



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

M Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

2 December 1981

Prime Minister
F.I.C.O. advice is attached.

Dear Michael Yes.

2. Agree the line in para. 6.?

A.S.C. 11/12

ARMS FROM THE UNITED STATES FOR THE RUC

1. The RUC will reach its present authorised establishment in March or April next year. This expansion has inevitably increased the RUC's requirement for firearms. As you will be aware, the requirement for revolvers has now been met by the US-manufactured Ruger Revolvers which were received both before and after the US Government's cessation of licensing sales to the RUC. (You will recall in particular Roy Harrington's letter of 13 February on this subject.)

2. On some occasions members of the RUC are equipped with rifles during their duty. One of the standard RUC rifles is the Ruger AC-556 manufactured in the United States which was adopted before the firearms ban was imposed. The RUC have 500 Ruger rifles, and require a further 200. Aside from the expansion of the force this reflects the fact that the RUC are now taking the lead in more difficult rural areas. (For urban work they are already equipped with the lower-powered US-manufactured M1 Carbine.)

3. The RUC's assessment is that the Ruger AC-556 is by far the most suitable weapon for rural patrolling. It is compact (important in a vehicle), unmilitary in style and did not develop faults during testing. There is a possible UK-manufactured weapon (the Sterling AR 180 - the "Armalite" made under licence) but the RUC do not give it as high an assessment as the Ruger. It is not well constructed or robust and is military in appearance. Furthermore if the RUC were to adopt the Sterling they would be required, in order to standardise their equipment, to dispose of their existing Rugers and to retain retain a number of policemen engaged on operational duties. This would be expensive and disruptive. We therefore accept that in policing terms there is a strong case for acquiring further Rugers.

✗ ←

✗ Why are we manufacturing the Sterling if it is "not well constructed or robust"?

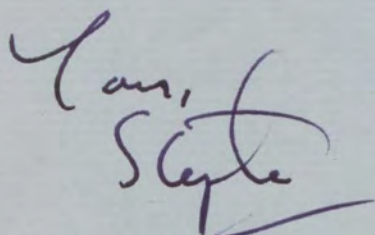
not

4. In 1979, in response to an outcry in Congress, President Carter instituted a review of US arms sales to the RUC which effectively prevents the issue of any further licences. In principle this 'review' is continuing and neither we nor the FCO have seen any merit in reopening the issue directly with the US Government. But our experience with Ruger revolvers (cf again Roy Harrington's letter of 13 February) has shown that the Northern Ireland Police Authority's suppliers can and will fulfil orders for Rugers.

5. This issue is quiet at present but if we authorise a further purchase of Rugers it may come to the surface again. The position is more delicate than it was in the case of the Revolvers, to the extent that we would be going further than merely to take up an order placed before the US Government instituted its review. However the Americans know well that we regard the stoppage of imports for the RUC which the review has brought about as quite indefensible; within the Administration itself there is sympathy for our position.

6. The Secretary of State therefore proposes to authorise an order for Ruger rifles to be placed with a firearms dealer in the UK. If any questions are raised about it, we should maintain the line that the Police Authority for Northern Ireland purchase arms in the normal way through legitimate dealers in the UK.

7. I am sending a copy of this letter to Francis Richards in the FCO.



S W BOYS SMITH