

# Greek suspect 'admits killing of British envoy

By Jimmy Burns

One of Europe's most notorious terrorist groups is being dismantled, British and Greek officials believe, after breakthrough arrests this week. The Greek group November 17 has been active for 27 years. Its victims include Brigadier Stephen Saunders, the British military attaché in Athens, murdered two

years ago. British antiterrorist agents have been working closely with the Greek authorities since his killing. Those arrested include Alexandros Giotopoulos, one of the group's alleged leaders, seized on Wednesday after a swoop on the eastern Aegean island of Lipsi. Three others captured this week are thought to have been behind the assassination of US and UK officials.

In what the Foreign Office described as an "extremely important breakthrough", Greek police said yesterday that Vassilis Xiros, one of those arrested, had admitted taking part in the murder of Brig Saunders. The arrests follow a botched bomb attempt last month by Savvas Xeros, the first November 17 operative to be arrested since the organisation first struck

with the assassination of Richard Welch, the CIA's Athens chief, in 1975. His capture was followed by the discovery of an arms cache that provided vital intelligence. Scotland Yard antiterrorist experts, together with MI5 and MI6, used expertise gained in years of tracking the IRA and other terrorist groups to bolster what British officials describe as hav-

ing been a chaotic Greek forensic and intelligence situation. Greece - praised by the UK yesterday for the breakthrough - has been criticised in the past by both Britain and the US for its lack of action against terrorists. In the 1980s and 1990s the country's ruling Panhellenic Socialist Movement was suspected of sympathising with

the anti-US position that was taken by the November 17 group. With the Olympic Games due to be held in Athens in 2004, Greek ministers are thought to have been concerned at the threat an operational November 17 could pose. The UK ambassador in Athens, David Madden, had been putting strong pressure on the Greek government to

act, as have the succession of UK ministers who have visited the Greek capital since the murder of Brig Saunders. His widow, Heather Saunders, has also been credited with influencing Greek public opinion with her high-profile, dignified campaign to bring those responsible to justice. [www.ft.com/europe](http://www.ft.com/europe)