

though it seems to be, has shaken Canadians' convictions about the first question, Canada's international alignment. Support for continued NATO membership appears as strong as ever. Indeed, few Canadians (20%) want to reduce that role, let alone withdraw from the alliance. Most (80%) reject the idea of any reduction. This compares with the 89% who opted, in a 1984 United States Information Agency (USIA) poll conducted in Canada, for continued membership rather than withdrawal.

Most Canadians, furthermore, clearly believe in the basic "power politics" principle of maintaining a military balance in Europe. About seven out of every ten (70%) agree or strongly agree with the statement on the 1987 CIIPS survey that "Although it's been over 40 years since we have had a World War, it is still necessary to maintain a military balance in Europe to prevent open aggression and hostilities."

Consistent with this principle, Canadians support maintaining if not increasing the country's military contribution to NATO. The same 1987 poll found half wanted Canada's force level in Europe maintained while almost one-quarter preferred to increase it. (These figures are little changed from the early 1960s when the question was last asked. About 10% thought the forces should be reduced and slightly less than 25% opted for outright withdrawal of the troops.)

These figures are all the more remarkable when juxtaposed with the strong tendency to regard the protection of Canadian territory and sovereignty as the best reason for any possible increase in Canadian defence forces. Fully three-quarters offer this rationale in the 1988 survey, rather than the promotion of Western defence or increased influence in NATO.

The vast majority of Canadians generally understand what NATO is and does. Gallup surveys through the 1960s found about 75% could provide a reasonable description of NATO objectives in response to an open-ended question. A 1984 survey found 78% knew Canada had armed forces in Europe; less than 10% incorrectly thought it did not.

ALLIANCE SUPPORT DOES NOT, OF COURSE, NECESSARILY translate into support for a continued defence effort. On the contrary, it might be expected, particularly in a lesser power such as Canada, to reduce that level of support. This is because of the so-called "free rider" phenomenon: A common observation about "collective goods" such as collective defence is that those who have less to contribute tend to contribute even less than they might because they realize that the benefits of the organization will accrue whether or not they exert themselves. The size of Canada's defence effort – on a per capita or per dollar of GNP basis, let alone on its totality – has often been criticized by observers, and some suggest Canada is a classic alliance "free rider."

Whether or not that charge is justified in terms of effort, relative or otherwise, the idea is not a line of thinking to which Canadians seem prone. On the second major question we are considering here – what level of defence spending is necessary? – over 40% agree or strongly agree in the CIIPS poll that the

Canadian government should spend more on defence. While this figure means, of course, that about six in ten disagree, most of these almost certainly want defence spending to remain at about the present level.

Moreover, support has increased in recent decades for enlarging the armed forces. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, a height of the cold war period, Canadians were evenly divided between those who wanted to maintain the forces at existing levels and those who wanted to increase their size. In the 1987 CIIPS poll, when the same question was asked, respondents favoured, by a 2 to 1 ratio, increasing the size of the forces over maintaining them at the same level. The proportion in favour of decreasing their size was unchanged and almost negligible (See figure 1).

One of the factors operating here is undoubtedly the public acceptance of the validity of ministerial statements and a litany of criticisms in the media regarding the poor condition of much of the Canadian armed forces' equipment. But another factor is also at work.

In the USIA poll, conducted a month after the Mulroney government won the 1984 election, Canadians were asked whether or not their country was contributing its fair share toward Western defence. Given that the average person tends to be a little hesitant about admitting to be a shirker, it is revealing that 44% accepted the idea that Canada was not doing its fair share. Only 25% insisted that their country was doing enough.

There is an important caveat to note: what support exists for increased defence spending appears to be, in the pollsters' term, "soft." The CIIPS respondents were asked immediately subsequently to the question on defence spending levels, whether or not the Canadian government should increase taxes to provide the funds necessary for increased defence spending. Of those who had said defence expenditures ought to be increased, about one-third (32%) agreed that a tax increase would be acceptable.

There is at the same time a group of approximately three in ten Canadians overall who profess to want a greater defence effort but say they are not prepared to bite the hard bullet of higher taxes to pay for it (See Figure 2). Alternate means exist, of course, by

Figure 1

From what you know or have read, do you think the Canadian defence forces should be larger, about the present size, or smaller.

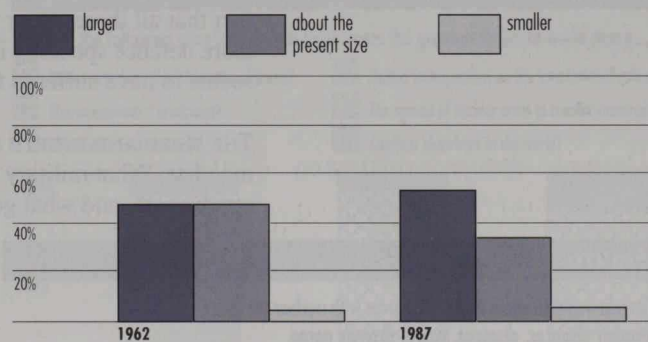


Figure 2

The Canadian government ought to spend significantly more on defence – strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree.

The Canadian government should raise taxes to increase its spending on defence – strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree.

