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NAVAL PARITY OR REDUCTION?

One of the biggest topics for international discussion for the next few years will be armaments—navies and naval ratios. Just 20 years after the World war this old world finds herself bristling again with arms of even more deadly character than were those used in that great conflagration. Every nation today is building up her land and sea forces. President Roosevelt, while on his Hawaiian cruise, promised naval officials and the nation that America would have a full Navy in four years—that is, a Navy up to full treaty strength. The Navy's building program authorized by the last Congress is now under way.

Under the Vinson Act passed by that Congress 102 fighting craft are to be added to the Navy by 1942. Thirty-two war vessels were laid down during the past fiscal year. On August 15 the Navy will open bids for several new cruisers, six submarines, two heavy and 12 light destroyers. Plans have already been approved for build-up 12 light destroyers, two heavy destroyers and five submarines in 1936. The Vinson Act also calls for the construction of 2,184 airplanes for the Navy to keep up aviation strength parallel with treaty powers. And to keep pace with the naval building program the personnel of this important branch of national defense will have to be increased by approximately 6,000 men.

Of course the big moment in the naval world now is the forthcoming 1935 naval conference. At that conference, it has long been expected, Japan would ask parity with England and the United States. After President Roosevelt's pledge of a full Navy in four years Japan's new premier, Keisuke Okada, declared that, while Japan did not expect to attain parity with Britain and America at that time, she could not favor continuation of the present ratio which "hurts the self-respect of nations." But the abandoning of parity plans was denied by high Japanese naval circles.

The present ratio of naval strength of the three nations, fixed by the Washington treaty of 1922, is, of course, 5-5-3, with Japan on the little end. Japan has long been dissatisfied with that ratio in capital ships. Thus today finds the Japanese built up to, if not actually surpassing, treaty strength in fighting ships. England, too, is much nearer treaty strength than the United States. When asked to comment on the Japanese declaration Secretary of the Navy Swanson said he would insist that the 5-5-3 ratio stand intact. Instead of Japanese parity with the world's two leading naval powers the Secretary advocated, as his own personal view and not administration policy, a general reduction of 20 per cent in naval armaments—providing all the powers signatory to the London Treaty agree.

Swanson

But Japan doesn't think very much of the idea. So truly there is little prospect of any general armaments reduction. The recent arms conference at London proved the futility of such a confab. With a real or imaginary enemy jumping at its throat there is hardly a nation today that does not think it better to arm to the teeth and put up a good fight than to risk an invasion and be at the mercy of her attackers. It was ever thus.