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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE OPENING SESSION  
OF THE NATO CCMS OIL SPILLS CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1970

The United States enters into the important deliberations of this Ocean Oil Spills Conference fully committed to a priority national policy of improving and safeguarding environmental quality. Few problems in this field are so pressing or so readily evident as those posed by ocean oil pollution.

Two weeks ago at the United Nations President Nixon singled out the oceans as an area of environmental concern to all nations. In his oil spills message of May 20 the President declared the United States' eagerness to participate in international forums considering marine pollution problems, . . . . and said that the United States particularly supports the efforts of NATO's committee on the challenges of modern society and that he would look forward to the recommendations of this conference.

The President asked me to head the United States delegation to this conference in the belief that this is a priority problem requiring the attention of NATO nations at the highest level.

For centuries men believed that the oceans had an inexhaustible capacity to absorb the consequences of indiscriminate commercial use. We know this is simply not true. The hazardous substances, particularly oil currently being dumped and spilled into the seas, are an immediate danger and a future threat to the health, recreation and welfare of mankind, and to the living resources of the oceans themselves.

Our knowledge of the exact effect of oil pollution is rudimentary; the scientific aspects of oil pollution and its hazards to health, for example, have not been separated from concern for marine pollution generally. We know that oil can taint the flesh of fish and shellfish, but we don't know the long-term effects of hydrocarbons in the marine food chain nor do we understand the impact on fishery resources of toxic chemicals, including those that pose the threat of cancer.

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It is my privilege today to speak briefly to you about what my government conceives as the goals of this conference and the opportunities for meaningful action that can flow from its recommendations.

Resulting from an initiative of Belgium, working closely with Canada, France and Portugal, this conference has been undertaken under the environmental program of NATO's committee on the challenges of modern society. The United States welcomes the opportunity to join in this important endeavor.

As a part of our common concern, we are addressing ourselves this week to problems involving one vital aspect of the world's environment -- the seas. More specifically, we are seeking the ways and means to combat ocean oil pollution.

The oceans of the world are a truly international resource. They constitute the connecting link over which moves vast quantities of international commerce. They are an indispensable source of supply for millions of tons of the world's food supply. They form a unified part of the world's environmental system, contributing to the maintenance of the atmospheric balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide, influencing global climate and providing the base for the world's water system. We use the oceans in many and increasing ways and we must harmonize these uses if we are to make rational and efficient future use of the seas.

The oceans are threatened by pollutants of many kinds from many sources. Municipal, industrial, and agricultural wastes enter the oceans through our river systems. These and other pollutants also enter the oceans directly by deliberate dumping. There are pollutants which enter the oceans from the exploitation of the ocean floor and from the transportation system -- the collision of the Pacific Glory and Allegro being only a too recent reminder.

The problem facing us in marine pollution are of many disciplines and transnational in nature. The sources are varied and adequate controls are lacking.

The magnitude, complexity, and pressing nature of oil pollution problems and marine pollution generally is evidenced, in part, by the growing number of international organizations addressing the pollution problems we face in the world oceans.

Every NATO nation is actively participating in one or more of the intergovernmental organizations at work in the marine pollution field -- IMCO, F-A-O, UNESCO and the I-O-C, the United Nations. The action oriented recommendations flowing from this conference should thus prove of value not only to the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization but also to the international bodies in which these nations participate. Additionally, the oil shipping industry and international industry committees are working toward increased safety and more effective pollution control.



While international efforts toward the prevention of ocean oil pollution have been excellent, no one, I am certain, believes that these efforts are complete. The conference affords NATO nations the opportunity to demonstrate responsible leadership that will be clearly recognized around the world, to recommend actions that will sharpen the focus of international attention, and work a catalytic effect on international progress in this field.

The nations in this organization are uniquely involved. They control under their flags and through their nationals approximately three fourths of the tanker tonnage of the world as well as total world shipping. More than 70 percent of the world's annual oil production enters their ports and their coastal areas -- coasts which are highly vulnerable to oil discharges at sea.

We view this conference as a gathering where recommendations for action may be agreed upon which in large part can be individually and collectively implemented elsewhere.

The United States' concern with the problems of environmental quality is of the highest priority. Particularly in the last few years we, like others, have come to realize that if we are to continue to rely on the air, land, and water of this earth -- upon which our survival depends -- we must treat these resources with care and respect.

President Nixon in his far-reaching message on the environment of February 10, 1970 placed the global situation we now face in perspective when he said: "The fight against pollution, ...., is not a search for villains." "For the most part, the damage done to our environment has not been the work of evil men, nor has it been the inevitable by-products either of advancing technology or of growing population." "It results," he said, "not so much from choices made, as from choices neglected, not from malign intention, but from failure to take into account the full consequences of our actions . . . ."

Immediately following the oil spills off Santa Barbara, California, in 1969, the President created an expert panel to report on the nature of the oil spills problem, and this panel's report clearly pointed to the challenge confronting the government:

-- To the need for greater knowledge;

-- To the need for surveillance and for the development of the technical and operational capability to cope with a major oil spill in the marine environment; and

-- To the need for effective national planning and organization.

In January of 1970, the President signed into law the National Environmental Policy Act, establishing the Council of Environmental Quality and charging the council with coordination of all Federal Environmental Quality Programs and with review of all Federal programs which affect the environment.



In April the President signed into law the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1970 which specifically provided for prevention and control of oil pollution in the inland and coastal waters of the United States.

On May 20, in a message to the Congress of the United States, the President outlined a number of additional actions which the Congress should take to reduce the risks of oil pollution, announced executive measures against oil pollution, and called for the cooperation of U.S. industry and the entire nation -- so essential to the achievement of these objectives. At the same time the President asked the Congress to ratify the important amendments to the 1954 IMCO Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil and the Two Marine Oil Pollution Conventions signed in this city last year.

Three weeks ago the President received a report on ocean dumping from his Council of Environmental Quality and transmitted it to the Congress -- a major report recommending a comprehensive national policy on ocean dumping of wastes and the enactment of implementing legislation to ban unregulated ocean dumping of all materials and to strictly limit ocean disposal of any materials potentially harmful to the marine environment.

These actions underline the concern with which the United States has examined its environmental policies. The steps taken, however, are only beginning steps of but a single nation.

I am also aware of the important strides being taken in the oil spills field by other NATO nations -- individually and in groups. We are united in our concern; let us reflect that concern by transforming it into effective cooperative actions.

Toward what goals, then, should we turn our energies this week? What actions can we as NATO nations identify and recommend that will set the international community on a course leading to the solution of the global ocean oil spills problem?

My government proposes that NATO nations resolve to achieve -- by mid-decade -- a complete halt to all intentional discharge of oil and oily wastes into the oceans by tankers and other vessels. This is a fundamental and major goal; it may involve steps such as improved ship design aimed at clean ballast operations and the development of adequate port facilities to receive waste, oily bilge and ballast waters. This is a major goal and an essential goal -- well worthy of the effort required. There is no doubt that the burden of achieving this goal will require a major effort by U.S. industry, but we know it can and must be accomplished and that it will have a dramatic effect on the marine environment.

Further, my government proposes that we as nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization recommend the following immediate steps toward abatement of both accidental spillage and intentional discharges:



- Acceleration of research into the effects of oil spills;
- Development of technology to prevent spills and of methods to remove oil once it is in the ocean;
- Establishment of more effective international ship construction standards;
- Improve training programs for shipboard personnel and improved operating procedures;
- And preparation of national and international plans for coping with spill contingencies.

We should address ourselves to practical recommendations for international cooperation in the field of response to oil spill accidents, not only to assist each other with moderate spills when such assistance is requested, but to develop operational plans to handle a massive spill which is beyond the immediate capability of a single nation or which is an imminent threat to more than one coastline.

As the solution of ocean oil spills problems involves expeditious development of countermeasures with minimum adverse effect on the environment, we should recommend cooperation in the exchange of information, upgrading of research capabilities, and improvement of technology.

It is to be hoped that the recommendations of this conference will lead to the establishment of a readily accessible repository for data on oil spill incidents, including information on spills occurring, measures taken to remove or minimize the effects, and the success of such measures.

At the same time, we should recognize that all the detailed planning required if we are to deal successfully with ocean oil pollution cannot take place in the few days now available; subsequent meetings on specific aspects of the problem -- meetings involving all interested nations and organizations -- will be required.

These goals my government considers appropriate and within the realm of practicality. The detailed suggestions for accomplishing them will be addressed by my delegation in the course of our discussions, and we look forward to a full exchange of views among all participants.

As NATO nations and as major maritime users we have the skill and the resources and the motive to meet this ever-mounting challenge. We must join these qualities with the leadership, the foresight and the energy required if we are to see the global marine environment freed from the adverse effects of oil pollution.

If I may borrow from the words of the American Daniel Webster: "A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent, like the deity. If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, duty performed or duty violated is still with us, for our happiness or our misery."



Establishment of the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society offers clear evidence that we recognize our duty to assist in improving the lot of mankind and to work as best we can to preserve the quality of the world in which we live. The recommendations coming from this ocean oil spills conference should substantially further these objectives.

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