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## OF FIREPROOF HOUSES: CANADA'S SECURITY

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*by Geoffrey Pearson*

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"We live in a fireproof house,  
far from inflammable materials."

— Senator Raoul Dandurand,  
before the Assembly of the  
League of Nations, 1924.

Throughout most of recorded history the security of groups, tribes, nations and states has been associated with the capacity to use force in self-defence. The stronger this capacity, it has been assumed, the greater the security. On the face of it, this assumption makes sense. Weak states have often been victims of stronger neighbours, and there is little doubt that arms and influence go together. But historians have had difficulty in establishing that powerful states enjoy any greater degree of security — the history of Russia is a case in point. It may be, on the contrary, that the greater the degree of national military power, the more likely will it arouse the resistance of others. The usual result has been war. Nevertheless, the assumption that strong armed forces bring security has continued to prevail.

There are examples of nation-states which have disregarded this view. The three nations of North America-Mexico, the United States and Canada — by the accident of geography and the fortunes of history, found little need to keep large armed forces after they gained independence, although in Canada's case the relationship with Britain created special circumstances. The US view of security changed after 1941, and, in the early years of the century, Mexico endured a long civil war which led to new roles for the armed forces, although these remained small. Canada, to this day, has never been able to perceive the threats to its security which would justify the keeping of large armed forces in peacetime.

Moreover, the advent of nuclear weapons and the missiles to carry them have appeared to challenge traditional assumptions about security. It is now commonly declared by East and West alike that a nuclear war cannot be won. The logical inference is that everyone would lose. Yet these same governments plan to use nuclear weapons in certain circumstances, explaining that such plans will "deter" their use by others and therefore prevent war. At the same time conventional forces remain ready to fight as if nuclear weapons were non-existent. Indeed, global spending on military security continues to climb in most of the world, fuelled by great power rivalries in the North, the costs of modern technology, and by the multitude of new (and some old) states in the South that proudly wear the mantle of sovereignty (and the concomitant garments of national defence) which Europeans, who have long set the example, are now beginning to discard. But a number of factors may begin to reverse this steady rise in military spending.

The first is a new willingness in both East and West to challenge the assumptions of the Cold War, a willingness defined by Mr. Gorbachev as "new thinking," by Mr. Reagan as "trust but verify," and by many others as "common security." "Universal human values have the priority in our age," Mr. Gorbachev has said. Whatever this may mean, there is no mistaking the signs of change in Soviet policies, including the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the change of course on the INF treaty, the desire to settle regional disputes, and a new respect for the United Nations. Indeed, the Soviet Union now appears to be taking the lead at the United Nations in efforts to reinvigorate the functions of the Security Council in keeping the peace. This is a striking departure from past Soviet

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