

War on terrorism now a priority

November 17 claims responsibility for British military attache's murder, PM seeks consensus for new measures

The November 17 urban guerrilla group yesterday claimed responsibility for the murder on Thursday of British military attache Stephen Saunders, claiming that he had played a part in planning NATO's war on Yugoslavia last year. But there was no trace of the killers who have been acting with impunity since the gang first appeared, murdering the CIA station chief in Athens in December 1975. Saunders, a 53-year-old father of two young daughters, was November 17's 22nd victim. Members of Scotland Yard arrived in Greece to help investigate the killing.

At the same time, all indications are that the Greek government has decided to make the war on terrorism a top priority.

Prime Minister Costas Simitis chaired a meeting of his Cabinet, where the main focus of discussion was the problem of terrorism. Sources said that the meeting discussed security in the country which, in light of the forthcoming Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, takes top priority. Simitis and his ministers concluded that from now on results have to be achieved. They noted that the hitherto ignored issue of security must become a central axis of government policy. There is a very real danger of pressure being exerted on Greece, even with regard to hosting the Olympic Games, and this does not allow for any slacking.

Simitis is expected to undertake initiatives that will achieve consen-

sus with other political parties with regard both to the measures themselves and their means of implementation. "We have to create a united front against terrorism," one source in the prime minister's office said. The first contacts between Simitis and opposition party leaders are expected on Friday, when he meets with them to discuss Greece's entry into the EU's Economic and Monetary Union next year.

Among the government's plans for a more systematic battle against terrorism is the rapid introduction of some legal changes, such as allowing terrorist crimes to be judged initially by a three-member appeals court and then, in the second instance, by a five-member court of appeals, in order to rule out the use

of jurors, who are believed to be more vulnerable to fears of retribution. After this, depending on the amount of consensus reached with other parties, there will be measures aimed at making the work of the anti-terrorism squad easier, while the Public Order Ministry will move swiftly to reorganize the police force.

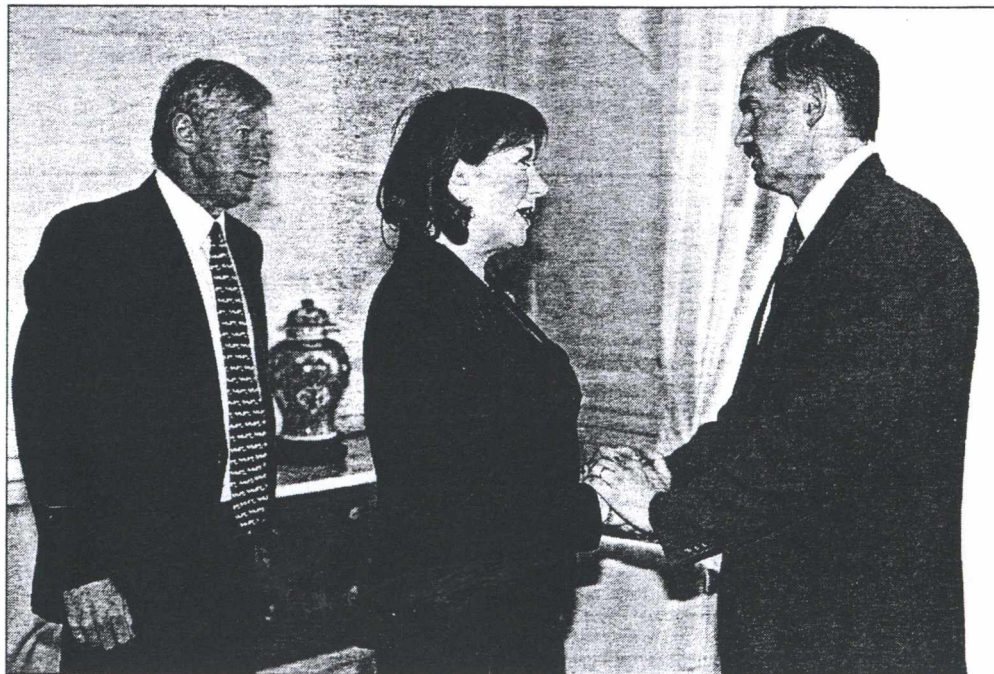
In all respects, the government appears to be feeling great pressure after the latest terrorist attack and wants to move decisively.

In a 13-page letter sent to the daily Eleftherotypia yesterday, the November 17 group said that Saunders had been targeted for his (purported) participation in last year's war on Yugoslavia by NATO. British sources, however, said that the mili-

tary attache had played no special role in the campaign.

In its statement, November 17 also claimed a series of attacks on western and Greek targets over the last two years, including rocket attacks on three foreign bank branches and the residence of the German ambassador to Athens. The group also denied reports that one of its operatives had been hurt in the attack on the German ambassador's residence.

In a moving statement to the news media, Saunders's widow, Heather, appealed for anyone having any information to help bring the killers to justice. "I stand before you half the person I was yesterday morning," she began, flanked by her two young daughters. (Pages 2, 3)



Foreign Minister George Papan-dreou met with Britain's minister for procurements, Baroness Symons, and Ambassador David Madden yesterday, and condemned the murder of the British attache. Prime Minister Costas Simitis also expressed the same sentiments in a meeting with Symons.

EU chief condemns 'attack on democracy'

European Commission President Romano Prodi yesterday condemned the fatal shooting of Britain's military attache in Greece, calling it "an attack against democracy."

In a statement, Prodi said: "I would like to express my utter abhorrence at the murder of Brigadier Stephen Saunders in Athens... An attack against a diplomat in such circumstances is an attack against democracy, the founding principle of the European Union," he said.

"The European Commission expresses its deepest sympathy for the family of Brigadier Saunders, and its full solidarity with the Greek government," he added.

Meanwhile, a Greek public prosecutor yesterday ordered a prosecutor who is charged with investigating terrorism to ask U.S. authorities for assistance in getting former CIA director James Woolsey to explain remarks he made in an interview with a Greek newspaper on Thursday that some Greek government ministers knew members of November 17. This was the latest in a series of comments and reports from the United States claiming that Greece was lax in combating terrorism.

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Yannis Kolenidis/The Associated Press

Heather Saunders, widow of the attaché, denouncing his killers Friday.

Greece Vows Fight Against Terrorism

Guerrilla Group Links Slaying Of Briton to Kosovo Campaign

By Alessandra Stanley
New York Times Service

ATHENS — As the Greek government pledged to introduce new antiterrorism measures after the assassination of Brigadier Stephen Saunders, the British military attaché's widow delivered her own emotional appeal to the Greek nation on Friday.

"I stand before you half the person I was yesterday," Heather Saunders said outside her house in Athens, her two teenage daughters standing at her side.

"The Greek people, I know, are not responsible for what happened yesterday, but for the sake and future of Greece within a European Community, I feel that these wicked men must be brought to justice."

Friday morning, in a letter delivered to a Greek newspaper, the leftist terrorist group November 17 took responsibility for the killing on Thursday, saying the

53-year-old British attaché had been singled out because of Britain's "barbaric" bombing campaign in Yugoslavia last year.

The assassination was the 23rd killing in 25 years linked to November 17, a guerrilla organization that first emerged in 1975 after the killing of Richard Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens.

The United States and Britain renewed pressure on Greek officials to take serious antiterrorist steps, noting that no members of November 17 had ever been arrested or identified.

The U.S. government has long accused Athens of lacking the political will to root out the terrorist organization. Four days before the attack, a special bipartisan commission set up by Congress recommended sanctions against Greece for "failing to fully cooperate" with Western antiterrorist activity.

On Friday, the Greek government spokesman, Dimitris Reppas, said Prime Minister Costas Simitis had held a cabinet meeting to discuss new counterterrorism efforts.

"The prime minister is determined to undertake all the necessary and additional measures that are required to combat and eradicate terrorism," Mr. Reppas said. "Efforts in the future will be more intense."

Mr. Reppas said Mr. Simitis had "also stressed the importance of taking all the necessary measures to ensure a framework of total safety for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games." Greece has presented some security plans to the International Olympic Committee but has not yet formed a full security strategy for the Athens Games.

Mr. Reppas said that the Greek government did not foresee fundamental changes to the legal system but added that it was considering some extraordinary measures, citing the possibility of using a one-judge trial in terrorist cases instead of a jury, a step used by Italy in the 1970s to try Red Brigades terrorists.

Italy and other countries also resorted to other extraordinary measures such as secret hearings, anonymous prosecutors and witness protection programs to reduce fears of jury intimidation and terrorist reprisals against judges and magistrates. It was not clear on Friday whether the Greek government planned to consider further measures, but some Western diplomats took heart.

"That is exactly the right path for Greece to take," a Western official said. "These are measures that Greece's

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Help catch these killers'

Brigadier Saunders's widow calls on public to help spare others from such pain

The widow of Britain's military attache murdered in Athens made a tearful appeal yesterday to the people of Greece to help catch her husband's killers.

"I only hope the people that carried out this cowardly act on an unarmed man, simply traveling on his way to work, will realize the total devastation they have caused," said Heather Saunders, whose husband Stephen, a British Army brigadier, was gunned down on Thursday.

"Not only have they killed my husband, they have destroyed me and my family," she told reporters in Athens, flanked by daughters Nicola, 15, and Catherine, 14, in an appeal broadcast on Greek and British television.

"We must make sure this never happens again. I appeal to the Greek people and to anyone who knows anything, because someone must know something about this terrible murder. Anyone who saw anything, anyone who knows anything, please tell the police so that no one else has to go through what we are going through today," she said.

"The Greek people are not responsible for what happened yesterday, but for the sake of the future of Greece these wicked men



A plea for help:

'Anyone who saw anything, anyone who knows anything, please tell the police so that no one else has to go through what we are going through,' said Heather Saunders, whose husband, Brigadier Saunders, was killed Thursday by the November 17 guerrilla group.

must be brought to justice."

The urban guerrilla group November 17 claimed responsibility yesterday for the assassination, saying it was for Saunders's purported role in the Kosovo conflict.

Saunders, 53, was shot by two men on a motorcycle as he drove to work at the British Embassy in Athens early Thursday. He died shortly afterwards in hospital.

In her appeal, Saunders de-

scribed her husband as "a wonderful, loving man. He was a man committed to peace and throughout his 35 years in the army, he never raised his gun to kill anyone. In fact in the past, I know he hesitated once, when someone opened fire on him in Northern Ireland, in case he hit an innocent bystander."

"Stephen was a forgiving man. As yet I cannot forgive the perpe-

trators of this horrible crime," she added.

Security has been stepped up around other British Embassy staff in Athens and visiting Junior Defense Minister Elizabeth Symons, who had dined with Saunders on the evening before he died, the Foreign Office said.

British officials and police officers are traveling to Greece to help with the inquiry. (AFP)

SLAYING: Greek Terrorists Link Murder to Kosovo Campaign

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European allies took to defend themselves against their indigenous terrorist movements in the 1970s and 1980s."

A Greek official told Reuters that the authorities had begun an intensive search for the killers.

Security was visibly tighter in downtown Athens on Friday, and nerves were on edge. When an explosion was reported near the city of Rhodes, some Greek news organizations immediately speculated that it was another terrorist attack. Turkish officials said later that the noise had come from submarine torpedo practice during a naval exercise in the Aegean.

The international scrutiny of Greece's antiterrorism record also hit a raw nerve. Some newspapers on Friday blamed the

United States and other nations in Europe for darkening Greece's image.

As an editorial in *Kathimerini*, a mainstream Athens daily, put it, "Those who exaggerate in their reactions, accusations and condemnations against our country — whether they come from Greece or abroad — only serve to highlight the admittedly obscure aims of November 17."

But there were also signs that the killing of Brigadier Saunders had profoundly shocked the nation.

Even in *To Vima*, a newspaper that traditionally supports the Socialist party of Mr. Simitis, editorials spoke of a national disgrace. For the first time the newspaper acknowledged Washington's concerns about counter-terrorism in Greece.

"We are incompetent to provide protection to the families we host in our country," *To Vima's* senior editorialist, Ioannis Pretenderis, wrote. "Twenty-five years now this same group of terrorists are moving around freely, killing anyone they desire, and then sending their proclamations to the press. This is the sign of a bankrupt society."

But some in Greece worried that the such sentiments might not last.

"Obviously, I really, really hope that this time will be different, that something will happen," Nikos Peratikis said Friday. His brother Costas, a wealthy Athens shipowner who was a British citizen, was killed in 1997 by the November 17 group. "But people have been saying that after every murder for the past 25 years."

■ Greece Is Seen as Weak Link

James Risen of The New York Times reported earlier from Washington:

The failure of Greek authorities to solve terrorism cases over 25 years has turned the November 17 group into one of the most mysterious and most successful terrorist units in the world. American and Greek officials do not even know the names of the group's leaders.

Greece is "one of the weakest links in Europe," the State Department's latest annual report on terrorism said.

The lack of progress by investigators has led to a perception among U.S. officials, and even in Greece, that Greek officials have turned a blind eye to November 17's activities.

"I believe that there are people throughout the U.S. counterterrorism community who are convinced that there are some Greek officials who over the last quarter century have had important information on 17 November and have not acted on it or shared it with us," said a former senior U.S. government official.

But a former U.S. intelligence official who served in Greece and investigated November 17 said the idea of a link between the group and the Greek government was a myth.

"The real story is just that the Greek police are inept," he said. "They are just incredibly sloppy."