

OBER 16, 1982

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 'Reflections on a Grim October'

Old soldiers don't fade away any more. Like Maxwell Taylor, they live to rewrite the history of their own disasters and to encourage new ones ["Reflections on a Grim October," op-ed, Oct. 5].

Some of the general's statements simply are not true. It is not true, as he says in his first two sentences, that in the Cuban missile crisis, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko denied the "presence" of "Soviet ballistic missiles being installed in Cuba." What Mr. Gromyko actually denied is that the U.S.S.R. was supplying any offensive weapons.

To further this significant misrepresentation, the general, who recommended stronger military action in that crisis, is wrong in saying that to solve the crisis, Nikita Khrushchev announced "that he would dismantle his offensive weapons . . ."

President Khrushchev never admitted that any of the weapons the U.S.S.R. gave to Cuba were offensive. They were defensive, the justification being that similar U.S.'s missiles were in place near the Soviet border with Turkey and at several points in Europe. Were ours defensive and theirs offensive?

The general has a point. We've had a peace of sorts since President Kennedy

agreed to Mr. Khrushchev's deal, but that appears not to satisfy the generals who thrice ignored JFK's order to remove our missiles from Turkey. (JFK did not learn this until he was deep in that extraordinarily dangerous crisis.) Because 20-year-old military airplanes are now "offensive" and not "defensive," the general tells us that the deal in which we guaranteed not to invade Cuba is of questionable "solidity."

With most of a page of space, the general said nothing about the Soviet Union's possible motives in placing missiles in Cuba. This is consistent with his statement that they were for "offensive" purposes. Yet to downplay the magnitude of the possible disaster, he says that, for the U.S.S.R., "the stakes were too small."

Aside from his apprehensions over our missiles on its borders, the Soviet Union had an obligation to defend Cuba. It is now well known that we were responsible for many attacks on Cuba and that more and larger ones were planned.

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Gen. Taylor's description of the EXCOMM deliberations during the Cuban crisis are fascinating, but his conclusions are astounding. To quote him, "the lesson here is that nuclear superiority is of little use in coping with an adversary similarly armed, whereas conventional superiority at the right place and time is likely to carry the day."

Two comments: First, it was that same EXCOMM that ordered Strategic Air Command B52s loaded with nuclear weapons on airborne alert as close to the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean and the Pacific as was prudent.

Second, subsequently, U.S. visitors were told by Soviet leaders that they would never again be forced to back down in a crisis for lack of adequate strategic nuclear forces. As a result of this embarrassing defeat, the Kremlin decided to begin the substantial accelerated buildup of Soviet strategic forces.

While Gen. Taylor may not have been convinced of the efficacy of these forces, his president in public announcements most certainly was. What a curious lapse of memory.

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