

Geneva, July 7th, 1932.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS**CONFERENCE FOR THE REDUCTION AND LIMITATION
OF ARMAMENTS****Statement of Views of His Majesty's Government
in the United Kingdom regarding the Proposals contained
in President Hoover's Declaration
(Document Conf.D.126).****COMMUNICATED BY THE UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION**

1. The Disarmament Conference has reached a stage when we must review the present position of our discussions and co-operate without loss of time in reaching and registering practical conclusions. The Government of the United Kingdom most cordially welcome President Hoover's declaration as a contribution to this end. We welcome it alike because it calls for a really substantial measure of disarmament and because it seeks to apply the two principles of quantitative and of qualitative limitation. As President Hoover says: "Reduction should be carried out, not only by broad general cuts in armaments, but by increasing the comparative power of defence through decreases in the power of the attack". We desire to associate ourselves with these conceptions and to contribute all that we can to secure their practical application. The United Kingdom Cabinet has considered President Hoover's declaration in this spirit, and what I am about to say on certain practical points is said with a deep desire to promote co-operation and agreement.

Success at Geneva depends upon general agreement, and the American delegation has made it plain that President Hoover's proposals are put forward as a contribution to an agreed general programme. The United Kingdom Government have already advanced wide suggestions of their own. These, while they differ in some important respects as to method or measure, are inspired by the same purpose, and a comparison will show that already there is a substantial area of common ground.

Without interrupting or anticipating detailed discussions which must take place with the other delegations represented at Geneva, it is convenient at this moment to set out in broad outline the main characteristics of the United Kingdom proposals. They in their turn should be regarded, as I have said, not as a declaration of isolated action, but as a contribution to general agreement.

2. First, the Government of the United Kingdom desire to put on record their agreement with President Hoover on the further principle that the three problems of military, naval and air disarmament are interconnected. International agreement cannot be attained without an adequate contribution from all three sources. Inasmuch as Britain, like the United States of America, finds her strongest arm in the navy, the contribution which concerns her most is to be found in this sphere, in which, as is well known, contributions to disarmament on the largest scale have already been made in advance of the General Disarmament Conference. Nevertheless, the Government of the United Kingdom now offer a further contribution as part of a general world settlement.

3. It is now proposed to set out under the necessary heads of land, sea and air the manner in which the Government of the United Kingdom would suggest that these principles could be applied.



LAND PROPOSALS.

4. In the realm of land disarmament, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom find themselves very largely in accord with President Hoover's proposals. Naturally, it will be necessary carefully to examine details before expressing a final opinion on their suitability to the situation in each country.

5. To consider in turn the four categories to which these proposals relate:

(a) In regard to the strength of land armies, His Majesty's Government have consistently placed in the forefront of their proposals for land disarmament the examination of measures for reduction of effectives to the lowest level compatible with national safety. So far as their own forces are concerned, His Majesty's Government have not only abolished conscription, but have already effected reductions to the minimum numbers required for the preservation of internal order and for the defence of their overseas possessions and communications. If we take account of the whole British Army, including not only British troops in Great Britain and her Colonies, but also those maintained in India, the personnel has been reduced, as compared with the year before the war, from 259,000 to 207,000, and this has been effected by the disbandment of nine regiments of cavalry, sixty-one batteries and companies of artillery, twenty-one companies of Royal Engineers, twenty-one battalions of infantry and six battalions of colonial and troops locally enrolled.

The United States proposal for a division of land forces into a " police component " and a " defence component " will require very careful examination ; but, so far as His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom understand the implication of the suggested basis of calculation, the result will be to show that the British land forces have already been reduced substantially below the number recognised to be necessary for the maintenance of internal order, without making any allowance for the forces needed for the lines of communication between the United Kingdom and territories overseas.

(b) In regard to chemical and bacteriological warfare, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom have already joined in rejecting the use of these methods of warfare and therefore cordially welcome the United States proposals under this head.

(c) In regard to land guns, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom have proposed the abolition of all mobile guns of a calibre greater than 155 mm. (6.1 inches calibre). Under this head, also, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom find themselves, therefore, in general agreement with the proposals of the United States Government.

(d) In regard to tanks, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom find themselves entirely at one with President Hoover in desiring the application of the principle that specifically offensive weapons should be prohibited. His Majesty's Government have already advocated the abolition of all tanks above a weight of 20 tons, which by their characteristics are especially suitable for offensive employment in battle. Tanks of the lighter type cannot be regarded as specifically offensive weapons. Their comparatively light armour and their reduced capacity for crossing trenches render them unsuitable for the assault of highly organised defences. Moreover, in a small voluntarily enlisted army like our own, they constitute an essential compensation for lack of numbers which it would be impossible to surrender. As far as this country is concerned, in view of its worldwide responsibilities, any general prohibition would require an increase in our present land forces in terms of man-power, and thus, as a measure of disarmament, would tend to defeat its own ends.

6. It will be seen, therefore, that in the realm of land disarmament the proposals of the United States Government, so far as they relate to matters which directly touch the land forces of the United Kingdom, approximate very closely to those favoured by His Majesty's Government ; and that, in the total of their effectives, His Majesty's Government have been able already to put into practice a measure of disarmament which more than conforms to the standards proposed by President Hoover.

NAVAL PROPOSALS.

7. These proposals cover all types of vessels—capital ships, aircraft-carriers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines.

It is essential that proposals that are intended to be adopted by general agreement should make due provision for varying circumstances. Having regard to the widely scattered responsibilities of the British Navy, it is not practicable for us to cut down the number of naval units beyond a certain point. Occasions may arise when these responsibilities call for the presence of ships simultaneously in parts of the world far removed from one another. It is essential to bear in mind in this connection the very large reduction in the numbers of ships of all categories which has already been effected. If a comparison is made with the year before the war it will be found that, taking account of completed vessels of the United Kingdom and other members of the British

Commonwealth possessing vessels of any of the categories mentioned, capital ships have been reduced from 69 to 15; cruisers from 108 to 52; destroyers from 285 to 147; and submarines from 74 to 52. Numerical reduction in the British Navy has therefore already been applied on a very large scale, and, indeed, cruiser numbers will require special consideration hereafter. But, though there is, for the reasons already pointed out, a limit to numerical reduction, it is perfectly possible, and in the highest degree desirable, to adopt a mode of treatment which will secure by other means the large diminution in naval armaments at which we are all aiming. The present treaty limits of size and gun calibre are far too high, and the United Kingdom Government consider that very large reductions amounting to about one-third, both in the case of capital ships and cruisers, can be made in future construction.

8. As regards capital ships, the position under existing naval treaties is that, as between Britain, the United States and Japan, no further capital ship construction could be undertaken in any event until the year 1937. The maximum size for any future construction has been fixed at 35,000 tons, and the gun at 16 inches. The total tonnage of the category of ships can be reduced either by diminishing their number or by diminishing their size. In regard to number, the considerations which the United Kingdom Government are bound to bear in mind have already been stated. The American proposal would leave the size of these enormously expensive vessels, and the calibre of their guns, untouched in any future construction of capital ships. Every figure involved in these huge dimensions—initial cost, upkeep, personnel, ammunition, stores, docks—would be maintained at the highest level. The United Kingdom proposal, while securing no less reduction in total tonnage, evades these consequences by (1) reducing the size of the gun, and (2) reducing the size of the ship. For example, if the calibre of the gun is reduced to 12 inches, the maximum size of the ship can be reduced from 35,000 to 25,000 tons, and an immense saving is effected under both heads, both initially and consequentially.

9. But the Government of the United Kingdom are prepared to go beyond this. They are ready to apply the same principles to cruisers, and to reduce their maximum size and gun-calibre by international agreement from the present figure of 10,000 tons and 8 inches to 7,000 tons and 6.1 inches. It would then be possible to reduce the dimensions in the case of capital ships still further and fix a maximum of 22,000 tons with 11-inch guns. This will nearly halve the initial cost of any future capital ship and greatly reduce the cost of maintenance. Thus, the whole scale would come down together, and there would be a definite return to smaller dimensions. On this basis, the United Kingdom proposal would effect an ultimate reduction in capital ship tonnage alone of 195,000 tons; the comparable figure under the United States proposal would appear to be about 175,000.

10. As regards aircraft-carriers, the Government of the United Kingdom are in substantial agreement with President Hoover's proposals. They propose a reduction in the size of the aircraft-carrier from 27,000 to 22,000 tons, with consequent reduction in total tonnage from 135,000 to 110,000 tons.

11. Special reference must be made to the submarine. The United Kingdom view has been, and is, that the submarine should be entirely abolished. If its abolition can be secured this would, in our view, at once make possible a reduction of approximately one-third in destroyer tonnage. If international agreement to abolish submarines is found impossible of attainment, ocean-going submarines should be got rid of by limiting the size to 250 tons, and the total tonnage to the lowest figure upon which agreement can be reached.

12. Consequently, the Government of the United Kingdom put forward for immediate adoption by international agreement the following set of proposals relating to the navies of the world:

(1) Reduce the maximum size of any future capital ship to 22,000 tons, and the maximum calibre of the guns carried to 11 inches.

(2) Reduce the maximum size of cruisers hereafter constructed to 7,000 tons, and maximum calibre of guns to 6.1 inches.

(3) If international agreement on point (2) cannot be secured, the Government of the United Kingdom would still urge that the maximum size of capital ships should be reduced to 25,000 tons and their guns to 12 inches as a maximum.

(4) Reduce the maxima for aircraft-carriers to 22,000 tons with 6.1-inch guns.

(5) Abolish submarines.

(6) Reduce destroyer tonnage by approximately one-third, this depending on the abolition of submarines.

(7) If submarines cannot be completely abolished, fix their maximum surface displacement at 250 tons, with a strict limitation both of total tonnage and number of units.

AIR PROPOSALS.

13. There is no aspect of international disarmament more vitally urgent than the adoption without delay of the most effective measures to preserve the civilian population from the fearful horrors of bombardment from the air. The Government of the United Kingdom would be prepared to go to any length, in agreement with other Powers, to achieve this object, and, if more drastic measures are proposed from any other quarter and are shown to be practicable, they will examine them with the utmost sympathy.

They propose that the contracting parties should agree between themselves in respect of their air forces that there should be:

(i) The complete prohibition of all bombing from the air, save within limits to be laid down as precisely as possible by an international convention. Attacks upon the civilian population would be entirely prohibited.

(ii) A strict limitation in the unladen weight of all military and naval aircraft (troop-carriers and flying boats excepted).

(iii) A restriction in the numbers of all kinds of military and naval aircraft.

14. In this last connection, the United Kingdom Government wish to add an observation. They sincerely desire to see numbers of military and naval aircraft restricted, and here, again, regard must be had to the course of recent events. In 1913-14, air armaments were negligible, and no comparison with that date can usefully be made. At the end of the war, Great Britain was one of the two leading air Powers in the world. Her colonial possessions are widely scattered and, since the war, her responsibilities have been increased by her various mandates from the League of Nations. More than any other Power, she relies upon aircraft to discharge her mandatory duties and to police and control undeveloped regions. Yet, in 1932, her first-line aircraft had been reduced to little more than 20 per cent of her post-war strength, with the result that the United Kingdom now stands, in the number of its military and naval aeroplanes, only fifth in the list of States. Of aircraft authorised for home defence in 1923 by the United Kingdom Government with the approval of Parliament, 20 per cent have not, in fact, been constructed.

15. Great and far-reaching as these reductions in all three arms have been—beyond comparison greater than any which have been effected elsewhere outside the countries disarmed by the Treaty of Versailles—His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are ready and eager to join in the further measures of disarmament for which general agreement can be attained. The proposals which, accordingly, are now made constitute an additional contribution, practical and extensive, to the effort to relieve the heavy burdens which the maintenance of existing standards imposes upon the world and which the world expects us, by a great common effort, effectively to diminish.
