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OTTAWA -- Canadians have their backs up over American foreign policy, according to a new survey that shows the vast majority believe the United States is acting like a bully with the rest of the world.

The survey suggests a chill has developed in Canada-U.S. relations compared to the empathy and support that characterized the relationship following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and for the launch of the U.S.-led "war on terrorism."

Although almost half of those surveyed agree the United States, as the world's sole superpower, has a responsibility to intervene in the affairs of other countries to protect global security, almost seven in 10 believe the U.S. is "starting to act like a bully with the rest of the world."

The survey, based on telephone interviews with 1,400 adult Canadians, was conducted in the first half of November for Maclean's magazine, Global TV and Southam News by the Strategic Counsel, a Toronto-based polling firm. It makes clear Canadians are conflicted about how supportive and friendly they want to be with Americans, an ambivalence some analysts say Prime Minister Jean Chretien reflects in his reserved approach to the Bush administration.

Indeed, the survey lands as the Canadian government is grappling with a couple of big issues: how to repair and enhance relations with the security-obsessed United States, the country's largest trading partner; and if and how to support Washington in a probable U.S.-led war on Iraq.

The survey indicates Canadians don't want the Chretien government bending over backwards to support the U.S. in the pending war.

The findings say Canadians are ambivalent, for example, about the threat posed by Iraq and are strongly opposed to backing a U.S.-led war on Saddam Hussein with Canadian fighting units.

At the same time, a majority -- 53 per cent -- said Canada should provide some non-combat support, such as food and transportation, regardless of whether the UN Security Council approves an attack.

Michael Sullivan, an analyst with the Strategic Counsel, says the findings lay bare Canadians' conflicted feelings about the United States.

"We obviously recognize we're tied to the U.S. in ways that we might not have been a decade ago because of NAFTA," he said.

But Canadians also are saying that despite shared security issues, a military partnership and a long friendship, their priorities are not necessarily the U.S. interests and the two countries may have different outlooks on things.

"As Canadians, we take pride in our role as peacemaking and peacekeeping," Sullivan said.

"I think that that is part of our personality. We take pride in medicare, we take pride in our peacekeeping role. And when we look at the U.S., we don't see those kind of values necessarily reflected."

Sullivan said the strong 67-per-cent Canadian agreement with the statement the U.S. government is "starting to act like a bully" with the rest of the world is telling. It was the first time the polling firm had asked the question in a survey.

Sullivan suggested the finding shows many Canadians are uncomfortable with the Bush-led Republican administration and where it is going on foreign policy.

It's not that Canadians don't think the U.S. has a responsibility in world affairs as the lone superpower, it's just they are upset over how the U.S. is exercising that responsibility, he said.

Respondents in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec were more likely to agree with the bullying statement, while those from Atlantic Canada and Ontario were least likely to agree.

In B.C., Saskatchewan and Alberta, the rate of agreement was 74 per cent. It fell to 72 per cent in Quebec.

Only 61 per cent agreed with the statement in Atlantic Canada. The figure in Ontario was 63 per cent.

A solid majority of Canadians (57 per cent) said they were concerned Canada is losing its independence from the U.S. The feeling is strongest among Quebecers (64 per cent) and British Columbians (63 per cent). Atlantic Canadians (53 per cent) were least concerned.

The finding is not surprising considering the emphasis on joint U.S.-Canadian ventures on everything from national security and border control to emergency planning for terrorist and other disasters in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

The survey shows more Canadians had put a distance between themselves and their U.S. counterparts by the end of this year, compared with a year earlier.

Last year, almost half of respondents -- 49 per cent -- said Canadians and Americans were "essentially" or "mainly" the same. That percentage slid to 41 per cent when the same question was asked this year.

Similarly, in the months after Sept 11, 2001, 33 per cent of Canadians said Americans are "like family" or "best friends." A year later, the proportion dropped to 22 per cent.

The national results of the survey are considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The regional margins of error, at a 95-per-cent confidence level, were within 5.8 percentage points in both B.C. and Alberta, 7.5 in Saskatchewan/Manitoba, 5.1 in Ontario, 5.8 in Quebec and 6.7 in Atlantic Canada.

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