

# Strategy by the sea

**B**RIGHTON — This is a tired, peeling old resort city which also serves as Britain's convention capital. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) decided to hold its 30th annual conference here and hence my somewhat reluctant presence in one of Europe's least inviting locales.

Five hundred of the western world's leading defence experts, security officials, diplomats and not a few spooks set about looking at what changes we might expect in coming years.

Among some of the more noteworthy predictions or observations:

- Quipped a former British defence minister, "Gorbachev has changed the world's strategic scene by choosing to smile instead of frowning."

- The process of nuclear arms reduction between the USSR and the U.S. is fast moving from one of "detente" to "entente," noted a senior British politician — a rosy view not shared by most other participants, but still a bon mot.

- Israel, we were informed by a person who knew, holds a stock of ready-to-use neutron bombs. These are nuclear devices that produce little blast but a great deal of lethal radiation. They work nicely against tank formations and kill people quickly without causing too much property damage — a convenient weapon in the confined spaces in which Mideasterners usually fight. France, I suspect, had a large role in this affair.

- The two superpowers are in relative strategic decline. New mid-sized powers are fast emerging to challenge the old bi-polar monopoly on power. Sharply aware of this hastening decline, Moscow and Washington are urgently trying to fashion a new system of international stability that will allow them to retain as much as possible of their waning power.

- Among the delegates there was a widely shared view that the western powers had made a grave error in closing their eyes to Iraq's use of poison gas against Iran and its own rebellious Kurds. Western politicians wanted Iraq to win the

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war and never made much of an issue of toxic weapons. Only now, after 10,000 Kurdish families have been driven by poison gas attacks to take refuge in Turkey has the West been forced by this outrage to finally take notice.

The failure to stop Iraq from using chemical weapons assures that their use by other Third World nations will become widespread. They are cheap and effective.

It's absurd and disgusting to see Washington boycotting South Africa or Chile for their political misdeeds, for example, while saying nothing, at least until last week, about Iraq's massive use of chemical weapons.

- The nuclear disaster at Chernobyl gave the Soviet general staff a rude shaking and may even have forced it to alter its planning for conventional operations against Western Europe. That area is dotted with nuclear power plants. The Soviets, we were told, estimate that many would be accidentally hit in the course of an invasion of Western Europe. Take Chernobyl and multiply by 10 or 20.

Come to think of it, Europe's best defence might be more, not fewer, nuclear power plants.

- One of the biggest new security problems for Western European nations will come from tourism. As travel costs drop and transit barriers are removed, more and more people are voyaging across Europe. In five years, a leading expert told me, Britain will have 500,000 visitors daily crossing its borders. How any security force can cope with such a horde remains unclear.

The now-abuilding Channel tunnel, or Chunnel, will add to the flood of visitors. Passports will be processed by machines, much like train tickets. Any serious checking of border arrivals would cause a line of furious tourists stretching from London to Amsterdam. In other words, a playground for terrorists and enemy agents.

- One of the thorniest problems in trying to make an arms reduction deal with the Soviets is that Moscow simply doesn't know how much it is spending on the military. Russia's accounting and pricing methods are so wretched that not even crude estimates are available.

Anyone who thinks this is incredible should ponder the following, which I heard from a Soviet source: For the past 40 years, every map published in the Soviet Union has been purposely distorted on orders of the KGB. I found this firsthand while trying to walk through Moscow, using a Russian map. Streets appeared where they should not have been, or did not exist where indicated on the map.

Recently, the city's government had to go to the U.S. Embassy and ask the Yankees if they had an accurate map of Moscow since none could be found in the USSR. Fortunately, the Americans had one. Grand strategy sometimes mixes with comedy.



"I've diagnosed your condition as acute Kleptomania."