

Yugoslavs awoke yesterday to face the awful truth that the army may soon be running their country. They heard the People's Army roll westwards from the republic of Serbia into the rebel republic of Slovenia. They saw convoys of tanks and armoured personnel carriers pour out of the barracks from Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.

After the failure of the country's politicians to implement three cease-fires, and regain any measure of control over the army, they now look on in horror at what appears to be the inevitable unfolding of a war waged by an army against its own people.

"The army is like a dog drawing its last breath," said Mr John Zametica, a military analyst at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies. "No one can heal the wounds of a dog which is seeking revenge, and with a vengeance which threatens to bring the country into a bloody civil war of the same magnitude which engulfed it in the early 1940s."

In the Second World War, the Nazi-backed Ustasha Croat government murdered tens of thousands of Serbs, and the Serb-dominated Partisan/Communist forces imposed Communist rule over Yugoslavia. The hatred engendered by those events still simmers.

In the villages and towns, Croats and Serbs are armed to the teeth. "I do not think you can imagine what kind of bloodbath will take place. Serbs and Croats will kill each other. They are seeking revenge for the past," said a western diplomat.

In Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, people were nervous but calm yesterday. The republic, once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, stands out from the south of the country. The people are Catholic, and write in the Latin script. They see themselves a part of the west, capable of matching the living standards of neighbouring Austria in a matter of years.

"It is crazy what is happening," said Mrs Sonja Bajic, a shop assistant. "But what can we do? The west has ignored our pleas for so long. They really believed Yugoslavia could be held together because it was convenient for them not to think about the alternative."

In Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, the mood was tense. Sobbing mothers besieged the republic's parliament, demanding that their sons be returned home. "If they do not come home, I want Slovene boys to be taken hostage," wailed one woman.

In contrast to western-looking Slovenia, Serbia was dominated by the Ottoman empire until 1918. Serbs are Orthodox and write in the Cyrillic script. They despise the Slovenes' high living standards and western aspirations.

It was Slovenia's desire to be free from what it sees as an economically

# Judy Dempsey says Yugoslavia's army is waging a war against its own people

## The settling of old scores

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Federal units on the defensive: it is still unclear if Yugoslavia's army can successfully carry out its threat of war

and politically backward system that cast the die for an army takeover. On Tuesday June 25, the republic declared independence. The federal army, under the command of General Blagoje Adzic, chief of staff, and Mr Marko Negovanovic, head of military intelligence, believed a limited operation, aimed at placing Slovenia's external borders back into the hands of the federal police, would be swift and clean. They miscalculated totally.

Slovenia's 30,000-strong Territorial Defence Units fought back to defend the republic's independence. They secured initial victory after surrounding many federal units. Slovenia, until then a largely unknown alpine republic of 2m people, was catapulted onto the world stage. Its people quietly revelled in their hour of victory.

"We simply made a point. We wanted the world, and western governments, to wake up and understand

that we were serious about our independence," said Mr Zoran Thaler, the republic's deputy foreign minister.

But Mr Janez Jansa, the republic's mercurial defence minister, wanted more than a moment of triumph; he was out to humiliate the federal army because he had old scores to settle. In 1989, he was court-martialled and imprisoned for allegedly making public a top-secret military document showing how the federal army was planning to invade Slovenia. Mr Jansa has never forgiven the military for putting him on trial.

By refusing last Monday to allow defeated federal army units - 2,000 men, many of them teenagers - to withdraw honourably to their barracks with their guns and equipment, he invoked the wrath of the military's high command.

Gen Adzic declared war on Slovenia, and by yesterday evening, the

fate of Yugoslavia and its 23m people rested in the hands of the army. It has two main goals: to avenge its early humiliation in Slovenia; and to hold the country together by force.

"The military realises that the future existence of a Yugoslav army in a country of independent states is a contradiction in terms," said an Austrian diplomat. "They will have no paymasters. They will have no role."

Commanded by veteran Yugoslav Communists committed to defending the country from break-up, the army is stuck in the past; the development of eastern Europe along democratic lines has passed it by. An army document last January revealed the military's contempt for the west and for democracy. "The army does not care about warnings from the west. It does not care if the west imposes sanctions. It is a law unto itself," said Mr Zametica.

One of the focal points of any full-scale war unleashed by the army will be Croatia, which also declared its independence on June 25. This is the heart of the Balkan powder keg. Croatia, unlike Slovenia, has a large Serb minority which makes up 11 per cent of the republic's 4.5m population. The Serb minority, led by Mr Milan Babic, and Mr Milan Martić, earlier this year declared their independence from Croatia and their eventual goal of joining Serbia. Mr Babic and Mr Martić now control Krajina, south-western Croatia, like a Serbian fiefdom.

But the Krajina, inhabited by half the Croatian Serb population, contains Croat enclaves. The only force which acts as a buffer against these two warring ethnic groups is the federal army. "If Croatia is attacked, there will be mayhem," commented Mr Srdjan Popovic, a member of Serbia's opposition Democratic party.

Croatia's defence forces total 75,000. However, they are "badly led and badly trained", said a western military attaché. "They are no match for the federal army," he added. An Austrian diplomat said: "An army intervention in Croatia will be the catalyst which will pit Serbs against Croats. I cannot see how this will be prevented."

It still remains uncertain whether the army can successfully carry out its threat of war. It may fragment under internal pressure pitting generations of officers and conscripts against each other. Its Communist leaders wish to retain their livelihood at any cost. However, among the lower ranks of the army, it is not certain that young Serbs would fight.

"The boys were brought up on Michael Jackson, not Marshall Tito," said Mr Drago Jancar, a young Slovene conscript. "The army is not fighting for independence, unlike the Slovenes. The top leadership is fighting for its own survival."

Many Serbs have already gone into hiding to avoid the call-up announced this week. Already, Slovenes and Croats have left the federal army. The Macedonians would not be prepared to join a Serb-dominated army and the ethnic Albanians could not be relied upon to support any war, or imposition of military rule.

Moreover, it is not clear whether the army could control, for any length of time, any republic it subjugated. The Slovenes have already shown they are determined to fight. The Croats might be encouraged to do the same. More significant, the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo would use military rule imposed in the north of the country as an opportunity to rebel against their Serbian administration.

If a military coup were carried out, it would lead to the inevitable rending of the federation - ironically, the one thing that the army has set out to avoid at all costs.