

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Note:

Ambassador Donlon rang on 6 May to enquire about the latest situation after the death of Hunger-Striker, Sands. In particular he was interested in an assessment of the disturbances in Dublin indicating that the various Bord Failte representatives in the U.S. were clearly concerned about the effects of reports of these disturbances in today's news.

The Ambassador mentioned that Senator Kennedy and Governor Carey had appeared jointly on television on 5 May and had spoken about the Northern Ireland situation in sensible terms. Kennedy was anxious to do whatever he could to show his concern about the present critical turn of events.

The Ambassador then asked my views about the possibility of bringing pressure on President Reagan to say something to Mrs. Thatcher. He mentioned this because the conduct of business in the Congress over the next 48 hours would put Speaker O'Neill in a very strong position to ask a favour of the President. I reacted by saying that it did not seem appropriate from here to try to get the President to question or criticise British Government policy on Northern Ireland prisons. Not a day passed that the London Government did not repeat with emphasis that they could not change that policy and unfortunately they were supported in this attitude by the British opposition. Moreover, the President would probably be reluctant directly to query an internal policy of an allied country. However it did seem possible to me that something might be suggested as appropriate material for a message to Mrs. Thatcher based on the unprecedented interest of the American Media in developments in Northern Ireland and the notable propaganda failure by the British Government in this context. In other words what might be possible would be for the President to say that he felt he had to get in touch with Mrs. Thatcher to comment on the very bad press which her Government was getting in the States, arising out of the Sands death and to wonder whether the British Government had given sufficient thought to this extremely negative publicity aspect when defining their policy. The President could possibly link his remarks with something along the lines used by him on St. Patrick's Day

namely that it is not good for the Western Alliance to have within it an area of instability and violence such as Northern Ireland. The effects of the present crisis were not likely to reduce instability, in-fact quite the contrary. He could also enquire how the recent deplorable developments would affect the dialogue between the British and Irish Governments inaugurated at the Bilateral Summit Meeting of 8 December. In general, the President might be willing to express the views that the pursuit of constructive policy could not be carried on in complete disregard of public opinion and that viewed from America public opinion was now disturbingly Anti-British in tone.

There is of course no certainty that the President could be induced even in the favourable circumstances described by Ambassador Donlon, to make any démarche to Mrs. Thatcher. Perhaps, however the above proposal could be examined.

I reminded the Ambassador that President Reagan had already made a statement of regret on Sand's death through the State Department. Donlon replied that this would have been a low level reaction relayed through the State Department but probably not even seen by President Reagan before being issued. In his view that reaction did not preclude the possibility of the action we had been considering.

*D.M. Neligan*  
D.M. Neligan

6 May 1981.