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Monday, March 9, 2009

Brown vows murderers will not be allowed to derail peace process



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FRANK MILLAR, London Editor

BRITISH REACTION: BRITISH PRIME Minister Gordon Brown has condemned the Massereene murders as evil and vowed the perpetrators and their allies would not be allowed to derail the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Secretary of State Shaun Woodward echoed Mr Brown's attack on those who gunned down two soldiers and left four others injured at the army barracks on Saturday night – saying “the contrast between those who serve the community and those who would destroy it could not be clearer”, while promising that the authorities would “track down” those responsible and “bring them to justice”.

Mr Woodward played-down the earlier Sinn Féin and SDLP criticism of the deployment of special reconnaissance personnel to assist the PSNI in countering the dissident republican threat, while sensing “a real opportunity for the community in Northern Ireland” to help identify those responsible for the attack.

Despite having raised the official threat assessment level, Mr Woodward admitted the authorities had not anticipated the attack on the barracks. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's The World this Weekend programme, Mr Woodward also suggested the dissidents might be driven by fear that the British Government would complete the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Stormont Assembly, although commentators may have found more plausible Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams's suggestion that their real motive could be to force the return of British troops on to the streets.

Mr Brown said the whole country was "shocked and outraged at the evil and cowardly attacks on British soldiers who were serving their country" and said his first thoughts and condolences were with the families of those who had been killed and injured.

"We will do everything in our power to make sure that Northern Ireland is safe and secure and I assure you we will bring these murderers to justice," the prime minister said.

He added: "No murderer will be able to derail a peace process that has the support of the great majority of the people in Northern Ireland."

In the absence of party leader David Cameron who is on compassionate leave, William Hague for the Conservatives said: "Our first thoughts have to be with the families of those soldiers who were killed. There's been so much progress in Northern Ireland in recent years and it is shocking that some people want to slide backwards.

"They have no popular support in Northern Ireland and there is nothing they can achieve by violence and murder. It is sad evidence however, that we must work even harder to reinforce the peace process," he said.

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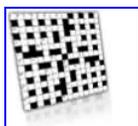
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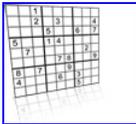
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