

SECRET UK EYES A.



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister.

If you have time to read it
the assessment of the Provisionals,
and their likely impact on the
SDLP, is relevant to the
Friday meeting on Northern Ireland.

A.J.C. $\frac{9}{2}$.



MR COLES

I attach an advance copy of
the JIC assessment on "The Strategy
of the Provisionals" which will be
contained in tomorrow's WSI.

Copies have also gone to the
FCO, NIO, Sir R. Armstrong and
Mr. Goodall.

Bill Savage

T.W. SAVAGE

9/2/84.

THE STRATEGY OF THE PROVISIONALS

The Provisionals' Aims

1. The aim of the Provisional Republican movement, embracing both its political wing, Sinn Fein, and the Provisional IRA (PIRA), remains that of forcing the withdrawal of the British from Northern Ireland by means of a dual strategy involving both political action and terrorism, and thereafter bringing about a new "socialist republic" of all Ireland.

Developments since the General Election

2. Since June 1983*, the Provisional leadership's dual strategy of political activity and terrorism has remained generally on course. Political activity has continued. In late June 1983 Sinn Fein won a council seat in West Belfast in a by-election contest with the SDLP. In its first political intervention for some time in the Republic, Sinn Fein won a respectable 7 per cent of the vote in a parliamentary by-election in central Dublin in November 1983, more than was achieved by the Labour Party. Local community activity on social and economic issues in strongly nationalist areas has continued: Sinn Fein now runs 28 advice centres in Northern Ireland and has begun to open similar centres in the Republic.

3. The Provisionals' annual conference, the Ard Fheis, in November 1983 saw significant developments in consolidating the leadership position of Adams and his supporters who strongly advocate the dual political/terrorist strategy, and also in opening the way for greater political activity. In a departure from the spirit of previous Provisional policy, it was agreed that Sinn Fein candidates who were successful in the European elections

*JIC(83)(N) 110 dated 30 June 1983

could take their seats, thus making them more attractive to voters; and that a greater political effort should be made in the Republic. Meanwhile, Sinn Fein's efforts to cultivate elements of the Labour Party in Britain continued, as well as propaganda efforts in the United States. Sinn Fein will hope to turn the 1984 Presidential election campaign to its advantage.

4. Terrorism remains the major component of Provisional strategy. It has produced mixed results. In 1983 PIRA was hard put to maintain even the limited campaign to which it has been reduced in recent years. At one point during the late summer, repeated Security Force successes reduced PIRA to a low ebb and it was preoccupied with its own problems, especially its internal security and logistics. PIRA was unable to achieve its ambitious objective of escalating terrorism and employing more sophisticated weaponry, and its campaign was restricted to occasional flurries of violent activity. Even Adams was only able to characterise the "military" situation as one of "a stalemate between republican and British forces". The boost to morale provided by the escape from HMP Maze, and the retraction of damaging evidence by a major converted terrorist nevertheless helped PIRA to recover before the end of the year. PIRA remains capable of maintaining a level of violence, and of raising that level occasionally for comparatively short periods. The public perception in the United Kingdom of the level of terrorist violence is high.

5. The Provisional leadership has faced strains in reconciling the political and terrorist elements in its strategy. There have been signs of discontent among PIRA rank and file over lack of sufficient terrorist activity and over political constraints. At the same time PIRA activity has sometimes prejudiced Provisional political objectives. These problems emerged with particular starkness in

December 1983 with the civilian deaths, including one American, caused by the car bomb outside Harrods, and the killing by PIRA of two members of the Republic's Security Forces during the rescue by the latter of a kidnapped businessman, Mr Tidey. These events threatened the Provisionals' position in the Republic, set back Adams' careful efforts to cultivate more moderate political opinion in Britain, and harmed the Provisionals' image internationally, especially in the United States. In addition, Adams' subsequent efforts to repair the propaganda damage risked alienating rank and file PIRA, who were little concerned with political considerations. Adams has nevertheless succeeded in riding out this particular crisis, and there is at present no serious threat to the leadership and its current policies.

Prospects for the European Parliament Election

6. There is little sign that the Harrods bomb and the Tidey affair have done much to harm Sinn Fein's political prospects in the Province. PIRA's terrorist campaign can therefore be expected to continue in the period up to the European election, with possibly a very short lull immediately before polling day. The Security Forces, especially those locally recruited, will continue to bear the main brunt of PIRA's attacks. In further attempts to maintain an atmosphere of political and economic insecurity, there will also be continuing attacks on the judiciary and prominent figures in political and official life, and on commercial premises. Attacks on "military" and "official" targets on the mainland will not be excluded. The effectiveness of the Security Forces will nevertheless continue to limit the impact of PIRA's campaign.

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7. Sinn Fein has been preparing energetically both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland for the European elections, including setting up special party structures, very careful registration of entitled voters and raising money. However, these elections present the Provisionals with greater problems than did their earlier political forays. Although the leadership sees the European elections as less decisive than the May 1985 Northern Ireland local government elections, it is important from their point of view that the momentum of Sinn Fein's political advance should be seen to be maintained. Adams has said publicly that he believes that the Sinn Fein vote can be increased and the SDLP's position further eroded. Privately the Provisionals have talked about increasing their vote by as much as 25,000 to 50,000, by attracting some of the middle class Catholic vote, and of depriving the SDLP candidate, John Hume, of his seat.

8. This will not be easy to achieve. Now that expectations about Sinn Fein's performance have been raised, it will be harder for the Provisionals either to achieve the same political impact or to keep up the enthusiasm engendered for the 1982 Assembly and 1983 General elections. The European Parliament election in Northern Ireland will be for three members in a single Province-wide constituency on the basis of proportional representation. Two seats are certain to go to Unionist candidates. The contest for the third, presently Nationalist seat will be seen as a straight fight between John Hume and the Sinn Fein candidate, Danny Morrison. Hume is a strong candidate, who polled well both in the last European elections when he received 140,000 first preference votes, and against a strong Sinn Fein challenge in the Foyle constituency in the General Election. Morrison has less

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charisma than Adams, and indeed is not popular in sections of the Republican movement. The selection of Morrison rather than Adams as the Sinn Fein candidate in this election reflects some nervousness among the Provisionals about their prospects.

9. To some extent the outcome will be influenced by events nearer the elections; in particular the outcome of the Forum for a New Ireland, in which the SDLP and Hume personally have invested a great deal of prestige. At this stage, however, another view expressed by Adams, that Sinn Fein would be satisfied with holding on to its 100,000 first preference votes in the General Election, looks realistic. Even achievement of this goal will need extensive use of personation and the other abuses of the electoral system used at the General Election and there are already signs of preparations by Sinn Fein, such as false registration. The Provisionals will also be standing in the European elections in the Republic, but more with the hope of building up their political organisation than of polling a large vote. Their candidates are little known outside their own areas and finance is having to be provided locally. This could lead to criminal activities to raise the necessary sums.

10. There are widespread doubts within the Province about the longer term viability of the SDLP. On present evidence it appears unlikely that Sinn Fein will defeat Hume in the European Parliament election, but it may make sufficient inroads into the nationalist vote to reduce the impact of Hume's victory. It is just possible that a split Nationalist vote could let in a third Unionist, but this is very unlikely. Equally, there seems little prospect that Sinn Fein will perform so poorly as to constitute a serious setback to the current dual political/terrorist strategy.

The 1985 Northern Ireland Local Government Elections

11. In the period up to the 1985 local government elections, we expect to see an increase in the problems which the Provisional leadership has already been experiencing, but it can be expected to hold to its dual strategy, including a terrorist campaign at as high a level as PIRA can achieve. At the Ard Fheis in autumn 1984 the leadership is likely to carry forward its policy of even greater political activity. As well as further moves in a socialist direction, this will include pursuing the question of taking up seats in the Dail. This would be a major departure from traditional Provisional policy, and it was this question which contributed to the breakup of the IRA in the 1960s. If the issue is pressed, there is a strong possibility of creating a significant split in the movement. Even without this, the Provisionals' goal of developing their political movement in the Republic is likely to make slow progress at best. The Provisionals will also fear the possibility of measures being taken to restrict their activities in the Republic, especially if there are further incidents like the clash with the security forces following the Tidey kidnapping last December.

12. At the 1985 Northern Ireland local government elections Sinn Fein will hope finally to overtake the SDLP in terms of votes, and to secure wide representation on local government councils in the Province, giving it a considerable say in several traditionally Nationalist councils. It would then claim to opinion in Britain, the Republic and overseas that it was the representative of the minority community. In that event, we judge that the Provisional leadership would be likely to maintain its successful dual strategy and continue to work towards the withdrawal of the British from Northern Ireland. Terrorism could be expected to continue. Only a British

declaration of intent to withdraw would lead to a formal "ceasefire" by PIRA. The British government could expect to be faced with problems over whether to deal with elected representatives of Sinn Fein who would not be prepared to condemn the use of violence.

13. If Sinn Fein were to become the majority party amongst the minority community in the North, the Irish government would be faced with even greater problems. They would find it difficult to continue to present themselves internationally as spokesmen of the minority community in the North. They would also be acutely worried about the immediate implications for Northern Ireland and, in the longer term, for Ireland as a whole. In particular, they would be afraid that HM Government might feel obliged to enter into a dialogue with Sinn Fein, thereby giving a further boost to its morale and credibility. The Irish Government would also be concerned about the possible implications of any attempt by Sinn Fein to extend its political campaign to the Republic where it might have the effect of radicalising public opinion. It is difficult to predict how Fianna Fail, the main opposition party led by Mr Haughey, would behave in these circumstances. An effective political campaign by Sinn Fein would probably represent a greater threat to Fianna Fail than to the coalition parties, since Fianna Fail at present enjoys an almost total monopoly of the hardline nationalist vote. Sinn Fein, which has already declared* that its long term aim is to replace the Irish government with a new "Socialist Republic", might feel sufficiently emboldened to step up its activity in the republic, perhaps with a view to intimidating the government.

* JIC(83)(N) 177 dated 28 October 1983

14. It is not clear that Sinn Fein will succeed in displacing the SDLP as the leading party of the minority in Northern Ireland in 1985. Security Force activity, changes in the electoral law and the verdict of the polls may set back its ambitions; there will be continuing difficulty in reconciling the political and terrorist strains in policy; and the SDLP and the Irish government, will be hoping for much from the Forum, though it is hard to see how this can help the SDLP if its principal call is seen to be for unrealistic action by the United Kingdom government. It is hard, therefore, to predict what strategy Sinn Fein might follow if it were to overtake the SDLP in popular votes this year, or in 1985. But consistent with its long term aims, Sinn Fein would be unlikely in that event to renounce, or even lower the level of terrorism. Indeed, it might increase it, in the hope of provoking a backlash amongst the Unionists and hence increasing the pressures both on the United Kingdom and on the Irish government.