

# US welcomes Cyprus military flight moratorium

By Bruce Clark  
in Washington

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US and Nato officials have warmly welcomed an apparent easing in the level of tension between the armed forces of Greece and Turkey, highlighted by an agreement to avoid military flights over Cyprus.

Mr Nicholas Burns, the State Department spokesman, hailed as a "significant step forward" a US-brokered

understanding that Turkey would refrain from military flights over Cyprus so long as the Cypriot government held back from inviting Greek aircraft to fly over the island.

The agreement reflects the emergence of a "much more positive atmosphere" in Greek-Turkish relations over the last few weeks, said one US official.

Since last year, when Washington narrowly suc-

ceeded in avoiding a Greek-Turkish clash over an islet in the Aegean, the US and Nato headquarters have been urging both governments to take steps to reduce the risk of accidental war.

Only recently has there been any sign of this effort bearing fruit, according to western diplomats. A "hot line" linking the defence chiefs of both countries, passing through Nato head-

quarters, has been functioning for about a month, and Mr Javier Solana, the Nato secretary-general, has started hosting twice-monthly meetings between the Greek and Turkish ambassadors.

These meetings will explore the possibility of the two countries placing observers on each other's ships and exchanging more flight information. Nato officials are confident that

Athens and Ankara will again refrain from naval exercises in the Aegean during July and August, the height of the tourist season. The US and other Nato governments would like to see a longer-term moratorium.

Despite the recent signs of progress, Athens and Ankara remain at odds over Nato's future command structure - which could spoil the atmosphere at the Madrid summit in July when

the alliance hopes to announce internal reforms and eastwards expansion.

Greece is resisting a Turkish proposal that the number of alliance commands in the region be reduced to three as this would leave no room for a significant Nato facility under Greek control.

While no formal linkage has been announced, one source of US leverage over the region lies in the fact that both Athens and Ankara have announced extensive arms procurement programmes that depend on US co-operation.