

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2010/19/1708
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	[March 1980]
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	8 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

U.S. Administration and Northern Ireland and developments  
relating to the sale of arms to the RUC

---

1. In recent years the U.S. administration has had to attempt to balance in its policy on Northern Ireland two quite conflicting approaches. On the one hand, the traditional U.S. establishment approach has been to regard Northern Ireland as an internal U.K. affair. On the other hand, Northern Ireland has become a subject of some popular interest and concern in the U.S. and the articulation of this interest and concern by certain politicians has obliged the administration to adopt a more positive stance. However the State Department and other elements in the U.S. establishment tend where possible to revert to non-intervention and acceptance of the "internal nature" for the U.K. of the Northern Ireland problem. The British authorities are very sensitive to any suggestion of overt U.S. administration involvement in Northern Ireland and it is therefore to be presumed that the British engage in forceful and sustained lobbying to inhibit such a development.
2. During the 1976 U.S. presidential election campaign, the then Governor Carter responded to pressure from the Irish National Caucus (see separate paper) by agreeing to meet with Caucus supporters in Pittsburg. Following approaches by the Irish Government and in consultation with four major Irish-American leaders (O'Neill, Kennedy, Moynihan and Carey), Carter as President refused to have any further contact with the Caucus. On the other hand, and again in consultation with the Irish Government and the four Irish-American political leaders, in August 1977 President Carter issued a statement in which he called for an end to violence and to American support for organisations involved in violence. President Carter's statement is in Annex I.
3. The formulation of President Carter's policy had proceeded over several months and took the following form. The initiative was formally taken by the four Democratic leaders of Irish descent who co-ordinated their approach at every step with the Irish Government and with John Hume. This relationship was well known

both to the Executive, i.e. State Department and White House - as well as to the British, although it was never formally acknowledged by either. Detailed diplomatic negotiations subsequently took place with both Governments. The permanent levels of the Administration (and notably the State Department) strongly backed British efforts first of all to quash and later, acknowledging the reality of O'Neill's enormous influence with Carter, to limit the range of the statement. The statement that emerged on 30 August 1977, although unprecedented in committing the Administration to an eventual role in helping solve the problems, nevertheless fell short of the desiderata of the Irish Government and the four U.S. politicians. In short, for the first time on this issue, Irish Government influence as exercised through the four leaders had proved to be very considerable but not absolute. President Carter in his tribute to O'Neill screened at the Ireland Fund dinner on 10 May 1978 formally acknowledged the Speaker's role in formulating Administration policy on Northern Ireland, thus effectively disposing of the Caucus claim to have initiated the Presidential statement.

4. A press disclosure towards the end of May 1979 that the U.S. State Department had authorised the Sturm Ruger Corporation of Connecticut to sell 3000 .375 magnum handguns and 500 .223 semi-automatic rifles to the RUC provoked Speaker "Tip" O'Neill to issue a statement on 1 June on the merits of supplying arms to any group or persons in Northern Ireland.

5. The Speaker's remarks were widely misinterpreted by British and Northern Ireland political figures and reactions were generally negative. The Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mr. Atkins, maintained that the arms were to defend the Northern Ireland community and the RUC from attacks while at the same time he defended the impartiality of the force. The DUP MP for East Belfast, Mr. Peter Robinson, urged the FCO to protest to the U.S. Government about the continual meddling of "this supposedly responsible American" in Northern Ireland affairs. Mr. Peter Jay,

the then British Ambassador in Washington met Speaker O'Neill on 5 June 1979 and rejected his alleged imputation that the RUC was a sectarian force and an instrument of repression of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. The Speaker's point that the sale would make more difficult the attainment of the common objective of reducing support in the U.S. for the IRA was not acknowledged. However, in the U.S. the Speaker's comments were broadly supported even in the normally pro-British establishment press.

6. In mid-July 1979 during a debate on the 1980 Appropriations Bill for the State, Judiciary and Commerce Departments Congressman Biaggi tabled a resolution to prevent funds voted to the State Department from being used to sanction the sale, transfer or gift of arms to the RUC. He withdrew his resolution following an assurance that the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House would investigate the question of arms deliveries to Northern Ireland. On 30 July, the Secretary of the Committee held an informal meeting at which Nimitz of the State Department indicated that the State Department had suspended all private sales of arms to Northern Ireland pending a review of policy on such exports (Annex III). Both Biaggi of the ad hoc Congressional Committee and Fr. Seán McManus of the Irish National Caucus claimed credit for the suspension.

7. Prime Minister Thatcher paid an official visit to Washington on 17 December 1979 and her programme included meetings at the White House and at a joint session of Senate and House Committees concerned with Foreign Affairs. Among her objectives during the visit was the removal of the U.S. ban on the sale of arms to the RUC. Immediately after her visit, the President made a private plea to Speaker O'Neill to change his position in regard to the arms sales. The British were, he said, among the best U.S. supporters in dealing with the terrorists who were holding U.S. hostages in Iran and it seemed reasonable that they should expect similar support in their efforts to deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland. The Speaker however continued to oppose arms sales to the RUC. In a Commons reply on 20 December Mrs. Thatcher said that there is not as yet a ban and that they have placed

another order for 3,000 Ruger revolvers which has neither been accepted nor rejected. She said she had made it perfectly clear that, if that order were rejected, it would be not only wrong, but a propaganda victory for the IRA. Press reports indicate that the freeze was likely to remain in effect at least until after the 1980 Presidential election. Following her talks with the President, the White House in a statement said the President and Mrs. Thatcher "condemned support for organisations and individuals engaged directly or indirectly in campaigns of violence and agreed that such campaigns only delay the day when peace and reconciliation can come to Northern Ireland". While the content of this reference in the communique is not dramatic, the fact that an Anglo-American summit communique referred at all to Northern Ireland is a remarkable departure which represents a significant internationalisation of the issue. This departure is attributable largely to Irish Government influence on the Irish issue, via Speaker O'Neill, on the U.S. administration.

8. The President, while travelling on a train from Washington on 7 August 1979 to an Italian-American meeting in Baltimore to promote his energy programme, met Biaggi on the train in what the White House termed a "casual encounter" but which must have had a degree of premeditation in it. Subsequently, Biaggi claimed that they discussed "the plight of the people of Northern Ireland" and that he "was heartened by the President's interest and concern about the Irish tragedy and was encouraged with his stated intention to maintain a continuing dialogue on the issue". Biaggi said that he had urged the President to "undertake an initiative to help bring all the groups together for discussions towards the achievement of a consensus solution".

9. The fullest recent statement of U.S. Government policy on Northern Ireland was made at a Press Conference in Washington on 5 September 1979 by Secretary of State Vance:-

Question: Mr. Secretary, as you know, Prime Ministers Lynch and Thatcher are meeting today. You or the Department recently suspended arms sales to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In the

meantime, people like Governor Carey have even stepped in to offer mediation. My question is, when will this study that you are doing now on this be completed, and are you contemplating suggesting to Mrs. Thatcher and the British Government a new political initiative to try and solve the problem?

Secretary Vance: The answer is that we are not planning to suggest a new political initiative. Our position has been - and President Carter stated it very clearly in 1977 - a position of impartiality. It is a position which supports the bringing together of the various factions in an attempt to try and move towards a peaceful solution.

It is an immensely difficult problem, as all of us know - one of the most difficult of these types of problems that exist throughout the world.

The position which we have taken is supported by the British Government, by the Irish Government and by the political parties in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. For us to intrude ourselves in at this point into the Irish situation, in my judgement, would not be wise. I think it would be resented by the parties concerned, and they are the ones that should deal with this issue".

10. During the Papal visit to the U.S. in October 1969, President Carter and the Pope discussed Northern Ireland. A White House press statement quotes them as jointly condemning "resort to violence, by any party, for any reason". President Carter also referred publicly during the visit to the search for peace in Northern Ireland as in Rhodesia, in Nicaragua and the Middle East. While such references have been interpreted as an "internationalisation" of the Northern conflict, no more concrete attitude on the part of the U.S. administration has emerged.

# President Carter's statement on Northern Ireland

Following is the text of the statement on Northern Ireland made by President Carter August 1977

Throughout our history, Americans have called the contributions men and women from many countries have made to the development of the United States the greatest contributions have been the British and Irish people, Protestant and Catholic alike. We have close friendship with both parts of Ireland, Great Britain

It is natural that Americans are deeply concerned about the continuing conflict and violence in Northern Ireland. We know the meaning of the bomb and the bullet. The United States wholeheartedly supports peaceful efforts to find a just solution that respects both parts of the community of Northern Ireland, protects human rights and guarantees freedom from discrimination. We hope that the people in Northern Ireland, as well as the Governments of Great Britain and Ireland, can support violence-free solutions to Northern Ireland's problems. Violence increases them, and solves nothing.

We hope that all those engaged in violence will cease this course and commit themselves to peaceful pursuit of legitimate needs. The path of reconciliation, negotiation and peace is the only course to end the human suffering and lead to a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland. I ask all Americans to refrain from providing with financial or other aid to those whose involvement, direct or indirect, in this violence delays the day when the people of Northern Ireland can live and work together in harmony, free from fear. Law enforcement agencies will continue to apprehend and prosecute any

who violate US laws in this regard

The US Government policy on the Northern Ireland issue has long been one of impartiality, and that is how it will remain. We support the establishment of a form of government in Northern Ireland which will command widespread acceptance throughout both parts of the community.

However, we have no intention of telling the parties how this might be achieved. The only permanent solution will come from the people who live there. There are no solutions that outsiders can impose.

At the same time, the people of Northern Ireland should know that they have our complete support in their quest for a peaceful and just society. It is a tribute to Northern Ireland's hard-working people that the area has continued to attract investment, despite the violence committed by a small minority. This is to be welcomed, since investment and other programs to create jobs will assist in ensuring a healthy economy and combating unemployment.

It is still true that a peaceful settlement would contribute immeasurably to stability in Northern Ireland and so enhance the prospects for increased investment. In the event of such a settlement, the US Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job-creating investment could be encouraged, to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

I admire the many true friends of Northern Ireland in this country who speak out for peace. Emotions run high on this subject, and the easiest course is not to stand up for conciliation. I place myself firmly on the side of those who seek peace and reject violence in Northern Ireland.

## Irish Government reaction

The Irish Government described President Carter's statement as a constructive development in American relations with Ireland and Britain which reflects the traditional generosity of the American Government and people and their interest in Ireland. The President has placed himself firmly on the side of those distinguished American leaders who, in the President's words, seek peace and reject violence.

It is particularly useful to emphasise that the problems of Northern Ireland have many dimensions, of which any effective and realistic solution must take account. President Carter rightly underlines the importance of finding a just solution by peaceful means which protects human rights, in which both parts of the community in Northern Ireland as well as the Irish and British Governments will be involved.

The Irish Government also welcomes the renewed American commitment to continue vigorously to apprehend and prosecute those who violate US laws in respect of supporting with financial or other aid organisations involved directly or indirectly in violence in Northern Ireland, irrespective of the political or religious sympathies of those involved.

President Carter's statement is a welcome indication of the interest of the US Government in Irish affairs. He has once again made clear the goodwill of the American people to a land for which many Americans have a special affection. He has offered to help. It is for the people of Ireland, North and South, together with the British and Irish Governments, to ensure that his offer is transformed into political and economic progress.

MR Berry  
PL file 805 14

ANNEX : 2

**THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE APPROVAL OF SALES OF U.S. MUNITIONS LIST ITEMS FOR USE BY THE POLICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

ON JANUARY 31, 1979, THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE APPROVED A LICENSE PERMITTING STURM, RUGER AND COMPANY OF SOUTHPORT, CONNECTICUT TO EXPORT 3,000 .357 CALIBER REVOLVERS AND 500 .223 CALIBER AUTOMATIC RIFLES TO THE POLICE FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR USE BY THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

THE APPROVAL OF THIS APPLICATION WAS CONSISTENT WITH OUR POLICY OF COOPERATING WITH LEGALLY ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENTS, PARTICULARLY DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED AND ALLIED GOVERNMENTS, IN THEIR EFFORTS TO CONTROL TERRORISM. THE RUC IS THE LEGALLY-CONSTITUTED POLICE FORCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND WE HAVE APPROVED LICENSES FOR THE EXPORT OF MUNITIONS LIST ITEMS TO THIS FORCE.

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THE .357 CALIBER REVOLVER IS A STANDARD POLICE ITEM USED BY MANY POLICE FORCES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THIS REVOLVER IS CARRIED BY MANY U.S. GOVERNMENT SECURITY PERSONNEL IN PERFORMING PERSONAL PROTECTION DUTIES. THE NUMBER OF 3,000 SUCH REVOLVERS WAS NOT EXCESSIVE FOR THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE APPROXIMATELY 6,000-OFFICER POLICE FORCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

WE WERE ALSO INFORMED THAT THE NEW YORK CITY AND WASHINGTON POLICE FORCES HAVE RIFLES SIMILAR TO THE .223 AND THAT SIMILAR RIFLES ARE ALSO USED BY MAJOR POLICE FORCES CONFRONTED WITH TERRORIST ACTIVITIES AND THREATS SUCH AS FACE THE POLICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THE NUMBER OF 500 SUCH RIFLES WAS NOT EXCESSIVE FOR A 6,000-OFFICER POLICE FORCE.

IN APPROVING THIS PARTICULAR LICENSE APPLICATION WE TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS :

— THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY IS THE LEGALLY-CONSTITUTED POLICE FORCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING ALL OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND — PROTESTANT, CATHOLIC AND OTHERS — AGAINST CRIMES AND ACTS OF TERRORISM. THE CONSTABULARY HAS ACHIEVED INCREASED ACCEPTANCE FROM THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

(937)82  
UUUHRDXA

— THIS POLICE FORCE CONTINUES TO FACE A VERY SERIOUS TERRORIST THREAT FROM THE PROVISIONAL IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY AND ALSO THE IRISH NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY AS WELL AS A POTENTIAL THREAT FROM PRESENTLY RELATIVELY INACTIVE PROTESTANT PARA-MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS. THESE ILLEGAL FORCES HAVE WEAPONS SIMILAR TO THOSE PURCHASED BY THE NORTHERN IRISH POLICE FORCE.

— MOST MODERATE OBSERVERS OF THE NORTHERN IRISH SCENE SUPPORT THE BRITISH POLICY OF TURNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND OVER TO THE POLICE AND WITHDRAWING U.K. ARMY UNITS.

— IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS POLICY GOAL THE BRITISH HAVE BEEN MODERNIZING THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY INCLUDING ITS EQUIPMENT.

— THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY HAS GAINED GROWING ACCEPTANCE FROM THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY AND ENJOYS CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE SECURITY FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. AS RECENTLY AS MAY 31, IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY REAFFIRMED IRELAND'S POLICY OF CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY IN COMBATTING TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE.

— IN EACH INSTANCE IN WHICH AN APPLICATION FOR THE SALE OF ARMS FOR USE BY THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY WAS APPROVED, WE CONCLUDED THERE WAS NO CAUSE BY REASON OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TO DISAPPROVE THE APPLICATION. WE ARE SATISFIED THAT THE BRITISH ARE TRYING TO MEET THE PROBLEM OF ALLEGED MALTREATMENT OF PERSONS SUSPECTED OF COMMITTING ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM.

— OVERALL U.S. POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND IS ONE OF STRICT IMPARTIALITY IN THIS COMMUNAL CONFLICT AND ONE OF SUPPORT FOR ANY SETTLEMENT WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH PARTS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMUNITY AND THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS. WE ARE NOT IMPARTIAL, HOWEVER, AS BETWEEN A LEGALLY-CONSTITUTED POLICE FORCE OF A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT SUCH AS THAT OF GREAT BRITAIN AND ARMED TERRORIST GROUPS SUCH AS EXIST IN NORTHERN IRELAND."