

This necessity for reflection before expressing opinions means that Foreign Ministers and the "spokesmen" for Foreign Ministers should resist the temptation to give off-the-cuff opinions on international developments as soon as they hear of them. It also means that newspapers should not expect a Foreign Minister, or one of his officials, to give them a "lead" on every important international development as soon as news of it comes over the ticker. In democratic countries we believe in the freedom of the press and the responsibility of the press, and I for one believe that a responsible free press is capable of giving an intelligent interpretation of, say, a new Russian proposal without benefit of a hasty, immediate expression of opinion by some Foreign Minister or official..

While haste and instability are bad, however, they should not be confused with flexibility. The latter, I think, is an important, almost an essential quality in diplomacy. Foreign policy should never get frozen or caught in a blind alley. We should always leave a line open for courageous advance or for honourable withdrawal; even in such things as our relations with Communist China or proposals to outlaw the atomic bomb. Policy can become frozen in many ways; by fear to act because of special or sectional pressures, by submission to the tyranny of slogans, of popular prejudices stimulated by wrong information. It can also be frozen by a stubborn refusal to change one's mind. There is a paragraph from General Stilwell's autobiography which amusingly illustrates this latter disability. It reads:

"I once took my family out for dinner at the San Diego Club, and told them to order whatever they wanted. The youngest boy, Ben six years old at once said, "Roast Duck!" That seemed a little heavy for his age, so I suggested cream of wheat. He leaned back and said "Duck". Then the family pitched in and suggested some nice spinach, or some vegetable soup and mashed potatoes. He said, "Duck", once more without budging. I made one more attempt, to which he answered "Duck", so I then wiped the perspiration off my brow and ordered duck. He had never heard of Joe Stalin, but he knew the technique. He'd make an excellent secretary of state but for the fact that he's going to be a doctor".

I'm afraid General Stilwell, in his admiration for his son, has indulged in a common error of mistaking obstinacy for determination.

Three of the important principles, then - and there are many others - underlying foreign policy should be responsibility, steadiness and flexibility. I suggest that we will need all of these in the days ahead. We will need also and especially patience and more patience, because the menace which faces us is not likely to disappear soon, and we would be well advised to settle down for a long hard pull. General Marshall said not long ago that the best we can hope for in the years ahead is a long period of increasing tension. Continuing, let alone increasing tension is almost as hard on the nerves as war itself; sometimes it is even harder. If we are to prevent that tension deteriorating into war, we shall, for the time being, have to accept an international situation, largely determined by a deeply divided world, and within that context deal with the various proposals and plans that are put forward to ease the tensions with Soviet Russia.