

Remarks By

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey

National Civil Defense Conference

New York City

September 9, 1958

A Call To Arms For Civil Defense

FOR RELEASE
ON DELIVERY
SEPTEMBER 9,
1958 - AT
10:45 A. M.

* * * * *

No threat facing our nation today is more dangerous to our security than that to our civil defense.

A major war could conceivably come at any moment. The past brush wars in the Middle East and the present hostilities in the Far East could spread overnight into a world-wide conflagration.

To meet these grave dangers we all agree that we must keep our military strength at its peak if we are to deter a would-be aggressor.

But all prudent men, it would seem to me, should also agree that we must keep invincible our non-military defenses - most especially our civil defense - if we are to survive in the midst of a possible catastrophe an all-out war might bring.

But - Are we doing this? Are we making our civil defense invincible, or as strong as we can?

We are not! Tragically, for reasons difficult to understand or to accept, we are not.

The Gap In Our Military Defenses

Our military establishment, despite the glowing reassurances made by Administration spokesmen, in reality is in danger of becoming second-rate, it's gravest weakness lies in what one of my colleagues has described as the Gap.

While we are on a par with the Soviets, and ahead of them in some respects, there is no question that in other areas of scientific development they are advancing at a far faster rate than we are, as many events of the past year prove. That is what is referred to as the Gap in the armaments race.

If we don't move with decision, and move resolutely forward quickly, to close this Gap, we may never catch up. That is why I am so gratified that the Senate increased the President's Defense Budget and strengthened the legislation reorganizing the Department of Defense, which he requested - almost 10 years after the 1st Hoover Commission recommended it in 1949.

Despite these advances, weaknesses remain and unless we recognize and correct them our national survival faces its greatest threat. In the expressed desire of the Administration to subordinate our security posture to fiscal and economic strength lies the root of our trouble. Half measures promises and expedients will not solve this problem.

The Pentagon has been one-sided in its planning; it may be preparing for the wrong kind of war. Borrowing from John Galbraith's "Affluent Society", our present

military wisdom may turn out not to be a divine revelation but remarkably foolish. Prime examples of such wisdom in the past are the invincibility of the Maginot line and the alleged congenital weakness of the Soviet. The threat before us therefore may not only be the all-out nuclear war for which we are preparing but a series of small wars in which nuclear weapons may not be used for fear of bringing on the world a nuclear holocaust. Unfortunately, however, a continuation of current defense planning and emphasis will result in an even larger Gap between our future defense strength and that of the Soviets.

Let me give you an example of this "thinking": In my book, Civil Defense and our reserves, including the National Guard are the key factors in the defense of the home front. But both are orphans in our security structure. The reserves, including the Guard, are close to the people; they are made up of home town boys. They are truly the "citizens" standing army which has distinguished itself in two great World Wars. Yet, the Department of Defense is reducing the size of both the reserves and the National Guard. In any type of war this might be fatal. Our Pentagon and security planners seem to overlook the basic elements needed for our security.

All elements of our defense, both military and non-military, must be planned for and supported. Of these, Civil Defense is a vital and integral part.

My Experience with Civil Defense and Disasters

I have been greatly concerned with the problem of Civil Defense. May I point out that I have had considerable experience with this subject which is of such concern to you. As a wartime Mayor of Minneapolis, I gained experience in operating a great city. I can well imagine the health, medical, welfare, engineering, and administrative problems of a city under attack. I have seen it on a small scale when our city was struck by the great blizzard of 1949 and 1950 and by the floods which followed them as well as by more recent floods and tornadoes. I thoroughly understand your concern as to what might happen in case we were bombed, and I recognize the frightful responsibilities which we would face.

Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

In addition to my service as Mayor, I was named by President Eisenhower to serve on the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. The former Civil Defense Administrator, Governor Val Peterson, also served on this Commission which was composed of members of Congress, Governors, Mayors, and a number of well-known citizens. One of the first jobs the Commission did was to establish a Task Force to study Civil Defense -- an intergovernmental relations problem of great magnitude and difficulty. I followed the work of the Task Force, contributed to its conclusion and participated in the debate which led to the preparation of the Chapter on "Civil Defense and Reduction of Urban Vulnerability" in the Commission's final report which made recommendations to the President and the Congress. Later, I will comment further on this Report.

The Reorganization Plan

More recently, as Chairman of the Reorganization Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, charged with the responsibility of considering all reorganizations of the government, I held extensive hearings on Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1958 which resulted in the merger of the Federal Civil Defense Administration and the Office of Defense Mobilization into what our Committee, upon your recommendation, christened the new Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization.

Our Committee hearings turned a much needed spotlight on Civil Defense. As a result of these hearings, and my past experience with Civil Defense, I was prepared

when my State Director and Walter Halstead asked me to help secure the enactment of H. R. 7576. After it was enacted I led the floor fight for the adoption of the Humphrey Amendment to the Senate Supplemental Appropriation Bill which would have provided funds for carrying out the administrative and personnel matching portions of H. R. 7576. I am sorry that due to the rush for adjournment, Congress did not give full attention to the debate on this Amendment, and as a result approved only part of the Appropriation for carrying out H. R. 7576. When the 86th Congress convenes next January, I shall renew my insistence on additional funds.

Recommendations for Improving Civil Defense

In view of my experience with Civil Defense, the following observations and recommendations seem in order:

If there is an increasing Gap in our military posture in relation to Soviet developments our shortcomings on the non-military or Civil Defense side are equally dramatic. There the situation is even more ironic because the more vulnerable we are to military attack the greater the need for a civil defense structure which can minimize casualties and help retain our will to resist. Whatever our position in the military race may be, in Civil Defense we are far behind the U.S.S.R. Witness the following:

1. The Soviets have made Civil Defense training compulsory. Every able-bodied Soviet citizen must serve a required 22 hours a year in Civil Defense training. Civil Defense in Russia is a semi-military organization in which every man and woman serves.
2. The Soviet Civil Defense organization not only has all the vast Soviet populace as its source for recruits, but in addition, many of its members and most of its leaders have had actual experience under bombing--under many bombings. They know what to do and are trained and disciplined to do it.
3. There are shelters in the Soviet Union and their number is growing daily. Reports issued by the Federal Civil Defense Administration and eye-witness accounts tell of the impressive gains made by the Soviets in constructing shelters and in modernizing or rebuilding the extensive bunkers and shelters constructed during the last war.
4. The Soviet defense industry has been deliberately dispersed over the largest land mass in the World. Thereby they have already substantially reduced their urban and production vulnerability. Nazi bombings of Russia's great cities near the Polish-Finnish borders during World War II drove home the need to bring about a greater dispersal of her industry and population.
5. Money is no object to civil defense preparations in the USSR. Their Civil Defense leaders don't have to worry about reluctant budget experts. Being a dictatorship, the legal niceties of intergovernmental and jurisdictional conflicts which sometimes impede us never affect them. Service in a Civil Defense Corps, although bothersome and regimented, is better than the salt mines of Siberia or sweeping the steppes.
6. Nor has the USSR failed to recognize that if nations are reasonably equal in their nuclear capabilities, the nation best prepared to minimize damage will probably be the Victor. No nation can risk being involved in a nuclear war if its civil defense preparations are inadequate. The above 6 points -- and there are others -- explain why we are being topped in the nonmilitary defense sweepstakes.

What To Do About It

What are we going to do about it? What steps are we taking and what should we do in the future?

Here is what I feel is required:

1. Executive Leadership

I feel that with the merger of the Office of Defense Mobilization and the Federal Civil Defense Administration, and the appointment of Governor Leo Hoegh as Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, we have at last taken the essential first step toward Federal leadership and unified direction at the Executive level that has so long been lacking. The Federal Government--thanks to Reorganization Plan No. 1, which was stimulated by recommendations made by the Hollifield and Kefauver Subcommittee of Congress, has concentrated its non-military defense functions and responsibilities in one agency--the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization. Thus, the way is clear for a unified direction and strengthening of these activities.

However, real leadership is required from the President. If Congress is reluctant--which it is--if the public is apathetic--which it is--then it will take a clear call from the President--a speech as forceful as either his Atoms for Peace or his Middle East speeches to arouse the American public to the mortal danger Civil Defense Authorities believe we face. Occasional paragraphs in a State of the Union Message or in the Presidential Budget Document are not enough. A major and continuing effort is demanded. If the American people are informed they will support the measures necessary to improve our Civil Defense structure.

2. Congressional Responsibility

While one doesn't like to criticize one's brethren, it is abundantly clear that Congress can and should do more--much more. The Armed Services Committees of Congress are the parent Committees for Civil Defense--they have jurisdiction. Since the close of the Kefauver hearings on Civil Defense in 1955, little attention has been given by the responsible Committees of the Congress to up-building the Nation's civil defense, possibly, I grant, because of the constant international crises we have faced, but my friends, that is exactly why--(these international crises) we should give every attention to civil defense.

For years, I have been trying to correct this deplorable situation. Back in February of 1955, I introduced, on behalf of Senator Symington of Missouri and myself, a Concurrent Resolution to establish a Joint Committee on Civil Defense. Realizing then that jurisdiction over such a responsible agency was not a part-time job, I declared:

"There is no more vital function being performed by our Government today than that of Civil Defense. Yet I must say that very few subjects of such great importance receive as little attention by the Congress. There is no Committee of the Congress with the clear authority or with the staff and primary responsibility to help guide and lead the Congress on this problem. I wish to make it clear, that in my judgment the Administrator and the hundreds of people working with him are applying themselves unselfishly and devotedly to the task of civil defense. The agency, however, operates with inadequate appropriations and inadequate guidance from the Congress."

Despite our efforts, no action was taken on this Resolution. This situation has not improved, except for the action taken by my Subcommittee on Reorganization a few weeks ago.

With the exception of the hearing by my Subcommittee on the Reorganization Plan and brief hearings by the Appropriation Committees, practically no time has been devoted to Civil Defense by the U. S. Senate during the past session of Congress. The House, where Congressmen Carl Durham and Chet Holifield have taken the lead, has shown more interest— but far short of what I think is required. Continuing attention, support and surveillance of the Civil Defense Program should be given by Congress. Yet I was told at the time of the hearing on the Civil Defense items in the Supplemental Appropriations Bill which would have made funds available to carry out H. R. 7576 that little time was permitted for the Office of Civil Defense Mobilization's budget presentation. Yet the Report said:

"The Committee feels that further expansion of the civil defense programs and the initiation of programs relating to fallout shelters can be presently deferred until the Committee can learn more about the objectives of the new policy that has been presented.

"The Committee appreciates that additional responsibilities have been added by the new legislation for the sharing of personnel and administrative costs of civil defense functions at State and local level, but the Committee believes that appropriations for contributions up to one half of such total costs should await the more accurate figures to be presented following the approval of State plans."

Senate Government Operations Committee Will Study Civil Defense

To correct this oversight, my Subcommittee has been given the responsibility by the Committee on Government Operations for surveying Civil Defense progress in the United States. Our report said, and I quote:

"The Committee, therefore, wishes to go on record that the greatest caution must be exercised in the realignment of non-military defense function to avoid any action that would either imperil the relationships between the Federal Government and State, municipal, and county civil defense officials or impair the morals of the tens of thousands of dedicated volunteer civil defense workers at the local levels. The position of civil defense in the over-all mobilization program must be zealously safeguarded if public support is to be maintained for this vital program. . . .

"It is, therefore, respectfully requested that the new director of the Office of Defense and Civilian Mobilization report back to the Committee on Government Operations during the 1st session of the 86th Congress to advise the Committee as to (1) the organization established for non-military defense functions, (2) the improvements in the conduct of non-military defense functions under Plan No. 1, and (3) whether additional statutory authority is required to strengthen the over-all non-military defense program."

After all, this is a National problem as well as an international one. It is not the fault of New York, Minneapolis, Portland, Dallas, or Minnesota, Oregon, Texas, or Massachusetts.

Congressmen should be the best informed of all the populace. The information is there. I know the seriousness of the problem. A great many Congressmen should be equally concerned.

3. The National Shelter Policy

The President's recommended National Shelter Policy, while a ~~good~~ step, does not ~~step far enough~~ nor does it follow the recommendations of many of his expert advisors. It should be implemented by Congress, and it can be, if sufficient leadership and planning are exerted in getting Congressional support when appropriations to carry it out are resubmitted to Congress.

One of the reasons why the National Shelter Policy did not receive Congressional approval is because the policy was only announced on May 7 and a Supplemental Budget request did not go forward until the closing days of Congress. There it was defeated because of a lack of Congressional understanding. As both Democratic and Republican members of the Senate Appropriations Committee told me, a much greater selling job is needed before Congress will appropriate funds to get it started. You are the people who can help convince the Appropriations Committees by working through your local Senators and Representatives. I am not going to go into the details of the National Shelter Policy since it will be discussed at length during your program.

~~I emphatically add that I support the Policy.~~ I hope it will lead to a comprehensive fallout and blast shelter program which has so long been debated and discussed. It's time we got started. No amount of dominant, fiscal strength will protect us against blast, thermal effects of radiation.

4. The Radiation Monitoring Program

While Congress, on a number of occasions, has refused to do anything about shelters, it has provided funds to start a radiological monitoring program. Congress seems willing to let the people know what they are dying of while doing nothing about shelters to protect them. At this point I would like to comment on what is being done in this field. This is a good program, and I am pleased that as a result of our efforts in the Senate that Congress approved the appropriation of an additional \$1 1/2 million under the authorization contained in H.R. 7576 to permit this program to go forward. I commend Governor Hoegh for undertaking a program to train 1 million high school instructors and students in over 15,000 high schools throughout the Country. As a result, not only will these students be trained for a vital job in case of trouble -- whether it be an enemy attack or an atomic accident, but over 1 million homes will have a clearer concept of what Civil Defense really is. A practical and comprehensive program such as this should help convince Congress as well as local legislative bodies that Civil Defense is not a boondoggle.

Congress has been generous in authorizing the purchase of radiological instruments. So impressed were members of Congress as to the danger of radioactive fallout and the need for a monitoring program that they approved a rider on the 1956 and 1957 Appropriation Bills to permit instrument procurement while awaiting passage of the necessary authorization language now contained in H.R. 7576. As a result, according to the Office of Civil Defense Mobilization, nearly one-half a million instruments of various types are being distributed to State and local Civil Defense agencies for training Civil Defense workers as well as the 1 million students.

I recall Governor Val Peterson saying at the time of the Intergovernmental Commission meetings that he would like to see instruments placed in every fire and police station, in our schools, and in all of our civil defense offices with people trained to use them.

I hope present goals for this program are soon achieved, and now that Congress has done its part, that no further excuses by the Executive are made for delaying such an essential program, which is so vital to our security and our safety.

5. Lack of Information On Civil Defense Danger

The press has frequently alluded to secret reports made by the Gaither Committee, the Rand Corporation, the East River Group, and so on. I am also acquainted with the Rockefeller Brothers Report, but few people know what these documents contain -- and more important, recommend.

If these reports are as alarming as the leaked versions or excerpts from such studies would seem to indicate, then it is time to give wide publicity and attention to the threat. Perhaps if this were done, Congress and the public would pay more attention to the needs of Civil Defense. So in the future, I urge that these publications and reports be given adequate publicity so that all of us will know where we stand.

One report which has received attention is that of the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

I am proud of the fact that most of the recommendations of the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations have been carried out.

Promulgation of the National Civil Defense Plan, completion of the Survival Studies which have been underway in the States and cities and passage of H. R. 7576 have gone far toward making the Civil Defense recommendations of the Commission effective.

Before closing, I would like to comment on a very practical application of Civil Defense Training. I refer to your Natural Disaster Relief activities.

Civil Defense and Disaster Relief

Natural Disasters have been a great proving ground for Civil Defense. Where there has been a strong Civil Defense many lives have been saved and much property conserved during the many terrible disasters which this Nation has experienced in recent years. Hurricanes, floods, tornados, drought, blizzards, fires, have caused great loss of life and billions in property damage. The fact that in most states, the Civil Defense agency by law handles such disasters is most fitting. The Office of Civil And Defense Mobilization as you know performs the disaster coordinating function at the Federal level.

The importance of this function and the value of Civil Defense has been brought home to me in a very practical way by the disasters which have affected my home State of Minnesota. While part of my State was parched with drought, other areas were under water. At times it seemed that sections not flooded or parched were being blown away by a disasterous series of tornados.

Throughout it all our State Civil Defense Agency headed by Colonel Hubert Schon working as a staff arm of Governor Freeman was always on the job saving lives and property and when Minneapolis was threatened or hit, your President, Walter Halstead, our Minneapolis Director was on the job working effectively in harmony with our State Director. The great job these two organizations did has been applauded in Minnesota as well as nationally. I am told that the recent Civil Defense Survey made by the American Municipal Association in which I once participated has singled out the Minnesota-Minneapolis Civil Defense work as outstanding and an example to the entire country.

Federal cooperation was of great assistance during these disasters. The coordination of various Federal agencies and departments was carried out through them by the Federal Civil Defense Administration's Natural Disaster Office working through the Regional Office. It was obvious to me that all the civil defense forces involved -- Federal, State, and local -- benefited from the experience of coping with these terrible disasters. But do not forget -- none of these -- not even the multi-billion dollar blizzards and floods of 1949 and 1950, nor the Connie nor Diane hurricanes -- would even approach an atomic attack -- in danger, devastation, and death.

Conclusion

Let me conclude on four brief points:

FIRST: a realistic view shows there is no absolute military defense, but an active civil defense can save millions of lives which cannot be saved by military countermeasures.

SECOND: we must raise the stature, responsibility, and scope of the civil defense program over and above the present ridiculous situation which finds the agency budget to be about a tenth of one per cent of the total Department of Defense budget.

THIRD: the civil Defense program must be continuing. It must be an essential part of Government responsibility so that it is accepted as a reality of living in this thermomuclear age.

FINALLY: there is not a member of the Senate or of the House of Representatives who would dare for a minute to go home and face his constituency if he had not voted for the defense of his Nation.

I hope some constituents will ask if he voted for the defense of their homes.

Defense does not mean merely a strategic air force or command that can strike at the enemy: **it** also means an adequate civil defense for the civilian population which makes possible resistance and striking back at an aggressor or attacker.

The lives of 170 million American citizens may in large part depend upon Civil Defense. We must -- we shall make our Civil Defense equal to its task.



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org