
The Transnational Dream:
Politicians, Diplomats and
Soldiers in the League of
Nations' Pursuit of
International Disarmament,
1920–1938

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Abstract

The pursuit of disarmament was central to the work of the League of Nations throughout its existence, but it was a relatively small and consistent set of national representatives who sat on the many bodies created to deal with the issue. Unfortunately, the gradual development of a sense of 'transnational' community among these delegates was never able to overcome the more powerful imperatives of national self-interest. Disarmament was always tied too closely to the issue of security for the individual governments of the major powers to view it from anything other than a strictly national strategic perspective.

Speaking during August 1927 to the Geneva Institute of International Relations, a 'summer school' for British and American League of Nations enthusiasts that met each year from 1926 to 1938, the Spanish director of the disarmament section of the League Secretariat quipped that 'we in Geneva are apt to forget the nation whence we come; we are so busy with the other nations'. Referring to his own particular area of expertise, Salvador de Madariaga declared that 'this work of disarmament is an excellent method of mutual education. The men who come to Geneva to discuss it are bound to go back to their own countries and to explain to their own public opinion the complexity of the political problems of the world.'¹ It was a

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1 S. de Madariaga, 'The Preparation of the First General Disarmament Conference', in *Problems of Peace: Lectures Delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations (August 1927)*, 2nd ser. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 124, 142.

common hope of the League's supporters that it might function as an international institution that transcended the narrow national interests of individual governments. As an organisation composed of sovereign member states – the sole source of its authority – the primary purpose for which the League of Nations was created was to maintain peace through a system of collective security. Yet the expansion of its influence and responsibility was also driven by the increasing extent to which so many problems formerly deemed to be solely of national concern were now considered fit for international discussion. Amid laments for its lack of achievement in the political arena, commentators still recognised that it was 'in the sphere of public health, of the suppression of the traffic in drugs, and of the White Slave Traffic, in the improvement through suasion of the standards of hygiene and public morals in the more backward countries, that the League has so far done its least spectacular but most efficient work'.² National delegates came to Geneva to consider all these issues and still others besides; the dream was that, once there, they might look beyond the strictly national perspective and act as a wider 'transnational' community of global citizens. Particularly during the 1920s there was a widespread belief in a kind of 'League spirit' that could infuse the normally cynical or sceptical delegate when he encountered the heady international air of Geneva. One League supporter insisted that 'such an atmosphere unquestionably exists, and there are those who view it with some misgiving as tending to impel delegates in a moment of enthusiasm to decisions or agreements which their Governments at home might subsequently decline to ratify'.³ Sadly, this dream of the power of the 'League spirit' went mostly unfulfilled, as the ideal of transnational co-operation was forever tempered by the realities of national interest. Another opinion, voiced amid the bleaker mood prevailing in the early 1930s, put the sensation of the atmosphere in Geneva more carefully, rejecting descriptions of it as 'a kind of international revivalism in which statesmen were apt to lose their sense of realities'. While there was certainly 'idealism' in Geneva, it was of a 'severely practical kind'.⁴

This inability to rise above the specific concerns of each nation-state was central to the League's failure in perhaps its greatest challenge, the pursuit of international disarmament, and clearly revealed the limits of the transnational dream. Disarmament was among the most complex of the political problems of the inter-war world. The League was bound to the task in 1919 by the peace settlements that followed the carnage of the First World War. Article 8 of the League Covenant stated that 'the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety', while the preamble to the arms reductions clauses of all the peace treaties signed with the defeated powers insisted that their enforced disarmament was taking place in order 'to render possible the initiation

2 G. D. H. Cole and Margaret Cole, *The Intelligent Man's Review of Europe Today* (London: Gollancz, 1933), 758–9.

3 H. Wilson Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 2nd edn. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), 123–4.

4 Harold Laski, editor's introduction to *Problems of Peace: Lectures delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations (August 1931)*, 6th ser. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), v–vi.

of a general limitation of armaments of all nations'.⁵ In practice, however, all the League's efforts over the next two decades met with only the most limited success as it failed to achieve either quantitative disarmament, through substantial reductions in the military forces of states, or qualitative disarmament, through regulation of the production and use of certain types of weapon. The most prominent forum for international debate on the subject was the disarmament committee at the annual League Assembly, known from the 1921 Assembly on as the Third Committee. High-profile though this committee was, it dealt with disarmament mostly in general terms; the practicalities of specific proposals were handled elsewhere. Between 1920 and 1925 the League adopted a broadly based approach to the issue, including attempts to regulate the global arms trade, to limit national military budgets and to link disarmament to new security regimes. The details of these schemes were overseen by two contrasting commissions, the solely military Permanent Armaments Commission (PAC) and the primarily civilian Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (TMC). From 1926 until 1930 a new body known as the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference (PCDC), composed of political and diplomatic delegates, conducted the interminable negotiations to produce a single draft disarmament treaty covering all nations and all spheres of armaments. Its years of work, filled with diverse and often contradictory initiatives, led up to the climax of the inter-war disarmament process: the meeting of the mammoth World Disarmament Conference (WDC), held between February 1932 and June 1934. While the conference's lengthy and unproductive deliberations were tedious, its eventual failure was spectacular, with the high drama of Germany's simultaneous withdrawal from the conference and the League itself in October 1933. After its final collapse some months later, a denouement saw new approaches to disarmament still being considered almost until the outbreak of another world war, though in a haphazard and admittedly unenthusiastic fashion. While the primary actors in this tragedy were always the major states, it is worth reconsidering the place of the League itself in the disarmament process which it organised, standing as it did as its inimitable linchpin.⁶

5 For the peace treaties with Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, each of which incorporated the League Covenant, see *The Treaties of Peace, 1919–1923*, 2 vols. (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924).

6 The best examination of the inter-war disarmament process is in Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 372–83, 565–97, 755–96. For a more general overview see Andrew Webster, 'From Versailles to Geneva: The Many Forms of Inter-war Disarmament', *Journal of Strategic Studies* (forthcoming). That disarmament should be approached from the perspective of the League, looking outwards from Geneva, seemed natural to inter-war commentators. However, in keeping with the more negative assessments of the League that dominated after 1945, most later studies have tended to view disarmament from the perspective of individual states, with the League itself often almost incidental to the process. For examples of the former, see John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Information on the Reduction of Armaments* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), *Disarmament and Security since Locarno, 1925–1931* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), and *The Pipe Dream of Peace: The Story of the Collapse of Disarmament* (New York: W. Morrow, 1935); Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1923–38* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925–77); and also the analysis by a former deputy secretary-general of the League in F. P. Walters, *A History of the League*

The task of implementing disarmament drew in representatives from every single member of the League of Nations, as well as from the most important non-member states. Significantly, for most of these countries the same people tended to be assigned to deal with disarmament year after year. As a result, a core of individuals set themselves apart over time as the main voices and chief experts on disarmament. There were, of course, innumerable exceptions to this continuity of representation on the League's various disarmament bodies – delegates replaced for a year or two due to changes of political fortune at home, highly influential figures present only for a very limited number of meetings, experts who were called in only for specific questions, and so on – but the long-term presence of a significant number of individuals was remarkable. While some held very high public profiles, many remained almost unknown outside the committee rooms of Geneva. Chief among them were a core of delegates from the European states, the most powerful and influential of whom were always those representing the major powers. For Britain, there was first and foremost the irrepressible Lord Robert Cecil, a Conservative cabinet minister, one of the founders of the League itself, and prominent as the president of the largest of all the national pro-League pressure groups, the League of Nations Union, but there was also the little-known Rear-Admiral John Segrave. For France, there was the flamboyant Joseph Paul-Boncour, a socialist minister and president of the 'study commission' of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale, whose glorious mane of white hair was so loved by cartoonists, but also the quietly competent René Massigli, head of the Quai d'Orsay's Service Française de la Société des Nations, and the penetrating and energetic soldier Colonel Edouard Réquin. For Italy, there was the senator Carlo Schanzer, focused on the need for statistical detail, and the ubiquitous General Alberto de Marinis, first soldier and then senator and a member of almost every League disarmament committee, who with his large head, short neck and sleepy eyes had the appearance of 'a good-natured bullfrog'.⁷ For Germany, there was the dour, unforgiving and unflinching Reichstag deputy and former ambassador Count Johann von Bernstorff. Finally, from the Soviet Union, came the chubby, clever and energetic deputy commissar of foreign affairs, Maxim Litvinoff. The smaller European states also provided figures who, often because of their personal prestige, were able to play important roles in the League's disarmament process. Two of the most prominent individuals in this category were the foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, the bustling Edouard Beneš, and the ambassador and sometime Greek foreign minister, the dapper legal expert Nicolas Politis. The Scandinavian states were perhaps the most forceful group of all in pressing for action on disarmament. Karl Branting served three terms as prime minister and represented Sweden each year until his death in 1925, while

of Nations, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952). For examples of the latter, see Edward Bennett, *German Rearmament and the West, 1932–1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Maurice Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord: la politique française en matière de désarmement, 9 décembre 1930–17 avril 1934* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1981); Christopher Hall, *Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921–1937* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Dick Richardson, *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s* (London: Printer, 1989).

7 Hugh R. Wilson, *Diplomat Between Wars* (New York: Longman, Green, 1941), 252.

Christian Lange, the secretary-general of the Inter-Parliamentary Union from 1909 to 1934, was an almost constant Norwegian delegate to the League from its founding until his death in 1938. Largely in recognition of their League work, in particular their activism in support of disarmament and pacifism, Branting and Lange would share the 1921 Nobel Peace Prize.⁸ Other constant presences were the Finnish ambassador and former foreign minister Eino Rudolf Holsti and the former Danish minister of defence Peter Munch, along with foreign minister Paul Hymans and senator Louis de Brouckère from Belgium, sometime president of the Swiss confederation Giuseppe Motta, and the Dutch foreign minister and later ambassador Jan Loudon, who would chair the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference. Finally, there was a host of less formally distinguished delegates, some of them non-European, whose almost continual service on the League's disarmament committees was striking and occasionally did give them useful influence. These included the permanent delegates to the League from Austria, Eméric Pflügl, from Poland, François Sokal, and from Japan, Naotake Sato, along with former under-secretary for finance Eduardo Cobian and Rear-Admiral Antonio Marques de Magaz from Spain and former prime minister and foreign minister Augusto de Vasconcellos from Portugal. For the South American states, ambassador and former prime minister Enrique Villegas from Chile, ambassador and former foreign minister Francisco José Urrutia from Colombia, ambassador J. Gustavo Guerrero from El Salvador, and ambassador Enrique Buero from Uruguay all became familiar faces.

These national delegates arrived at the meetings of the innumerable committees, commissions and conferences dealing with disarmament bearing instructions to advance or defend their own state's respective political, military, economic and security interests. In the League's international forum, over the years they steadily acquired a deeper understanding of the global dimensions of the problem, the various policy requirements and anxieties of their fellow delegates, and the compromises and concessions that were needed if success was to be achieved. That this awareness did not produce a genuine international disarmament regime was the result of a variety of factors, the most important of which was always the widely divergent political and security interests of the great powers. The men (for they were almost universally male) who in Madariaga's words came to Geneva to discuss 'this work of disarmament' were unable to escape from the powerful contradictory tendencies driving their work. On the one hand, there was the development of a sense of transnational community among familiar individuals who mostly worked with genuine sincerity to achieve a common goal, driven on by the internationalist ideals of the post-war period which underpinned the existence of the League itself. On the other hand were the competing national policies they were expected to implement, each intended to safeguard the security of the individual state, which were themselves manifestations

8 Tyler Wasson, ed., *Nobel Prize Winners* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1987), 141–3, 595–7. See also S. S. Jones, *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations* (New York: American Scandinavian Association, 1939).

of the countervailing nationalist attitudes that were already strong by the start of the 1930s and became ever more powerful as more time passed.

Perhaps more than on any other issue, the politicians, diplomats and soldiers who dealt with disarmament were caught between these competing pulls. The hopes that an independent, transnational community might emerge among this group of experts foundered on the clash of the national perspectives they represented. In this sense, the disarmament process sponsored by the League remained dominantly 'inter-national' rather than 'trans-national'. Whereas 'international' means 'between nations' and so reinforces the idea of dealings between states, 'transnational' means 'extending beyond or across national boundaries' and so represents a crossing of the boundaries that separate nations or states. It implies something that goes beyond a sectarian interest, a critical distinction that has been put in precise fashion by a recent study of the international women's movement and its place in the pacifist debates during and after the First World War. Whereas the term 'international negotiation' suggests 'a balancing of national interests between high-level representatives of both sides, charged with getting the best possible for their own country at the least cost in concessions to the other side', the term 'transnational' is more appropriately used 'for negotiation based on common interests among people on either side of the artificial line on the map'.⁹ The contradiction that emerged in the League-sponsored disarmament process was between the 'international' approach preferred by the governments of the major powers in particular, who viewed disarmament from the viewpoint of their own strategic interests, and the 'transnational' ambitions of those League enthusiasts who viewed disarmament as an issue which the world war had shown intimately to affect all humanity regardless of nationality. As a consequence, the disarmament talks took on a truly transnational dimension only briefly and within narrow confines; on the larger scale, they never escaped from the control of the governments of the major powers. It is not difficult to see why this should be so. Disarmament was and is tied absolutely to the issue of security, and this was always likely to be its downfall during this period. Fundamentally, its potential effects on national security were too great for the individual governments of the major powers to view it from anything other than a strictly national strategic perspective or to allow any effective transnational community either to form or to have its way. The problem in essence was that armaments themselves were inextricably national: that is to say, the basic unit of any disarmament negotiation was always first and foremost the nation. There did not exist any non-state community or interest that possessed armaments; the League possessed no international police force and so had no independent voice or community of non-national 'experts' on armaments from which to draw counsel. The politicians, diplomats and soldiers who took on the problem of disarmament at Geneva, nominated by their respective governments, were always going to be national representatives in the first instance.

9 Jo Vellacott, "'Transnationalism' in the Early Women's International League for Peace and Freedom", in Harvey L. Dyck, ed., *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 376.

What, then, was the basis for Madariaga's optimistic claims to the students in August 1927 about a transnational attitude at work in Geneva? At the time of his remarks, in the hopeful interlude of Franco-German reconciliation prompted by the 1925 treaty of Locarno and the apparently imminent convening of a general disarmament conference, the vision of international collaboration by national representatives in the League's work was still common. This was visibly embodied in the multinational collection of personnel that made up the League's Permanent Secretariat, described by Gilbert Murray (a frequent delegate to the League himself) in 1929 as 'a great permanent staff of international officials, whose business is international co-operation . . . These people know each other; they are familiar with the question at issue; they see one another's point of view and national interest.'¹⁰ Led by the British diplomat Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretariat was the permanent administrative organ of the League. Drummond from the start conceived of it as an international civil service, though contrary to popular belief he always recognised that it would of necessity play a political role in its own right. While its members – drawn from over thirty countries and differing in language, religion and degrees of professional experience – received their appointments from the League directly and not from their own national governments, the senior posts were deliberately used as political conduits between Geneva and the key member states.¹¹ Though initially of precarious existence, the survival of the Secretariat was an enduring accomplishment of inter-war internationalism. Indeed, the ability of the League and its various organs to function at all, even on the most basic level of language, is something of an overlooked triumph: Geneva did not turn into a second Tower of Babel. 'The indiscriminate use of English and French for office purposes quickly became an easy working habit', recalled Harold Butler, the director of the International Labour Organisation during the 1930s. 'In the meetings of the League, too, most of the delegates knew one or the other well enough for practical purposes.'¹²

It was members of the Secretariat, working within the many commissions and special committees created to tackle disarmament, who formed the long-term core of the League's transnational approach to the issue. In its original structure, the Secretariat contained a series of 'sections' formed to handle key areas of importance: Political, Information, Legal, Administrative Commissions and Minorities Questions, Economic and Financial, Mandates, Transit and Communications, and Social Questions. The attention that disarmament immediately attracted once the League began to operate led at the first Assembly in December 1920 to the swift addition of a 'Disarmament Section', initially as bureaucratic support specifically for the Temporary Mixed Commission. This was accomplished despite opposition from the French, who wished to keep control of the issue strictly in the hands of the major powers via the military-run Permanent Armaments Commission. They were unable to stem the tide of opinion in Geneva, however, for the Disarmament Section was in fact expanded

10 Gilbert Murray, *The Ordeal of this Generation: The War, the League and the Future* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), 77–8.

11 Walters, *League of Nations*, I, 75–80; James Barros, *Office Without Power: Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 60–71.

12 Harold Butler, *The Lost Peace: A Personal Impression* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), 25.

and made into a distinct independent entity by the 1921 Assembly and was made permanent by the 1923 Assembly.¹³ Nevertheless, still included in the membership of the Disarmament Section were the three secretaries of the PAC's land, sea and air sub-commissions, which by informal agreement were permanently assigned to a French soldier, a British sailor and an Italian airman. These military officers found it particularly difficult to think in international terms. As Madariaga put it, 'active service men lent on short-term contracts to Geneva were expected to remain first and foremost members of their own fighting services, even though serving in Geneva as international officials'.¹⁴

Always the smallest of the League's specialised sections, the Disarmament Section enjoyed a significant continuity in its membership throughout its existence. Its first director was Professor Bernardo Attolico, who had been chief of the Italian food, shipping and raw materials organisation in London during the war. His primary role as under secretary-general for internal administration, and the pressure he came under from Rome after the Fascist takeover of power in Italy, meant that in practice it was the ambitious and self-important Madariaga who ran the section from mid-1922 onwards, taking formal charge from 1926 until he left Geneva for the chair in Spanish studies at Oxford at the end of 1927. Eric Colban, a Norwegian who had formerly headed up the section on minorities, took over until 1930, when Thanassis Aghnides of Greece, previously a senior member of the Political Section, became director until the section's dissolution with the outbreak of war. Only two individuals worked in the Disarmament Section for its entire existence. Nokhim Sloutski, a Russian émigré holding a Nansen passport (an internationally recognized identity card first issued by the League to stateless refugees), edited the League's *Armaments Year-Book* and in 1941 published a still useful study on inter-war armaments based on the section's massive body of documentation. The long-suffering Mlle Gabrielle Boisseau, from France, who served as the section's secretary throughout its life. Among its other members, Manuel Arocha of Venezuela, M. A. Nolda of Germany and F. T. B. Friis of Denmark each worked for the commission for at least five years, while from 1931 two Americans, Francis Colt de Wolf and Noel Field, both formerly of the State Department, served successively in the section.¹⁵

The Disarmament Section rapidly became effective at providing bureaucratic backing for all the League's disarmament work. Though he faced some initial

13 League of Nations, *Records of the First Assembly* (2 vols., Geneva: League of Nations, 1920), I, 508; League of Nations, *Records of the Second Assembly* (3 vols., Geneva: League of Nations, 1921), I, 647–9; League of Nations, *Official Journal* (hereafter OJ), special supplement #13 (1923), 154–5. On French policy see John L. Hogge, 'Arbitrage, Sécurité, Désarmement: French Security and the League of Nations, 1920–1925', Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1994, 33–36, 106–7, 135–6.

14 Salvador de Madariaga, *Disarmament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 82.

15 For the composition of the Disarmament Section of the Secretariat, see samples of the annual staff list in OJ, III, 9 (1922), 1064; OJ, VIII, 1 (1927), 90; OJ, X, 10 (1930), 1419; OJ, XVI, 10 (1935), 1106; OJ, XX, 11–12 (1939), part I, 466–7. See also Salvador de Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon: Memoirs* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973), 24–5; Egon F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie endowment for International Peace, 1945), 128–30; N. M. Sloutzki, *The World Armaments Race, 1919–1939* (Geneva Research Centre: *Geneva Studies*, 12, no. 1 (July 1941)).

opposition, Madariaga ensured that he was able to attend the meetings of the PAC; in addition, he (and subsequently his successors) served as secretary to the Third Committee from 1922 onwards.¹⁶ There were other early battles, which helped define the section's role. The disarmament clauses in the Covenant had called for the 'full and frank' exchange of information on the scale of national armaments; this became the basis for efforts by first the PAC and then the Temporary Mixed Commission to draft and carry out surveys of the extent of armaments around the globe. But when in February 1922 Attolico circulated a new questionnaire on national armaments which his section had drafted on its own, he was firmly and fiercely slapped down by the French representatives. The Disarmament Section's initiative was exactly the sort of independent action, outside the control of the main powers, that the French intended to prevent. Besides their dismay at the general issue of the Secretariat overreaching its prerogatives, the questionnaire itself went beyond what the French were willing to accept by requesting sensitive data on military mobilisation plans. The hostile attitudes in Paris were caught in a note by a senior French diplomat: 'It is dangerous to leave the Secretariat to its own devices', he wrote, '[for] disarmament questions must not be dealt with outside governments'.¹⁷ The initial conception of the exchange of information on armaments as a mandatory submission by each country of specific data on its military readiness was steadily downgraded to a much less intrusive process, whereby the League would independently collect data on each country from official and public sources. In 1923, the Disarmament Section was directed to compile such a comprehensive report, describing the strength and equipment of each state's armed forces, the size of its defence budget and its industrial production in materials of military use. The result was the appearance in mid-1924 of an *Armaments Year-Book*, covering thirty-seven countries; it would subsequently be published annually from 1926 until the outbreak of war and regularly examined over sixty countries. The section also compiled information on the global arms trade, which it published annually from 1926 to 1938 as a *Statistical Year-Book of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition*; the last edition contained data on sixty countries and sixty-four colonies, protectorates and mandated territories. These yearbooks came to be widely regarded as an essential source of information, often the only means of monitoring changes in national armaments even accounting for the inevitable distortion of figures, and they formed a significant part of the Disarmament Section's legacy.¹⁸

Although the section was more than merely secretarial, it did not fulfil the hopes of some that it might constitute a permanent, non-governmental agency to monitor continuously the state of world disarmament and supervise dispassionately a continuing process of international negotiation. The management of the disarmament

16 Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon*, 26, 79–80.

17 Gout to President Millerand, 10 Feb. 1922, quoted in Hogge, 'French Security', 136–7.

18 League of Nations, 'Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission' (Geneva, 15 Aug. 1923), League of Nations Publication (hereafter LNP) A.35.(Part II).1923.IX, 7–9; League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book: General and Statistical Information*, First year (Geneva, 1924), LNP A.37.1924.IX; League of Nations, *Statistical Information on the Trade in Arms, Ammunition and Implements of War* (Geneva, January 1926), LNP 1926.IX.2.

process was instead retained firmly within the hands of commissions of limited mandate which were filled by national delegates. While a debate over the establishment of some form of permanent disarmament commission, with supervisory and possibly even enforcement powers, would echo back and forth within first the Preparatory Commission and then at the WDC and beyond, the factor defeating success always remained the refusal of the major powers to accord to an international body any significant degree of power to act independently in the sphere of national armaments.

In that regard, the body that probably came the closest to achieving the kind of transnational co-operation which success in disarmament might have required was the Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments. Pushed through at the 1920 Assembly primarily by the Scandinavian powers, the commission was intended by its sponsors to supersede the PAC, which had doggedly failed to register any achievements. In contrast to the all-military composition of the PAC, the new body was to be composed of private individuals possessing 'the requisite competence in matters of a political, social and economic nature'. With their range of experience and personal independence, the TMC's members were expected to approach the problem of disarmament in broader terms and without having their hands tied by their various governments. Six members (expanded by 1923 to fourteen) with 'political' expertise were to be appointed by the Council, four would be appointed by the League's Economic and Financial Committee, and six would be drawn from the employers' and workers' groups of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The original conception that this would be an entirely civilian body was overturned, however, as the French and the British ensured that the new commission would also include six military representatives, drawn from the PAC, to provide a check on the potentially dangerous idealism of the civilian members. In addition, the new commission was given only a 'temporary' character, with its mandate to be reviewed annually; the repeated French attempts to block the renewal of the commission's mandate all failed.¹⁹ It was the lack of national accountability that was so objectionable to both Paris and London. Marshal Emile Fayolle, a French member of both the PAC and TMC, complained that 'the creation of this temporary commission... is useless and untimely', while the head of the British Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, would similarly lambaste the TMC's membership as 'absolutely irresponsible amateurs'.²⁰ Yet this independence was of course exactly what appealed to others: as one commentator approvingly pointed out, 'the aim was clearly to obtain a committee more or less denationalised in its collective nature' with a membership that was 'neither entirely

19 *Records of the First Assembly*, I, 503–9; OJ, II, 2 (1921), 146–7; Wheeler–Bennett, *Reduction of Armaments*, 34; Walters, *League of Nations*, I, 219–21; Marie-Renée Mouton, *La Société des Nations et les intérêts de la France, 1920–1924* (Bern: Lang, 1995), 268–78.

20 Report by Fayolle, 4 Oct. 1921, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (hereafter MAE), série Société des Nations (hereafter SDN), 706, fos. 224–7; minute by Crowe, 1 March 1924, quoted in G. A. Silverlock, 'Issues of Disarmament in British Defence and Foreign Policy, 1918–1925', Ph.D. thesis, King's College, London, 2000, 52.

militarists, nor officials, nor technicians, nor the satellites of statesmen'.²¹ Indeed, its entire rationale was that, unlike other League committees dealing with the issue, its members were not representing their governments and so were free to advance whatever ideas seemed most likely to produce real progress. This was brought out most starkly in February 1922, when one of the 'political' delegates, Lord Esher, a Liberal peer who as the *eminence grise* of British defence planning before the war had been a long-serving member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, submitted on his own personal initiative a radical scheme to limit land armaments. Not only did the French find his idea unacceptable, evaluating it as 'a simplistic plan that might have been applicable for the 18th century', so did Esher's own government, for he had advanced it without backing from London.²²

The Temporary Mixed Commission was an active body, meeting ten times between July 1921 and July 1924 and creating numerous sub-committees to study specific issues.²³ It began its work rather narrowly, however, with its initial focus on a limited conception of disarmament intended to establish tentative regimes of control over armaments rather than on ambitious schemes for sweeping reductions of armaments. The French had ensured that the commission had one of their own as its president, René Viviani, the prime minister at the outbreak of war in 1914, and both he and the other French delegates, such as Colonel Réquin, very much took their lead from Paris. Viviani delayed convening its first meeting for as long as possible and thereafter as much as possible steered its work into less contentious areas. Three of the TMC's first four meetings were held in Paris, reflecting the French desire to dominate its agenda. As the French hold over the commission slipped, its meetings similarly shifted to Geneva. This is not to say that it did not do useful work. It co-ordinated the efforts to implement the exchange of information on national armaments, it pressed ahead with attempts to study and publicise the horrors of

21 H. R. G. Greaves, *The League Committees and World Order: A Study of the Permanent Expert Committees of the League of Nations as an Instrument of International Government* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 209.

22 Memo by Réquin, 25 Feb. 1922, MAE, SDN, 707, fos. 68–72. See also memos by Réquin, 24 Feb. and 5 April 1922, *ibid.*, fos. 52 and 131; Philip Towle, 'British Security and Disarmament Policy in Europe in the 1920s', in R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke and M. Howard, eds., *The Quest for Stability: Problems of West European Security, 1918–1957* (London: German Historical Institute, 1993), 131–5.

23 For the composition of the TMC, see sample membership lists in *Monthly Summary of the League of Nations* (hereafter MSLN): MSLN, II, 10 (Oct. 1922), 268–9, and MSLN, IV, 1 (1924), 18–19. Its main 'political' members were René Viviani and Albert Lebrun (France), Lord Robert Cecil, H. A. L. Fisher and Lord Reginald Esher (Britain), Carlo Schanzer (Italy), Karl Branting (Sweden), Colonel Emil Lohner (Switzerland), Enrique Villegas (Chile), Eduardo Cobian (Spain), Francisco Urrutia (Colombia) and Eino Holsti (Finland). Key military representatives from the PAC included Marshal Emile Fayolle and Colonel Edouard Réquin (France), Rear-Admiral Aubrey Smith and Rear-Admiral John Segrave (Britain), General Giovanni Marietti and General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), General S. Inagaki (Japan), Rear-Admiral Antonio Marques de Magaz (Spain), and Rear-Admiral José Penido and Rear-Admiral L. M. de Souza (Brazil). The greatest continuity was among the members from the economic world, with the largest roles played by Albert Janssen (Belgium), from the League's Financial Committee, Colonel David Carnegie (Canada), an employers' representative from the ILO, and Léon Jouhaux (France), secretary-general of the Confédération Générale du Travail, a workers' representative from the ILO.

chemical warfare, and it oversaw the drafting of a new treaty on the global arms traffic and the attempts to draft a similar treaty regulating the private manufacture of arms.²⁴ It also pursued a scheme, arising from an initial proposal by Admiral Segrave, one of the delegates drafted in from the PAC, to extend to lesser maritime states the principles of ratios of naval strength agreed between the chief naval powers at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22. This resulted in an unsuccessful naval conference held in Rome in February 1924, which failed due to the stubborn resistance of the smaller states to accept the limits that the main maritime states sought to impose on them.²⁵ The real progress made on the arms trade treaty was led by the concerted efforts of the Temporary Mixed Commission – the limiting factor for many years was in fact the non-participation of the United States – and it led to the treaty being approved at a conference in Geneva in May–June 1925. The conference was attended by forty-four nations, represented by a selection of individuals already or soon-to-be well-experienced in the disarmament question. Even this success was more apparent than real, however, for the proceedings of the conference revealed a deep split between the larger and smaller powers over issues of state sovereignty, and the treaty itself never actually came into force.²⁶ The private manufacture of armaments, for its part, would preoccupy both the Temporary Mixed Commission and a series of successor special committees throughout the 1920s, drawing in many veterans of the disarmament talks. The years of fruitless meetings, however, ultimately resulted only in a still-disputed plan that was never put up for ratification.²⁷ Still other special sub-committees of the TMC, which dealt for instance with chemical warfare, always managed, though small, to include a core membership of Réquin from France, de Marinis from Italy and Cecil from Britain.²⁸

In the midst of all this more limited work, the expansion of the number of the Temporary Mixed Commission's 'political' members in early 1922 was the spark for

24 League of Nations, 'Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission' (Geneva, 15 Sept. 1921), LNP A.81.1921.IX; League of Nations, 'Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission' (Geneva, 30 July 1924), LNP A.16.1924.IX.

25 League of Nations, Naval Sub-commission of PAC, 'Extension to Non-Signatory States of the Principles of the Treaty of Washington for the Limitation of Naval Armaments', 25 Feb. 1924, LNP C.76.1924.IX.

26 League of Nations, *Proceedings of the Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War, Geneva, 4 May to 17 June 1925* (Geneva, September 1925), LNP A.13.1925.IX. Familiar delegates at the conference included Gustavo Guerrero (Salvador, vice-president of the conference), Joseph Paul-Boncour (France), General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), Christian Lange (Norway), Eduardo Cobian (Spain), Francisco Urrutia (Colombia), Enrique Buero (Uruguay), Admiral L. M. de Souza (Brazil), along with Swedish under-secretary of commerce Einar Hennings, the permanent Czechoslovakian delegate to the League, Ferdinand Veverka, and the US minister to Switzerland, Hugh Gibson.

27 MSLN, IV, 2 (1924), 32–3; MSLN, VII, 3 (1927), 58–9; MSLN, IX, 8 (1929), 256–7. Key delegates dealing with the private manufacture of armaments included Colonel Edouard Réquin, Léon Jouhaux and Joseph Paul-Boncour (France), General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), Lord Robert Cecil (Britain), Count Johann von Bernstorff (Germany), Eduardo Cobian (Spain), François Sokal (Poland), Louis de Brouckère (Belgium), Ferdinand Veverka (Czechoslovakia), Francisco Urrutia (Colombia), Alberto Guani (Uruguay), Gustavo Guerrero (Salvador), Naotake Sato (Japan) and Hugh Gibson (United States).

28 MSLN, III, 3 (1923), 51.

a momentous shift in the commission's approach to disarmament. Not originally a member of the commission, Cecil managed to force his way onto the TMC despite French resistance, abetted by the even greater opposition in Paris to the candidacy of Lange with 'his dangerous pacifist inclinations'.²⁹ Cecil at once set about taking control of the commission's agenda in order to realise his own vision of achieving general disarmament through the provision of new systems for international security. In a political climate where states felt secure, he argued, they would be willing to reduce their armed forces.³⁰ Cecil was one of the most remarkable men whom the League of Nations attracted during the course of its existence. He was a tireless champion of the League and with his 'tall black-coated figure, rounded shoulders and outthrust head' was one of the most familiar sights in its halls. 'He looked like a benevolent vulture', recalled the American diplomat Hugh Wilson.³¹ What made Cecil unique was his willingness to free himself from the restrictions of pursuing disarmament solely along the lines of British strategic self-interest. At the first three sessions of the Assembly, he had in fact represented South Africa and so could and did take a sweeping, independent stance in Geneva. He tried to maintain such a line whenever possible once he became an official British delegate in 1923. The foreign secretary, Austen Chamberlain, indeed complained about him in 1925 that 'both in Paris and Rome I got hints, quite polite but quite unmistakable, that in recent years we seemed to have spoken with two voices – one at Geneva, another in the Foreign Office – and our reputation for good faith has suffered in consequence'.³² Even in January 1930, as the British government representative at the meeting of yet another League committee on new security measures, he would still take an individual stand contrary to that advised by the Foreign Office. 'Had you desired merely a gramophone mouthpiece, you ought to have sent somebody else', he replied to complaints from London.³³ And yet even Cecil could not stray too far from his government's official line, lest his actions be subsequently repudiated by London (as they were in 1930). This made the Temporary Mixed Commission the ideal platform for him, for despite the French conception of its members functioning as national representatives, in formal terms they represented no one but themselves.

Cecil put forward to the commission a series of proposals that attempted to link disarmament with security, eventually submitting an actual draft treaty during 1923. His active French counterpart, Colonel Réquin, was aware that here again there was no actual backing in London for such personal efforts – indeed, Réquin learned that Admiral Segrave had official instructions to vote against Cecil's scheme – and so submitted a competing draft treaty of his own.³⁴ What made matters difficult for the

29 Report by Service Française de la Société des Nations, 18 Feb. 1922, MAE, SDN, 707, fo. 21.

30 Viscount Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (London: J. Cape, 1941), 124–5, 138–41.

31 Wilson, *Diplomat Between Wars*, 218–19. On Cecil see also Lord Robert Cecil, *All the Way* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949); Major-General A. C. Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe* rev. edn (London: Collins, 1939), 66–9.

32 Chamberlain to Salisbury, 2 Jan. 1925, National Archives (hereafter TNA), FO 800/257, fos. 13–14.

33 Cecil (Geneva) to Noel-Baker, 4 March 1930, British Library (hereafter BL), Cecil papers, Add. Mss. 51107.

34 Memo by Réquin, 12 June 1932, MAE, SDN, 828, fos. 208–14. See also minutes of Committee of Imperial Defence, 11 April 1932, TNA, CAB 2/3.

French was that Cecil chaired the series of TMC sub-committees created to study the linking of disarmament to new security measures.³⁵ The two drafts were eventually amalgamated to produce a ‘Treaty of Mutual Assistance’, presented to and endorsed by the Assembly in September 1923, when Cecil was for the first time a formal British delegate.³⁶ It was a particularly awkward moment for the British government, as (in the words of a Foreign Office official) ‘the scheme originally proposed by [Cecil] when in the position of an irresponsible member of a committee, not representing his government, has now assumed final form at a moment when he has become the official representative of His Majesty’s Government’.³⁷ Only an election and a change of government in London from Conservative to Labour resolved the situation without difficult or embarrassing choices having to be made.

With the subsequent rejection of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance in July 1924 by the new Labour government, work on its sequel moved outside the TMC. External imperatives such as the pressure of domestic public opinion and the need for improved Anglo-French relations drove officials in London to join with those in Paris to seek a replacement at the 1924 Assembly. This was found in the ‘Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes’, known as the Geneva Protocol, negotiated mainly between the British and French during a few feverish weeks in Geneva. The Protocol rested on the triple formula of ‘security, arbitration, disarmament’, the key point being its emphasis on the prevention of conflicts through machinery for the compulsory settlement of international disputes. Disarmament was not faced head-on; rather, the implementation of the Protocol’s security provisions were made dependent on the successful conclusion of a general disarmament conference which was to meet during mid-1925. The drafting process for the Protocol was initiated by a joint Anglo-French resolution, drawn up with the mediating help of Edouard Beneš, the Czech foreign minister: the Third Committee (chaired by Beneš) was charged with drafting the security and disarmament provisions of the new agreement; the First Committee (which dealt with legal and constitutional questions and was chaired by Politis of Greece), was to draft provisions for compulsory arbitration and conflict resolution. It was the French and British delegates who stood at the heart of the negotiations, including Joseph Paul-Boncour, Henry de Jouvenel and Léon Jouhaux from the former and Labour ministers Lord Parmoor and Arthur Henderson from the latter – Cecil himself, critically, was not invited to Geneva by the Labour government – but it was Beneš who charted the way between them, with numerous successive drafts.³⁸ The Protocol’s formula for defining the aggressor in any future

35 MSLN, II, 7 (1922), 143–4; MSLN, III, 2 (1923), 5–6; MSLN, III, 5 (1923), 101; MSLN, III, 7 (1923), 143. The core members of these sub-committees were Lord Robert Cecil (Britain), Colonel Edouard Rêquin and Léon Jouhaux (France), General Giovanni Marietti and General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), Albert Janssen (Belgium) and Colonel Emil Lohner (Switzerland).

36 MSLN, III, 9 (1923), 236–9; Wheeler-Bennett, *Reduction of Armaments*, 61–81.

37 Foreign Office memo by Campbell, 25 Jan. 1924, TNA, FO 371/10568, W637/1334/98.

38 Reports of the First and Third Committees, MSLN, IV, supplement (1924), 6–33; MacDonald diary, 21 Sept. 1924, TNA, PRO 30/69/1753; Parmoor to Foreign Office, 18 Sept. 1924, TNA, FO 371/10570, W8063/134/98. See also P. J. Noel Baker, *The Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes* (London: P. S. King, 1925).

conflict was notably influenced by the appearance of the so-called 'American plan' (also known as the 'Shotwell plan'), a draft treaty submitted to the League during 1924 by a group of American academics, former diplomats and soldiers headed by Professor James Shotwell, many of whom were connected with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Its particular interest was as an almost unique input into the League's disarmament process from completely outside the League itself: 'We have no official connections whatever and can speak only for ourselves', assured Shotwell in his covering letter to Secretary-General Drummond.³⁹ As for the Geneva Protocol, the final result of such intensive negotiations at the 1924 Assembly, it was not truly satisfactory to either Britain or France, and in fact the new British Conservative government rejected it early in 1925. Attention that year instead focused on the private negotiations between Britain, France and Germany for a Western security pact, which ultimately resulted in the signing in December of the treaty of Locarno.

The Temporary Mixed Commission showed both the possibilities and limits of the dream for a transnational approach to disarmament. Cecil's initiatives, undertaken independently of his government and without their support, roused real enthusiasm among the other members of the commission and forced the French delegates to respond. The result was a draft treaty that came close to gaining acceptance from the League's member states. Esher, on the other hand, while also acting independently in submitting a draft disarmament scheme, was by contrast quick to let his scheme lapse when it was faced with the stern disapproval of London and Paris.⁴⁰ The TMC's unofficial, independent representatives were in fact at best semi-state actors trying to serve two masters, both the League disarmament vision and their own governments. Many of its members, and not only those from France, never acted as anything other than de facto national delegates. The independence of spirit shown by the commission always remained objectionable to the major powers. It did not represent their official armaments policies and so, 'like the dormouse when it became too rowdy', it was shoved abruptly into the teapot when the chance came in 1925 to replace it with a more amenable disarmament body in the form of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference.⁴¹

Though central to the League's work on disarmament, its Secretariat and special commissions possessed a relatively low profile. The individuals who were dominant in the public eye were in fact the politicians and diplomats who appeared at the annual meetings of the League Assembly and participated in the debates of its 'Third Committee' on disarmament.⁴² Many of them were of course the same veterans of the Geneva scene who sat on those less conspicuous commissions. Such an overlap

39 League of Nations, 'Draft Treaty on Disarmament and Security, Prepared, with a Commentary, by an American Group', 7 July 1924, LNP C.339.1924.IX. See also James T. Shotwell, *On the Rim of the Abyss* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 14–21, 378–85; Walters, *League of Nations*, I, 269–70.

40 Esher to Poincaré, 15 June 1922, MAE, SDN, 707, fos. 259–60; Towle, 'British security and disarmament policy', 134.

41 Greaves, *The League Committees and World Order*, 215.

42 For the composition of the Third Committee at the Assembly, see sample membership lists in OJ, special supplement #16 (Geneva, 1923), 5–6; OJ, special supplement #47 (Geneva, 1926), 5–6; OJ, special supplement #78 (Geneva, 1929), 6–7; OJ, special supplement #172 (Geneva, 1937), 5–6.

of personnel was indicative of the close rein under which most were kept by their respective governments. The delegates from the major powers, such as Lord Robert Cecil for Britain, Joseph Paul-Boncour for France and Count Johann von Bernstorff for Germany, unsurprisingly exercised the most influence. Nevertheless, it was one of the abiding characteristics of the League system that, even on questions as vital as disarmament, it also gave a voice and a powerful public platform to the lesser powers. This was in evidence at the very first Assembly, when the Scandinavian states insisted that the question of general disarmament be put onto the agenda. Karl Branting of Sweden and Christian Lange of Norway were particularly active in pressing for greater progress towards actual disarmament. While Branting presided over the disarmament committee at the 1920 Assembly (and would do so again the following year), Lange forcefully backed an attempt to establish some form of limit on national military budgets, vowing that ‘the peoples will be sadly disillusioned if we leave this hall having given them only a promise – and that a vague one – of studying the question of armaments a long time hence . . . we must do something tangible today’.⁴³ A proposal for a two-year freeze on national armaments expenditure was indeed adopted and circulated to the member states for approval; unfortunately but unsurprisingly it came to nothing, despite repeated attempts over the next four years to garner international support. Lange’s words were consistent with the character of most of the speeches on disarmament from the smaller powers at these early Assemblies: disarmament had to come soon, it was insisted, for world public opinion demanded it and stable peace could not be secured without it. In their advocacy of such initiatives, the representatives of the smaller powers became in effect governmental voices putting the case for a transnational approach. Yet this forum too proved ultimately unproductive. Despite the prestigious status of the annual gatherings of the Assembly and the global attention they garnered, they themselves generated few of the League’s disarmament initiatives. The Third Committee’s early resolutions instead tended to stick to the confirmation or modification of the work of the PAC and TMC. After the creation of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, its active role diminished even further as it was reduced to standing on

Key delegates included: H.A.L. Fisher (Britain, 1920–22), Lord Robert Cecil (South Africa, 1920–22, and Britain, 1923, 1926, 1929–31), Joseph Paul-Boncour (France, 1924–28, 1936–38), Henry de Jouvenel (France, 1922, 1924–26), Léon Jouhaux (France, 1924–28, 1930–31, 1936–37) René Massigli (France, 1929–31), Carlo Schanzer (Italy, 1920–21, 1924) General Alberto de Marinis (Italy, 1924–31), Count Johann von Bernstorff (Germany, 1926–31), Karl Branting (Sweden, 1920–24), Rickard Sandler (Sweden, 1927, 1929–31, 1936–38), Christian Lange (Norway, 1920–26, 1928–31, 1936–38), Eino Rudolf Holsti (Finland, 1922–31, 1936–38), Peter Munch (Denmark, 1924–26, 1929–31, 1936–38), Paul Hymans (Belgium, 1920, 1922, 1924), Louis de Brouckère (Belgium, 1925–27), Jan Loudon (Netherlands, 1922–29), Giuseppe Motta (Switzerland, 1920, 1922, 1925–28, 1936–37), Edouard Beneš (Czechoslovakia, 1920, 1922–31), Nicolas Politis (Greece, 1924, 1927–31, 1936–38), Eméric Pflügl (Austria, 1921–31, 1936–37), François Sokal (Poland, 1927–31), Eduardo Cobian (Spain, 1924–25, 1928–30), Augusto de Vasconcellos (Portugal, 1923–25, 1927, 1936), Enrique Villegas (Chile, 1924–26, 1928–31), Francisco José Urrutia (Colombia, 1920–27, 1930), J. Gustavo Guerrero (Salvador, 1920, 1923–28, 1930), Enrique Buero (Uruguay, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1931), and Naotake Sato (Japan, 1926, 1928–30).

43 Speech by Lange, 14 Dec. 1920, *Records of the First Assembly*, I, 524–6.

the sidelines and exhorting the PCDC about 'the necessity of accomplishing the first step towards the reduction and limitation of armaments with as little delay as possible'.⁴⁴ By the end of the decade, the subject had been practically talked out. In his address to the 1929 Assembly, Beneš, the Czech foreign minister, commented wryly that the preparatory work for a disarmament conference certainly now had to be on the verge of completion, for 'we have hardly anything left to say to one another. Each of us knows the others' views by heart – so much so that we could change places with the greatest ease.'⁴⁵ When the World Disarmament Conference finally opened in February 1932, it was decided to suspend further meetings of the Third Committee while the conference was in session; it would not reconvene until 1936.

It was the element of national interest that would invariably trump the transnational vision in the League-sponsored disarmament process, asserting itself particularly strongly during the 1920s on more tightly controlled commissions such as the PAC and PCDC. These forums only demonstrated how worryingly indefinite was the idea of a 'League spirit'. It seemingly had little to do with the host city itself, for most delegates could not bear Geneva's stuffy hotels, bad food and cold winters. Sir John Simon, a frequent visitor as British foreign secretary in the early 1930s, considered it 'a dreadful place, well worthy of Calvin'.⁴⁶ The countryside around the city provided some diversion (whether for vigorous walks or good meals in rural inns) from the negative aspects of so much international mingling, namely 'the gossip of the cosmopolitan politicians, the huge dreary dinner-parties given by different nations in turn, the depressing cocktail parties and receptions'.⁴⁷ Gaps in understanding and acceptance between the different linguistic, ethnic and racial groups present at League meetings similarly challenged the blithe assertions of its multinational amity. There is, unfortunately, no shortage of disparaging comments even from the most progressive pro-League European commentators about the shortcomings of the non-European nations. In one of the milder examples of the sort, Gilbert Murray, then representing South Africa, wrote from Geneva about the 1921 Assembly that 'one was conscious of many weaknesses in the Assembly: some intrigue, some loquacity, a rather large proportion of small dark Latin nations and so on'.⁴⁸

44 Resolution of the Third Committee, 25 Sept. 1928, OJ, special supplement #63 (Geneva, 1928), 57.

45 Speech by Beneš, 9 Sept. 1929, OJ, special supplement #75 (Geneva, 1929), 73–6. For other examples see speech by Cecil, 1 Oct. 1921, *Records of the Second Assembly*, I, 627–31; speech by Hymans, 26 Sept. 1922, *Records of the Third Assembly*, I, 261–4; speech by Urrutia, 29 Sept. 1923, OJ, special supplement #13 (Geneva, 1923), 151–2; speech by Villegas, 23 Sept. 1926, OJ, special supplement #44 (Geneva, 1926), 102–3; speech by Paul-Boncour, 18 Sept. 1928, OJ, special supplement #67 (Geneva, 1928), 58–62.

46 Simon to Baldwin, 11 Oct. 1933, Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Baldwin papers, 121, fo. 83.

47 Viscount Norwich (Alfred Duff Cooper), *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 163. See also Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London: Cape, 1944), 186–9.

48 Murray to Smuts, 8 Oct. 1921, quoted in Salvador de Madariaga, 'Gilbert Murray and the League', in Gilbert Murray, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), 185.

It was the soldiers, sailors and airmen who quickly acquired the worst reputation as obstacles to a transnational approach to disarmament. The first substantive step of the League's disarmament work was the creation by the Council in May 1920 of a Permanent Armaments Commission, as specified by Article 9 of the Covenant. Each Council member had three representatives on the commission – military officers expert in land, naval and air questions respectively – who were responsible to their various governments and general staffs. The most active and important members on the commission were those from the major European powers, but many also played other roles, including serving on the Temporary Mixed Commission and appearing as national representatives on the Assembly's Third Committee.⁴⁹ The most dynamic figure was unquestionably Colonel Edouard Réquin of France. Madariaga, for one, remembered him as 'the most intelligent and forcible [*sic*] member of the Commission'.⁵⁰ Despite his formal status usually being that of a substitute delegate, it was Réquin who co-ordinated French policy planning for PAC meetings and who did the legwork in Geneva itself. Returning to Paris after yet another round of private discussions, this time lobbying French allies in preparation for a meeting of the Temporary Mixed Commission (on which he also sat), he commented, 'I have no hesitation in confirming that these frequent personal liaisons in Geneva, outside the sessions of our commissions, afford us a real influence and serious advantages.'⁵¹

Dominated by the representatives of the major powers, the PAC's agenda and proceedings over the years when it engaged in substantive work (1920–6) would focus on national security interests rather than on co-operation along international lines. It made no significant efforts to draft a meaningful scheme of armaments reduction; indeed, in December 1920 it formally advised that such an attempt was both premature and potentially dangerous.⁵² The commission's focus was instead almost entirely on a set of limited and highly technical tasks. These included laying down regulations for the military forces of states which applied for admission to the League (such as Estonia and Finland), compiling statistical surveys of national arms programmes and, most broadly, offering technical assessments of the other League disarmament initiatives. In particular, the French representatives ensured that the commission gave its primary attention to the preparation of a scheme for implementing the Council's right of inspection in the former enemy states, as specified

49 For the composition of the PAC, see sample membership lists, MSLN, II, 10 (1922), 271, and MSLN, IV, 1 (1924), 16–18. The most important members were Rear-Admiral John Segrave, Rear-Admiral Aubrey Smith and Colonel J. S. Lowe (Britain); Marshal Emile Fayolle, Vice-Admiral V. Jehenne, Captain J. Deleuze, General Jacques Dumesnil and Colonel Edouard Réquin (France); General Giovanni Marietti and General Alberto de Marinis (Italy); General S. Inagaki and Rear-Admiral J. Kiyokawa (Japan); Rear-Admiral Antonio Marques de Magaz (Spain); and Rear-Admiral José Penido and Rear-Admiral L. M. de Souza (Brazil).

50 Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon*, 61.

51 Memo by Réquin, 28 June 1922, MAE, SDN, 708, fos. 75–6.

52 Edouard Réquin, *D'une guerre à l'autre, 1919–1939* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1949), 13–14, 23–27; Walters, *League of Nations*, I, 120–1, 171, 219; League of Nations, *Procès-Verbal of Meetings of the Council, 1920*, 'General Report of the Permanent Advisory Commission', LNP 20/29/17, 30.

in Article 213 of the Versailles treaty.⁵³ Given the strictly military composition of the PAC, such an unproductive outcome should perhaps not have been altogether surprising and there was no shortage of commentators willing to offer cynical explanations of why this might be so. 'It was as foolish to expect a disarmament convention from such a commission as a declaration of atheism from a commission of clergymen', Madariaga would reflect in 1929.⁵⁴ Another study mocked derisively that, 'while the health official as such has no vested interest in the maintenance of ill-health, the same can hardly be said to apply to the military technician in relation to an army and a navy'.⁵⁵ Certainly, there seemed to be no very active progress made by this group: some of its meetings were entirely futile, for example its seventh session in May 1922, when the commission after five days of discussions declared itself unable to give a precise definition of the term 'war material'.⁵⁶

For their part, however, the military men clung resolutely to arguments of simple pragmatism and the minimum requirements of national security in a world where war was an inevitable part of human society. As one of the foremost military thinkers of the interwar period, J. F. C. Fuller, asserted unequivocally, 'Until humanity has evolved to a more perfect state of peacefulness, wars are likely to be necessary as moral purges.'⁵⁷ None of the armed service chiefs, particularly those of the two states – Britain and France – that formed the key to any progress in League-sponsored disarmament, believed that greater security could be obtained through arms reductions. Rather, they shared the assumption that sufficient military power was in fact essential to guarantee the safety of the state. This led to equally cynical dismissive evaluations of the pro-disarmament lobby: 'The argument that war can never be abolished, since it is merely the outcome of the inexorable laws of evolution, is responsible for the opinion, particularly widespread in Service circles, that all supporters of the League of Nations are academic idealists or, in other words, cranks.'⁵⁸ The results of this tendency for each nation's military delegates to defend their own country's specific need for armaments was seen most clearly in the work of the PAC during 1926, in its slightly expanded form as Sub-Commission A of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference. After seven months of intense labour, it produced a report so crowded with reservations, minority opinions and declarations that it constituted no agreement at all but rather formed a mere compendium of individual national positions. On each issue of debate, the battle was fought on strictly national grounds. Even on the most basic question put to the sub-commission – 'What is to be understood by the expression 'armaments'?' – it returned three competing replies: the first from Britain, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United States; the second from Argentina, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France,

53 League of Nations, 'Rules adopted by the Council for the Exercise of the Right of Investigation' (Geneva, 15 Dec. 1926), LNP 1926.IX.17.

54 Madariaga, *Disarmament*, 78–9.

55 Greaves, *The League Committees and World Order*, 206.

56 MSLN, II, 5 (1922), 95.

57 Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, *The Dragon's Teeth* (London: Constable, 1932), 123–4.

58 Brigadier-General P. R. C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London: Faber, 1934), 33.

Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia; and the third from Chile on its own.⁵⁹ The British military delegate on the sub-commission, Colonel (later Major-General) A. C. Temperley, recalled the ridicule heaped on them at the time and offered up the simple explanation for the difficulties. 'Soldiers, sailors and airmen, like other experts, are not ideally fitted for Commissions, as they are not trained as debaters and, being wed to discipline, are apt to adhere more rigidly to instructions than politicians are accustomed to do. Deadlocks are more frequent and compromises more rare.' Yet, he went on, the relations between the delegates on the commission during that hot and tedious summer in Geneva were generally very pleasant. 'There was a genuine camaraderie between the various members which I have never seen in political commissions, due to our common service in the profession of arms.'⁶⁰

In December 1925, buoyed by the successful conclusion of the Locarno treaty, the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference was created to prepare the way for the convening of a conference to implement general disarmament on a global scale. Initial expectations were that the so-called World Disarmament Conference would meet early in 1927 at the latest; in practice, the Preparatory Commission only finally succeeded in drawing up a draft disarmament convention in December 1930. Much of this was the result of the change in the character of the disarmament process which followed the dissolution of the Temporary Mixed Commission. 'Disarmament had now entered into a more official phase', Madariaga reflected, 'and what was wanted was a committee composed of accredited government representatives with powers to negotiate.'⁶¹ Many of these delegates were again the same figures who had already sat 'independently' on the Temporary Mixed Commission or officially represented their country on the Third Committee, such as Cecil, Paul-Boncour, de Marinis and Lange. The Preparatory Commission's membership also included delegates from the three critical non-League members: Count Johann von Bernstorff from Germany (which joined the League in 1926), Maxim Litvinoff from the USSR (who only began to attend in 1927) and the two 'Hughs', Gibson and Wilson, successive US ministers to Berne.⁶² From this point on, the international community of disarmament negotiators now routinely included German, Soviet and US representatives. In addition, running alongside the Preparatory Commission

59 League of Nations, Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, 'Report of Sub-Commission A (Military, Naval and Air)' (Geneva, Dec. 1926), LNP 1926.IX.16.

60 Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, 53.

61 Madariaga, *Disarmament*, 129–30.

62 For the composition of the PCDC, see sample membership lists in League of Nations, *Documents of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference* (hereafter DPCDC), Series IV (Geneva, 15 June 1927), LNP 1927.IX.5, 6; DPCDC, Series VIII (Geneva, 25 May 1929), LNP 1929.IX.3, 6; DPCDC, Series X (Geneva, 15 Jan. 1931), LNP 1931.IX.1, 13. Its key members were Jan Loudon (Netherlands, president of the commission), Lord Robert Cecil (Britain, until his resignation from the Cabinet in the wake of the failed 1927 Geneva Naval Conference), Lord Cushendun (Britain), Joseph Paul-Boncour (France), René Massigli (France), General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), Naotake Sato (Japan), Louis de Brouckère (Belgium), Einar Hennings (Sweden), Eino Holsti (Finland), Nicolas Politis (Greece), Eduardo Cobian (Spain), Ferdinand Veverka (Czechoslovakia), François Sokal (Poland), Francisco Urrutia (Colombia), and Gustavo Guerrero (Salvador), along with Count Johann von Bernstorff (Germany), Maxim Litvinoff (USSR), Hugh Gibson (United States) and Hugh Wilson (United States).

between 1927 and 1930 was its offshoot, the Committee on Arbitration and Security, which included many of the same figures, although its work steadily diverged from the PCDC and proceeded chiefly towards the elaboration of new forms of international arbitration.⁶³

The nature of the change that had taken place with the creation of the PCDC was quickly evident. General de Marinis, the ubiquitous Italian delegate, was expressing a common view when he insisted on the first day of its first session on the clarification of the status of the commission and its sub-commissions. 'It must be clearly understood that . . . members will represent their governments and will not speak in a personal capacity', he pointed out. The French delegate, Joseph Paul-Boncour, unsurprisingly concurred: 'The final decision rests with us alone, as representatives of our governments.'⁶⁴ The consequence was that the members of the PCDC had very little room to depart from their formal instructions, with their primary identities as national delegates overpowering the alternative role of transnational disarmament experts. It was significant that matters were decided by vote on the PCDC, not settled by consensus. The early sessions were nevertheless able to skate over fundamental disagreements (such as how to limit each state's numbers of trained military reservists) by continually postponing confrontations over contentious issues, causing the commission's work to drag out in stalemate. The results raised mixed reactions in the various national capitals: the massive report of one sub-commission was rather airily dismissed by a Foreign Office official in London as 'a marvellous piece of work when one considers the polyglot composition of the committee. But what waste of time and money'.⁶⁵ Elements of agreement did not spring from fruitful searches for common ground among the delegates, but rather came as concessions driven primarily by national pressures from home, made in order not to garner the blame for failure. When a 'second reading' draft treaty emerged from the commission in May 1929, it was because the setbacks of the previous years had left the major powers in a chastened mood and willing merely to abandon their most contested proposals.⁶⁶

Further delay was no longer an option when the commission met for what would be its final session in November–December 1930. Though it did manage at last to conclude a draft disarmament treaty, it still proved impossible to find a way to harmonise the fundamental political conflicts dividing the major powers. While many of the usual faces were there, the key players would be the delegates of the major European powers – Cecil for Britain, Massigli for France and Bernstorff for

63 For the composition of the CAS, see sample membership lists in DPCDC, Series V (Geneva, 16 Jan. 1928), LNP 1928.IX.2, 35; DPCDC, Series IX (Geneva, 16 June 1930), LNP 1930.IX.3, 7. Its key members included Edouard Beneš (Czechoslovakia, president of the committee), Joseph Paul-Boncour (France), René Massigli (France), Lord Robert Cecil (Britain), Lord Cushendun (Britain), General Alberto de Marinis (Italy), Eino Holsti (Finland), Nicolas Politis (Greece), François Sokal (Poland) and Naotake Sato (Japan).

64 Speeches by de Marinis and Paul-Boncour, 18 May 1926, DPCDC, Series II (Geneva, 1 Aug. 1926), LNP 1926.IX.7, 11, 13.

65 Minute by Kirkpatrick, 12 March 1927, TNA, FO 371/12662, W2482/61/98.

66 Report by Salisbury, 22 March 1929, TNA, CAB 24/202, CP 91(29); memo by Massigli, 14 May 1929, MAE, SDN, 856, fos. 208–16.

Germany – and no amount of personal amity or co-operation established over years of close interaction could overcome the more important pragmatic needs of national interest. On the contrary, the talks sparked off antagonisms which affected the final product. Cecil and Bernstorff repeatedly clashed during the fierce debates, to the satisfaction of Massigli, who strove to make common cause with the British delegate. Cecil reported that ‘I have become great personal friends with Massigli, who is certainly delightful to work with. He really is a fair-minded Frenchman, with all their extreme alertness and intelligence and more than their usual honesty.’⁶⁷ Whereas Réquin had been the ubiquitous French representative on disarmament matters for the initial years of the League’s activities, from the late 1920s onwards that role fell to Massigli, the head of the Quai d’Orsay’s League of Nations section. He was extremely pleased with the extent of the ‘solidarity with the Anglo-Saxon representatives’ he had been able to establish.⁶⁸ Bernstorff by contrast, a former German ambassador to Washington and now a Democratic member of the Reichstag, was a man of very stiff manners who ‘strutted about the halls of the Palais des Nations with a cold and haughty air’.⁶⁹ He repeatedly attacked the draft treaty in the commission’s open sessions as a mere sham, although in private conversation he was more reasonable.⁷⁰ Cecil considered Bernstorff and the German delegates to be ‘quite incredibly stupid’: ‘I would have gladly worked with them if they had even once put forward any proposal which they really believed would be adopted and would make for disarmament, but they have done nothing but make more or less dishonest demagogic speeches explaining how badly they are being treated.’⁷¹ On almost all the contentious issues, Cecil and Massigli voted together against the positions defended by Bernstorff. Cecil was willing to accept compromises and imperfect provisions in order to ensure that the World Disarmament Conference was actually convened at last. Personally affronted by Bernstorff’s obstructionism, he responded by linking with the French in taking a hard line towards German demands. The treaty which resulted was not one likely to command easy approval at the disarmament conference itself.⁷²

The World Disarmament Conference opened at last with the representatives of fifty-nine nations gathering on the grey Geneva day of 2 February 1932. Six commissions were quickly created to deal with various aspects of the question, with at their heads key experts from the previous decade of League efforts.⁷³ Perhaps the most

67 Cecil (Geneva) to Noel-Baker, 25 Nov. 1930, BL, Cecil papers, Add. Mss. 51107, fo. 143.

68 Massigli (Geneva) to Quai, 27 Nov. 1930, MAE, série Y, 516, fos. 199–207.

69 Geneviève Tabouis, *They Called Me Cassandra* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), 67.

70 Speech by Bernstorff, 13 Nov. 1930, DPCDC, Series X, 88; J. Bernstorff, *The Memoirs of Count Bernstorff* (London: Heinemann, 1936), 313–15; Cecil (Geneva) to Henderson, 4 Dec. 1930, TNA, FO 371/14970, W13289/31/98.

71 Cecil (Geneva) to Gilbert Murray, 29 Nov. 1930, BL, Cecil papers, Add. Mss. 51132, fos. 122–4. See also speeches by Cecil, 27 Nov. and 2 Dec. 1930, DPCDC, Series X, 262–3 and 325.

72 DPCDC, ‘Draft Convention’ (Geneva, 9 Dec. 1930), LNP 1930.IX.8.

73 MSLN, XII, 2 (Feb. 1932), 35–8; MSLN, XII, 5 (May 1932), 146–7. The commissions were: Political, chaired by Arthur Henderson (Britain, conference president) with Nicolas Politis (Greece) as vice-chairman and Edouard Beneš (Czechoslovakia) as rapporteur; Military, chaired by Enrique Buero (Uruguay); Naval, chaired by Eric Colban (Norway, former head of the Secretariat’s Disarmament Section); Air, chaired by Salvador de Madariaga (Spain, former head of the Secretariat’s Disarmament Section), with Christian Lange (Norway) as rapporteur; National Defence Expenditure, chaired by

notable absence was Cecil, who had declined to serve as a British delegate to the conference because of his unhappiness with the policy proposals of the National Government.⁷⁴ Yet despite the apparent plethora of the usual faces, in the opening stages of the conference it was the leading politicians from the various governments, including some who had never come to Geneva before, who dominated proceedings. Many of the long-serving experts from the Third Committee and Preparatory Commission were still present, attached to their country's delegation, but they were now swamped by the influx of new politicians, diplomats and soldiers seeking to protect the interests of their respective state or indeed armed service. Most of the more important states were represented in the first months by their prime ministers or foreign ministers. The question of national armaments was too important to do otherwise. As Samuel Hoare, a Cabinet member in the British National Government, recalled, 'From 1931 to 1935, there was scarcely a meeting of the Cabinet or the Committee of Imperial Defence in which disarmament was not discussed in one form or another.'⁷⁵ The result for the conference of this focus on individual national concerns was, as might have been predicted, stalemate. This often took the form of a relentless descent into trivialities. Britain's representative on the conference's military commission, Lord Stanhope, the under-secretary of state for war, wrote to his prime minister in late May 1932 that 'our committee on guns spent 2 hours in discussing whether we were justified in discussing a subject they had been talking about for 2 days'.⁷⁶ By mid-June 1932, the British foreign secretary despaired that the conference 'has been living for weeks on technical experts and it is in danger of dying from technical experts'.⁷⁷ Still, it was hardly entirely their fault, as one of the British military 'technical experts' recalled: 'When the politicians were confronted with an insoluble problem or wished to waste time, the invariable device was to appoint a technical committee.'⁷⁸ Introducing on 20 July a resolution to bring the first session of the conference to a close, Beneš almost incidentally put his finger on the core of the problem: political differences were blocking meaningful co-operation among the delegates of the major states, with matters being decided only by backroom horse-trading on a basis of strict national interest. The text of the resolution was a compromise, he said, reached only through 'the private conversations of certain Great Powers and the mutual concessions they have made during the last few days'.⁷⁹

Even into its second year, the conference's committees saw little real negotiation; delegates tended simply to stick to their own positions in the face of all arguments. On the Air Committee, the British minister for air, Lord Londonderry, would not put forward any constructive proposals and so, in the words of the unhappy

Augusto de Vasconcellos (Portugal); Special Committee on Effectives, chaired by Louis de Brouckère (Belgium). Thanassis Aghnides, head of the Secretariat's Disarmament Section, acted as conference secretary.

74 Cecil to Simon, 30 Dec. 1931, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Simon papers, 70, fos. 100–103.

75 Lord Templewood (Samuel Hoare), *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), 25.

76 Stanhope (Geneva) to Baldwin, 25 May 1932, CUL, Baldwin papers, 118, fo. 179.

77 Simon to Tyrrell, 9 June 1932, TNA, FO 800/287, fo. 79.

78 Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, 191.

79 Speech by Beneš, 20 July 1932, MSLN, XII, 7 (July 1932), 208–24.

diplomat Alexander Cadogan, 'could only sit looking rather like a boiled owl'.⁸⁰ The disarmament issue was now more highly politicised than it had ever been. This was not solely to do with the accession to power of Hitler in Germany in January 1933. Disarmament had from mid-1932 replaced reparations as the key issue dividing France and Germany, and this in fact changed the very nature of the question. Concessions over German disarmament were vital to Berlin to cover their already ongoing illegal rearmament; confrontation and an absolute refusal of all compromise followed. As the conference dragged interminably onward and no progress seemed possible, many of the more prominent figures departed. Left behind, still talking about many of exactly the same issues, were some of those delegates who had dealt with disarmament throughout the 1920s. At the meeting on 14 October 1933 which saw the spectacular withdrawal of Germany from both the disarmament conference and the League itself, looking on were familiar figures who had sat at meeting after meeting of the Temporary Mixed Commission, the Committee on Arbitration and Security, the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference and the Third Committee.⁸¹

Even after the final collapse of the World Disarmament Conference in June 1934, attempts continued to be made in Geneva to secure limited arms control initiatives: on the regulation of the trade in and manufacture of armaments, on publicising national budgetary expenditure on armaments, and on the creation of a permanent international disarmament commission. Unsurprisingly, these too met with no success.⁸² The executive bureau of the WDC met one last time in May 1937, but only to urge that work continue and to direct the Disarmament Section of the Secretariat to carry out a survey of existing national policies for controlling the manufacture of and trade in arms.⁸³ Along with the preparation of the *Armaments Year-Book*, this was all the work left for those officials to do. In deference to the disarmament conference, the Assembly's Third Committee had not met between 1932 and 1935. When it once again convened at the 1936 Assembly, some of the same old faces were still in evidence: Nicolas Politis represented Greece and was the provisional chairman of the WDC following the death of Arthur Henderson in 1935, while Christian Lange of Norway chaired the committee.⁸⁴ The following year, with much the same turnout, once again it was the smaller European powers (Belgium,

80 Cadogan to Lady Theo, 20 Feb. 1933, Churchill College, Cambridge, ACAD 3/6.

81 League of Nations, *Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments: Conference Documents*, III (Geneva, April 1936), LNP 1936.IX.4, 865. Among them were Joseph Paul-Boncour (France), René Massigli (France), Edouard Beneš (Czechoslovakia), Nicolas Politis (Greece), Peter Munch (Denmark), Eino Holsti (Finland), Christian Lange (Norway), Rickard Sandler (Sweden), Giuseppe Motta (Switzerland), Eméric Pflügl (Austria), Augusto de Vasconcellos (Portugal), Salvador de Madariaga (Spain), Enrique Buero (Uruguay), Naotake Sato (Japan) and Hugh Wilson (United States).

82 See, e.g., *Survey of International Affairs, 1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 47–58.

83 MSLN, XVII, 5 (1937), 103–5; OJ, XVII, 12 (1937), 913–14.

84 OJ, special supplement #158 (Geneva, 1936), 5–7. See also n. 42 above. Also present were three other delegates who had all been involved with disarmament during the 1920s: Raoul Dandurand (Canada), Alberto Guani (Uruguay) and Manuel Arocha (Venezuela, long before a member of the Disarmament Section of the Secretariat).

Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) that made a final effort for the Assembly to achieve some amount of disarmament. It was still hoped that small steps might serve as a means to restart a wider disarmament process. A joint resolution introduced by Lange, now far removed from the heady and hopeful days of the early 1920s when he had won the Nobel Peace Prize and led the charge for budgetary limits on national armaments, called on League members, as 'a first step' towards the conclusion of a general disarmament agreement, to 'examine the possibility of adopting internal measures' to supervise the manufacture of and trade in arms.⁸⁵ Paul-Boncour, still representing France, insisted that the committee recognise the enormous amounts of technical work that had been accomplished, asserting against all appearances that 'the work of the [Disarmament] Conference, however compromised in its results, had not been useless. It had opened up possibilities, not only for the future, but also for the present'.⁸⁶ When the League Council met at the end of September 1938, in the midst of the crisis over Czechoslovakia, Secretary-General Joseph Avenol reported that the planned reconvening of the conference's executive bureau had been put off due to 'the political situation'. He felt it better to postpone indefinitely any further meetings 'to a more propitious date'.⁸⁷ It was the last stitch of the lengthy disarmament thread.

Floating on such tides, the disarmament 'community' in Geneva was ultimately little more than flotsam and jetsam. Certainly the continuity of the various individuals dealing with disarmament during the inter-war years was remarkable. Figures like Cecil, R equin, Paul-Boncour, Massigli, de Marinis, Beneš, Politis and Bernstorff, plus the Scandinavians, turned up again and again. The mere attendance of representatives from non-League states, such as the United States, was a demonstration of the power of an issue such as disarmament to 'educate' them in internationalism. But the unfortunate truth is that they ultimately accomplished very little. The moral authority of some of them was significant enough that they could never be summarily dismissed, particularly figures from the smaller powers, such as Lange and Beneš, but the most powerful and influential delegates were always those who represented the great powers and they remained wedded to their own strategic concerns. The dedication of the tiny staff of the Secretariat's Disarmament Section, the independent spirit of the individuals on the Temporary Mixed Commission, the determined advocacy of the smaller states on the Third Committee and even the camaraderie of the soldiers, sailors and airmen on the Permanent Armaments Commission – all of these incorporated elements of the transnational dream which Madariaga so proudly proclaimed, yet none of them could produce the degree of compromise necessary for a functioning disarmament agreement to emerge. Instead, the imperatives of national interest won out time and again. The progress to a draft disarmament convention in 1930 did not spring from the common cause of a transnational community of experts, but rather came through the intercession of national governments responding to the external pressure of public demands for progress. The failure of the 1924 Rome

85 OJ, special supplement #169 (1937), 92; OJ, special supplement #172 (1937), 8–11, 15–17.

86 Speech by Paul-Boncour, 23 Sept. 1937, OJ, special supplement #172 (1937), 12–13.

87 OJ, XIX, 11 (1938), 876.

naval conference and the 1925 Geneva arms traffic conference both testified to the unwillingness of even the smaller powers to surrender their national interests for the sake of obtaining disarmament agreement.

In all the disarmament negotiations conducted under the auspices of the League of Nations, it was thus the individual nation-states that dominated. Yet it must always be remembered that the League itself was far more than merely incidental to this process. Indeed, it was the League which supervised, organised and in its own fashion drove onward the disarmament talks. Without it, the momentum and imperative to continue any ongoing process of disarmament would likely have expired long before 1933, when it did in fact effectively perish. Unlike the case of the economic and financial spheres of the League's work, experts on disarmament were not seconded from wherever appeared useful. Rather, with the exception of the Temporary Mixed Commission, they came only as nominated representatives of governments, which chose them from manageable groups: the armed forces, the diplomatic corps and mainstream domestic politics. The rise of the independent 'expert' during the inter-war period thus did not give rise to a separate, transnational voice on the disarmament question. What the League achieved, therefore, was not the transnational dream of its most committed supporters in the shape of a global community working for the benefit of all humanity, but rather the creation of a meaningful and surprisingly effective forum for the conducting of international business. The inter-war disarmament committees may have left no substantive legacy of technical expertise, as the post-1945 focus of attention shifted to the new challenges of atomic arms control, but some of the tasks assigned to the new United Nations remained the same, such as the collection of information and consideration of the limitation of national military budgets.

When Cecil addressed the final session of the League Assembly in April 1946 as it handed its tasks over to the new United Nations, it was once again to the transnational dream that he turned, the vision that had underpinned so many of the high hopes held out for the League. Cecil cast his mind back to the very first meeting of the Assembly. 'I see again the hall crowded with representatives of the different countries, most of whom were seeing one another for the first time. I remember it was at the outset rather a chilly audience without any cohesion or corporate life. Speeches were made and business was done, but it was still merely a collection of individuals.' However, he recalled, the business of coming together to think about and try to act on the problems of the world wrought an incredible change during that first session, for 'the spirit of the Assembly changed. It began to live, and what came to be known as the "atmosphere of Geneva" came into existence.'⁸⁸ A powerful sense of international spirit and a real degree of co-operation between nations was indeed a legacy of the League's work. But on issues like disarmament, that internationalism did not transform itself into a true 'transnational' community. The 'atmosphere of Geneva' still never induced the delegates charged with carrying it out to forget 'the nation whence they came'.

88 Speech by Cecil, 9 April 1946, OJ, special supplement #194 (Geneva, 1946), 29.