

Commission for Conventional Armaments

The Third Session of the General Assembly adopted a Franco-Belgian resolution which called upon the Security Council to pursue its studies of the regulation and reduction of conventional armaments through the agency of the Commission for Conventional Armaments. The operative section of this resolution suggested that the Commission, in carrying out its plan of work, should devote its first attention to formulating proposals for the receipt, checking and publication by an international organ of control, within the framework of the Security Council, of full information concerning the armaments and armed forces of member states. The resolution also invited the Security Council to report to the General Assembly no later than at its next regular session on the effect given to these instructions.

During 1949 the Commission was hampered in its attempts to implement this resolution by the continuing fundamental disagreement between the U.S.S.R. and the Ukraine on the one hand, and the remaining members of the Council on the other. The Soviet Representative made his Government's position clear, when the question was reconsidered in February 1949, by reintroducing the disarmament proposals which the Third Session of the General Assembly had decisively rejected in Paris. These proposals provided that measures be formulated to reduce the armaments and armed forces of the permanent members of the Council by one-third; and that two draft conventions were necessary, to take effect simultaneously, concerning the prohibition of atomic weapons and the control of atomic energy. The Soviet Representative added a further proposal to those which the Soviet Union had submitted to the General Assembly to the effect that the permanent members of the Council were to submit full data on their armed forces and armaments, including atomic weapons, no later than March 31, 1949. Western representatives characterized this Soviet draft resolution as a manoeuvre intended to divert attention from the disarmament resolution passed by the General Assembly. Accordingly, the majority in the Commission devoted a large number of informal meetings between February and August, 1949, to the preparation of a plan for the exchange and verification of information on conventional armaments. The initiative in the matter was largely taken by the delegations of Canada, France, the United Kingdom and the United States which, by the end of May, had agreed upon a composite working paper setting forth proposals for the census and verification of the armaments and armed forces of member states. At this stage the proposals contained in the working paper were outlined in two sections. The first section elaborated on the aims of the resolution passed by the Third Session of the General Assembly and described the nature, scope and limitations of the proposals. These proposals were to be capable of implementation under existing political conditions, but were not designed to provide, of themselves, the safeguards essential to security. As a prerequisite to implementation they were to be accepted by not less than two-thirds of the member states, including all the permanent members of the Security Council. Section two listed the categories of armed forces and armaments on which information was to be supplied to an international control organ and outlined the verification procedures (inspections, spot-checks and cross-checks) provided.