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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London
SW1.

*Rather a pity that Sterling Arms could not
have been brought to take this decision six or nine
months ago.*

6 March 1980

Dear Michael,

At Cabinet on 20 December the Home Secretary undertook to set in hand an examination of the apparent inability of British arms manufacturers to produce an adequate substitute for the American Ruger Magnum revolvers which the Police Authority for Northern Ireland were having difficulty in obtaining for the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). It was later agreed that the examination should be conducted by the Northern Ireland Office in consultation with the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Further enquiries confirmed that no British arms manufacturer currently produces a hand gun which would be an adequate substitute for the Ruger Magnum revolver preferred by the RUC. But one British firm, Sterling Arms, is considering manufacturing a Magnum revolver, and the RUC have recently seen representatives of the firm to discuss the likely performance of this weapon. If it lives up to all that Sterling Arms are promising, it might well be a very good replacement for the Ruger, and the RUC are sufficiently keen on it to want to defer any final decision on a new gun until they have seen production copies of the Sterling weapon, and have been able to test them thoroughly. Mr. Atkins supports them in this judgement since, inter alia, we should clearly give priority to directing our orders to British industry if we can. On the other hand we must be careful not to press the RUC into buying a weapon until they are certain that it will perform adequately. Production copies will not be available for full testing until about September this year - but the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is satisfied that the force can absorb the operational problems of having to wait that long for a decision on the new gun.

Mr. Atkins naturally hopes that the Sterling Magnum revolver will turn out to be as good a weapon as its manufacturers intend. But we must be prepared for the possibility that it will not turn out so well. If that happens, the RUC's next preference, on operational grounds, is for a .38 Special revolver. Magnum revolvers, such as the Ruger and the Sterling, have the advantages

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

of being revolvers (as opposed to automatic pistols) and of firing high velocity cartridges. A .38 Special revolver also has all the advantages of being a revolver (and is operationally much more satisfactory than the Walther automatic which the RUC has at present) but it uses a lower velocity cartridge which has less penetrating power than the ammunition fired by a Magnum. The .38 Specials originally evaluated by the RUC were of American origin, but the RUC have been engaged since Christmas on a fresh evaluation of non-American guns. The testing of these non-American .38 Specials will be completed before September, and will give us a fallback position in the event of the Sterling proving unsatisfactory.

All this of course assumes that the suspension on the supply of Rugers will not be lifted in the foreseeable future and that, for the reasons I have outlined (including the Sterling's potential), the eventual choice will be between the Sterling and the .38 Special. We shall, however, continue to monitor the situation in the United States, through the FCO, in case of disappointment over the Sterling and a change of heart over the Ruger.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of all other members of OD and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M. W. Hopkins

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