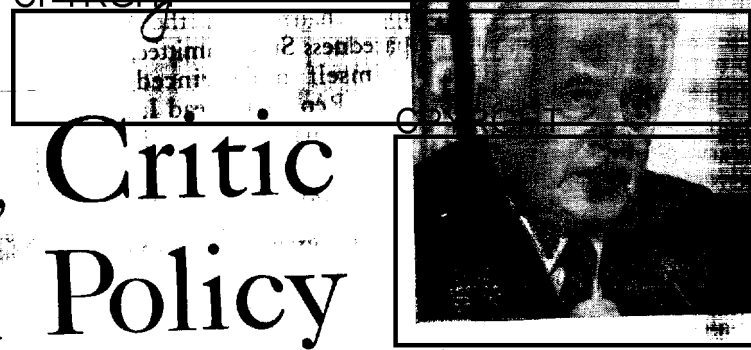


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Kenneth Keating, Critic of Our Cuban Policy

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By JAMES DANIEL

This quiet, level-headed Senator alerted the nation to the threat of Soviet military power only 90 miles from our shores, and is still deeply concerned

AGAIN, last January and February, controversy flared over Cuba. And again the uproar was touched off by Sen. Kenneth B. Keating—the mild-mannered but intent man who last fall warned the country that Cuba was being turned into a Soviet nuclear-missile base.* Rising in the Senate on January 31, he sought to correct what he considers the dangerously complacent view taken by President Kennedy and the administration.

Though the President in his latest press conference had minimized the Cuba danger, saying, "There is no influx of military equipment," Keating pointed out that Soviet-bloc ships had been arriving in Cuba at a rate of more than one a day since last October, often with military supporting equipment, such as helicopters. Even as the President spoke, Keating said, a Soviet ship laden with arms was steaming into Cuba. To block U.S. aerial reconnaissance, the ships unload at covered docks or by means of trucks lowered into the holds. (These facts were verified by such sources as the U.S. Navy and the Maritime Administration.)

To what purpose all this feverish preparation? Obviously not to attack the United States directly, Keating said. "What the Russians are planning to do—are already doing—is mount an increasing wave of sabotage, terrorism, political subversion. Already riots in Venezuela, Peru and Brazil are demonstrably

the work of communists trained and armed in Cuba. The time will come when the United States will have to make a hard choice: either get rid of this advance communist arsenal no matter how, or give up in Latin America. Furthermore, the Soviets are building Cuba up militarily to the point where it will be impossible to get them out with conventional weapons. Cuba is becoming an impregnable fortress."

As in last October, the latest Keating blast provoked instant and indignant denials. In an effort to make the Republican Senator eat his hat, the White House staged a televised photo-intelligence briefing by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that lasted one hour and 45 minutes. Scores of pictures flashed on the screen. Aerial photographs showed some missile sites plowed up, some missiles and missile-supporting equipment being shipped but. But the pictures also told another story, an ominous and thought-provoking one which confirmed Keating's charge of a military buildup. They showed an immense amount of conventional weapons, of the latest Soviet types, including delta-wing MIG-21 fighters, anti-aircraft rockets, nuclear-capable torpedo boats.

Yet in spite of all this armament—in spite of the 17,000 Russian soldiers (plus thousands more Red

*See "While America Slept," The Reader's Digest, March '63.

worried about the effect on elections. Not Keating. He said, "If the price the Republicans must pay for the President's action is the loss of some Congressional seats or some votes, I think it's a pretty small price."

As a member of the Senate Internal Security Committee, Keating was voicing public concern about the risks of a communist Cuba as early as 1959. In January 1960, he criticized the Eisenhower administration for lack of attention to the danger, called for a "massive reappraisal" of policy, a "re-evaluation and rewriting of the Monroe Doctrine, in terms also of this present internal threat to our hemisphere." He warned: "Cuba is nearing an almost complete takeover by the communists."

After the 1961 Bay of Pigs disaster, Keating was among those who hopefully applauded President Kennedy's ringing pledge to "re-examine and reorient our forces of all kinds, our tactics and our institutions" so as to keep more Cubas from happening. But then, last summer, he watched in fascinated horror as the Russians began to convert Cuba into a major military base.

In ten major addresses on the floor of the Senate, Keating detailed each step of the buildup. His facts were the identical facts gathered and verified by official government sources; they were even more fully available to the White House than to him; yet they were ignored and indignantly denied by top members of the administration.

Since the October crisis—during which it seemed for a time that the President had stopped Khrushchev in his tracks—Senator Keating has watched with mounting uneasiness

the steady retreat from Kennedy's strong original stand. The milestones:

1. Removal of the naval blockade in November without obtaining the promised on-site inspection.

2. The disbanding of the ransomed Cuban Freedom Fighter brigade, nucleus of any liberation army.

3. The emasculation of an order curtailing trade with Cuba. Originally intended to prohibit a shipping company from carrying U.S. government cargo if any of its ships calls at Cuban ports, the order now provides merely that the same ship cannot do both. And even this is not rigidly enforced. When the Agriculture Department threatened to keep the Norwegian freighter *Nora* from picking up a cargo of surplus tallow at Peekskill, N.Y., because it was engaged in Cuban trade, the State Department got the decision reversed.

4. The creation in January of a special task force within the State Department to improvise a new Cuban policy. Though the unit claims carte blanche to recommend ways of getting rid of Castro, such "new" policies as have been disclosed seem to be only the old policy of containment. As President Kennedy himself announced at his March 6 press-conference, "We feel the wisest pol-

icy is the isolation of communism in this hemisphere."

We are now trying to cut off Castro's traffic of Red money, arms and—most important of all—agents trained by Cuban schools of subversion. The prospects for success are not promising. According to Castro's chief of training, Lionel Soto, Cuba has 351 revolutionary schools with 14,000 students, including, as Kennedy admitted, 1200 who came last year from other Latin countries.

"Containment is not a policy," says Keating, "but an acceptance of the *status quo* in the pious hope that it won't get worse—which it obviously will in Latin America, once the communists are assured the United States has only a do-nothing policy on Cuba. Someday unless there is a sharp change this country is going to find the separate pockets of 'contained communism' all joined up together, and the southern half of this hemisphere one huge, boiling communist caldron.

"I believe that Americans of all parties will stand behind the President in any firm, realistic step he takes to reverse this trend. And I believe that if we make our position clear enough soon enough, leaving no doubt of our intention to back it up with what it takes, we can reverse the trend without war."

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