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FILE

207

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

10 September, 1984

VIP VISITORS:

CARRIAGE OF ARMS BY BODY GUARDS

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 4 September on this subject, together with the Home Secretary's letter of 7 September with his comments.

The Prime Minister agrees that the difficult issues raised need to be discussed. A meeting has been arranged for 12 September. I am sorry that it was not possible to arrange it before M. Cheysson's visit.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office).

(C.D. Powell)

L. Appleyard, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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Prime Minister (2)  
CDP 9/19



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

7 September 1984

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2 Geoffrey,

VIP VISITORS: CARRIAGE OF ARMS BY BODYGUARDS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of <sup>with PM</sup> 4 September to the Prime Minister on this subject. I know that we shall be discussing the matter with the Prime Minister on 12 September, when we shall be able to go into more detail. But I support the views you have expressed. My own strong preference is that we should take a firm decision to resist firmly any special exceptions, and should apply a consistent no arms policy. I entirely agree that we cannot make invidious distinctions or exceptions in respect of particular nations with whom we are closely associated while discriminating against others.

I realise that the next visit in respect of which the problem is likely to arise is that of President Mitterand, making it particularly likely that Monsieur Cheysson will raise the subject on 10 September. I would hope that if he does so you would be able to defer a definite answer until after the discussion with the Prime Minister. I know how concerned the Commissioner was about the position in which he was put in exercising his statutory responsibilities under the Firearms Act on the previous occasion involving President Reagan's bodyguards. I hope our conclusion will be a firm no arms policy but in any event I think it is important not to commit the Commissioner, without consulting him, to making an exception about which he would, I know, be most uneasy.

A copy of this letter goes to the Prime Minister.

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The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe, QC., MP.

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PM/84/143

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister  
This is a difficult one. But I am sure we should stand firm on an exception for President Reagan only: after all he's the only one who has actually been shot.

Agree to meeting with

Agree to meeting with

VIP Visitors: Carriage of Arms by Body Guards FCS & HS ?

1. You will recall that the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police agreed, in the light of the strong representations which the Americans had made to us here and in Washington, that some of President Reagan's body guards might carry firearms while he was in the United Kingdom in June for the Economic Summit. The departure from the stated police policy which this represented has provoked questioning comment from a number of other governments and we can expect some of them to try to exploit it to secure similar concessions for their own VIP visitors. I would be glad of an opportunity to discuss with you and the Home Secretary what the Government's position on this should be in future.

COP  
5/9

2. As Leon Brittan pointed out in his minute of 5 April, the police have tried since 1978 to impose a strict policy that visiting body guards should not be armed. We have accordingly made every effort to persuade foreign governments that the sole responsibility for the armed protection of our visitors lies with our police. In January 1982 we instructed our missions abroad formally to draw the attention of their host government on the occasion of each visit to the fact that body guards are not permitted to carry arms here. We constantly remind diplomatic missions in London of the rules. Although on occasion arms slip through the net, we think that the ban has been generally effective.

PM TOURS PT 1  
L.E.S.





3. The problem has arisen from the exceptional concessions that we have been making for the Americans. As Leon Brittan also indicated in his minute, the 'no-arms' policy had been breached in their favour prior to the Economic Summit on three occasions. This mattered less while such arrangements remained secret. However, the carriage of arms by the President's body guards at the Economic Summit became public knowledge when the police made clear the exception from their publicised policy. That has seriously undermined the credibility of the police's no arms policy and of the line that we take on it with foreign governments. You will also recall that at the time of the London Economic Summit, French protection officers were detected and briefly held by the police when it was discovered that they were armed, without of course our knowledge and consent.

4. Three governments have responded directly. The French reaction was to refuse permission for your detective and mine to carry arms when we attended the June European Council. Although in the end they relented, the Quai have now sent a Note Verbale to the Embassy in Paris asking us to reciprocate by allowing the body guards of French VIP visitors here to carry arms. They are no doubt thinking ahead to next month's State Visit by President Mitterrand. The Germans have also sent us a formal Note suggesting that we did not consider the Metropolitan Police capable of protecting President Reagan and drawing the inference that the police had not been capable of protecting Chancellor Kohl either. I had to write to the Foreign Minister of The Netherlands last year explaining why we could not let Queen Beatrix's body guards carry arms here, and The Netherlands Ambassador has now expressed his concern to us about her likely reactions to the concessions to the Americans. We do not doubt that other missions are watching developments closely. It will be in the interest of some of them that the 'no firearms' policy should founder.





5. There is no easy answer. The question of whether we should reaffirm the Government's support for the police's no-arms policy is of course primarily a matter for Leon Brittan, and he may want to comment on this point. Whatever we decide, it will be important to apply our policy consistently to all the major Western countries. As I have indicated above, if exceptions are made they become known sooner or later and cause resentment among those discriminated against. This can in turn prompt retaliatory measures which affect the safety of our own senior visitors abroad.

6. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this difficult subject with you and Leon Brittan. There is a degree of urgency because M. Cheysson may well raise it with me when he comes here on 10 September.

7. I am copying this minute to Leon Brittan.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

4 September, 1984



Diplomatic Missions Jan 80  
Fire Arms for Protection Officers