

IN THIS ISSUE

The bombing of the World Trade Centre earlier this year and the pre-emption of two further terrorist plots — including an alleged attempt to assassinate former US President Bush — have refocused attention on the problem of international terrorism. The Bush plot, which has been attributed to the Iraqi secret services, gives particular saliency to Noemi Gal-Or's examination of state-sponsored terrorism. The attempt to kill the former president was probably motivated purely by a desire for revenge, but that case may be exceptional. Instead, Gal-Or asks the reader to consider whether state-sponsored terrorism should be seen as a diplomatic tool — a form of inter-state bargaining. While acknowledging the problem of applying traditional paradigms of war and diplomacy to terrorism, the author suggests that state-sponsored terrorism could be interpreted as an attempt to redefine the traditional norms of diplomacy in the direction of coercion. To illustrate her case, she points to Iraq's use of detained foreigners as coercive "bargaining chips" during the 1990 Gulf Crisis.

Two lengthy review essays address one of the seminal events of the Vietnam War — the Tet Offensive — and the role of the North Vietnamese Commander, General Vo Nguyen Giap — in that event. Both remain immersed in historical controversy: over the objectives of the Tet Offensive and whether they were achieved; over the extent to which the US experienced an intelligence "failure" regarding Tet; and, over Giap's role in Hanoi's decision to launch the offensive. In popular commentary on the war, he is often described as the "architect" of the Tet Offensive. Scholarly research, however, reveals his opposition to this high-stakes gamble — a final "roll of the dice" intended to reverse the flagging fortunes of Hanoi's 1967 military campaign. The two books, and the critical reviews of them, grapple with these subjects by varying degrees; James Wirtz's volume in particular, adds much substance to the historical debate.

In the other articles, William Hazleton argues that the "constitutional question" — Ulster's place in or out of the United Kingdom — remains the central issue of "The Troubles" and the source of Unionist intransigence. He asserts, moreover, that ambiguity about the North's future status impedes conciliation and fuels extremism, and that only acceptance of the constitutional status quo will bring about the stability and tolerance necessary for a longer term solution. Thomas Mitchell continues his examination of "internal settlements" as a conflict resolution technique. He demonstrates that the internal settlement in El Salvador achieved its primary objective — acquiring outside support for the regime — but failed to win popular support or cause defections from the insurgents. Mitchell concludes that the Salvadoran case proves the viability of the internal settlement model beyond Africa, but only in circumstances where there is significant external pressure for fundamental reform.

The opinions expressed in the articles, reviews and other contributions are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily represent those of the Centre for Conflict Studies or the University of New Brunswick.
