Kia Javanmardian
March 10, 2003

<u>Too much Technology?</u>

Recently, <u>The New York Times</u> published an article discussing the role of technology plays in homeland security. The article talks about a company, PointSource, that is in the business of screening water for toxic agents.

After the events of September 11th, this company has seen a great increase in the demand for its product. During the super bowl, the main line of water going into the stadium was monitored by PointSource's technology. During the entire event, the company's machines were monitoring the water for bacteria that could have been intentionally placed there by terrorists. The company's technology uses lasers to differentiate between different bacteria that may be harmful to humans. While the current technology can only identify a handful of agents, the company is working on a more elaborate system that can differentiate between bacteria and other a biotic chemical compounds.

While PointSource's technology may only be used at a handful of large events each year, the need for such technology in our post September 11th world implies a great deal. No matter how much we, as a nation, would like to feel safe, our everyday lives are forever changed. Terrorism has come from being a distant possibility, to an everyday reality. Today, our government is taking preventative measures that would have seemed preposterous five years ago. Mail is being scanned for anthrax; our water is being screened for toxins, and each of us are being searched, frisked, and interrogated every time we step on a plane.

The efficacy of this preventative technology is also a question. For example, how effective of a deterrent is PointSource's technology? While it is able to monitor the levels of E.coli and other bacteria, how hard would it be for a terrorist to take advantage of the equipment's weaknesses? Admittedly, this device is unable to detect a lot of different toxins. It would be fairly easy for terrorists to learn of these weaknesses and exploit them.

The use of PointSource's technology illustrates an important point. As a nation, we need to decide how far to push technology when it comes to issues of homeland security. I personally don't believe that PointSource and similar technologies are the answers to our problems. I believe that the scope of fully securing any event is impossible. If a terrorist group wants to inflict harm on a large group of people, they will, and can, find a way to do so. If we keep relying upon technology to keep us safe, our efforts will eventually be defeated.

How, then, are we supposed to effectively deal with terrorism? I believe that the answer to this question is not a clear-cut one. Technology should definitely be a piece of the solution, but it shouldn't be the entire solution. Scanning mail and water are useful preventative measures, but these precautions should not remove the sense of urgency we as a nation should be feeling. Our administration needs to start taking swift action against terror through offensive measures. If we continue to take a defensive approach, we may be giving terrorist the time they need to plan their next big attack.