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Intelligence Gap

One of the most foolish statements yet made about the continuing Cuban controversy came recently from Rep. George Mahon (D-Tex.), chairman of the House military appropriations subcommittee, who called on the government to stop answering questions about Cuba. "There has been talk of an intelligence gap," Mahon said. "There is an intelligence gap. The gap is in the intelligence of those who are daily revealing the secrets of the intelligence operations of the U.S. government."

It is an unwritten but accepted rule of American politics that politicians will try to halt criticism of their own party. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake for this special pleading to still public criticism of our government's mishandling of the Cuban situation. For it is now revealed that there was an intelligence gap over Cuba.

IN TESTIMONY recently released by the House appropriations subcommittee, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara admitted that for more than three weeks last fall, Soviet missile sites in Cuba went undetected because U.S. U-2 planes were photographing the wrong end of the island. Between Sept. 18 and 21, reports told of offensive missiles near San Cristobal, 100 miles west of Havana. But it was not until Oct. 14, McNamara admitted, that a U-2 finally was sent over a "specific flight path" in the San Cristobal area and revealed the sites.

Early in the fall, while the administration angrily denied the existence of Soviet missiles, a number of private citizens and critics of the administration charged that Russia was turning Cuba into a camp armed with weapons even the administration would consider "offensive." Sen. Kenneth Keating even named facts and figures during a speech on the Senate floor in August, and he repeated his charges again in October. Both times administration spokesmen discounted Keating's warning, saying they preferred to trust U.S. intelligence.

WHEN IT TURNED out that U.S. intelligence had been lax, and that Senators Keating, Goldwater, Smathers, and Thurmond had been correct, there were no apologies. Nor is there the slightest official admission now that any of the four knew what they were talking about. Yet the pattern appears to be repeating itself. Congressmen are pointing to testimony by the head of the CIA, by the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, and by the army intelligence chief, to prove that Cuba once more is being turned into a powerful fortress and is being used as a base for the export of communism — something President Kennedy, a few short months ago, said the U.S. would never tolerate.

But again the administration officially denies the claim. And again political partisans, who seemingly learned nothing from the earlier Cuban crisis, are accusing critics of undermining confidence in the American government.

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