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SofS: Well, I never speculated about a date upon which Sinn Fein might qualify themselves to be invited to join the talks. I never speculated upon that before these latest atrocities and I do not speculate upon it now after this latest series of atrocities. What I will say is that these latest series of atrocities must affect the timescale of the process by which people will need to consider any declared ceasefire. Every succeeding atrocity makes the IRA's credibility gap harder for them to bridge - and of course they have to bridge it - because these talks are talks for people who commit themselves to democracy and to peaceful means.

Interviewer: Secretary of State if people vote for these people, isn't there an onus on people like you to recognise the mandate of those people regardless of what their political allegiances might be?

SofS: Political allegiance are of no concern in a democracy. But what is of concern is commitment to democracy. I've already said that you cannot expect people to sit down in a democracy, who are committed to the disciplines of democracy, when across the table there are people who are not, and who threaten to supplement their democratic vote with Semtex and bullets and mortars. You will not find people prepared to sit down and talk in those circumstances: they will leave and if you insist that they should be put to that test then you will destroy the very process upon which every hope of progress here in Northern Ireland depends.

Interviewer: Are you saying in effect that events of last week in Britain make it more difficult for Sinn Fein to be admitted to talks?

SofS: Yes I am exactly saying that.

Interviewer: I think that most people will accept the thrust of your argument, most conventional constitutionalists, in terms of if there is violence then people won't be at the conference table. But is it morally tenable to argue that just because somebody else will walk away from the talks against the backdrop of a ceasefire and a commitment to Mitchell that there shouldn't be talks?

SofS: Nobody is arguing that. There should be talks. The process

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of talking is the only means by which progress towards a comprehensive settlement can be made in Northern Ireland. We are talking about not whether there should be talks but who should be at them and it is neither morally tenable nor practicably tenable to argue that people who resort to violence should be admitted to those talks notwithstanding that the result will be that other people will walk out and leave.

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