

CONFIDENTIAL



052120

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

VIP VISITORS: CARRIAGE OF ARMS BY BODYGUARDS

The Prime Minister has noted your minute of 4 April which sets out a number of proposed exceptions to the guidelines agreed in 1984 on carriage of arms by bodyguards for visiting VIPs. The Prime Minister is content with the proposed changes and with the revised draft Parliamentary Answer.

C.D.P.

Charles Powell

6 April 1986

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1288



Ref. A086/1031

MR POWELL

Yes

Prime Minister  
 Agree to the  
proposed amendments?  
 CDP  
 4/4.

VIP Visitors: Carriage of Arms by Bodyguards

My minute of 17 October 1984 set out the guidelines under which exceptions to the "no armed bodyguards" rule for visiting VIPs would be permitted. These were that, subject to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis being satisfied as to their ability, two protection officers could be armed with hand guns at any one time for visits by Heads of State or Government of countries in which reciprocal facilities are or would be granted for visits by The Queen or the Prime Minister.

2. Strict adherence to these guidelines has not been possible for a number of visits since then (notably Vice President Bush, Rajiv Gandhi and Prince Sultan of Saudi Arabia). The Commissioner and other chief police officers have independent statutory powers to control the carriage of arms in the United Kingdom. Rather than having to breach the agreed guidelines at the request of Ministers, the Commissioner would prefer to build into the guidelines sufficient flexibility to allow him to exercise his own discretion, in consultation with the Home Office as necessary. He is of course very much in favour of limiting the number of occasions when armed bodyguards are admitted to the minimum possible, not least because of the operational complications for his own officers of having to work alongside visiting protection officers.

3. To allow him this discretion and to reflect the way practice has developed since the guidelines of 1984 were agreed, he has helpfully suggested, and the Home Office and FCO have agreed, that the principle of "no armed bodyguards" should admit the following exceptions:



a. The guidelines should cover visits not only of Heads of State and Government but also of persons acting specifically on their behalf.

b. To allow for rotation of protection officers accompanying such visitors, more than two might, when necessary, be issued fire arms certificates, but we would maintain the limit of no more than two armed bodyguards on duty at any time in a public place (this was done, for example, during the Gandhi visit).

c. Semi-automatic pistols as well as revolvers should be covered, since they are the standard equipment of many protection services.

The Commissioner has indicated that, if necessary, he would be prepared to consider permitting firearms in cases beyond a. above, where he had every reason to believe that the Government would be unhappy with a refusal.

4. These exceptions constitute sensible modifications of the guidelines in the light of practical experience. The Metropolitan Police would be the last to admit exceptions unless they were absolutely necessary; but recent exceptions to the original guidelines have been a source of embarrassment to the statutory position of the Commissioner of Police in these matters. It is in this light that I recommend that the Prime Minister agree the changes.

--- 5. The revised draft Parliamentary Answer (attached) takes account of these points.

MS

for ROBERT ARMSTRONG

4 April 1986



DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question

What is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the carriage of arms by protection officers of VIPs visiting this country?

Answer

As a general rule, and in accordance with the well understood convention of international practice, the United Kingdom as the host country is responsible for the protection of visitors from overseas for whom protection is necessary while they are in this country. The police are responsible for providing protection, and any protection officers accompanying visitors from overseas are required not to carry arms while in this country. In exceptional circumstances, notably a visit by a Head of State or Government, the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis is prepared to give permission for the carriage of arms by a narrowly limited number of protection officers. Each request for permission is considered in the light of all the circumstances, and permission is given only subject to strict safeguards designed to minimise the risk of accidental injury.

It will be the policy of the Government, and of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, to decline to give information about the protection arrangements made in particular cases, for obvious security reasons.



DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS: Armed protection, Jan. 1980

