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*U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James's*

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# Address to the U.S. Naval War College

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William J. Crowe, Jr.  
U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James's

**I**T IS A PLEASURE TO BE IN NEWPORT, especially at the Naval War College. I envy the students here. As you know, I come to you from London, where for the past two years I have been the Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

Prior to this assignment I spent forty-seven years in the military. It was a little tough retiring in 1989 after wearing the uniform for so many years. Retirement does, of course, have its compensations. A friend told me that I would have increasingly vivid memories of things that never happened at all. Having now read some of the memoirs of my Washington contemporaries, I think there is some truth in his observation. Another advantage of retirement was that once out of government I was uninhibited by government policy and could speak freely. The rub was that I no longer had a staff to tell me what I wanted to say. It is difficult for old admirals to start thinking for themselves.

Despite the pleasures of retirement, I was pleased to be asked once again to serve the republic in a position of responsibility.

One reason I am enjoying my current assignment so much is my enduring affection for London. My attachment flowered when I was attending Princeton

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Ambassador Crowe graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946; he later earned a master of arts degree in education from Stanford University and a Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University. In 1985 he was appointed by President Ronald Reagan as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and in 1987 to a second term. Retiring from naval service in 1989, Admiral Crowe served as a counselor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., and as professor of geopolitics at the University of Oklahoma. In addition, he was appointed by President William J. Clinton as chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and he has been a director of the Council on Foreign Relations and chairman of the Washington Institute of Foreign Affairs. He was nominated on 22 March 1994 as U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, presenting his credentials to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on 2 June 1994.

These remarks were delivered to a Naval War College and Newport community audience on 29 May 1996 as part of the College's International Lecture Series, sponsored by the Naval War College Foundation.

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University graduate school and elected to do research in London. I spent several months there with my family in 1964–65. I was working on a dissertation with the forbidding title, “The Political Roots of the Modern Royal Navy.” After its completion, this tome lay on the library shelf, unheralded and unread, for almost thirty years. Then some enterprising British journalists discovered that the new ambassador to the Court of St. James’s had written a dissertation on the Royal Navy. I have been defending it ever since. My only real defense is that if I had known that I was going to be ambassador one day I wouldn’t have said all those things. I suppose I should have taken Calvin Coolidge’s advice to budding politicians: You don’t have to explain something you never said.

In any case, despite having to defend my thesis, I have greatly enjoyed my time in London. I must say, it is a pleasure to serve in a city where one of the principal monuments is dedicated to an admiral. Lord Mountbatten once referred to the ribbing he received from his army friends about the Nelson Monument in Trafalgar Square. They insisted that the Admiral’s figure was so high in the air it was never noticed or appreciated. Lord Mountbatten replied with a story about the young English boy who used to walk by the equestrian statue of Wellington in Hyde Park on his way to school.

One day his father was with him, and the boy stopped in front of the statue and asked, “Father, who is that?”

His father replied in reverent tones, “Son, that is Wellington.”

The young lad then walked over to the statue and said, “Wellington, I come by here every day; I am very fond of you and will never fail to stop on my way to school.” He then turned and asked, “Father, who is that *on* Wellington?”

As ambassador I must deal with some strange views about how diplomats spend their time. One British speaker compared camels and diplomats, saying camels can work for a week without drinking and diplomats can drink for a week without working. If only that were true.

In a more serious vein, during my time in London I have witnessed some important changes in the geostrategic climate, with far-ranging implications for our security and diplomatic postures. As you might suspect, I take a personal interest in the area where our foreign and security policies intersect. This evening, I would like to discuss what some of these changes portend for our future. I should

Albert Einstein warned that every problem should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler. In a very real sense, this statement suggests the perplexity of making foreign policy today. With that advice in mind, let me begin by reviewing what I see as the basic principles underpinning American policy at this juncture.

Two lines of type were inadvertently omitted from Ambassador Crowe's remarks, page 70. The last sentence of the second paragraph from the bottom should read: *"I should stress that these observations are essentially my personal views, as opposed to official—they mainly concern process and trends rather than current issues."*

First and foremost is the imperative of American leadership. At the moment, the nation is grappling with this issue. Secretary of State Warren Christopher put it well recently in testimony before Congress: "Without our continued leadership, we cannot hope to protect future generations of Americans from the pitfalls of a still dangerous post-Cold War world. This is the central lesson of our century that must continue to guide us." Americans can ignore or neglect this advice, but they do so at their peril—frankly, at the Free World's peril. In London I see evidence every day that the international community yearns for Washington to remain globally engaged and, despite occasional grumbling, to lead, but still to do so in an enlightened fashion—through consultation, not by fiat.

This demand is grounded in reality. Like it or not, as the world's remaining superpower, we are irrevocably entwined with the global community. Indeed, globalization has advanced to the point that direct foreign investment is now one of the leading forms of international trade. Nearly one-fifth of American workers owe their jobs in whole or in part to foreign trade and investment. Exports now account for almost one-third of real U.S. growth and are expected to climb faster than the overall economy for the remainder of this decade. Studies show that American companies which export their goods tend to be more profitable, and their workers better paid. The bottom line is that those countries plugged in to world markets are expanding. Those that are not are falling behind fast. Economic reality alone argues for the United States to play a leading role in the world.

But that is only half the picture. Our strength gives us unique capabilities that no other nation can match. This, in turn, brings with it not only benefits but also costs. As Winston Churchill put it, "The price of greatness is responsibility." Put simply, we cannot lead the international community if we are not prepared to share its problems and, ultimately, the solutions to those problems.

I suspect most of us want America to assume a preeminent role in world affairs. But this in itself means very little. More important are the guidelines for giving that leadership body, shape, and direction. This is a necessary but not always satisfying exercise, because that's where the trouble starts—witness the current debate in Congress over the degree of our involvement overseas. Time limits me to fundamentals. So I will suggest three general propositions which furnish the underpinnings for our leadership and will give you a pretty good idea of where I come down in this debate.

The first is the promotion of global peace and prosperity. Americans thrive on political stability and free markets. We have a vested interest in advancing the spread of both. But there is a catch. This concept argues the need to strengthen institutions that foster international cooperation. Bodies such as Nato, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank allow us to share the rewards, costs, burdens, and risks of global leadership. Unfortunately, to succeed they also require our active involvement, and, in turn, that we give up

some of our decision-making latitude. I do not pretend that this is an easy sell in the United States or will instantly solve all our problems. But to reject these international institutions or to give only symbolic support in today's world is, I believe, the height of folly. That does not mean we should totally sacrifice our independence. But it does mean we shouldn't opt out. We followed this path once when we refused to join the League of Nations—one of our more renowned and misguided steps.

Similarly, we should continue to support democracy and human rights around the world. In the long run, the growth of accountability and democratic governance increases stability and respect for the rule of law, which in turn enables free market economies to flourish. Such goals have been a consistent and bipartisan element of U.S. policy since World War II.

My final guidepost is the critical importance of constructive relationships with the great powers. It is these nations—our long-term allies in Europe and Japan, as well as Russia and China—whose actions, like it or not, can directly affect our own security and prosperity. We do not agree on all issues. At times individual governments, even friendly ones, can be very trying; but I would suggest our foreign policy calculus should always take them into account.

These generalizations are easy to state. They point in the right direction and have a high ethical content. But that is all they do. As you can readily see, they do not suggest a go-it-alone course (as many in our country are currently proposing), and at times they may even be competitive with each other. Certainly they do not furnish ready answers to all questions. I do not apologize for that. It is the very nature of foreign affairs. We must have benchmarks, but we should also be aware that there are no hard and fast absolutes to be followed in all situations. On today's planet, our interests are too many and too diverse to be pursued without continuous accommodation and compromise. That is where statesmanship comes in. It calls for tolerance of varying views and a fine sense of judgment to balance constantly these competing demands. In international affairs, as with most things in life, you can't make everybody happy all the time. To understand that basic concept is the beginning of wisdom in dealing with foreign affairs.

Let me turn now to some of the trends that heavily impact the way we pursue our foreign policy. The first and most obvious change is that we no longer have the unifying vision of the Cold War to fall back on. The demise of the Warsaw Pact removed the landmarks that had informed our strategic thinking for almost half a century. No matter what the problem, the response was determined with at least some reference to the influence it would have on the superpower conflict.

That is no longer the case. We are now back to what William Pfaff has called the "usual disorder of history" [*Baltimore Sun*, 7 July 1994]. In many ways the Cold War period was an anomaly, when the threat was clear, omnipresent, and so

potentially deadly it overshadowed all our international conduct. Throughout history, it is rare for such circumstances to coincide. What we are witnessing now is, in some ways, a return to the normal dynamics of international politics. You can see this in the resurrection of diplomatic terms, such as “great powers” and “shifting blocs,” which had languished for many years. There is, however, a Cold War residue that is distressing. We have had some difficulty weaning ourselves of the tendency to look for total solutions to the range of challenges we currently face. I will return to this idea a little later.

Inevitably, the collapse of the iron curtain dramatically changed the international climate and bred a host of new concerns. For example, environmental issues have crept from the domestic menu to the international agenda. Others are: the rise of international crime and narcotics trafficking, money laundering, industrial espionage, terrorism, refugee flows, and health issues such as AIDS. It is clear that the increasing globalization of the world is steadily erasing the line between domestic and foreign policy. President Clinton put it this way at Freedom House last year: “The once bright line between domestic and foreign policy is blurring. . . . The common good at home is simply not separate from our efforts to advance the common good around the world.” This view makes eminently good sense.

A corollary is the interlocking nature of so many foreign policy issues today. For example, the Middle East peace process is intimately tied up with the search for scarce water resources. As Shimon Peres has said, there is more history in the Jordan River than water. Others have noted the growing interconnectedness of groups that traffic in terrorism, drug smuggling, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. China presents a similar dilemma. Beijing’s human rights record is deplored throughout the Free World. At the same time, an emerging free market offers the best prospect for promoting healthy changes in the Middle Kingdom. More and more we are realizing not only that global issues transcend national boundaries but that they form a web of linkages that are not easily teased apart. As a result, multilateral and multidisciplinary approaches to diplomacy will increasingly be the norm. When necessary we will act alone; but pursuing goals in concert with our allies is much to be preferred in today’s uncertain political climate. No longer can Washington invoke the Soviet spectre to overcome disagreement. Like it or not, we must turn more to international cooperative mechanisms to build consensus.

I am not so naive as to pretend that this is an easy sell in our country—quite the contrary. In fact, in some quarters the United Nations is an extremely emotional issue. I suspect much of the criticism of this institution arises from inflated expectations. But the fact remains, it is a vital part of marshalling the international community and building consensus on a variety of issues. Churchill said that the UN was not designed to take us to heaven but rather to keep us out of hell. We can hardly expect to lead the Free World by ignoring the network of

international machinery that has been so carefully constructed, with American encouragement, over the last fifty years. We can work to use it for our purposes, to improve it, to redirect it; but to abandon it, I believe, would make little sense. My personal experience, both in the military and in London, has shown me that being able to call on habits of cooperation with other nations is a precious resource in today's world, and not one to be squandered mindlessly.

Let's not sell ourselves short. Our track record in the multilateral arena, while not perfect, is impressive, and when you do succeed, the resultant policy carries the weight of many capitals, not just Washington—a big plus in today's environment.

I would mention one further change that I believe is profound. Today, the universality of information means that almost nothing is hidden from the public eye. In addition, unprecedented levels of education and mobility have greatly expanded the number of citizens with active views on foreign issues. Similarly, the pluralism that so many societies now enjoy encourages greater public comment and critical expression in all areas, including international affairs.

As a result, foreign policy making is no longer the sole domain of a policy elite. Agendas are set and strategies developed with the active participation of the public. In turn, as the main conduit through which the public gets information about the world, the media's influence on foreign policy has, in my opinion, reached an all-time high. Our UN representative, Ambassador Madeleine Albright, has described CNN as the sixteenth member of the Security Council. This development may not comfort you, but I am afraid it is an irreversible part of our lives. As military professionals you must prepare yourselves to deal with this reality.

Unfortunately, advances in information technologies have not been matched by new levels of human reflection. Even with growing access to information, the facts may get lost. Take for example the results of a recent poll that reported that a majority of Americans think 15 percent of the federal budget is spent on overseas development assistance and that 5 percent would be a better amount. The actual amount spent is less than 1 percent. Such a gap between reality and perception severely skews the problem of gaining public support. Actually, there are a number of such examples in the foreign affairs business.

Even more insidious, the media has a tendency to telescope problems and highlight disagreement, reducing situations to a zero-sum game, with winners and losers. Two illusions result from this dynamic. Spotting only disputes and the events of the moment exacerbates the perception of crisis in the public mind. By ignoring the complexities of the situation, it often creates the false impression that a simple solution is just around the corner, if only policy makers were not such dolts. This approach is certainly not helpful.



The painful fact is that foreign policy challenges are best addressed through long-term efforts. The unglamorous truth of diplomacy is that our stock in trade is compromise, incremental progress, monumental patience, and unending talk. This method has, over the long run, generated a host of successes—Nato, the Marshall Plan, the World Trade Organization, the North American Free Trade Association, and a host of bilateral security arrangements. Most Americans want their problems solved by Friday night so they can have the weekend free—a luxury that is unknown in the foreign affairs business.

The point for you to take away is that public perceptions will play a growing role in making foreign and security policy, and professionals cannot ignore that reality. It may not be logical, but then, many things are not, especially in politics and governance. (At this moment, British politics is dominated by diseased cows.) If you want to improve the making of foreign policy, there is no more important area than bringing public perception and reality closer together.

These changes have a number of implications for the services. As former Secretary of State George Shultz is fond of saying, the military is the umbrella under which diplomacy is conducted. What I have been trying to illustrate is that it is raining in some new and unusual places as we approach the end of the century. It is only natural that the military adapt in parallel with our diplomacy.

First, it helps to realize that not every issue we face is newly minted. For example, for quite some time one of the most important foreign policy issues faced by the U.S. government has been nuclear and conventional arms control and nonproliferation. These subjects by definition require significant military expertise. Some of our most highly educated officers underpin this vital effort. Arms control and nonproliferation will continue to be key aspects of our foreign policy. Many of the people in this audience will participate in these endeavors.

What is new is the trend toward more multilateral approaches to arms control and nonproliferation. Even nuclear arms control, long a primarily bilateral affair between the Soviet Union and the United States, has shifted to a multilateral enterprise.

Peacekeeping missions are not new, but they have assumed a much higher profile. This is one reason why our current effort in Bosnia is so significant. In the Balkans we are field-testing concepts and strategies that may well become doctrine in the new century.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of success in Bosnia. Like it or not, the future character of European security is being tested in the Balkans. Nato, Russian reform, the European Union, the UN—all have a heavy stake in the Bosnian outcome. It will, without a doubt, be a watershed event in the history of the next fifty years.

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Add to these efforts those that break completely new ground. For instance, our forces are increasingly involved in the campaign to fight narcotics trafficking. And their unique abilities are also being called upon to respond to humanitarian crises in every corner of the globe. Witness Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Somalia. The military is learning to respond rapidly to refugee situations, to set up the necessary logistics infrastructure, and then hand off responsibilities to civil and nongovernmental authorities. Here, we are using our traditional flexibility in new ways.

The use of United Nations forces for dealing with violence offers a special challenge. The changes in the international environment have given an impetus to the UN's use of multinational units to enforce its resolutions and mandates. But clearly, it has a long way to go before this is a practical idea. The UN has no logistics infrastructure, no suitable intelligence organizations, and no permanent command structure. The Secretary-General must rely on uneven and temporary contributions from member states. However, this does not diminish the need for an effective UN peacekeeping mechanism.

Therefore I expect that the pressure to develop a UN cadre will rise. Inevitably, Washington and the Nato alliance will be involved. I suspect we will eventually be seeing more blue berets and more U.S. participation in some fashion. A genuinely workable arrangement will require imagination and, I suspect, a marked change in national attitudes.

One more important, substantive comment. It was inevitable that the end of the Cold War would produce a military drawdown. But while the threat once posed by the Soviet Union has vanished, the need for a viable U.S. military has in no sense disappeared. The services will no doubt be smaller and reconfigured, but it will still be imperative for them to be healthy and capable. I heard a Washington wag say that all we know about the new world order is that it is long on new and short on order.

In this regard, I am afraid our history is not encouraging. In protracted periods of peace, with no prominent enemy on the horizon, our practice has been to let our services atrophy. It is not so much a partisan political matter as it is systemic. Without a tangible threat, it is difficult for a democracy to sustain an effective security policy over long periods of peace. Three times in this century we have allowed this to happen. It's a little like the law of gravity.

I am not overly concerned about the current state of readiness, but even a small establishment—to remain viable and modern and to attract volunteers—requires steady investment. Early in the next century we will be facing some genuine difficulties unless we alter our spending habits. In essence, we must bend every effort to keep the historical pattern from repeating itself. I wish I could be more optimistic that we would do so. It will be your burden to keep this concern on the country's front burner.

In sum, we are entering a world filled with new and interesting challenges. The public, diplomats, politicians, and the military will be interacting as never before. This comes at a time when our old signposts have been swept away and when, in a foreign policy sense, we are in a period of inevitable confusion. This is not unprecedented. It is quite typical to undergo sea changes in the wake of major disruptions, such as the demise of the Cold War.

But it will require a great deal of trial and error before we fully understand the new world order and our place in it. To assume there is an easy shortcut is not only intellectually lazy but misguided. The present period has many similarities to the years following World War II. It was almost a decade before we sorted out the debris of that conflict and arrived at a coherent strategy.

Nato, the Marshall Plan, the containment policy—these didn't spring full-blown onto the scene. They were the product of groping, argument, the Korean War, and political compromise. For instance, Berlin was the last place we wanted to test our strength against the Kremlin, but that is where the first decisive confrontation came, when Stalin blockaded that city.

Today, Bosnia is the last place Nato would have chosen for its effort to readjust to new circumstances. But you have to play the hand you are dealt and, as the British say, "get on with it." That is what we are doing at this moment in Yugoslavia. It is a significant step in the process of arriving at a new strategic game plan.

I am confident that the Free World will ultimately find its way in this new terrain, but it will not be easy; it will involve time, pain, mistakes, and yes, a lot of debate. That process may not comfort theorists and pundits—not to mention voters—but that is the way the real world deals with traumatic change. In the interim, we have to avoid precipitate action for the sake of decisiveness. The Cold War graphically demonstrated that democracies can handle uncertainty as long as they remain determined, patient, and optimistic. Steady and regular progress should be our goal, instead of a frantic search for a magic formula. As that well known midwestern philosopher [and long-time radio commentator] Paul Harvey puts it, "In times like these, it is helpful to remember there have always been times like these."

Let me conclude with a word to the students in the audience. Your posting here is an exceptional opportunity. Such a time—to reflect on your profession, to hone your reasoning skills, to review the lessons of history, and to better understand your own society—is invaluable. In the coming years, you will often fall back on the knowledge you have acquired in these halls. Perhaps more than any previous period, we will need officers who are versatile, innovative, and independent thinkers. Certainly, the ability to face unexpected and unplanned challenges will be highly prized. Tools to fit the task will not always be at hand, and occasionally you will have to fit square pegs in round holes. There's nothing new

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about that. But today's rapidly advancing technology is complicating such challenges.

In this environment, military officers are increasingly called upon to be all things to all people. You will be expected to be sensitive to the nation's political problems, social strains, and international role. You will be called upon to act as negotiators, advocates, public educators, and counsellors. In essence, the minefields of the mind will require as much attention as the more traditional variety.

Your stay here will better prepare you to enter the public debate over the country's international role. I urge you to do so. You will be amazed how much the citizenry respects and wants to hear your views. If we are to have a healthy and modern military, it is imperative to gain the public's backing. Let people know how you feel and why. It is vital that they understand we have a military made up of thinking, sensitive, and broad-minded professionals.

One more piece of advice. If you get nothing more out of this college, I urge you to open your mind to new ideas and take this trait with you back into the field or the Pentagon. My most serious concern when I was Chairman was that I saw too many officers who were reluctant to entertain unconventional suggestions. This is a quality we most desperately need. Your mind is something like a parachute: it won't help you if it doesn't open when you need it.

Don't underestimate this task. Given the military's tendency to specialize everyone, you will have to work continuously to keep yourself open to fresh points of view. You could pay no greater tribute to the Naval War College or to yourself than winning the fight to maintain your intellectual freedom, independence, and imagination.

I personally witnessed a man wrestling with this problem a few months ago in New York City. I was in a taxi and asked the driver who he was going to vote for in the next election. He said that his entire family—including his grandparents, parents, and brothers—had always voted for party X. I surmised that he also was going to vote for party X. No, he said, this time he would vote for party Y. He went on to explain, "There comes a time in every man's life when he must ignore his principles and do the right thing." I could not have put it better myself.

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The vitality of thought is an adventure. Ideas won't keep. Something must be done about them.

Alfred North Whitehead,  
*Dialogues*