

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

GREAT GEORGE STREET,

LONDON SW1P 3AJ

29 April 1981

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

M.

Dear Michael,

NORTHERN IRELAND : THE HUNGER STRIKE AND LAW AND ORDER

1. Sands is now in the 60th day of his hunger strike, and is in imminent danger of death. There was a slight, unexplained, improvement in his condition yesterday, but the doctors' present assessment is that he cannot live much longer unless he accepts treatment. There is every indication that Sands is reconciled to dying if he cannot force us to concede. Of the other three hunger strikers, Hughes is reckoned by the doctors to be about one week behind Sands.
2. Since his election, Sands has attracted a following in Northern Ireland, and in the last 10 days his hunger strike has been accompanied by more frequent demonstrations, last Sunday's demonstration in Belfast being particularly large (15,000). There has been frequent rioting by hooligans, sometimes drawn from the ranks of those who attend demonstrations, but the scale of the disorder has been both exaggerated by the press and to some degree encouraged by the press. Despite the frequency of television and newspaper reports of stone-throwing incidents and high-jacked vehicles, the disorder has not been widespread, has rarely involved more than 100 youths at a time, and has invariably lasted for only a few hours. There has been no repeat of the large scale rioting, or the sectarian confrontations that developed in 1969 and 1970.
3. As I think you know, the security situation remains better this year than it was last year. Both the capacity of the terrorists, and the number of terrorist crimes, have continued to decrease. The number of deaths, explosions and shooting incidents are all well down this year compared with last - but the influence of the hunger strike is shown in the fact that 13 of the 24 deaths this year have occurred since the beginning of the hunger strike - seven of them (including three rioters) during the last fortnight. The police have behaved admirably, and, closely supported by the Army, have succeeded in controlling not only outbreaks of disorder, but also terrorist activity, with a minimum of irritation to the community at large.

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4. There have been persistent political pressures on the Government, on the one side seeking a way to get Sands off his hunger strike (which we know can only be achieved by making unacceptable concessions) and increasingly from the Protestant side urging us to stand firm in the face of what they see as orchestrated Republican pressure. Throughout all these pressures our stance has been simple and consistent: we will not concede political status or negotiate a separate regime for protesting prisoners; we are determined to administer a fair and humane prison regime; and we are determined to uphold and enforce the law against all who challenge or break it.
5. Particular attention has focussed on the intervention of three members of the Irish Dail, the involvement of the European Commission on Human Rights, and the current visit of the Pope's Private Secretary, Father Magee. The three Irish politicians were admitted to the Maze because Sands had asked to see them; one of them used the occasion to press Sands to abandon his hunger strike. Despite loyalist claims that the visit was part of a plot, we would have found it far more difficult to defend a refusal to let these three see him. The European Commission on Human Rights became involved when Sands' sister lodged a complaint with the Commission on his behalf, after a meeting between members of the family and the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic. We have consistently made it plain that we will facilitate the European Commission in their duties and they therefore visited the Maze in order to speak to Sands: he refused to see them unless Gerald Adams * and Daniel Morrison (Editor of the Provisionals' newspaper 'An Phoblacht') accompanied him. There were some accusations that the Government thwarted the ECHR mission by refusal to allow Adams and Morrison into the prison, but the Provisionals have concentrated their attack on Mr Haughey who is said to have misled Sands' sister in the belief that the Commission "would deliver on the political prisoners' demands". It is now widely accepted that, once Sands had refused to confirm that he wished to take up the complaint, the ECHR had no further locus.

Father Magee is currently in Northern Ireland and my Secretary of State will report separately to Cabinet on any points of importance.

As you know the 400 protesting (non-hunger-striking) prisoners asked for furniture to be put in their cells some two weeks ago. The supply of beds and bedding has been deliberately spun out, and will be completed today. Other items of furniture will begin to be supplied next week. Some prisoners, anxious to get what comforts they can, have asked for the books and newspapers to which they are entitled, and are being given them.

Although some last minute change of course cannot be ruled out, the probability is that Sands will die very soon. We can expect determined trouble, but my Secretary of State, after consulting the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding, is satisfied that police and Army resources should be adequate to the task ahead, and that proper plans are being laid for dealing with the threat.

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under a FOI Exemption.

Wayland,
13 October 2011

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If Sands does die, there may be some pressure for a further by-election. My Secretary of State is clear that we must resist that, at least until the electoral law has been changed, to prevent convicted prisoners being MPs. As you will know, H Committee will tomorrow be considering proposals to that end drawn up by the Home Secretary.

I am sending a copy of this letter to all Private Secretaries to Members of Cabinet and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

PS I am enclosing (for the information of the Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Lord Privy Seal and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster) an intelligence assessment - agreed with the police and army - of the situation we shall face in the event of Sands' death

AMM.

MONTHLY INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT (1 to 29 April 1981)

SECTION A: MAIN FEATURES AND OUTLOOK

1. The period has been dominated by the campaign in support of the hunger-strikers at HMP Maze and the election of Robert SANDS in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election on 9 April.
2. Towards the end of the period the pace of terrorist activity, particularly INLA, appeared to quicken with a number of effective attacks. In all four members of the security forces and two civilians were murdered.

Outlook

3. SANDS' death is imminent. The Provisional leadership, in contrast to their position before Christmas, seems still to be keener on achieving political status for the prisoners than saving SANDS' life partly because they have been confident (particularly since his election) that HMG would eventually succumb. They have totally misread the situation throughout. Their tactics have been determined on a day-to-day basis to take advantage of opportunities as they offer and it is unlikely that they have any clear policy on what to do next. Even with SANDS dead there will still be three prisoners on hunger-strike and it could be that the PSF/H Block Committee will continue to concentrate their efforts on bringing political pressure to bear on HMG, eg through large, peaceful demonstrations.
4. However a violent scenario seems unavoidable. There has been a good deal of intelligence in recent days of preparations by both Catholic and Protestant communities for severe civil disorder: and activity on both sides is provocative with a poster-war and plans for shows of strength. Rioting in Republican areas on SANDS' death is inevitable and, with the prospect of attempts to erect barricades and no-go areas, likely to lead to confrontation with the security forces. Whether or not the Provisionals seek to provoke such disturbances - there will be no need for them to do so - they will undoubtedly take advantage of them, hoping to present themselves as protectors of the Catholic community. However, there

is still little evidence, despite the Fermanagh vote, that Catholics on the whole have any sympathy for SANDS or the demand for political status. The PSF came badly out of the ECHR visit and have been widely criticised for their obduracy. Much will depend on security forces success in controlling events in the early days; and on what the Loyalist paramilitaries do.

5. There are also undoubtedly plans well advanced for terrorist activity. Decisions on whether and when to put them in practice are probably still to be taken. The leadership, whatever their preference, will undoubtedly come under pressure to give the go-ahead. Explosives (probably for use in car bombs) are available in the Province, a number of radio-controlled devices have been supplied, and there is an adequate supply of weapons, not necessarily modern, but suitable for the kind of "defensive" activity principally envisaged at this stage. The Belfast capability, with the presence there of Robert STOREY (recently acquitted at the Old Bailey), Martin LYNCH (recovered from a wound) and Tommy GORMAN (recently released from the Maze) is greater than for some time. But the pre-emptive arrest in recent days of a large number of active terrorists will temporarily have disrupted Provisional plans and made co-ordination more difficult for them. Though there is no recent specific intelligence it must be assumed that PIRA will also want to mount activity on the mainland.

6. INLA continue with their targetting and, as their recent shootings and booby trap bombings have shown, are capable of effective action, though on a limited scale. INLA are also keen to foment disorder in support of the hunger-strikers.

7. On the Loyalist side, Andy TYRIE (UDA leader) has clearly decided the moment has come to assert himself. Although by extremist standards he has been acting responsibly, for example ruling against confrontation with the security forces, he was behind the re-activation of the Ulster Army Council (likely to be the vehicle principally for UDA/UVF para-military co-operation) and is keeping firm tabs on the Ulster Workers Council. TYRIE certainly sees himself as the key figure. And while relations between him and PAISLEY remain distant, their objectives are essentially the same and the test, if

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it comes, will find them together for as long as their interests coincide.

8. PAISLEY's own plans remain obscure. There were rumours of another spectacular but he may decide that things are running sufficiently his way at the moment for him to bide his time. The latest intelligence suggests that this will not come until after the election.