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PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

17-18 DECEMBER 1979

NORTHERN IRELAND (INCLUDING ARMS FOR RUC)

Brief by Northern Ireland Office

POINTS TO MAKE

1. US Administration's unequivocal condemnation of violence and practical steps to prevent US assistance to IRA terrorists are very welcome. But the refusal of the Administration to allow the RUC to buy weapons from US manufacturers is a most serious issue.

Political development

2. HMG determined to make political progress by moving away from direct rule and giving people of Northern Ireland more responsibility for own affairs. This movement desired on all sides; but wide differences remain over nature of any new arrangements. This is essence of the problem: we are willing to proceed with any one of wide range of possibilities, but any new system of government must be acceptable to both sides of community to work.



3. Working Paper, recently published and well received by most, paves way for a Conference at which we shall seek highest level of agreement between parties before we put our proposals to Parliament. Concerned only with a form of government for Northern Ireland within the existing relationship with the United Kingdom. Not concerned with long-term constitutional issues such as Irish unity, on which clearly no prospect of agreement. Internal government the place to start. During recent visit to US, Mr Lynch accepted this notwithstanding his desire for eventual Irish unity: we expect any successor to take broadly similar line, but may encourage "republicans" in North to be more strident.

#### Arms for RUC

4. Grave consequences if Administration continues to withhold export licences for arms for RUC:

- a. practical, for RUC. These replacement revolvers are needed for self-protection against terrorists. No adequate non-American alternative available in the foreseeable future. One-third of initial order already honoured. Second tranche due early 1980 (and final tranche not until 1981);
- b. Get facts straight: RUC is a lawfully constituted police force with same status as any other police force in U.K., Europe or U.S.A. Non-sectarian. Professional. IRA is terrorist organisation with international terrorist connections aiming to destroy Government in North and South. Republic of Ireland recognises this: Gardai and RUC work together against common enemy.



c. Outrage and bafflement in UK Parliament and country that ally should ban arms for a legitimate police force as if it were murderous terrorist organisation.

d. Especially strong reaction in Northern Ireland.

Unionists will exploit situation. Prospects of political initiative jeopardised;

e. Will be a major IRA propaganda victory, heartening NORAI, INC and all republican sympathisers and waverers.

f. Not just practical matter of arms supply; the issue is moral and strategic overtones. We cannot compromise.

If Administration's answer is negative, PM has no option but to react strongly and publicly, both while in US and on return home. Major repercussions on Anglo/US relations.

5. Appreciate President's political constraints. But terrorism is an international phenomenon and needs to be fought wherever it appears. British public will not understand how US Administration can actually obstruct that fight in NI while looking for British support in other places.



## BACKGROUND NOTES

### A. Arms for RUC

1. Because of the terrorist threat, members of the RUC are each issued with self-protection weapons, currently the Walther 9mm semi-automatic pistol. In 1978, following exhaustive tests on 11 personal protection weapons, it was decided that the replacement should be 9000 US-manufactured Ruger Magnum revolvers. No suitable alternative weapons are available in sufficient quantities from sources outside the US. A British firm, Sterling, have a revolver at the design stage but it cannot yet be evaluated; a French firm produce a revolver, but only in small quantities and at great cost. The first of 3 equal tranches of Rugers was ordered through a GB agent in September 1978. After a little delay the State Department licensed the export of these weapons and they were delivered (together with certain other weapons) in March/April 1979.

2. Following critical articles in the US press, Speaker O'Neill of the House of Representatives vigorously attacked the State Department for issuing export licences for the sale of arms to the RUC. Consequently, in July, Secretary of State Vance agreed that the State Department would conduct a review of the policy and procedures for the export of arms to the RUC. Meanwhile further export licences would be withheld. Thereupon the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, which was engaged in negotiations over the price of the second tranche, decided, in consultation with the Government to withhold the order for that tranche until the matter was settled.



3. There has been no progress since then, and since the next tranche of revolvers is due in early 1980, the Police Authority, again following consultation with Government, decided that they should now place their order. Consequently the second tranche of 3000 weapons was ordered through the UK agents on 23 November together with an order for further spare parts. It is understood that the manufacturers have received this order and have applied for an export licence. The orders which have been placed and await export licences are :

- |   |   |                          |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| a | 500 magazines for Ruger rifles:           | ordered 9 October 1978   |
| b | spares for M1 Carbines:                   | ordered 29 May 1979      |
| c | spares for Ruger revolvers and<br>rifles: | ordered 1 June 1979      |
| d | Armourers Tools:                          | ordered 19 June 1979     |
| e | 3000 Ruger Revolvers:                     | ordered 23 November 1979 |
| f | further M1 Carbine spares:                | ordered 23 November 1979 |

If these orders were delivered, no further weapons or spares would be ordered until 1981 - after the US Presidential Election. This has been made clear to the State Department.

4. Export licences for ammunition have not so far presented a problem, probably because the destination is less "visible".

5. Non-delivery of Rugers will become a practical problem for the RUC early in 1980. If they (or consequently, any other US replacement) are not forthcoming, the RUC will have to carry on with the Walther, which requires both hands to cock and fire it,



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lacks penetrating power and will jam increasingly as its reliability deteriorates. Given the persistent terrorist attacks on RUC officers off-duty, it is obvious that the effect on RUC morale and effectiveness would be grave.

6. MPs and others in Northern Ireland and G.B. are taking a close interest in the outcome of this issue and will react strongly to an adverse decision. Feeling would be especially strong in N.I. The UK Government would be bound to share publicly in this reaction. A US decision not to supply the weapons would be regarded as a deliberate boost and a public victory for the IRA and its sympathisers; it would embitter Unionist attitudes and put at risk the Government's plans for political advance (which deserve the support of US sympathisers with the Catholic minority). It can only damage US-UK relations more widely.

7. The US Administration has been made well aware of these consequences. There is considerable sympathy within the Administration for the resumption of licensing, but O'Neill's intransigence is the main stumbling block. A change of policy on this issue could cause a serious row with O'Neill and in Congress, making the whole question an election issue in important constituencies. The President may be advised that a quarrel with Britain is less damaging to his re-election prospects than a quarrel with the Irish vote. It is important to bring home to him the countervailing weight of disadvantage of a quarrel with Britain on an issue central to the protection of Western traditions against internal subversion.



8. Despite their acknowledged domestic difficulties, the Administration should have powerful new justification for resuming the issue of export licences based on:

- a. The Mountbatten and Warrenpoint murders, and the recent convictions in the Republic of some of those concerned in terrorism on both sides of the border.
- b. The Pope's forthright condemnation of violence during his visit to Ireland;
- c. The continuing improvement in RUC/Garda co-operation against the IRA following the recent meetings with the Irish authorities;
- d. The EEC agreement on terrorism at the Dublin Council;
- e. HMG's continuing efforts to restore to the people of Northern Ireland an acceptable form of control over their own affairs so as to assist both communities to learn to live together.



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## B POLITICAL MATTERS

1 The President had the benefit in the summer of a detailed set of papers describing our problems and policies in Northern Ireland (PM's letter of 20 July to him). These are the background to any conversation with him.

2 On political matters the US Administration has consistently taken a helpful attitude. Its declared position remains as described by President Carter in August 1977 (copy of statement at Annex A). US Government policy is one of impartiality between the conflicting political traditions in Northern Ireland but the administration would like to see some progress towards reconciliation and would support the establishment of a form of government which could command widespread acceptance throughout both parts of the community. In the event of a peaceful settlement "the US Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job-creating investment could be encouraged".

3 The US Government is also totally opposed to the violence. President Carter recently recommitted his Government to doing "everything we possibly can to prevent American citizens giving assistance to terrorists in Ireland". State and Justice Department officials have always worked hard to prevent money and weapons being sent illegally to Ireland.

Irish-American Influences

4 There are two distinct Irish-American lobbies. By far the most influential and important is that led by Speaker O'Neill, Senators Kennedy and Moynihan and Governor Carey of New York.



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These prominent politicians have condemned terrorism in outright terms and have made every effort to limit the supply of funds from the US to organisations associated with the use of violence in Ireland. They are very close to Mr John Hume, the new leader of the SDLP, and to the Irish Government. Being further from the scene of action than the latter, they can afford to give freer rein to their emotional commitment to a united Ireland. Governor Carey, who in August unsuccessfully attempted to arrange a meeting in New York between the Secretary of State and the Irish Foreign Minister to discuss Northern Ireland, is seeking a meeting with the Prime Minister.

#### Irish National Caucus and NORAID

5. The second Irish-American lobby is represented in Congress by Mr Mario Biaggi (an early supporter of Mr Carter's presidential candidature) and orchestrated by the Irish National Caucus. Leading figures in the INC have been closely linked with the IRA in the past. Mr Biaggi is chairman of an "ad hoc" Congressional committee on Irish affairs which has so far failed to win official recognition from the House Leadership, including Speaker O'Neill. Mr Biaggi has recently postponed indefinitely plans to hold a 'peace forum' in the US for all the "parties to the conflict" in NI. Mr Jack Lynch has strongly criticised both the INC and Congressman Biaggi for the moral support they give to terrorist groups in Ireland.

6. There are also organisations such as NORAID (the Irish Northern Aid Committee) which collect money for 'welfare' purposes in Northern Ireland. Many NORAID officials have been implicated in gun-running prosecutions.

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Throughout our history, Americans have rightly recalled the contributions men and women from many countries have made the development of the United States. Among the greatest contributions have been those of the British and Irish people, Protestant and Catholic alike. We have close ties of friendship with both parts of Ireland, and with Great Britain.

It is natural that Americans are deeply concerned about the continuing conflict and violence in Northern Ireland. We know the overwhelming majority of the people there reject the bomb and the bullet. The United States wholeheartedly supports peaceful means for finding a just solution that involves both parts of the community of Northern Ireland, protects human rights and guarantees freedom from discrimination - a solution that the people in Northern Ireland, as well as the Governments of Great Britain and Ireland can support. Violence cannot resolve Northern Ireland's problems: it only increases them, and solves nothing.

We hope that all those engaged in violence will renounce this course and commit themselves to the peaceful pursuit of legitimate goals. The path of reconciliation, co-operation and peace is the only course that can end the human suffering and lead to a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland. I ask all Americans to refrain from supporting, with financial or other aid, organisations whose involvement, direct or indirect, in this violence delays the day when the people of Northern Ireland can live and work together in harmony, free from fear. Federal law enforcement agencies will continue to apprehend and prosecute any who violate US laws in this regard.



US Government policy on the Northern Ireland issue has long been one of impartiality, and that is how it will remain. We support the establishment of a form of government in Northern Ireland which will command widespread acceptance throughout both parts of the community.

However, we have no intention of telling the parties how this might be achieved. The only permanent solution will come from the people who live there. There are no solutions that outsiders can impose.

At the same time, the people of Northern Ireland should know that they have our complete support, in their quest for a peaceful and just society. It is a tribute to Northern Ireland's hard-working people that the area has continued to attract investment, despite the violence committed by a small minority. This is to be welcomed, since investment and other programmes to create jobs will assist in ensuring a healthy economy and combating unemployment.

It is still true that a peaceful settlement would contribute immeasurably to stability in Northern Ireland and so enhance the prospects for increased investment. In the event of such a settlement the US Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job-creating investment could be encouraged, to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

I admire the many true friends of Northern Ireland in this country who speak out for peace. Emotions run high on this subject and the easiest course is not to stand up for conciliation. I place myself firmly on the side of those who seek peace and reject violence in Northern Ireland."