



Gen Adzic: antipathy towards Croats

General Blagoje Adzic, like so many of his Serb compatriots, is a man with a tragic past. As a teenager he escaped as Croats belonging to the fascist Ustasha movement slaughtered 37 of his family in the village of Pridvorica close to the border between Croatia and Herzegovina. Many Croats and members of other ethnic groups have similar memories of savage treatment at the hands of Serb royalist Chetniks or of Tito's communist partisans.

What makes General Adzic so special is that he is now commander in chief of a federal army which appears to have wrested control of the country's fate from its politicians. He is perceived as a personally honest man of little charisma who has spent his lifetime as a career officer since he joined Tito's partisans.

As a general and a Serb, Gen Adzic is dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the federal state created by Tito. It was a state in which communist theories of "proletarian internationalism" were meant to erase the perverse ethnic loyalties which

caused so many past atrocities. But he shares much of the mutual distrust developed over centuries by Croats and Serbs. He harbours a violent personal antipathy, fully reciprocated, towards Mr Stipe Mesic, the Croat president who finally took his place as president of Yugoslavia's collective state presidency last weekend.

Ironically, although Mr Mesic is a Croat, he comes from a partisan family whose family was also slaughtered by the Ustasha – on ideological grounds. At one session of the presidency the two men reportedly argued fiercely as to who had suffered most at the hands of the Ustasha.

Given the general's background it is not surprising that his appearance on Belgrade television on Tuesday night to declare "war" on the

Tragic hardliner

Anthony Robinson on the army chief

"enemy" Slovenia, and threaten to unleash the full might of the army to secure Yugoslavia's territorial integrity, sent shivers up many spines.

His stiff, white-haired appearance on TV also set alarm bells ringing abroad – confirming that the military was in control, and set on escalating the violence in order to bring the "war" to a rapid end.

Whatever his military virtues, the fact that a man like Gen Adzic could become commander in chief of a multi-ethnic army in itself helps to explain the foreboding now coursing through Yugoslavia, especially in the ethnically mixed areas of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The army likes to present itself as the all-Yugoslav institution. But with Serbs forming nearly 70 per cent of

the officer class, many doubt it is ethnically even-handed. Fears that under pressure it will act as a Serb army in federal camouflage has been heightened by the replacement of non-Serb officers. General Zivota Avramovic, a specialist in armoured warfare from the third military district around Belgrade, for example, has replaced the Slovene General Konrad Kolsek as commander of the fifth military division which includes Slovenia and parts of Croatia. The head of the air force has also been replaced by a Serb, Gen Milos Bajic.

Ironically, however, while many non-Serbs fear the federal army, Serb nationalists such as Vuk Draskovic of the Serbian Renewal party see the army as a group of dogmatic bolsheviks blinded by their communist ideology. Generals who are seen as willing tools of Serbian chauvinism by non-Serbs are criticised in their ethnic backyard for having left the Serbs without a reliable army of their own, while all the other nationalities have been busy building up their own national forces.