plaintively:—

“The detailed information which Tomoyuki got from Prefectural Governor Ôyama in Kagoshima a few days ago is quite in conflict with the several telegrams which have come.”

(KBH III, pp. 436-437).

Shiba (1989, vol. 7, pp.112-118) gives a dramatised (but probably basically accurate) account of the Hayashi mission, in which Hayashi, ever fearful of falling victim to a *shigakkô* assassin³⁷, succumbs instead to the blandishments of Ôyama, who is at pains to persuade him that “things are not in the least different here from the way they are in other prefectures” and who protectively escorts him on a carefully devised tour (including a banquet during the New Year holiday, at which he is made guest of honour), so that Hayashi allows himself to be persuaded and tells Ôyama that no changes are necessary. On this betrayal by Hayashi of Ôkubo's purpose in sending him to Kagoshima, Shiba (op. cit., p. 118) makes the twofold comment:— “One may say that he was completely seduced by Ôyama's political skills; at the same time, no doubt he did not want to aggravate the situation and be assassinated for his pains” (“*Ôyama no seijiryoku ni marukomerareta to iu koto mo ari, dôjini, koto wo aradatete ansatsu saretaku nakatta ni sôï nai*”)³⁸

How much credence Ôkubo, who knew Ôyama of old and no doubt was well aware of the kind of operator he was, placed in the blithe reports of his subordinate is another matter. Since the turn of November/December information had been coming to him of mounting activity and a restless atmosphere among the *shigakkô* students under the stimulus of news of the October risings, of the gathering together of weapons and other warlike preparations. The improvement in pensions brought about a temporary easing of tension, but the mood went on building until it seemed that the Satsuma samurai were indeed on the brink of revolt. (Uno, in Ôkubo 1981, p. 171). It was about this time (mid-January, according to Naramoto et al. [1990, p. 564]), that one of the actions that was to provoke the Rebellion was initiated: the dispatch by police commander Kawaji Toshiyoshi of some 22 policemen of Satsuma origin (as was Kawaji himself) back to Kagoshima in plain clothes (ostensibly on leave), with a remit to investigate events and if possible to win *shigakkô* members away from the movement.

³⁷ The reader may recall McLaren's previously-quoted comment that: “In the Tokugawa period an official of the Shogun's Government entered the territory of the Shimadzu (sic) family at peril of his life, and the same was true of Satsuma until after 1877” (McLaren 1916, p. 91).

³⁸ 大山の政治力にまるこまれたということもあり、同時に、事を荒だてて暗殺されたくなかったに相違ない

As is well known, the presence of these men was soon detected, their leader, Nakahara Hisao, was tortured into "confessing" that the group's mission had included the assassination of Saigô Takamori; and this created a mood of indignation that made revolt of some kind virtually inevitable.

Whether the alleged assassination orders were ever given will, as Mounsey suggested, probably never be known (after the war the government that had sent Nakahara on his mission put him on trial for having conspired to murder Saigô and, perhaps not surprisingly, acquitted him); but whether they were or not, the presence of so many plain-clothes police agents in Kagoshima was bound to be regarded in a sinister light and to provoke at the very least a degree of suspicion and unease. It will be argued subsequently that this operation was ordered or authorised by Ôkubo (whose Ministry controlled the police) in full knowledge of its provocative potential.

Ôkubo must by now have been well aware that the threat posed by Satsuma was far too serious and deep-rooted to be bought off, and that the end of the road had probably been reached as far as possible concessions were concerned. He would have known as well as Kido that, whatever arguments might have been used to give a surface rationalisation, the concession on Satsuma samurai pensions would in many eyes amount to favouritism, to the payment of what could be regarded either as a bribe or as protection money. He must also have recognised the peril in which this placed the régime, especially in the current conditions of widespread unrest³⁹. Any doubt he might still have had as to the pressing need for action would surely have been blown away by these words⁴⁰ in an article in the January number of the *Hyôron Shimbun*:—

"The shigakkô . . . do not obey Army orders and constitute themselves a real army. These Satsuma samurai all have their own weapons and ammunition privately stored away. Why is Satsuma the only area in Japan which does not accept the direction of the central government? . . . The government must suppress (them), as a violent wind blows the dry leaves"

It would have been with that knowledge clearly in mind that he faced Kido in mid-January for what must have been a wide-ranging discussion of the Kagoshima problem—and presumably also of what should and could be done about it.

In a comparative personality study of these two men, Craig writes, in a passage referred to earlier (p. 7 above): "Resisting all centralizing reforms, *Satsuma...was like a*

³⁹ As the reader may recall from Chapter 1, Mounsey (p. 90) notes that, after the pension commutation, samurai failed to unite against the government on the basis of their common grievance. It is important to bear in mind that Mounsey was writing with the benefit of hindsight; no-one in the government in late 1876 could be confident that some form of co-ordinated revolt might not occur.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Buck 1959, p. 121

time bomb, ticking away. (...) Ôkubo had to prevent the explosion until the government was strong enough to contain it. (...) Kido had no comparable responsibility." (Craig & Shively 1970, p. 306 (emphasis added)).

Although Kido makes no record of Ôkubo having informed him of the planned dispatch of police agents, Ôkubo must have known that it either had been initiated or very soon would be, and that the Satsuma time-bomb was possibly about to be detonated at last.

CHAPTER 3: OPTIONS FOR ACTION

*If we take measures ahead of time, they will
assist in preserving the public peace*

Kido Takayoshi⁴¹

Kido's diary entry for 18 January 1877 relates that on that day he and Ôkubo met by appointment and discussed the Kagoshima situation for seven hours. After recalling that in early December he had "denounced the great evils of the day in a petition to the Prime Minister" (among these being the apparent supineness of the government in the face of pressure from Kagoshima "without any consideration for the principles of justice or impartiality at all"), he records that "I argued with full evidence that among the prefectures today Kagoshima presents the greatest obstacle to true Imperial rule"; no doubt he also expressed outrage at the recent pension improvement that had been extended exclusively to Satsuma *shizoku*. His record tells us that "Ôkubo also gave full expression to his views"; yet there is not the slightest hint of anything concrete that Kido suggested the government should do, nor of what Ôkubo actually said in reply.

Here and elsewhere in the diary, Kido's scathing comments on Ôkubo must be read in the light of the fact that, in addition to political differences between the two men (extending beyond the immediate issue of Kagoshima), their relationship was not friendly (see, e.g., Iwata 1964, pp. 162-163; p. 233). However, even after allowing for that, the bitter tone colouring this entry suggests that Kido came away from the meeting under the impression that Ôkubo was going to continue doing nothing. Yet, as noted on the previous page, that can hardly have been the case. What seems more likely is that, for whatever reason, Ôkubo simply preferred at that time not to reveal to Kido what was in train.

Huffman (Huffman 1980, pp. 70—71) relates an incident that reveals Ôkubo's keen awareness of the value of discretion. Reproached by Fukuchi for a lack of candour ("I state my opinion frankly and win out by force of reason. You are incapable

⁴¹ From diary entry for 5 February (KBH III, p. 435)

of trusting me because my knowledge is a threat.”), Ôkubo reportedly said in reply: “As you said, if you know a secret, you cannot keep it . . . Henceforth, you should correct your habit of bragging about what you know and practice earnestly the trait of prudence and mature reflection. Otherwise . . . you will suffer the misfortune of being cut off from society, even while yearning to serve your nation.”. If, as may be supposed, Ôkubo knew of Kido’s links with Fukuchi (now editor of the *Tôkyô Nichi-Nichi*), then he would no doubt have thought it prudent to leave Kido unenlightened.

Be that as it may, although the diary entry is mute on specifics, it seems reasonable to suppose that at least some of that lengthy discussion must have been devoted to debate about what should be done, that Kido must have made some concrete suggestions and that Ôkubo responded in a way that left him deeply disappointed. Seven hours of nothing but Kido denouncing evil and Ôkubo protesting that he could do nothing about it is inconceivable; Ôkubo for one would hardly have put up with it.

It may be surmised that, among other matters, the two men discussed the main options open to the government for dealing with the Kagoshima problem, such as it had become by the time this meeting took place. What were these?

One end of a spectrum of possibilities comprised simply doing nothing and letting events take whatever course they might. At the opposite extreme lay the option of sending armed forces into the prefecture (invading the “state-within-a-state”, as it were) and taking over its administration, staffing it with men who could be relied on to ensure that the central government’s writ ran in Kagoshima. Various steps might in theory lie between these extremes, (indeed, some attempts had been made, such as the fruitless summoning of Ôyama to Tôkyô and the abortive mission of Hayashi Tomoyuki) but part of the problem, as it must have appeared to Ôkubo, was that, in practice, once a posture of non-intervention was abandoned, confrontation would be likely to escalate at an accelerating and uncontrollable pace towards armed conflict.

The dangers of doing nothing were considered in ^{Chapter 1} the ~~previous chapter~~, and Kido no doubt enlarged on them at great length. Whether or not Ôkubo said so openly, he would have had to recognise that essentially Kido was right.

However, if non-intervention was not a viable option and confrontation with Kagoshima was inevitable, sooner or later, this would involve the use of armed force. And for all Kido’s urging that the government should “do something”, this too was a path fraught with difficulty and danger.

If one supposes that at some point in his long meeting with Ôkubo Kido advocated a pre-emptive military expedition against the prefecture, then it is not hard to surmise various objections that Ôkubo might reasonably have voiced in reply.

Firstly: "sending in the troops" was not something that Ôkubo could order on his own initiative (he was not Army Minister); it would require a decision by the government as a whole (and probably the seeking of imperial sanction on top of that); and Ôkubo might well have pointed out that the government was highly unlikely to choose such a course, considering that, although governor Ôyama and the prefectural administration he headed were refusing to implement government laws, policies and directives, and even withholding taxes due to the central government, not to mention supporting Saigô's private army, that did not amount to open rebellion, and nothing remotely resembling an act of overt insurrection had occurred. In such circumstances, it would be unwise to propose a military expedition. (Ôkubo could have pointed out to Chôshû man Kido a parallel with the decision not to take action against Maebara after he had been caught in the act of conspiring to rebel without having engaged in overt rebellion, and the reasons why the Yamaguchi authorities at the time asked that no action be taken⁴².)

As to why the government would be unlikely to agree, Ôkubo could point out that, for one thing, it would be highly offensive to the personal respect and sympathy that many in government, including Ôkubo himself but not only men of Satsuma origin), felt towards their former colleague and comrade in arms Saigô Takamori. There was still a body of opinion that saw Saigô's influence as being the main, indeed perhaps the only, influence keeping the Satsuma samurai from open revolt.

If Kido were to object that the matter was too serious for personal sympathies to be allowed to obstruct the business of bringing Kagoshima into line, and that in any case those very sympathies were laying Ôkubo open to the charge of partiality towards his native prefecture, as well as of being intimidated by Kagoshima's armed strength, then Ôkubo could, among much else, have invited Kido to imagine what people might think should the government set out deliberately, without overt provocation, to kill and maim some of its citizens in the name of the emperor (always assuming that things ever got as far as someone going to ask His Majesty to agree to such a thing). It would foreseeably cause widespread anger, alarm and dismay. Not only would it be a propaganda gift to the government's opponents; it could serve as a rallying cause for armed opposition throughout the country (no doubt led by the malcontent *shizoku* whose numbers Kido contemplated with such apprehension). By making war on Kagoshima (and against Saigô, who in the eyes of many young samurai was a hero who could do no wrong), the government might in the end find that it had summoned up insurrection on all sides, perhaps even more than its fledgling conscript army could handle at once.

⁴² This incident is related and discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 26-28).

(As previously mentioned, Mounsey judged that if disaffected *shizoku* had united in arms at the time samurai pensions were compulsorily commuted, the government would probably not have had sufficient forces to withstand such an assault. An attack by the government on Satsuma and Saigô would undoubtedly have proved to be a much more effective spur to united revolt than pension commutation.)

Ôkubo could also make a point to which Kido, as a Chôshû man, would surely be sensitive. Were the government to mount an attack against Kagoshima, an obvious parallel with the Bakufu's second campaign against Chôshû (where the government had only recently had to suppress the revolt led by Maebara Issei) would operate powerfully to the government's moral disadvantage. The Meiji rulers would be vulnerable to being portrayed as acting no differently from the Tokugawa. And everyone knew that the Bakufu's attempted invasion of Chôshû had ended in a defeat followed less than two years later by the end of Tokugawa rule.

However, even assuming that imperial sanction were obtained, and even making a "best-case" assumption, namely that the government would be free to deploy all its forces in such a campaign without having to deal with any insurrectionary activity elsewhere, what of the military practicalities of initiating a campaign against Kagoshima? Both Ôkubo and Kido had enough military experience to be able to discuss this aspect of the matter.

Geographical considerations first: the location of Kagoshima at the extreme southwestern end of the main Japanese archipelago afforded a mixture of advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the territorial scope of the fighting could probably be confined within Kyûshû. On the other hand, the troops dispatched to the front could not quickly be recalled if they were needed to deal with any subsequent unrest elsewhere in the country; this might have been regarded as a somewhat imprudent gamble. The government's forces would also be operating at the end of a long and vulnerable supply line.

Furthermore, distance lengthened the timescale required for the government to concentrate enough troops in the theatre of combat, particularly since no railways ran further west than the Kansai⁴³. The army's disposition in regional garrisons of between 4,000 and 7,000 men each (peace-time establishment figures—Mounsey, p. 145) had been designed to deal with relatively minor local disturbances of lightly armed samurai and peasants, not for a full-scale military operation such as the forcible occupation of a province (not to mention confrontation with a force of some 13,000 men equipped with artillery, particularly when those men were of the fighting calibre of the Satsuma samurai).

⁴³ Source: Ôkuma 1910, vol.1, pp. 433—434).

If anything, the government's position *vis-à-vis* Satsuma/Kagoshima was arguably weaker than had been that of the Bakufu (until as late as 1865/6) in relation to rebel provinces. The Bakufu had enjoyed the traditional power to summon the domains to supply troops to assist in the quelling of any resistance to or defiance of its authority. As is well known, it had been able (with Satsuma support) to do this so effectively against Chôshû in 1864 that the domain government capitulated without a fight in the face of the forces massed on its borders (in contrast, two years later a second expedition against resurgent rebellion in Chôshû, which by then had Satsuma as an ally, failed to obtain support from many domains that had supported the Bakufu in 1864 and was beaten off by Chôshû's forces). The cash-strapped government of post-Restoration Japan could only have recourse to those troops that it directly possessed, and they were few in number.

Only some 4,700 men (the troops of the Kumamoto military district, some of whom were in fact based at Fukuoka) were stationed in Kyûshû⁴⁴. To meet Satsuma on terms of barely more than numerical equality would require the addition of the troops from both the Hiroshima and Kansai garrisons. Adding the garrisons of Nagoya and Tôkyô, and bringing the troop numbers up to their war-time establishment level, would give a fair margin of numerical superiority (with the Sendai garrison as a reserve), but the resulting force would need to be reorganised into formations suitable to undertake a task for which the army had not been designed. Arrangements would also have to be made to ensure that, once concentrated in Kyûshû, the army could be kept supplied with all that it required by way of food, replacement of worn-out equipment, and, above all, ammunition. To achieve this, a supply organisation would have to be created from nothing⁴⁵.

All this would take time, and would be hard to keep secret. It would soon become obvious that some large-scale military operation was being prepared; nor would it be hard for informed observers to guess at its most likely objective. Thus, news of the government's mobilisation was likely to reach Kagoshima long before any of the government's soldiers did. In consequence, when the army at last arrived there, it would be met by fully prepared defenders who, in addition to the advantages of being able to concentrate their forces more rapidly, and of fighting on interior lines

⁴⁴Mounsey gives the following distribution of line troops (all arms) among the various regional garrisons (figures in brackets represent the wartime establishment): Tôkyô 7,140 (10,370); Sendai 4,460 (6,540); Nagoya 4,260 (6,290); Kansai (Ôsaka+Kyôto) 6,700 (9,820); Hiroshima 4,340 (6,230); Kumamoto 4,784 (6,940), giving peace (war) totals for line troops of 31,684 (46,190), to which should be added 3,961 troops of the Imperial guard, for a wartime-establishment maximum of 50,151 (Mounsey 1879, p. 145).

⁴⁵ Mounsey (p. 232), on the basis of a government statement of having paid for 12,856,700 coolies' days' work, estimates that this represented the employment of "no less than 50,000 coolies per diem".

(so that men, ammunition and equipment could be more easily moved from one point on the front to another as necessity required), would possess an additional benefit in the natural ramparts formed by the mountainous terrain along the Kagoshima border, as well as in their knowledge of the terrain. The alternative to attacking through the mountains was to attempt a landing somewhere on the Kagoshima coast; that too would be vigorously opposed. The army had reportedly had enough trouble managing an *unopposed* landing of a mere 1,300 troops in the Formosa campaign of 1874 (Buck 1959, p. 96); to attempt an opposed landing on a large scale against troops of the calibre of Satsuma would be to risk disaster at the very outset.

Even if the imperial forces were able to overcome the Kagoshima defences and formally occupy the prefecture, creating a prefectural administration compliant with the central government and the law of the land would be a formidable task, given that the prefectural bureaucracy was staffed exclusively by *shigakkô* placemen (Inoue 1970, vol. 2, p. 154). There would probably also be continued guerilla resistance, which would be likely to enjoy widespread popular support, given the emotions that would be aroused by what local people would hardly be able to see as anything other than an act of unprovoked aggression. This might necessitate keeping a large contingent of troops in Kagoshima for an unforeseeably long and costly time, reducing the strength of garrisons elsewhere until additional recruitment and training enabled the government to make good the troop deficit. Even an optimistic view of the situation had to recognise that stripping troops from the rest of the country was dangerous, given the frequency of recent samurai revolts and the possibility of disruption of the government's deployment of its forces, or harassment of its rear, or even full-scale national revolt, by disaffected *shizoku* acting in sympathy with their Satsuma *confrères*.

Factoring in such possibilities made the option of a government-initiated campaign against Satsuma look increasingly hazardous. With a war-time strength barely exceeding 50,000, the government might have enough troops either to guard against local unrest or to concentrate against Kagoshima, but probably not enough to do both at once; there seems to be no reason to doubt Mounsey's previously-quoted assessment that a nationwide armed rising might well have been more than the army could handle. In this respect, the balancing-act Ôkubo had to perform was even more complex and hazardous than as portrayed by Craig. It was not simply a question of whether the government was strong enough to contain the explosion of Satsuma; Ôkubo had to be concerned with what else might explode at the same time, and to take account of the need to avoid stirring up more trouble at once than the government's slender resources could deal with. Army Minister (Rikugun-kyô 陸軍卿) Yamagata Aritomo, with whom Ôkubo would surely have discussed any issues related to the military operations against Kagoshima, would quite possibly have voiced the same apprehension himself⁴⁶

Ôkubo could also have pointed out to Kido the great burden of cost that a civil war would impose on the country: the financial and material costs of fielding an army and keeping it supplied; costs that would arise from the inevitable damage and destruction inflicted on those localities where fighting took place; the toll of death and injury among combatants and non-combatants alike (which indeed ran into many thousands of casualties). Kido's diary gives no hint that such considerations as these ever arose during his discussion with Ôkubo. Yet both men would surely have been alive to such concerns, and at some point during those seven hours Ôkubo may well have reminded his visitor that, knowing what devastation civil war would bring, the government must be seen to have tried every other possibility before resorting to that extreme measure.

But he would have known too that the situation could not be tolerated indefinitely, and that sooner or later something must be done to end it, that in the event of resistance by the "formidable military organisation" Parkes had referred to, hard fighting would be inevitable and the responsibility for starting it would be grave.

The government's dilemma would be solved if the Satsuma samurai were to take that responsibility themselves by embarking on some kind of insurrection. None of the thorny issues involved in a pre-emptive strike against an outwardly pacific prefecture would arise; in using the army to put down an armed rebellion against lawful imperial authority the government would be in a morally, legally, and politically unassailable position—acting on clear imperial authority, so that anyone opposing or obstructing its action against Kagoshima could immediately be branded as a rebel not merely against the government but against the emperor and the imperial institution itself.

In addition to the moral and political advantages that a Satsuma rebellion would give to the government, a Satsuma force that marched out of Kagoshima prefecture beyond the natural mountain defences of the prefectural border would be easier to attack—thus offering an opportunity, firstly, to destroy the *shigakkô* army on the field of battle, and then (more important in the long term) to eradicate any possibility of a repetition of the offence by destroying the *shigakkô* organisation root and branch.

Further, rather than wait for insurrection to occur at a time of Satsuma's choosing, it would be clearly advantageous to take control of the timing of events by finding

⁴⁶ Buck (Buck 1959, p. 130) cites an incident related by Yamagata's biographer Tokutomi, in which news of the *shigakkô* students' munitions raid first reached members of the oligarchy, whereupon, of a group comprising Yamagata, Kido, Sanjô Sanetomi and Itô Hirobumi (Ôkubo was not present at the time), Yamagata was "the only member of the group who was not surprised by the direct action taken by the Private School"; this may be regarded as suggesting that Ôkubo and Yamagata might have had such a discussion—in the course of which, if Ôkubo were in fact contemplating provoking a rising, he would probably at the very least have given Yamagata some intimation of this.

some means of provoking the young disciples of Saigô into revolt—employing, to continue Craig's "time bomb" metaphor, controlled detonation as a method of bomb-disposal. With disaffection as clearly widespread as it had become by the turn of 1876-77, the longer Satsuma was left to its own devices the more time there would be for *shigakkô* emissaries to liaise with anti-government elements elsewhere in the country with a view to concerting plans for widespread simultaneous insurrection.

Ôkubo has been called the "Bismarck of Japan"; this is in fact the title of one biographical study of him (Iwata 1964). He had in fact met Bismarck on his travels with the Iwakura mission shortly after the Franco-Prussian War (Iwata 1964, pp. 158-159), and would doubtless have been familiar with the celebrated episode of the Ems Telegram by which Bismarck had engineered the French declaration of war and brought about the conflict he himself had wanted but had been unable to initiate. If it were accepted that ultimately the Kagoshima problem would have to be solved by force, the Ems Telegram affair offered an object lesson in technique, demonstrating how the main obstacles in the way of implementing such a solution might be overcome.

But Ôkubo would have to be more subtle than Bismarck, because Kagoshima was part of Japan and not a foreign state. Whatever the government did to provoke the Satsuma samurai, it was vital that any intention to provoke be well hidden from public view, that the government's actions should be such as could be portrayed as legitimate and reasonable, leaving no room for argument that the rebels might have some degree of right on their side.

One such arguably "legitimate and reasonable" action was the attempt to remove the weapons and ammunition stored in government arsenals located in Kagoshima. The idea of doing this is widely attributed to Kido⁴⁷ (who in his diary makes no reference to having suggested it); if that is indeed correct, and if Ôkubo had privately decided that the time had come to stop doing anything to prevent Satsuma from exploding, then he had cause indeed to be grateful for the chance to make his intentions the more deniable by giving someone else the credit for one of the two actions that sparked off the Rebellion.

"If the central authorities had been looking to provoke a showdown, they had succeeded." Thus Harries and Harries (p. 22 - emphasis added) comment on the attempt to collect the munitions. This chapter has examined factors that gave Ôkubo a very strong motive for "looking to provoke a showdown". The following chapter reviews circumstantial evidence regarding the proposition that that was in fact what he did.

⁴⁷ Buck relates that the plan had been earlier dropped, because of opposition from Yamagata and other senior military officers, who "feared that such an act would...be certain to add to existing unrest", but that "*Primarily at Kido's urging*, the plan was revived in January, 1877. A Mitsubishi ship, the *Sekiryu-maru* ("The Red Dragon") was hired and the operations began ..." (Buck 1959, pp. 122-123; emphasis added).

CHAPTER 4: CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

*Apprehended and interrogated, these spies came to represent,
in the minds of the extremist followers of Saigo,
the embodiment of a supposed conspiracy to assassinate Clan leaders, and
to foment an uprising which would be followed
by prompt, effective military suppression by the central government.*

James H Buck⁴⁸

In the passage quoted above, Buck is describing the reaction among *shigakkô* members to the discovery that the government had sent a squad of plain-clothes police agents into Kagoshima. Putting aside for the moment the assassination component of the suspicions this action evoked, the *purpose* described in the last two lines of the quotation appears so strikingly similar to the *effect* of what the government did that it is surely not unreasonable to suppose that the suspicion of those at the receiving end of the government's action may not have erred very far⁴⁹.

As argued in the previous chapter, it was a rational thing for the government to seek to do. On any reasonable assessment of the situation, the political conflict between the central government and Kagoshima prefecture must have appeared to Ôkubo and his close colleagues (Yamagata and Kawaji, if no-one else) to be unresolvable except through the use of military force; furthermore, it was clearly in the interests of the government and the state that the first blow be seen to come from Kagoshima and not from the government. There thus existed a strong motive for Ôkubo to seek to provoke the Satsuma samurai into some kind of insurrection as a pretext for turning the army loose on them, precisely as they suspected the government was plotting to do.

That alone, however, does not constitute proof that he did it; and, as Stephan concedes in his study of the rôle of Saigô Takamori, here too it is necessary to admit a scarcity of documentary evidence, so that much of the argument must rely on the interpretation of circumstantial evidence.

⁴⁸ Buck 1959, p. 237.

⁴⁹ The subsequent anger engendered by the government's attempted removal of munitions ensured that the suspicion did not help them avoid falling victim to the very plot they suspected the government of hatching.

The principal items of evidence that will be discussed in this chapter are:—

- the government's dispatch of secret police agents
- the government's attempt to collect munitions from arsenals in Kagoshima
- the Kawamura "peace mission" of early February
- the apparent absence of any movement by the government of military personnel or matériel prior to the outbreak of the Rebellion

One item not included in this list has already been discussed (see pp. 37-39): the absence from Kido's diary of any reference to a plan to provoke the Satsuma *shizoku*. If it is objected that, if there were such a plan, surely Kido as a member of the government would have been privy to it, the reader is referred to that prior discussion. Only two further points seem to warrant mention here: firstly, that Ôkubo may well have been operating on a "need-to-know" principle that would exclude all save the minimum necessary persons (e.g. Kawaji Toshiyoshi and Army Minister Yamagata Aritomo), and may well have regarded Kido as being outside the circle of those who should be initiated into his plans; secondly, that, while it is established that Kido urged the dispatch of a ship to collect munitions from Kagoshima (see p 45 above), he makes no diary reference to that proposal either. In short, the "missing diary reference" may be regarded as inconclusive—neither in conflict with the Ems Telegram hypothesis nor directly supportive of it.

The Dispatch of Police Agents and the Attempted Collection of Munitions

These two matters will be discussed in conjunction, since the same arguments apply to both.

It is these two actions by the government that are generally recognised as having triggered the Rebellion; furthermore, the sending of the *Sekiryû Maru* with its squad of armaments-collectors is generally portrayed as a blunder—as an attempt to defuse the situation that, as it were, misfired.

In summary, we are to believe that Ôkubo and whoever else was involved in the ordering of these two operations not only did not intend them to be provocative but had no inkling that they would be. Put bluntly, this belief implies an affirmative answer to one or the other of these two questions:— *Did they believe no-one in Kagoshima would notice?* and *Did they believe that, even if anyone did notice, they would not react adversely?*

Applying the first question to the matter of the police agents, it is worth recalling, firstly, that all of these men were natives of Satsuma, and secondly that they came from a comparatively small circle: that of the samurai class, albeit of the “non-castle” category. They would be known to others who had grown up in that circle; so too would their employment in the police service. Their return from Tôkyô on ostensible furlough would, individually, be noticed by at least some of their former acquaintances. Some of those acquaintances might be presumed to know each other; furthermore, there would be a likelihood of overlap between at least some of the police agents’ circles of acquaintance. There would be talk; and before long someone would become aware that a considerable number of Tôkyô policemen had returned to Kagoshima within a very short time of each other. The same conclusion could have been reached from prefectural border security checks (movement of persons in and out of the prefecture was closely policed—see, for example, Inoue 1970, vol. 2, p. 208) . One way or another, it would not be long before the men’s presence was known in *shigakkô* circles (which included most of the staff of the prefectural police), and the agents would then be marked men.

It is surely hard to credit that neither Ôkubo nor Kawaji—both Satsuma born and bred, the latter also a thoroughly professional police chief and, as has been seen, not without experience in the business of covert political police operations—could have been unaware of the likelihood of such a scenario.

Turning now to the arms-collecting operation; the received version of events requires us to believe that Ôkubo and whoever else was involved imagined either that no-one in Kagoshima would notice a large steamship turning up in port and disembarking a sizeable squad of men, or that, if they did, no-one would mind.

On the first of these points, even supposing that the plan envisaged the ship arriving at night, the proposition that a ship of any size could put into harbour at night unobserved is hardly credible to anyone who has lived near a harbour, whether in Japan or anywhere else (and this writer lived near some Japanese harbours for four years). Especially at night, the sound of ships’ engines travels far and can be heard on land when the ship is still a considerable way out at sea — and nineteenth century steamships, driven by wheezing and clanking reciprocating engines, were much noisier

than modern vessels. Furthermore, the operation of docking a ship is, by definition, not quiet. The ship must be brought to a standstill using its engine—an operation involving much noisy thrashing of reversed propellers. Anchor-chains do not run out quietly, nor do anchors drop silently into the water. Furthermore, in a harbour there are usually people about even late at night—particularly men out fishing off wharfs and jetties—who would see a ship coming in. They would be curious; they would watch. And if they saw anything that aroused suspicion, they would not keep what they saw to themselves.

Nor could it be easily imagined that, even at night, the activities of the squad sent to collect the munitions would pass unremarked. A large body of men on the move, particularly one involved in the transport of voluminous stores, is neither invisible nor inaudible.⁵⁰

Taking all aspects of the operation into account, it is, as in the case of the police agents, hard to credit that those who ordered this operation seriously imagined that it could be carried out clandestinely. This brings discussion to the second of the two questions: as to whether those who ordered these operations supposed that, if anyone noticed, there would be no adverse reaction—bearing in mind that signs of attempted clandestinity would in themselves be likely to arouse suspicion.

Even setting aside the question of whether or not Admiral Kawamura in fact warned Ôkubo as Iwai and Shiba suggest: as was shown in the previous chapter, it was known that, among the young men of the *shigakkô*, anti-government sentiment was running high. In particular Ôkubo, who as head of the ministry that controlled the police would have had his finger on the political pulse, would have been aware of this. In such circumstances it is surely inconceivable that he would have been unaware of the kind of dire suspicion that the presence of so many police agents would kindle—or that he would have failed to recognise what was clear to Kawamura: namely, that trying to remove arms and ammunition from the prefecture would, both literally and metaphorically, be playing with explosives.

From this, two conclusions seem, on the face of it, to be possible. One is that the danger of a strongly, perhaps even violently, adverse reaction to these operations was

⁵⁰ It may be noted here that, according to Shiba (1989, vol. 7, p. 174), the arms-collection operation was embarked furtively, in disregard of regulations concerning the transport of explosive or incendiary materials. These required, *inter alia*, that it be done in daylight, that a red flag be displayed by those engaged in the transport, and that residents along the intended route of transport be notified in advance together with the prefectural authorities. Buck (1959, p. 123) relates, “the operations began under conditions of maximum secrecy, for no notification was made to the prefectural government.”

recognised, but that, while still wishing to avoid open conflict, the government leadership was prepared to take the risk because the necessity of the operations themselves was seen as being so great as to outweigh the danger involved.

Whatever may be said on this interpretation of the sending of the police agents (and it cannot be denied that intelligence as to what was going on in Kagoshima was something the government could hardly have too much of), it would seem at the very least to be highly questionable as far as the attempted munitions-collection is concerned. Undeniably, as Buck (1959, pp. 122-123) points out, it would have been highly desirable from the government's point of view to have weapons and ammunition retrieved from the reach of potentially rebellious hands and safely in those of the government, or rather of its soldiers; however, Buck also provides figures from which it can be inferred that, even had the operation succeeded, it would hardly have made a significant difference to what was in any case a vast government superiority in military resources. He states that, while the Satsuma army (presumably after seizing the munitions that the *Sekiryû Maru* had been sent to retrieve) possessed enough small arms to equip each soldier (but no reserve stocks), and some 1.5 million rounds of small arms ammunition (equivalent to 100 rounds per man), the government had over 45,000 individual weapons, with over 63 million rounds of ammunition for them (Buck 1959, pp. 145; 148)⁵¹.

These figures greatly weaken the objective force of the argument of "risk accepted in the face of overriding necessity"—however much it may have underlain Kido's thinking as he urged the munitions-recovery plan on Ôkubo and others in government. Ôkubo and Yamagata between them would have been much better placed than Kido to make an accurate guess at the relatively insignificant quantity of munitions involved (indeed, Yamagata's and other officers' earlier opposition to the plan may have been based partly on the argument that, for so little, it was hardly worth risking so much trouble). Nevertheless, the operation ultimately went ahead; and this arguably adds strength to the alternative conclusion that, for Ôkubo, the munitions furnished a convenient pretext (made even more convincing by Kido's advocacy of the project) for pursuing his real purpose: namely, to stir up precisely the kind of trouble that Yamagata, Kawamura and the other military men had voiced apprehension about. One can envisage a scenario in which Ôkubo, maintaining a show of reluctance to the very end, and all the while knowing that Kido is probably making a fuss about relatively little, finally "yields" to the latter's persistence and, "under protest", agrees to order the step that he knows will probably trigger the explosion of rebellion that he has wanted all along.

⁵¹ Mounsey relates that, by about July, the rebels were in such shortage of ammunition that they were reduced to commandeering metal utensils from local people—even the weights of fishermen's nets (Mounsey 1879, p. 192).

The Kawamura Mission

As related by both Mounsey and Stephan (see Mounsey, pp. 124—127, which forms the basis for Stephan 1965, pp. 150—52), in early February the government ordered Vice Navy Minister Kawamura Sumiyoshi to Kagoshima on what is generally portrayed as a bid to avert armed conflict.

Much has been made of this last-minute démarche, and of Ôyama Tsunayoshi's alleged thwarting of a meeting between Kawamura and Saigô Takamori, preventing negotiations which, it is suggested, could have averted the civil war that was about to ensue. This version of events was supported by Ôyama himself at his post-war trial (Mounsey 1879, p. 229)⁵², in a statement which, it is surely reasonable to assume, was largely if not entirely dictated by the government whose captive he then was (Ôyama would have known that he faced execution in any case for having diverted public funds to support the rebellion, and would have had nothing to gain or lose by making this statement too). The government could therefore claim to have tried until the last moment to avert armed hostilities, and blame for the war could be laid at the feet of Ôyama; the government could claim that, had Kawamura and Saigô (who was conveniently dead and in no position to speak on his own account) been able to meet, all misunderstandings could have been clarified and Saigô would have been able to persuade the young men of the *shigakkô* to calm down and abandon their rebellious intentions. It was, of course, additionally convenient that many of the young men concerned, and all of Saigô's lieutenants who had formed the *shigakkô* leadership (Shinohara Kunimoto, Murata Shimpachi, Beppu Shinsuke, Kirino Toshiaki and the rest) were also dead.

It may be argued that the Kawamura mission constitutes evidence against the proposition that Ôkubo was determined on a fight. Certainly, any defence of the Ems Telegram hypothesis has to show that it and the reality of the Kawamura mission can be seen as mutually consistent.

Stephan (Stephan 1965, p. 150) treads a well-established path in his statement that ministers ordered Kawamura to Kagoshima "hoping to salvage the situation" (i.e. avert a civil war). Yet how realistic could such a hope have been? More to the point: could such a political realist as Ôkubo really have entertained such a hope? To accept the official line and regard the Kawamura mission as a genuine peacemaking effort on the part of Ôkubo and those colleagues in whom he confided involves disregard of any such questioning of the official version of events. It requires us to accept that the government leadership not only wished to avert war but also genuinely believed in

⁵² It should be noted, however, that, in the signed confession reproduced by Mounsey (op. cit., p. 284), Ôyama blamed an attempted attack on Kawamura's ship by *shigakkô* members for the fact that the meeting did not take place.

the possibility of averting it.

Both those propositions merit critical scrutiny, especially in view of Kido's diary entry for 6 February (the day Kawamura was given his orders), in which (besides revealing that there had been conflicting views as to whether Kawamura was an appropriate emissary) he expressed scepticism as to whether a military solution could be avoided: "I believe that even if the Vice Minister of the Navy is dispatched, *the general run of Satsuma men will not repent unless we send troops to call them to account*" (KBH III, p. 436) emphasis added). It should be noted here that this diary entry continues: "No other policy is open to us but first to grill the people of the Prefectural Office", making no reference to any intention to find a way of averting conflict.

If anyone on the government side seriously believed that it was possible to avoid war, then what terms were they prepared to regard as an acceptable alternative situation? In particular, it has to be asked whether either Ôkubo or Kido could have regarded as acceptable a return to the *status quo ante*, to the political standoff between the government and the Kagoshima state-within-a-state, with the continuation of a private military buildup in the latter. Surely they could not. Were the rebels likely to agree to an abandonment of Kagoshima's position of confrontation with the government? Again, surely not. Might Ôkubo have expected them to agree? He would surely have been far more likely to share Kido's scepticism on that point. Any possibility of an accord on future policy implementation (the key issue as far as the government was concerned) must have seemed out of the question. That being the case, from Ôkubo's perspective, war must have appeared to be the only course that offered any possibility of bringing Kagoshima into line with the rest of the country.

Then, too: what of the arms and ammunition forcibly taken by the *shigakkô* students? What mutually face-saving compromise might be found between the return of this government property (which the government was bound to require), and its remaining in the hands of the robbers? How likely was it that the *shigakkô* students would docilely return their booty, even if Saigô Takamori himself were to ask it of them? It must surely have seemed unlikely, given the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion as to the government's intentions towards Satsuma. If they refused, could the government afford to acquiesce in the violent theft of its own property? Again, the most likely answer would appear to be: surely not. If the government wanted to recover its property, it would in all probability have no alternative but to attempt to do so by force. Clearly that was Kido's belief; Ôkubo, the supreme exponent of *realpolitik*, would surely have had no illusions either.

Indeed, on 7 February, the day after Kawamura was ordered to Kagoshima on his "peacemaking" mission, Ôkubo is writing to Itô Hirobumi privately welcoming the rebellion as an opportunity to destroy the opposition movement in Kagoshima⁵³. Can this seriously be seen as the attitude of a man in search of a way of avoiding a fight?

There is also the incident recalled by Hayashi Tadasu, quoted by McLaren (McLaren 1916, pp. 104—105), in which, the morning after the first news of the rebellion arrived, without Ôkubo having given any hint of his thoughts on the matter, Hayashi and Itô Hirobumi were astonished to awake "to find the city placarded with edicts depriving Saigo of his titles and rank, proscribing him as a rebel, appointing Prince Arisugawa the Commander-in-Chief of an expedition against Satsuma, and summoning the Council of State to a meeting that very next day". McLaren comments: "This story is told by Hayashi as illustrative of Ôkubo's methods: overnight he had formulated the plans which in his mind were required by the occasion, and without consulting any of his official colleagues he had caused the necessary proclamations to be issued." But it may, alternatively, be taken as indicating that Ôkubo, while keeping his intentions to himself, had thought out his tactics considerably longer in advance; the mechanics of obtaining official edicts, of getting placards prepared and printed or copied, and making arrangements for their distribution, suggest that more than overnight improvisation lay behind this incident.

If, as all of the above suggests, avoidance of military conflict was neither desired by Ôkubo nor seen as being achievable in any case, then what might have been the purpose of the Kawamura mission? Several interpretations may be seen as possible; they are not mutually exclusive.

One is simply that government leaders, rather than rely on the necessarily limited picture of events in Kagoshima given by telegraphed reports, felt the need to obtain, if it were still possible to do so, an on-the-spot eye-view of the situation from a trusted and authoritative source who would be acceptable to the other side. Ôkubo's biographer Iwata, while relating that Kawamura was ordered to Kagoshima, makes no mention of any peacemaking intention on the government's part (or of any specific purpose at all) and suggests that Kawamura himself, on hearing how far the rebellion had progressed, sought a meeting with Saigô "hoping that he could by this means forestall a civil war" (Iwata 1964, pp. 247-248)—a hope which he may have expressed before setting out on his journey, and which Ôkubo would no doubt have taken care not to dampen.

⁵³ This is mentioned by Inoue—see p. 6 above.

Another interpretation is that, while being determined to meet the Satsuma challenge with force, the government leadership (and Ôkubo in particular) were anxious to create and maintain every appearance of having had war forced upon them after having to the very last done everything possible to avoid it. By the same token the rebels could be made to appear to have rejected the government's proffered olive branch and to be intransigently bent on rebellion. If, as this thesis has argued, Ôkubo had in fact set out to provoke the Rebellion, he would have had all the more powerful a motive to create such an appearance.

Yet another is that government leaders might have hoped to be able to detach Saigô from the rebels—either to deprive them of the possibility of using his charisma, or to rescue their former colleague from the prospect of certain death in a hopeless cause (not to mention the ignominy, after his long record of service to the imperial cause, of ending his career as a rebel like Etô Shimpei), or, more likely, with both these aims in view. However remote the chance might appear to be, they may yet have considered that they owed it to him to make the attempt; and what better emissary to send than his own brother-in-law? Such an interpretation is arguably consistent with the personal respect in which Saigô continued to be held during the rebellion by members of the government's political and military leadership (see, e.g., Morris, pp 266, 268).

A further possible interpretation also concerns the position of Kawamura. Both Iwai and Shiba portray him as opposing Kido's proposal to take custody of the arms and ammunition on the grounds that it would provoke the "*shigakkô* crowd" ("*shigakkô no renchû wo shigeki suru koto ni natte, kaette mazui*" [Iwai 1987, p. 136]; "*maru de seifu ga ran wo tsukuru yô na mono da*" [Shiba 1989, vol. 7, p. 173]). If this is accurate, then Kawamura represented a weak point in the façade of innocence that it has been argued Ôkubo wished to establish, since he was in a position to state that the dispatch of the *Sekiryû Maru* had proceeded in the face of his having warned that it would have the effect that had eventuated in reality⁵⁴. Offering him the key role of *parlementaire* in an ostensible endeavour to "salvage the situation" might help to neutralise that potential threat; it would certainly implicate him directly in the "failure to avert war". For this to work, Kawamura must genuinely believe, firstly, that the situation could still be salvaged, and, more importantly, that the government sincerely wished for and believed in the possibility of achieving a peaceful resolution of matters. This was no doubt what he wished to believe; he could be encouraged in this belief by, for example, offering him a fulsome apology for not having paid closer

⁵⁴ So too, of course, was Yamagata (see footnote 45 p. 45; but it seems reasonable to assume that he may have been at least privy to and supportive of the provocative intention attributed in this thesis to Ôkubo. Furthermore, not being a Satsuma man, he would not have had Kawamura's local and personal sympathies.

heed to his warnings—which, it could be added, had unfortunately turned out to have been all too correct—before giving in to the “regrettable” insistence of Kido.

(Lest it be questioned whether Ôkubo would have resorted to such a cynical piece of manipulation, it should be recalled that it was this same Ôkubo who, Môri has argued (Môri 1987), in 1873 conspired to drive five government colleagues from office, and in 1874 had the head of one of them, the former Justice Minister, cut off and publicly exposed after a trial that was a travesty of justice. Making use of Kawamura in the manner suggested above is something Ôkubo can fairly be seen as being perfectly capable of if he considered that the interests of the state required it.)

At all events, the Kawamura *démarche* is capable of an interpretation that is entirely consistent with the Ems Telegram hypothesis: not that Ôkubo believed that civil war could be averted and sought to avert it, but that his purpose, while actually intending to provoke rebellion, was to do everything possible to avoid any appearance of having pursued that aim. Kawamura may have believed in the genuineness of his “peace mission”, and posterity would seem to have been encouraged to believe in it also; but, in the reading of events suggested here, for Ôkubo it would have been a useful piece of political theatre that gave added deniability to his determination to seek a military solution to the Kagoshima problem.

The Government's Military Unpreparedness

The remaining major issue to be addressed is the absence of any overt military movement by the government prior to the outbreak of the Rebellion, of any sign that the government anticipated or was preparing for trouble. This unpreparedness is well attested to by Mounsey: the government “had not concentrated any force on the frontiers of Satsuma, or even at Ôzaka (*sic*) or Kiôto (*sic*). No extraordinary movements of troops or men-of-war had been ordered. The army and navy were in their normal state and in their usual positions.” (Mounsey 1879, p. 130); later again, the army “was located in its usual quarters”—which he cites as evidence that “the government had no intention at this time of attacking Satsuma” (op. cit., p. 145).

Kido's diary entries for 4, 6 and 9 March (KBH III, pp 456—460) are eloquent on the consequences of this: the rebels' rapid advance to Kumamoto, the garrison's retreat into the castle, widespread devastation in the city, with homelessness, loss of all property, loss of livelihood, and even death, being suffered by the local populace on a large scale—all of which, he appears to suggest, could have been prevented “if we had placed garrison troops on the border of Satsuma in strategic positions for defensive action, and if we had dispatched a large force in addition to the garrison to help out.”

He expresses alarm at the possible consequences should the Satsuma force advance on into Hizen (Saga)—a quite reasonable concern, since that was precisely what the rebels should have been doing if their leaders were serious about marching to Tôkyô⁵⁵.

It is not clear what he imagined a force of around 4,000 officers and conscripts could have achieved against more than three times their number of Satsuma warriors. As for the dispatch of a large enough force in time to forestall the Satsuma army's arrival in Kumamoto city: for that to have been possible, given the distribution of the army in garrisons around the country, it would probably have been necessary to initiate mobilization measures *before* news of the first rebellious moves had been received. In view of his statement (entry for 9 March) that "as early as last December rumours of rebellion had reached the capital", Kido appears to be suggesting that some such measures should have been set in train at that time and to be complaining that they were not.

Like the fact of the Kawamura mission, the fact that no overt military preparations occurred before the rebellion got under way, may appear *prima facie* to constitute evidence against the Ems Telegram hypothesis. It may be argued that, if Ôkubo or anyone in the government had been thinking of stirring up trouble in Satsuma they would surely have made at least some precautionary troop dispositions, and that therefore the absence of any such preparatory moves must signify that no-one in the government even expected trouble, still less entertained any thought of instigating any.

However, especially in the light of earlier discussion of the dangers inherent in preparing a military initiative against Satsuma (see Chapter 3), the situation described by Mounsey may also be seen as being consistent with the suggestion that what Ôkubo wanted was that the first blow in the fight he sought be seen to come from Satsuma and not from the government, and that the government take no action that could be seen as provocative or as preparation for attack.

Quite apart from that consideration, there were other reasons for not moving units from where they were until absolutely necessary. It may be recalled⁵⁶ that, besides Satsuma, Kido had noted other "centres of dissension" in such localities as western Honshû (requiring the vigilance of the Hiroshima garrison), Kinki (covered by the Kansai garrison) and Tôhoku (within the purview of the garrison at Sendai). Assuming that the troops based at Nagoya and Tôkyô would be needed as a reserve (and that in

⁵⁵ "Saigô calculated that by marching fifteen miles a day he would reach Kokura, a port...on the straits of Shimonoseki, in twelve days. Thence it was his intention to cross to the mainland..." (Mounsey 1879, pp. 142-143)

⁵⁶ See p. 22 above.

any case Nagoya troops might need to be dispatched to Tosa, one of Kido's "centres of dissension" where there was no garrison), this effectively tied down all of the five garrisons stationed outside Kyûshû.

Thus the government's "lack of preparedness" in no way conflicts with the Ems Telegram hypothesis: it can be seen partly as insurance against trouble elsewhere, partly as an essential component of the façade of innocence with which, it is suggested, Ôkubo desired to mask his intention to lure the disaffected *shizoku* of Satsuma to their destruction.

There may also have been a degree of complacency. Ôkubo seems not to have anticipated the rapid initial move north of the rebel army, nor the ensuing mayhem in Kumamoto—perhaps he did not expect war on the scale that eventuated. In his 4 March diary entry, Kido writes revealingly of initial reactions among key government leaders at the time news of the rebellion first broke: "Yamagata said that the Higo (i.e. Kumamoto—*PT*) garrison was adequate to meet the danger in Kyûshû; and he was unwilling to send soldiers... I was intensely worried that if the rebels push into Higo a great disaster would befall us. My view, however, was not adopted. *The dominant view at that time* was that the rebels would hold their ground in Satsuma at first, stir up the rest of the country, then afterwards stage an insurrection..." (emphasis added).

While Kido is at pains here to emphasise his having felt a need for urgent action, his diary for the first two weeks and more of the rebellion shows awareness only gradually dawning of the magnitude of what the government faced. Thus, on 10 February he refers to "the Satsuma incident" and to "this civil disturbance" (KBH III, p. 441); a day later (p. 443) we find "the Satsuma affair"; on 13 February (p. 444) he writes of "the rebel movements and their alarming nature"; not until 18 February (p. 447) does the "incident" become an "insurrection"⁵⁷ which "will give rise to disaster". By the following day (a fortnight after the first news arrived) it is "the Satsuma rebellion". Finally, on 23 February (the day of the rebel army's second general assault on Kumamoto Castle—Isami 1990, *Nenpyô*, p. 3), it becomes "this war".

Government leaders thus seem to have been generally surprised at the speed and scale of the Satsuma response. Ôkubo and Yamagata may have wanted the Satsuma force to move out of its home prefecture so that the insurrectionary nature of its conduct would be clear to all, and so that it could the more easily be attacked and destroyed; but even so, they do not seem to have expected it to move so fast. Here perhaps was another reason for lack of military preparation: an under-estimate of what

⁵⁷ It also became an "unprecedented upheaval".

the government would be up against.

In summary: of the circumstantial evidence reviewed in this chapter, all of the items that at first sight appear to refute the Ems Telegram hypothesis can be seen, on closer inspection, to be capable of an interpretation that is consistent not only with the hypothesis itself but also with what has been seen of the character of Ôkubo Toshimichi. Of the two actions that combined to spark off the Rebellion (the dispatch of police agents and the attempt to remove munitions), it can be seriously questioned whether these can really have been blunders, as is generally maintained; indeed, they can reasonably be construed as having been ordered in full knowledge that they would be provocative in effect. In addition, two pieces of evidence — the placards incident and Ôkubo's letter of 7 February — point quite suggestively towards the possibility that the outbreak of the Rebellion was the intended result of Ôkubo's "management of Satsuma".

CHAPTER 5: A LOST CAUSE?

*From the moment when the siege of fortresses
compels us to suspend the advance,
the offensive has as a rule reached its culminating point.*
Carl von Clausewitz⁵⁸

If, as has been argued, Ôkubo deliberately sought to provoke the Satsuma *shizoku* into rebellion, it may be presumed that he did so in confidence that the government could defeat any military initiative Satsuma took—that its forces were strong enough to contain the explosion. How justified was that confidence? Was the Satsuma Rebellion a lost cause from the outset? Alternatively, was there a possibility that the government could face defeat?

As noted in Chapter 4, the army that marched out of Kagoshima some 13,000-strong in mid-February seems to have given government leaders an unpleasant surprise. They must have recognised then that defeating it would require all the forces at their command. The worst possibility they had to face was that, simultaneously with this prompt and massive rising in Satsuma, more *shizoku* or peasant insurrections in other parts of the country might force the government to split those forces between two or more, perhaps widely separated, fronts. The government was fortunate in being spared that potentially lethal trap; as will be shown in this chapter, it arguably had Saigô and his colleagues to thank for that.

The course and outcome of the war may be said to have been largely determined by two major errors: on the Satsuma side, the siege of Kumamoto Castle; on the government side, delay in opening a second front against the Satsuma army as it conducted its siege, and consequent failure to trap and destroy it there and then. The former was more decisive, being generally regarded as having virtually ensured that the rebellion as a whole would fail; the latter made it a certainty that the war would continue for much longer, would entail more damage, suffering and loss of life, and

⁵⁸ Book 8, Chapter 9; Clausewitz, Howard et al. 1976, p. 625.

would cost the government far more, than would otherwise have been the case.

Both of these errors were *unforced*, resulting from decisions taken in the absence of compulsion imposed by the other side. It is therefore reasonable to enquire into what may have prompted them as well as to consider the scope of their consequences.

Beginning with Satsuma: it is generally recognised that it was in halting its drive north and besieging Kumamoto castle that the Satsuma army leadership forfeited any chance of success that the rebellion might have had. Why they made that error, and what they arguably should have done instead, are questions that appear to have been rather neglected, and which will be examined in more detail in this chapter.

Furthermore, it will be argued that, while assessments made hitherto of the negative impact of the Kumamoto siege on the Satsuma army's campaign are correct as far as they go, they are too limited, being based on a view of events that focuses only on the immediate theatre of operations, overlooks wider geographical and politico-military dimensions and thus fails to take the full measure of the possibilities that went unrealised because the Satsuma commanders —without being compelled to do so — suspended their army's advance.

It is equally clear that, in the campaign to relieve the Kumamoto siege, government commanders let slip a genuine opportunity to end the war there in April (Mounsey, p. 168, writes that "some members of the government expected" that the Satsuma army would be "surrounded and forced to surrender"); and this chapter also explores how and why that opportunity came to be missed.

Kumamoto, lying on the Satsuma army's chosen route north, was one of the government's two Kyûshû garrison towns—the other one being Fukuoka. Stationed in Kumamoto Castle, under the command of Major-General Tani Tateki (谷干城: his given name is also sometimes rendered in Sino-Japanese style as Kanjô, and his rank is given by Mounsey as colonel⁵⁹), was a force of some 2,000 officers and men (strengthened to over 4,000 by the arrival of last-minute reinforcements). Outnumbered by at least three to one, and composed largely of unblooded non-samurai conscripts, this was not a force capable of giving serious opposition to the advancing rebel army—in addition to which, Tani appears to have had doubts as to the capability, morale, and even (justifiably, according to Buck) the loyalty both of his troops and of the local townspeople; therefore, rather than oppose the Satsuma forces on open ground, after a minor skirmish on the southern outskirts of Kumamoto at

⁵⁹Although "Major-General" is the now-accepted equivalent of Tani's rank-designation *Rikugun-Shôshô* (陸軍少将), Mounsey may have chosen to rank him as a colonel because the number of troops under his command (some 4,000, equivalent to a brigade) would, in a western army, have been commanded by a colonel—whereas a general officer would normally command at least a full division.

Kawashiri (川尻 given by Mounsey and by Brown and Hirota as Kawajiri) he withdrew his forces into the castle and prepared for a siege (Buck 1973, pp.434-37; Isami, p.15, pp. 31-32; Mounsey, pp. 143-144)

Even when confined to the castle, the garrison posed a potent threat. Buck points out that the Satsuma leadership chose a route via Kumamoto "because it was necessary to make certain that the imperial troops in Kumamoto would neither obstruct the army's passage nor attack its exposed rear" (Buck, op. cit., p. 432). Tani had prudently chosen not to obstruct the Satsuma army, but that left no shortage of options to cause trouble. As Buck implies, the most useful tactic from the government's point of view might be to hang on the rebels' rear, avoiding pitched battle but constantly harassing, delivering spoiling attacks from this direction or that. Whatever he chose to do, his force was large enough to be a serious nuisance that could not be ignored; the problem for the Satsuma commanders was what to do about it.

Among the military commonsense in which *On War* abounds⁶⁰, Clausewitz makes, in Book 8, Chapter 9, numerous remarks that bear directly on the situation in which the Satsuma army found itself:-

Firstly: having set off to march to Tôkyô, it was vital to keep going, and fast:-

"The second principle (of strategy) is: act with the utmost speed.
No halt or detour must be permitted without good cause."

Clausewitz, Howard et al., 1976, p. 617

—a point which, later in the same chapter, Clausewitz restates and emphatically elaborates as follows:-

"Any unnecessary expenditure of time, every unnecessary detour, is a waste of strength and thus abhorrent to strategic thought. It is still more important to remember that *almost the only advantage of the attack rests on its initial surprise. Speed and impetus are its strongest elements and are usually indispensable if we are to defeat the enemy.*

op.cit., p. 624 (emphasis added)

"Should the tide of victory sweep us past (the enemy's) fortresses, the question of whether to besiege them or not will depend upon our strength. If our superiority is very great, we will lose less time by taking them as early as we can; but if we are not so sure that fresh successes lie ahead, we must invest them with the smallest possible forces (...) From the moment when the siege of fortresses compels us to suspend the advance, the offensive has as a

⁶⁰ The edition used for the references in this thesis is the translation listed in the Bibliography as Clausewitz Howard et al, 1976. The original work, *Vom Kriege*, was published posthumously in 1832.

rule reached its culminating point. Therefore we demand that the main force should go on advancing rapidly and keep up the pressure."

op. cit., p. 625 (emphasis in original)

One option in keeping with this advice was to detach sufficient troops to act as a blocking force — not to capture the castle, still less to annihilate Major General Tani and his men, but simply to immobilize them — while the main body moved on towards Tōkyō (following Clausewitz's imperative "the main force should go on advancing and keep up the pressure"). With Ōyama in control back home as the army's quartermaster, such a force could surely have been progressively relieved by fresh musters from Kagoshima and released to move north and rejoin the main body of the army. Thus the Satsuma army would have maintained mobility, confronting the government with the problem of where to concentrate in order to bring it to battle. (Much later in the war it was to demonstrate a fine ability to do this; but by then it was too late to matter).

Instead, the Satsuma leadership handed the solution of that problem to the government by staying put and squandering irreplaceable lives, ammunition and, above all, time, in repeatedly fruitless assaults (vividly described by Buck) on one of the strongest fortresses in Japan - held by over 4,000 resolutely-led men⁶¹, leaving the government free to mobilize and deploy more than ten times that number against an enemy that had obligingly pinned itself down. As Buck puts it, the government's task of suppressing the rebellion "was immeasurably aided by Saigō's concentrating his forces in a single area" (Buck 1973, pp. 433-434).

Given the professed aim with which the rebels had set out, the siege was worse than an irrelevance; it became, in Clausewitz's words, an "unnecessary expenditure of time, (an) unnecessary detour, ...a waste of strength...abhorrent to strategic thought" (Clausewitz, Howard et al., 1976, p. 624). Saigō's original timetable⁶² might have had his army crossing the Shimonoseki Straits into Honshū by early March—at which time, in reality, the rebels were preparing to defend entrenched positions only a few kilometres northwest of Kumamoto against an imperial force that was advancing massively south from its Hakata beachhead.

A protracted siege was apparently not what the Satsuma high command expected or intended. Certainly, leading Satsuma hawk Kirino Toshiaki, himself a former commander of the Kumamoto garrison, cannot have foreseen the 50-day siege that eventuated; he is quoted (Isami 1990, p.15; Inoue 1973, vol.2, p. 222) as having

⁶¹ Tani had been appointed after the débâcle in which the *Shimpūren* managed to surprise and kill significant numbers of the Kumamoto garrison and hold the castle for a short time until superior force rallied against them. His conduct during the preliminaries to the siege, and throughout the siege itself, showed a determination to deny the castle to the enemy at all costs.

⁶² See footnote 55, p. 56 above.

opined that the calibre of the defenders was so poor that a single attack with bamboo staves would suffice to force the castle's surrender.

Superficially at least, Kirino could claim support for his opinion in the initial success of the *Shimpûren* uprising. In fact, however, the castle was renowned for its strength, and Kirino should have known better.

What strategic reasons might have been considered for taking the castle? Buck, who is quite clear as to why a route of march via Kumamoto was chosen (see above), does not discuss this question. The argument attributed to Kirino and his supporters by Isami (1990, p. 20) was that the capture of this government garrison would constitute a great Satsuma victory that would spur other samurai throughout the country into revolt. In short: a symbolic prize too valuable, and too easy for the picking, to be ignored.

Whatever its symbolic value, other eyes saw that the picking would not be so easy, and this perception did much damage to the Satsuma cause.

Itagaki Taisuke of Tosa (now Kôchi prefecture), one of the leading Restorationists who had resigned from government with Saigô over the *Seikan-ron* affair, on hearing that Saigô's troops were besieging the castle, presciently described the move as a recipe for defeat, and as one in which the Satsuma army would sacrifice the flower of its forces (Isami 1990, p. 20). That judgement, coming from the mouth of such a man, may well in itself have been enough to deter disaffected Tosa samurai from flocking to the Satsuma banner⁶³; certainly, while there was a rallying to the rebels from groups in many parts of Japan, Tosa men appear to have stayed neutral⁶⁴.

There was evidently rebel potential in Tosa (it was one of Kido's "centres of dissension" —see p. 22 above), and its failure to materialise can be seen as a major strategic loss from the Satsuma point of view. Tosa had contributed excellent troops to the Restoration, and would have been a valuable source of experienced fighting men as reinforcements. More significantly, however, co-operation from Tosa samurai and access to Shikoku⁶⁵ (where there was no government garrison) could have given the Satsuma army a greatly enhanced freedom of manoeuvre, with the

⁶³ In addition, there were insular Tosa men like the one quoted footnote 22, p. 19 above. In addition, a biographical note by Brown and Hirota on the Tosa politician Sasaki Takayuki (KBH I, pp 428—429), relates that he "kept rebels in Tosa in line during the Civil War of 1877".

⁶⁴ Gotô, in Iwanami 1975, p. 298, makes reference to a projected rising by 1,100 members of the *Tosa-Kinnô-Tô* as late as August-September, which had support for Satsuma as its object but in fact for one reason or another was aborted. See Mounsey's reference to government fears of anti-government activity (cited on p. 64 below).

⁶⁵ It is assumed here that the co-operation envisaged would extend to assuring control over local shipping and port facilities.

possibility of a shorter route enabling it to sidestep the presence of imperial troops (across the Bungo Strait; then a north-eastward march across Kôchi and Tokushima prefectures; then across the Kii Strait to, say, Wakayama—or via Awaji-shima in the direction of Kôbe), leaving government commanders guessing as to where they would appear in Honshû.⁶⁶ If such a manoeuvre had resulted in the government's main force being caught to the *west* of the Satsuma army, with little left to interpose between the rebels and Tôkyô, a rebel victory would have been distinctly possible.

The possibility of a Tosa-Satsuma linkup is considered by Mounsey (pp. 161-162), who, after noting that, under Itagaki's guidance, Tosa "did not openly oppose the government though far from reconciled to the existing order of things" continues significantly: "It was, however, impossible to say how long the discontented men of the province would remain quiet, or *what they would do if Saigô gained any considerable success. . .*" (Mounsey, pp. 161-162; emphasis added). It was also considered by the government. Buck relates that one of the first actions taken by the oligarchy was to liaise with the two most prominent Tosa politicians, Itagaki and Gotô Shôjirô, and make them responsible for "keeping Tosa in line" (Buck 1959, p. 131). Later in the war, Mounsey (p. 196) relates, the government was obliged to strengthen its military presence there because it was feared that "a considerable number of samurai...intended to cause a diversion in Saigô's favour"⁶⁷.

The fact that government leaders showed such keen awareness of Tosa as a point of political and military vulnerability, and acted so promptly, displayed a strategic insight that quite eluded the Satsuma leadership. In vainly besieging Kumamoto castle for some fifty days, Saigô and his colleagues not only failed to grasp the Tosa connection and the potentially devastating advantage it could have given them; they in effect abandoned the purpose for which they had marched out of Kagoshima, letting their army get bogged down in the kind of fighting it should have avoided.

The Satsuma army was not equipped for sustained combat (Buck 1959, p. 145). It had set out to march to Tôkyô, not to besiege a castle in Kyûshû. Instead of keeping on the move, as Saigô had envisaged (and as Clausewitz would have urged), it became a sitting target for the government forces that were moving to relieve the siege. It became committed to meeting the main body of those forces in a static, positional battle in which it would be on the defensive, and in which the scales would be tipped in favour of the side that could bring the greater firepower to bear, take greater losses, and fight on—the 17-day battle of Tabaruzaka⁶⁸.

Why, in the face of the successful resistance of the garrison, the Satsuma leadership

⁶⁶ The post-Kumamoto phase of the war showed that, repeatedly, the Satsuma army was able to elude army forces and vanish, reappearing to surprise its enemies. Even when numerically weakened, mobility enabled it on occasions to strike telling blows.

⁶⁷ This might refer to the same aborted rising noted by Gotô (see note 64 p. 63 above).

did not abandon a siege that was a strategic irrelevance is undoubtedly the greatest puzzle of the entire war. Perhaps they locked themselves into believing that the next battle, or at any rate the one after that, would succeed. Perhaps, after causing so many lives to be thrown away, former Major-General Kirino could not bear to lose face. Be that as it may, had the tactical ability they showed on repeated occasions been matched by a capacity for strategic thinking, the entire course of the war could have been very different, with a government victory not necessarily guaranteed.

On the government side, the most notable error is the delay in opening a second front to attack from the rear the Satsuma army besieging Kumamoto Castle. Kido's diary records his having begun to advocate this strategy on 26 February, yet it was not adopted until some weeks later, with 4,000 troops under Kuroda Kiyotaka landing at Hinaku on 19 March (Kido, diary entry for 20 March; Isami 1990, *Nenpyô*, p. 4; Isami relates that the orders for this expedition were issued to Kuroda on 14 March).

As a consequence, those who expected the Satsuma army to be caught in pincers before Kumamoto and either destroyed or forced to surrender were disappointed (much more delay, and the garrison might have been compelled to surrender for lack of food—Mounsey 1879, pp 167—68). Furthermore, the war was prolonged by an estimated five months (Buck 1959, p. 184). Mounsey contrasts the slow movement of the government forces with the tactical nimbleness of their opponents:—

The Imperialist generals then found, to their surprise, that the rebels had withdrawn . . . Their retreat was conducted in a most masterly manner by Saigô, who, in the face of superior forces, was able to draw off all his men in good order, carrying with him his wounded, ammunition, and camp equipage . . . (The rebels') losses had been about 2600 killed and 5300 wounded⁶⁹, but their ranks had been refilled, and their retreat from Kumamoto showed that their army was still highly efficient⁷⁰.

op. cit., pp. 166—168

⁶⁸ This battle, narrated in copious detail by local historian Isami Kazuyuki (Isami 1989), was a long drawn out static battle of sheer attrition, a conflict of virtually unrelieved horror, "fought with a ferocity unknown in the history of Japanese warfare", (Buck 1959, p. 167) in which the government forces sought, in the end successfully, to dislodge their opponents from formidable defensive positions (*kosu ni kosarenu Tabaruzaka*, in the words of a folk song commemorating the event) guarding the northwest approaches to Kumamoto. Buck (1959, p. 184) describes this battle as "indecisive"; the present writer considers this judgement debatable. That debate lies beyond the scope of this thesis; however, suffice it to note that it was at Tabaruzaka that the Satsuma samurai belief in their own fighting superiority over the government's despised peasant conscripts received an even more crushing refutation than at Kumamoto.

⁶⁹ Corresponding figures for government losses up to this point are given by Mounsey (p. 168) as 3876 dead and 6748 wounded: a total casualty rate of about one-third of the force mobilized thus far.

What appears at first glance like sloth on the government side may be seen in part as a consequence of the poor quality of the southern pincer force in terms of the troops' experience and training, as well as of command problems (Buck 1959, p. 187); however, it may also be seen as indicative of the style of military management displayed by land-forces commander Yamagata Aritomo (who, as has been seen, had significantly misread his opponents' initial intentions), so that at this point some consideration of Yamagata's approach to his duties may be appropriate.

As a relatively junior officer of the *Kiheitai* in the civil war of 1866, Yamagata had experienced at first hand the victory of the greatly outnumbered Chôshû forces in their defensive fight against the Bakufu and its allies.

1877 saw him in a reversal of roles: as director of his government's land campaign against the troops of a rebellious province — not fighting defensively but moving into enemy-held territory. One thing that his handling of the campaign against Satsuma shows is how the lessons of 1866 informed his actions.

Above all, this shows in his caution. He had good cause to appreciate the strengths of his opponents⁷¹: above all, the fighting spirit of the Satsuma samurai, many of whom, as Kido noted, had actual combat experience. Against such men he was directing an army whose rank-and-file could largely be typified as unblooded civilians in uniform—who would fight because they were ordered to do so, but without their opponents' zest and flair for combat. No doubt in part thanks to his 1866 experience, he clearly appreciated too the strength of the defence against the attack, and Tabaruzaka more than anything else showed how costly victory could be when pitted against a combination of these strengths. Even at Kumamoto, although the Imperial army had been able to relieve the besieged castle, it was outmanœuvred and failed to encircle the rebels; Yamagata would have been very clearly aware of what this meant in terms of the relative tactical competence of the two armies and their respective command cadres.⁷²

However, Yamagata also showed a clear awareness of the importance of playing to one's own strength against the opponent's weakness. And the government's strength lay in numerical, material and technical superiority: in the ability to replace

⁷¹ This is shown very clearly in a letter from Yamagata to Ôkubo discussed by Buck (1959, pp. 197-199).

⁷² Even when reduced to a few hundred men encircled at Enodake in August, Saigô and his followers were still able to give Yamagata "a convincing lesson in infantry tactics and the spirit of the offensive" (Buck 1959, p. 214).

casualties⁷³, to keep its troops adequately fed and clothed and able to keep shooting when the opposition's ammunition was running low; in senior commanders' ability to be quickly and accurately informed through the telegraph of events on the various fronts and to co-ordinate the movement of units operating in geographically separated areas of the war theatre⁷⁴. Even against the formidable fighters of Satsuma, greater numbers, and greater firepower, could be expected to bring victory in the long run if sensibly managed.

Arguably, the run proved to be longer than it need have been, in part because of Yamagata's tendency (displayed nowhere more clearly than in the final action at Shiroyama⁷⁵), to delay initiating battle until he was satisfied that all the elements necessary for overwhelming success were firmly in place. (In this respect his approach is reminiscent of Montgomery, against whom criticism for undue delay was not infrequent.)

The war showed another facet of Yamagata's character as a commander, which also would have tended to induce caution: his sense of responsibility for the long-term task entrusted to him in 1874 of creating a national army based upon conscription.

Inconveniently — as he must surely have thought it—the Satsuma Rebellion occurred at a time when the military institution it was his task to build was in its infancy, both numerically and organisationally. As regards numbers, Mounsey's figures for the whole of the army (all arms, including the Kumamoto garrison, but excluding the Imperial Guard), give a war-time establishment of some 46,000⁷⁶—minuscule compared with the 1.3 million strength (including reserves) of the 1874 German army (Westney, in Jansen, Rozman et al. 1986, p. 193).

Organisationally, the imperial army was still a ramshackle affair. There was as yet no General Staff; the first class of officer graduates from the recently-established military academy had yet to emerge, and Japan did not yet possess "an officer corps

⁷³ Witness Yamagata's pleas for reinforcements, in the form of a call-up of conscripts, to make good heavy casualties (Buck 1959, pp. 196—197).

⁷⁴ As numerous entries in Kido's diary show, the telegraph also made it possible, for the first time in Japanese military history, for the political leadership, far removed from the theatre of conflict, to be informed in more-or-less real time of the progress of the fighting (at least to the extent that reports from theatre commanders kept them informed). Buck (1959, p.238-239, footnote) writes: "The Imperial Army laid more than 500 miles of telegraph wire during the Rebellion".

⁷⁵ On this point, see Buck 1959, p 224 *et seq.* and Mounsey 1879 pp. 210-214.

⁷⁶ Mounsey gives 46,000 as a global establishment figure (p. 108—a detailed breakdown by garrison is given on p. 145), but gives the total of troops employed by the government in the war (including fresh recruits raised to replace casualties) at some 58,000, plus 7,000 police and four artillery battalions. Buck gives a combined combat strength for major units as 45,819, broken down by unit and arm of service (Buck 1959, p. 265).

socialized into the patterns of the modern military and equipped with the skills adequate to the training of recruits and the effective use of the new weapons" (Westney, op. cit., p. 177), without which the development of an effective modern fighting organisation was hardly conceivable. Furthermore, its major formations were comparatively small units; the brigades (*ryodan*—旅団) that were formed for the purpose of fighting the war tended to be rather motley assemblies of battalions and smaller units drawn from different garrisons, without any previously-established unit identity or *esprit de corps*.

Some thirty years later, when looking back over the development of the Japanese army⁷⁷, Yamagata was to acknowledge a particularly important organisational defect in the 1877 army, which would have had a directly limiting impact on its mobility: a serious weakness in the area of logistics. He may by then have been glad in hindsight that such weaknesses were revealed before the army had to face an external enemy.

This infant army was all that the government possessed. It had to be used, and would inevitably suffer attrition (which indeed it did to the extent of over 6,000 dead and more than 10,000 wounded—Mounsey, p. 233); yet at the same time it was Yamagata's duty to ensure that it was not broken by the war; and this meant avoiding needless casualties wherever possible. A preference to husband soldiers' lives rather than gamble with them would inevitably make for prudence on the battlefield.

Another factor may also have inclined Yamagata towards caution. As previously noted, this was the first Japanese military campaign in which, thanks to the telegraph, it was possible for the high command to be at a distance from, yet in almost immediate touch with, developments on the battlefield. For Yamagata in his Hakata headquarters far behind the front line, to be able to command while not having the immediate feel for a battle situation that being on the scene gives was an experience that, besides being new and strange, may well also have been discomfiting (especially since the telegraph also enabled the politicians back in Ōsaka to peer over his shoulder and breathe down his neck). He had already had reports of instances in which the Satsuma forces had been able to spring unpleasant surprises on those who were physically present and able to look around them (particularly that in which Nogi Maresuke's regiment had its battle flag captured—Isami, pp. 22-23); if they could be ambushed, how much more exposed to such a risk was he himself, who had only the telegraphed reports of demonstrably fallible front-line commanders on which to rely? Nogi had lost only a battle-flag; Yamagata, on the other hand, could lose much more—perhaps, at that stage, he could still lose even the war. In such circumstances, it is understandable that he would have preferred to move only when he was doubly satisfied that all the requirements for

⁷⁷ Source: Ōkuma 1910, vol. 1, p.204.

success were present, and with plenty to spare in case of the unforeseen with which he knew the Satsuma men were capable of surprising his forces.

Summarising the characteristics of the opposing forces in this war, it may be said that they displayed complementary strengths and weaknesses. The Satsuma army clearly excelled in tactical flair, in mobility and combative *élan*; its Achilles' heel was arguably not so much its relative poverty of resources but rather its commanders' strategic blindness, which failed to make effective use of the assets they had and played into their opponents' hands.

In contrast, the imperial army, certainly in the early stages of the war, seems tactically weak: plodding and ponderous in its movements—unable, for example, to move fast enough to trap the rebel army at Kumamoto. Unlike the rebels, however, being relatively resource-rich meant that—barring gross strategic blunders—the government could better afford to make mistakes. And its leadership did not blunder strategically; indeed, the attention paid to Tosa, at a time when it would have been understandable for all eyes to be on events in Kyûshû, showed an admirable clarity of strategic vision.

At the same time, the government had some luck. It was not inevitable that the Satsuma army would enmire itself at Kumamoto and thus virtually assure its own defeat. Arguably the Rebellion was not at all necessarily the lost cause hindsight proclaims it to have been; indeed, if in fact Ôkubo did deliberately provoke the Rebellion, he may well have risked a good deal more than he knew.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

*Satsuma...was finally ... rendered obedient
to the general laws of the country.*

Augustus Mounsey⁷⁸

The post-war trial of Corporal Nakahara for conspiracy to assassinate Saigô Takamori may have been one of the few political show-trials in which the purpose was to secure an acquittal rather than a conviction — one which made possible the burial, not only of the “assassination plot” accusation, but also of what had been linked with it: the suspicion of the Satsuma *shizoku* that the government had intended to stir them into revolt and then use the army to crush them. Although that was what the government had in fact done, it was able to acquit itself of having *intended* to do it. Thus the ground was laid in which the “blunder” explanation of how the Rebellion happened could take root and flourish. The main purpose of this thesis has been to disinter that buried suspicion and examine it afresh.

It is beyond doubt that the Rebellion was highly convenient for the government. It opened the way to implementing what was probably the only possible solution of an intolerable situation and to achieve, as Mounsey put it⁷⁹, “the extinction of the last of the semi-independent states of Japan”. The “blunder” explanation of events requires us to believe that one of the most astute, thoughtful and self-disciplined politicians of the Meiji era, who must have devoted many hours to pondering how that result might be accomplished, achieved it by mistake.

Even more implausible than that proposition is the nature of the mistakes he is said to have made. Once they are analysed, it is surely more credible that Ôkubo

⁷⁸ Mounsey 1879, p. 253.

⁷⁹ See p. 4 above.

Toshimichi, just like Bismarck when editing the Ems Telegram, knew precisely what he was about.

As shown in Chapter 1, the confrontation between Satsuma and the central government had been developing since the early 1870s—in fact, since before 1873, although the government split over the *seikan-ron* did much to accelerate the process.

Craig rather oversimplifies in likening Satsuma to “a time bomb, ticking away”, so that Ôkubo “had to prevent the explosion until the central government was strong enough to contain it”. The fact is that an “unexploded” Satsuma was eroding the authority of the central government simply by the continued existence of a quasi-independent prefecture, militarily strong, run on unreconstructedly feudal lines that were a negation of the society the central government was striving to create—and above all by the fact that this state of affairs was public knowledge. Moreover, it was not only the government's domestic standing that was threatened; the fact that there was a part of the country where Tôkyô's writ did not run was also bound to undermine the government's credibility in the eyes of foreign powers with whom it sought ultimately to renegotiate the unequal treaties of the Bakumatsu period.

Satsuma was additionally threatening because it offered a rallying point for all members of a class that had strong collective reasons for antagonism towards the government. What ambassador Parkes had referred to as Satsuma's “formidable military organisation” offered the hope of a rebellion with more chance of success than the abortive affairs of October 1876, with the further prospect of righting the wrongs many of the *shizoku* class saw themselves as having had inflicted on them. The longer Tôkyô tolerated this state of affairs, the stronger and more widespread would the perception become that the government could be cowed by the threat of military force; and there could hardly be a clearer invitation to rebellion. The upsurge of insurrectionary activity in late 1876 added point to this. Given the small size of the imperial army, this was a time of great danger, when the government could well have been toppled by a united rising of the *shizoku* class⁸⁰.

All these considerations cast doubt on the main assumption underlying the conventional “blunder” theory of the outbreak of the Rebellion, namely that heading off a revolt was what the government leadership wanted and was actually trying to do. Some of them may have desired that. But did Ôkubo, who was effectively in charge, necessarily share that desire?

Viewed objectively, the situation was one that no government could allow to

⁸⁰ See p. 19 above for Mounsey's view on this point.

continue, and by early 1877, after the failure of attempts to bring about change by peaceful means, it must have been clear to Ôkubo that matters could hardly be remedied without the use of force. In that case, the issue as he saw it was probably no longer how, in Craig's words, to prevent the explosion, but how most expediently to bring it about and destroy the Kagoshima opposition.

As was shown in Chapter 3, there were powerful arguments against the government's taking the military initiative. This left Ôkubo with the following choice: either wait for Satsuma to rise at a time of the Satsuma leadership's choosing, or pre-empt matters by provoking the *shigakkô* rank-and-file into insurrection, thereby creating the opportunity to use force in legitimate response. The latter choice had far more to commend it; thus, motive can be seen as established.

An important proviso was that the provocation be made to appear not to have been deliberate. The two actions which in fact triggered the Rebellion (especially the attempted collection of munitions) were, it may be said, quite legitimate in themselves. However, given the situation of mounting tension that existed at the turn of 1876/1877, Ôkubo can hardly have been unaware of the provocative effect they were likely to have.

If one takes the view that Ôkubo was perfectly aware that the steps he was setting in train were likely to detonate the "Satsuma time bomb", then either, having decided that those things needed to be done anyway, he chose to risk triggering the explosion, or *triggering the explosion was not merely an "accepted risk" but was the intended result*. (as Shiba suggested in *Tobu ga Gotoku*⁸¹). In the case of the munitions the government tried to collect, the overwhelming weapon superiority the imperial forces enjoyed casts doubt on the need for the operation. And Ôkubo's welcoming of the rising in his 7 February letter to Itô Hirobumi, combined with the placards incident mentioned by McLaren⁸², makes the "intended result" interpretation seem more probable.

Turning to the other circumstantial evidence discussed in Chapter 4: the lack of military preparation by the government, and the Kawamura "peace mission", might at first sight seem to count against the Ems Telegram hypothesis, but can be interpreted in a manner wholly consistent with it in the sense that they contributed to creating the deniability which, it is argued, was a key part of the strategy.

⁸¹ See p. 8 above.

⁸² See p. 52 above.

Thus, although it cannot be considered proven, it may reasonably be considered likely that Ôkubo, like Bismarck, so manipulated events as to get the war he wanted and at the same time be able to maintain a façade of innocence.

Judging when the government might be strong enough to “contain the explosion” was problematical; given the smallness of the army in 1876-77 one can envisage Ôkubo conferring frequently—and at times no doubt anxiously—with Yamagata on this question. How justified was Ôkubo in his confidence that the forces at the government's disposal by early 1877 were sufficient to deal with the Satsuma rebels?

Hindsight points to the government's victory and to its material superiority; and on those grounds it is usually suggested that a Satsuma defeat was a matter of course. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 5, a case can be made out for the possibility, in the early stages of the war, of a Satsuma victory (or at least, of a stalemate that might have forced the government into making significant political concessions). In this writer's view, the fact that the Satsuma army leadership threw away whatever chances of victory they had is not sufficient grounds for asserting that the defeat of the Rebellion was a foregone conclusion; nor does it of itself refute the suggestion that Ôkubo may well have taken more of a risk than he realised, and that the government was saved from potential disaster by its opponents' military mismanagement. It was arguably more of a close-run thing than meets the eye.

As Craig comments, “the failure of the Satsuma Rebellion demonstrated the futility of insurrection” (in Jansen, Rozman et al. 1986, p. 61). That demonstration was necessary, because at that time there were still in Japan many armed men who not only harboured grievances against the government but who also believed in the possibility of overthrowing it by force—after all, that was how the Meiji oligarchy itself had achieved power. Nowhere in Japan was the potential military strength to achieve such an overthrow more powerfully concentrated than in Satsuma; therefore, to achieve national political stability, Satsuma had to be destroyed as an independent entity.

It was not the security of the régime alone that was at stake. Since the establishment of the Kamakura shôgunate, authority to rule Japan had derived directly from military force. A necessary part of the Meiji modernization was the transition to a state in which government rested upon a foundation of constitutional legitimacy.⁸³ That transition was not to be fully achieved until the establishment of the Meiji Constitution; but banishing the seizure of power by armed force was an important step towards it. In that sense the civil war and the defeat of the Satsuma *shizoku* constituted a major historic turning-point in the development of Japan as a polity.

Destroying Satsuma's military potential, and thus establishing the principle of civilian government, as well as of the state's monopoly of military power, was a necessary task; and how to accomplish it was one of the most challenging problems facing the early Meiji government. It was a task calling for cool judgement of the balance of forces, a fine sensitivity to the interaction between the military and the political dimensions of the problem; above all, it called for a rare combination of discipline and patience on the one hand and, on the other, an ability to act rapidly and decisively (some would say ruthlessly) when the moment came to do so. All of these, it may be noted, are qualities for which it has been customary to praise Tokugawa Ieyasu.

If the suggestions of Inoue, Mōri and Shiba are correct, and if the Ems Telegram hypothesis can be regarded as giving a tenable account of events leading up to the Satsuma Rebellion, it is consistent with Craig's characterisation of Ōkubo Toshimichi (Craig & Shively, p. 307) as a tough and disciplined leader; it shows him too, perhaps, as the "iceberg" at whose coldness Fukuchi protested. (Huffman, p. 70). But it also shows him as a consummate and courageous manager of conflict: not flinching from what had to be done, and carrying it out adroitly and successfully, with a rare combination of skill, judgement, and coolness under pressure for which, in the view of this writer, Ōkubo has been given less credit than he deserves. In short, it confirms Iwata's characterisation of Ōkubo Toshimichi as "the Bismarck of Japan".



⁸³ It is noteworthy that, in dealing with the Satsuma Rebellion, the government had the support of both Kido Takayoshi and Itagaki Taisuke, both of whom were in their respective ways highly critical of the government's conduct of affairs but who were equally committed to the principle of centralised civilian government. Concerning Itagaki's position, see, for example, Mounsey 1879, pp. 161 and 196.

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