opinion  feedback

SACC has failed to accept SND's challenge to a debate over SDI

To the Editor:

Seven weeks ago, two members of the MIT Students for National Defense and the MIT Republican Club publicly challenged Richard Cowan of the Site Science Action Coordinating Committee to debate the question "Should the US pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative?"

The goal of this debate is to improve the quality of the SDI argument from selective quoting of sub-issues and shallow one-liners in posters and on flyers to a reasoned discussion of the overall issue. Demonstrations and leaflets do not facilitate give-and-take, permitting their creators to ignore the weaknesses in their case. This leads to a poor discussion of the issues, as there is no opportunity to dispute arguable points, such as technological feasibility, desalinization, and economic effects.

A debate forces both sides to deal with all aspects of the issue. In a real-time interactive argument, each side must rectify itself to defensible arguments, or be countered effectively.

One would think that SACC would welcome the opportunity to debate, because they should believe their arguments to be correct and, therefore, strong enough to withstand debate. One would think that SACC would welcome the opportunity to debate, because they should believe their arguments to be correct and, therefore, strong enough to withstand debate. We are disappointed that Cowan, though apparently willing to debate, has been unable to find one more student to form a two-person team to debate against SACC.

It is particularly disturbing that a group which organizes protests of a hundred people is unable to find as many as two students who are willing and able to defend their opinions in an equal-time setting such as a debate.

We remain hopeful that the debate will take place, as we prefer to explore the full depth of the issue than to watch SACC retreat from the intellectual challenge of a real discussion of the whole SDI issue and resort to the easy way out — more rallies, leaflets, emotional choas, and manoeuvres.

Lucien Van Ellen '90
Ronald G. Lovejoy '89
Nate Osgood '90
and eight others

Students must demonstrate against support of contras

To the Editor:

If it is true that governments as well as people can be judged by the friends they keep, the revelations from the Eugene Hasenfus affair in Nicaragua speak volumes about the interests that form US government policies in Central America.

Hasenfus was a cargo handler for a Central Intelligence Agency-run operation to supply the contras fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. He survived the downing of a C-123 aircraft on its way to deliver a cache of assault rifles, grenades, boots, and other military supplies to the contras.

With the direct and indirect support our government has offered in the operation of which Hasenfus was part, it comes as no surprise that Oxfam America has been denied permission to send $41,000 worth of agricultural implements and emergency housing supplies to Nicaragua. In contrast, the US Council for World Freedom, headed by Gen. John K. Singlaub (Ret.) had no difficulty obtaining a license to send a helicopter to the contra army's base in Estelí.

The contra army relies on outside support for its existence. They operate mostly from Honduras and Costa Rica and have little support within Nicaragua. "People...fear the contras because many contra leaders are former soldiers in the National Guard of deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza..." American financing of the contras mimics its support of the Somoza regime in 1912-1925 and 1926-1933 (The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 8).

If those historical associations were not enough to put a damper on the contras' popularity, their current actions would probably suffice. On July 2, 34 civilians were killed near the hamlet of Bocaycito when a passenger truck was destroyed by an antitank mine. A week ago Monday, an anti-aircraft mine explosion took the lives of six passengers on a truck in northern Nicaragua and injured 42 others.

The lack of support for the contras within Nicaragua and their dependence on US assistance was known well in advance of Hasenfus' capture. Among the

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