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TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 4147 OF 11 DECEMBER, 1979,
INFO DUBLIN.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH THE PRESIDENT ABOUT ARMS FOR THE RUC.

1. I REALISE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN GETTING CONFLICTING SIGNALS FROM HERE ABOUT WHAT THE U S DECISION IS GOING TO BE ABOUT THE SUPPLY OF U S ARMS FOR THE RUC. THE PRESENT POSITION IS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS NOT TAKEN A DECISION ON THIS SUBJECT AND WILL NOT DO SO UNTIL HE HAS TALKED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ABOUT IT.

2. I CANNOT SAY THAT I THINK THAT THE PROSPECTS OF HIS AGREEING TO AUTHORISE THE EXPORT OF THESE ARMS AS A RESULT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH HIM ARE ROSY. THE REASON WHY THE AMERICANS ARE BEING SO OBSTRUCTIVE ABOUT THIS IS CLEAR: SPEAKER O'NEILL IS IRRETRIEVABLY OPPOSED TO IT: THIS STEMS FROM VISCERAL FEELINGS RATHER THAN ANY NEED FOR VOTES ON O'NEILL'S PART: HE HAS COME OUT OPENLY AGAINST ANY HELP FOR THE IRA AND PROTESTS THAT HE CANNOT CREDIBLY ACCEPT THE SUPPLY OF U S ARMS FOR WHAT HE AND MANY IRISH/AMERICANS REGARD, HOWEVER INADEQUATELY, AS THE OTHER SIDE: THE U S ADMINISTRATION HAVE GIVEN HIM SOME COMMITMENT THAT THEY WILL NOT AUTHORISE ARMS EXPORTS TO THE RUC WITHOUT HIS APPROVAL. ON FOREIGN POLICY GROUNDS THERE IS NO DOUBT WHATEVER THAT BOTH THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE WHITE HOUSE WOULD LIKE, FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U K, TO SEE THESE ARMS PROVIDED: THEY DO NOT CONCEAL FROM US PRIVATELY THAT THEY THINK WE HAVE A VERY STRONG CASE: BUT THEY ASK US TO ACCEPT THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE MOMENT WHICH ARE THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS HAVE TOP PRIORITY AND THESE WOULD BE INCOMPATIBLE WITH A ROW WITH O'NEILL WHICH COULD IMPAIR CARTER'S CHANCES OF RENOMINATION. O'NEILL'S BACKING IS ALSO NEEDED TO GET LEGISLATION THROUGH THE CONGRESS.

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3. AN ADDITIONAL ELEMENT IS THAT CONGRESSMAN BIAGGI, WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF THE CONGRESSIONAL AD HOC COMMITTEE ON IRISH AFFAIRS AND CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE IRISH NATIONAL CAUCUS, IS PLAYING A MAJOR ROLE AS A CONGRESSIONAL STRATEGIST IN CARTER'S RENOMINATION CAMPAIGN. HE THUS HAS ACCESS TO CARTER'S INNER CIRCLE.

4. THIS MEANS THAT THE PRESENT IS A BAD MOMENT IN WHICH TO HOPE THAT WE CAN GET OUR WAY ON WHAT SEEMS TO US AN UNANSWERABLE CASE. WHAT INDEED MAKES IT EVEN MORE UNANSWERABLE IS THAT WE ARE GIVING THE USA A LOT OF HELP OVER IRAN AND THEY RECOGNISE THIS. IT IS DIFFICULT OF COURSE TO KNOW WHAT THE STATE OF AFFAIRS OVER IRAN IS GOING TO BE NEXT MONDAY WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER SEES THE PRESIDENT. BUT ASSUMING THAT THE IRAN HOSTAGE PROBLEM HAS NOT BEEN SOLVED I DO NOT DOUBT THAT THE LINKAGE OF THESE TWO ISSUES WILL BE IN THE PRESIDENT'S MIND. THE MORE WE CAN DO TO HELP THEM IN THE WAYS THEY ASK, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT IS GOING TO BE FOR THE PRESIDENT TO RESIST OUR REQUESTS TO HIM TO HELP US OVER OUR TERRORIST PROBLEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND. BUT THERE ARE CLEARLY LIMITS TO WHAT WE CAN IN PRACTICE DO OVER IRAN AND I DOUBT WHETHER WE WILL BE ABLE TO DO SO MUCH IN THE IRAN CONTEXT AS TO MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE PRESIDENT TO REFUSE OUR IRISH REQUESTS.

5. THOUGH IT MAY BE EXPEDIENT TO AVOID RAISING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS IN ADVANCE AND THOUGH INDEED THE OUTCOME MAY FALL SHORT OF WHAT IS HOPED, I AM IN NO DOUBT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER MUST RAISE THIS SUBJECT IN THE FIRMEST POSSIBLE WAY WITH THE PRESIDENT. IT WOULD SURELY BE BEST IF THIS DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE IN RESTRICTED SESSION WITH THE PRESIDENT; HE WILL BE WANTING TO GET AT THE TRUTH AND THE PRIME MINISTER WILL KNOW FROM HER PREVIOUS TALK WITH HIM IN TOKYO THAT HE RESPONDS WELL TO DISPASSIONATE ARGUMENT.

6. IT IS JUST POSSIBLE THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL SAY QUOTE YES UNQUOTE BECAUSE, AS I HAVE SUGGESTED ABOVE, THE PROBLEM IS REALLY THAT OF ONE MAN, THOUGH A VERY IMPORTANT ONE. BUT IF HE CAN UNDERTAKE NO POSITIVE COMMITMENT AT THE MOMENT IT DOES NOT FOLLOW FROM THIS THAT HE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO DO SO. INDEED ONE MUST ALLOW FOR SENTIMENTS CHANGING. MOREOVER, IF HIS RENOMINATION BECOMES CERTAIN, OR, IF IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE IS NOT GOING TO BE NOMINATED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, THE WAY COULD BECOME OPEN FOR HIM TO DISREGARD O'NEILL. IT WOULD SEEM REASONABLE THEREFORE

FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO PRESS HIM TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND ON THE SUBJECT AND TO AVOID A NEGATIVE COMMITMENT: AND SUCH AN ATTITUDE WOULD AT LEAST BE OF SOME HELP SO FAR AS OPINION IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS CONCERNED. IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE ALSO TO GET THE PRESIDENT TO AGREE THAT IF THE IRA INTENSIFY THEIR ACTIVITIES THIS WILL MAKE HIM MORE DISPOSED TO GIVE A POSITIVE DECISION ON THE ARMS: AND IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE AT LEAST TO HINT AT THIS AFTERWARDS IN PUBLIC.

7. SO FAR AS THE LINE THE PRIME MINISTER MIGHT USEFULLY TAKE WHEN SHE VISITS THE CONGRESS I SHALL BE TELEGRAPHING SEPARATELY.

8. ASSUMING THAT THE UPSHOT OF THE MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT IS A READINESS ON HIS PART TO COME OUT WITH A CLEAR CONDEMNATION OF TERRORISM AND ITS IRISH AMERICAN SUPPORTERS IN RELATION TO NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE AVOIDANCE OF A DEFINITE QUOTE NO UNQUOTE TO ARMS SUPPLIES AND AN UNDERTAKING TO KEEP THE SUBJECT UNDER REVIEW PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IN ULSTER, A LOT WILL HANG ON HOW THIS SUBJECT IS HANDLED PUBLICLY AFTERWARDS. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL OF COURSE KNOW MUCH BETTER THAN I DO HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BRITISH OPINION, AND IT IS OF COURSE DIFFICULT TO TELL IN ADVANCE EXACTLY HOW THE RESULTS CAN BEST BE FORMULATED, BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IF WE CAN WORK FOR SOME PUBLIC FORMULA SUCH AS IS CONTAINED IN M I F T, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE SOMETHING OF THE ISSUE.

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