

2/11/89

Dear Mr. Arons,

Thanks for your good letter to Navasky.

As soon as I saw Kopkind's nonresponse and the space given it I wrote Navasky the enclosed.

Well, He'll see it but I wrote the letters people.

I believe I'd written him earlier about other such revisionism, without any response.

Best wishes,

Harold Wisking

COPY

Lud Arons
1619 COMMONWEALTH
BOSTON, MA 02135 USA

February 8, 1989

Dear Mr. Navasky:

The state of The Nation is poor because it is badly edited. Specifically Kopkind's reply to Weisberg. He prattles (Harold's right!), "To pull out of Vietnam, Kennedy would have had to order a radical reversal of policy in 1963 or early 1964, which of course he did not do." This outrageous Goebbelsian lie is at the crux of Kopkind's long-winded if transparent smoke screen. But even if Andy isn't a liar, he's simply unqualified to write on this or any other subject of substance, being so miserably uninformed. Now that's your bailiwick, Mr. Editor and it's ironic how you tagged the 300-word letter writer's limitation onto the end of your charge's 900-word rebuttal.

Cognitive dissonance makes me nauseous. Dump Kopkind. He's too stupid to be entrusted with the vital work of maintaining our illusion of a free press. Doublethink demands a certain quality of craftsmanship. On the positive side, I salute your consistently effective efforts to obfuscate the primary motive for the assassinations of JFK et al as part of the generally well-run media cover-up these past 25 years. Certainly neither Mafia nor rogue CIA elements kindle this level of devotion. We all march to a far more powerful drummer. So why not at least try to be a bit more subtle for comforts sake.

Lud Arons

Letters to the Editor
The Nation
72 Fifth Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10011

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
2/6/89

Andrew Kopkind spends more than two columns (2/20/89) in additional anti-Kennedy
distributes without once responding to what I ^{actually} wrote. He ignores my opening sentence, in
which I could not have been more explicit: "Andrew Kopkind's version of J.F.K.'s legacy
fails to recognize the drastic change in Kennedy's policies beginning with the 1962
missile crisis..." He rambles on ^{at} ~~in~~ venomous length about the early Kennedy administra-
tion but does not, save for ^{an} ~~an~~ occasional misrepresentation, address the post-missile
crisis Kennedy policies. He can't. I was correct. I'd researched a book I was not able to
write, "^{the untold story of the Cuba Missile Crisis} Tiger To Ride" ^{on} over the ~~radically~~ different last year of his administration.

^{actually} Where I ~~addressed~~ ^{Rupkind} addressed what he said about the "plots of assassination" against
Castro he pretends I spoke about efforts to ^{or} subvert and not the CIA's assassination
attempts. And even then he attributes ^{these} the CIA's abuses to J.F.K., with no basis at all.
He as much as says that it was Kennedy who ordered the CIA to manufacture toxins to
poison Cubans with. I know of no basis for this and do ^{Rupkind} not believe ~~him~~ ^{In any event}. But, he does not
respond to what I actually wrote.

He cannot refute but he pretends to dispute that Kennedy had ordered the liquida-
tion of our involvement in Vietnam. ("He planned to reduce his troops.") As I wrote,
just before he was assassinated there was a Pentagon press release you should be able to
get announcing the gradual reduction that was to have been completed over a period of
months. Just after he was assassinated the Pentagon re-evaluated its re-evaluation and
said it was optimistic. And the rest, post-Kennedy, is bitter history.

~~Kopkind~~ was in Washington at the time of the missile crisis, if I recall correctly,
and he should have a better recollection of both the day-by-day events and the solution.
~~He~~ ^{It} also mixes the beginning with the end. At the beginning all the advisers were hawk
and urged strong military action except CIA Director John McCone, who was soon turned
around by his subordinates, ^{and} Adlai Stevenson. But at the end Robert did the exact
opposite of what kopkind says, "told him (JFK) to hang tough, to humiliate Khrushchev and

and to risk escalation."

(and secret)
Khrushchev's first proposal, via John Scali, then of ABC News, and outside his own diplomacy, was that Kennedy promise not to invade Cuba and he'd withdraw his missiles. When he did not receive a prompt reply his next proposal was released ^{in "takes"} while it was being teletyped to Kennedy: you take your missiles out of Turkey and I'll take mine out of Cuba. That looked too much like we'd be knuckling under. It was not accepted.

But it was Bobby Kennedy who recommended the opposite of hanging tough, the opposite of raising escalation, the opposite of humiliating Khrushchev that was the agreed-to solution. He added to Khrushchev's original demands ^{do} assurances Khrushchev did not ask for and gave Castro protections nobody else in the world could assure. Instead of promising only that we would not invade Cuba our offer was to protect Cuba against any invasion.

Kopkind ^d is wrong even in saying that "Kennedy refused to accept the principle of mutual withdrawal of missiles from the border regions of the opposing superpowers." (Only those in Cuba were near our border, + note.) Kennedy was shocked to learn that we still had missiles in Turkey because he had earlier ordered them withdrawn. While their removal was not part of the formal agreement, ^{some} they were removed, along with others we had elsewhere near the USSR and by the Kennedy administration.

Kopkind states what is at best a conjecture, "Khrushchev's fall from power two years later was directly attributable to Kennedy's action." That took two years?

I think it is more reasonable to attribute his fall to changed US policy under LBJ that made the Politburo believe they did not want a dovish premier or party secretary.

Kennedy learned from the missile crisis, if ^{although} Kopkind didn't and he did begin the first halting steps toward detente, ^{when} he feared he might fall because of them, like the limited test-ban agreement. It was his idea and he feared the Senate would clobber him.

There is nothing that can change the ^{actual} record of the Kennedy administration up to October, 1962 and I made no effort to. I regret that Kopkind and The Nation undertook to misrepresent the policies of his last 13 months. They were ^{prop. vs. mine} radically different and peaceful. ^{- seeking} Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

LETTERS.

ON COLD WAR CAMELOT

Frederick, Md.

Andrew Kopkind's version of "J.F.K.'s Legacy" [Dec. 5, 1988] fails to recognize the drastic change in Kennedy's policies beginning with the 1962 missile crisis, and is wrong in its sneering reference to the 1963 American University speech, which states Kennedy's hope for those changed policies.

Such things as the first step toward détente, the limited test-ban agreement; canceling some military contracts, including the Blue Streak missiles for Britain; stating the new policy of refusing to recognize military dictatorships that overthrew democratically elected governments, as in the Dominican Republic; and ordering our withdrawal from Vietnam are hardly the policies of a "hard cold warrior from the start."

His little-remembered change in Vietnam policy was announced by the Pentagon shortly before he was assassinated and the reverted and expanded policy was announced by it shortly after his assassination. That he had called his generals in, one by one, and explained to them that Vietnam was a political problem and that political problems are not susceptible of military solutions was confirmed to me by one of those generals in 1967. The "brutal and self-defeating devastation of Vietnam" was begun by the Eisenhower-Dulles-Nixon Administration, was inherited by Kennedy and was made really bloody by Johnson and Nixon, *not* by Kennedy.

It is not reasonable to prate that Kennedy "never grasped the possibilities of Nikita Khrushchev's reforms" when it is a fact that these two leaders had an extensive exchange of still-secret communications, hardly on either part a hard cold war exchange.

It is the fiction of those who hated J.F.K. and those who were really responsible for the "plots of assassination" against Castro that this was Kennedy's policy. This is reflected in C.I.A. records disclosed to me. Does anyone really believe that once the Kennedy brothers were dead the C.I.A. would admit to undertaking those adventures on its own?

Harold Weisberg

KOPKIND REPLIES

New York City

I had forgotten the full force of John F. Kennedy's anti-Communism, as perhaps Harold Weisberg has, until reminded by the clips of the late President's speeches, pronouncements and press conferences that overran the TV networks on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. There was Kennedy Red-baiting the Eisenhower Administration for failing to recognize the Soviet threat; there he was promising to stop Communism wherever it appeared in the world; there he was rationalizing his beneficent programs such as the Alliance for Progress in starkly anti-

Communist terms. If that wasn't hard cold war stuff, I don't know what is. It was certainly there "from the start" and, I now see more clearly, to the last.

Those who were charmed by the Kennedy rhetoric—the liberal passages written by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Richard Goodwin—are inclined to misunderstand the nature of the Kennedy foreign policy. Kennedy's advisers, such as Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk and Maxwell Taylor, created the sophisticated "era of counterinsurgency" to replace the more simplistic Eisenhower-Dulles "era of massive retaliation." The Third World moved to the center ring of foreign policy activity. Truman (in 1945) and Eisenhower (after 1954) poked around in Vietnam, but their efforts were puny indeed compared with Kennedy's all-out intervention, which even by the time of his death was both "brutal and self-defeating," as those earlier efforts were not.

On many occasions Kennedy wished out loud that he could withdraw from what he saw was a deepening quagmire; there's no evidence he believed it was also a moral and ideological swamp. He planned to reduce his troops, as Lyndon Johnson did right up to the end, as soon as the "strategic hamlets" were undermined, the natives were pacified and the enemy was on the run. That was the time of hopeful prognoses and self-deluding strategies designed to produce "light at the end of the tunnel." To pull out of Vietnam, Kennedy would have had to order a radical reversal of policy in 1963 or early 1964, which of course he did not do. So the darkness persisted and the force reductions never came.

To listen to the rhetoric of Kennedy's wishful thinking and disregard the facts on the ground in Vietnam and elsewhere in the Third World is to miss the point of Kennedy's innovative brand of imperialism. It began, wherever possible, with pressure (violent as well as diplomatic) to remove nationalistic dictatorships and authoritarian regimes and replace them with reformist governments. New, modern, "charismatic leaders"—aping the Kennedy style and grateful to Washington for their installation—would attend to the welfare of their restless populations, open their economies to U.S. corporate investment and serve American strategic interests when the opportunity arose.

To aid the process of modernization and democratization, Kennedy sent Peace Corps volunteers into villages and barrios and offered Point Four aid, Food for Peace and Alliance for Progress assistance. The problem was that peaceful intervention didn't always work to counter insurgencies. Turn then to Plan B, and enter the Green Berets and the C.I.A., which was hyperactive all during the Kennedy Administration both with its own institutional forces and its "assets" in student, labor and cultural organizations.

The ideological rationale for intervention

on the side of "democracy" and for development in the Third World was that authoritarianism provokes insurgency, and economic oligarchy "breeds Communism." Weisberg is right that Kennedy favored democratically elected governments over military dictatorships (shades of Ronald Reagan!), but the point wasn't democracy. Rather, it was dependence on the United States and inclusion in the U.S. satellite system. As Kennedy told Schlesinger (as cited by Noam Chomsky in *Towards a New Cold War*), the United States would always prefer a democratic government in the Third World, but if forced to choose between an allied Trujillo and an independent Castro, it would choose the former.

It's ridiculous to hold that John and Robert Kennedy were not aware of and not responsible for the multifarious attempts to terrorize, subvert and ultimately destroy revolutionary Cuba. In fact, the Administration launched a campaign of historic barbarism against Cuba, including the use of biological weapons (African swine flu virus against livestock) and chemical agents (against sugar cane). Robert Kennedy was in charge of the operation (see "The Kennedy Vendetta: Our Secret War in Cuba," by Taylor Branch and George Crile 3d, in *Harper's*, August 1975). Cuban fishermen were blown out of the water by U.S.-sponsored terrorists and civilian targets inside Cuba were hit, with many casualties (O, *contras!*).

As to Kennedy's relationship with Khrushchev, it was as far from détente as possible. During the missile crisis, Kennedy refused to accept the principle of mutual withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the border regions of the opposing superpowers. The hawks around him, including his brother Robert, told him to hang tough, to humiliate Khrushchev and to risk escalation. He listened to them and brought the world to the brink of nuclear apocalypse by going far beyond what any reasonable assessment of American security interests demanded. Khrushchev's fall from power two years later was directly attributable to Kennedy's actions. Instead of encouraging Khrushchev's plans for reform in the Soviet Union, he dashed them.

Kennedy indeed seemed shaken by the missile crisis, and he was doubtless ambivalent about Vietnam and other areas of intervention. He occasionally made wonderful speeches about the need for peace and international cooperation. He was a master of rhetoric. But as John Mitchell once pointed out, it is more instructive to watch what an Administration does, rather than what it says.

Andrew Kopkind

The Nation welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.