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Greece Ties Terror Group To Slaying of U.K. Attaché

Compiled by Our Staff From Dispatches

ATHENS — Two assassins shot and killed Britain's top military diplomat in Athens on Thursday in a drive-by shooting that the police linked to the November 17 guerrilla group.

Two men in helmets riding a motorcycle fired four shots at the military attaché, Brigadier Stephen Saunders, as he drove to work in the morning rush hour, hitting his abdomen and hands. Doctors said that he had suffered severe bleeding and that his vital organs had failed.

The killing of the 52-year-old father of two teenage girls touched off outrage

in Greece and abroad and brought calls for Greece to hunt down the killers.

"This highlights again that Greece needs to take a tougher stance against terrorism," Ken Bacon, the U.S. Defense Department spokesman, said. Washington has long complained that Greece has not been active enough in tracking down terrorists, particularly November 17, whose members have eluded arrest for more than 25 years.

Prime Minister Costas Simitis telephoned his British counterpart, Tony Blair, and expressed his horror at the assassination. "The Greek government will do its duty and defend with all means citizens' safety," he said in a statement.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, but the police said ballistic tests had shown that the spent shells from a .45-caliber automatic pistol found on the scene came from a weapon used by November 17 in previous attacks.

The group has killed three Greeks and an American with the same gun since 1980, and it wounded a Greek member of Parliament, police sources said.

Brigadier Saunders would be its 23d victim overall. The group, named after a student uprising in 1973 against the

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Eurokinissi/The Associated Press

Brigadier Stephen Saunders, the murdered British defense attaché.

SLAYING: *British Official Shot*

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junta then ruling Greece, came to world-wide attention with the murder of the CIA station chief in Athens, Richard Welch, in 1975.

It has since killed Greeks, Americans and Turks. In May 1999, November 17 fired a rocket at the residence of the German ambassador in Athens but no one was wounded.

The two assailants stopped their motorcycle in the middle of the busy Kifisias Avenue in the northern suburb of Halandri and fired several times at Brigadier Saunders through the passenger-side window of his white Rover car.

The car had normal Greek license plates and no diplomatic insignia, a safety precaution taken by most Western embassies in Athens, police said.

The police launched a manhunt, setting up roadblocks all over the capital and sending out scores of plainclothes officers to search for the attackers.

With the Athens Olympic Games four years away, Greek security precautions are to come under intense scrutiny. The U.S. State Department last month accused Greek authorities of being "lax" in an annual report, and the U.S. Congress's terrorism commission has just proposed putting Greece on its list of noncooperating countries. (Reuters, AFP)

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British military attache assassinated

Trademark weapon of November 17 used in murder that casts pall over Greece's 'modern, peaceful' image

With uncanny timing, four days after a U.S. congressional committee recommended sanctions on Greece for its "passive" attitude to terrorism, suspected November 17 members assassinated the British military attache in Athens yesterday, deeply embarrassing a government bent on projecting a spotless international image.

Brigadier Stephen Saunders, 53, died of internal injuries in the Red Cross hospital three and a half hours after being shot in the chest and stomach through the closed window of his car by a helmet-wearing assassin riding pillion on a motorbike. The driver's features were also obscured by a helmet.

The attack took place on Kifissias Avenue at 7:40 a.m., while Saunders's Greek license plate-bearing car was stuck in a traffic jam.

Public Order Ministry officials said

ballistic evidence from the four rounds fired by a .45 automatic pointed to Greece's deadliest leftist terrorist group, November 17, which had already killed 21 people since it appeared in 1975.

Prime Minister Costas Simitis denounced Saunders's killing as an abhorrent and barbarous act. "It comes at a time when Greece has been progressing well in all sectors, when the country's stature had risen around the world," he said. "We will not permit anyone to disturb the calm and progress being achieved, or to blacken the image of a modern, peaceful and democratic Greece." In a message to British PM Tony Blair — who denounced the "contemptible and senseless act of terrorism" — Simitis promised to spare no effort in bringing the assassins to justice.

Foreign Minister George Papandreou, who hastened to the hospital

after hearing news of the incident, condemned the attack and expressed the government's deepest sympathy to Saunders's family and the British government. "We will be most merciless in our fight against terrorism," he affirmed.

Culture Minister Theodoros Pangalos drew attention to the fact that the attack followed closely on the heels of Monday's report by a U.S. congressional committee, which advised the American administration to designate Greece as a country "not fully cooperating" with the U.S. on counter-terrorism.

"It is a great coincidence, which I think we all thought of," he said. "I do not want to proceed further, I do not like conspiracy theories."

Pangalos, one of the key figures in Athens's preparations for the 2004 Olympics, expressed the hope that, over the next four years, Greece "will

have achieved something in the struggle against terrorism."

Greece's opposition parties joined in condemning the assassination of Saunders, who had been stationed in Athens for a year and left a widow and two children.

British Foreign Minister Robin Cook, speaking in Sierra Leone, said he was "appalled and deeply saddened at the news."

And visiting British Minister of State at the Ministry of Defense, Baroness Symons, expressed her shock and horror to journalists in Athens. She said: "I am sure we can rely on those in authority in Greece to do their utmost to bring whoever is responsible for this appalling outrage to justice."

The Foreign Office yesterday advised British visitors in Greece to exercise reasonable caution in their moves. Predictably, the killing drew

barbed comments from Washington, which for years has been leaning on Athens to adopt a draconian anti-terrorist drive through police and judicial measures that would clash sharply with Greece's post-dictatorship tradition of democratic liberties. "This highlights again that Greece needs to take a tougher stance against terrorism, and we have made that point repeatedly with the government of Greece," Defense Department spokesman Ken Bacon said.

With tragically apposite timing, yesterday's issue of Greece's *Pondiki* weekly carried an interview on terrorism with former CIA director James Woolsey, who claimed that government officials know the identity of some November 17 members.

Government spokesman Dimitris Reppas invited Woolsey to share his evidence with Greek courts. (Page 2)

Killing could bring change to law

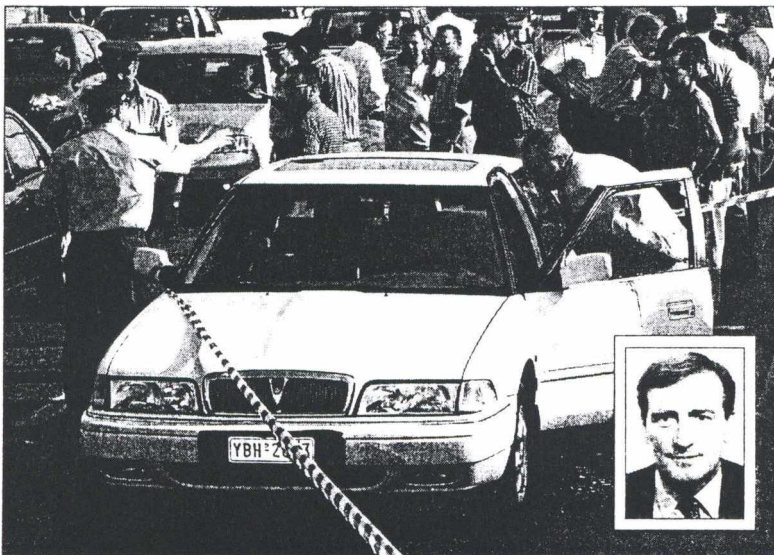
The murder of the British military attache has revived the debate over changes to the counterterrorism law. According to informed sources, the government is considering changing the composition of courts responsible for trying terrorism cases so that only judges and no jurors are involved, as is the case now.

This is because jurors are considered to be at risk and cannot be expected to make decisions based purely on their own conclusions regarding the case.

Special measures are also being discussed, to be implemented under certain circumstances, in order to facilitate investigations by the counterterrorism service, such as searches of suspects' homes without the presence of a public prosecutor, and following suspects' movements using what are now considered unorthodox means.

It also appears certain that a bilateral police cooperation agreement with the U.S. will be signed within the month of July as part of the fight against terrorism.

Conservative former PM Constantine Mitsotakis called on the government to sign such a deal with the United States and to change legislation on terrorism, saying its indecisiveness was "harmful to the country's image."



Two people on a motorcycle gunned down Brig. Stephen Saunders (inset) in his car as he was stuck in traffic on Athens's Kifissias Avenue. By late last night there was no claim of responsibility but ballistics tests found that the .45 handgun used was a trademark weapon of November 17. The leftist urban guerrilla group has killed another 21 people since its emergence in 1975, without any of its members being arrested. Saunders's vehicle was not armored. November 17 is named after the day in 1973 when the military junta crushed a student uprising.

4 shots on Kifissias Avenue

November 17 strikes at the same spot with the same gun for a third time

By DORA ANTONIOU
KATHIMERINI

The four shots went unheard amid the roar of traffic on Kifissias Avenue. Car drivers halted in a traffic jam in Halandri barely realized what was happening when the driver of a white Rover opened his car door and fell to the road, covered in blood. At that moment a motorcycle fled the scene at high speed, weaving through the stationary cars. It was 7:40 a.m.

November 17 had once again confirmed its reputation as a mystery organization, by murdering the military attache to the British Embassy in Athens, Brigadier Stephen Saunders.

The 53-year-old diplomat, who never traveled with a security escort, had left his house in Nea Filothei shortly beforehand to travel alone to the embassy. About 100 meters after the Hlygeia hospital, his car was caught up in heavy traffic, in the left-hand lane. A large white Enduro-type motorcycle pulled up beside the car, its driver and pillion passenger both wearing helmets.

The passenger drew a pistol and put four shots through the car window. The bike then made its getaway through the side streets of Filothei. Wounded, Saunders managed to open the car door, trying to get help, but he sank to the ground. Police motorcycle, patrol cars and an am-



The British ambassador, David Madden, and the visiting British defense procurement minister, Baroness Symons, talk to the press on the steps of the Red Cross hospital yesterday.

bulance arrived within minutes, and took the seriously injured victim to the Red Cross hospital.

Confused initial reports from witnesses about a sawn-off shotgun led police to suspect common criminals, but the cartridges left at the scene of the crime revealed the identity of the gun, a .45-caliber pistol. The victim's identity documents indicated the nature of the

crime. November 17 had struck in the same way, at the same spot and with the same weapon for the third time.

Wounded, Saunders managed to open the car door, trying to get help, but he sank to the ground

"The evidence so far — the weapon and the method — indicate that it was November 17," announced Dimitris Efsthadiadis, general secretary of the Public Order Ministry, and ballistic tests conducted shortly afterward con-

firmed the suspicion. "This was a murder, decried by all Greeks, and it was committed in order to harm the interests of this country," said Public Order Minister Michalis Chrysochoidis.

It is the first time the terrorist organization has targeted a British citizen.

In April 1994 it attempted to strike the British aircraft carrier Ark Royal with two rockets, but the ignition mechanism failed and police found the rockets on an empty plot of land after an anonymous member of the gang reported their existence in a telephone call.

Why they choose Halandri to strike

The way in which the murderous attack was executed yesterday provides a typical example of the tactics of the November 17 terrorist group, which used the same style and approximately the same spot to attack two other victims previously.

The reason appears to be the fact that people driving toward Athens from the northern suburbs get caught in morning rush-hour traffic on Kifissias Avenue at Halandri. The complex road network in Halandri and Filothei also allows gunmen to escape quickly through the leafy suburbs where they obviously are well-acquainted with the areas.

It was on November 15, 1983, when U.S. Navy Captain George Tsantes, head of the joint U.S.-Greek military group in Greece (JUSMAG), and his Greek driver were assassinated while driving on Kifissias Avenue. The terrorists approached the car while riding a

Vespa scooter, shot them at close range and then sped away from the scene. The Vespa was later found abandoned in a street in the nearby suburb of Halandri.

At the exact same location five years later, businessman Alexandros Athanasiadis-Bodosakis was killed.

The assailants, again riding a motorcycle, approached his car, stopped at the traffic light, where the pillion passenger gunned the businessman down.

Other strikes

In the greater Halandri area, other strikes by November 17 have also been recorded. On February 4, 1987 at number five Rizari Street, members of the terrorist group shot and injured Doctor Zacharias Kapsalakis. On January 18, 1989, in front of 22 Antheon Street,

November 17 shot and injured public prosecutor Panagioti Tarasouleas. Again in the same area, terrorists set off a bomb in a parked car as former PASOK Public Order Minister Giorgos Petros drove by, injuring him slightly.

November 17 had also chosen Halandri for carrying out a number of its bomb attacks. In February 1989 it set off a bomb in an uninhabited house, while the Citibank branch in the area has become the target of bomb attacks by November 17 twice, in 1991 and 1996.

Yesterday's attack has now been added to this gruesome and growing list. Authorities have examined the multiple attacks in the area by November 17 in the past, and concluding that, because the terrorists are familiar with the streets of Halandri, they choose to organize their attacks there so they can make their getaway fast.

Terrorists claim twenty-two victims in twenty-five years

Brigadier Stephen Saunders, the British military attache, is the 22nd victim of the phantom organization "November 17," since the first killing, on December 23, 1975, of Richard Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens.

Almost exactly a year later, the group murdered retired police officer Evangelos Mallios in Palaio Faliron, using the same .45 automatic pistol that killed Welch.

The next killing was four years later, on January 16, 1980, when Pantelis Petrou, a senior officer of the riot squad, was killed. His driver, Sotiris Stamoulis, died a few days later of injuries sustained in the attack.

The same gun was used again in November 1983 in the murder of U.S. Navy Capt. George Tsantes and his driver, Nikos Veloutsos.

In February 1985, the gun was used to kill Nikos Momferatos, publisher of the newspaper Apogevmatini, and his driver, Giorgos Roussetis, in an attack in the Kolonaki district.

Policeman Nikos Georgakopoulos was killed when the group blew up a riot police bus in Kaisariani in November of that year, and in 1986, industrialist Dimitris Angelopoulos was shot dead in Kolonaki.

In June 1988, U.S. military attache William Nordeen died when a bomb destroyed his car in Kifissia, and the same year the .45 automatic was used in the murder of industrialist Alexandros Athanasiadis-Bodosakis.

Public prosecutor Constantine Androulidakis was seriously injured by gunfire in January 1989 and died about a month later.

In September 1989, the .45 pistol reappeared when it was used to kill parliamentary deputy Pavlos Bakoyiannis, who was married to current ND deputy Dora Bakoyianni.

In March 1991, a remote controlled explosive device was used to kill U.S. Sergeant Ronald Stewart in Ano Glyfada.

Turkish deputy press attache Cetin Giorku was killed by the .45 in Athens in October 1991, and the next month the November 17 organization attacked a police van in Exarchia, using an anti-armament rocket and hand grenade, killing one officer, Yiannis Varis, and injuring six others.

In 1992, the group shot another rocket at a car being used by the then Finance Minister Ioannis Paleokrassas in Syntagma Square, killing a bystander, 22-year-old Athanasios Axarlian.

Former National Bank of Greece governor Michalis Vranopoulos was the group's next victim, in January 1994, in Kolonaki. In July of the same year, November 17 claimed responsibility for the murder of Turkish diplomat Omer Saphioglou, outside his home in Palaio Faliron, once again by the same .45, which was also used to kill the last victim before Saunders, shipowner Costas Peratikos, in Piraeus, in May 1997.

Last year in May, the group fired a rocket at the Halandri home of the German ambassador, damaging the roof but injuring no one.