

# Army on standby to attack us, says Slovenia

SLOVENIA was braced for a massive assault early today after the interception of a secret message ordering federal army commanders to prepare for action.

Few details were revealed but a senior minister in the capital, Ljubljana said the order placed federal troops in the republic on standby to move at first light and join with other forces.

Slovenian television announced that the units had been told to prepare for new activity to take place in the early morning. Information Minister Jelko Kacin dismissed it as 'a brutal order'.

Rumours abounded yesterday that the army had taken power in Belgrade. Prime Minister Ante Markovic has not been seen for two days and the generals are blatantly disobeying the will of President Stipe Mesic.

## Coup

'The army is completely out of control; there has been, in effect, a coup d'etat,' a Western military expert said.

A Western diplomat added: 'There is total chaos at the head of the country. We have a disappearing prime minister and a president the army ignores.'

Government officials in Belgrade issued a statement denying Mr Markovic was under house arrest and saying he was

## us, says Slovenia



From DAVID WILLIAMS  
in Ljubljana

'working normally in his office'. After another day of fierce fighting around Slovenia, a vast convoy of 180 tanks, armour and thousands of troops was heading north towards its border with Croatia.

In an apparent attempt to seal the borders of the two breakaway republics, tanks and troops were also heading into Bosnia and eastern Croatia. The move brought a warning from Zagreb's newly appointed Defence Minister Sime Djodan, a hardline nationalist, that Croatia's 70,000-strong defence forces would oppose any violation of its territory.

'We don't want to fight but if the freedom of our nation depends on it we will,' he said in a TV broadcast. 'That is the price of freedom.'

Hours after ordering the mobilisation of forces he said that Croatia was ready to do battle. His declaration was a blow to diplomats still trying to hammer out a

new ceasefire agreement. In Ljubljana, where militia and territorial forces still surround more than 400 Yugoslav army tanks and armoured vehicles, an official accused the army of pressing on for the complete occupation of Slovenia and the toppling of the freely-elected democratic government.

'The final reaction will depend on the international community but no one has authority over the army,' he said.

There was a deep feeling of impending doom among Slovenians. Tank battles had raged at Radgona, near the Austrian border, and at Mirabor as Slovene radio repeatedly carried the warnings of senior officers in Belgrade that a ceasefire was no longer possible.

Skirmishes were reported in seven separate areas of the republic while gun battles flared in two villages near the Croatian border. Six houses were destroyed during a tank battle.

## Withdrawn

The Red Cross in Slovenia said 1,080 federal soldiers had been captured and more than 700 had defected during the first week of the crisis. Full casualty figures were not available but 29 people were killed on Tuesday, it said.

Slovenian television reported last night that federal army tanks had withdrawn from three separate positions on its borders.

And the deputy commander of the federal army in Slovenia, Andrija Raseta, emphatically denied any plans for a military coup. He said his forces would not open fire unless they were fired on. The army still answered to the Federal Presidency of Mr Mesic, he insisted.