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FM WASHINGTON 272115Z JULY
TO IMMEDIATE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE
TELEGRAM NUMBER 2106 OF 27 JULY 1979
INFO NIO LONDON, NIO BELFAST, DUBLIN.

YOUR TELNO 911: ARMS FOR RUC

1. VANCE TOLD ME TODAY THAT FOLLOWING HIS TELEPHONE TALK WITH YOU HE HAD, AS PROMISED, GIVEN THE SUBJECT FURTHER THOUGHT.
2. HE TOLD ME OF THE GREAT STRESS YOU HAD LAID ON THE STRONG FEELINGS ON THIS SUBJECT IN THE U K. THERE WAS NO NEED FOR HIM TO REPEAT TO ME THE POLITICAL DELICACY OF THE PROBLEM IN THE U S A AT THE PRESENT TIME. HE WISHED TO SUGGEST THEREFORE THAT WE SHOULD CONSIDER WITHDRAWING THE ORDER FOR SPARES AND AMMUNITION. (THE ORDER FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT COULD GO AHEAD AS IT RAISED NO PROBLEM). IF WE COULD DO THIS THE U S GOVERNMENT COULD MEET CONGRESSIONAL ENQUIRIES BY SAYING THAT THERE WAS NO OUTSTANDING ORDER FOR ARMS.
3. I SAID THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT REPLIES WOULD HAVE TO GO TO CONGRESSMEN WHO HAD WRITTEN ON THIS SUBJECT. WOULD THEY BE LIMITED SIMPLY TO THE STATEMENT THAT THERE WAS NO ORDER FOR ARMS ON THE TABLE? IT STRUCK ME THAT IT COULD BE VERY DAMAGING IF THE ANSWER, OR ANYTHING SAID TO CONGRESSMEN, INDICATED EITHER THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN ORDER WHICH HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN OR THAT THE U S GOVERNMENT WERE NOT IN THE FUTURE PREPARED TO ENTERTAIN ANY SUCH ORDERS.
4. VANCE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS FOR A MINUTE AND CONSULTED NIMETZ, VEST AND FUNSETH WHO WERE PRESENT. HE THEN REPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE.
5. I THEN ASKED WHETHER WE COULD BE SURE THAT NOTHING WOULD BE DONE THAT MIGHT GIVE RISE TO PUBLICITY THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN ORDER THAT HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN AS A RESULT OF PRESSURE ITC. VANCE SAID THAT HE WOULD STICK TO THE VERY BRIEF AND CLEAR STATEMENT THAT THERE WAS NO ARMS ORDER ON THE TABLE. HE WOULD TRY TO AVOID ANY SUGGESTION THAT THERE HAD BEEN A WITHDRAWAL OF AN ORDER.

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6. I EMPHASISED HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS TO AVOID ANYTHING BECOMING PUBLIC THAT INDICATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A CHANGE IN THE POSITION AS STATED BY NIMETZ TO THE CONGRESS ON 15 JUNE.

7. VANCE ALSO THOUGHT THAT THERE WAS NO NEED TO DEAL NOW WITH THE PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE. THE MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO LET THE THING COOL DOWN AT PRESENT. HE WOULD AVOID SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT THE FUTURE AND SIMPLY STICK TO THE LINE THAT THERE WAS NO OUTSTANDING ORDER. THE ONLY OTHER POINT TO EMERGE WAS THAT NIMETZ THOUGHT THAT THERE MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE A LEAK IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THIS SHOULD BE AVOIDED ALSO. (THIS IS OBVIOUSLY AN IMPORTANT POINT).

8. I CAN SEE THAT THERE MAY BE A PRACTICAL PROBLEM OVER NOT GETTING IMMEDIATELY THE SPARES AND AMMUNITION AND THE OTHER ARMS THAT THE RUC REQUIRE AND OF COURSE I AM IN NO POSITION TO JUDGE HOW INSUPERABLE THIS IS. BUT CERTAINLY THE SUGGESTION THAT VANCE HAS PUT FORWARD IN THE LIGHT OF YOUR CONVERSATION SEEMS TO ME THE BEST WAY OF LIMITING THE DAMAGE AT THIS MOMENT. WE MAY NOT BE GETTING THE MILITARY EQUIPMENT WE WANT BUT AT LEAST WE WOULD BE AVOIDING THE TREMENDOUS FILLIP WHICH THE TERRORISTS WOULD OBTAIN FROM A PUBLISHED ANNOUNCEMENT OF A U S REFUSAL TO MEET THE RUC'S ORDER.

9. I TOLD VANCE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT WITH ENCLOSURES ABOUT THE NORTHERN IRISH QUESTION WAS BEING DELIVERED THIS AFTERNOON AND I WAS LETTING HIM HAVE A COPY. THE LETTER AND ENCLOSURES DID NOT DEAL WITH THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM HE HAD BEEN DISCUSSING WHICH HAD ARISEN LATER.

10. I WOULD BE GRATEFUL TO KNOW WHETHER YOU CAN AGREE TO VANCES' PROPOSAL.

HENDERSON

DEPARTMENTAL D

RID

NAD

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

NORTHERN IRELAND