

Yugoslav president assails his generals

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From Tony Barber in Belgrade

STIPE MESIC, the Croat who is Yugoslavia's new head of state, said yesterday that the military leaders who launched last week's crackdown in Slovenia should step down. His remarks seemed certain to rekindle tension between Serbian and Croatian politicians since most of the officers responsible for the action were Serbs.

"A certain section of the military leadership must reassess its position in the light of the war in Slovenia," Mr Mesic told reporters in Belgrade. "We must have an inquiry as to whether they exceeded their responsibilities." He specifically named General Blagoje Adzic,

the chief of staff, a Serb whose family was wiped out by Croatian fascists in the Second World War and who was pressing for a military state of emergency to be declared in Yugoslavia as early as last March.

Mr Mesic, a former political prisoner and member of Croatia's ruling party, the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (CDU), was appointed head of state on Sunday night after Serbia and its allies lifted the veto they had applied since May. He is the first non-Communist President of Yugoslavia since 1945.

As the head of the eight-member collective presidency, which groups one

representative from each of Yugoslavia's six republics and two provinces, Mr Mesic is now the nominal leader of the country's armed forces. He pledged yesterday to send home reservists who were mobilised during last week's fighting. But if he tries to purge General Adzic and other Serbian Communist generals, he will almost certainly meet bitter resistance not only from the army but from the Communist leadership of Serbia. His appointment may therefore not be quite the breakthrough in Yugoslavia's crisis

that was hoped for by the European Community.

Mr Mesic also has a very different vision of Yugoslavia's future to that of Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia's Communist President. "We will not be secure unless we have a union of sovereign and equal states," he said. This contrasts with Mr Milosevic's desire for a more centralised Yugoslavia in which all Serbs remain within one state, Serbia's industries continue to be subsidised by the more prosperous republics of Slovenia

and Croatia, and Serbia is, in effect, first among equals in the federation.

Mr Mesic, 57, became Croatia's Prime Minister last year after the CDU swept to victory over the Communists in the republic's first free elections since the war. He should have succeeded to the Yugoslav presidency on 15 May when it was Croatia's turn to take over the leadership for one year. Just before Serbia blocked this, he said: "The only way to prevent me taking office is to shoot at my car while I'm in it."

Mr Mesic, a trained lawyer, was imprisoned for one year in 1971 on charges of fomenting "hostile propaganda"

when Tito, the late leader of Yugoslavia, suppressed a Croatian nationalist movement known as *Maspok* and sent police and troops into Zagreb. After his release, he was prevented from finding work for three years.

He makes little secret of his belief in Croatia's right to self-determination or of his dislike for military interference in politics. But he struck a more conciliatory note yesterday, saying: "There is no need for internal war now or in the future. What happened in the past is history." Tensions had eased since Sunday, he said, adding that Yugoslavia could now "sail into calmer political waters".

Troops stay on alert as hopes of peace fade

HOPES of a peace settlement in Slovenia were fading yesterday, after the breakaway republic claimed army helicopters shot at civilian targets, and army leaders accused Slovenia of firing on soldiers with dum-dum bullets.

Janez Jansa, the Slovene Defence Minister, said the federal air force helicopters shot civilian targets near the army base at Vrhnika, wounding one person. He also said the Yugoslav army was transporting munitions into Slovenia and had mobilised 200,000 reservists, mainly in Serbia, for action against Slovenia.

The army issued a shrill statement accusing Slovenia of firing on soldiers with dum-dum bullets and taking hostages among the families of army personnel stationed in the republic.

Earlier, Slovene leaders cast doubt on the success of the EC troika's peace plan, as it failed to address the key issue of the army's withdrawal to barracks. They said the plan would collapse, unless international military and civilian observers came to Slovenia to monitor the army's retreat. The peace plan proposed by Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, called on Slovenia and Croatia to suspend the declarations of independence from Yugoslavia for three months.

Serbia was urged to lift a six-week-long veto on the election of Stipe Mesic, a Croat, as President of Yugoslavia. The election of Mr Mesic as President late on Sunday night appeared to fulfil the conditions for a ceasefire, but Milan Kucan, the President of Slovenia, said the army's withdrawal remained the key to the crisis.

Appearing at a press conference surrounded by youths wielding sub-machine-guns, Mr Kucan repeated claims that the army was out of control.

The Slovene leader repeated his demands for international observers to monitor the ceasefire and the army's withdrawal. "If the Yugoslav response is positive, they are ready to send observers from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe," he said. "If the answer is negative,

From Marcus Tanner in Ljubljana

they will abandon us to our own fate and to war." Mr Kucan said he doubted whether Mr Mesic could re-establish civilian control over the military.

In one of his first statements as President of Yugoslavia, Mr Mesic said that army leaders responsible for the war in Slovenia "must be brought to account". A sticking point may be Slovenia's demand that the army hand back control of international border crossings seized in three days of fighting.

The precise mechanism of the army's withdrawal to barracks has yet to be worked out. Slovene leaders said it will depend on local agreements being forged between army units and units of the Slovene Territorial Defence working under the auspices of a specially-appointed commission. The commission will contain Slovene and federal representatives.

There were no signs yesterday of army units yielding the positions which they occupy on Slovenia's roads, around airports and at frontier crossings.

At Brnik, near Ljubljana, the airport was still surrounded by army tanks secreted in the woods around the airfield. Barricades of lorries and buses, set up by the Slovene defence forces, still block almost all main roads and intersections. Thousands of members of the Slovene Territorial Defence force remained vigilantly on the beat, ready to shoot at a moment's notice.

Trapped between the road blocks, without food or supplies, under the constant surveillance from the Slovene forces moving stealthily through the countryside, many tank crews are reported to be in a desperate state.

Most Slovene people remain deeply suspicious of the Yugoslav army and distrustful of any peace accord.

The poor performance of the Yugoslav army in the fighting has boosted Slovene self-confidence and fuelled demands for complete independence from Yugoslavia.



A tank trapped by a Slovene road block lies abandoned by its crew of soldiers from the Yugoslav federal forces

Photograph: David Rose

System of defence will aid breakaway forces

By Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

YUGOSLAVIA'S armed forces have been shaped by history and geography in such a way that they can easily break away under the command of separatist republics. Experts believe that if the ceasefire fails, the breakaway regions will have more chance of surviving a contest with the central government than anywhere else in Eastern or Central Europe.

The reason goes back to Tito's doctrine of "Total People's Defence", which envisaged guerrilla war and a decentralised command structure. Because Belgrade was extremely vulnerable to attack from the north, command was delegated to Yugoslavia's four military regions. This approach differed from that of Romania, which began to emulate Yugoslav

defence thinking after 1968, but where Nicolae Ceausescu insisted on maintaining a tight grip on the command structure.

The rebel groups are likely to have plenty of expertise at their disposal because this command and control system has been dispersed and because so many have served in the armed forces. This policy also resulted in arms being dispersed throughout the population, enabling the breakaway republics to arm themselves fairly easily.

The system was primarily developed to defeat a Soviet invasion. The only question is whether it has been eroded in recent years as the external threat has lessened.

Nor do the Yugoslav federal forces have elite units predomi-

nantly manned by the dominant group — Serbs — comparable with the predominantly Slav Soviet airborne forces, for example. About 60 per cent of the army officers are Serb, but in the navy there is a higher proportion of Croats.

As in the Soviet Union, there was an effort to ensure that conscripts did not serve in the military region from which they came. The fact that the Serbs are now forming their own military units — as distinct from the federal army — is an indicator that Serbian control was far from ensured.

Before the recent crisis, the reg-

ular Yugoslav army numbered 138,000, including 93,000 conscripts. The navy numbered 10,000 and the air force 32,000. These were backed up by a 1.5 million-strong Territorial Defence Force, or militia, mainly with obsolete equipment.

In addition there is a force of Ministry of Defence Frontier Guards, and the *Milicija* — police — who, like their Soviet and other Eastern European equivalents, are relatively well armed, with reconnaissance vehicles and armoured vehicles. But they lack the formidable character of the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) divisions, which are almost as well armed as the army.

According to David Isby, a Washington-based defence ana-

lyst specialising in Eastern Europe, these internal security troops amount to "a riot squad", and would be less effective in suppressing revolt than the regular army, for whom there is "a degree of residual respect". The rebels might also be reluctant to fire on the army because Croats and Slovenes are still serving in it.

Asked if he thought the ceasefire would hold, Mr Isby said: "It could be a 90 days' armistice, with people digging holes and filling sandbags in the interim." There have also been rumours of former East German Stasi secret policemen trying to join the Croatian forces. "Whether the stories are anything more than Serbian fantasy I don't know."