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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Michael O'D B Alexander Esq
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21 September 1979

Prime Minister

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Dear Michael,

*I understand that the assessment of X may
be more optimistic: there is a suggestion that Americans may
agree to supply Rugers in exchange for an understanding that
we will not order them: however clearly we should await US
decision before deciding what further action to take ourselves. I think*

In his letter of ~~23~~²¹ August to Joe Pilling, Bryan Cartledge referred to the Prime Minister's request for a report on alternative supplies of firearms for the RUC. 2/5

We have now been into this again thoroughly, in consultation with the RUC. I am sorry that it has inevitably taken some time because of the need to check a number of technical points. The results are not encouraging.

Rugers (or comparable modern revolvers) are available in quantity only from sources which lead directly back to US manufacturers. Any attempt to make alternative arrangements while the US administration's review is going on would be doomed to failure, and would be likely to lessen the chances of their deciding to issue export licences in the normal way at the end of their review. If they decide to decline to issue further licences, it might be possible in a year or two to obtain some supplies of a British weapon (made by Sterling): but that weapon is as yet only at the design stage, and we cannot be certain of its suitability. The operational consequences for the RUC of a delay in the supply of new weapons could, if necessary, be borne. The consequences in terms of morale in the force, and political reactions, would be far more serious. In particular, the IRA would claim official US Government support, and Protestant opinion would draw its own conclusions from our apparent inability to obtain American support.

x | In the light of this review, the Secretary of State's conclusion is that in the immediate future there are no alternative supplies of suitable weapons. He has noted recent indications from Washington that their review is being speeded up, and there may be some reason to hope that, in the aftermath of 27 August, there is a slightly better chance of new export licences being issued. That remains the best chance for obtaining early supplies, and there is no immediate

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action available to us which would not jeopardise that chance. Meanwhile, we shall be keeping a close watch on development of the Sterling weapon.

... I attach an annex which discusses the background in a little more detail.

... I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Lever (FCO) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Ry Harrington.

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E. R.

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ANNEX

ARMS FOR THE RUC

The Type of Weapon

The RUC want to replace their present Walther automatic pistols with Ruger revolvers. The Walther requires both hands to cock and fire it, its low velocity rounds lack stopping power and it can jam. The revolver does not suffer from these disadvantages. The RUC are satisfied that a revolver is for those reasons the right type of weapon (other UK Police Forces take the same view) and that the Ruger is the best of this type.

Sources of Supply

The only present source of suitable modern revolvers in quantity, whether of Ruger or other manufacture, is the United States. A British firm, Sterling, have a revolver at the design stage but it cannot yet be evaluated. A French firm, Manurhin, produce a revolver, but only in small quantities and it costs four times as much as the Ruger.

The nature of the market for revolvers, which is small and specialised, is such that we could not place orders for the required quantities of Rugers or comparable US weapons without that becoming apparent to the US Government. That would apply whether such orders were placed with private firms in this country or abroad (because they could not supply such quantities from stock and would have to order from America) or were placed by the Home Office or Ministry of Defence (which would of course be even more obvious).

Operational Considerations

The next batch of Rugers is due early next year, so a refusal of new export licences for Rugers would not bite until then. The Walthers in service now will remain serviceable for some time to come, though it is obviously highly undesirable to leave police officers with a "second best" weapon with which to defend themselves when better weapons are, or should be, available from the US. The Chief Constable's assessment is that although it would be highly undesirable for new weapons not to be available for a year or two (the earliest date at which the Sterling might be available, if it proved to be suitable for RUC use) the operational consequences could if necessary be borne. The consequences in terms of morale in the RUC, and the political consequences referred to in the letter, would be more significant.

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