

Ref. A083/1050

PRIME MINISTER

Northern Ireland: The Provisionals and the General Election

--- I attach your copy of JIC(83)(N) 61, a note on the above subject which was approved by the JIC on 7 April 1983.

2. The note assesses the intentions and preparations of the Provisional IRA through their political wing, Sinn Fein, for the next British General Election.
3. Sinn Fein will contest as many of the 17 Northern Ireland seats as possible and their own expectation of winning one seat (Gerry Adams in West Belfast), and possibly a second (Owen Carron in Fermanagh and S. Tyrone), is realistic. There has been a drive to recruit new party members and workers; and priority has been given to the registration of new Nationalist voters. Sinn Fein, who will certainly exploit electoral malpractices to the full, are likely to receive sufficient votes to be able to claim electoral success, but are unlikely to overhaul the SDLP in terms of seats or total votes. The Sinn Fein (Republican) and SDLP (Nationalist) votes stem from largely distinct traditions in Northern Ireland.
4. If elected, Sinn Fein MPs would not take up their seats (like Owen Carron who is currently MP on an H Block/Armagh Committee label); but by achieving representation at Westminster the Provisionals would hope to gain a gloss of respectability for their activities in the eyes of the world, make difficulties for the British Government and increase instability in the Province by seeking to supplant the SDLP as the representative party of the minority.
5. Terrorism (initiated by either the Provisional IRA or INLA) can be expected to continue though, where such violence could conflict with their other interests, the Provisionals are likely to apply their own constraints in an attempt to balance terrorism with increasing political activity. They will still retain the capability to mount terrorist attacks in Great Britain and on the continent and such attacks cannot be ruled out.



6. I am copying this minute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12 April 1983

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Northern Ireland: The Provisionals
and the General Election

The Prime Minister has noted the contents
of your minute of 12 April 1983.

AJC

13 April 1983

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