

It is, I think, more than normally easy to fall into the danger of excessive precision and undue rigidity on the eve of an international conference. This is particularly tempting in the case of a conference with a dangerous ideological enemy; especially if it is a conference designed to put an end to inconclusive but costly fighting. One can even find oneself under contradictory pressures from the same well-intentioned sources, (a) to bring the boys back home by negotiating a settlement, (b) not even to talk to the enemy with whom any settlement would have to be negotiated.

Even if you avoid these particular pitfalls, as I have indicated you may run into the lesser, but nonetheless serious danger of being urged to adopt in advance, and to announce, principles so rigid that they leave no room for manoeuvre or negotiation.

If diplomacy, however, is to get anywhere, it must avoid not only the excessive flexibility of the jelly fish, but the excessive rigidity of a mastodon. Remember what happened to mastodons!

Historians may come to consider "Unconditional surrender" a diplomatic demand of questionable wisdom even in an all-out and victorious war. Certainly it is out of place in a localized conflict of limited objectives. Yet an international "police action" is, as I see it, precisely that: and one of our basic purposes in such actions must be to keep our objectives limited and the fighting localized so that it can be ended without the holocaust entailed in the destruction of great societies.

On a different plane, some people might counter the doctrine that "an uncertain policy is always bad", with the desirability of "keeping them guessing". If this can be applied to the potential enemy rather than to your allies, then in a cold war situation the doctrine may have something to be said for it. But even here the uncertainty should be limited to non-essentials. It would, for instance, be morally wrong, and politically unwise, to allow the slightest uncertainty on the fundamental point that, in default of anything better, we on our side of this cold war accept co-existence, not merely as a temporary tactic, but as firm policy: that our purposes are defensive and pacific; that we will never start a world war. We must do all we can to prevent responsible persons in any part of the world concluding that war is inevitable, lest they ever be tempted to the desperate and fatal expedient of launching a preventive aggression.

On this fundamental point, therefore, let us not keep anyone guessing. Our purposes are defensive, and defensive alone. On this at least, let us be utterly precise; rigid, if you like.

So much, then, for Mr. Reid's first point - precision or the lack of it in the practice of diplomacy and foreign policy.

Of the principles which Mr. Escott Reid found in Canada's pre-war foreign policy, some of them have clearly been modified not a little since he wrote. It is interesting to relate them to the situation of 1954.