

MOST CANADIANS NOW perceive the policies and weaponry of both superpowers, not just the USSR, as the major problem in East-West relations. The present nuclear stockpiles of both superpowers are regarded as increasing the likelihood of war rather than decreasing it. These are among the major findings of a 1987 public opinion poll sponsored by the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security.

The survey, carried out prior to December's Soviet-American treaty on intermediate-range nuclear weapons, shows a striking tendency overall to evaluate negatively the

seem, disagree. Few apparently regard a Soviet nuclear attack as likely. The greatest threat, most seem to be saying, lies in an unstable relationship between the superpowers and in the possible escalation of a regional conflict.

THE CIIPS SURVEY RESULTS ARE borne out by another survey done at about the same time for the Department of External Affairs. Asked which of a list of possible causes was most responsible for tensions between East and West, a near majority of the External Affairs survey respondents chose "a lack of trust" between East and West. Once again, only a small minority pointed to Soviet policies.

Canadians currently are as likely to blame the US as the USSR for recent tensions and to view certain American policies as negatively as Soviet policies. In the External Affairs survey, while about one in every seven or eight (13%) indicated East-West tensions had arisen from Soviet attempts to increase their power and influence, a similar proportion (13%) thought tensions were caused by American attempts to increase their power and influence.

Respondents to the CIIPS survey were less even-handed in their evaluations of responsibility for the state of relations between East and West. Of those who saw an improvement in these relations in recent years, many more (40%) regarded the USSR as responsible for this improvement than thought the US responsible (10%). Of those who saw deterioration in relations, at least up to mid-1987, most blamed the United States.

Canadians seem to be rather wary, at best, of the basic thrust of both superpowers' policies. Eight out of ten (79%) believe the USSR is trying to increase its influence in the world today. But eight out of ten (81%) also believe the US is trying to increase its influence. Few, only 20%, believe either power is more or less content with its present influence.

Confidence in the ability of each superpower to deal wisely with present world problems is also low. Once again, Canadians' skepticism is clear and the same parallelism emerged almost as strongly. Less than four out of every ten Canadians

(38%) expressed very great or considerable confidence in the ability of the United States. Over six in ten expressed little, very little or no confidence (62%). On the other hand, and even more surprisingly, almost three in ten expressed very great or considerable confidence in the Soviet Union's ability to deal wisely with the world's problems while seven in ten expressed little, very little or no confidence (28% vs 73%).

In short, overall confidence in American policy was not much higher than that in Soviet policy. (See chart) Although historical public opinion data are thin it seems that forty years of cold peace with the USSR, including a decade of detente, as well as a few years of Mikhail Gorbachev's appealing diplomacy, have persuaded Canadians that Soviet handling of world problems is not all bad. Conversely, a few decades of US foreign policy problems, including Vietnam and Nicaragua, topped by a term or two of Ronald Reagan's simplistic and sometimes bellicose rhetoric, have persuaded Canadians that American handling of world problems is not all good.

Identical questions were also asked in the CIIPS survey regarding how trustworthy Reagan and Gorbachev were on nuclear and arms control issues. Few found either of them very trustworthy. About half perceived the two leaders "somewhat" trustworthy and half regarded them as not very or not at all trustworthy. Fewer of those questioned regarded the American leadership as genuinely interested in disarmament than regarded the Soviets as such (37% to 46%).

During the cold war period most Canadians had essentially positive perceptions about the US and essentially negative perceptions of the USSR. It is no longer so. Perhaps most striking of all in the 1987 survey is an evident tendency on the part of many individual Canadians to be negative about both superpowers' policies.

Fully one in three (32%) found neither leader trustworthy on arms control. In contrast, 11% regarded Ronald Reagan as trustworthy and

SUPERPOWERS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

A recent survey commissioned by CIIPS shows most Canadians perceive the policies of both superpowers, not just the Soviet Union, as the major threat to national security.

policies, nuclear and otherwise, of both superpowers. While some of these perceptions of Canadians may have already become more positive as a result of the Washington summit agreement, it is unlikely this dramatic event has much affected the apparent balance in these views or the tendency to perceive Soviet and American policies in a similar light.

Respondents to the survey were asked what posed the greatest threat to world peace. Very few pointed to the USSR. Only one in every twenty (5%) said Soviet actions on the international scene were the greatest threat. About the same number (8%) thought it to be American actions. On the other hand, fully one quarter believed the superpower arms race was the greatest threat. Finally, approximately equal groups thought that the spread of nuclear weapons to smaller countries and the Middle East situation were the greatest threats (29% and 27%, respectively).

These findings, it might be noted, contradict the assumption of the Canadian government's White Paper on Defence that "the principal direct threat to Canada continues to be a nuclear attack on North America by the Soviet Union." Canadians, it would

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