It has now become fashionable to talk about global interdependence. It has made its way from the pages of dull textbooks to the desks of bright politicians. But its precise meaning is not always clear; still less its policy implications.

I see two broad meanings in global interdependence as applied to matters of economics. It embraces the term of increasing economic linkage among countries through the continuing development of trade and especially financial flows. It also covers a somewhat different, though related concept, that is, the interrelationships among the powerful forces shaping the present and foreseeable world economic system: most obviously in the complex nexus emanating from macro policy, capital flows, exchange rates and trade.

In these two manifestations of interdependence there is a common message. Interdependence clearly conveys a sense of amplified risk but also unprecedented opportunities for joint gains.

The policy implications are important both for individual governments and for international economic institutions. Many policy issues traditionally perceived as subject only to internal criteria are increasingly exposed to the intrusion of international objectives or have major spillover effects on the international economy. In no country as yet is the decision-making process fully adapted to this blurring boundary between domestic and international economic policy.

The multilateral institutions are also under pressure to adapt. The structure established after World War II to promote economic development, orderly financial markets, and an open world trading system, rested on a tripod -- the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Today's world economy has become immeasurably more interdependent than the one these institutions were designed to serve. The "old multilateralism" worked surprisingly well for several decades, but unless it is adapted and strengthened it will be unlikely to meet the needs of the 1980's and beyond.

The problem, however, is one of timing. There are two clocks ticking: the clock of rapidly accelerating economic interdependence and the clock of domestic and multilateral decision-making. But they are not, as yet, ticking to a simultaneous schedule. We have yet to agree on the economic policy equivalent of Greenwich Mean Time.