LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

PREPARATORY COMMISSION FOR THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL

on the Work of the First Session of the Commission

held at Geneva from May 18th to 26th, 1926.

The Preparatory Commission convened by resolution of the Council dated March 18th, 1926, met at Geneva from May 18th-26th, 1926. It elected as Chairman H. E. Jonkheer J. Loudon and, as Vice-Chairmen, M. Cobian and M. Buero, delegates of Spain and Uruguay respectively.

From the outset the Preparatory Commission realised that the study of the questions submitted to it by the Council would be facilitated by the constitution of two special Sub-Commissions composed of persons directly attached to the delegations forming part of the Preparatory Commission and consequently representing the opinion of their respective Governments. The Preparatory Commission intended to entrust one of these Sub-Commissions with the study of the military, naval and air aspects of the questions under consideration, while the other would devote its attention to the non-military aspect of these questions.

Presided over by the two Vice-Chairmen of the Commission itself, these two Sub-Commissions, which would thus be in close touch with the Commission, would be in a position to observe faithfully the principles laid down for their guidance by the latter.

The Sub-Commission entrusted with the study of non-military questions has been authorised by the Preparatory Commission to ascertain the opinion of the organisations or persons it may judge advisable to consult on these questions, and particularly that of the Joint Commission set up by resolution of the Council. The Military, Naval and Air Sub-Commission has identically the same composition as the Permanent Advisory Commission as enlarged by the decision of the Council. The system thus set up by the Preparatory Commission therefore follows the main outlines of the organisation established by the Council.

The Preparatory Commission does not doubt that the Council will see fit to endorse its decisions, in which it has been guided by its desire to do all in its power to ensure the success of the task entrusted to it.

1.

On the proposal of the French delegation, the Preparatory Commission considers that the task entrusted to it by the Council should be undertaken on the understanding that every Government should have in view for the proposed Conference for the preparation of a disarmament agreement, definite and quantitative proposals accompanied by reasons in support calculated with reference to the degree of security existing at the date when the Conference meets.

2.

A. The Commission refers to its Technical Sub-Commissions the points stated below in order that it may be informed on the technical aspect of the questions submitted to it by the Council. The Commission is alone competent to deal with the political aspects of these questions in the same way that it has sole responsibility for the final answers to be given to the questions.

The Chairman and the Vice-Chairmen may take the necessary steps to co-ordinate the work of the two Sub-Commissions and to enable each to consult the other on any particular point.
Question I.
What is to be understood by the expression "armaments"?

(a) Definition of the various factors — military, economic, geographical, etc. — upon which the power of a country in time of war depends.

(b) Definition and special characteristics of the various factors which constitute the armaments of a country in time of peace; the different categories of armaments — military, naval and air — the methods of recruiting, training, organisations capable of immediate military employment, etc.

The Commission refers Question No. I to Sub-Commission A.

Question II (a).
Is it practicable to limit the ultimate war strength of a country, or must any measures of disarmament be confined to the peace strength?

With regard to Question II (a), the Commission is of opinion that it would not be practicable at the present time to limit the ultimate war strength of a country. On the other hand, it affirms that it is possible to limit the land, sea and air forces permanently maintained in peace-time by the various countries or capable of immediate use without preliminary mobilisation measures. This principle is in any case without prejudice to the conditions of such limitation as determined by an examination of the remaining questions, notably Question V.

The Commission refers to Sub-Commission A the definition of the forces mentioned in the preceding paragraph and the study of the possibility of a wider limitation than that referred to above.

Question II (b).
What is to be understood by the expression "reduction and limitation of armaments"?

The various forms which reduction or limitation may take in the case of land, sea and air forces: the relative advantages or disadvantages of each of the different forms or methods: for example, the reduction of the larger peace-time units or of their establishment and their equipment, or of any immediately mobilisable forces: the reduction of the length of active service, the reduction of the quantity of military equipment, the reduction of expenditure on national defence, etc.

Question III.
By what standards is it possible to measure the armaments of one country against the armaments of another, e.g., numbers, period of service, equipment, expenditure, etc.?

The Commission refers to Sub-Commission A the two following questions for its opinion:

(a) What are the standards by which it is possible to measure the (a) military, (b) naval, (c) air armaments of one country against the corresponding armaments of another country?

(b) What are the methods by which the reduction and limitation of (a) land, (b) naval, (c) air armaments can be effected, and what are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of each?

Note. — The following methods, amongst others, have been suggested: the reduction of the larger peace-time units or of their establishment and their equipment, or of any immediately mobilisable forces; the reduction of the length of active service; the reduction of munitions of war.

It has also been suggested that a limitation of armed forces might be effected by the reduction or limitation of expenditure on national defence.

The Commission wishes to have the opinion of the two Sub-Commissions on this last subject and on the conditions in which the above method might be applied, should they consider that it is practicable.

Question IV.
Can there be said to be "offensive" and "defensive" armaments?

Is there any method of ascertaining whether a certain force is organised for purely defensive purposes (no matter what use may be made of it in time of war), or whether, on the contrary, it is established in a spirit of aggression?

The Commission refers to Sub-Commission A the following questions:

Are there any armaments (and, if so what) which are only capable of being used for the defence of a State's territory?

Is there any method of ascertaining whether a certain force is organised for purely defensive purposes (no matter what use may be made of it in time of war), or whether, on the contrary, it is established in a spirit of aggression?
Question V (a).

On what principle will it be possible to draw up a scale of armaments permissible to the various countries, taking into account particularly:

1. Population;
2. Resources;
3. Geographical situation;
4. Length and nature of maritime communications;
5. Density and character of the railways;
6. Vulnerability of the frontiers and of the important vital centres near the frontiers;
7. The time required, varying with different States, to transform peace armaments into war armaments?

As the armaments to be maintained in each country cannot be determined on the basis of mathematical considerations alone, the Commission, in order to allow of a profitable examination of the basis on which the reduction and limitation of armaments is possible, requests the two Sub-Commissions to investigate how far armaments in general are affected by factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 enumerated in Question V (a) and refers factor 6 to Sub-Commission A.

Question VI.

(a) Is there any device by which civil and military aircraft can be distinguished for purposes of disarmament? If this is not practicable, how can the value of civil aircraft be computed in estimating the air strength of any country?

(b) Is it possible or desirable to apply the conclusions arrived at in (a) above to parts of aircraft and aircraft engines?

(c) Is it possible to attach military value to commercial fleets in estimating the naval armaments of a country?

The Commission refers Question VI to Sub-Commission A for its opinion.

Question VII.

Admitting that disarmament depends on security, to what extent is regional disarmament possible in return for regional security? Or is any scheme of disarmament impracticable unless it is general? If regional disarmament is practicable, would it promote or lead up to general disarmament?

The Commission asks Technical Sub-Commissions A and B to consider whether regional military, naval and air disarmament can be regarded as an important step towards general disarmament, and, should general disarmament not prove immediately practicable, what regions could be considered separately, from the point of view of the limitation of armaments. Sub-Commissions A and B are requested to consider what factors the term "region" should connote from the point of view of security and from the point of view of disarmament.

B. The Commission has examined the attached proposal submitted by the Belgian delegate.

Without expressing a definite opinion regarding the measures suggested in this proposal concerning which certain delegations have reserved their decision, the Commission has decided to refer this matter to the Technical Sub-Commissions, on the understanding that such reference does not prejudice the question in any way, either as regards the practicability of these measures or as regards any subsequent decision which the Preparatory Commission itself may take when it comes to examine the question from the general and political point of view.

The delegate of Italy reiterated his opinion that supervision would be ineffective and was inadmissible, and asked to have his view placed on record.

Proposal.

"The last paragraph of Article 8 of the Covenant of the League stipulates that 'the Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes'.

"With a view to organising this exchange of information, Sub-Commission A has been requested to consider the advantages and disadvantages from the military point of view of the various methods which might be employed and in particular:

"(a) The organisation at Geneva of a permanent service for the collection of information received from the different Governments;

"(b) The conclusion of an international convention making it compulsory to publish all inventions which can be used in chemical or bacteriological warfare and in general all forms of warfare which are condemned by the opinion of the civilised world."
“Sub-Commission A is requested to investigate what would be the consequences from the military point of view of inserting in the Convention relative to disarmament, or in that regarding the prohibition of certain forms of warfare, of provisions similar to those contained in the statute of the International Labour Office (Articles 411 to 420 of the Treaty of Versailles).

“Sub-Commission B is requested to ascertain the consequences of such insertion from the economic point of view.

“Sub-Commission A is requested to consider to what extent the experience acquired regarding the supervision of disarmament points to the possibility from the military point of view of general supervision.

“Sub-Commission B is requested to state if such supervision offers any difficulties from the economic point of view and, if so, what difficulties ?”

C. On the proposal of the delegate of the British Empire, the Commission decided to refer to the competent Sub-Commissions the questions defined below without prejudice to any Convention or Rule of International Law on the subject:

To Sub-Commissions A and B.

1. (a) Can factories normally and legitimately employed for chemical purposes, including dyeworks, be quickly adapted to manufacture poison gases?
(b) If the answer to the above is in the affirmative, how long would it take to effect the change?
(c) Can any proposals be made to prevent or hinder chemical factories from being used for the production of poisonous gases?

To Sub-Commission A.

2. (a) What are the means which would probably be employed for spreading gas and what would be the apparatus required?
(b) How long would it take to manufacture this apparatus, and how long would it take to superimpose this apparatus on the normal equipment of an aeroplane?
(c) Would the length of time referred to immediately above vary in the case of military or civilian aircraft?

3. (a) What is the information in existence as to the effect of the distribution of poisonous gas over closely populated districts?
(b) Have any experiments been carried out on this subject?
(c) Apart from the difficulty of equipping the entire population of a city with gas masks, are there any gases known against which a gas mask affords no protection?

Sub-Commission A is invited to consider what effective sanctions can be proposed for the enforcement of the international undertaking not to employ poison gas or bacteria in warfare.

A. Questions V (a) 8 and V (b).

8. The degree of security which, in the event of aggression, a State could receive under the provisions of the Covenant or of separate engagements contracted towards that State?

(b) Can the reduction of armaments be promoted by examining possible means for ensuring that the mutual assistance, economic and military, contemplated in Article 16 of the Covenant shall be brought quickly into operation as soon as an act of aggression has been committed.

The following very important proposal has been laid before the Commission by the French delegation:

Proposal:

"With reference to Question V (a) 8 and V (b), the Commission considers that, in order that a State should be able to calculate to what extent it can consent to the reduction or limitation of its armaments, it is essential to determine what method and what machinery are best calculated to give help to that State when attacked.

"The Commission therefore proposes to suggest to the Council:

"1. That methods or regulations should be investigated which would:

"(a) Facilitate the meeting of the Council at very brief notice in case of war or threat of war;

"(b) Enable the Council to take such decisions as may be necessary to enforce the obligations of the Covenant as expeditiously as possible."
2. That the Permanent Advisory Commission should be instructed:
   "(a) To define the measures necessary to comply with paragraph (a), No. 8;
   "(b) To investigate the procedure which would allow of the rapid drafting of recommenda-
   tions regarding the military assistance provided for in the second paragraph of
   Article 16 of the Covenant, when the Council shall have decided to make such recom-
   mendations;
   "(c) To investigate what measures should be taken in case of a conflict of which the
   Council shall have been notified, and when the latter shall have taken a decision, in order
   to prevent the development or preparation of hostilities, according to the precedent of
   the Greco-Bulgarian dispute.

3. That the Joint Commission should be instructed:
   "(a) To investigate the question of the improvement of the telegraphic and the telephonic
   communications of the different countries with the Secretariat of the League;
   "(b) To study what measures would be most appropriate, when the Council shall have
   so decided, to give most rapidly such economic and financial help as may be necessary
   to a State which has been attacked;
   "(c) To determine the composition and procedure of the Committees for the supply and
   allocation of resources which the League might set up for that purpose."

It has been objected that the aim of the proposal was to define and elaborate the machinery
for carrying into effect the decisions taken by the Council of the League of Nations in virtue
of Article 16 of the Covenant, and that constructive proposals of this nature belonged rather
than to that of the present Commission.

Without pronouncing any opinion on the validity of this objection, the Commission feels
that there are obvious inconveniences in asking a body comprising representatives of countries
not members of the League of Nations to discuss new means of carrying out the provisions of an
instrument which they have not signed.

The Commission has accordingly decided to forward the French delegation's proposal to
the Council with a request that it should be immediately taken into consideration.

B. The Commission also decided to forward to the Council the following proposal of the Polish
delegation, which is closely related to that of the French delegation:

Proposal.

"The Commission suggests to the Council that it would be well to consider whether a
special organisation of regional assistance within the scope of the Covenant of the League
would be likely to give the organs of the League effective help in supplying the assistance
required and would thereby render the execution of the relevant articles of the Covenant
easier and more expeditious (study of the machinery, form and procedure of regional
assistance)."

C. The Commission has decided also to send to the Council the following proposal by the
delegation of Finland:

Proposal.

"The Commission proposes that the Council should undertake the examination of special
arrangements whereby a reduction of armaments agreed to by States unfavourably placed,
owing to geographical or other exceptional circumstances, might be compensated in order
to meet their requirements for security."

* * *

The United States delegation stated that it was anxious to favour every effort made with
a view to disarmament, and that it therefore had no objection to certain proposals being discussed
in connection with the obligations entered into by the Members of the League of Nations; but it
naturally could not be bound in any way by such discussions in which it could not properly take
part. This observation refers, in particular, to certain phases of the proposals reproduced in
Nos. 1, 2 B and 3 above.

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The German delegation stated that its exceptional position did not at present allow of its
being heard before the Council, and therefore desired to be in a position to submit an opinion
on the Council on the proposals which were referred to it in regard to Questions V (a) 8, V (b).

The suggested examination of the methods likely to bring rapid assistance to a country
attacked, should not, in the opinion of the delegation, be based on the present position of arma-
ments, which is only temporary. This examination should have as a starting-point a state of dis-
armament resulting from the Conference such that no country would be powerful enough to be
in a position to assert its strength against that of the League of Nations. The examination of
Questions V (a) 8 and V (b) could only give provisional results if it took as a starting-point the
present position of armaments (see Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the Drafting Committee).