When someone speaks to you of the world, what image forms immediately in your mind? A picture of hills and plains and rivers? The shining orb, spinning at a thousand miles an hour, that astronauts have seen? Or a vision of people, white, black or yellow, rich and poor? When you pick up an atlas, are you drawn by those maps that are headed ‘physical’, where you can trace the heights of mountain ranges and the depths of oceans, or those that are headed ‘political’, where national boundaries are strongly marked and great cities and ports and airfields are printed in big type? The world has quite different meanings for the geologist, the astronomer, the student of life and culture in their myriad aspects, the politician, the poet or the trader. So I must make clear at once that my world, the world I understand and am going to talk about, is the harsh, proud world of nations and of states, of flags and capital cities, of governments with interests to promote and populations to shield, of societies that generate power of many different kinds and in different degrees, and the way they interact upon each other. A rapid and, for the most part, unforeseen process of change is now occurring in the nature of these interactions, in the whole of the way the world goes round, as the final quarter of this century comes upon us.

Although European history since the Renaissance has been one continuous pageant of change, every adult alive today, and anywhere in the world, has undergone a greater alteration in his environment, even remote Himalayan sherpas or Andean Indians, than any of his forebears. It has been swiftest in the industrial democracies, for there it has affected every aspect of our lives, our prosperity, our safety, the structure of our societies and our families, our access to information and to distant places. I am only 55, for instance, but when I first went to school it was in a pony and cart, and I can just remember — because the middle-aged often have a better memory for their childhood than for their youth — our acquisition of a funny little box called a crystal set which was the very beginning of radio broadcasting. People of my age and older grew up, in fact, in the darkening twilight of the 19th century, still partly moulded by its values, our daily lives still largely conditioned by its technology, the political map of the world different only in Central and Southern Europe and one or two other places from that which Disraeli had surveyed.

Then for a quarter-century after 1940 we went through one of the most profound transformations in the political history of mankind, to which every sentient person over 45 has been a witness. Out of the wreckage of the war there emerged two states with a mixture of economic power, military strength and social magnetism of a different order from that of the old European and Asian great powers. A degree of ideological hostility unknown since the French Revolution expanded their influence into opposing coalitions; an international system that had been primarily Eurocentric in its springs of action since man had been grouped into sovereign states five centuries earlier disappeared; and the vast European empires in Asia and Africa first buckled
and then broke into literally scores of new sovereign states. And this gigantic process of political change took place against a background of scientific and technological innovation so rapid, so pervasive, as in the end to cause something of a popular reaction against-science itself.

No nation, perhaps, was more deeply affected by this revolutionary pace of change than Britain, whose position was transformed in the space of a generation from that of a country whose monarch ruled over seven hundred million subjects and whose government was still one of the most influential in the world, to that of a member—a senior member, it is true—of a West European club of middle and small powers of wide but finite interests, a country now more admired for its civilisation than respected for its energy. If we British sometimes display a rather sluggish interest in some of the world’s problems, it is perhaps because the change in our position in the world has been too great to digest and accept within the span of a single generation. Ironically, the American scholar who in 1944 coined the term ‘super-power’ assumed that Britain would be one of them, but the scale of power in this new international order was far beyond our reach.

How we survived this period of cataclysmic change without a major war will be for the later historian to unravel. But the provisional answer must surely be the existence of nuclear weapons in the hands of two leading powers who had both the technological base and the land mass to deploy them, so that by the mid-Fifties neither could attack the other with impunity: this created a sense of prudence at the core of a new kind of balance of power, based on the ability to deter rather than defend. And at the beginning of the Sixties it was. not unreasonable to speculate that we might be entering a new kind of international order, resting essentially on the preparedness of the two tight coalitions that had aggregated round the superpowers in the blizzard of the Cold War years to compete but not to fight: coexistence, but with a gradually increasing identification of certain common interests between two otherwise antagonistic conceptions of the organisation of society, the open and the disciplined. In other words, the storm might be dying out, as a similar storm of religious conflict died out in the middle of the 17th century, and through the acceptance of the same formula: to each prince his own religion. World trade was beginning to increase rapidly, the great advances in knowledge were turning from the physical to the life sciences, and there were other hopeful signs.

Adversary Partners
The political events of the past ten years have provided some justification for this view. The two super-powers are now, in certain specific fields, what has been called ‘adversary partners’; China, shuttered from normal diplomatic intercourse for nearly a quarter of a century, is again an accepted member of the international community: the ravelled skein of unfinished business in Europe, knotted by the onset of the Cold War immediately after the Second World War, has been largely unwound—thanks partly to the patient diplomacy of Chancellor Brandt and partly to an alteration in Soviet preoccupations. The process of decolonisation is substantially accomplished. American involvement in Vietnam, which clouded most of the past decade, is ended, even if only by a rather shaky armistice.
Yet we do not light bonfires to celebrate the dawn of a quieter world, for we have a
sense that we are again in the early stages of a new cycle of change which is
structural, quantitative and qualitative in character and which may make the final
quarter of this century as different in its preoccupations and prospects as the post-war
era was from that of the earlier 20th century. The lines of force are changing:
ideological adversaries like the United States and the Soviet Union are finding a
measure of common ground; friends of long standing are in danger of becoming
adversaries on certain issues like trade and access to raw materials. Gradually, a new
range of possibilities that were not worth our time and breath to speculate upon ten or
even five years ago has begun to enter the realm of the possible: that we may risk a
shift in the balance of power, so that it is the Soviet Union rather than the United
States which becomes the world’s strongest and most active state; that some form of
Soviet-American alliance may be necessary; that the Atlantic Alliance, which has
been the principal device for keeping the peace in Europe, may have a limited future;
that we may see a Far East dominated by a Sino-Japanese entente; that the developing
world may again become divided into spheres of influence among the great powers;
or conversely, that the policies of certain developing countries may have a profound
influence upon our own lives. I am not suggesting that such developments will occur,
still less that they are inevitable, but simply that the scope of the possible has
gradually begun to expand. And, as in all cycles of change, we are confronted—
especially in a vulnerable country like Britain—with a new uncertainty as to where
our material and moral interests lie.

In part, our sense of uncertainty derives from our historical experience. We are
accustomed to thinking of major reorientations in the pattern of world politics or in
the structure of world order as a consequence of wars and the settlements that have
succeeded them the Peace of Westphalia or the Treaty of Utrecht; the European
settlement that Castlereagh and Metternich hammered out in Vienna after Napoleon’s
defeat and entrenched in the subsequent European congresses; the series of treaties
and understandings that emerged from the Versailles Conference after the First World
War, with all their shortcomings; the successful codification of the free world’s
economic and monetary relationships that Keynes and others negotiated at Bretton
Woods in 1944; or the launching of the United Nations in 1945. At the end of a great
war there is a readiness to make a fresh start, to confront the problems of the future.

But when the structure of power or the climate of world politics changes in a time of
peace and high prosperity we are in a more difficult position, though we are spared
the carnage of war. There is no tabula rasa. We cannot make a fresh start. There are
no victor powers to impose a settlement upon the vanquished. We must adjust and
improvise the perspectives and alter the policies that we already have to meet a
changing set of circumstances. This was what had to happen about a hundred years
ago when a new great power rapidly emerged in Europe after Bismarck transformed a
group of small and middle-sized German states into a powerful industrial empire. But
our situation is much more complex than it was then, for this time the changing
agenda of world politics is the consequence not of a single political development but
of a multiplicity of causes. Structural changes are occurring in the relative power and
influence of the major states; there has been a quantitative change of colossal pro-
portions in the interdependence of the Western countries and in the demands we make
on natural resources; and there are qualitative changes in the preoccupations of our
societies. Each kind of change interacts upon the others. Subjects that were the
concern only of experts a few years ago have suddenly become high politics. As a result, we, the nations, are a little like the members of a committee who have been struggling hard to settle items one to three on the agenda—how to control or eliminate weapons of mass destruction, how to create easier relations between countries of opposing ideologies, how to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor countries—only to find that we must add five, six or seven new and important items to it. Hence the latent sense of crisis.

I am not going to try to play the role of prophet, least of all Jeremiah, nor attempt to delineate what the political and social map of the world may resemble in the Eighties and Nineties. There are particular pitfalls in any such attempt at present. For the very reason that the international agenda is changing there are a number of important international negotiations under way or soon to start—on arms control, on relations between the European states, on trade relations, on the reform of the international monetary system, on the law of the sea, and on oil—whose outcome cannot be predicted. We face, moreover, impending changes in the political leadership of the world’s most influential states: Richard Nixon will be out of office in just over three years’ time if not sooner; Leonid Brezhnev is a man of indifferent health at 67; and Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai are old. The men who fill their shoes, at whose identity we can only guess, may still make a deep imprint upon world politics.

But we can at least identify the processes of change that are occurring; we can discuss trends and currents even if we cannot make positive projections; and we can reach at least a tentative judgment on the kind of order that we wish to see emerge. So I am going to start by talking about the more obvious aspects of this new cycle of change. Next week I will discuss a group of disparate but pervasive quantitative forces, some of them technological, that are increasingly influencing the agenda of world politics. Then I shall focus on the United States, still by far the world’s strongest power, whose debates and decisions continue to affect the climate of world politics more than those of any other country, for she remains the apex of what is provisionally a new structure of power: a new triangular political relationship between herself, the Soviet Union and China and a triangular economic relationship with Europe and Japan. Thereafter, I am going to devote two lectures to the great arc of land and water that stretches from the Suez Canal to the Bering Sea that bears the rubric of Asia, for it is there, and not in Europe with its highly articulated and carefully controlled alliance systems, that the problem of sustaining order among a number of countries with conflicting interests is likely to be most acute. Finally, we must speculate on the means by which we are to control this dynamic process of change and keep it from erupting into conflict.

America’s Loss of Magnetism
To get some sense of the scope of change, let us take a brief step back into the past. Ten years ago John Kennedy was killed in Dallas, and the whole world mourned him as it has not mourned a leader dying in office perhaps since Pericles. We thought we were mourning a man, but if we had only known it, we were paying our respects to the passing of an era, to the end of the Americo-centric world. Ten years ago the United States was not only the world’s most powerful country at every level on which a state exerts power but also its most magnetic society. She had a superiority over her fellow super-power in strategic weapons of the order of ten to one.
A year earlier, Kennedy had used that margin of strength with skill and prudence to settle the Cuban missile crisis—which is the nearest we have so far come to nuclear war—and he had led his European allies with equal firmness through the prolonged Berlin crisis that ended with it.

America then produced nearly half the world’s wealth and was the major source of development aid. Her policy decisions were central not only to those of her 44 allies but also to those of many non-aligned countries. Her laboratories were the prime forcing-house of scientific discovery and technological innovation. She had led the world in the expansion of higher education; and though her racial problem had been getting steadily more serious with the increasing urbanisation of the black minority, she had displayed since the New Deal a flexibility in her approach to new social problems which older societies could not seem to match. She was the great experimental society, and other countries were concerned about the ‘brain drain’—her powerful attraction for their first-class minds.

The Soviet Union, which, with colossal efforts over two generations, had converted itself into an industrial and technological power of the first magnitude, seemed by comparison internally divided and politically static. The Sino-Soviet alliance, cobbled together in 1950 from an apparent identity of ideology and interest but probably more from mutual fear of American power in the Far East, had ruptured. China itself was a power of very limited influence. Japan was only just beginning to become a viable economic state. In Europe, the newly-founded Community had got no further than removing some of its internal trade barriers, and De Gaulle, by vetoing Britain’s first application to join it, had for the time being foreclosed the prospect of a comprehensive West European political association. Moreover, for every country in Europe, including France, it was the relationship with the United States, rather than with each other, that took precedence.

Ten years later, only parts of this map are still recognisable. True, the United States is still the world’s most powerful country. But though she remains the greatest technological power, her society has lost its magnetism, so that even the governments of her closest allies do not have a domestic constituency that permits them to accept her leadership unquestioningly in every field. And even her own political leadership is in doubt. The Soviet Union now has a larger armory of long-range nuclear weapons, missiles on land and in submarines, than the United States, and the two countries are locked in a negotiation of great complexity to find a formula that would prevent either achieving a meaningful strategic superiority over the other: since they may be unable to monitor whatever formula they can arrive at, their relationship may increasingly have to be one of mutual trust. When Mr Brezhnev, the most self-confident Soviet leader since Stalin, visited Washington in June, he had already signed an agreement with President Nixon whereby the two powers would urgently consult if their own relations or the relations of a third party appeared to involve a risk of nuclear war: an agreement that was inconceivable ten years ago. And the agenda of Soviet-American business is lengthening. They have just halted a fourth Arab-Israel war by a process of mutual bargaining in which they refused to let other powers become involved.

All this may be encouraging, provided we are not heading towards a situation in which these two states are drawn to each other by the power they exercise rather than
the principles for which their societies stand. That is the fear in Europe, and it is one of the forces that is making even the Government of the Fifth Republic, which never wanted the European Community to be more than a trading system enabling her to pursue a national foreign policy while keeping Germany closely knit to her, begin to see that the Community must now be transformed into a more effective instrument of collective diplomatic bargaining with both super-powers. It is a fear that is even more strongly felt in China, which is now in a state of armed confrontation with the Soviet Union.

These are not the only structural changes. Japan has shot to the surface, like a dolphin emerging from the ocean, as the world’s third strongest economic power, and possibly by the end of this decade its second. The unity of the so-called Third World has gone. Nehru’s conception of an inherent identity of interest between the new and the poor states of the world, non-aligned in the conflicts of the industrial powers of the East and West, is dead. His own country is an ally of the Soviet Union: so also, though in a discontented fashion, is the homeland of that other great apostle of the Third World, Gamal Nasser’s Egypt. Some developing countries—Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria—are rising dramatically in wealth and will exercise considerable influence in their own regions. In others, such as Zaire, the standard of living is falling as increased population offsets increased production. There are new relations of entente and new enmities among the developing countries. Politically, we are in a plural world such as we have not known for a generation or more.

What were the main agents of this profound alteration in the structure of world power? There was no single cause. Obviously, the Sino-Soviet dispute, the splitting of the Communist bloc, has been a prime cause and would have brought us into a more plural world ten years ago but for two things. One was the mistaken American belief that the machinations of North Vietnam represented a threat to the vital interests of the West, or was a deliberate challenge by both the great mainland powers to the United States: this kept alive a mutual Chinese-American hate image long after there was any political basis for it in terms of hostile intentions towards each other. The other was the Cultural Revolution in China, which withdrew her from contact with the outside world for much of the later Sixties. The second prime force has been the gradual loss of American hegemony, both as a strategic power and as the dominant economic power whose currency was the base of the whole monetary system: and more than that, a shift in the values of American society, not just as a consequence of Vietnam, the first major failure of American arms in the history of the Republic, not just because of domestic problems, but because of a growing uncertainty as to what power is or whether it is worth possessing. The third cause was that, as the threat of major war receded in the early Sixties, as the two super-powers began to develop invulnerable means of retaliation, so the natural desire of other sovereign states for greater freedom of action, even those bound in alliances to the super-powers for reasons of security, like France, Germany, Japan, Rumania, Australia, began to reassert itself.

**Romantic Revolts**

We can adjust to structural change, though it often takes courage to create it, as it took courage on Nixon’s part to respond to China’s overtures in 1970 and 1971. But structural change has been accompanied by other pressures. For instance, a qualitative
change is taking place in the goals of many nations and societies. In the democracies, the declining coherence of the family, a declining belief in the intrinsic value of work, a distrust of science, a distaste for ‘power politics’ despite the fact that the scale of different kinds of national power is growing every year, can be observed. It is the mass media rather than our political leaders which tend to set the agenda of public debate, and there is a diminishing confidence in the judgment of political leadership. Thus it is much harder for Edward Heath, who is a hard-working and strong-minded prime minister, to lead this country than it was for, say, Stanley Baldwin, who was neither, a generation ago.

Both in the democracies and the dictatorships, both in the developed and the developing world, there is a romantic revolt against the planned society which draws together as allies against the state those who have an ethnic or religious fellow-feeling, whether they be Welsh Nationalists, Ulster Catholics, Quebeckois, Flemings, Basques, Latvians or Georgians, Kurds or Nagas. As words like ‘honour’, ‘duty’, ‘patriotism’ lose their force, there is a growing divorce between political and social values which affects, among many other things, the degree of military power the governments of open and disciplined societies can sustain. Because of these changes in values, it is particularly important that our political perceptions should be clear.

When European life and politics were undergoing a similar process of change a hundred years ago, when Britain crossed the watershed from Palmerston to Gladstone, Bagehot, the essayist and editor, made this comment: ‘A political country is like an American forest: you have only to cut down the old trees and immediately new trees come up to replace them; the seeds were waiting in the ground and they began to grow as soon as the withdrawal of the old ones brought in light and air. These new questions of themselves would have made a new atmosphere, new parties, new debates.’ It is to some of these young and growing trees that I should like to turn next week.