

Chapter XXII

Luncheon Address

Environmental Security

Mr. Gary Vest

Professor Grunawalt: I would like to take this opportunity to introduce our luncheon speaker, Mr. Gary Vest. He is Principal Assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security. His prior positions and his current responsibilities demonstrate the enormous breadth and range of his span of control. A graduate of the University of Idaho, Mr. Vest also holds a Masters Degree from the University of Washington. He has been with the Government for a considerable number of years.

I want to briefly mention his general areas of current responsibility. He is involved in the process of establishing policy in this general area and overseeing the implementation of that policy. Again, if you look at his subsets of responsibility, not only with respect to the environment, but concerning safety, occupational health, explosive safety, and fire emergency, it is a very broad mandate indeed. He is currently, I underscore that word "currently," co-chairman of not one, but three separate NATO environmental groups. He also chairs the Defense Environmental Safety and Occupational Health Policy Board. He chairs the Defense Environmental Security International Activities Committee. There is not much concerning our subject that does not properly fit within the scope of his committees' consideration. So without further ado, it is my pleasure and privilege to invite Mr. Vest to address us. Mr. Vest.

Mr. Gary Vest - Principal Assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security

Thank you very much, it is indeed a pleasure to be here. As we were visiting over lunch one of the things that I commented on was how important an event like this is because we are in an evolutionary process of dealing with the environment and defense. It may well be that the last real step in that process is at some point in the future, to come to grips with the topic that you are addressing.

Today I will provide: one, an overview of what we are doing in our government in terms of defense and the environment; two, a bit of meaning to the terminology "Environmental Security"—which is the label under which we put all these

things; three, an overview of our relationships out in the world, our relationships with other countries in a defense and environmental context; and, four, a few stories about some things that are actually going on.

Your principal question here is, "Do we need more law in this area and if so, what would it be." At the outset I will offer an opinion that before we embark on a course of creating a lot more law, we ought to look carefully at what law exists and how it should actually apply.

We probably do not fully understand that, even as we go about our peacetime operations. It is very important to look at the present in the context of history. Nineteen Hundred and Seventy was sort of a watershed year in this country, and I think it is fair to say, in the world. There was an event in 1970—April 22 to be exact—called Earth Day. I was in a rather interesting situation at that time. I was an officer in the military of the United States, but I was also very actively involved in the "environmental movement." In April of 1970, you did that sort of thing at some peril because military folks in this country were not too enamored with the left-leaning liberalism of the environmental activists and the environmental activists who often were also doubling as anti-war activists. Certainly this did not have any comfort with the military.

So in 1970, the military and the environment were about as far apart as possible. Environment in the United States Department of Defense was basically non-existent. There was no program, there was no budget, there were no professionals, there was no body of policy. Now, 25 years later, the United States Department of Defense has in excess of a \$5 billion annual environmental budget. I submit that fact as representative of a fairly substantial cultural transformation.

There were many reasons for that change, not the least of which was the United States Department of Defense responding to a body of law. In responding to the expectations of the American people, we have evolved very effectively over the past 25 years. I believe that what I am about to say is true. There is probably no environmental program in the Federal Government today that can equal that of the United States Department of Defense. It is exceptional. And, we have not overlooked the international dimension of the environment.

That \$5 billion annual effort is predominantly a domestic involvement. In 1980, with our NATO colleagues, we began to look at this issue of environment and defense. There was a conference in Munich on defense and environment where we came together to begin looking at where the environment fits into the NATO equation. During the 1980's, we found that environment was becoming a constraint to operational capability and readiness in Europe. Most specifically, in Germany; aircraft noise, artillery noise, maneuver damage, etc.

We found that those who did not believe in the NATO mission structure would use the environment as a means to get at that NATO capability. So, within the Alliance, we began to address those environmental issues. By 1985, we had a

specific group devoted to aircraft noise. Eleven years later, it still meets and I chair it.

In the late 1980s, we began to really understand where the environment and defense fit when a colleague from Bonn told me that there were low-level discussions between East and West German officials on mutual reductions of aircraft noise in the FRG and the GDR. That was before the demise of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.

On the eastern side, they were concerned about the burden that they were bearing with the Soviet aircraft. On the western side, there was concern with the Sending States' activities. By 1990, in the NATO context, we were very concerned about what the host-nation laws were. What were the expectations of the host nations regarding NATO forces environmentally? So we created another group called Defense Environmental Expectations. We just concluded that effort last week in the U.K.

We set out to identify, catalogue, and characterize environmental laws and regulations of all the NATO countries that would apply to NATO activities—peacetime operations, exercises, or whatever. We did not stop with the legal part; we also looked at public expectations because that is very important. What do the citizens expect?

We mounted, in that effort, an extensive education and training component. We drafted the only existing NATO environmental policies, which went before the North-Atlantic Council and were adopted two years ago. We created a basic code of environmental conduct within NATO for commanders. We produced videos. We produced all manner of education and training materials. What we were about was changing, or attempting to change, the cultures of the militaries of NATO. Looking back to 1980, there were very few environmental programs in the NATO countries. In keynoting a NATO conference on the environment and defense last week in the U.K., I said, and I said with confidence, that, "The NATO environmental work related to defense is the model."

That brings a vision. If you are concerned with the environment, if you are concerned with sustained peace and stability, you should look at the military. Because if you aggregate the militaries of the world, you have probably put into a single basket or bucket the single greatest negative or positive force for the environment in the world. For every military that you are able to change, to move them away from not caring, with no commitment to the environment, the further you move them to the neutral, and once you move them over to the positive, you have made a tremendous difference.

That does not take a lot of money. We know from experience that simply changing the way you view things, the way you do things, in terms of environment and defense, can make tremendous advancements. Moreover, this does not detract from your operational readiness or your capability to do the mission.

When NATO reached out to its former foes, environment was a major part of that outreach. The U.S. European Command began a military-to-military program to reach out to all of the former-Warsaw Pact countries. Early on, the environment became part of that military-to-military program because in those countries there was a growing awareness that the militaries of the former-Warsaw Pact had to deal with their citizens who had begun to embrace the environment. Thus, a lot of the military-to-military teams were environmental.

We saw, as time went along, environmental matters coming into the Partnership for Peace proposals. We are finding that if you are interested in democratization, environment and defense is perhaps one of the best avenues, best laboratories, to work for democratization because the militaries of the former-Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact really were not used to working with civilian agencies. They were unaccustomed to paying attention to their public. They did not work on a constructive basis with state and local government.

We find, as we work with those countries—work with the military—much of what we are doing is focusing on policy concepts, methodology as to how the military functions in a democratic arrangement. We find that we are a formidable force in that process.

Based on what has happened in this country during the 1970s, and with our NATO friends during the 1980s, we are now looking to the 1990s. We eventually expect to make a tremendous impact in Central and Eastern Europe on these matters. Additionally, we are looking beyond Europe with an initiative in the Pacific.

In January, as part of a trilateral arrangement with Australia and Canada, I approached Admiral Macke, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Command, with the proposal that we, the three countries and Admiral Macke, host the Defense Environmental Conference for the Pacific and Asia. I think it is fair to say that Admiral Macke is not an environmentalist, but his reaction was instantaneous and positive. "Yes! Let's do that."

Because, as I read that, he understands that in the Pacific Command area of responsibility, environment and defense are indeed very related. The militaries of the Asian and Pacific countries are facing a new set of requirements, new expectations, and we can help a great deal. So our strategy in the Pacific will be to bring 45 nations together next summer with representatives from both the defense and the environment establishments to talk about defense and the environment in the Pacific. We will showcase such things as coral reefs. There is an international coral reefs effort underway and the question you have to start asking is where does the military fit in terms of coral reefs? From my dealings with the Australians, I know that the Australian military understands that pretty well. We have a lot to learn. We will be doing a major exercise in Tinian later this year, and the protection, the preservation, and the care of the coral reefs will be a major part of

that exercise. Going back around the other side of the world, next year there will be a major environmental component in the BALTOPS naval exercise in the Baltic Sea. So, increasingly what we are doing nationally, as well as multilaterally, is bringing to bear these environmental considerations in our activities.

I would like to discuss our basic concepts and beliefs relative to environmental security in the Department of Defense. We started with the perspective of threat. We are a military organization, and it is easiest for us to deal with things when we express them in terms of dealing with some sort of threat.

We went on to express these threats at three levels. The first was global. These are simply examples of things that are of interest to us, or that are going to affect us. For example, the United States military was on the U.S. team that negotiated the Montreal Protocol. The Montreal Protocol has had a significant impact on the United States Department of Defense. We recognized, at the outset, that we had to be part of it and deal with it very aggressively or we would become a victim of it.

We believe there are several regional threat considerations. They have different dimensions, but when we start thinking of regional environment, we also start thinking in terms of where does environment fit into the conflict equation. To what extent are environmental phenomena, factors? Do they directly or indirectly affect stabilities of nations and peoples? In other words, to what extent might they be the cause of conflict or war? So much of what we are debating and thinking about today is what are those forces? Which ones should we be paying attention to in a preventative mode rather than having to deal with them after the fact.

There are also national threats. These threats tend to be more of the traditional things that we deal with in the military in our environmental program.

Now, from that very basic threat structure, we put forward six or seven fundamental statements of environmental security and mission. The first, and this is very fundamental to our view, is that our mission must be performed in an environmentally responsible, safe, and helpful manner. That is not optional, certainly domestically. It gets a little murkier internationally, and I will speak to that in a moment in terms of how we handle it internationally.

Perhaps one of the most important statements relative to environmental security is this; militaries simply cannot function without adequate access to land, water, and air to conduct their missions. As I learned from the German experience, and we have encountered it throughout the United States, when you are not attentive to your environmental responsibilities, you begin to run a fairly high risk of either having your access eliminated or significantly abridged; and ultimately, you simply cannot do the mission.

This leads us to making strong statements and strong commitments in terms of environmental compliance, environmental cleanups, and in dealing with the environmental aftermath of the Cold War; being good stewards of the national

and cultural resources entrusted to us. You can go to any number of countries today and find that some of the best cared for and preserved areas of national and cultural interest are those that have been controlled by the military. I have even seen it in former-Warsaw Pact countries. The Czech army did an absolutely superb job of maintaining the environment during the Soviet era at a major training area in the Czech Republic, probably one of the best areas in the country in terms of preservation. I was in Australia recently, visiting some areas which had been completely denuded and destroyed, but now that the military has got them back. They are recovering to the extent that they are some of the finer tropical rain forest-types of environment.

We also need to be heavily engaged in pollution reduction. There are many examples of where the militaries of the world can, in fact, become very much the leaders in pollution reduction.

Environmental security is about protecting; national security defense is about protecting. We have a mandate, a responsibility, to do those things to protect our war-fighting assets, people, equipment, and facilities. There are many threats to them that if not dealt with will adversely affect that capability. We, in environmental security in the Department of Defense, are actively engaged in furthering the thought process concerning this conflict equation of which I have spoken.

We have people involved in counter-proliferation. Recently, they came to me and said that, "We really need to be working with you because what we are now beginning to realize is that a very important part of the proliferation equation is the environment." It figures in on the demand side of the equation. To the extent that environmental conditions or forces are generating a demand for weapons in various countries or regions we need to deal with that.

Looking ahead, we must be prepared for tomorrow's challenges. In our government, we have a responsibility to bring, as best we can, defense and environmental security considerations to bear on the bulk of national security policy. A number of the positions of our government that are developed for international treaty negotiations on the environment are actually driven out of the National Security Council. They are not coming from the State Department; they are not coming out of the Environmental Protection Agency. That is a very important message. We view international conventions and treaties on the environment as a major national security consideration.

The Basel Convention, London Dumping Convention, and other agreements impacting the environment are of high interest from the Defense perspective. We also have a responsibility to look at how the assets of the United States Department of Defense can be used as an instrument of national and environmental policy. Some months ago, Defense Minister Jørgen Kosmo of Norway approached Secretary Perry and requested U.S. assistance in dealing with the Russians on their

environmental behavior in the Arctic, particularly on the Kola Peninsula and the Barents Sea, where the disposition of the nuclear submarines sitting in the port of the Northern Fleet is a major interest to the Norwegians for obvious reasons. The Norwegians had been working that issue through their foreign ministry to not much avail. At Defense, we mounted an effort which resulted in an effective trilateral dialogue with the Russians on their behavior in the Arctic with these military assets. That is an example of how the United States Department of Defense plays in those arenas. We are also leading the U.S. delegation to a NATO group on cross-border contamination, which is focusing on the defense or the military role in pollution risks associated with crossing borders in Central, Eastern, and Western Europe.

Also of note is the United States Navy's involvement in NATO's Special Working Group Twelve (SWG 12), the environmentally-sound ship. As we look to the future in terms of our ability to function as a Navy, increasingly we understand that we have to make major advancements in the manner in which we handle the environment on our ships. Not doing so can produce constraints that are simply unacceptable.

We have been asked to prepare a cooperative program with the Baltic nations. The United States Department of Defense, working with the governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, is in the process of building a cooperative program; to build an environmental infrastructure for the militaries of the three countries to deal with the environmental aftermath of the Soviet presence, and also, to put them in a position of leadership in their countries to deal with current environmental hazards.

We recently signed an agreement with Poland for environmental cooperation. The Polish military have an aggressive program today for practical reasons. They need to meet European Union environmental requirements, and they recognize that their military has to be part of that. The Polish military has an aggressive environmental compliance program, particularly in clean air and clean water issues. We are assisting them.

We have been engaged with the Czech Republic providing information and assistance, once again to deal with the environmental aftermath of the Cold War.

Several months ago, we signed an agreement with the Russians. In that agreement, amongst other things, Russia and the United States agreed to look together at their respective intelligence capabilities—the full range of sensors; space, aerial, terrestrial and aquatic—and apply them to environmental problems. I will be meeting next week with the Russians to put together the details on implementation of that agreement. We will be doing projects to apply that capability in the United States, in Russia, and in third world countries to a whole different brave new world. Very, very interesting. Are there any questions?

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Professor Myron Nordquist, Naval War College: Have you encountered in these other countries, outfits like yourself? Basically, you are dealing with new governments in the former Soviet Union. Organizationally, do they have anything akin to the environmental organization that you run in the Department of Defense?

Mr. Vest: The question is, "are there comparable capabilities in other governments?" We are probably the largest and most expansive; there is no question about that. Certainly, some of the NATO countries have very fine programs. What is really surprising is how far the Russians have come. The Russians today have a Lt. General in the Ministry of Defense who runs their Department of Ecology. It is getting bigger. And what is very interesting is that the Russians, in the agreement that I just spoke about, actually said they have the money programmed to do their part of it, which is kind of a surprise, too. The Russians have been surprisingly candid about their problem and the nature of it. They are ramping up considerably.

When I was in Poland recently, the Polish military introduced a two-star General who has in his portfolio environment and about half a dozen Colonels who are running environmental organizations within the Polish military.

The Czech military, as I indicated, has been involved in environmental matters for quite some time. About 12 years ago, they brought in an environmental professional, a Ph.D., gave him the rank of Colonel, and he has been building environmental programs ever since. They are holding international conferences on defense and environment in the Czech Republic now. We are seeing a lot. In the Pacific, the Koreans recently approached us and said, "We have to do it, can you help us?" There are a lot of good signs in that regard.

Captain Stephen A. Rose, JAGC, U.S. Navy, U.S. Atlantic Command: Mr. Vest, at the beginning of your presentation you mentioned the \$5 billion a year budget. What reservations or difficulties do you see ahead to sustain that program? A key to a lot of this seems to be reliable income in order to do what you want to do.

Mr. Vest: The Defense environmental budget peaked about 2 years ago. That \$5 billion was about \$5.2 billion two years ago; in FY 89 it was about \$1.2 billion. What is very interesting is that the Defense Environmental Security budget exploded during the tail end of the Reagan Administration and during the Bush Administration. It has actually declined the last two years. It has more or less found its level; its going to stay around \$5 billion.

At the beginning of this calendar year, the new majority in Congress had staked out that \$5 billion program, in some people's mind, for total elimination. Others

avored massive reduction. At most, we will lose \$135 million of our \$5 billion request this year. We are going to emerge from this authorization/appropriation process probably the least adversely affected of any agency in the Federal Government. Why is that? I submit to you it is because when you understand defense and environment you can not reject it. If you do not understand it, you can engage in a lot of rhetoric and say you cannot do it. When people do begin to understand it, which is what we have done with the Congress, it sustains itself. The other thing that I would say is that today we have an incredibly good quality program. Once you look at it and understand it, you have to acknowledge it. I do not see us having much difficulty in that regard, once again because of the quality and because when you understand it, it is not that debatable.

Professor Bernard Oxman, University of Miami: I was struck by your comment on the active participation of the Department of Defense and general international environmental associations. It raises a question in my mind of what assumptions you and the Department of Defense are making when you participate in the formulation of U.S. policy and negotiation of these treaties? I can think of three possibilities that I am addressing now, not ordinary operations but armed conflict. One is that international environmental negotiations do not affect you in armed conflict. Second, is that they do affect you in armed conflict to the extent consistent with military necessity. Third, they limit you in armed conflict, even if compatible with military necessity. I am wondering, have you thought through those questions when you participated in negotiations?

Mr. Vest: It is fair to say that the real straightforward answer to your questions is, "no." Now let me explain. We are, in my opinion, in an evolutionary process and people are continuing to try to better understand where this environment thing fits into the whole range of national security. As I said in my remarks, we have gone through a 25-year period where we have successfully come to grips with that in terms of peacetime operations. Outside the United States, for example, we created several years ago a document called the Overseas Environmental Baseline Guidance Document which was a codification of U.S. requirements, good practices that our people together thought made good sense to govern our behavior around the world. We have taken that and created what are called Final Governing Standards for any nation where we have a presence. It is, basically, a definitive environmental code of conduct for the operation of installations, exercises, etc. That is the baseline.

We have also created an auditing program to audit our environmental behavior in those countries. For example, I remember giving our Audit Manual to my opposite number in the United Kingdom Ministry of Defense. They did not have anything like it. We knew more about how to comply in auditing environmental

requirements on the military in the U.K. than the British military did. It has been my observation that, historically, our involvement in treaties is more to look at the things that would cause us a problem. You asked if we considered whether that treaty would impose an unacceptable constraint, either on peacetime operations or potentially other operations? I think it is fair to say that dimension will always be there because that is responsible behavior. We are now getting to the point in some of these negotiations where we look beyond that. We, as military people, are saying okay, what are the things that can be in these treaties and in these international conventions that are generally positive along the lines of the concepts that I was putting forward here. That is another dimension.

I have not seen much evidence of us really addressing the conflict part. As you look along this continuum, this evolution probably will come to grips with the environment in the conflict situation a little bit further out there. We really must figure out some of these intermediary things first.

Now, as a practical matter what is happening, and again this is my observation, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Haiti, Somalia, wherever, our behavior in those activities environmentally is quite different than it would have been ten years ago. Is that because of some treaty, some convention, some stated policy pertaining to those kinds of operations? No, but what has happened is that the culture has changed. When our people go to war, when our people go into an exercise, they take their whole culture, their whole process with them. They do not go brain-dead on the environment when they go to Bosnia; they really do not. When we get ready to leave Haiti, what will be one of the major issues the last week we are in Haiti? What are we going to do with the hazardous material down here? That is how our military is thinking; it is in their culture.

Rear Admiral Horace B. Robertson, JAGC, U.S. Navy (Ret.): How much of that \$5 billion is tied to base closings?

Mr. Vest: About \$400 or \$500 million.

Professor Grunawalt: As a follow-on to Admiral Robertson, about how much of that would you say would fall into what we generally call the R&D arena, looking to the future for pollution abatement and all these other kinds of things with respect to the environment?

Mr. Vest: That, I do not have at my fingertips. It is a couple hundred million in the technology area. Speaking of technology, our international arrangements focus a lot on environmental technology because what we are trying to do is to use the

work of others, and of course, provide the results of the work that we are doing to others.

We have a very productive and effective environmental technology data exchange with Germany. Every 8 to 12 months, in one country or another, there is a gathering of sometimes 60 to 100 scientists; military environmental scientists of the two countries; its very effective. Any other questions or comments? Thank you.

Professor Grunawalt: Thank you Mr. Vest. I am confident that all of our conferees benefitted enormously from your remarks. Frankly sir, I am personally left with a deeper sense of optimism about our environmental future than I had before. Thank you for sharing that vision with us.