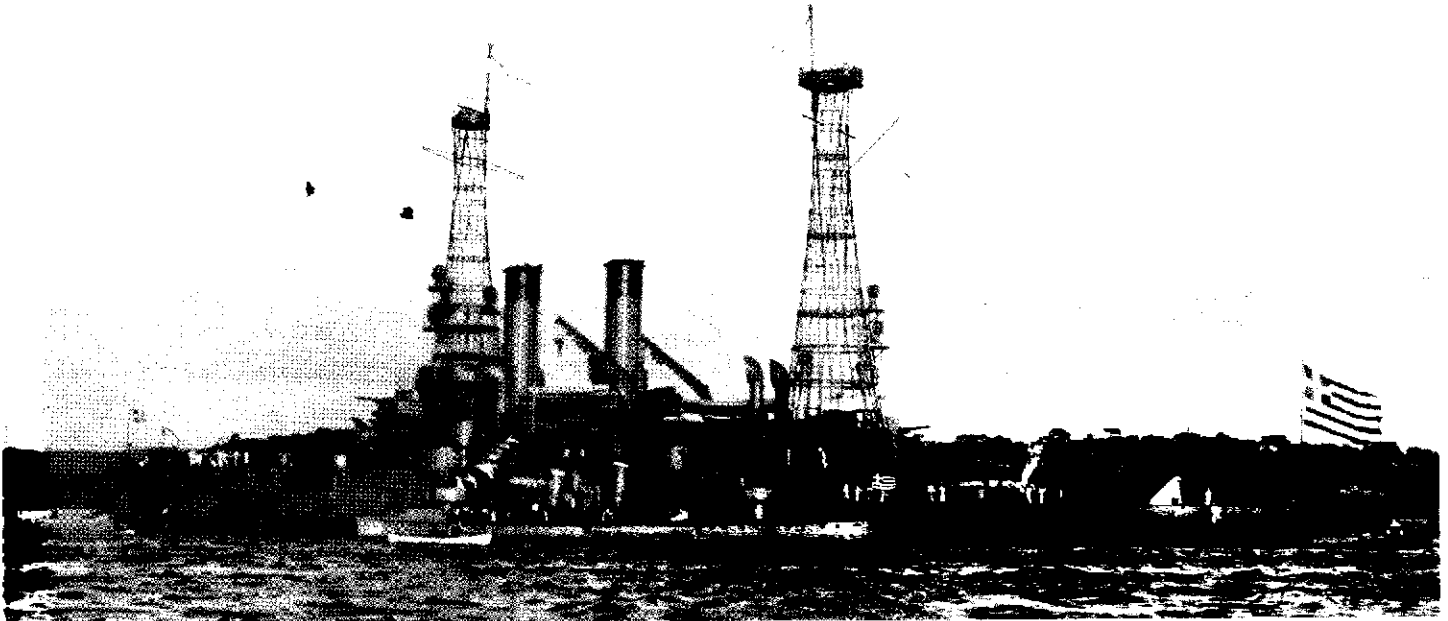


# THE GREECE–TURKEY NAVAL PROTOCOL OF 1930

DAVID CHESSUM



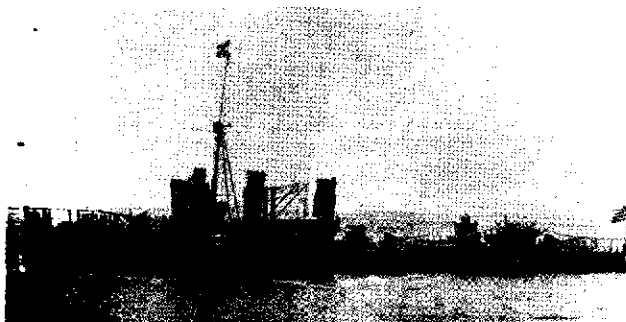
**The Greek battleship Lemnos (ex-U. S. Idaho, Battleship No. 24) seen at Constantinople, Turkey, probably in 1919. Official US Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph NH 46708. The Greek torpedo boat Dafni appears alongside the battleship.**

Antagonism between Greece and Turkey had existed since the former had achieved independence from the Ottoman Empire early in the nineteenth century. Direct naval rivalry in the interwar period can be traced directly to the first Balkan War of 1912–13, when the Greek armored cruiser *Georgios Averof* provided Greece with sufficient naval superiority to prevent the transportation by sea of Turkish troops in the Aegean – a recognised factor in Turkey's defeat in that war.<sup>1</sup>

This accomplishment added fuel to an emerging naval race between the two powers. Turkey had ordered a battleship from England prior to the Balkan war,<sup>2</sup> and Greece had countered with the order of the battleship *Salamis* from Germany. Then in 1913 the Brazilian Navy offered the partially complete battleship *Rio de Janeiro*, then building in England, for sale. Greece made desperate attempts both to

raise loans to buy the incomplete ship, and to apply diplomatic pressure to prevent Turkey from doing the same. They were unsuccessful on both counts, and Turkey purchased the ship, renaming her *Sultan Osman I*. Greece responded by ordering a further battleship from France, but the two Greek ships were far behind the Turkish ships in construction, and it was clear that Greece would face a capability gap in the period between the delivery of the Turkish ships and the completion of the Greek ships. In 1914, therefore, as the Turkish ships were nearing completion, Greece purchased two second-hand battleships – *Mississippi* and *Idaho* – from the US Navy to fill the temporary void.<sup>3</sup> Turkey attempted to stop the sale, asserting that Greece would attack Turkey as soon as they had a momentary naval advantage, and even tried to buy the ships themselves by offering more than the Greeks, but Congress approved the sale of the ships to Greece on 23 June 1914, and both vessels were in Greek service by the end of July 1914.<sup>4</sup>

Warships building, purchased, or ordered by Greece and Turkey during this period are listed in the two tables below. As can be seen from these tables, the outbreak of World War One in 1914 seriously disrupted the programs, with all of the warships then under construction either taken over by the nations building them for service in their own fleets, or abandoned and not completed. In Turkey's case this loss was partially offset by the transfer to Turkey, upon the outbreak of war, of the German Mediterranean Squadron consisting of the battle cruiser *Goeben* (renamed *Yavuz Sultan Selim*<sup>5</sup>) and the light cruiser *Breslau* (renamed *Medilli*).



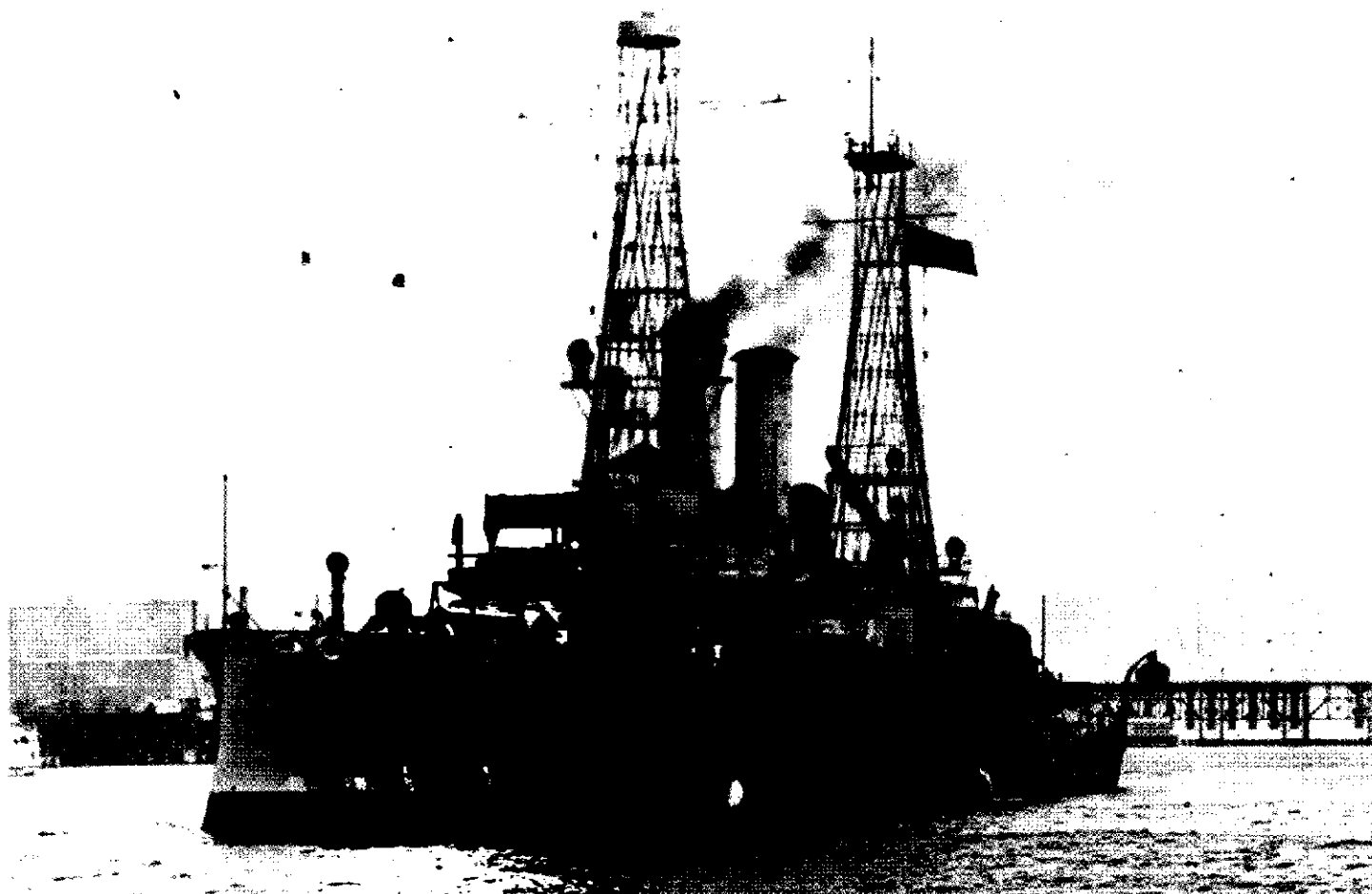
**The small (2600-ton) Greek cruiser Helle. Originally ordered from the New York Shipbuilding Corp. by the Chinese Navy as Fei Hung, she was offered for sale following the Chinese Revolution and purchased by Greece in 1914. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.**

Table 1: Warships Building, Purchased, or Ordered by Greece, 1912–14<sup>9</sup>

| Name                         | Type         | Ordered From | Tonnage | Fate                                  |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Vasileus Konstantinos</i> | Battleship   | France       | 23,500  | Not completed                         |
| <i>Salamis</i>               | Battleship   | Germany      | 19,500  | Not completed                         |
| <i>Kilkis</i> <sup>7</sup>   | Battleship   | USA          | 12,500  | Delivered                             |
| <i>Lemnos</i>                | Battleship   | USA          | 12,500  | Delivered                             |
| <i>Katsonis</i>              | Cruiser      | UK           | 5,200   | Taken over by UK <i>Chester</i>       |
| <i>Kountouriotis</i>         | Cruiser      | UK           | 5,200   | Taken over by UK, <i>Birkenhead</i>   |
| <i>Helle</i> <sup>8</sup>    | Cruiser      | USA          | 2,600   | Delivered                             |
| <i>Chios</i>                 | Destroyer    | UK           | 1,000   | Taken over by UK, <i>Melampus</i>     |
| <i>Kriti</i>                 | Destroyer    | UK           | 1,000   | Taken over by UK, <i>Medea</i>        |
| <i>Lesvos</i>                | Destroyer    | UK           | 1,000   | Taken over by UK, <i>Medusa</i>       |
| <i>Samos</i>                 | Destroyer    | UK           | 1,000   | Taken over by UK, <i>Melpomene</i>    |
| <i>Aetos</i>                 | Destroyer    | UK           | 980     | Delivered <sup>9</sup>                |
| <i>Ierax</i>                 | Destroyer    | UK           | 980     |                                       |
| <i>Panther</i>               | Destroyer    | UK           | 980     |                                       |
| <i>Leon</i>                  | Destroyer    | UK           | 980     |                                       |
| <i>PS</i>                    | Submarine    | France       | 457     | Taken over by France, <i>Antigone</i> |
| <i>X</i>                     | Submarine    | France       | 457     | Taken over by France, <i>Amazone</i>  |
| <i>Aigli</i>                 | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |
| <i>Alkyoni</i>               | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |
| <i>Arethousa</i>             | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |
| <i>Dafni</i>                 | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |
| <i>Doris</i>                 | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |
| <i>Thetis</i>                | Torpedo Boat | Germany      | 120     | Delivered                             |

Table 2: Warships Building, Purchased, or Ordered by Turkey, 1912–14<sup>10</sup>

| Name                                | Type       | Ordered From | Tonnage | Fate                               |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Sultan Osman I</i> <sup>11</sup> | Battleship | UK           | 27,500  | Taken over by UK, <i>Agincourt</i> |
| <i>Reshadieh</i>                    | Battleship | UK           | 23,000  | Taken over by UK, <i>Erin</i>      |
| <i>Fatih</i>                        | Battleship | UK           | 23,000  | Not completed                      |
| <i>No 1</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>No 2</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>No 3</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>No 4</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>No 5</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>No 6</i>                         | Destroyer  | France       | 1,040   | Cancelled                          |
| <i>Yard No 458 / 520</i>            | Submarine  | UK           | 660     | Taken over by UK, <i>E25</i>       |
| <i>Yard No 459 / 521</i>            | Submarine  | UK           | 660     | Taken over by UK, <i>E26</i>       |
| <i>Aydin Reis</i>                   | Gunboat    | France       | 502     | Delivered                          |
| <i>Burak Reis</i>                   | Gunboat    | France       | 502     | Delivered                          |
| <i>Preveze</i>                      | Gunboat    | France       | 502     | Delivered                          |
| <i>Sakiz</i>                        | Gunboat    | France       | 502     | Delivered                          |
| <i>Hizir Reis</i>                   | Gunboat    | France       | 413     | Delivered                          |
| <i>Isa Reis</i>                     | Gunboat    | France       | 413     | Delivered                          |



*One of the two Greek battleships purchased from the USA, either Kilikis or Lemnos, seen in a U. S. port. Official US Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph NH 77442.*

Apart from a small number of submarines procured by both parties, there was no significant attempt by either nation after World War I to strengthen their naval strength prior to 1928, at which time the balance of naval strength was represented by Table 3 below:

*Table 3: Balance of Naval Strength, 1 January 1928<sup>12</sup>*

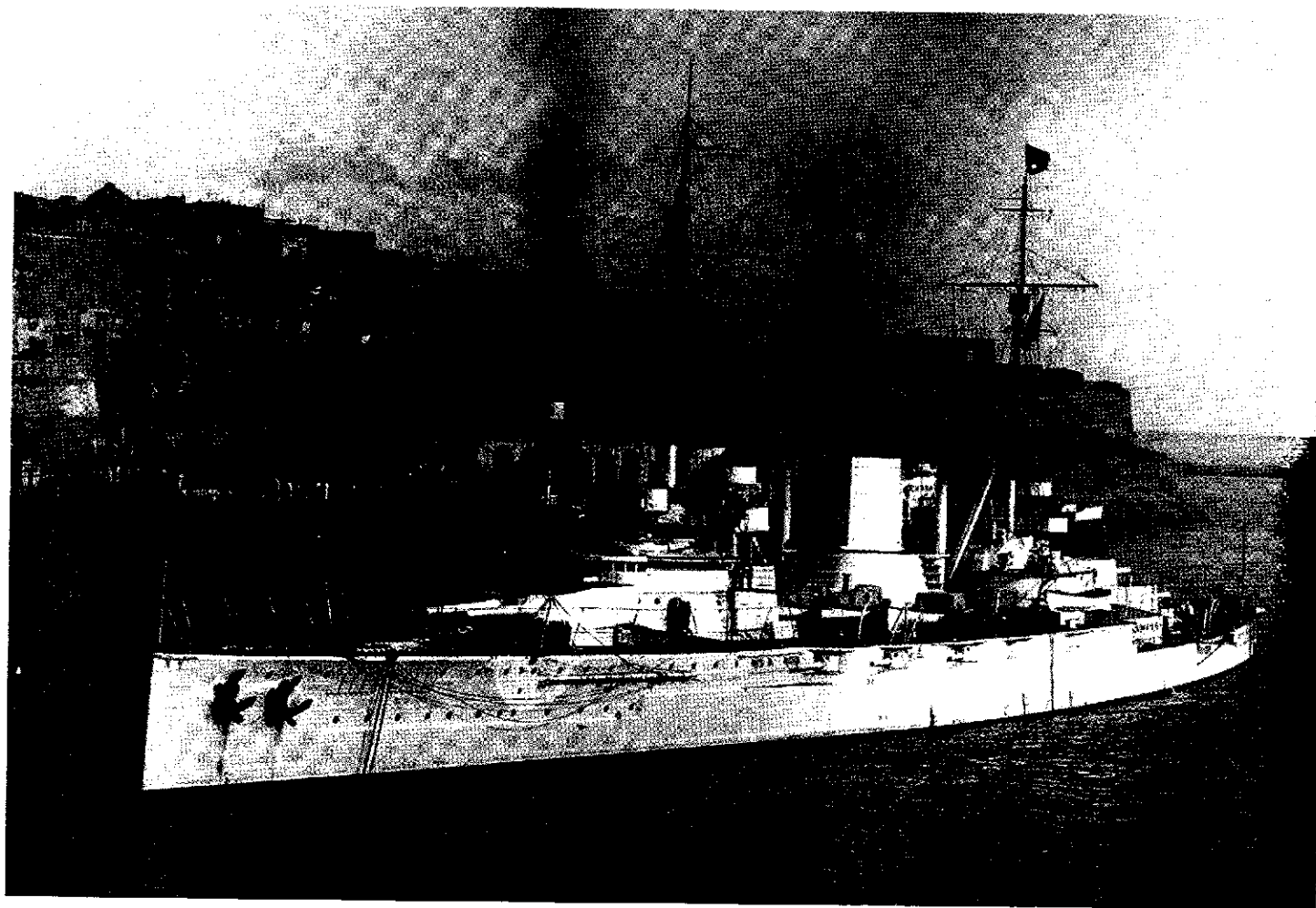
| Greece                                                   |                  |         | Turkey                                    |                |         |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------|-------------------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| Name                                                     | Type             | Tonnage | Name                                      | Type           | Tonnage |
| <i>Kilikis</i>                                           | Battleship (old) | 12,500  | <i>Yavuz</i>                              | Battle cruiser | 22,980  |
| <i>Lemnos</i>                                            | Battleship (old) | 12,500  |                                           |                |         |
| <i>Giorgios Averof</i>                                   | Armored Cruiser  | 9,956   | <i>Medjidieh</i>                          | Cruiser (old)  | 3330    |
| <i>Helle</i>                                             | Cruiser          | 2,600   | <i>Hamidieh</i>                           | Cruiser (old)  | 3830    |
| Destroyers x 10                                          |                  | 350–980 | Destroyers x 3                            |                | 290     |
| Torpedo Boats x 12                                       |                  | 120–241 | Torpedo Boats x 2                         |                | 98      |
| <i>Katsonis</i> class Submarines x 2                     |                  | 585     | <i>Birinci Inonu</i> class Submarines x 2 |                | 505     |
| <i>Proteus</i> class Submarines x 4 (under construction) |                  | 750     |                                           |                |         |

*Yavuz* was by far the most powerful warship in either navy, but damage incurred during World War One had not yet been effectively repaired, and the ship was in such a poor condition that the Greek Navy had an effective superiority over the Turkish fleet at this time.<sup>13</sup> At the 1924 Rome conference, Greece declared that it was willing to accept a 36,000-ton limit for capital ships in the context of a proposed naval holiday until 1931 on two conditions.<sup>14</sup> First, the tonnage of the Turkish navy must be limited to the same figure, and second, Greece would reserve the right to acquire or build a cruiser in place of the *Salamis* if the latter could not be completed. Following the Conference, the Greek Government renewed its proposal for a ten-year 'naval holiday' with Turkey along the same lines, with the additional condition that Greece reserved the right to build two further cruisers to replace *Lemnos* and *Kilkis*.<sup>15</sup>

Although funds for the repair of *Yavuz* were approved in 1924 and contracted to the French Company Penhoët,<sup>16</sup> little progress was made until late 1928 when a large-scale Greek naval exercise off the Dardanelles triggered a revival in momentum,<sup>17</sup> and the ship finally was ready for operations

in 1930.<sup>18</sup> This ship was supplemented in 1929 by Turkish orders from Italian shipyards for two destroyers, two submarines, and three submarine chasers.<sup>19</sup> Together, these initiatives threatened to reverse the situation in the Aegean. As the security of the Greek (formerly Turkish) islands in the Aegean, which had been demilitarised by the Treaty of Lausanne, depended upon Greece's ability to support them by sea, a fully effective *Yavuz* would jeopardize these islands should Turkey attempt to reclaim her lost possessions.<sup>20</sup>

In view of the strategic significance attached to naval superiority in the Aegean, the Greek government sought a counter to *Yavuz*. The incomplete battleship *Salamis* had been ordered by Greece in 1912 from the Vulkan shipyard at Hamburg, but not completed. During the war the main armament guns (ordered in the USA) had been purchased by Britain and fitted to the *Abercrombie* class monitors.<sup>21</sup> After the conclusion of World War I, Germany was unable to complete the unarmed vessel due to the limitations imposed by Article 194 of the Peace Treaty of Versailles, and Greece attempted to cancel the incomplete ship, resulting in a lengthy legal dispute with the shipyard.



*The Turkish battle cruiser Yavuz in Malta in 1936. Originally SMS Goeben in the German Mediterranean Squadron, she was transferred to Turkey in 1914, and retained by the Turkish Navy after World War I. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.*

In May 1929, with *Salamis* still in Germany while the protracted legal proceedings dragged on, the Greek government re-investigated the possibility of completing and taking delivery of the ship as a counter-weight to *Yavuz*.<sup>22</sup> Large sums of money had been spent, but it would have been necessary to spend considerably more to complete her.<sup>23</sup> After protracted discussions, Greece decided not to proceed, but to counter the threat of *Yavuz* by investing in light naval craft and aircraft which, the Prime Minister claimed in a speech delivered to the Greek legislature on 10 February 1930, would create too great a risk for Turkey to employ *Yavuz* in offensive operations.<sup>24</sup>

The threat of a naval race in light craft now loomed. In 1929 Athens had responded to a Turkish order for additional destroyers and submarines by ordering two new destroyers from Italy. In February 1930, the Turkish Grand National Assembly increased the 25 million Turkish Lira special plan for naval armaments approved in 1928 by a further 9.5 million Lira. Greece then ordered another two destroyers from Italy, and in May Turkey also placed an order for additional destroyers.<sup>25</sup>

Neither power had the money or inclination to pursue this arms race, and high level negotiations, supplemented by diplomatic assistance from Britain and Italy, resulted in the conclusion on 30 October 1930 of a protocol regarding naval armaments that had been under discussion since August 1927.<sup>26</sup> The essential element of the protocol was an undertaking not to proceed with any order, acquisition or construction of naval units, or of armaments for naval units, without first giving the other party six months' notice in advance. The protocol was ratified by the Greek Chamber on 21 December 1930 and the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 12 February 1931,<sup>27</sup> with ratifications being exchanged in Athens on 5 October 1931.<sup>28</sup>

This brevity of this protocol stands in significant contrast to the level of detail in the contemporary London Naval Treaty of 1930. No attempt was made to define parity, or overtly constrain construction using complex rules or mathematical formulae. Instead, the protocol relied upon the advance notification of building programs and good-faith negotiations. This approach appears to have been reasonably

effective, in that a potential naval race was avoided, and was perhaps the forerunner to the similar proposal floated at the London Naval Conference of 1935 when it became apparent that Japan would not accept the binding quantitative limits proposed for them.

Although the protocol did not set any limits on naval power, as each state remained free to order whatever new ships they wished (or could afford) providing they notified the other party in advance, it played a central role in the *rapprochement* of the two powers, and as a confidence building measure it successfully prevented a naval arms race that could have been both economically disastrous and politically dangerous.<sup>29</sup>

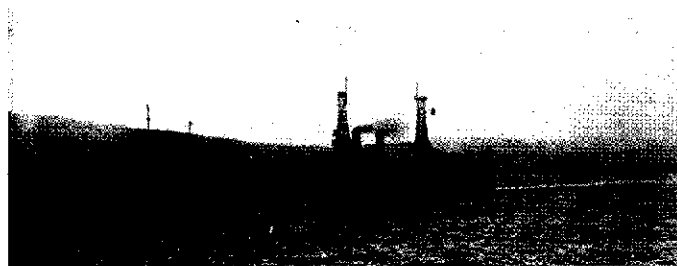
The notification provisions were first exercised in April–May 1934 when Turkey advised Greece of its intention to increase its submarine fleet to ten boats, and Greece replied with plans to procure two new destroyers.<sup>30</sup>

#### APPENDIX: TURKEY–GREECE NAVAL PROTOCOL – 30 OCTOBER 1930

The two High Contracting Parties, inspired by the principles which have led them to sign the Convention of Friendship and Arbitration, of to-days date, and desirous of preventing any unnecessary increase in their expenditure on naval armaments, and of keeping pace with one another in the limitation of their respective forces, with due regard to the conditions particular to each of the said states, undertake to effect no order, acquisition or construction of war units or armaments, without having notified the other party six months' previously, so that both Governments may thus be enabled if necessary to prevent any competition in the sphere of naval armaments by means of a friendly exchange of views and of explanations on either side in a spirit of perfect sincerity.<sup>31</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 R. D. Burns & S. L. Chapin, 1970, Near Eastern Naval Limitation Pacts, 1930–1931, *East European Quarterly*, 4 (1), pp72–87.
- 2 Many reference books (for example Z. Fotakis, 2005, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy, 1910–1919*, Routledge, London & New York, p35) claim that two battleships were ordered in England by Turkey in 1911 – *Reshadieh* that was built by Vickers at Barrow (and ultimately became HMS *Erin*) and *Reshad-i-Hamiss* to be built by Armstrongs at Elswick, that was laid down, but not proceeded with after the 1912–13 Balkan wars. But detailed research of the relevant Armstrongs records by Peter Brook has made it clear that no Turkish battleship was ever ordered from, let alone laid down by Armstrongs, and there was only ever the one battleship: see P. Brook, 1999, *Warships for Export*, World Ship Society, Gravesend, p143. On the other hand, a further battleship, named *Fatih*, was laid down by Vickers just before World War One, but was subsequently broken up on the slip.
- 3 J. C. Reilly, Jr., & R. L. Scheina, 1980, *American Battleships 1886–1923*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, pp200–201.
- 4 P. A. Marshall, 2010, History of the U.S. Navy 7-in/45 Gun, *Warship International*, Vol.47 No.2:162–163
- 5 Hereinafter referred to simply as *Yavuz*, although her name was not formally abbreviated until 1936.
- 6 D. J. Chessum, *Warships for Export 1905–1914*, accessed 18 Oct 2017, <https://naval-arms-control-archive.site123.me/>.
- 7 *Kilkis* and *Lemnos* were the ex-U. S. battleships *Mississippi* and *Idaho* respectively, that were purchased second hand on 21 Jul 1914.

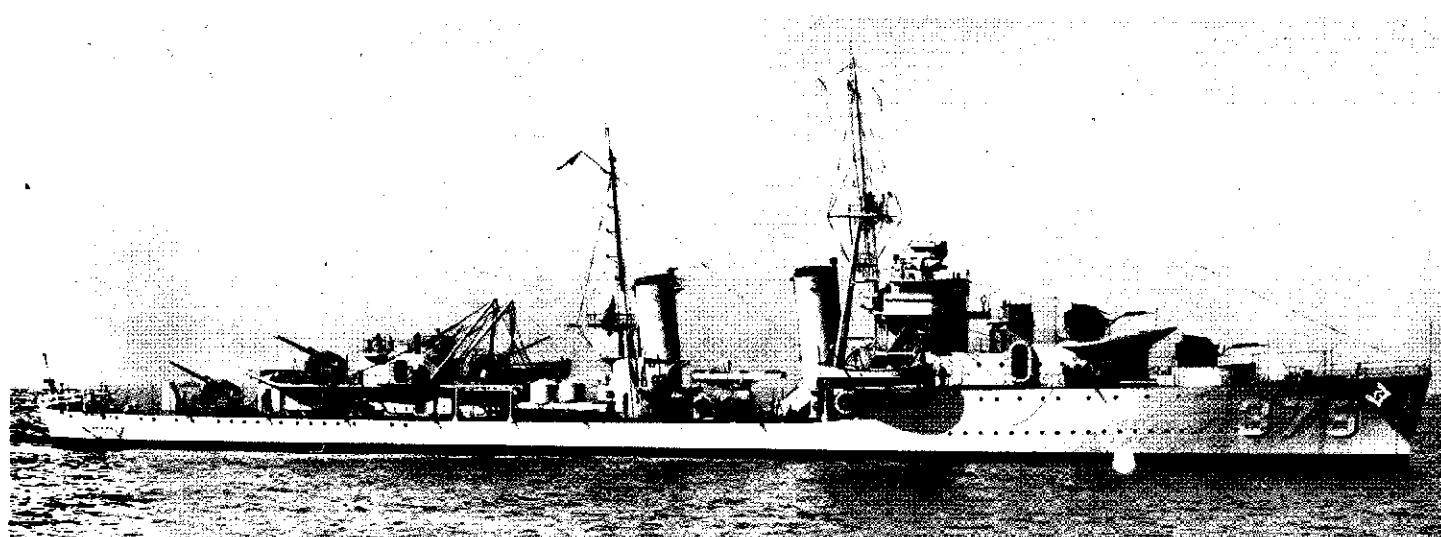


*The Greek battleship Lemnos at Smyrna in August/September 1922, with the French battleship Jean Bart at left. Lemnos originally was built as the USS Idaho (Battleship No.24), before being sold to Greece on 30 June 1914. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.*

- 8 *Helle* was originally the Chinese cruiser *Fei Hung* that Greece purchased from the builder while still under construction.
- 9 All four were ex-Argentine vessels, purchased in 1912 while still under construction.
- 10 D. J. Chessum, *Warships for Export 1905–1914*, accessed 18 Oct 2017, <https://naval-arms-control-archive.site123.me/>.
- 11 Originally laid down for Brazil as the *Rio de Janeiro*, and purchased by Turkey while under construction in Feb 1914.
- 12 R. Chesneau (ed), 1980, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1922–1946*, Conway Maritime Press, London. The incomplete *Salamis* was still in existence at this time, but is not included in the table.
- 13 E. Hatzivassiliou, 1998, The 1930 Greek–Turkish Naval Protocol, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9 (1), p93.
- 14 References differ as to whether this figure was 35,000 tons or 36,000 tons, however the figure recorded in the draft agreement was 36,000 tons, and it is suspected that this has been confused with the individual capital ship limit of 35,000 tons.
- 15 D. Barlas, & S. Guvenc, 2010, Turkey in the Mediterranean during the Interwar Era: The Nature and Limits of Middle Power Diplomacy, <http://essaydocs.org/download/turkey-in-the-mediterranean-during-the-interwar-era.doc>, pp73–74.
- 16 S. Guvenc & D. Barlas, 2003, Ataturk's Navy: Determinants of Turkish Naval Policy, 1923–38, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26 (1), p28.
- 17 S. Guvenc, 2002, Building a Republican Navy in Turkey: 1924–1939, *International Journal of Naval History*, 1 (1).
- 18 D. Barlas, & S. Guvenc, 2010, Turkey in the Mediterranean during the Interwar Era: The Nature and Limits of Middle Power Diplomacy, <http://essaydocs.org/download/turkey-in-the-mediterranean-during-the-interwar-era.doc>, p138. O. Kocer, 2008, *Sanli Yavuz*, Deniz Basimevi Mudurlugu Kasimpasa, Istanbul, p88.
- 19 D. L. Barlas & S. Guvenc, 2002, To build a navy with the help of adversary: Italian–Turkish naval arms trade, 1929–32, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(4), pp143–168.
- 20 R. D. Burns & S. L. Chapin, 1970, Near Eastern Naval Limitation Pacts, 1930–1931, *East European Quarterly*, 4 (1), pp72–87.
- 21 I. L. Buxton, 2008, *Big Gun Monitors*, 2nd rev, Scaforth, Barnsley, pp16–17, 21.
- 22 D. L. Barlas & S. Guvenc, 2002, To build a navy with the help of adversary: Italian–Turkish naval arms trade, 1929–32, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 (4), pp143–168. The legal dispute regarding *Salamis* dragged on until the early 1930s. See Section 2.1.
- 23 E. Hatzivassiliou, 1998, The 1930 Greek–Turkish Naval Protocol, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9 (1), p94.
- 24 R. D. Burns & S. L. Chapin, 1970, Near Eastern Naval Limitation Pacts, 1930–1931, *East European Quarterly*, 4 (1), pp72–87.
- 25 E. Hatzivassiliou, 1998, The 1930 Greek–Turkish Naval Protocol, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9 (1), pp101–102.
- 26 *ibid*, p95.
- 27 R. D. Burns & S. L. Chapin, 1970, Near Eastern Naval Limitation Pacts, 1930–1931, *East European Quarterly*, 4 (1), pp72–87.
- 28 T. N. Dupuy & G. M. Hammerman (eds), 1973, *A Documentary History of Arms Control and Disarmament*, RR Bowker & Company, New York & London.
- 29 E. Hatzivassiliou, 1998, The 1930 Greek–Turkish Naval Protocol, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9(1), p106.
- 30 SHD, 1BB7–169, *Compte Rendu De Renseignements (Turquie)* No. 4 (18 Apr 1934) and No. 6 (4 May 1934), cited in D Barlas, & S Guvenc, 2010, Turkey in the Mediterranean during the Interwar Era: The Nature and Limits of Middle Power Diplomacy, <http://essaydocs.org/download/turkey-in-the-mediterranean-during-the-interwar-era.doc>, p217.
- 31 This text is drawn from T. N. Dupuy & G. M. Hammerman (eds), 1973, *A Documentary History of Arms Control and Disarmament*, RR Bowker & Company, New York & London. p169. It differs from the text reproduced in R. D. Burns & S. L. Chapin 1970. Near Eastern Naval Limitation Pacts, 1930–1931, *East European Quarterly*, 4 (1), pp72–87, but the differences are not material, and appear to be the result of independent parallel translations from the original text.

<sup>1</sup>For additional information on *Salamis*, see *W.I* Vol. 57 (2020) No.1:49–53—Ed.].

## CAPTAIN'S SCRAPBOOK



**The US Navy destroyer Downes (DD-375) soon after completion. Official USN Photograph (National Archives) 80-G-457867, forwarded to the Navy Dept. with a Norfolk Navy Yard letter of 1 March 1937. One of 16 Mahan (DD-364) class ships. The contract design called for 36.5 knots' speed, enabled by a 42,800 SHP (25,400 EHP with appendages) propulsion plant. Hull wetted surface was 12,080 sq. ft. and designed displacement for the class was 1,500 tons (including a 9-ton margin) standard, plus 25 tons reserve feed water and 200 tons fuel for 1,725 tons full load.**