

We cannot make
any concessions.
Who will this new
issue do change
be ready?

Ref. A03482

PRIME MINISTER

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Prime Minister.

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Since Sir R. Armstrong, I wonder if we
should now be thinking in terms of getting
PIRA "off the hook". Our aim should be to
break the strike (see paras 16-20 of the assessment)
+ we should only be driven off this if there is a
v. dramatic deterioration indeed in the situation

I think that you may be interested to see the attached assessment by
the Liaison Staff in Stormont of the possible developments on the hunger strike
in the Maze.

2. The problems are going to be to keep the peace in the streets of
Northern Ireland; to recapture and then retain the initiative in the propaganda
battle; and finally to find a way of getting the strikers and the PIRA off the
hook without making concessions which will be interpreted by the Loyalists as
surrender.

3. There are reasons to think that both the PIRA and the INLA may be
thinking in terms of some kind of "spectacular" act of terrorism in support
of the hunger strike at some stage. Both the Secretary of State for Northern
Ireland and Dr. Paisley have been mentioned as high risk targets; in both
cases the threat is being taken very seriously and the appropriate measures
are being taken.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

7th November, 1980

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Ref: A03403

PRIME MINISTER

I think that you may be interested to see the attached document

the Liaison Staff in connection of the possible developments on 7 November 1980 in the West.

2. The problems are going to be to keep the peace in the West of Northern Ireland, to keep the IRA and the British Army in a state of alert; and finally to give a way of getting the IRA and the British Army out of the situation which all are interested in. The Liaison Staff are working on this.

3. There are reasons to think that the IRA and the British Army are doing in fact a good deal of work in support of the British Army in Northern Ireland. But the Government of Northern Ireland and the British Army have been mentioned as being in a state of tension. The British Army and the Government are being asked to take the necessary steps to ensure that the situation in Northern Ireland is stable.

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TITLE: POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE HUNGER STRIKE AND RELATED
ACTIVITY: AN ASSESSMENT

THE HUNGER STRIKERS

1. WE MUST ASSUME THAT AT LEAST SOME OF THOSE ON HUNGER STRIKE WILL CARRY IT THROUGH TO THE END. THE FIRST SEVEN HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY SELECTED FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND TOUGHNESS: AND TO REPRESENT DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE PROVINCE, THUS PRODUCING A RECIPROCAL SENSE OF IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN THEM AND THEIR SUPPORTERS AT LOCAL LEVEL. NEITHER WILL WANT TO LET THE OTHER DOWN. EVEN IF ONE OR TWO OF THE FIRST SEVEN STRIKERS GIVE UP, THEIR PLACES WILL BE TAKEN BY OTHERS FULLY COMMITTED. (A FURTHER TWO GROUPS OF TWELVE ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN NOMINATED: IT SEEMS LIKELY HOWEVER - CONTRARY TO AN EARLIER REPORT - THAT THE INTENTION IS NOT FOR A WAVE-LIKE SUCCESSION AT PREDETERMINED INTERVALS, BUT FOR ANY GAP WHICH MAY DEVELOP TO BE FILLED FROM THE RESERVE GROUPS). HUNGER STRIKES ARE PART OF REPUBLICAN MYTHOLOGY AND THERE MUST CERTAINLY BE SOME OF THE PRISONERS WHO ARE PHYSICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY READY TO MAKE MARTYRS OF THEMSELVES IN PREFERENCE TO SEEING OUT MOST OF THEIR LIVES IN PRISON. THEY HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR MONTHS FOR A HUNGER STRIKE. THEY ARE RELIEVED THAT THE DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN AND ENCOURAGED BY THE DEMONSTRATIONS OF SUPPORT BOTH FROM THEIR FELLOW PRISONERS WHO HAVE GONE ON THE DIRTY PROTEST AND FROM OUTSIDE.

2. THERE ARE NOW NO SIGNIFICANT FORCES TRYING TO PERSUADE THEM OFF IT. INTELLIGENCE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT MOST OF THE RELATIVES, ALTHOUGH DISTRESSED BY WHAT IS HAPPENING, WERE, THE MOMENT THE DECISION WAS TAKEN, RECONCILED TO IT. AND THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE VERY WILLING FOR THEIR KIN TO DIE FOR THE CAUSE IN THIS WAY. ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUAL PRESTES (INCLUDING FATHER FAUL) ARE UNDOUBTEDLY DOING THEIR BEST, THE CHURCH IS NOT BEING PARTICULARLY HELPFUL. CARDINAL O'FIAICH AND BISHOP DALY HAVE NOT AS YET TAKEN A VERY CONSTRUCTIVE LINE. FATHER REID, WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN A HELPFUL INFLUENCE, IS REPORTED TO BE IN DROGHEDA SUFFERING FROM A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN. ADVICE COMING FROM OUTSIDE (EG ALISTAIR

/ LOGAN,

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LOGAN, AN ENGLISH SOLICITOR WITH REPUBLICAN SYMPATHIES) IS THAT THE HUNGER STRIKE MUST CONTINUE IF THE PRISONERS ARE TO GET WHAT THEY WANT.

3. WHETHER OR NOT AGREEMENT ON 23 OCTOBER THAT PRISONERS MIGHT WEAR THEIR OWN (AS OPPOSED TO PRISON ISSUE) CLOTHES WOULD HAVE PRE-EMPTED THE HUNGER STRIKE IS NO LONGER RELEVANT. ATTITUDES HAVE CERTAINLY HARDENED SINCE THEN, AND IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT THE PRISONERS WILL ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS THAN THEIR FULL DEMANDS. THEY WILL SEE IT AS A MAKE OR BREAK ISSUE. "SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS" WOULD MEAN VICTORY FOR THEIR CASUE: ANYTHING LESS THEY WOULD SEE AS A SERIOUS DEFEAT, A VIEW WHICH WOULD BE WIDELY SHARED WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT (AND HAS BEEN GIVEN FULL VOICE IN RECENT LOYALIST STATEMENTS).

4. THERE HAS BEEN SOME TALK, AT LEAST AMONG THE CAMPAIGN ORGANISERS, OF THE WOMEN IN ARMAGH JOINING THE HUNGER STRIKE. IN FACT THE LEADERSHIP HAVE NEVER SHOWN MUCH INTEREST IN WHAT THE WOMEN ARE UP TO BUT HAVE LEFT THEM TO THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, THEY MAY CONSIDER IT WORTH BRINGING IN THE WOMEN AT A LATER STAGE AND IT IS ALSO QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THE WOMEN WILL TAKE THE DECISION THEMSELVES PRECIPITATELY. THE DEATH OF PAULINE MCLOUGHLIN OR INDEED HER RELEASE, WOULD GIVE THE WOMEN A NEW EMPHASIS.

5. NOR CAN IT BE EXCLUDED THAT AT SOME STAGE ACTION WILL BE INITIATED IN MAINLAND GAOLS, A POSSIBILITY CONSIDERED IN THE PAST.

6. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE EXPLOITATION OF THE PRISON OFFICERS' INDUSTRIAL ACTION THOUGH NO CLEAR PLANS HAVE BEEN MADE OF HOW TO DO THIS.

SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

7. THE CAMPAIGN ORGANISERS (ALTHOUGH INEVITABLY BICKERING AMONGST THEMSELVES - THE RAC BEING UPSET AT THE PSF/SMASH H-BLOCKS COMMITTEE MUSCLING IN) FOUND A SENSE OF PURPOSE WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE HUNGER STRIKE AND WERE ENORMOUSLY HEARTENED BY THE SIZE AND BREADTH OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN

/BELFAST,

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BELFAST, ON THE EVE OF THE STRIKE. A HIGH PROPORTION OF THOSE TAKING PART WERE NOT COMMITTED REPUBLICANS OR WERE LAPSED SUPPORTERS OF THE CAUSE. BUT THEY ARE PROBABLY DISAPPOINTED THAT IN SUBSEQUENT DEMONSTRATIONS THE BULK OF THEIR SUPPORT HAS COME FROM PREDICTABLE SOURCES AND THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF A FEW DIE-HARDS. PUBLIC INTEREST IS LIMITED.

8. PRESENT PLANS FOR SUPPORT ACTIVITIES ARE FOR "MORE OF THE SAME" INCLUDING PICKETING OF SHOPS AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS, ROAD BLOCKS, TOKEN HUNGER STRIKES. THERE IS TALK OF SCHOOL WALK OUTS SEMI COLON AND CLOSING OF THE CLUBS AND PUBS (TO ENCOURAGE CLIENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN DEMONSTRATIONS).

9. ATTENTION IS ALSO BEING GIVEN TO THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION, THE MAIN SCHEMES AT PRESENT BEING FOR EX-BLANKET MEN TO PERFORM, PARTICULARLY IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. THEY ALSO PLAN A CAMPAIGN IN EUROPE (KIERAN NUGENT HAS APPEARED IN PARIS) BUT THIS WILL TAKE TIME TO HAVE AN IMPACT.

10. THE ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR, AT A CERTAIN LEVEL, ARE CONSIDERABLE AND REFLECT THE DEDICATION AND ENERGY OF THE ORGANISERS. BUT THEIR EFFORTS ARE STILL UNSOPHISTICATED. THEY HAVE NOT YET APPRECIATED THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING ARTICULATE SPOKESMEN FOR THE CAMERAS AND HAVE NOT YET GIVEN ANY REAL CONSIDERATION TO EFFECTIVE MEANS OF RECRUITING RESPECTABLE NEWCOMERS TO THEIR CAUSE. THIS IS SOMETHING THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN VERY GOOD AT, AND THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS WILL NOT HAVE ENCOURAGED THEM. HOWEVER, THEIR WORK MAY WELL BE DONE FOR THEM (AND INCREASINGLY AS TIME GOES ON), FOR EXAMPLE, BY CHURCH LEADERS OR POLITICIANS WHO MAY FEEL UNDER A COMPULSION TO ADOPT THEIR CAUSE.

11. THE ATTITUDE OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT IS, AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN, BASICALLY HELPFUL. THEY SHARE HMG'S CONCERN NOT TO DO ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT LOSE GROUND IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE TERRORISTS: AND WOULD SEE ANY SIGNIFICANT CONCESSION ON HMG'S PART AS UNDERMINING THEIR POSITION - HENCE THEIR CONCENTRATION ON HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS AND THEIR ANXIETY THAT HMG SHOULD

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HANDLE THE MATTER WELL (AND, FOR INSTANCE, GET BACK ON GOOD TERMS WITH THE CARDINAL).

12. THE CAMPAIGN ON THE STREETS OF THE PROVINCE, ON A LIMITED SCALE, COULD BE SUSTAINED INDEFINITELY - THE ENTHUSIASM IS THERE. BUT THE ORGANISERS MAY NOT FIND IT EASY TO LIFT IT TO ANOTHER PLANE (AT LEAST UNTIL DEATHS OCCUR) PROVIDED:

A) NOTHING HAPPENS TO PROVOKE A SERIOUS LAW AND ORDER PROBLEM - BUT IT WILL BE HARD FOR THE SECURITY FORCES TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN KEEPING TEMPERS DOWN, AND NOT PROVOKING LOYALIST ACCUSATIONS OF SOFTNESS TOWARDS THE PROVOS. THE ORGANISERS, HOWEVER, PRESENTLY TAKE THE VIEW THAT PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS WILL BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE.

B) THE LOYALIST POLITICIANS OR PARAMILITARIES DO NOT PROVOKE TROUBLE - UNFORTUNATELY THE POLITICIANS ARE PREPARED TO DO SO, AND ALTHOUGH THE UDA HAVE SHOWN SOME SYMPATHY WITH PROVISIONAL DEMANDS, THEY ARE FULLY COMMITTED, PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, TO A POLICY OF "ELIMINATING" ACTIVE PROVISIONALS INVOLVED IN THE H-BLOCK CAMPAIGN, AND ARE CLEARLY PREPARING THEMSELVES AGAINST A TIME WHEN (WHETHER OR NOT PROVOKED BY THEM) THERE IS A RESUMPTION OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE.

C) HMG KEEP (OR, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE CHURCH, SECURE) THE INITIATIVE IN THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE - THIS OUGHT TO BE POSSIBLE. THE KEY POINT IS THAT THOSE IN PRISON ARE THERE FOR ACTS OF MURDER AND VIOLENCE AND HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR TEN YEARS OF MISERY IN THE PROVINCE.

TERRORISM

13. INTELLIGENCE IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE HUNGER STRIKE DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION IN THE MINDS OF THE PIRA /LEADERSHIP

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LEADERSHIP AS HOW BEST TO USE TERRORISM IN SUPPORT OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS. THEIR DILEMMA IS OBVIOUS: CAN THEY CAJOLE AND BLUDGEON AT THE SAME TIME? MOST RECENT REPORTS SUGGEST THAT CAJOLERY IS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY THE ORDER OF THE DAY. THERE IS, FOR EXAMPLE, INTELLIGENCE THAT ATTACKS ON OFF-DUTY UDR, RUC AND PRISON OFFICERS ARE TO BE SUSPENDED; AND GERRY ADAMS IS REPORTED TO HAVE INSISTED ON A DISCLAIMER OF THE SHOOTING ON THE UDR WOMAN IN STRABANE ON 24 OCTOBER. HOW FIRM THIS POLICY IS, OR HOW RIGOROUSLY IT CAN BE HELD TO, REMAINS TO BE SEEN: AND IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT IT WOULD BE SUSTAINED INDEFINITELY IF ONLY BECAUSE IT IS IN SUCH CONFLICT WITH THE LEADERSHIP'S EARLIER DETERMINATION TO INTENSIFY THE CAMPAIGN THIS WINTER. AS A MEMBER OF THE RELATIVES ACTION COMMITTEE (CONCERNED ABOUT THE BAD PUBLICITY OF THE STRABANE MURDER) PUT IT, "HOW CAN WE GIVE UP THE WAR WHEN THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE IN GAOL FOR". WHAT DOES SEEM LIKELY IS THAT ADAMS IS GIVING THE MOST CAREFUL THOUGHT TO HOW AND WHEN BEST TO USE TERRORISM IN SUPPORT OF THE PRISONERS. A TURNING POINT COULD BE THE FIRST DEATH.

14. IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT EVEN IF TERRORISM IN THE PROVINCE IS KEPT AT A LOW PITCH, EFFORTS WILL BE MADE TO MOUNT ATTACKS ON THE MAINLAND AND AGAINST BRITISH TARGETS ABROAD. THERE HAS BEEN GOOD INTELLIGENCE IN THE PAST THAT THIS WOULD BE PIRA POLICY IN THE EVENT OF A HUNGER STRIKE. RECENT REPORTS SUGGEST THAT ASUS HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR THE MAINLAND (POSSIBLY ORIGINALLY AS PART OF THE 'WINTER CAMPAIGN') AND A RECENT IMPORTANT GARDA FIND OF EXPLOSIVES AND EXPLOSIVE DEVICES WAS ALSO CERTAINLY BOUND FOR EITHER THE MAINLAND OR THE CONTINENT. HOWEVER, PIRA'S CAPACITY FOR SUCH ACTIVITY IS CURRENTLY LIMITED.

15. IT IS ALSO LIKELY THAT INLA (WHO HAVE COOPERATED WITH PIRA/PSF OVER THE HUNGER STRIKE) WILL PURSUE AN INDEPENDENT POLICY ON VIOLENCE. AND THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF THEIR INTENTION TO MOUNT MAINLAND OPERATIONS.

/CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

16. THE HUNGER STRIKE COMES FROM PIRA'S WEAKNESS, NOT ITS STRENGTH. ALL THE SIGNS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR HAVE BEEN THAT THEY WERE A DECLINING FORCE, SUFFERING FROM SECURITY FORCE EFFECTIVENESS AND THEIR OWN INABILITY TO SUSTAIN THE TERRORIST CAMPAIGN AT A SIGNIFICANT LEVEL. OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN THWARTED, KEY FIGURES ARRESTED; THEY HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS TOWARDS ANY OF THEIR OBJECTIVES, SHORT OR LONG TERM; AND HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY ALIENATED FROM THE COMMUNITY. THE LEADERSHIP CLEARLY REGARDED IT AS ESSENTIAL THIS WINTER TO REESTABLISH THEIR CREDENTIALS BY STEPPING UP THE LEVEL OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY.

17. THE HUNGER STRIKE HAS INTERFERED SERIOUSLY WITH THEIR PLANS AND IS DEEPLY DISLIKED BY THE LEADERSHIP FOR IT CONFUSES THE ISSUE, GIVES SCOPE FOR DIVISION OF VIEWS AND DAMAGING DISAGREEMENT, AND IS OUTSIDE THEIR CONTROL.

18. IT IS, OF COURSE, POSSIBLE TO SEE THE SITUATION DEVELOPING TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WILL BE NO PREVIOUS GIVE ON EITHER SIDE, THE NEXT CATALYST WILL BE THE FIRST DEATH. THIS WILL CLEARLY BE HIGHLY EMOTIVE AND IS BOUND TO LEAD TO LARGE SCALE DEMONSTRATION WHICH, IF IT GOT OUT OF HAND, COULD IN TURN SPARK OFF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE. THE LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES EXPECT AND ARE READY FOR IT. THE PROVISIONALS WOULD HOPE TO SEIZE ON SUCH A DEVELOPMENT AS THE OPPORTUNITY TO REESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS DEFENDERS OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY. THERE IS INTELLIGENCE TO SUGGEST THAT IN BELFAST THEY MAY BE COMING TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT THE TIGHT ASU SYSTEM IS NO LONGER WORKING AND MAY BE IN THE PROCESS OF REVERTING TO THEIR EARLIER PATTERN OF BRIGADES AND BATTALIONS. ARMS FOR SUCH AN ORGANISATION (OR FOR A "DOOMSDAY" SITUATION) NEED NOT BE SOPHISTICATED AND SOME ARE PROBABLY ALREADY AVAILABLE.

19. SUCH A SWITCH OF APPROACH, EVEN THOUGH MADE AT AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT, WOULD BE AN ADMISSION OF FAILURE, AND IT IS FAR FROM CERTAIN THAT EVEN IN THE EVENT OF DEATH, THE SITUATION /WILL

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WILL DEVELOP IN THE WAY OUTLINED ABOVE, OR IF IT DID, THAT THE PROVISIONALS COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT. THEIR CAPACITY TO MOUNT A TERRORIST CAMPAIGN IS LIMITED AND THEY WOULD NOT EASILY REGAIN THE INITIATIVE. 1980 IS NOT 1969 OR 1972. THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE IS DEEPLY WEARY OF VIOLENCE AND UNCONVINCED THAT IT CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING: THE SECURITY FORCES ARE MUCH BETTER EQUIPED AND ABLE TO COPE WITH STREET OR SECTARIAN VIOLENCE THAN WAS THEN THE CASE. EVEN IF THINGS BEGAN TO GO WRONG, IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD BE BROUGHT BACK UNDER CONTROL. THERE IS CERTAINLY NO GROUND, ON THE BASIS OF THE BEST ASSESSMENT WE CAN MAKE, FOR CONSIDERING THAT ANY CONCESSION (APART POSSIBLY FROM GOING THE WHOLE WAY ON CLOTHES IN ORDER TO GET CARDINAL O'FLAICH AND BISHOP DALY BACK ON SIDE) WOULD IMPROVE THE SITUATION. IT IS UNLIKELY (EVEN THOUGH THE PROVISIONAL LEADERSHIP WANT OFF THE HOOK) THAT ANYTHING WHICH COULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE. AND TO CONCEDE THAT WOULD A) BE THE VERY BEST BOOST TO THEIR MORALE THE TERRORISTS NEED AND B) PROVOKE REACTIONS IN THE LOYALIST COMMUNITY ALMOST CERTAINLY FAR MORE SERIOUS THAN ANYTHING WHICH WOULD FLOW, ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE, FROM ALLOWING PRISONERS TO DIE.

20. ONE REASON THE PROVISIONAL LEADERSHIP DO NOT LIKE THE HUNGER STRIKE IS THAT THEY ARE DOUBTFUL THAT IT WILL ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVE. THEY APPEAR TO BELIEVE THAT HMG WILL NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS. ALTHOUGH THE PRESENT HUNGER STRIKERS ARE DEDICATED AND DETERMINED, THERE MUST BE A QUESTION OF HOW MANY OF THEIR FELLOW PRISONERS WOULD BE PREPARED TO EMBARK ON A HUNGER STRIKE ONCE THEY HAD HAD IT DEMONSTRATED THIS WOULD MEAN DEATH. THE CAMPAIGN COULD FIZZLE OUT, TO THE SHAME OF THE MOVEMENT. IT COULD TURN OUT ALSO, TO THE MOVEMENT'S SHAME, THAT NO EFFECTIVE WAY IS FOUND TO REINFORCE THE PRISONERS' EFFORTS. AT PRESENT THE EMPHASIS IS ON WINNING THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE. THE MOMENT IS LIKELY TO COME WHEN THE LEADERSHIP WILL DETERMINE THAT THE STRIKE BE SUPPORTED BY TERRORIST ACTIVITY. INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE WILL RUIN THEIR CAUSE. BUT, ALTHOUGH THEY CAN STILL CERTAINLY MOUNT VERY DAMAGING ONE-OFF ATTACKS, /A WELL

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A WELL-DIRECTED, SUSTAINED TERRORIST CAMPAIGN ON THE SCALE THEY NEED IS, ON OUR PRESENT ASSESSMENT, OUTSIDE THEIR CAPABILITY. THE FACT IS, THE OUTCOME OF THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THE PROVISIONAL LEADERSHIP'S ABILITY TO CONTROL AND MANIPULATE COULD WELL DETERMINE THEIR OWN SURVIVAL. THEY KNOW THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO FAIL.

/READERS

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