

REPORT ON DISARMAMENT DISCUSSIONS, 1957

Disarmament discussions under United Nations auspices, which began not long after the end of the Second World War, have now been in progress for over a decade. For the greater part of this period there were few signs that the Soviet Union had serious intentions of reaching a disarmament agreement. Since May 1955 and particularly in the earlier part of 1957, however, there was some evidence that a first step toward partial disarmament may have become negotiable. Despite their failure to achieve agreement, the meetings between March and September of the Sub-Committee of the United Nations Disarmament Commission until their final stages were encouraging in this respect. In view of the importance of these negotiations and those at the Twelfth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and because of their length and complexity, this report has been prepared to provide a brief but reasonably comprehensive account of disarmament discussions during 1957.

I. Background

The United Nations Disarmament Commission was established by General Assembly resolution 502(VI) of January 11, 1952 to assume the tasks of both the Atomic Energy Commission and the Commission for Conventional Armaments. It is composed of representatives of the members of the Security Council and Canada. With the exception of the months immediately following its establishment, during which twenty-six meetings were held, the Disarmament Commission has met only to review the work of its Sub-Committee, and has not been the major forum for detailed discussion of substantive disarmament questions.

On the initiative of France and India, General Assembly Resolution 715(VIII) of November 28, 1953 contained the suggestion that the Commission "study the desirability of establishing a sub-committee consisting of representatives of the powers principally involved. . . ." On April 19, 1954 the Commission approved the establishment of such a sub-committee, to be composed of representatives of Canada, France, the United Kingdom, the U.S.S.R., and the United States. From May 13, 1954 until the end of 1956 the Sub-Committee held a total of eighty-six meetings, during which the main developments were discussions of the necessary provisions of a comprehensive disarmament programme and the schedule of their implementation, and later the recognition of the desirability of negotiating a partial agreement which could be implemented without political conditions. Some progress toward agreement was achieved in connection with conventional disarmament and the nature of a control system but there was little advance made on nuclear measures.

II. The Eleventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Shortly after the opening of the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly the Soviet Union issued, on November 17, 1956, new disarmament proposals calling for: (1) a reduction within two years of the armed forces of the Soviet