

INTRODUCTION

The end of the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's may prove to be one of the greatest watersheds of modern history. "Experts," prognosticators and policy-makers are in rout and disarray as the verities of the post-war era are trampled under millions of quietly determined feet in the capitals of Central and Eastern Europe. Even some of the most hardened of cold warriors cannot resist the euphoria as promise turns to reality in widening circles of political, economic, diplomatic and military change. Some of the most jaded commentators are talking confidently of the end of the Cold War and a new era of peace and cooperation. Defence budgets are being cut, huge sums of Western aid are going to Eastern Europe, and the political will to achieve even deeper arms cuts may be running far ahead of the sheer capacity to negotiate the ones so far committed.

When the Canadian government's White Paper on Defence in 1987 said "Canadian security policy must respond to an international environment dominated by the rivalry between East and West" many Canadians strongly disagreed. But even those who found this a dated view at the time now feel a need to pinch themselves. Not only does the rapid thaw in the Cold War seem almost too good to be true, but the breakup has been so dramatic that the waters ahead are thick with random floes, and huge icebergs sometimes loom up in the path.

We want to believe that this "peace" is real and enduring, yet millennia of human experience and recent decades of history counsel caution. Our gaze is firmly rivetted on the drama of Eastern Europe, but we are still aware of wars and threats elsewhere. If millions of people are beginning to dare to hope that the recourse to armed conflict among major nations will decline, their hope is tied to the grave concern that humanity as a whole now faces ominous new security threats, particularly to the Earth's environment and life-support system.

It is deliberately provocative to ask whether this is the beginning of "peace in our time" – echoing the fateful tones of Neville Chamberlain's self-delusory appeasement. In the year that has marked the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War and the seventy-fifth anniversary of 1914, it is right and necessary to face that history squarely. The memory of Munich is still alive and has been the guide to much action for the intervening half-century. The guardians of