

# THE NUCLEAR WORLD:

*How should Canada respond? By Geoffrey Pearson*

■ **There are two different sets of assumptions about Canada's strategic situation. The first might be labelled "conventional," the second "naive," although neither is meant in a derogatory sense.**

■ The conventional assumptions go something like this:

The most direct threat to Canada's security stems from the USSR and the international tensions created by Soviet foreign policy.

Deterrence, embodied in the strategic forces of the US and in the allied forces of Western Europe, is the best means of warding off this threat.

It is in Canada's interest to co-operate with the US in the defence of North America and with her allies in the defence of Western Europe, although in both cases Canada's military contributions to defence and deterrence are open to change.

Deterrence demands maintenance of a rough balance of forces between East and West and a willingness on the part of NATO, if it cannot match the conventional strength of Warsaw Pact Forces, to use nuclear weapons first.

Canada's interests include: the control of her territory and protection of her sovereignty; active involvement in seeking better East/West relations, especially through arms control and disarmament; and a readiness to assist her allies or the United Nations to help keep the peace in the Third World.

The second or "naive" set of assumptions takes shape along the following lines:

The main threat to Canada's

security is the danger of nuclear war between the superpowers.

This danger is intensified by policies, both Soviet and American, which emphasize the threat to use nuclear weapons to deter attacks from the other side anywhere in the world.

The effort to control and reduce nuclear weapons is a top priority. This may be accomplished by a ban on testing, production and/or deployment of nuclear weapons, by deep cuts in nuclear arsenals, or by general and complete disarmament.

Canada should work to change NATO's first-use policy, refuse to test nuclear-capable delivery systems, leave NORAD if its functions go beyond early warning and control of air space, and (some would add) declare itself a nuclear-free zone.

In the international arena, Canada should give greater priority to mediation and negotiation both in East/West relations and in regional conflicts; increase the aid budget at the expense, if necessary, of the defence budget; and, in general, seek allies among "like-minded" nations wherever they are located – the sponsors of the Five-Continent Peace Initiative, for example.

By and large, Canadian governments have accepted the "conventional" assumptions described above, although not without occasional misgivings over particular policies of our allies, especially the US. We

have been skeptical about the contention that there is a Soviet hand in most of the world's trouble spots. Canada has been much more willing than the US to accept such countries as Cuba and Nicaragua (or, in 1968, China) as legitimate partners rather than enemies. But in dealings with the Soviet Union, Canadian governments, and most Canadians, have accepted the vision of the USSR as the "adversary," if not the "enemy," and have supported the strategic posture which is the logical consequence of that view.

So far at least, the "naive" assumptions described above have failed to dislodge the basic conviction that, unchecked, the USSR would necessarily expand its power and influence in the world. A commonly heard claim is that the peace in Europe has been preserved for almost forty years because the armed forces of the Western Allies have deterred "Soviet expansionism."

It is impossible to test this claim, but it need not be accepted as revealed truth. My own view is that the conventional assumptions about Soviet objectives in Europe are now outdated, if indeed they were correct in 1949. In any event, the effort to preserve the balance of power in Europe has led to the taking of steps on both sides which threaten rather than enhance peace and security, e.g. the build-up of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF).

What is to be done to control and reduce the scale of nuclear confrontation both in Europe and around the world? The naive assumptions here run into the

obstacle of political realism espoused by the great majority of those in government, the media and the "establishment." This is the view that, if the US rejects most of these assumptions, Canada cannot promote them without damaging the bilateral relationship. This is all the more true if the major NATO allies also reject these assumptions, which at present they do. I say "at present," for it would not be surprising if the new Soviet proposals for arms control and disarmament have some effect on European opinion in the months ahead. For example, a Soviet move towards more realistic measures for verification, including on-site inspection to monitor weapons reductions and troop withdrawals, could create a favourable response in Western Europe.

Perhaps the key word in this debate is "stability." Is nuclear deterrence stable? If it has kept us from nuclear war for forty years, will it continue to do so? The conventional answer is "yes," but Canadians should not accept this answer without reservations. Disarmament is no guarantee of stability, but neither is the "balance of power." New weapons, new doctrines, new fears can upset the fragile confidence on which stability rests. That is the problem with the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI): whether or not the technology is viable, SDI may block efforts in Geneva to reach negotiated agreements on nuclear weapons. Without such agreements, tensions are bound to rise, and the security of Canada