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Fighting spreads to Croatia

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YUGOSLAVIA's army leadership appeared to have wrested control of federal policy away from civilian politicians yesterday, with a declaration of war on Slovenia and the first army attacks in Croatia. Three people were reported killed in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, after troops turned their machine-guns on a crowd of demonstrators.

An EC-brokered ceasefire had collapsed earlier in the day when a convoy of 12 anti-aircraft gun transporters attempted to blast through barricades put up by the Slovene units. This was followed by air attacks on the Slovene capital, Ljubljana, and a day of heavy combat between federal and Slovene forces.

By last night the Slovenian Prime Minister, Lojze Peterle, declared a unilateral ceasefire, announcing that Slovene units had been ordered to stop fighting. But no sooner had he made his last-minute peace offer than it was rejected by General Blagoje Adzic, the Yugoslav army chief of staff.

"Under the existing circumstances, a truce is no longer possible," he told parents of Serbian soldiers serving in the Yugoslav army. "There is a war in Slovenia, and truce cannot be realised, although the Yugoslav Defence Ministry wanted to return the units to the barracks."

Only hours earlier, General Adzic had made a surprise televised address to declare war on Slovenia. "We have accepted war," he said, and promised to "carry it through to the end".

The general blamed the federal government for placing obstacles in the army's path and he lashed out at the "great high treason" of Slovenia. "The federal organs continually hampered us, demanding negotiations while they [Slovenia] were attacking us with all means," he said.

"We will make sure that the war that has been forced upon us be as brief as possible... We are doing everything to protect the lives of members of our army. We will force the enemy to respect the ceasefire and cease its arrogant behaviour." His speech and later



A federal army tank driver running away from a burning rebel barricade during a battle with Slovenian soldiers at Brezice, in the south of the breakaway republic, yesterday

comments were a clear indication that the army was now running the show and that Yugoslavia was closer than ever to fully fledged civil war.

The resumption of violence was deplored by President George Bush, who wrote to the Yugoslav President, Stipe Mesic, urging him to "ensure that civilian control over the military is re-established and peace restored". He also appealed to all sides to abide by a European Community-backed ceasefire plan. Three EC diplomats are to go to the Yugoslav

capital today to discuss sending in civilian monitors.

But Mr Mesic — a Croat, whose own appointment was blocked by Serbia for two months until the EC forced through a deal on Sunday — might retort that that would be easier said than done. Yesterday's violence, and General Adzic's words, dealt an apparently fatal blow to the EC plan.

Most ominous was the reported clash in Zagreb — the first time the conflict had spread to the Croatian capital. Witnesses said the incident started when dozens of

tanks filed out of the Marshal Tito barracks on the edge of the city, apparently heading for Slovenia. Demonstrators outside the barracks were shouting and throwing Molotov cocktails. The army then fired at the crowd, killing at least three people. Several Yugoslav soldiers died in the biggest battle, near the Krsko nuclear power plant, close to the Croatian border. A second battle raged on the Austrian border at Sentilj, where Slovenians for the first time used tanks captured from the army to attack federal forces.

The Slovene capital also suffered its first air attack yesterday. Shortly after midday, a couple of MiGs fired grenades at the radio and television transmitter on top of Ljubljana Castle. The explosions shook buildings and smashed windows in the centre of the city. It was the first air attack launched on a European city since the end of the Second World War. As air-raid sirens wailed throughout Ljubljana, thousands dived off the streets and into nearby air-raid shelters. Yugoslav jets also launched attacks on Slovene

forces at the border crossing of Dravograd and Jesenice.

There were reports of continued fighting around Slovenia last night amid other signs that the Slovene and Yugoslav forces were heading for further confrontation. A column of tanks reportedly left the barracks at Varazdin in Croatia, for Ptuj, near Maribor, in Slovenia. This brought the estimated number of Yugoslav tanks and transporters in Slovenia to about 500. Zagreb airport was closed to allow combat jets to take off for action in Slovenia.

Yesterday's fighting forced the German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, chairman of the crisis committee of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, to call off mediation talks in Ljubljana. Speaking at Villach in Austria, close to the Slovenian border, Mr Genscher said he had briefed Slovene President Milan Kucan on his talks in Belgrade. The CSCE's crisis committee will meet in Prague today.

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