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SECRETARY OF STATE ISSUES CHALLENGE AFTER BOMB ATTACK

The Secretary of State, the Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP, today challenged Sinn Fein and leading Republicans to explain what they hoped to achieve by the rocket attack on police in the centre of Belfast today.

He said: "Once again the IRA has exploded a lethal weapon in a busy part of the City never mind who may get killed or maimed. All decent people condemn this sort of outrage of course. But now let those responsible explain themselves.

"Let the leaders of the Republican movement explain publicly why in the first week of the New Year they have done this.

"What do they say was the reasoning behind this act?

"What do they say it was meant to achieve?

"How is this going to get them into meaningful negotiations, as they say they want?

"These questions, and many more, must be asked of them, day after day. Answers must be demanded.

"Meanwhile, let me make it once again clear that the blackmailing power of violence is not going to work.

"The familiar terrorist combination of hard deeds and honeyed words wont wash. In the language of Ulster 'these people should catch themselves on'.

"There will be no free passes into the talks process, which they say they want to join. Exclusive commitment to peaceful methods and to democracy is demanded of all parties. Each gangster crime of this kind only serves to reinforce their self-imposed exclusion."