Last week I started to discuss the evolving relationships of the new and old great powers in the area where the interests of four of them intersect—namely, the Far East. But one can get only a partial sense of the way in which these relationships may develop or conflict if one does not examine the ramifications of their activities in the rest of Asia. If we had all the world and time, I should talk about Africa and Latin America as well, where much is changing in the relations of the external and the local powers. But though Africa may one day be the scene of the greatest crisis since the Second World War, if the equatorial states gain the strength, the unity and the external backing to attempt to overthrow white rule in Southern Africa, and though Latin America is plagued by both old and new forms of violence, both have regional organisations for the reconciliation of their differences, or the assertion of their interests, and neither continent is in the vortex of high politics in the sense that the different regions of Asia have been and may be again.

For not only does Asia contain two-thirds of the world’s population: two of today’s great powers, China and Japan, are Asiatic, a third, the Soviet Union, has vast Asian estates and a rising Asiatic population, while the United States and the countries of Western Europe have been deeply involved in the politics of Asia. Not only have the greatest contests of force taken place in Asia in the post-war era, but we also have a sense that such equilibrium and understanding as has been attained in the relations of the major powers could be overturned more easily by developments there than in Europe.

It is a much vaster area: it includes enormous states and small states, prosperous and poverty-stricken countries, fierce and gentle peoples, societies alienated from each other by generations of hostility, Arabs and Israelis, Pathans and Sikhs, Annamese and Cochin-Chinese—fissures over which the colonial powers laid only a thin and temporary layer of reconciliation. It is not even a single area in political terms, but four related ones: South-West Asia, which Europeans long ago named the Middle East; the Indian sub-continent; South-East Asia, which in political terms now includes Australia; and Pacific Asia. In each of these areas the relations of the indigenous countries are susceptible to the influence of the external powers. Patterns of order can still be rapidly upset in Asia, and there is elbow-room for great-power manoeuvre of a kind which there no longer is in Europe.

Of the great powers, the Soviet Union is obviously seeking to fill those vacua left by the retreat of Western power in such a way as to contain the expansion of Chinese influence and to sustain her claim to be regarded as a universal power. If her containment policy vis-à-vis China also disorients Western or Japanese interests in the process, this obviously is to the good. But Soviet policy, though ambitious, and animated by the particular necessity to establish her credentials as an Asian power in
her own right, is infused by the same sort of disillusionment as American policy: by the obstacles to promoting revolutionary change in the slow-moving societies of Asia just as much as by the obstacles to promoting industrial and social democracy. She pursues, therefore, the Orthodox diplomacy of great-power expansion. She has seen naval power as a particularly useful diplomatic instrument for this purpose, although I wonder whether her confidence in a surface navy is not based on a reading of rather old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon treatises on the influence of sea power on history: Mahan, Corbett or Richmond.

American policies in Asia are in a sense the converse of the Soviet Union’s: those of a universal power which has had strong, not to say knotted, connections with every area of Asia, but is in the process of defining her interests in the area more carefully. Far more American blood has been spilt in Asia over the past 30 years than in any other area of the world. And throughout the post-war era, she devoted great efforts to the development of a system of alliances that would contain the expansion of the mainland powers, and then to an attempt to impose a system of regional order. There is now a question-mark: has the revulsion caused by Vietnam, has the American détente with the mainland powers, had the effect of narrowing her Asian interests to those that directly concern her national well-being or security—the Middle East and Pacific Asia? Curiously enough, for a country that has had so much vituperation heaped on its head by the Asian states, it may be partly by their own desire that she remains involved in the area as a whole, for China, in particular, which lived for years with the nightmare of American invasion, now fears the possibility of too great a reduction of American commitments in the area, by reason of the added freedom of action it would give the Soviet Union. So the United States may remain more deeply concerned with the politics of Asia than her people would prefer. Four times in my lifetime American Presidents have stated that the United States would not get involved again in Asian quarrels: Roosevelt in the Thirties, Truman after VE Day, Eisenhower after Korea, Nixon after Vietnam. Have we reached a decisive or only a false marker in America’s concern with Asia? If there were a debacle in the Sino-Soviet balance that posed the threat of Soviet dominance over the Pacific littoral if not the whole of China, could America remain aloof?

China’s policy in Asia is not a mirror image of Soviet policy. Because she is a country that is both poor and big, she has to use what limited assets she possesses, and one of them is the sense of identification that a poor but determined country, one that is pulling itself up by its own bootstraps, can establish with other developing countries. She needs their diplomatic support as a form of deterrence against Soviet pressure or attack, as an element in her own conception of a multiple balance of power. But a policy of global influence, or even one that is Asia-wide, is beyond her reach at present. For the time being, her most active diplomatic efforts are concentrated, not on the periphery of the Middle Kingdom, but in parts of East Africa, Iran and Pakistan where Soviet influence is most vulnerable to competition, and where it is important to China that it does not become entrenched. But the focus may change, particularly if there should be disillusionment in Soviet-Indian relations, or the Soviet Union should become very active in South East Asia.

Japan finds her Asian interests difficult to identify, though she is for ever conscious of the fact that she is an Asian power. She is also aware of the many bitter memories her name still raises in South-East Asia, and her businessmen have in recent years created
new abrasions. She has looked warily on grandiose ideas about pan-Asian organisations, for she wishes to remain neutral in local disputes. She would have liked to have played a part in the development of peace in Indo-China, and would still like to participate in its regeneration. As I suggested last week, no Asian sphere of influence has any economic significance or political attraction for her. For the time being, her diplomacy may be concentrated on creating a working entente between herself, Indonesia and Australia, whose interests are complementary to her own. But Japan has ambitions to play a much wider international role, in the control of change without war, if the other nations have the imagination to help her.

Finally, what about the European powers whose sailors and traders were active all over Asia when Japan and China were locked in isolation, when Russia was a frost-bound principality, and the future United States of America a group of struggling British and Dutch colonies on the Atlantic seaboard? Has Asia gone over the horizon for us? Obviously it has not. There is European investment and trade all over Asia; all of us are dependent on Middle Eastern oil; France has, or had, an active policy of entente with the Arab states as a whole; and Britain is still the mainstay of a modest collective security, arrangement in South-East Asia. European governments were deeply resentful when Henry Kissinger told them in a speech in April that they had only regional interests. Nevertheless, it is the case that the political content of European relations with the different parts of Asia is diminishing, certainly by comparison with Africa. France has lost any influence over the politics of Indo-China, as has Britain over those of the Indian sub-continent. But even if European influence is no longer decisive in shaping the politics of Asia, it is important that the Community’s interest in the various countries be sustained, and in a more energetic and unified fashion than at the start of last month’s oil boycott against the Netherlands.

**Arab Wrath**

Let us turn the map the other way up, and see how the activities of the external powers affect the relations and the aspirations of the local Asian states themselves. To take the Middle East first, it is clear that two things are happening there. First, there is a new balance of power between the oil states and the West, to which the Soviet Union is not a party, though she can deter any attempt to use Western force to alter it. The West is now going to suffer in economic terms the wrath of Arab radicalism, the consequences of a prolonged crisis of self-confidence which the Arab world has hitherto lacked the unity to express in political terms. The second is that the Arab-Israel balance is now likely to be a matter of joint management by the superpowers. They will not enjoy this new responsibility, and it will create new costs and frictions in their relations. But it is inherent both in their conception of their interests and in the behaviour of the local powers. For well-known reasons, the United States cannot divorce itself from the fortunes of Israel: the Soviet Union is lumbered with the consequences of a decision now nearly twenty years old to redress her failures elsewhere by developing a sphere of influence in the Arab world. Neither can escape the consequences of the past. United Nations peace-keeping forces are not once again in Sinai and on the Golan Heights because the international community, as a whole, has decided, as it did in 1956 under the great leadership of Hammarskjöld, to find a means of keeping the super-powers disengaged from the area. By 1973 the international community has been largely alienated by the intransigence of Israel and
the foxiness of Egypt and Syria, and the United Nations is involved not as an independent actor but at the entreaty of the super-powers themselves in order to give a cover of internationalism to a bilateral bargain.

I have called these Reith Lectures ‘Change without War’ and, although the title was chosen months ago, I think the recent Arab-Israel war confirms my general thesis. Before 6 October, Egypt and Syria could have counted on the rising wealth of the Arab world to increase their bargaining power for a diplomatic settlement with Israel. Now, they may simply have increased her sense of being a garrison state, and they may even have finally made Israel decide that she must produce her own nuclear weapons. Moreover, an assize of arms of this kind is so costly to each state in terms of men and equipment that it cannot be decisive. All that the belligerents in this particular war have done is impale themselves on the horns of a dilemma: either they must move steadily towards a settlement that involves concessions on both sides, or the super-powers will diminish their autonomy by insisting on greater control of their relationship.

In the second case, I feel there may be no alternative to an American treaty of alliance with Israel and to a Soviet alliance with Syria, as well as with Egypt. Kissinger has spoken vaguely of the United States guaranteeing a settlement, but the only effective and tested form of guarantee is an alliance. It would make it clearer that the United States has a particular relationship to Israel which does not derive from her position in Europe, as well as making all concerned weigh the consequences of renewed conflict with especial care. It would also avoid the European-American bickering that occurred last month when the Europeans resented being used as Airstrip One for the supply of American arms to a war in which they had no contractual involvement and over whose termination they were specifically denied any influence. But Israel and her neighbours should weigh the consequences of their relations becoming a dependency of the central balance, in the way that, for inescapable historical reasons, those of the European powers became so dependent in the Cold War years.

Both in the Arab-Israel balance and in the Arab-Western balance, the external powers will be much to blame, if events get beyond their control, for having used arms as the currency of influence. As far as the Arab-Israel balance is concerned, by far the heaviest blame attaches to the Soviet Union, which has cynically militarised the policies and, to a large extent, the societies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries, and thereby retarded their economic growth and development, simply as a means of extending her influence there. And one can argue that as the Russian tanks, missiles and aircraft poured into these countries both before 1967 and again after it, the United States, with its influential Jewish community, had little alternative but to do the same for Israel. But the West—the British, the French and, above all, the Americans—have made just the same mistake as the Soviet Union in relation to other Middle Eastern countries, notably the Gulf states. If you inject a great deal of complex modern military hardware into a traditional society, you do two things simultaneously: first, you cast a pall of fear across its relations with its neighbours; and secondly, you create a technologically trained elite—pilots, radar technicians, tank colonels and so on—who become simultaneously discontented with the framework of a customary society and endowed with the power to overthrow it. Hence Nasser, Boumedienne and many of the military dictators who bestrew the developing world.
At the moment, Iran, which is on reasonably good terms with the Soviet Union, is being wooed by China and has no serious enemies, is spending about $2,000 million a year on Western arms, the King of Saudi Arabia is trying to catch up, and the Emir of Kuwait may have 400 million dollars’ worth of arms on order. Fortunately, some of the small Gulf emirs are putting their wealth to more constructive uses, but they are likely to catch the infection. We, as oil consumers, may fear the hard bargaining in which OPEC now indulges on behalf of the oil-producing states, or resent the way in which oil money is used to try and force the West’s hand on the Arab-Israel issue. But a situation in which the Gulf itself erupted into armed conflict between the component states, with the Arab half of it resenting the Iranian attempt to turn it into a Persian lake, would mean no oil at all for us and no revenue for them. Conversely, a situation in which the major Gulf states face each other over piles of armaments may force them to try and find a basis of coexistence in an attitude of common intransigence towards the industrial world. Moreover, a situation in which today’s rulers, including the Shah, are overturned by importunate soldiers contains considerable dangers for stability in Asia. For if they are right-wing radicals, men of the Gaddafi stamp, they are likely not merely to drive an even harder bargain with the West on oil, but also to use their wealth to extend their influence into East Africa, Pakistan, South-East Asia, wherever Islam flourishes, so that we shall have new frontiers of religious tension as well as all the other forms of conflict to which Asia is susceptible. If they are left-wing radicals, they will move closer to the Soviet Union. Arms are not just another engineering export, as men in boardrooms or hard-pressed treasuries are apt to argue: they are a sure means of undermining regional relationships without the vendor acquiring any ability to control the upheavals to which they give rise.

I have always felt there was a certain logic in the Soviet-Indian treaty of 1971, given Russia’s long-standing interest in a position of influence with India, and the fact that there is no other major power who is in a position to assist India politically in an emergency. But the last word has not been said on the alignments of the area. The Russians are not tactful allies and relations between India and China, though still cool, are somewhat more flexible than, say, ten years ago when India was regarded as the great Asian experiment in Western political democracy and China was still an outcast. The Russians, perhaps sensing this, are now cultivating Pakistan, as well as reducing the independence of Afghanistan, but even if they should succeed, Iran (Pakistan’s ally) remains an important element in a fluid balance of relationships. This area of desert and high mountains is the land of Kim, of the ‘great game’, and one of the key proving-grounds of whether the local powers in the developing world are able to assert their own interests and sustain a balance of their own, or whether they will remain the objects of great-power manipulation. A crucial factor will be the application to this area of the principle of mutual access: for if the Americans and the Europeans lose interest in India now that she is closely linked to the Soviet Union for political and defence purposes, then they will be in a weaker position to insist on a similar principle of access elsewhere.

It may still be South-East Asia that represents the greatest challenge to the conception of peaceful co-existence. This is partly because of its recent history and the fact that all the external powers, including Japan, have to contend with the legacy of the past. Partly, it is because of the structure of its relationships. Excluding Burma, which has opted out of world politics, it consists of eight states: North Vietnam is militarily strong and militant; Indonesia is a potential major power, like Iran, but still internally
disorganised; Singapore is very small; Malaysia is ethnically divided; Thailand has a weak government; Cambodia is in a state of civil war; South Vietnam is exhausted and disorganised: in Laos civil conflict has become endemic.

The interests of the external powers may all differ, but each is determined that the area shall not become the exclusive province of another. One must assume that Indo-China will be an idea of endemic instability for some years to come. But, just because this is so, it seems to me that there is the beginning of a tacit consensus among the great powers to isolate conflict there: the United States, from public revulsion at her failure to impose her own stamp of order on the area; the Soviet Union, because conflict offers too good an opportunity to China; China, because conflict on her southern borders still raises fears of external threats to herself; Japan, because she is anxious to get on with the economic development of the area. In the rest of South-East Asia there is a modest regional organisation, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, which with Japanese and Australian encouragement and support might one day acquire the characteristics of a genuine ‘community’. The change in Australian perspectives is itself encouraging. Whereas, ten or even five years ago, Australians tended to think of themselves as the inhabitants of a larger Israel, an embattled outpost of Anglo-Saxon civilisation surrounded by the hordes of Asia, Mr Whitlam now reflects a changing national perspective in emphasising that Australia is in political reality an Asian country but one with great assets in terms of Lebensraum and distance from her neighbours.

Korean Peace
Pacific Asia is remarkable for one development that is a consequence, not of the efforts of the great powers, but of their inattention. For a quarter of a century, North and South Korea, which were accidentally divided at the end of the Second World War, and then the scene of a war in which half the world got involved, have been shouting blue murder at each other. As it has become clear to the South that the United States is determined to reduce her forces there, as the Communist North has become increasingly fearful of the consequences for her of the Sino-Soviet conflict, so there have been the beginnings of rapprochement between the two governments. They have been holding talks for the last year and a half, and in July 1972 signed a communiqué which, in flat contradiction of the position taken by the two Germanies or the two Vietnams, stated that ‘as a homogeneous people, a great national unity shall be sought above all, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems.’

There is less fighting in Asia today than at any time in the past 40 years, and the improving prospects of the Asian powers, in both economic and security terms, are partly attributable to the greater polycentrism of the international system. Just as Thailand may calculate that she can retain her American links and still improve her relations with Peking, because China does not want the Soviet Union to step into American shoes, so Japan has become an alternative source of investment and support to many countries as American interests become more sharply defined, and Pakistan can calculate that if she loses China’s interest she still has that of Iran. As the storms
that followed decolonisation die out, local systems of co-operation, still for the most part very frail, are developing.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the prospect of change without war in Asia depends crucially on the policies of the external powers. The war on the Indian sub-continent of two years ago was partly an adjustment to the development of a triangular relationship between America, Russia and China. The Sino-Soviet conflict could lead to new forms of war by proxy in Southern and South-East Asia. The Soviet Union could manipulate the inevitably difficult relationship between the Arab world and the West into open conflicts. Or some consumer crisis in Europe and America could convince a weak leader that oil must be secured by force, a repetition of Suez in a more hostile environment.

If formal agreements or large alliances in Asia are unlikely to command widespread support because the sense of threat is too diffuse, or because Asia has no one leader, what is required is a more elastic system of great-power interactions which recognises that their interests are not identical at every level on which power is exercised, strategic, political and economic. But for such a system to remain stable involves two important conditions. The first is what a Canadian colleague of mine, the late Leonard Beaton, used to call ‘cogniscence’, the conveyance between powers who may still be adversaries of a general understanding of what their long-term intentions are and what their short-term plans mean: something that the old diplomacy used to accomplish in the more homogeneous international order of the 19th century. Here again the lack of Sino-Soviet communication is a de-stabilising force, as to a lesser degree the secretiveness of the Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy has been.

The other condition is more difficult to meet but even more important. The Asian states cannot progress or confront their formidable economic and social problems without the support and interest of the major powers. But their involvement can avoid becoming militarised again only if there is an implicit agreement among them to subscribe to the principle of mutual access. Inevitably, they will compete, but if they try to establish exclusive zones of influence, to deny the local powers access to their rivals, then the seeds of fresh conflict will be laid. ‘Such an implicit consensus,’ a wise Indonesian diplomat has suggested, ‘should be based on a realisation that over-involvement of one major power is bound to lead to escalation by others without assurance that the political objectives of such over-involvement would be attained.’ This applies just as much to the Soviet Union in Syria or India, to China in Zambia or Laos, to Japan in Indonesia, as it did to the United States in Vietnam.