While I disagree with the cynic—I am in honour bound to—who came to the depressingly obvious conclusion that a man can only begin to think when he ceases to work, I confess that my activities in recent years, and even in recent months, have not given me the time or opportunity to buttress my thoughts, if not with logic and learning, at least with an impressive academic record. I am also acutely aware, from my life in the world of active politics, national and international, how great is the gap between many of the ideas and ideals which I will express in these talks as essential to peace in the family of man, and the hard reality of the practices and policies that dominate our world today. If, having abandoned the limiting responsibilities of office, my reach may now seem far beyond my grasp, I can only echo hopefully the poet’s question, ‘What’s a heaven for?’ It’s a question that not only Reith Lecturers but even practical and pressured politicians ought to keep in mind.

The first 16 years of my life were spent in the Edwardian end of the Victorian era. It was a time when we felt that God was in His Heaven and all was well with our world. For a young Canadian, that world was a very small part of a province, of a Dominion, in an Empire on which the sun was said never to set. And then in August 1914 the armies moved, and it all ended. For me there followed four years of unheroic but never to be forgotten military service overseas; the sacrifice of many of my friends and a large part of my generation. When that war ended, almost exactly 50 years ago, those of us who survived, resolved: ‘never again—it must not be.’

The League of Nations seemed to embody that resolve. It was an organisation founded on Woodrow Wilsonian idealism, but on which we hoped, the French especially, to build a practical and realistic structure for international co-operation and collective security. But the will was lacking; and so was international trust. Fear was first among the emotions and it is not a good base for peace. I recall my own very modest part as a civil servant in Canadian delegations to League meetings after 1930. In particular I think of the days of hope when our League of Nations took stern collective action against an aggressor. I remember the Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom moving us to cheers and almost to tears when he pledged the policy of His Majesty’s Government to steady and collective resistance against aggression; in this case, Fascist aggression against Ethiopia. The date was 1936.

That, to me, was the high point of international progress between the wars. It was soon followed by the lowest; with the shoddy betrayal of international sanctions by us all, and the desertion of the brave victim. I have felt ever since that this abject failure of collective action against Fascist Italy’s aggression in Ethiopia was the beginning of World War Two. That action failed because, when the test had to be faced, national policy and national fears—yes, and national prejudices—proved to be more important than international ideals.
I recall one conversation I had at that time with a British naval friend, who was worried that even the ineffective sanctions that had been adopted might lead to war with Fascist Italy—real war. ‘We dare not go further along this path,’ he said. ‘The British Navy is in no condition to wage a war in the Mediterranean.’ This was against Italy alone. I asked my naval friend: ‘What would happen if the Italians landed 1,000 men on an island in the Mediterranean which happened to be under the British flag?’ The reply was quick and decisive: ‘It would be war and we would drive them off.’ And so it happened. A few years later, for King and Country, this same Navy went proudly and confidently into the Mediterranean to face Italy and Germany and their allies, without doubt or hesitation.

So the League collapsed and World War Two began. 1939 merely confirmed that those who are not able to read the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its tragedies. As World War Two was drawing to an end in 1944, many of us were again encouraged to believe that this time we had learned the tragic lessons; this time the world would effectively organise for peace. San Francisco was to be no second Versailles. This time we would build a United Nations organisation, on the ruins of the old League; one that would succeed. The new world—if one may put it this way—of Washington and Moscow would redress the balance of the old: the world of the old League of Nations, the Western European statesman’s club with associate membership from Latin America and some other parts of the world, but without the United States, the Soviet Union and all those ‘lesser breeds’ (as they would probably have been thought of) that had not yet achieved independence. For a few weeks at San Francisco we thought we had scaled the heights and could see the Promised Land.

What went wrong this second time? Not the Charter we drew up at San Francisco. True, it had to be based on the equal sovereignty of every member-state—but it was good enough and strong enough to be the foundation of a world organisation if the will to build had been there. It was not limitation of membership. That only became apparent later when 700 million Chinese were represented by a government in exile on the island of Taiwan. Not because of the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council. That was only a symptom, not the disease. It merely underlined the fact that the UN could only work effectively if the five great powers—and particularly the USA and the USSR—worked together.

That co-operation soon became impossible, on any agreed terms. To the Soviet Union such co-operation implied that the two super-powers—as leaders of two blocs—would run the world and each would keep out of the other’s sphere of influence. But the USA and the UK and France, while insisting on the recognition of their own power interests and responsibilities, were unwilling to accept Moscow’s idea of international order and organisation. And so the Cold War began.

How could we expect the UN to grow in strength and authority as a world organisation in these circumstances? Instead of being a pathway to peace and security, it became far too often a battlefield in the Cold War. This was nowhere more apparent than in the effort to organise international security. The Council, which the Charter had decreed should be the main agency for such security, became, in the words of the Canadian Prime Minister, ‘frozen in futility and divided by dissension’. There could be no international force built up under its jurisdiction. Most important of all was the
failure to establish international control of the atomic weapon which brought an entirely new and dangerous element into international relations.

My mind goes back, again, to a personal experience. I was Canadian Ambassador in Washington in November 1945 when President Truman invited the Prime Ministers of the UK and Canada with their advisers to discuss with him what should be done about atomic weapons, which the United States alone possessed at that time. On a Sunday morning we went for a cruise with the President down the Potomac River. At one point Mr Truman said: ‘Now, we will go around the table, and I’ll ask everybody’s opinion as to what we should do about the bomb.’ When it came to me I was a little diffident about saying anything. But not much was needed. All I had to say was: ‘There’s only one thing to be done, and that’s to get in touch with other powers, especially the USSR, which will become a nuclear power shortly, and draft an agreement for international control of this new force.’ That was the general feeling of the meeting. But it didn’t lead to action then—or at any time. The great opportunity was lost.

Once the Russians got the bomb, the guarantee of peace and security was no longer millions of men with bayonets but the nuclear deterrent. And we have balanced on this thin edge of safety ever since.

But the UN did not give up the fight for collective and international security. It took action against the aggressor in Korea, when the absence of the Soviet delegate enabled the Security Council to act. That absence is unlikely to be repeated. When the futility of the Security Council to guarantee security or to act against the aggressor became apparent, the Assembly, where the veto did not operate, was authorised to mobilise international force for international action to preserve the peace or defeat aggression, a step taken against the bitter opposition of the Communist and some other members, who insisted that it was in violation of the Charter.

But it was this Resolution which made possible UN intervention in the Suez crisis of 1956, of which I have vivid memories, even 12 years later. In October 1956 the United Kingdom and France intervened in fighting between Israel and the United Arab Republic for the stated purpose of bringing that fighting to an end. At the United Nations there was violent opposition to this intervention and a demand that unless it were brought to an end the United Kingdom and France should be declared aggressors under the Charter. Friends of France and Britain—and that included Canada and others that had not been able to support the intervention—were deeply disturbed about the possibility of punitive political action. They were also worried about the very real danger of the war spreading through Soviet intervention and about division within the Commonwealth deep enough to lead to its break-up.

Between London and Washington also a serious break had developed. Now there is one cardinal and constant feature in Canadian foreign policy: to avoid any situation by which Canada as a North American country will come into conflict with Canada as a member of the Commonwealth. So I, as the Canadian delegate was naturally anxious to do anything I could to find a solution by UN action: a solution by which the fighting could end, by which those who had felt they had to intervene could honourably withdraw and by which the danger of a Commonwealth break-up would be removed.
As I saw it, the UN must move quickly to set up some kind of international police force. I discussed the idea with Dag Hammarskjöld—who was doubtful about its practicability at first—and with some other delegations, including the United Kingdom. And that same night, when I got the floor at the Assembly, I put forward the resolution that led to the UN Emergency Force.

There is a time in every crisis when everyone is so frightened of what might happen that they will accept many things that they wouldn’t have contemplated before the crisis; and indeed are unlikely to contemplate a week after it has ended. So at the time it was introduced my resolution for a police force was greeted with almost unanimous acclaim. That resolution gave us only 70 hours to report back to the Assembly on the organisation of the force. But before that deadline was reached we had completed our report. It was a thrilling moment. We had to get contingents from various countries, arrange for UN uniforms, badges and identification, and provide for air transportation. If only 100 men of the United Nations were to appear at once, that would be better than a division later. Wasn’t it Stalin who said, ‘How many divisions has the Pope?’ Well, this UN Force was beyond divisions. It was the conscience of the world community, acting to stop a small war and prevent a bigger one. Whether it actually succeeded in preventing that bigger war, we shall never know. But it certainly succeeded in bringing the particular conflict to an end, at least for some years. And when UNEF was forced to withdraw, we know what happened.

The Assembly, then, had discharged important responsibilities in maintaining peace and security; but this was not the way it was meant to be done by the Charter. The Security Council had been intended as the principal peacekeeping agency. The Cold War made this impossible; so in the late Forties, when hopes failed of organising security under the Security Council on a universal basis, those of us who believed in collective action rather than national action felt that we should not allow the best to become the enemy of the good: we should try to make regional arrangements, and those governments that were ready to subordinate their national sovereign rights to the greater need of peace and international security should get together for that purpose. So we began the talks that led to Nato.

We had to act quickly because the destruction of democracy in Czechoslovakia by the USSR in 1948 showed that there was a danger of Soviet aggression against Western Europe and to prevent this I felt strongly that collective resistance had to be organised on an Atlantic basis. I was as much a United Nations man after Nato as before. In Nato I also saw more than a military alliance. Along with others, I hoped that it might develop into a genuine Atlantic community, organised on a supranational basis. That is why I was happy when Article 2—which is sometimes called the Canadian article—was put into the Treaty to provide for co-operation on other than military matters. This seemed to me to be essential. A military alliance rarely survives the crisis and danger which gives birth to it.

The attitude of the bigger Nato powers was friendly but sceptical. ‘OK, if you idealistic Canadians want to do this, it can’t do anybody any harm, but don’t expect it to do anybody much good, or worry too much about it.’ Well, the smaller members in the alliance did worry about it. They were anxious to make Nato a genuine collective organisation for more than defence. But they have only partially succeeded. Nato did
become an effective organisation for collective security, but it was impossible to
develop Article 2 as we had hoped. Nato was both too small and too large in its
membership. On the political side, the smaller and less important powers were willing
to give up more of their sovereign rights than the larger ones were. This was natural:
their sovereignty in any event was more theoretical than actual. The United States, the
United Kingdom and France did not wish Nato to become a political organisation
with supra-national authority. They were not willing to allow their policies to be
determined, or even indeed too much influenced, by a group of men from other
countries. Nato has remained a diplomatic and consultative, rather than a political and
decision-making, organisation. The position of Turkey is of particular significance in
this security context, it seems to me. The Turks are a brave and stalwart people. They
are also neighbours of Russia and must always be anxious about their security in an
uneasy world. Therefore Nato must have seemed to them a very important
organisation. Turkey borders on the Soviet Union. Turkey is a member of Nato. If
there are, or have been, bases near the Soviet-Turkish border— nuclear bases, missile,
bases—they are Nato bases and the USA, as a member of Nato, is there. But the
Russian reaction might well be: ‘This Turkish base is really an offensive and
aggressive Nato base. It is a threat to us.’

I remember—if I may digress for a moment—long and weary discussions at the
Geneva Disarmament Conference of the Thirties on the distinction between offensive
and defensive weapons. If a naval gun is 7.8 inches, say, it is offensive, but, if you
bring it down to 6.4 inches, it is defensive. The arguments went on for days and days.
One night at a café in Geneva, after a very good dinner, some of my friends and I,
junior advisers and therefore very confident in our wisdom, solved this problem
without any difficulty. The distinction between offensive and defensive arms was a
simple one: if you were in front of them, they were offensive; if you were behind
them, they were defensive.

Well, the Russians are in front of any kind of a weapon on the Turkish border. They
may have felt that if they adjusted to this situation on their Turkish border without too
much alarm or counteraction, the United States would hot—or should not —be so
violently opposed to their transporting a few missiles from Russia to an American
state, Cuba, which had by that time become an ideological friend of Russia. Canada
supported the United States in its determination to get Russian nuclear missiles out of
our part of the world. Especially in a hostile country, as Cuba was, they were a
provocation and a threat to peace. So I do not condone what the Soviet Union tried to
do in Cuba—any more than I condone what they are doing in Czechoslovakia. But we
should try to understand their reasoning if we are going to react wisely to what seem
to us dangerous situations that spring from that reasoning.

I had personal evidence of the importance, and the difficulty, of doing this during a
weekend I spent with Mr Khrushchev in October 1955, at his palace (so-called) on the
Black Sea near Yalta. Mr Bulganin was there too. We had hours of very frank, no-
holds-barred talk. Mr Khrushchev kept referring to the danger of renewed Nazi
aggression and the mistake that Canada was making by joining West Germany in
Nato. His theme was: ‘You have no idea what these people have done to us. How can
you join them and encourage them to attack us again?’
I told him I could understand their feelings but I did not share their fear. I believed that West Germany was a good- and peaceful member of the European community. However, I argued, even if there were such a danger, which I didn’t admit, surely Nato lessened rather than increased it. Wasn’t it better from the Russian point of view to have the Germans inside an organisation which could curb any aggressive tendencies? ‘Do you think,’ I asked him, ‘that Canada is aggressive?’ ‘Oh, no,’ he assured me, ‘not at all. You are fine, brave people.’ So I replied: ‘All right, we’re in Nato. So are Norway, and Denmark, and the Netherlands, and Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Do you really think we want the Germans or anybody else to use Nato as a base for an attack on the Soviet Union?’ I made not the slightest impression on him.

And by the same token I suppose there’s not much use trying to argue with the Russians that they should have left Czechoslovakia alone; that Czechoslovakia is a free democracy; that the Czechs weren’t trying to abandon socialism; that they’d have been even better and stronger allies of Russia as a free socialist democracy. There was no way in which the Czechs could convince the Russians of that, and so they moved in: and in so doing they underlined once more how close we are to the brink of a destructive nuclear war; and this reminded us of the agonising paradox that our main hope for peace at present depends on the capacity for annihilation of the very weapons we fear. Certainly the only real deterrent we now have is the fear that conflict will destroy us all.

But in the long run, without fundamental changes in international society, that fear will either disappear, in which case we shall quarrel and threaten ourselves into conflict in the old traditional way, or the fear will become so great that we will have to fight in order to remove it. And in either case the result will be nuclear war. I do not believe that if the big powers get into all-out military action they will be able to refrain from using any weapon they have. Once in the middle of a war there would be no deterrent against the escalation of weapons. There never has been at any time in history. In a war for survival a nation uses everything it has for victory, even if it loses half its population in getting it or failing to get it. What entitles us to think that we are different in this respect from what we were 100 years ago, or 50 years ago? So we really are on the brink of survival or complete destruction. If we don’t do something urgently to solve the basic problems of the world, political problems, security problems, problems of the rich and the poor, the developed as well as the developing nations, there will be an explosion. And I mean a nuclear explosion.

Yet there is no cause for despair. We know what we have to do, and it can be done. On the other hand, I am acutely aware of the difficulty of bringing about the necessary social, political and economic changes inside our own countries which will have to precede the establishment of an effective international order. There is a temptation always to demand easy and clear-cut solutions of the ‘world order now’ variety, which remove the necessity of living patiently with our problems until we can solve them. Certainly- in the urgency of our situation it is wise not to ignore any opportunity to move forward. But if we insist on all-or-nothing solutions, we can count on getting nothing. And for a long time yet we shall have to reconcile urgency with practicality. Our situation is rather like that of a man in a runaway car on an icy slope gathering speed towards a precipice, who has to say to himself: ‘If I slam the
brake on, I shall skid. But I know there is a way of stopping this thing. Carefully now…”

Care and patience are not qualities too widely esteemed in this tense and uneasy world. But only care and patience, in combination with idealism, determination and common sense, will see us through to peace in the family of man.