

# The Superpowers and International Security

## Results of a three-country comparative survey

THE PUBLICS IN THREE KEY WESTERN COUNTRIES — CANADA, THE UK AND THE Federal Republic of Germany — continue to exhibit a broad wariness of both superpowers, despite the Washington and Moscow summit meetings, the recent improvement in US-USSR relations, and the ratification of the intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) treaty.

These are some of the results of cooperative public opinion surveys carried out recently in all three countries, the first time coordinated polling on this topic has been done in these three nations. The new multinational results strongly back up those of the earlier CIIPS poll (See *Peace&Security*, Winter 1987/1988).

Canadians, Germans and Britons in the late 1980s see less of a serious military threat from the Soviet Union. They are as skeptical of the policies of the US as those of the USSR. The common problem they perceive is not the USSR but both superpowers. And the degree of commonality seems as striking as the opinions, especially given the different geographic positions of the three allies.

Asked what is the greatest threat to world peace, only a very few Canadians, Britons and Germans chose the Soviet Union (see figure 4). As many or more in each country chose the United States, the leader of the Western alliance, as the greatest threat. (In Canada, the ratio was 11% to 5%; in the UK, 16% vs. 2%; and in Germany, 4% and 4%). More Germans, in particular, regard the superpowers' arms race as the major problem. Nuclear proliferation and regional conflicts, such as the Middle East, however, seem to most people to be the greatest threats to world peace. Consistent with this picture, overwhelming majorities (more than 85%) in all three allied countries regard a Soviet attack on Western Europe, the standard NATO war scenario, as unlikely or very unlikely. As large or larger majorities see little chance of a Soviet attack on North America, Japan or China.

The black-white, cold war perspective has clearly diminished, perhaps almost disappeared. Only a minority in each country regards the USSR as aiming at world domination. Canadians and Germans though, are more likely than Britons to believe the Soviets are more interested in domination.

Most in the three countries seem cool about the policies of both superpowers. A majority of Canadians, Britons and Germans express little, very little or no confidence "in the ability of the United States to deal wisely with present world problems." While a majority of those in

all three countries have low confidence in the USSR as well, four in ten Canadians and Britons (40%) and one in three Germans (33%) express very great or considerable confidence in the ability of the Soviet Union to deal wisely with present world problems.

Despite the recent superpower summit meetings and the improvement in US-USSR relations, more than one in every four in Canada and Britain still believe a nuclear war to be likely or very likely. One explanation of this level of concern may be that relatively few expect such a war, if it occurred, to be the result of a deliberate attack.

The most likely scenarios in most people's minds are not the usually discussed problems of Western security. Over six in every ten Canadians, Britons and Germans think it more likely that a nuclear attack would be triggered by accident than by a deliberate, aggressive action. Notably, many (around 40% in each of the nations surveyed) fear some other country in the world, rather than one of the superpowers, would be responsible, especially in the case of a deliberate attack.

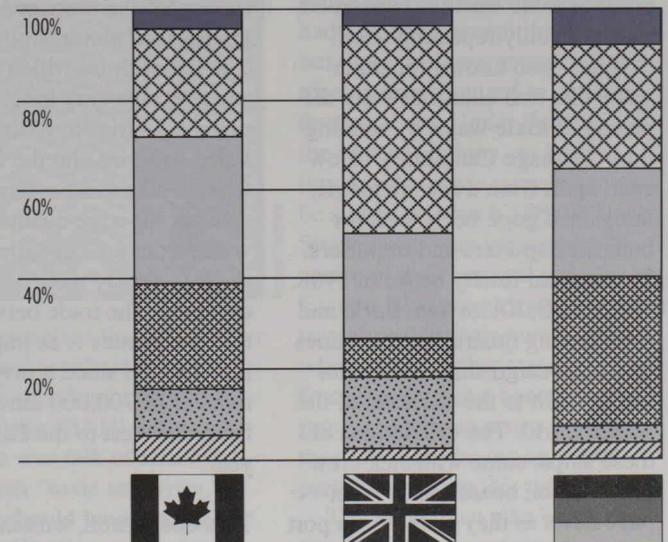
One prescription for security seems clear: reduce nuclear weapons stocks. Over three-quarters in all three countries agree or strongly agree with the statement that "the security of Western countries could best be increased by substantial reductions in both American and Soviet nuclear weapons."

Despite being American allies, strikingly few in Canada, the UK or the Federal Republic would prefer to have a world in which the US was the predominant military power. The vast majority — over 80% — in each of these western countries would prefer the two superpowers to be about equal in total military strength. □

**Figure 4**

Which of the following situations do you think poses the greatest threat to world peace ...

- ▨ Soviet actions on the international scene?
- ▩ The superpowers' arms race?
- ▧ The Middle East situation?
- ▤ United States actions on the international scene?
- ▥ The spread of nuclear arms to smaller countries?
- Conflicts elsewhere in the world?



The public opinion data presented here are the product of the International Security Project, a cooperative effort of three national survey organizations and the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security (CIIPS). Like the larger domestic survey referred to in this issue of *Peace&Security*, it was coordinated by Professor Don Munton of the University of British Columbia. Results of the comparative survey were first released in August 1988. The British poll was carried out by Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd. It was based on interviews with a national sample of 819 adults, aged 18 years and over, conducted during the period 7-12 July 1988. The German poll was carried out by the Institute für Angewandte Sozialwissenschaft (INFAS). It was based on a national sample of 1473 adults, 18 years and over, interviewed during the period 11-23 July 1988. Percentage results from samples of this size are generally accurate to within +/- 3%, 95 times out of 100.