### September 11, 2001

As we go to press with this issue of Connections, we do so at a time when the majority of the world seems to have aligned itself behind the United States in the so-called war against terrorism. Many of us are still in shock at what we witnessed and wish to extend our sympathy and support to all those affected. Following the outrages on the world trade center and in Washington there was a spate of activity on SOCNET. In the first instance giving assurances to our community about members who could have been victims and then latterly about the role of SNA in the fight against terrorism. This was further triggered by the article that appeared in the Washington Post that highlighted how network methods could be used to combat underground organisations. It would be naïve of our community to think that this is in some way new. Here in the United Kingdom we have lived with terrorism from Irish paramilitary organisations for a long time. It seems to be well known that the security services here are very familiar with all the techniques that we believe to be our own, and have probably developed many others which are not in the public domain. As a community we need to continue to develop tools that we believe will help us understand the society we live in. It is up to individuals to decide whether they wish to apply these methods to terrorist groups or understanding aids. The problem I have with the ethical discussions contained on SOCNET is they asked questions such as: Can you be certain your methods are robust enough to decide whether someone will live or die? On their own clearly the answer is no, but as part of a larger collection of evidence, perhaps it is yes or at least yes to the fact that the individual may need to account for themselves. We are back to the old adage if it looks like a rose, and smells like a rose, then the chances are it is a rose.

On reflecting about what has happened I wondered about other areas in which networks may assist. As mentioned by others the situation is brought about often by an inherited political situation. Networks have been used for conflict resolution and perhaps this is the area in which we should be more forthcoming. In addition it is clear that the two (or more) sides involved in conflicts such as this have no understanding of the other. We are in the situation in which inbred dogma fuelled by propaganda leads to a vicious cycle of hatred and the hardening of ideas. But we claim to know about diffusion of ideas. Can we not use this to help combat terrorism? Does our research not provide an insight into how we can help both sides at least adopt some empathy for the other? Not easy I know but possibly an area in which we can help. Members that are involved in social support clearly can contribute to those directly affected. I realise this does not move us towards curing the problem, but it is a positive outcome from network studies from an area that is too often seen as the poor relation within our field. Finally, I was struck by something I read in a PhD submission, and I quote "I would like to thank….members of INSNA who provided comments and advice by e-mail from all over the world…..the informal, non-hierarchical, highly supportive network based organisation must surely provide a model for other learned societies to follow in the third millennium." Perhaps we have a model that should not only inform other learned societies but larger organisations and regimes as well.

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Martin Everett<br>
26 September
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