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Greece, UK probe murder of diplomat

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A British diplomat in Greece was shot dead by a gunman on a motorcycle yesterday in what appeared to be a political assassination carried out by November 17, a Greek, leftwing terrorist group.

Brig Stephen Saunders, 53, military attaché at the Athens embassy, died in hospital from wounds received in the attack. Police said two men on a motorcycle came alongside his car just before 8am on Kifissias Avenue, a suburban highway.

The UK has sent a team of Scotland Yard investigators to Athens to help in the enquiry. The Foreign Office said the team, which has been sent at the request of the Greek authorities, would also be reviewing security arrangements of British embassy staff in the Greek capital.

Costas Simitis, Greek prime minister, condemned the shooting as "abhorrent and barbarous". He said the government would "not allow anyone to blacken the image of a modern, peaceful Greece".

The shooting coincided

with a visit to Athens by Baroness Liz Symons, UK defence under-secretary, for talks on defence procurement. Vickers, the UK defence manufacturer, is among the bidders for a Dr550bn (\$1.5bn) contract to supply up to 250 new battle tanks for the Greek army.

The shooting, which followed unsuccessful attempts against the lives of the German and Dutch ambassadors last year, suggested the focus of ultra-nationalist resentment may be shifting from the US to the European Union, as the latter wields an ever-grow-

ing influence in the country.

The US has often complained about Greece's failure to arrest or convict any of the group that has carried out repeated attacks against US targets. Five US embassy employees have been assassinated in Athens since 1975, and 24 US businesses have been bombed in the city in the last 2½ years, the State Department said.

A US congressional commission on terrorism said in a report this week that Greece was not doing enough to combat terrorism.

Wayne Merry, a former US diplomat in Athens and a

senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in Washington, has been critical of successive US administrations for failing to take effective steps to counteract the group's apparent immunity from prosecution.

He expressed surprise that Greece was admitted earlier this year to the Schengen group, which allows passport-free travel within the EU, without an effective programme against terrorism. "The question now is whether the EU and its members are going to be any more effective than the US has been," he said.