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TELEGRAM NUMBER 2980 OF 3 OCTOBER
INFORMATION NIO BELFAST.

Prime Minister
Paul

MY TELEGRAM NO 2906 : ARMS FOR THE RUC.

1. VEST (ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR EUROPE, STATE DEPARTMENT) ASKED ME TO CALL ON 3 OCTOBER. HE SAID THAT HE HAD RAISED THE MATTER OF ARMS WITH VANCE WHEN THE LATTER HAD BEEN IN WASHINGTON OVER THE WEEKEND TO DEAL WITH THE CUBAN AFFAIR. VANCE HAD ASKED HIM TO CONVEY TO ME HIS VIEW THAT IT WOULD BE BEST FOR NO NEW REQUESTS FOR ARMS FOR THE RUC TO BE PUT FORWARD DURING THIS PERIOD OF "POLITICAL LIABILITY". IN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION VEST CONFIRMED THAT VANCE HAD NOT MADE ANY SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW WE MIGHT FIND A WAY ROUND THIS PROBLEM.

2. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, VEST ADDED THAT HE WAS NOT ANXIOUS TO SEE THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY REVIEW CARRIED FORWARD TOO FAST. HE COULD NOT SAY HOW LONG THIS MORATORIUM WOULD LAST, BUT LEFT ME IN NO DOUBT THAT IT WOULD BE UNTIL AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. IT RAMINED HIS VIEW THAT ANY PRECISE ACTION WOULD CREATE SERIOUS POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES: THE CLEAR MESSAGE THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAD RECEIVED FROM SPEAKER O'NEILL WAS THAT A RECOMMENDATION TO RESUME SALES OF ARMS FOR THE RUC WOULD DRIVE O'NEILL AND OTHER MODERATES IN CONGRESS INTO THE ARMS OF THE EXTREMISTS. I POINTED OUT THAT INDEFINITE DELAY WOULD CAUSE NO LESS GREAT DIFFICULTIES IN THE UK. VEST SAID HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THIS: BUT THE PROBLEM HERE WAS THAT WE WERE DEALING WITH IRRATIONAL EMOTIONS IN THE CONGRESS WHICH IT WOULD BE VERY RISKY TO STIR UP.

3. I WONDERED ALOUD IF IT MIGHT HELP IF I WERE TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM WITH DEFENCE SECRETARY BROWN, SINCE THIS WAS A MATTER OF ARMS SUPPLIES TO A NATO ALLY. VEST CLEARLY DID NOT LIKE THIS IDEA AND POINTED OUT THAT THE QUESTION OF APPROVAL OF EXPORT LICENCE APPLICATIONS WAS EXCLUSIVELY A MATTER FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND NOT THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.

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4. I ALSO TOLD VEST THAT WHEN NORTHERN IRELAND CAME UP AT MR HOWELL'S BREAKFAST MEETING WITH DR SCHLESINGER ON 2 OCTOBER, SCHLESINGER HAD DESCRIBED THE SUSPENSION OF SALES OF ARMS FOR THE RUC AS SCANDALOUS AND HAD SAID THAT HE WOULD SPEAK TO BRZEZINSKI ABOUT IT.

5. IN FURTHER CONVERSATION I FLOATED THE POSSIBILITY THAT ARMS NEEDED BY THE RUC MIGHT BE ORDERED BY HMG FOR THE ARMED FORCES FOR GENERAL PURPOSES WITHOUT SPECIFYING THE END USE. THEY WOULD BE ORDERED BY HMG AND CONSIGNED TO A UK PORT OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND. WE WOULD SAY THEY WERE FOR USE IN THE UK FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE REALM. IT WAS THEN UP TO US TO DO WHAT WE LIKED WITH THE WEAPONS. MIGHT IT NOT THEN BE POSSIBLE FOR EXPORT LICENCES TO BE APPROVED WITH NO QUESTIONS ASKED? VEST AND FUNSETH (DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF NORTHERN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS) UNDERTOOK TO LOOK INTO THE EXACT WORDING OF THE EXPORT LICENCE APPLICATION FORM TO SEE IF THIS MIGHT BE FEASIBLE. BUT THEY WERE CLEARLY UNHAPPY. FUNSETH POINTED OUT THAT THE APPLICATION FORM (WHICH WAS AN OPEN DOCUMENT AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION BY ANYBODY) REQUIRED A FAIRLY SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE END USE TO WHICH ARMS WOULD BE PUT. EVEN IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO FUDGE THIS, IT WAS ALMOST INEVITABLE THAT NEWS OF A FURTHER LARGE ORDER FOR HANDGUNS OF THE TYPE ALREADY DELIVERED TO THE RUC WOULD GET OUT. OPPONENTS OF ARMS SALES IN CONGRESS WOULD BE ON THE LOOKOUT AND WOULD BE SURE TO CREATE FRESH TROUBLE.

6. THEY PROMISED TO GET INTO TOUCH WITH ME AGAIN AND I WILL BE TELEGRAPHING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

HENDERSON

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