Here, as in so many other questions, the distinction between dictatorship and totalitarianism is crucial: The two are utterly different political phenomena. The totalitarian government effectively controls terrorism because it controls everything else. What is more, even if once in a while the pervasive control system slips up, this is a containable failure, because the government also controls all communications. A terrorist act derives most of its political utility from the publicity surrounding it; conversely, such an act is almost completely meaningless if no one knows about it.

Today the only genuinely totalitarian regimes are in the Soviet Union and its satellites (China, in all likelihood, cannot be characterized as totalitarian in the same way—it is, very likely, not sufficiently centralized to be). Outside the Soviet orbit dictatorships differ greatly in their ability to control terrorism; on the whole, though, they are more effective than democracies.

Aside from a totalitarian system, what methods have worked against urban terrorism? The answer is short and depressing. Counterterror has worked, at least in some places. Brazil and Chile are cases in point, and Argentina may soon provide another case. Counterterror becomes effective when the organs of repression operate as ruthlessly as the terrorists, in a zone free of legal inhibitions and the restraints of public opinion. Counterterror, like terrorism, uses spectacular acts of violence to produce fear: random assassination, the taking and execution of hostages, violence of various kinds inflicted on the families of putative opponents, a policy either of taking no prisoners or of torturing prisoners. These methods, as the Brazilian case shows clearly, are always threatened by an independent judiciary and/or an even residually free press. This is why they are not likely to succeed under democratic conditions. To be sure, some methods other than counterterror have shown some results, such as the new security provisions for air travel. Comparable techniques of self-defense may be possible in other areas. It is unlikely, though, that these, by themselves, will end terrorism.

As to whether capital punishment is an effective deterrent against terrorism, I think the answer is a flat No. The imposition of the death penalty for terrorists, while all other facets of a Western legal system remain in force, is likely to make things even worse. Not only would it dramatize condemned terrorists as heroic martyrs, but it would encourage further terrorist acts (notably the taking of hostages) intended to free terrorists who are under a sentence of execution. These arguments carried the day in a recent debate over this matter in the British House of Commons—rightly so, I believe (which, incidentally, is a conclusion quite independent of one’s feelings about capital punishment as such—that is, independent of one’s moral or humanitarian ideas about the death penalty).

It may seem then that we face a stark alternative between living with terrorism or accepting counterterror. I hope that is not the case. I hope that techniques of self-defense, comparable to those that have so effectively reduced terrorism in the air, notably hijackings, will be developed. Such techniques leave intact our Western values on the limits of government repression. In addition to these, there may be ways of making the legal system more effective without making it less humane (the same possibility pertains to ordinary crime, especially in this country). The solidification of public opinion against terrorists of all political colorations will also be helpful; this process, it seems, is well under way. Also, there is an element of fashion in this as in most other human activities.

Nevertheless, given the character of modern society, it is more likely than not that terrorism will be a recurring phenomenon. If so, the following thought is worth holding on to: Even in the totalitarian state terrorism does not really end. What ends is, so to speak, free enterprise terrorism; the State acquires a monopoly in the field—and exercises it with a vengeance. Given the imperfections of history, terrorism by individuals acting occasionally may be preferable to terrorism as a continuous government activity. The question, I suppose, is one of degree. If a certain level of insecurity is reached, most people will opt for any political measures that promise security. Quite apart from other dangers facing it, Western democracy (and with it just about everything we mean by decency in government) is gravely threatened by the possibility that this level may be reached in our lifetime.

**EXCURSUS III**

*James Finn on*  
**Peace Against the U.S.**

There is no peace movement in the United States today. But then there wasn’t a peace movement in the late sixties when the term was accepted and promoted as legal tender by most of the media in this country. The term—always a misnomer—was used then to encompass all the individuals, groups, and organizations that were opposed to the war in Vietnam. It did not clarify the situation to say that the end of the war would bring peace, and therefore all the protesters were joined in a common enterprise. On the basis of that proposition Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon belonged to the “peace movement,” for they too wanted an end to the war. The terms on which the war was brought to an end, the cost of the “peace” achieved, were all important then, and they remain important now. The “peace movement” was actually a protest.
movement, and when the occasion for the protest disappeared, the frail binding tie that supposedly united groups with very disparate social and political goals broke, and the groups and individuals went back to their own favorite preserves.

Question: Why these familiar observations on those melancholy years? Don't we have enough problems at the moment?

Answer: Some of the problems we have at the moment are intimately related to those of the sixties; attitudes that affect our current responses to issues are grounded in the years of the Vietnam protest.

The Vietnam war (and the ensuing horrors of Watergate) made criticism of some elements of American policies essential. But some within the protest turned that criticism into a general anti-American attitude. And that note of sour anti-Americanism continues to sound in many current political/social analyses and prescriptions. It became a convenient shorthand in the sixties to speak of "other Vietnams" that would break out in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and to presume that they would be instantly recognizable as such. That spurious insight continues to plague much of the popular discussion of U.S. foreign policy.

I am prepared to find that many who were most active within the protest movement—some of whom I marched with and who remain close friends—will not find the foregoing statements either palatable or accurate. But some, I know, will agree. For what I have said finds strong support in the recent reflections of James Forest—active opponent of the Vietnam war, member of the New York AFSC Peace Program Committee, member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and editor of its journal. He recently demonstrated at the U.S. Mission to the U.N. against the shipment of arms to Angola. Routine and familiar action. But then he and others moved down to the Soviet Mission to protest USSR intervention in Angola. Not familiar, not routine, not expected. In fact, none of the demonstrators, all associated with pacifist groups, could recall a "peace movement" protest at the Soviet offices since the Czech uprising of 1967 was crushed by Soviet tanks. Was Angola the first unruly Soviet venture since then? Of course not. But why, then, Forest asked himself, did the demonstrators always find themselves in front of the U.S. Mission and not that of the USSR? His response caused him to think back on the role of the protesters during the Vietnam revolt.

As the war dragged on, we became less and less a peace movement, and even less and less an anti-war movement. We became a new "just-war" movement—somewhat different from other just-war movements in history in that its membership found its own "side," not the opponent's, in the wrong. In the agony and frustration of our inability to bring the war to an end, we increasingly identified with those who were responding to American violence with counterviolence. We became convinced wars must be fought.

The American protest movement's devolution had profound political consequences within the U.S. In the minds of many ordinary Americans, though they were deeply troubled by the war, the protest movement failed to be inviting—because it was largely a cheerleading project for those who were fighting America. It was noticed that the protesters didn't bring the same ethical standards to bear on the behavior of other governments.

This analysis is perfectly accurate. There were always people within the antiwar movement who realized this was happening at the time and who fought against it. An honorable fight, but one that they lost in terms of how the protest movement was regarded by the media, most of the American public, and many, if not most, of the protesters.

Mr. Forest is convinced that pacifism was not fatally compromised by that dismal aspect of the protest movement and that the Angola demonstration—against both the U.S. and the USSR—demonstrates its regained purity and strength. Possibly. But there is abroad in our land, alive and active, an ideological specter that views wars of national liberation as naturally good and to be supported, U.S. intervention as bad and to be condemned, U.S. strength as dangerous and to be diminished, U.S. leadership as misguided and to be limited. Those who were part of the protest movement in the sixties are partially responsible for the propagation of such views. They have a special obligation to dispute and disperse them.

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