

That's why I particularly welcome the chance to speak at the Empire Club today. It has allowed me to pause in the galloping race of events and to formulate more specifically in my own mind some of the questions that have been bothering many of us for some time. In doing this, I certainly shall not pretend to have all the answers -- but it seems a good place to start.

First, I ask myself what kind of a world is it that we are living in. What are the political realities? The last time the Government of Canada asked this question out loud was a good ten years ago during its full scale foreign policy review. Well, things have sure changed since then.

Ten years ago it was still possible to believe in a broad system of international security based on the spheres of influence of the super-powers. Some effects of this broad system paralleled those of the colonial era of the last century. By the late sixties, of course, the process of decolonization was nearly complete -- the European empires had been pretty well disbanded. But though the empires had gone, they left behind a certain way of thinking about international affairs. No matter what you may think of the morality of imperialism, it did at least give a stabilizing frame of reference to world affairs. By and large, during the colonial period, conflict around the world was controlled by the European homelands, countries whose own economic self-interest weighed heavily against spontaneous outbreaks of conflict between neighbouring countries or colonies. The Pax Britannica was, after all, an almost unprecedented period of stability in the history of human affairs. And so one legacy of the colonial period was an intellectual approach to international affairs based on the stability that it brought. A decade ago, then, there was still a view of the world, shared by many, that the two super-powers would guarantee between them some sort of stability in the global system.

And certainly there was some evidence to support this view. In the fifties and sixties the United States saw fit to intervene with troops when trouble broke out in Guatemala and in the Dominican Republic without outraging international public opinion. The U.S.S.R. brutally quashed political change in the satellite states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Of course the system of stability was both incomplete and imperfect, but in those days it was still possible to view the world in that way.

Today the view is quite different. The world is not split into two great blocs who have a definitive influence. We have seen the development of a nuclear strategic stalemate, with neither super-power having overwhelming force. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore at the Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka described this as a new Roman arch, built not of bricks but of nuclear missiles, under which it is possible for other countries to find room