

LIMITATION OF ARMAMENT

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

COPY OF A MEMORANDUM TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY, AND JAPAN, SUGGESTING THAT THEY EMPOWER THEIR DELEGATES AT THE FORTHCOMING MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION FOR THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE AT GENEVA TO NEGOTIATE AND CONCLUDE AT AN EARLY DATE AN AGREEMENT FURTHER LIMITING NAVAL ARMAMENT, SUPPLEMENTING THE WASHINGTON TREATY ON THAT SUBJECT, AND COVERING THE CLASSES OF VESSELS NOT COVERED BY THAT TREATY



FEBRUARY 10, 1927.—Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs
and ordered to be printed

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WASHINGTON
1927

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THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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FRANCE, BRITAIN, ITALY, AND JAPAN, 1925,
STATING THAT THEY HAVE THEIR DELEGATES
AT THE CONFERENCE OF THE LIMITATION OF
THEY HAVE BEEN TO DISCUSS THE
IN ORDER TO NEGOTIATE AND CONCLUDE AT
AN EARLY DATE AN AGREEMENT FOR THE
LIMITATION OF ARMAMENT, INCLUDING THE
TREATY OF THAT SUBJECT, AND COVERING THE
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MESSAGE

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to my instructions the American ambassadors at London, Paris, Rome, and Tokyo will to-day present to the Governments of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan a memorandum suggesting that they empower their delegates at the forthcoming meeting of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference at Geneva to negotiate and conclude at an early date an agreement further limiting naval armament, supplementing the Washington treaty on that subject, and covering the classes of vessels not covered by that treaty. I transmit herewith, for the information of the Congress, a copy of this memorandum.

I wish to inform the Congress of the considerations which have moved me to take this action.

The support of all measures looking to the preservation of the peace of the world has been long established as a fundamental policy of this Government. The American Government and people are convinced that competitive armaments constitute one of the most dangerous contributing causes of international suspicion and discord and are calculated eventually to lead to war. A recognition of this fact and a desire as far as possible to remove this danger led the American Government in 1921 to call the Washington conference.

At that time we were engaged in a great building program which, upon its completion, would have given us first place on the sea. We felt then, however, and feel now, that the policy we then advocated—that of deliberate self-denial and limitation of naval armament by the great naval powers—promised the attainment of at least one guarantee of peace, an end worthy of mutual adjustment and concession.

At the Washington conference we found the other nations animated with the same desire as ourselves, to remove naval competition from the list of possible causes of international discord. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to reach agreements at Washington covering all classes of naval ships. The Washington treaty provided a specific tonnage limitation upon capital ships and aircraft carriers, with certain restrictions as to size and maximum caliber of guns for other vessels. Every nation has been at complete liberty to build any number of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. Only size and armament of cruisers were limited. The signatories of the Washington treaty have fulfilled their obligations faithfully and there can be no doubt that that treaty constitutes an outstanding success in its operation.

It has been the hope of the American Government, constantly expressed by the Congress since the Washington conference, that a

favorable opportunity might present itself to complete the work begun here by the conclusion of further agreements covering cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. The desirability of such an agreement has been apparent, since it was only to be expected that the spirit of competition, stifled as regards capital ships and aircraft carriers by the Washington treaty, would sooner or later show itself with regard to the other vessels not limited under the treaty. Actually, I do not believe that competitive building of these classes of ships has begun. Nevertheless, far-reaching building programs have been laid down by certain powers, and there has appeared in our own country, as well as abroad, a sentiment urging naval construction on the ground that such construction is taking place elsewhere. In such sentiments lies the germ of renewed naval competition.

I am sure that all governments and all peoples would choose a system of naval limitation in preference to consciously reverting to competitive building. Therefore, in the hope of bringing about an opportunity for discussion among the principal naval powers to ascertain whether further limitation is practicable, I have suggested to them that negotiations on this subject should begin as soon as possible.

The moment seems particularly opportune to try to secure further limitation of armament in accordance with the expressed will of the Congress. The earnest desire of the nations of the world to relieve themselves in as great a measure as possible of the burden of armaments and to avoid the dangers of competition has been shown by the establishment of the preparatory commission for the disarmament conference, which met in Geneva last May, and which is continuing its work with a view to preparing the agenda for a final general conference. For more than six months, representatives of a score or more of nations have examined from all points of view the problem of the reduction and limitation of armaments. In these discussions it was brought out very clearly that a number of nations felt that land, sea, and air armaments were interdependent and that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to agree upon the limitation of one type of armament without simultaneously limiting the other types.

The consequence to be feared is that a deadlock will be reached, should even partial progress in the reduction of armaments be conditioned upon the acceptance of some universal plan covering land, sea, and air forces together. If the prospective deadlock can not be broken, it is probable that little progress will be made for the time being. It appears to me to be the duty of this Government, which has always advocated limitation of armaments, to endeavor to suggest some avenue by which concrete results may be achieved, even though such results may be short of an ultimate ideal solution for the threefold problem of land, sea, and air armament.

Our delegates at Geneva have consistently expressed the view that under conditions as they exist in the world to-day the problems of land and air armaments are most susceptible of solution by regional agreements covering regions within which the land or air armaments of one country could constitute a potential threat to another country. Geographical continents have been suggested as regions appropriate for land and air limitation agreements.

The American land and air force constitute a threat to no one. They are at minimum strength; their reduction has been suggested by no one as a necessary condition precedent to general arms limitation. This reduction of our land forces has been rendered possible by our favored geographical position. I realize that the problems of armaments on land and in the air in Europe are beset with difficulties which in all justice we must recognize and, although this Government will always be ready to lend its assistance in any appropriate way to efforts on the part of European or other Governments to arrive at regional agreements limiting land and air forces, it would hesitate to make specific proposals on this subject to European nations.

The problem of the limitation of naval armament, while not regional in character or susceptible of regional treatment, has been successfully treated, in part, by an agreement among the five leading naval powers, and, in my opinion, can be definitely dealt with by further agreements among those powers.

It will be a contribution to the success of the preliminary work now going on at Geneva should the great naval powers there agree upon a further definite limitation of naval armament.

It is my intention that the American representatives at Geneva should continue to discuss with the representatives of the other nations there the program for a general limitation-of-armaments conference. If such a conference should be possible in the future, on a basis generally acceptable, this Government would, of course, be highly gratified. Pending the formulation of the plan for such a general conference, however, I believe that we should make an immediate and sincere effort to solve the problem of naval limitation, the solution of which would do much to make the efforts toward more general limitation successful.

CALVIN COOLIDGE.

THE WHITE HOUSE,
February 10, 1927.

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MEMORANDUM

The American Government has followed with close attention the proceedings of the preparatory commission for the disarmament conference, and, after the most careful deliberation, has concluded that it can helpfully make certain observations at this time which, it hopes, may contribute materially to the success of that commission—a success earnestly desired by the Government and people of the United States.

The conviction that the competitive augmentation of national armaments has been one of the principal causes of international suspicion and ill will, leading to war, is firmly held by the American Government and people. Hence the American Government has neglected no opportunity to lend its sympathy and support to international efforts to reduce and limit armaments.

The success of the Washington conference of 1921-22 demonstrated that other powers were animated with a similar desire to do away with this dangerous source of international discord. The Washington conference made a beginning, however, and it has been the continued hope of the American Government, since 1922, that the task undertaken at Washington by the group of naval powers could be resumed and completed.

For this reason, the American Government was happy to observe that the efforts looking towards the holding of a general international conference for the limitation of armament, which had been in progress for several years under the auspices of the League of Nations, had reached, in December, 1925, a stage sufficiently advanced, in the opinion of the Council of the League of Nations, to warrant the establishment of the preparatory commission, to meet in 1926, to prepare the ground for an international conference at an early date. The American Government, pursuant to its policy of cooperation with all efforts calculated to bring about an actual limitation of armament, accepted the invitation of the council to be represented on the preparatory commission. The American representatives on that commission have endeavored to play a helpful part in its discussions, and they will continue to be guided by that policy.

The American Government believes that the discussions of the commission have been most valuable in making clear the views of the various governments as to the problems presented, and in demonstrating the complexity and diversity of the obstacles to be overcome in the preparation and conclusion of a general agreement for the limitation of all armament.

At the same time, these very complexities and difficulties, as brought out in the preparatory commission, have clearly pointed out that a final solution for the problem of armament may not be immediately practicable. Indeed, at the latest meeting of the Council of the League of Nations several distinguished statesmen, leaders in the

movement for the limitation of armament, sounded a note of warning against too great optimism of immediate success.

The American Government is most anxious that concrete results in the limitation of armament may be achieved. The discussions of the preparatory commission have emphasized the fact that a number of Governments consider that one of the chief present obstacles to the general reduction and limitation of armaments lies in the interdependence of land, sea, and air armaments, and in the consequent impossibility of reducing or limiting one of these categories without dealing simultaneously with the others. On the other hand, the discussions have demonstrated even more emphatically that, should all effort to bring about the reduction or limitation of armament be conditioned upon the acceptance by all the world of a comprehensive plan covering all classes and types of armament, there would be little, if any, prospect of actual progress toward arms limitation in the near future.

The above difficulties must be frankly recognized. The American Government believes that they can be overcome and that they must be overcome, since the consequences of a failure to overcome them, and to make some definite, if only partial, agreement for the limitation of armament, would constitute a setback to the cause of international peace too great to deserve serious contemplation as a possibility.

Admitting reluctantly that the existing political situations in certain parts of the world may render the problem of universal limitation incapable of immediate solution as a whole, the American Government believes that it is entirely practicable for the nations of the world to proceed at once to the isolation and separate solution of such problems as may appear susceptible of such treatment, meanwhile continuing to give sympathetic consideration and discussion to comprehensive proposals aimed at the simultaneous limitation of land, sea, and air armaments by a general agreement when such an agreement may be warranted by existing world conditions. The American Government believes that the adoption of such a course is the duty of the governments represented on the preparatory commission, and that by so doing they will insure the achievement by the commission and by the general conference of concrete, even though perhaps only partial, results, thus facilitating progress toward the final solution of the general problem.

The American Government, as its representatives on the preparatory commission have repeatedly stated, feels that land and air armaments constitute essentially regional problems, to be solved primarily by regional agreements. The American Army and air force are at minimum strength. Agreement for land and air limitation in other regions of the world would not be dependent upon the reduction or limitation of American land and air forces. Therefore the American Government does not feel that it can appropriately offer definite suggestions to other powers in regard to the limitation of these categories of armament.

The problem of the limitation of naval armament, while not regional in character, can be dealt with as a practical matter by measures affecting the navies of a limited group of powers. This has been clearly established by the success of the Washington treaty limiting naval armament. The United States, as the initiator

of the Washington conference, and as one of the principal naval powers, has a direct interest in this question, and, being both ready and willing to enter into an agreement further limiting naval armament, feels itself privileged to indicate a course of procedure which will, in its opinion, lead to such an agreement.

The discussions over a period of six months in Geneva have been most useful in the opportunity afforded for an exchange of views as to the general problem of naval limitation, and on the basis of these discussions it is felt that there is a possibility of reconciling many of the divergent views which have been expressed in such a manner as to meet the requirements of the naval powers and enable them to decide upon acceptable measures of limitation.

In order to advance definitely toward a limitation agreement, the Government of the United States takes this method of addressing an inquiry to the governments signatories of the Washington treaty limiting naval armament as to whether they are disposed to empower their representatives at the forthcoming meeting of the preparatory commission to initiate negotiations looking toward an agreement providing for limitation in the classes of naval vessels not covered by the Washington treaty.

The American Government is not unmindful of the fact that the preparatory commission is not specifically charged with the duty of concluding international agreements, and that its task is primarily that of preparing the agenda for a conference to be called at a later date. Nevertheless, being sincerely desirous of the success of the preparatory commission, the American Government makes this suggestion in the firm belief that the conclusion at Geneva, as soon as possible, among the powers signatories of the Washington treaty, of an agreement for further naval limitation, far from interfering with or detracting from the success of the preparatory commission's aims, would constitute a valuable contribution to the sum of achievement attributable to that commission and would facilitate the task of the final conference in dealing with the particularly complex problems of land and air armament, perhaps capable of solution for the present only by regional limitation agreements.

It seems probable that under any circumstances the final conference will not be able to meet during this calendar year. The coming into effect of agreements reached by it might be delayed for a considerable period for a multitude of causes. Therefore the American Government believes that those powers which may be able to arrive at an agreement for further naval limitation at an earlier date would not be justified in consciously postponing that agreement and thereby opening the way for a recrudescence of a spirit of competitive naval building—a development greatly to be deplored by all governments and peoples.

The American Government feels that the general principles of the Washington treaty offer a suitable basis for further discussion among its signatories.

Although hesitating at this time to put forward rigid proposals as regards the ratios of naval strength to be maintained by the different powers, the American Government, for its part, is disposed to accept, in regard to those classes of vessels not covered by the Washington treaty, an extension of the 5-5-3 ratio as regards the United States, Great Britain, and Japan, and to leave to discussion at Geneva

the ratios of France and Italy, taking into full account their special conditions and requirements in regard to the types of vessels in question. Ratios for capital ships and aircraft carriers were established by that treaty which would not be affected in any way by an agreement covering other classes of ships.

The American representatives at the forthcoming meeting at Geneva will, of course, participate fully in the discussions looking to the preparation of an agenda for a final general conference for the limitation of armament. In addition, they will have full powers to negotiate definitely regarding measures for further naval limitation, and, if they are able to reach agreement with the representatives of the other signatories of the Washington treaty, to conclude a convention embodying such agreement, in tentative or final form, as many be found practicable.

The American Government earnestly hopes that the institution of such negotiations at Geneva may be agreeable to the Governments of the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan, and that comprehensive limitation of all types of naval armament may be brought into effect among the principal naval powers without delay.



