

UN Envoy Keeps Candor Showing

Brooke W Kroeger Newsday UN Bureau

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By Brooke W. Kroeger

Newsday UN Bureau

United Nations — Meet Alan Keyes: the undiplomatic young diplomat catapulted from obscurity to ambassador, and now, before he turns 35, likely to become the State Department's highest-ranking black appointee.

Administration officials say Keyes is President Ronald Reagan's choice to become assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, succeeding Gregory Newell.

Since October, 1983, after a brief five years in the Foreign Service, he has been U.S. representative to the United Nation's Economic and Social Council. That presidential appointment

carries ambassadorial rank.

Short as the Reagan administration might be on high-level minority appointments, the prospect of this one is causing no celebration among those in the mainstream of concern with equal opportunity.

Alan Keyes is not their kind of guy.

"I never saw it as my job in life to satisfy other people's expectation of what black people are," he said during an interview in his office at the U.S. mission.

"And when people come to me — and I've had it happen once or twice — and say, 'How can a black person do this?', I look at them and say, 'I hate to tell you

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Newsday/Ozler Muhammad

Alan Lee Keyes: Reagan's choice for assistant secretary of state

High-Ranking Envoy Keeps Candor Showing

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this, but whatever I do, that's what a black person does. And at the end of the day, my life is going to be a contribution to helping you understand what it means to be black."

To allies and adversaries, in UN corridors and committees, he has propounded the more unpopular aspects of U.S. policy with all the diplomatic subtlety of the cannon burst in Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

West Europeans take strong exception to the way he delivers criticism, sometimes peppered with compound words that have first syllables such as horse and bull.

"Contrary to the view that some of my European colleagues take, the countries that we work with here, I generally approach my colleagues from developing countries as if they were mature, responsible adults representing sovereign countries, not as if they were children who had to be humored along . . ." Keyes said.

African delegates find it hard to fathom his impassioned, formidably articulate and economically reasoned defense of U.S. policy on apartheid.

"It's difficult to hear someone whom you expect to sympathize speaking so much as someone who is not part of you," one said, "as if his people never experienced slavery."

Keyes said he spends a great deal of time thinking not only about how to eliminate apartheid, but how in the process an alternative to it can be built.

"And that is not something you do with rhetoric, slogans and noninvolvement. It's not something you will achieve through disinvestment," he said, calling such action "moral posturing, not morality."

"The United States would cease to have any kind of direct influence on that situation and, in my opinion, the second thing that would happen is that South Africa as a political concern would drop completely off the radar screen of politics in this country. Nobody would care anymore."

"I think the end result of that obviously will be a situation in which we have left the situation to the evils of both extremes — to the right-wing evil of the Afrikaners who at all cost want to preserve the apartheid system, and to the left-wing evil, the Soviets and others who will see the situation solved not through the processes that involve economic forces and real changes in the lives of the black people, but AK-47s and the arts of destruction, and we see what those arts bring elsewhere.

"How many people is disinvestment going to educate? How many people's health is it going to improve? How is it going to improve the educational, managerial expertise of the black people of South Africa? . . . I think that what we should be thinking about is not how we give up the chance we may have to influence the situation for change, but how do we use it?"

" . . . And that means giving up the racist assumption — I call it a racist assumption advisedly — that the future of South Africa lies exclusively in the hands of white people in South Africa and that the only role the blacks there have to play is as a source of potential violence or as the passive victims of injustice. That is racist in my opinion, and I can't look at the situation that way.

"I see the black people in South Africa as the most critical positive factor for eliminating apartheid and building the future of that country. The question we should ask is how we can engage with them to improve the kinds of skills they need so that they can play that positive role most effectively . . ."

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Keyes might have been conjured in a laboratory run by Reagan administration headhunters. He is the youngest of five Army brats and moved seven times before he went to college — Harvard, where he stayed until he earned his PhD in government in 1978.

His academic interest — political theory — has now become a hobby, and he fills his computer with writings that "someday may be useful." He swims every day. He jogs. He speaks a fluent French and dabbles in a few other languages.

After Harvard, he joined the Foreign Service and was sent to New Delhi as vice consul "to stamp visas" for 18 months after a short stint in 1978 working on conservative Republican Jeff Bell's unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. Senate against Bill Bradley in New Jersey. Guttenberg, just over the Hudson, is now home to him, the wife he met and married four years ago in Bombay and their two children, the youngest born May 23.

In 1980, he returned to the State Department to work as a desk officer for four months for Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, and then spent 2½ years on the policy planning staff and a few weeks as an adviser to the National Security Council before his UN charge. His leapfrog to power has not set well with all his Foreign Service colleagues, with whom his reputation is, at best, mixed.

Keyes' latest preoccupation is with the international women's conference in Nairobi next month. He is the only man on the U.S. delegation, headed by President Reagan's daughter Maureen. He is leading her through the spaghetti tangle of political nuances that anything tied to the United Nations can be.

And he admits that the system leaves him impatient — the volcano of paper and speeches and political posturing that often substitutes for really trying to understand world problems.

"I like to think that the real attitude one should bring to these issues here would be the same attitude that I would bring to the job if instead of going home to comfortable surroundings, I went home to a child who was starving, the way those children are starving in this world."