

'Nice guys' finish first

The March 12 editorial "Nice Guys" begins with a rhetorical question about the Democrats' intentions regarding Nicaragua, and ends with an equally rhetorical suggestion that if they "dismantle" the Contras without having a "secret threat" to fall back on, we must necessarily (again) send the Marines to Nicaragua.

Overlooked is the fact that Washington's historical and well-documented penchant for violent methods of achieving its goals in Latin America has been counter-productive, and that another show of the U.S. flag at the head of a Marine phalanx in Nicaragua will ignite a huge reservoir of anti-American sentiment throughout Latin America.

— Bill Becker
Woodland Hills

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Conflicting internal pressures from the right and the left might well cause the disintegration of several of the major democracies (including Mexico). Generalized violence in the region would be the norm. As Mexican author and former diplomat Carlos Fuentes has said "Where will U.S. security be then?"

There is a practical alternative to this scenario which deserves the most serious consideration. The Contadora group, (Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela) with support from the Lima Four (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay) is capable of fashioning, and enforcing, a regional accord for Central America. Add to Contadora's previous peace-seeking efforts the current Costa Rican initiative, and there is every reason to believe that a region-wide peace plan can be achieved.

It is widely understood that Contadora is now the only feasible vehicle for peace in Central America. It is time for Washington to show some respect for what Fuentes has called the most capable collection of Latin governments yet to appear. The benefits to our national security far outweigh the risks.