

IT NOW SEEMS CLEAR — ALMOST trite to say — that the post-War order of almost a half century has crumbled. Less clear is the shape of the new order replacing it. Much less clear again is the thinking that will underlie that order.

What have been the orthodox post-WWII Canadian perceptions? The Americans and Russians are strong. Japan and Europe (and Canada) are weak. The United States is our friend; the USSR is our enemy. Military force is the currency of world politics. Soviet expansionism and nuclear war are the major threats, thus NATO is essential. Europe and Germany are and will be, for a long time, divided. The Third World is poor and weak. And the UN is needed but ineffective.

Thus, the essential goals of Canadian foreign policy, it could be said, were to keep the Yanks friendly, the Russkies away, the defences up (as much as possible), the troops in NATO, the UN operating, the peacekeepers standing by, and the foreign aid flowing (but not too freely). With these basic policies the Canadian public, for the most part, concurred. The question is whether they still do. Or is there any evidence of a new thinking about the new order?

THE CONVENTIONAL SCHOLARLY (AND OFFICIALS') WISDOM IS THAT MOST people pay little attention to international relations, have relatively little understanding of these events, and could care less. One possibility, then, is that the Canadian public has been largely tuned out and their attitudes are currently not much different than they have been for decades, at least not yet.

Another possibility is that conceptual order has been replaced by disorder. Even in less extraordinary times, most people find the buzz of events in world affairs a trifle confusing. But the recent blitzkrieg of peaceful change has not only out-paced our policies but over-run our psychological defences. The Berlin Wall is opened overnight. Soviet policy seems to shift daily. Iraq, a far-away country smaller than Canada, suddenly becomes the focus of concern in the world. The thinking of the mass public, perhaps no less than that of foreign policy elites, is thus perhaps in understandable disarray.

The annual public opinion surveys of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, now dating back four years, provide a rich basis for evaluating whether consistency prevails, confusion now reigns, or a new coherence is emerging.

Polls from the early 1970s show a solid majority of Canadians regarded the USA as the strongest country militarily and economically. About the same number still regard the United States as the strongest military power, but only about half as many choose the USA as the strongest country in economic terms today.

In contrast, while only one in six (15%) pointed then to Japan as the strongest economic power, a majority (50%) now regard it as such. The

*The 1990 public opinion survey, as those from 1987 through 1989, was designed by Don Munton and Institute staff, funded by the Institute, and carried out in September and October 1990. 1,275 people responded to the questionnaire, an overall response rate of 62%. The margin of error with samples of this size is approximately +/- 3%, 95 times out of 100.*



## CIIPS PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

1990

# OLD THINKING NEW THINKING

*Canadian opinions in the  
dangerous, topsy-turvy world of the  
post, post-War period.*

BY DON MUNTON

European Community comes in a distant third at 11%. Significantly, most Canadians now also regard economic factors as more important than military ones in the exercise of national power.

CIIPS SURVEYS SINCE 1987 HAVE tracked warming perceptions of the United States and the Soviet Union. Those with considerable or great confidence in the ability of the US to deal wisely with world problems increased from 37% in 1987 to 47% in 1988 to 67% in 1989, and now amount to fully 75% of Canadians. Canadians' confidence in their southern neighbour was thus higher in fall 1990 than at any time since the early 1970s, but may well have suffered because of American pursuit of the Gulf War.

Those with considerable or great confidence in the USSR rose steadily from only 28% in 1987 to 42% in 1988 to 52% in 1989 and to 62% in 1990. This is almost certainly a record high level of

confidence in Soviet policies internationally, but is not entirely unprecedented. While Mikhail Gorbachev and his reforms have undoubtedly done much to improve Western publics' perceptions of the Soviet Union in recent years, the USSR image among Canadians has only in the past eighteen months surpassed that held in the early 1970s, around the time of the first US-USSR Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

No major country, including the USSR, is regarded by more than one in four Canadians as a military threat. While five years ago 40% agreed that the USSR was "an expansionist power that threatens Western security," only 5% do so now.

On the other hand, two countries stand out in Canadians' minds as serious economic threats. One is the United States, named by no less than two out of three (68%). The other is Japan, named by almost as many (65%). A unified Germany was named as an economic threat by fewer than these two but by more than any other source (43%). Perceiving the US as an economic threat to Canada may seem inconsistent with the high levels of confidence in the US noted earlier, but is not. Canadians, or at least the roughly half of them who are neither consistently negative nor consistently positive in their perceptions of the US, apparently have confidence in American ability to deal with world problems, but, at the same time, apprehensions about *bilateral* Canada-US economic relations.

CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A NUCLEAR WAR IS DOWN. IN 1987, prior to the signing of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty and the warming in US-USSR relations, one in two Canadians (55%) perceived much danger of nuclear war. Only one in three (33%) do so now.

On the other hand, perceptions of the danger of "world war" are relatively high; indeed, they seem as high as those of the early 1960s. Four in ten respondents (41%) to the present survey believed, in the month following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, that there was much danger of a world war. (This concern undoubtedly increased in the subsequent months of speculation about a direct military conflict with Iraq. Canadian attitudes to specific wars in which Canada has participated, including the Gulf War, are explored on page 16.)