

Letters to the editor  
Washington Post  
1150 15 St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20071

2/5/89

Like old soldiers, old spooks never die. They hang around forever trying to defend the disasters and catastrophes they fashioned in the name of national security while actually seeking to advance ideologies then already outdated.

This is illustrated by Ray Cline's "The Cuban Crisis Revisited," which is more accurately stated as the Cuban Crisis Revised.

That "nuclear war seemed remote" to him is incredible because, virtually all of *them* President Kennedy's top advisers pressed immediate military action on *him* from all the contemporaneous accounts of his advisers.

What Cline and all other commentators never refer to was in fact Khrushchev's *reason* trigger for placing those missiles in Cuba. It is not surprising that Cline ignores this because he also misrepresents the time ~~of the discovery of the missiles~~ the CIA was first *had* aware of proof of the presence of these missiles in Cuba. It has always been the official CIA line that this was not until October 14, 1962, when in fact it was much earlier and, after that crisis, the colonel/photoanalyst was decorated for his discovery of this proof.

It was no secret in 1962 that the CIA was plotting another adventure against Cuba, as was recently confirmed by FOIA disclosures to Scott Armstrong. After the CIA's Bay of Pigs fiasco, which JFK inherited from the Eisenhower administration, the USSR signed a mutual-assistance pact with Cuba, just as we have such pacts with countries that can't really contribute to our defense at all.

Aware of the *new* plans to invade Cuba, Castro invoked this pact, ultimately sending a delegation headed by his brother Raul and including Che Guevara to ask Khrushchev how he was going to defend Cuba against *a new* United States invasion. *How, indeed, was he?*

There was and there is no way anyone can prevent an invasion of Cuba. But if Khrushchev did nothing, it meant that treaties with the USSR were worthless and he was a paper tiger. In placing the missiles in Cuba Khrushchev gave Kennedy his own tiger to

ride, the working title of a book I researched then and have not been able to write since. ~~He~~ passed the war or peace decision ~~over~~ to ~~Kennedy~~ the United States, which <sup>second</sup> planned the <sup>invasion</sup> of the <sup>Cuba</sup>. Khrushchev was pledged to <sup>prevent</sup> ~~defend against any invasion~~.

Cline's self-serving interpretation, consistent with the ideology behind all those <sup>so</sup> ~~spoke~~ insanities that did bring us to the brink of <sup>annihilation</sup> ~~annihilation~~, is that "Khrushchev visualized a major change in the ~~world~~ <sup>balance</sup> of world power as a result of having 84" missile close to and aimed at us.

Unless and until armed those 84 missiles were <sup>only</sup> ~~provocative sitting ducks~~ <sup>they would not</sup> ~~be~~ <sup>be put to</sup> ~~intended for~~ any offense use. <sup>got</sup> But they not only were not armed - the USSR went to some trouble to establish that they were not armed. As Cline himself <sup>sup</sup> ~~said~~ and as I recall from the time of the crisis, there was never any evidence of so much as a single warhead in Cuba. Without them 84 <sup>million</sup> ~~million~~ <sup>missiles</sup> ~~missiles~~ are worthless - except as ~~provocation~~ or to promote thought.

"Our ~~massive~~ <sup>photo</sup> reconnaissance never revealed any evidence of warheads being shipped or being present," Cline says. He reflects the exact opposite of his claim that Khrushchev ~~solely~~ <sup>the USSR</sup> sought "a major change in the balance of world power" in acknowledging that ~~he~~ <sup>loafed</sup> on the job: there was "a surprisingly leisurely assembly of the weapons and a stretched-out timetable for operational readiness."

With these two observations alone Cline refutes his and the CIA's dangerous nonsense substituted for analysis of Khrushchev's real objectives in placing those missiles 90 miles away from us.

There was only one way in which <sup>h</sup> Khrushchev could meet his mutual-assistance pact obligations to Cuba when if he <sup>did</sup> ~~does~~ not meet them the USSR <sup>become</sup> ~~becomes~~ an international laughingstock and the symbol of puerility. That was by forcing the decision on war or ~~peace~~ <sup>peace</sup> on JFK and there was only one way he could do that, by displaying missiles in Cuba. He could go to war with the United States in defense of Cuba but that would not defend ~~Cuba~~ <sup>Cuba</sup> and it would have devastated Cuba. <sup>A</sup> Ultimately and despite the very bad advice pressed upon him, Kennedy saw this and on his brother Robert's advice he added to ~~the~~ Khrushchev's initial demand, that we promise not to invade Cuba, the guarantee that we

would prevent any invasion of Cuba- by anybody.

Kennedy gave Cuba protection ~~Khrushchev~~ had contracted but could not deliver.

The two leaders then grew close <sup>in</sup> a common quest for <sup>the</sup> peace ~~that~~ neither lived long enough to bring about.

It is past time for advisers and commentators to <sup>recall</sup> Santayana's wisdom, that those who do not learn from ~~the~~ the past are doomed to relive it.

<sup>W</sup> One such crisis ought be too much for the world to hope to survive.

Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg  
7627 Old Beaver Rd  
Frederick, Md 21701

Dear Editor,

Please excuse my typing and I realize that what I intended as a letter grew too long. I send it anyway. Perhaps it may inform you. I lived through that and it was not all that long after I'd been an intelligence analyst. On Latin America, too.

Retyping this would not help. I'm recovering from surgery on my better eye.

It may interest you to know that the afternoon of the second Wednesday of that crisis I discussed this contemporaneous analysis with the Post's then foreign editor and a former colleague in Latin America intelligence, then manager of the National Symphony. Your former foreign editor told me that the Post had reached and then abandoned this same analysis.

The decoration of the photoanalyst who detected the presence of those missiles was a closely-held secret - until he was decorated for it! If the Post has Elie Abel's book on that crisis in its library it quotes the release on that decoration.

This means that the CIA knew of the presence of those USSR missiles and withheld knowledge of it from JFK until the installations were closer to completion. Scary?!

If I recall correctly, the photoanalyst's name was Wright. He was a colonel.

Harold Weisberg



Ray S. Cline

Oct 25/89

## Nuclear War Seemed Remote . . .

Bob McNamara telephoned me before leaving for Moscow to try to recall some of the events of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 to be discussed at the conference reported in The Post Jan. 29. While the facts we knew in Washington in 1962 are pretty well established, impressions about the whys and wherefores of the crisis are remembered differently by different participants.

The thrust of the Soviet argument at the meeting in Moscow is that Nikita Khrushchev feared an American invasion of Cuba and made this extraordinary strategic move to defend his protégé, Fidel Castro. I doubt this is the whole heart of the matter. I regret that American participants seemed for the most part to accept this reasoning.

In fact I have grave reservations about a good bit of the interpretation and some of the evidence tabled by Soviet speakers. My role in 1962 was as the senior CIA intelligence analyst. I alerted MacGeorge Bundy and President Kennedy to the definitive evidence of the secret missile deployment and on behalf of Director of Central Intelligence John McCone briefed the president on the developing story on many occasions in the summer and through to the bitter end of the 13 days in October.

The Soviet Union has never invited me to participate in any of these historical exercises, but I wish it had. I clearly remember what we knew and thought in Washington at the time, and I seriously doubt the spin on the story Moscow is presenting.

Many of the Americans reacting to these reminiscences in company with Soviet speakers seem rather to like the romantic idea that the two superpowers were at the very brink of war, and they tend to accept that Khrushchev may have acted defensively. Neither of those propositions is valid in my view.

Without going into much detail I think it is clear that both sides were scrupulous in avoiding any remote chance of an actual nuclear exchange for the simple reason that, as we all assured the president, the United States had at least a four-to-one advantage in ICBMs and perhaps an eight-to-one superiority in nuclear weapons capability if our powerful bomber aircraft force of that era were entered into the



A Defense Department reconnaissance photo of a Cuban missile site in 1962.

more heavily in our favor. While it is exciting to speculate on how brilliantly we escaped the nuclear holocaust, none of the informed officials I talked with at the time thought the chances were more than one in a thousand.

Otherwise the direct threat of nuclear retaliation, which I helped others to draft for the president's Oct. 22 warning, would have been argued at length and probably would have been hedged. Our superiority was so great that only a mad Khrushchev would have fired a nuclear weapon. We knew enough about him to believe he was wily, secretive and deceptive but not blind to his own and his country's security. Castro might have been tempted, as was suggested in the 1989 Moscow conference, but Khrushchev kept him on a tight rein, as Khrushchev's son indicated at the meeting.

Another piece of suspect evidence presented at this conference was the suggestion that the Cuban missiles were armed with nuclear warheads, thus heightening the danger of war. A military historian said he "reviewed archive material on the subject," but did not present

been needed for safe storage, and none was constructed.

Finally, while protecting Castro's forward base for Moscow's penetration of the Caribbean was a serious motivation for the whole maneuver, in my view it was not the main one. I believe Khrushchev visualized a major change in the balance of world power as a result of having 84 missiles comparatively nearby and aimed at Washington and New York, as they undoubtedly would have been. On the other hand Khrushchev was not crazy enough to have fired them. He wanted them for strategic blackmail. Many of us thought at the time that there was evidence of Soviet preparation for a new Berlin crisis and that the endgame would have been to threaten

war with greater credibility because of the missiles in Cuba, thus forcing the United States to abandon Berlin. That was the way Khrushchev's mind worked, and it was more complex than the interpretation advanced in Moscow last month.

*The writer, a former deputy director of the CIA, is chairman of the U.S. Global Strategy Council.*

warheads were in place. Khrushchev's son seemed to agree on the presence of warheads in Cuba, but said they were not "mounted on the missiles."

My own recollection is clear because this exact subject was what Kennedy repeatedly asked me about. The CIA's view, concurred in by the Defense Intelligence Agency as far as I ever heard, was based on two firm pieces of evidence. Our massive photo reconnaissance never revealed any evidence of warheads being shipped in or being present, and there was firm evidence that structural elements that we knew were designed for nuclear weapons bunkers did arrive and were never assembled.

Since our discovery of the first missile site on Oct. 14 revealed a surprisingly leisurely assembly of the weapons and a stretched-out timetable for operational readiness, the probability is high that the blockade did stop the delivery of the warheads. That may be Kennedy's greatest achievement, accounting for Khrushchev's strategic retreat. It is conceivable the warheads arrived secretly and were hidden at a distance from the site, but certainly bunkers would have

Jane M. Thompson

## ... With the Help of an Old Pro

Oct 2/5/89

American, Soviet and Cuban decision-makers on opposite sides of the Cuban missile crisis met in Moscow in January to compare notes on the miscalculations and false assumptions that nearly brought the world to Apocalypse. As credit for peacefully ending the confrontation is apportioned by these and other students, I hope they will note one of the heretofore overlooked ironies of the crisis—that President Kennedy, known for scoffing at the usefulness of professional diplomats, was decisively guided throughout those fateful 13 days by a career Foreign Service officer, my late husband, Llewellyn E. Thompson.

It is fair to suggest that the "combination of toughness and restraint" later celebrated by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. would not have been so "matchlessly calibrated" had President Kennedy lacked the counsel of someone who had known Khrushchev as U.S. ambassador to Moscow from 1957 to 1962 in what remains the closest relationship between an American diplomat and a Soviet leader. It was by sheer coincidence that two months before the missile crisis, Tommy returned to Washington to advise the president and secretary of state on Soviet affairs.

Key to prodding the Russians to withdraw their offensive missiles and bombers from Cuba without nuclear war was for the president to

decipher the complex aspirations and anxieties of his Soviet counterpart. By October 1962, the president had met Khrushchev exactly twice—to shake hands as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1959 and for two tumultuous days in Vienna in June 1961, when Khrushchev spared no effort to impress Kennedy with his belligerence and strength and threatened nuclear war over Berlin. The Vienna summit was unlikely to give the president a three-dimensional view of Khrushchev's values and priorities.

As the crisis unfolded, Kennedy had access to intelligence profiles and analyses of the Soviet leader's intentions, but these were no substitute for the day-by-day interpretations of a trained diplomat with a decade of Moscow experience who had spent hundreds of hours with Khrushchev over a period that included times of both détente and Cold War. With this in mind, the president installed Tommy on his now-famous crisis-management panel, Ex Comm.

On Oct. 16, the day the president learned of the Soviet missiles, his advisers leaned toward an air attack on the Soviet bases. Tommy dissuaded them, warning that Khrushchev was more sensitive than most national leaders to the killing of his troops and that this therefore bore a greater risk of escalation than the president may have realized. As the newly released Ex Comm

transcripts from the 13th day of the crisis show, it was Tommy who advised Kennedy to try the all-important "Trollope ploy." A first letter from Khrushchev suggested withdrawal of Soviet weapons from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade. A second letter demanded that the United States pull its missiles out of Turkey. We have learned from the recent Moscow conference that Khrushchev may have written these letters in reverse order and that technical problems caused the second to reach the White House first. Not knowing this, Kennedy said, "We're going to have to take our weapons out of Turkey." Tommy said, "I don't agree. . . . The important thing for Khrushchev, it seems to me, is to be able to say, 'I saved Cuba, I stopped an invasion. . . .'" The Moscow conference has shown us that Khrushchev's determination to stop an American invasion of Cuba was greater than anyone had thought.

With Tommy's assurance, the president ignored the second letter and saved the day. This is the only instance in the transcripts in which an Ex Comm member directly challenged Kennedy. Tommy's long professional history with Khrushchev gave him the confidence to make these and other vital recommendations and to persuade the president.

One of the occupational hazards of historians is that they are naturally inclined to ignore those

figures who do not write memoirs or otherwise enshrine their own version of their role in world events. My husband was a self-effacing man. He never wrote his memoirs because he thought that this would prevent future Soviet leaders from speaking as candidly to future American ambassadors as Khrushchev did to him. Dean Rusk, secretary of state in 1962, has written, "I doubt that the full account of Llewellyn's contribution to the Cuban missile crisis will ever be recorded, but his role proved to be crucial behind the scenes." Robert McNamara, secretary of defense, has called Tommy "the unsung hero of the crisis."

One of the lessons commonly drawn from the missile crisis is that it was a triumph of improvisation and proved the inadequacy of traditional methods of diplomacy in times of high nuclear danger. To my mind, this is exactly the opposite of the real moral of the story. As demonstrated by Llewellyn Thompson's contribution, the Cuban episode shows the value of giving American presidents the advice of trained men and women who have worked with foreign leaders for years and who can provide the context and penetrating insight that special emissaries and ad hoc crisis managers cannot.

*The writer accompanied her husband, the late ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson, on his Moscow assignment.*