

Not used

III DISARMAMENT DISCUSSIONS 1932-34

Statement of February 1932

The first General Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments assembled at Geneva in February 1932.

At the Washington Conference of 1922 the principle of limitation had been established by treaty for capital ships of the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Japan; at the London Naval Conference of 1930 this principle was extended to other types of warships of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan. Prior to the opening of the General Disarmament Conference in 1932, these were the principal steps taken by the nations of the world to lighten the burden of large armies and navies.

At the beginning of this conference Ambassador Hugh Gibson, speaking for the United States delegation, said that civilization was threatened by the burden and dangers of the gigantic machinery of warfare then being maintained. He recalled that practically all the nations of the world had pledged themselves not to wage aggressive war. Therefore, he said, the conference should devote itself to the abolition of weapons devoted primarily to aggressive war. Among the points advocated by Ambassador Gibson were the following: Special restrictions for tanks and heavy mobile guns, which were considered to be arms peculiarly for offensive operations; computation of the number of armed forces on the basis of the effectives necessary for the maintenance of internal order plus some suitable contingent for defense; abolition of lethal gases and bacteriological warfare; effective measures to protect civilian populations against aerial bombing; abolition of submarines; prolonging the existing naval agreements concluded at Washington and London; proportional reduction from the figures laid down in the Washington and London agreements.

PROPOSAL OF MAY 16, 1933

For more than a year the Conference at Geneva struggled with the tremendous problems involved -- without making substantial progress. President Roosevelt made an effort in May 1933 to inject new life into the

Not used

III DISARMAMENT DISCUSSIONS 1932-34

Statement of February 1932

The first General Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments assembled at Geneva in February 1932.

At the Washington Conference of 1922 the principle of limitation had been established by treaty for capital ships of the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Japan; at the London Naval Conference of 1930 this principle was extended to other types of warships of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan. Prior to the opening of the General Disarmament Conference in 1932, these were the principal steps taken by the nations of the world to lighten the burden of large armies and navies.

At the beginning of this conference Ambassador Hugh Gibson, speaking for the United States delegation, said that civilization was threatened by the burden and dangers of the gigantic machinery of warfare then being maintained. He recalled that practically all the nations of the world had pledged themselves not to wage aggressive war. Therefore, he said, the conference should devote itself to the abolition of weapons devoted primarily to aggressive war. Among the points advocated by Ambassador Gibson were the following: Special restrictions for tanks and heavy mobile guns, which were considered to be arms peculiarly for offensive operations; computation of the number of armed forces on the basis of the effectives necessary for the maintenance of internal order plus some suitable contingent for defense; abolition of lethal gases and bacteriological warfare; effective measures to protect civilian populations against aerial bombing; abolition of submarines; prolonging the existing naval agreements concluded at Washington and London; proportional reduction from the figures laid down in the Washington and London agreements.

PROPOSAL OF MAY 16, 1933

For more than a year the Conference at Geneva struggled with the tremendous problems involved -- without making substantial progress. President Roosevelt made an effort in May 1933 to inject new life into the

Conference. In a message of May 16 to the heads of 54 governments he stated that if all nations would agree to eliminate entirely from possession and use the weapons which make possible a successful attack, defenses automatically would become impregnable and the frontiers and independence of every nation would become secure. Therefore, he said, the ultimate objective of the Conference must be "complete elimination of all offensive weapons". His specific proposals were: Through a series of steps the weapons of offensive warfare should be eliminated; the first definite step should be taken at once; while these steps were being taken no nation should increase existing armaments over and above the limitations of treaty obligations; subject to existing treaty rights no nation should send any armed force of whatsoever nature across its own borders.

Ten days before this message was sent, President Roosevelt had made clear to Dr. Schacht of Germany, President of the Reichsbank, who was in Washington as a special representative of the German Government, that the United States would insist that Germany remain in statu quo in armament and that we would support every possible effort to have the offensive armament of every other nation brought down to the German level. The President intimated as strongly as possible that we regarded Germany as the "only possible obstacle" to a disarmament treaty; that he hoped Dr. Schacht would give this point of view to Hitler.

STATEMENT OF MAY 22, 1933

One of the complications arising from the Disarmament Conference was that France felt that it could not agree to reduce armaments unless the United States and Great Britain would join with France and other nations in a system of collective security to enforce compliance on the part of Germany of provisions for arms limitation and reduction. It was argued that if League states took measures against an aggressor nation, there was no assurance that the United States would not interfere with these measures. In an effort to meet this objection and difficulty, Norman H. Davis, Chairman of the United States delegation at Geneva, stated to the Conference in an address of May 22, 1933 that the United States was ready not only to do its

part toward the substantive reduction of armaments but that if this were effected by general international agreement, the United States was prepared to contribute in other ways to the organization of peace. In particular we were willing to consult other states in case of a threat to peace, with the view to averting conflict. Furthermore, in the event that the states, in conference, determined that a state had been guilty of a breach of the peace in violation of its international obligations and took measures against the violator, then the United States, if it concurred in the judgment rendered as to the responsible and guilty party, would refrain from any action tending to defeat this collective effort for a restoration of peace.

A few days later the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations rejected a proposal, urged by the Secretary of State, which would have permitted this Government to join with other governments in an arms embargo against an aggressor nation. (See page 23.)

During a conversation on October 9, 1933 Secretary of State Hull discussed with the German Ambassador at Washington, Hans Luther, the question of disarmament. The Secretary said that the purpose of the United States was the promotion of general disarmament; that the theory of this Government was that we should "wage a steady contest for the disarmament of the heavily armed nations, rather than become parties to a plan for others to proceed to rearm".

A plan was considered by the Disarmament Conference for certain immediate steps of disarmament and for progressive limitation and reduction of armaments. France proposed that instead of agreeing to steps being taken immediately and progressively there should be a period of trial in which to test German good faith. Germany refused to accept this proposal. On October 14, 1933 Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and on the same day gave notice of withdrawal from the League of Nations.

* * * * *

The Conference continued at Geneva, without substantial progress. Twenty-seven months after its opening, Chairman Norman H. Davis of the United States delegation made an address to the Conference surveying the disarmament situation. In this address of May 29, 1934 Mr. Davis summarized

as follows the attitude and policy of the United States: "We are prepared to cooperate in every practicable way in efforts to secure a general disarmament agreement and thus to help promote the general peace and progress of the world. We are furthermore willing, in connection with a general disarmament convention, to negotiate a universal pact of non-aggression and to join with other nations in conferring on international problems growing out of any treaties to which we are a party. The United States will not, however, participate in European political negotiations and settlements and will not make any commitment whatever to use its armed forces for the settlement of any dispute anywhere. In effect, the policy of the United States is to keep out of war, but to help in every possible way to discourage war."

JAPANESE DENUNCIATION OF NAVAL TREATY OF 1922

At the end of 1934 the Japanese Government gave notice of intention to terminate the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

* * * * *

Excerpt from "Peace and War"
Official publication
Department of State, U. S. A.
Pages 9, 10, 11 and 12