

Indistinguishable Doves and Hawks

Washington.

CLIO, THE MUSE of history, is in bed with a splitting headache, prostrated by the task of trying to correct the still multiplying misunderstandings of the Cuban missile crisis. Most Americans believe 'twas a famous victory won by a resolute president prepared to take the world to the brink of nuclear war. Actually, there was not much

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of a brink, and no triumph worth celebrating.

In last Sunday's *New York Times Magazine*, J. Anthony Lukas reported on an April reunion of former Kennedy administration participants in the crisis. The meeting was at a Florida resort with the wonderfully inapt name of Hawk's Cay.

Because the crisis began when the Soviet Union began putting missiles in Cuba and ended when the missiles were removed, it was considered an unambiguous triumph achieved by a president more hawkish than some dovish advisers. (The terms "hawks" and "doves" were popularized by this crisis.)

Now much is being made of a letter from former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, a letter read at the April reunion. The letter is said to show 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In the crisis, Robert Kennedy notified Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin that U.S. missiles in Turkey would be withdrawn within months of withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, but it was imperative (obviously for domestic American political reasons) that the linkage of the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. Mr. Rusk's letter reveals that if the Soviet Union had insisted on public linkage, Kennedy would have complied.

That historical morsel is only redundant evidence of what should by now be patent: Kennedy succeeded 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. The Kremlin must have been astonished — and elated — when Kennedy, in spite of advantages that would have enabled him to insist on severance of Soviet military connections with Cuba, sought only removal of the missiles. He thereby licensed all other Soviet uses of Cuba.

The stunning revelation in Mr. Lukas' report is not Mr. Rusk's letter; it is something said at the reunion by Ted Sorensen, the aide closest to Kennedy.

In September of 1962, Kennedy warned the Soviets not to put in Cuba "offensive ground-to-ground missiles." Now, Mr. Sorensen says that the president drew a line where he soon — in October — wished he had not drawn it:

"I believe the president drew the line precisely where he thought the Soviets were not and would not be. That is to say, if we had known the Soviets were putting 40 missiles in Cuba, we might under this hypothesis have drawn the line at 100, and said with great fanfare that we would absolutely not tolerate the presence of more than 100 missiles."

This is amusing in light of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s rhapsodizing about Kennedy's handling of the crisis that Kennedy, according to Mr. Sorensen, wanted to define away: "He coolly and exactly measured. . . . He moved with mathematical precision. . . ."

In 1978, MIG-23s (nuclear-delivery vehicles far more menacing than the 1962 missiles) were introduced into Cuba. Kennedy's non-invasion pledge guaranteed the survival of this hemisphere's first communist regime and makes attempts to remove or reform the second seem disproportionate.

The Reagan administration, which began by talking about dealing with Nicaragua by "going to the source" — Cuba, is reduced to clavering for piddling sums for the contras, a recipe for another protracted failure. Most "peace plans" for Central America postulate the moral equivalence of U.S. and Soviet involvements in the region, another legacy of the missile-crisis "triumph" that killed the Monroe Doctrine.