



1 Mr Whitmore HM 31/7
2 Prime Minister Home Affairs. 2

You will probably want to await
comments from Mr Atkins and the Home
Secretary's response before deciding
whether or not to comment
yourself.

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MO 19/1

30th July 1981

Dear Willie

ASSISTANCE TO THE CIVIL POLICE:
RIOT GUNS AND BATON ROUNDS

Your officials recently passed to mine a request for up to 50 riot guns and 5,000 baton rounds to equip civil police forces in Great Britain. I thought that I should write to you about this request in view of its significance. As you know I have considerable reservations about whether we should, particularly on that scale, be issuing Army weapons to police forces in Great Britain.

There is an added complication of which you should be aware. Tests by our Research and Development Establishment at Porton on the commercially available riot gun/baton round systems have shown that these are all less safe than the system being used by the Army. The report by the Establishment which should be available in the next few days may point therefore to a need to replace the commercial systems in the hands of the RUC. This has already been discussed by officials of my Ministry and the Northern Ireland Office, and at worst could give rise to a requirement for of the order of 260 riot guns and 30,000 rounds.

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw CH MC MP



Our resources for meeting these demands are strictly limited. Our stock position (ignoring those items already in the hands of units) is:

	Northern Ireland	Great Britain
Riot Guns	<u>413</u>	256
Baton Rounds	10,600	<u>6,000</u>

These figures must be seen against the knowledge of an average Army use in Northern Ireland in recent months of 3,000 rounds a month and the fact that production of additional rounds cannot start until September, when the output will be only 2,000 rounds per month.

Against this background the most which I feel I could make available for sale to the police in this country would be 50 riot guns and 4,000 rounds, although even this would inevitably reduce our ability to aid the RUC should they need to seek our assistance in replacing their own weapons. These baton rounds would be drawn from the packs of equipment which we hold in this country against the possibility of troops being called upon for internal security duties at home or in a dependancy overseas - and we would have to accept the risk that if troops (other than the Spearhead Battalion for which stocks will be kept) are needed before these rounds can be replaced then their response to higher level disorder would necessarily be limited to the use of CS gas or firearms. How would you like to proceed?

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

John Nott
John
 John Nott