

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
September 4, 1987

Mr. Harold Piper
Baltimore Sun
501 N. Calvert St.,
Baltimore, Md. 21270

Dear Mr. Piper,

Here is the piece we discussed by phone earlier this afternoon.

I did not include a caption because I do not know how you will use it if, as I hope, you do use it. Feel free, please.

The Sun did not use the full column, as I indicate in a note for your information, not for publication.

If your morgue is not adequate for checking me out among the standard sources are books by Ted Sorensen, Arthur Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy, Elie Abel and the guy who headed State's intelligence division. His name escapes me at the moment.* (Abel was then in NBC-TV's Washington bureau.)

* Roger Hillsman as I now recall it. Maybe "Hillsman," but I think not.

If you are too young to remember it, the rest of the Kennedy presidency was entirely different. That is, after the Cuba missile crisis. He cut back on military spending and actions but had to make some compromises, he cancelled the contract for making "Blue Streak" missiles for Britain, he sent Averill Harriman to negotiate the limited test-ban agreement and, among other things, he stated his new and clearly "dovish" policy at American University. I think it is worth reading today. (June 1963)

If you want to discuss this with me do not phone until after 10:30 a.m. I am away from home for physical therapy until about then. After that I'm generally home for the rest of the day. 301/473-8186.

I am a former reporter, investigative reporter, Senate investigator and editor and World War II intelligence analyst, beginning in OSS and also as a Latin Americanist.

Sincerely,


Harold Weisberg

"Clio, the muse of history," George Will says in his "Indistinguishable Doves and Hawks" column, "is in bed with a splitting headache, prostrated by the task of trying to correct the still multiplying misunderstandings of the Cuban missile crisis."

If poor Clio is suffering a bed, it is because Will has just raped her again in this newest "misrepresentation" that, having invented it, Will misuses as a device for promoting the dangerously false concept that only greater power solves international controversies.

Will refers to a letter written by JFK's Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, as quoted by Anthony Lukas in the New York Times, not to its quotation the same day by Richard Harwood in the Washington Post, which prints Will's columns. But Lukas is a liberal and Will has a thing about and uses this column against liberals.

"The letter is said to show," Will writes, "that Kennedy was a dove. In the crisis, Robert Kennedy notified Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin that U.S. missiles in Turkey would be withdrawn within months of withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, but it was imperative (obviously for domestic American political reasons) that the linkage of the withdrawals not be announced."

This, in the Rusk/Will version, is the officially accepted solution to that crisis, one that in his newest revisionism Will says did not "take the world to the brink of nuclear war." (What could Will have been on in October 1962?)

"Kennedy succeeded," Will prates in his newest assault on Clio, "because his military advantage was huge and his goal was tiny. The Soviet Union was not going to war at a time when U.S. advantages were three to one in long-range bombers, six to one in long-range missiles and 16 to one in warheads."

(Or, by inference, let's get more of these "advantages," regardless of cost and budget deficits.)

Not a word of this Will revisionism is true. It boggles the mind to realize that this omniscience could be so wrong about what he lived through or the alternative, that he says it despite knowing better.

What really happened is that when the presence of medium-range Soviet missiles in Cuba was confirmed JFK convoked an "executive committee," what came to be known as "Ex Comm," not the National Security Council as Will states. [Note: cut from the column as used in the Sun but in the Post.] Most of these men were hawks and in various ways advocated war, mostly bombing Cuba or invading ^{to} ~~her~~, JFK decided on a blockade.

Khrushchev responded outside diplomatic channels, through John Scali, then of ABC-TV news. His proposal was that if we would promise not to invade Cuba he would withdraw the missiles. Kennedy's hawks opposed this, deliberations continued for several days, and then Khrushchev went very public with his alternative proposal: he would take his missiles back if we got ours from Turkey. This shocked JFK because he had ~~long-earlier~~ ordered our missiles out of Turkey. It was his first inkling that his order had been ignored, that the missiles were still there.

Khrushchev began to disclose his proposal before Kennedy could finish reading it.

That public, that unacceptable to Kennedy.

What Robert Kennedy actually did is recommend what became the actual solution: he modified Khrushchev's initial proposal to mean that we would protect Cuba against any invasion, JFK made this offer and Khrushchev accepted it.

It was not, as Will says, the Soviet Union that would be "going to war." It would have been the U.S. if it wanted to get those missiles out of Cuba. The U.S.S.R. would merely have sat back with its missiles in place - unless the U.S. started a war.

What Kennedy learned is the opposite of what Will says - that his "huge"

military advantage was utterly useless unless he was prepared for World War III. This is hardly "not much of a brink" or a "tiny" goal.

Withdrawal of the missiles from Turkey was not part of the solution. They were removed later, as JFK had ordered earlier.

Will really gets carried away with himself in all this invention of fact:

"The Kremlin must have been astonished - and elated - when Kennedy, in spite of advantages that would have enabled him to insist on severance ~~of severance~~ of Soviet military connections with Cuba, only sought removal of the missiles."

Kennedy tells Khrushchev to sever his military ties to Cuba, Khrushchev tells Kennedy to get lost - what then, George? Does Kennedy resort to his "huge" military advantage, all that excess of missiles and nuclear warheads, and start World War III?

How else could he have severed the military connection between Cuba and the U.S.S.R.?

Rusk's recollection is simply wrong, the Turkey missiles were irrelevant. Rusk, in fact, was hawkish during the crisis and was one of the less active Ex Comm participants.

Any columnist making Will's pretension ought have known this, too.

Contrary to Will's misrepresentation, the world then was on the brink of a nuclear holocaust and he could not have been unaware of it.

Contrary to Will's misrepresentation, Kennedy could not have had a military or nuclear advantage huge enough to make any difference when, as happened, Khrushchev did not cry "uncle."

Only at the end does Will make even passing reference to "Kennedy's non-invasion pledge" and then it is to inveigh against "'peace' plans for Central America."

There is, after all, that "huge" military advantage we have once we face the actuality that the Contras cannot overthrow the government of Nicaragua.

Pity poor "Clio, the muse of history," when George Will goes for her.

Harold Willey