

But the political, economic and military obligations we have undertaken for our common defence offer commensurate rights and duties. Among them is the right to speak about the full range of Western policies, and the duty to reflect about where we are and where we should be going.

We are not silent partners in any of the councils we have joined — because silence would mean the abdication of responsibility in the face of crisis. We are not ambiguous about our international commitments — because we recognize our deep engagement with an interdependent world. We are not afraid to negotiate with those who may threaten us — because that fear would betray lack of confidence in the vital strength of our own values.

That is the mood I want to bring to you this evening, and the spirit in which I want to share with you some of my own reflections on your theme of "Strategies for Peace and Security in the Nuclear Age".

I will tell you right away that I am deeply troubled: by an intellectual climate of acrimony and uncertainty; by the parlous state of East-West relations; by a superpower relationship which is dangerously confrontational; and by a widening gap between military strategy and political purpose. All these reveal most profoundly the urgent need to assert the pre-eminence of the mind of man over machines of war.

There is today an ominous rhythm of crisis. Not just an arms crisis. It is a crisis of confidence in ourselves, a crisis of faith in others. How can we change that ominous rhythm? That is the question which brings me here tonight.

I start from what I suppose is a problem in epistemology — the difficulty all of us experience in trying to know what is going on in the world — to know it and to understand it in a manner that is accurate, that provides the ground for useful action.

Too often our knowledge and our judgments are true and false at the same time. This is often the distinctive sign of rapidly changing realities which tend to elude our understanding. For example we know that there are, in the Eighties, many new kinds of power and many new centres of power. There is the power of oil, or of cheap labour, or of regional hegemony. We call it a multipolar world — which suggests that no nation can act in isolation, that no power is truly dominant. But surely it is also true, and perhaps now with a special force, that the superpower relationship is at this time as dominant and as crucial as it ever was in the Fifties — when we had a more simplistic bipolar model with which to understand the world.

Another example: military strategy is the subject of much debate these days. This is a positive sign. Many strategists, in rightly trying to increase the odds against the nuclear gamble, advocate increased strength in conventional weapons, and new doctrines for conventional deterrence. Some of these doctrines have the sound purpose of delaying, or even preventing, the terrible resort to nuclear weapons in any European conflict.