

# Turkey threatens Cyprus attack

By John Barham in Ankara,  
Andreas Hadjipapas  
in Nicosia and  
Bruce Clark in London

Turkey yesterday issued its strongest warning so far that it might attack Cyprus to prevent the deployment of air defence missiles which the Greek-Cypriot government has ordered from Russia.

The government-owned Anatolia news agency said: "Ankara is seriously considering an operation against the missile launchers when the time comes if Turkey's warnings to the Greek-Cypriot administration are not heeded."

Earlier, Mr Turhan Tayan, Turkish defence minister,

said Ankara would use "all our abilities, step by step and as necessary, to prevent [delivery]" of the S-300 ground-to-air missile system".

A re-enactment of Washington's embargo on Cuba following deployment of Soviet missiles there in 1962 was "one of the possibilities" under consideration, he added.

Mr Tayan said Turkey might also repeat its 1974 invasion of Cyprus: "We will do the same again. If needed, we will strike. We are warning everyone. Nobody has the right to turn the island into a tinderbox".

But Mr Yiannakis Cassoulides, Greek Cypriot government spokesman, played

down Ankara's warnings: "These threats... are nothing new," he said, accusing Ankara of launching a "war of nerves" against his government. He insisted there was no real reason for concern or tension.

However, Mr Tayan's comments are the strongest by a Turkish official since the Greek Cypriot government announced last weekend that it would buy the S-300 system from Russia.

On Monday the Turkish foreign ministry warned that Turkey "will not tolerate any developments which can change the balance between Turkey and Greece in the eastern Mediterranean. For these purposes we will take the necessary actions".

Mr John Buck, British chargé d'affaires in Cyprus, met Mr Alecos Michaelides, Cypriot foreign minister, to express London's concern over the forthcoming arms purchase from Russia.

A UK official said it "flew in the face" of undertakings given to Mr Malcolm Rifkind, UK foreign secretary, in Cyprus last month.

Both Turkish and Greek-Cypriot officials insisted they were still committed to seeking a settlement in Cyprus.

Mr Sermet Atançali, Turkey's foreign ministry spokesman, said delivery of the missiles might take some time, giving mediators room to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.