



THE GENEVA

DISARMAMENT

CONFERENCE

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Political Science 145.

Spring 1936
Superior State
Teachers College

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE FOR THE REDUCTION
AND LIMITATION OF ARMAMENTS, 1932-3.

B+

A clear presentation of facts. More emphasis
might have been given, however, to Germany's position
with reference to the Conference. Kindly note corrections.

E. M. C.

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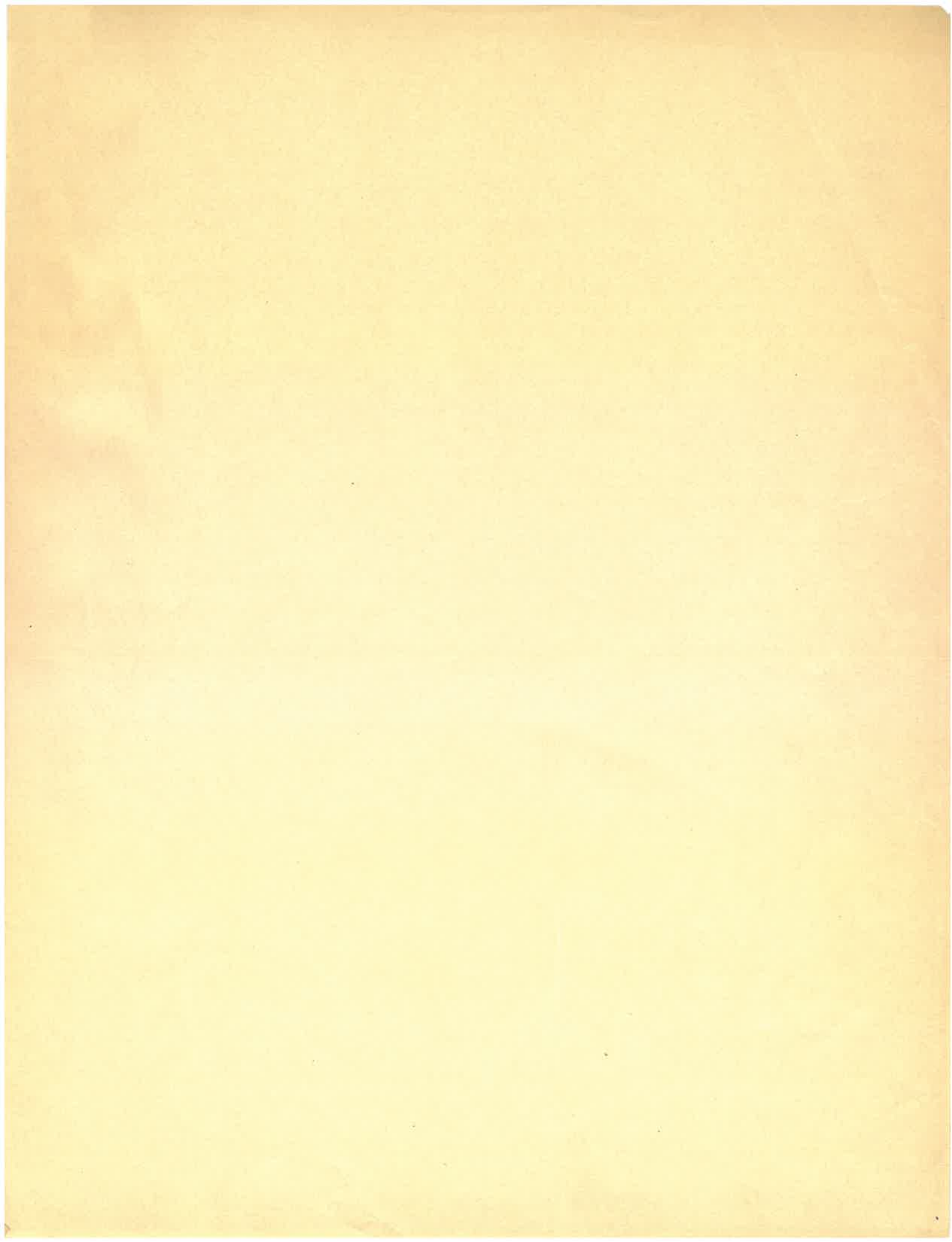


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Chapter I.
Introduction

The Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments convened at Geneva on February 2, 1932. The principle representatives¹ were: for the United States, Mr. Hugh Gibson, Mr. Norman H. Davis, Senator Claude A. Swanson, Mr. Hugh R. Wilson; for Great Britain, Sir John Simon, Mr. Anthony Eden, and the Hon. Alexander Cadogan; for France, M. Joseph Paul-Boncour, M. Rene Massigli; for Germany, Baron Konstanin von Neurath, Herr Hans Frohwein and Herr Hans Herman Voelkers; for Italy, Signor Grandi, and Pompeo Aloisi; for Russia, Mr. Litvinoff, for Japan, Mr. Matsudaira; for Greece, Mr. Politis, and for Czechoslovakia, Mr. Benes.

The ultimate objective of the Disarmament Conference was the complete elimination of all offensive weapons. The more immediate objective was the substantial reduction of some of these weapons, the elimination of many others, and the furtherance of durable peace for our generation in every part of the world.

The first two months were devoted to the presentation plans by the various delegations, and of national views of the participating powers. These were then analyzed, tabulated under headings according to subject matter, and put on the agenda.

1. Walter Lippmann, The United States in World Affairs, 1932, p. 255.

This work had a twofold result. It showed first that for the Conference as a whole to consider all subjects and theories presented would take years. Second, it showed that a majority of states favored a method of disarmament which had not been taken into account in the previous year in preparing the Draft Convention. This Convention had been based on the theory of numerical, that is to say, quantitative, limitation of armaments. The first discussions at Geneva, however, emphasized the idea of qualitative disarmament, namely, that certain weapons particularly adapted to breaking down national systems of defense be abolished. The principle of quantitative restrictions on the size of armies and the amount of war material was not abandoned, but it was proposed that these restrictions be supplemented by qualitative disarmament and the total elimination of specified arms and certain methods of warfare.

The Conference was driven to the idea of qualitative disarmament as a necessary supplement by a variety of considerations. First, this theory had been applied in the Treaty of Versailles which, in addition to fixing numerical limitations, had banned certain types of arms, such as submarines, military aviation, and heavy guns. Second, it was recognized that if the disarmament was to be a proportional reduction on a number basis, the relative security of the states would remain constant. If, on the other hand, defense were strengthened by doing away with

1. Dulles, Allen.

Foreign Affairs, vol. 11, pp. 54-55.

arms adapted to breaking down defense, relative security was increased. Finally, extreme difficulty in fixing the numerical limits led them to seize on the idea of qualitative disarmament. The first important result of the Conference was the acceptance of this principle and the agreement to apply it to heavy guns, tanks and military aviation.

Following the presentation of general plans, it became necessary to organize the unwieldy conference for the discussion of the many questions that were before it. A steering committee called the Bureau, a General Commission comprising the first delegates, of all states represented. and a number of technical committees to deal with navies, armies, air forces and budgetary matters were agreed upon.

The states of the world had divided into two large groups representing different theories on disarmament: the Latin group, led by France, which insisted that national security should precede disarmament, and the other states, led by the English-speaking nations, which maintained that disarmament should precede any further attempt to organize security. Mr. Arthur Henderson, then Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, was chosen President of the conference. Mr. Politis of Greece and Mr. Benes of Czechoslovakia were elected vice-president and rapporteur respectively.

These two statesmen belonged to the "security" school. The French bloc attempted to make one of them Chairman of the Bureau and the General Commission but here the American delegation took the initiative and supported a motion which resulted in Mr. Henderson being placed in charge of these two important committees.

A Political Commission was then created to deal with the question of security, and an attempt was made to secure a Chairman who was favorable to the idea. Here Mr. Gibson again came forward and obtained the selection of Mr. Henderson as head of this Commission also. Thus the working organs of the conference were under the control of nations desiring disarmament without political considerations.

As there were over fifty nations represented at the Disarmament Conference, space does not permit a detailed discussion of all that took place. This paper is confined to a discussion of a few of the more important plans and policies that were submitted.

Chapter II.
The American Policy.

The American policy had a certain duality which obtained during the whole of the post-war period. Successive Administrations had maintained the idea that the reduction of armaments was the surest guaranty of political security and they preached this doctrine in their efforts to get the European powers to reduce. On the other hand, these same Administrations had acted on a directly opposite principle with regard to the balance of naval power in the Pacific and on other questions where a vital American interest was at stake. The United States had insisted on the organization of political security as a prelude to the reduction of armaments, and had signed the Washington Naval Treaty only after the Nine-Power Treaty, which promised the integrity of China and the Open Door, had been agreed to. But since the United States had no vital interests either in the balance of naval power on the Mediterranean or in the balance of land armaments on the Continent, the government continued to disclaim a belief that political questions should precede a reduction of armaments. As the year progressed, it became plain that no substantial reduction of armaments was possible merely through discussion and without political agreement.

Thus the American policy was conducted on two levels. The less conspicuous was in attempts to participate in the organization of political security. The more conspicuous was in the presentation of three proposals to the Conference on the reduction of armaments. The first¹ of these was a nine point program for the limitation of certain types of arms and the total abolition of others. It was presented to the Conference by Mr. Hugh Gibson on February 9, 1932, and follows in brief.

1. The American government expresses its entire willingness to give full consideration to any proposals calculated to advance the end we all seek.

2. We suggest the prolonging of of the Washington and London naval agreements.

3. We advocate proportional reduction from the Washington and London agreements on naval tonnage as soon as all parties to the Washington agreement have entered this framework.

4. We advocate, as we long have done, the total abolition of submarines.

5. We will join in formulating the most effective measures to protect civilian populations against arial bombing.

6. We advocate the total abolition of lethal gases and bacteriological warfare.

1. Walter Lippmann, The United States in World Affairs, 1932. Appendix VIII, p. 310 f .

7. We advocate the computation of the number of armed forces on the basis of effectives necessary for the maintenance of internal order plus some suitable contingent for defense.

8. We agree in advocating certain restrictions for tanks and heavy mobile guns; in other words, for those arms of a peculiarly offensive nature.

9. We are prepared to consider a limitation of expenditure as a complimentary method to direct limitation, feeling that it may prove useful to prevent a qualitative race, if and when the quantitative limitation has been effected.

It will be noted that in this proposal no concession whatever was made to the theory that armaments and politics are related. In this speech Mr. Gibson proposed to restrict tanks, heavy guns and gases, but in a proposal¹ which he laid before the Conference on April 11, he advocated the total abolition of them. It follows in part.

...Whereas the establishment of constant superiority of defense over attack would promote in the peoples of all states a feeling of security;

The General Commission believes that the abolition of aggressive weapons would constitute a first and

1. Lippmann, op. cit., Appendix VIII (b), p 311.

essential requisite, not only for the reduction of armaments, but for the establishment of security; and resolves:

1. (a) That the following weapons are of a peculiarly aggressive value against land defenses--tanks, heavy mobile guns and gases--and as such should be abolished; and

(b) To request the Land Commission to draw up and submit to the General Commission a plan for scrapping tanks and mobile guns exceeding 155 millimeters in caliber and for the abolition of the use of gases in war.

2. (a) That an undertaking by the states not to avail themselves of the aforementioned weapons is equally essential; and

(b) To request the Political Commission to draw up and submit to the General Commission texts for these purposes.

In this proposal the American delegation attempted to deal with security and disarmament in one stroke. Mr. Gibson argued that the demand for security arose from a fear on the part of a government to successfully withstand invasion and that the very nations which maintained the largest armaments were those which were most apprehensive about their security. The solution was to remove the fear of aggression.

Technical progress and the invention of tanks, heavy mobile artillery and lethal gases had been the chief cause. The abolition of these offensive weapons would make defense superior to offense, and along this avenue lay the only hope of achievement by the Disarmament Conference.

The final and most ambitious American proposal to reduce armaments without political considerations was that known as the Hoover Plan,¹ which was presented on June 23. The plan called for a reduction of one third of all land armies above the police component. This component was to be calculated from the army allowed Germany under the Treaty of Versailles; that is, 100,000 troops for 65,000,000 people, or one soldier to every 650 inhabitants. The plan also suggested "corrections for powers having colonial possessions". It proposed further to abolish all tanks, all large mobile guns, all instruments for chemical warfare, and all bombing planes, to reduce by one third the number and tonnage of battleships fixed in treaties, to reduce the treaty tonnage of aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers by one fourth, to reduce the treaty tonnage of submarines by one third, and to prohibit more than 35,000 tons of submarines.

1. Cf. Appendix. (a)

The Hoover Plan was immediately approved by three important delegations.

Signor Grandi, Foreign Minister, speaking for Italy, accepted " entirely and in all its parts the disarmament plan just submitted to the General Commission by the American delegation, ... not only in principle, but also as to practical consequences." Yet a month later, when the general resolution which had grown out of the Hoover Plan was adopted, Italy abstained from voting.

Mr. Litvinoff, speaking for Russia, who has always been in favor of peace, said that the Soviet delegation " was prepared to go to any length in the direction of disarmament. It would agree to complete disarmament, partial disarmament, qualitative disarmament, quantitative disarmament, moral disarmament, or any other form which meant substantial disarmament." The Soviet delegation, however, voted against the Hoover Plan.

The German delegation also approved the plan, but it, too, felt obliged to vote against the resulting resolution.

Great Britain, France and Japan, although they were all doubtful as to the original plan, voted for the resulting resolution.

The intention of the Hoover Plan was to make an appeal over the heads of governments to public opinion and, while it did not appeal to the professional diplomats, it did have a favorable reception among the peoples of the states.

The American government was by this time in close touch with European politics, and in order to avoid a rupture with other countries and to make necessary compromises with regard to its own plan, it entered into secret negotiations with France, Great Britain and Italy. These conversations lasted a month--June 22 to July 22-- but on July 7 and 8 the General Commission was convened to allow thirty delegations from the smaller states to express themselves concerning the Hoover Plan. From July 8 to 20 the negotiations were entirely secret. This fact alienated the support of Germany and Russia, the former supposing that her own special problems were not being given sufficient consideration.

On July 21, General Balbo,¹ speaking for Italy, stated that the the resolution which the Americans, British and French had drawn up in secret was "entirely inadequate when compared with the wishes and hopes of the world." The Soviet delegate, Mr. Litvinoff, also stated that the resolution would "bring bitter disappointment to those persons and organizations who had been pinning all their hopes of peace on the conference." The Dutch and Swedish delegations proposed amendments which would restore certain points of the Hoover Plan. The American, British and French delegations voted against these amendments.

1. General Balbo had replaced Signor Grandi, who had been removed from office because of his failure to stand the Hoover Plan which Italy had already endorsed.

The adoption of this resolution by the General Commission on July 23, and the adjournment of the Conference on the same day mark the end of the first phase of the Disarmament Conference. It marks, too, a change in the American policy. The United States no longer professed a belief that armaments could be reduced without political agreements, and it declared itself willing to participate in collective efforts to maintain peace.

This development of the American policy is one of the chief results of the first phase of the Disarmament Conference.

Chapter III.

The Second Phase of the Conference.

The Resolution of July 23 was of importance, not because of what it said, but because it marked the collaboration of Great Britain, France and the United States, the three strongest powers in the world.

The resolution¹ did not affect existing armaments except that the truce which had been agreed upon in September, 1931, with regard to the construction of armaments, was extended four months from November 1, 1932.

The first part of the resolution stated that, (1), a substantial reduction in world armaments should be effected, applying alike to land, naval and air arms, and that (2), a primary objective should be reduction of the means of attack.

The second part recorded specific conclusions which had been arrived at in the first phase of the conference.

The third part promised a strict limitation and a real reduction of effectives, based on the Hoover proposal.

The immediate result of the July resolution was the withdrawal of Germany from the conference. The reason was that it was not clear if the resolution applied to Germany equally with all other nations, or if she was to have a special status fixed by the Versailles Treaty. She had asked for a promise that the Disarmament Convention would replace Part V of the Versailles Treaty, putting German armaments on the same basis as those of other nations.

1. Cf. Appendix. (b)

Germany argued that she could not be bound both by Part V of the Versailles Treaty and the disarmament convention, and that it was impossible to apply "two sets of weights and measures" to the states participating in the conference. The British joined the French in opposing this plea. While the French were not disputing the equity of Germany's claim, they were opposed to a revision of the Versailles Treaty, suggesting that it might do injury to the United States. President Hoover urged Germany to remain in the conference, but considered her plea for arms equality purely a European question.

Early in October, Baron von Neurath presented a statement¹ of the German position. The text of it was:

(1) Germany is ready to transform the Reichswehr into a short service army.

(2) Germany will accept any prohibition of arms on the condition that it is generally applied.

(3) Germany wishes to know what arms are limited in quantity, and to what limit.

(4) Unlimited arms. If there is no limitation for others, there can be none for Germany. If the future convention calls for further limitation, Germany will agree.

This statement of the German position was unacceptable to both England and France on the ground that it suggested

1. Dulles, Allen W., "Germany and the Crisis in Disarmament", Foreign Affairs, vol. 12, p. 263.

immediate rearmament. The British Prime Minister, Mr. MacDonald, proposed that representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany, with an American observer, meet in London to consider the problem. France refused this proposal. M. Herriot feared that if Great Britain and Italy sided with Germany, France would be isolated. To meet this situation, he brought forth a French disarmament plan. This plan was presented to the Disarmament Conference on November 14. It proposed that the armies of Continental Europe should be reduced to a general type, that of a national short-service army with limited effectives. It also repeated with some modifications, the proposal which had been made by the Tardieu government in a previous French plan, that of an international army. The purpose of this was to emphasize France's opinion that disarmament was dependent on collective resistance to warlike aggression.

The French plan was again presented to the conference on February 2, 1933. Delegates of Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Jugoslavia supported it, but the delegates of Italy, Germany, Great Britain and the United States were no in favor of it.

The British government now came forward with a proposal containing " a solemn affirmation, to be made by all European states, that they will not attempt to resolve any present or future differences between them by resort to force". However, this same proposal had been embodied

in the Pact of Paris, and had not prevented the movement of troops and the invasion of frontiers. In consequence, the proposal seemed weak and inadequate of guaranteeing security. An argument ensued between France and Germany over the affect of this plan on the Locarno Treaties. A compromise text was drafted, and adopted by the political commission on March 2.

On March 16, Mr. MacDonald in an address before the conference, said "Armed nations must be prepared to make their contribution in disarmament. Disarmed nations must help establish good will, security and mutual understanding. He presented a new British plan which took the form of ninety six articles. The question of security was dealt with in the first six articles. The plan adopted the French proposal of a uniform militia, but it proposed a concrete plan for limitation. It suggested that the average effectives should not exceed :for Germany, 200,000; for France, 200,000 at home and 200,000 overseas; for Italy, 200,000 at home and 50,000 overseas; for Poland, 200,000; for Czechoslovakia, 100,000; for Rumania, 150,000; For Jugoslavia, 100,000; for for Hungary, 60,000; for Russia, 500,000; and for other European nations, numbers varying in accordance with their populations and colonial responsibilities. Equality in home forces would thus be granted Germany, France, Italy and Poland.

The British plan also proposed limitations on the size of mobile land guns, tanks, aircraft, and the abolition of airplane bombing and chemical warfare. It was aimed to combine the French militia system with German insistence on equality of status, on reduction of larger armies, and on limitation of war material as well as of effectives.

Following this speech, Mr. MacDonald travelled to Rome where he discussed with Premier Mussolini an Italian formula for security and revision. This proposal merely contemplated making use of machinery for the revision of treaties already provided by the League Covenant in Article XIX. It suggested that it was better for the succession states to give up a part of their gains than to risk their existence in another war. It involved recognition of the equality of France, Germany and Italy. But the proposal of these changes seemed a promise of concessions to Hitler, and it was due to this consideration that the plan found little support.

On March 26 the MacDonald plan was endorsed by the United States and it was accepted by the conference as a basis for discussion on March 27.

On May 22, Mr. Norman H. Davis reaffirmed the willingness of the United States to accept the MacDonald plan, and its readiness to supplement this plan with a system of international supervision of armaments.

He also announced a new American policy. The government was prepared to consult with the other nations in a case of a threat to peace, and to refrain from any action tending to defeat such collective effort as the states may make to restore peace, should there be a breach of the peace, providing it concurred with the judgement rendered as to the responsible and guilty party. f

This policy promised no positive action. It did promise that the United States would not attempt to protect its trade with any nation which the League had adjudged the aggressor, providing the United States concurred in identifying the aggressor.

On May 27, the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate reported an amendment which permitted the President to lay an embargo only against all parties to the dispute, and not only against the aggressor nation.

While the change in American policy was being discussed, Premier Mussolini made an attempt to revive the plan which he had proposed two months previous. 4 The plan met the same objections which had originally been made against it. The result was a complete revision of the plan. The Locarno Treaties were reaffirmed, the section dealing with the equality of rights for Germany was deleted, and no mention was made of treaty revision.

On May 27 the Disarmament Conference was adjourned until October 16.

On May 30 the principles of Mussolini's four-power treaty were accepted by members of the Little Entente at the Prague Conference, and on July 15 the four-power pact was signed in Rome by Premier Mussolini and ambassadors of France, Great Britain and Germany.

On October 14, Germany gave notice of her withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations.

On October 16 the General Conference of the Disarmament Conference convened and adjourned until October 26.

On November 23 the Conference meeting was again postponed. The Arms Conference was still alive when the year ended, but all power to control the course of events had departed from it.

The Text of the Instructions given by President Hoover to the American Delegation to the Disarmament Conference, Read by Ambassador Gibson , June 22, 1933.

I propose the following principles should be our guide:

- (1) The Kellogg-Briand Pact,--the use of arms solely for defense.
- (2) Reduction should be not only in armament cuts, but in increasing defense by decreasing power of attack.
- (3) Armaments have grown up in relation to each other, and such relativity should be preserved in making reductions.
- (4) Reductions must be real and positive. They must effect economic relief.
- (5) There are three problems to deal with--land forces, air forces and naval forces.

Based on these principles, I propose that the arms of the world should be reduced by nearly one third.

Land Forces.

In order to reduce the offensive character of all land forces the abolition of all tanks, chemical warfare, large mobile guns and land armies over and above the police component.

Air Forces.

All bombing planes are to be abolished. This will do away with all planes capable of attacks on civilian populations.

Naval Forces.

I propose that the treaty number and tonnage of battleships shall be reduced by one third; that the treaty tonnage of aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers shall be reduced by one fourth; that the treaty tonnage of submarines shall be reduced by one third; and that no nation shall have a submarine tonnage greater than 35,000.

General.

The effect of this plan would be to bring an enormous saving in the operating expense of all nations of land, sea and air forces.

It is folly for the world to break its back over military expenditure, and the United States is willing to take its share of the responsibility by making definite proposals that will relieve the world.

Text of Resolution Adopted by the General Commission of the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, July 23, 1932.

The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments decides that

(1) A general reduction of world armaments shall be effected to be applied by a general convention alike to land, naval and air armaments;

(2) A primary objective shall be to reduce the means of attack.

I. Air Forces.

(1) Air attack against the civilian population shall be prohibited.

(2) Bombardment from the air shall be abolished, and;

(a) There shall be a limitation by number and restriction by characteristic of military aircraft.

(b) Civil aircraft shall be submitted to regulation.

II. Land Armaments.

(1) Land artillery.

All land artillery shall be limited in caliber number.

(2) Tanks.

The maximum unit tonnage of tanks shall be limited.

III. Chemical, Bacteriological and Incendiary warfare.

All of this type of warfare shall be prohibited.

IV. Preparation of the Second Phase.

(1) A strict limitation shall be made of effectives.

There shall be a limitation of national defense expense.

(3) Trade and manufacture of arms shall be regulated.

V. General Provisions.

The present resolution in no way prejudices the attitude of the conference towards more comprehensive measures.

VI. Armaments Truce.

The conference recommends to the governments the renewal for a period of four months, from November 1st, 1932, the truce provided for by the Assembly of the League of Nations in a resolution on September 29, 1931.

Text of the Five-Power Declaration of December 11, 1932.

1. The governments of the United Kingdom, France and Italy have declared that one of the principles that should guide the Conference on Disarmament should be the grant to Germany the equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations.

2. On the basis of this declaration Germany has signified its willingness to resume its place in the Disarmament Conference.

3. The governments of the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy are ready to join in a solemn reaffirmation to be made by all European states, that they will not attempt to resolve any present or future differences by a resort to force.

4. The five governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Germany declare that they are resolved to cooperate in the conference with the other states that are represented, seeking without delay to work out a convention which will result in a substantial reduction and limitation of armaments, with provision for future revision with a view for further reduction

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