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LEAGUE OF NATIONS

**Conference for the Reduction and Limitation
of Armaments**

**MEMORANDUM RELATING TO THE SUGGESTIONS
OF THE DANISH DELEGATION
(Conf. D.99, page 51)**

PROPOSAL I.

The arms referred to in suggestion I are, generally speaking, those whose use is already prohibited in certain countries under the treaties of peace, namely :

“ Tanks, heavy artillery, large-calibre trench artillery, capital ships, battle cruisers, aircraft-carriers, submarines, automatic contact mines laid in the open sea, military aircraft, chemical and bacteriological means of warfare, and incendiary bombs.”

Although it is rather the use of the arms than their actual type that determines their offensive or defensive character, there will still always be certain kinds of arms, vessels and aircraft which possess specifically offensive qualities, as compared with arms of a more defensive character ; the arms in question are certain groups of implements particularly suited for attacking a foreign country at a great distance and at great speed, or for producing extensive damage affecting the civilian population and material property.

The perfecting of offensive arms of this nature which has been brought about during the last few decades has conferred on the offensive a much greater superiority than it possessed during the preceding period, and has, in particular, increased the possibilities of rapid and unexpected attack. This evolution is not only such as to confer on all wars a more destructive character, but implies in itself a great increase in the danger of war and a continual menace of a specially serious character for all peoples who neither desire nor are able to play the part of aggressors. The suspension of this evolution of offensive arms would thus constitute a big step towards the security of nations and the establishment of a lasting peace.

As regards *land armed forces*, the world war led to the creation of various groups of new arms designed in the main to assist the attack in a foreign country.

Tanks. — Tanks appeared when the line of defence became too difficult to break, owing more particularly to the increase in the number of machine-guns and the extended use of barbed wire. The artillery of the attacking army experienced growing difficulty in discovering and reaching the desired objectives (*i.e.*, the machine-gun nests scattered along the enemy front). At the same time, the efficacy of automatic arms had greatly increased. Such being the case, it was felt that the best means of restoring the superiority of the attacker would be to place the arms designed to destroy the defenders' machine-guns in an armoured vehicle which would carry these offensive arms actually into the enemy's lines, at the same time breaking down his barbed-wire entanglements. Tanks, then, it is clear, originally constituted a definitely offensive weapon. A distinction should be made, however, between tanks and the lighter armoured cars armed with rifles. The latter are employed, as was intended, for reconnaissance, and are not characterised by such definitely offensive features as the heavy tanks.

The evolution of artillery is dominated by an attempt to achieve the following two objects : to increase the effect produced by the projectile, and to increase the weapon's range. The need

to increase the force of projectiles is felt mainly by the attacker, since the defence tends increasingly to employ for the protection of its arms all sorts of means of cover : earthworks, armour, concrete, etc. Large-calibre artillery and long-range artillery thus constitute definitely offensive arms.

First and foremost there is the mobile heavy artillery, whose chief object is the destruction of the more strongly fortified positions of the defence ; together with tanks it forms the main instrument of an attacking army for breaking down the resistance of positions of this kind.

Non-mobile heavy artillery set up permanently in a fortified position cannot be regarded, generally speaking, as a specifically offensive weapon, unless so constructed as to be easily made transportable. It may, however, assume a definitely offensive character if set up near a land or sea frontier, so that it can fire on the territory of a neighbouring Power. In this case it would, of course, be expedient to fix limits. At the same time, it has to be remembered that there often exist, quite close to the frontier, towns or big undertakings the proper protection of which is of vital importance to the country, while it cannot be claimed that fortifications set up in such a place would, even if armed with heavy artillery, constitute an essential danger to the neighbouring country.

Trench artillery (mine-throwers), particularly of large calibre, is also a definitely aggressive weapon.

The peace treaties have already noted the distinction between heavy and light artillery, and also between large-calibre and lighter mine-throwers, and it will thus be quite natural to employ the same distinction in future conventions.

As regards *sea armed forces*, the peculiar qualities which confer an aggressive character on a vessel are :

Wide range of action ;
Great speed ;
Great power in battle.

From this standpoint the following categories should be specially considered :

- (1) Capital ships ;
- (2) Battle cruisers ;
- (3) Aircraft-carriers ;
- (4) Submarines, if such as to constitute a threat to other Powers in their territorial waters.

Battle cruisers exceeding certain dimensions possess the same offensive character as capital ships, in view of the strength of their armament and their wide range of action.

The offensive character of *aircraft-carriers* is self-evident : such vessels make it possible to convey aircraft to points from which, without them, the latter could not operate. The big aircraft-carriers can convey from 20 to 90 aircraft at a time ; they are armed with from 6 to 16 guns, whose calibre ranges from 10 to 20.3 cm. ; their maximum speed is from 20 to 35 knots, and they also are characterised by a powerful armament, high speed and wide range of action.

As regards submarines, those exceeding 500-600 tons are peculiarly suited to offensive warfare, owing to their great navigability, their wide (surface) range of action and their powerful armament. The nature of the living-quarters, however, hardly permits of a lengthy stay at sea on board vessels of less than about 1,000 tons.

The smaller submarines (under 600 tons) will be suitable for offensive purposes only if the distance between the territorial waters of the two countries is fairly short. They may, indeed, have a wide range of action, but their armament—especially as regards torpedoes—is generally inconsiderable, and the lack of space for quarters for the crew makes it difficult to carry on prolonged operations without communication with the shore. The prohibition to employ such craft would thus be less important, in connection with the limitation of offensive weapons, than the prohibition of the bigger submarines.

Mines are in themselves a definitely defensive weapon, but their application may be offensive when they are laid near the enemy coasts or on frequented routes by mine-layers, more particularly torpedo-boats, destroyers and submarines. The laying of mines in such circumstances must be regarded as a definitely offensive act. At the same time, however, the mine is peculiarly suited for certain defensive purposes—for example, the protection of the ports and anchorages of a country. The best procedure as regards mines would be to prohibit the use of automatic contact mines in the open sea.

Air armed forces are all definitely offensive in character, and it is difficult to distinguish between the various classes of aircraft, most of these being capable of carrying bombs in varying degrees. The big bombing aircraft are specifically offensive. The best index of the offensive character of these armaments is, no doubt, their horse-power.

Scouting aircraft are, of course, defensive weapons, but they can always be loaded with bombs ; they may thus play an offensive part, though less offensive than the regular bombers, whose special suspension gear ensures greater precision of aim, which enables them to hit limited targets, such as ships, fair-sized buildings, factories, etc. In the case, however, of fairly large objectives (towns, big industrial establishments, etc.), bomb-bearing scouts will produce the same effects as bombing aircraft.

Chemical and bacteriological means of warfare, employed with the help of artillery or aircraft, are all of a manifestly offensive character and specially suited for use against the civilian population. The prohibition of these offensive weapons should involve that of *incendiary bombs* and implements of a similar character.

PROPOSAL II.

The Danish delegation proposes :

“ That a small technical commission be appointed to examine, in conjunction with the Commission for Air Navigation placed under the authority of the League of Nations, with the International Air Traffic Association, consisting of national associations grouped together for commercial purposes, and with the International League of Aviators, the possibility of internationalising civil aviation or of instituting strict international supervision over it, with the object of preventing its employment for military purposes.”

With a view to giving effect to the suggestion set forth in the French proposal and reiterated by several other delegations, including the Danish delegation, for the internationalisation of civil aviation or the institution of supervision over it, it will, no doubt, be of practical value to discuss the question at once with the representatives of the big international federations which have already set up an important international civil aviation organisation.

PROPOSAL III.

The Danish delegation proposes :

“ That the examination of the extent to which the prohibition of the several specifically offensive arms would reduce the level of armaments and the military expenditure of countries in which such arms have assumed considerable proportions be referred to the special Commissions—Land, Naval, Air—and to the National Defence Expenditure Commission.”

The organisations particularly concerned in the work of the League of Nations—the Interparliamentary Union, the Federation of League of Nations Societies and other bodies—have put forward the idea of fixing a percentage which might be taken as a guide for the reduction of the existing level of armaments of countries not already bound in this respect.

The Danish delegation took up this idea in its suggestions of February 20th, 1932, convinced as it is that it will be necessary to agree on certain general principles if any result is to be obtained.

Failing such general principles, it will be very difficult to agree on the figures to be inserted in the draft Convention framed by the Preparatory Commission. Most of the States, if asked what figures they wish to have inserted, would probably reply : “ That depends on what figures are decided upon for the other States whose armaments concern us particularly”. And even if some of them reply without knowing the figures put forward by the others, the figures they give will in many cases probably be very high. With this method, there would thus in reality be a risk of opening the door to competition in armaments, instead of paving the way for their reduction. The only means of obviating this danger would be to resort to private conversations between certain groups of States. Negotiations of this kind will certainly be necessary, at all events between the big Powers.

It would undoubtedly be an excellent thing to agree in advance on a common starting-point and on a principle to be taken as a general basis for the reduction of armaments.

As regards the starting-point, it is only natural to turn to the present level of armaments of the various States, that level being normally the point where all those factors converge which are characteristic of the political, geographical and economic situation of the country in question. True, there are exceptions ; there are new countries which have not yet organised their armaments in conformity with their actual requirements ; there are others which, for one reason or another, are keeping their armaments at a very different level from what has ordinarily been adopted by Powers of a similar character. In such cases, it will be natural to make adjustments, if the States in question so desire. As a general rule, however, the existing level of armaments can be taken as a starting-point. Once agreement has been reached on that basis, it would be possible to take as a general guide a certain percentage of reduction. The Interparliamentary Union and the Federation of League of Nations Societies have proposed 25 per cent, other groups 15 per cent. Those figures, needless to say, are open to discussion.

In any case, however, it will not be impossible, given goodwill, to succeed, in the course of this Conference, in finding a practical basis for fixing this percentage.

A large number of delegations have proposed the prohibition of arms of a specifically offensive character. If, by accepting these proposals, it is possible to prohibit the use of such weapons, and also training and preparation with a view to their use, and if a reasonable construction is placed on the term "weapons of offence", this will mean a substantial reduction of the level of armaments and military expenditure, at all events in the case of the big Powers, which have gone farthest in the use of those arms. This reduction would imply a result which would be different for the various big Powers, but not so different as to prevent its being used as a basis for a percentage applicable also to the other States.

It would therefore undoubtedly be useful to make an exhaustive study with a view to determining to what extent, in certain countries where these arms play an important part, their level of armaments and also the sum of their military expenditure would be reduced by the abandonment of each of the principal arms classified as specifically aggressive arms : heavy artillery ; tanks ; capital ships ; submarines, divided into two categories, below and above 600 tons ; military aviation ; chemical and bacteriological weapons.

A practical method would certainly be to institute a separate study of each category of these various weapons. The result of such researches could, of course, only yield approximate figures. Even for expenditure, it would not be possible to arrive at accurate figures, and as regards the level of armaments, of which that expenditure is the expression, one would certainly have to be content with a fairly rough estimate. That result, however, would in itself be sufficient to give some idea of the extent to which armaments will be reduced if the prohibition of the more offensive weapons, or at all events of certain of those weapons, can be brought about.

The adoption of higher age-limits for warships would also result in a reduction of military expenditure, which should be duly taken into consideration.

Obviously, even if one succeeds in establishing this proportion, which might be taken as a guide in fixing the figures to be inserted in the tables annexed to the Convention, that guide cannot be mathematically applied, for it will always be necessary, under the terms of the Covenant, to take into account the special circumstances of each country : its geographical and political situation, the duties peculiar to certain Powers and recent changes in armaments. In other words, certain adjustments will have to be allowed. Once a common basis of reduction has been established, however, it will be essential that States which desire to depart from it should specify their particular reasons for doing so. Further, the percentage reduction cannot be applied to States which are bound by the peace treaties, and whose armaments are consequently quite different in character from those of States that resemble them in other respects, whereas they would be subject, like the others, to budgetary limitation.

PROPOSAL IV.

The Danish delegation proposes :

" That the Permanent General Control Commission provided for in the draft Disarmament Convention should consist of representatives of all the States signing the Disarmament Convention."

The purpose of this proposal is to safeguard the juridical equality, from the standpoint of joint control of all the States whose armaments will be limited by the Convention, and to facilitate the task of the Control Commission by ensuring the presence at all times of representatives who can give it such information as it may require.

PROPOSAL V.

The Danish delegation proposes :

" That the 1925 Convention concerning chemical and bacteriological warfare be supplemented by an undertaking entered into by the States not to engage in any preparatory manufacture or training with a view to the use of such weapons, and to prohibit all private manufacture of means of chemical and bacteriological warfare ;

" That a technical sub-committee be set up with a view to getting into touch with national cartels for chemical and bacteriological manufacture and studying with them the possibility of organising an international cartel responsible for ensuring that such private manufacture shall not be employed for preparation for chemical or bacteriological warfare."

PROPOSAL VI.

The Danish delegation proposes :

" That the Conference agree to the principle of reduction by stages until the object of Article 8 has been achieved and the principle of juridical equality realised ;

" That the first reduction of armaments be carried out within the first three years ;

“ That the preparation of the successive stages be entrusted either to the Permanent Control Commission or to some other permanent commission consisting of a representative of each signatory State, such commissions having power to appoint sub-commissions and to co-opt experts ;

“ That the interval between the successive stages of the progressive reduction be fixed at five years.”

It seems probable that the present Conference will only achieve a first step towards disarmament, and that the result of its work will in all likelihood not be such that the object laid down in Article 8 of the Covenant can be deemed to have been attained. True, there is room for discussion as to the level to which armaments should be reduced with a view to giving effect to the provisions of that Article. At the same time, other chapters of the peace treaties in which the Covenant is inserted contain provisions in which certain indications may be found relating to the object of Article 8 : the chapters in question are those which fix the limits imposed in the matter of armaments on four States which now belong to the League of Nations. That does not mean that a mathematical comparison is possible between the armaments of those States and the armaments of others. Account must always be taken, as provided in the Covenant, of the special situation of each country, and important differences, it may be added, are found in the provisions of the peace treaties relating to the four countries concerned. Further, if one attempts to compare the level of armaments in the different countries, with the object of establishing juridical equality, a number of problems admittedly arise which are difficult of solution, as for example : To what extent must account be taken of the colonies of this or that State ? How is its “ war potential ” to be calculated, independently of the level of its armaments ? How make up by a difference in armaments for the difference in the “ war potential ” of two States ? How is the special situation of a country to be equitably estimated ?

These problems will have to be settled before full effect can be given to Article 8 of the Covenant. Undoubtedly it would be of the utmost value were it possible at once to apply the principles of that Article in full, but it has to be admitted that such an integral application will be difficult of achievement until moral disarmament has made more adequate progress in every country. All that we can hope to do at present is to set up the first marks and lay down a programme for reduction by stages.

In the circumstances, it is unnecessary, then, to settle at this first Conference all the problems that will arise ; it is possible, moreover, that later they may assume a different aspect, and that it will then be easier to find solutions.

On the other hand, the States whose armaments are already limited maintain that the principle of juridical equality must be recognised, and, even if the present political situation does not permit of the immediate enforcement of that principle, they may expect that at all events the first step shall be taken, and that the main lines of a programme shall be established now with a view to its realisation at a later date.

PROPOSALS VII, VIII, IX.

As regards the problems referred to under numbers VII, VIII and IX of the Danish suggestions, the Danish delegation assumes that the French delegation, which first submitted a proposal in this connection, intends to explain and define them. It reserves the right, if necessary, to table proposals later concerning those problems.



