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NEWS DEPT

NO 10 DOWNING STREET ✓

GRS 280

*CONFIDENTIAL*

*Prime Minister*

FM WASHINGTON 220036Z DECEMBER 79

TO PRIORITY F C O

TEL NO 4334 OF 22 DECEMBER

INFO NIO BELFAST, DUBLIN, BIS NEW YORK.

ARMS FOR THE RUC.

1. YOU MUST HAVE BEEN SURPRISED, AS I WAS, BY THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS, IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ON 17 DECEMBER, TO THE EFFECT THAT CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL WOULD BE NECESSARY IF THE SALE OF REVOLVERS FOR THE RUC WERE TO TAKE PLACE AND SPEAKER O'NEILL HAD ENOUGH SIGNATURES TO A DOCUMENT TO BLOCK SUCH APPROVAL.

2. THERE IS IN FACT NO STATUTORY REQUIREMENT FOR CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF A SALE OF SUCH RELATIVELY LIMITED VALUE AS THE REVOLVERS REQUIRED BY THE RUC. THE REQUIREMENT WOULD BE PURELY POLITICAL, DERIVING FROM THE UNDERTAKING GIVEN BY VANCE TO O'NEILL IN JULY AND THE RUMPUS WHICH CONGRESSMAN BIAGGI AND HIS SUPPORTERS COULD BE EXPECTED TO PROVOKE IF IT GOT OUT THAT EXPORT LICENCES FOR THE GUNS WERE LIKELY TO BE APPROVED.

3. EQUALLY, OUR OWN EXTENSIVE ENQUIRIES ON THE HILL AND THOSE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE TURNED UP NO TRACE OF ANY DRAFT CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION OR SIMILAR DOCUMENT RELATING SPECIFICALLY TO THE SALE OF THE GUNS, STILL LESS A RESOLUTION DRAFTED OR ENDORSED BY THE SPEAKER. I THINK WE CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT NO SUCH RESOLUTION OR DOCUMENT EXISTS. THE STATE DEPARTMENT SPECULATE THAT THE PRESIDENT QUOTE MUST HAVE BEEN SPEAKING FIGURATIVELY UNQUOTE IN REFERRING TO A DOCUMENT WITH SIGNATURES, BUT UNQUOTE.



PRESIDENT QUOTE MUST HAVE BEEN SPEAKING FIGURATIVELY UNQUOTE IN REFERRING TO A DOCUMENT WITH SIGNATURES. BUT WHATEVER THE EXPLANATION THE HARD FACT REMAINS THAT, AS WE HAVE CONFIRMED WITH THE SPEAKER'S OFFICE, THE THE PRESIDENT SUBSEQUENTLY SPOKE TO O'NEILL AND FAILED TO SHIFT HIM FROM HIS ADAMANT OPPOSITION TO THE SALE.

4. I SHALL BE TELEGRAPHING FURTHER ON MY THOUGHTS ON WHERE WE GO FROM HERE. FOR THE TIME BEING THERE IS LITTLE SCOPE FOR ACTION BY US ON THE HILL, SINCE THE CONGRESS RECESSED EARLY THIS MORNING FOR CHRISTMAS AND IS NOT EXPECTED TO RECONVENE UNTIL 22 JANUARY.

HENDERSON

NNND