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TELEGRAM NUMBER 2906 OF 28 SEPTEMBER 1979

Prime Minister

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PERSONAL FOR SECRETARY OF STATE:

ARMS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

1. WHEN I SAW VEST AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT TODAY IN THE ABSENCE OF VANCE I SAID THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT VANCE WOULD BE WANTING TO HAVE A WORD WITH ME ABOUT IRELAND. I WAS AT HIS DISPOSAL BUT OF COURSE FULLY UNDERSTOOD HOW INEXTRICABLY INVOLVED HE WAS WITH ALL THE MINISTERS VISITING THE USA FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

2. I WENT ON TO REFER TO OUR NEED TO SECURE AN EARLY DELIVERY OF A FURTHER 3,000 REVOLVERS. THE PLACING OF THIS ORDER HAD BEEN HELD UP BECAUSE OF THE PROMISED STATE DEPARTMENT REVIEW. THE POLITICAL DELICACY OF THIS SUBJECT IN THE USA WAS WELL UNDERSTOOD, BUT I MUST STRESS THAT NO LESS HIGH FEELINGS WERE RUNNING IN LONDON IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE WAS TAKING PLACE IN EARLY OCTOBER AND PARLIAMENT WOULD BE RESUMING AFTER THAT. INDEFINITE DELAY OR A REFUSAL TO MEET A NEW ORDER WOULD BE BOUND TO PROVOKE A STRONG POLITICAL REACTION, APART ALTOGETHER FROM THE GREAT BENEFIT THAT IT WOULD AFFORD THE TERRORISTS.

3. VEST SAID THAT HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS IN VANCE'S MIND BUT HE WOULD COMMUNICATE WITH HIM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HIS OWN VIEW WAS THAT CONGRESSIONAL OPINION ON THIS SUBJECT WAS JUST AS HARD AS EVER. MR VANCE HAD BEEN PERSUADED THAT ANY FURTHER APPROVALS FOR THE EXPORT OF ARMS FOR THE RUC WOULD DRIVE THE MODERATES IN CONGRESS INTO THE HANDS OF BIAGGI AND THE EXTREMISTS.

4. I SAID THAT NEVERTHELESS MR VANCE MIGHT HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS THAT HE WANTED TO PUT TO ME. PERHAPS THERE WAS SOME CONCEIVABLE WAY ROUND THE PROBLEM. THE FUNDAMENTAL FACT WAS THAT TERRORISM REMAINED A GRAVE ISSUE AND THE RUC NEEDED THESE REVOLVERS TO DEAL WITH IT. WHEN THE US WERE PROVIDING ARMS ALL ROUND THE WORLD, E.G. FOR USE BY THE ISRAELIS TO BOMB THE LEBANON, IT WAS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE IN THE UK TO UNDERSTAND WHY THEY SHOULD BE DENIED FOR USE IN FIGHTING TERRORISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND. /5.

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5. VEST SAID THAT NEVERTHELESS THE SUPPLY OF ARMS FOR THE RUC WAS AN EMOTIVE SUBJECT ON THE HILL AND HE WAS SURE THAT IF AN ORDER WAS SUBMITTED NOW THE LICENCE WOULD BE REFUSED. THERE WAS NO WAY OF AVOIDING THE NEED FOR A LICENCE. BUT HE ADDED THAT HE WOULD GET INTO TOUCH AS SOON AS HE HAD TALKED WITH VANCE BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE FOR A WEEK OR SO.

6. UNSATISFACTORY THOUGH THIS IS, I THINK THAT IT WOULD BE EXPEDIENT TO WAIT TO HEAR WHAT VANCE HAS TO SAY BEFORE PUTTING IN THE ORDER FOR THE 3,000 REVOLVERS.

HENDERSON

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HD/RID
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PS/PUS
SIR A DUFF
MR BULLARD
MR FERGUSSON

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MR WHITMORE
NO 10 DOWNING STREET
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CABINET OFFICE

2

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