



A tank commander of the Yugoslav federal army holds his head in shock having just survived an ambush by Slovene units at Krsko, between Ljubljana and Zagreb. The federal army fought on and later took Slovene prisoners in the area *Photograph: David Rose*

Slovenes braced for tank attack

SLOVENIA prepared for an all-out attack by the Yugoslav army yesterday, after tanks and troops massed on the republic's border and a column of tanks left Belgrade in the direction of Slovenia.

The column of 180 tanks and artillery vehicles, accompanied by thousands of troops, moved out of the barracks in the Belgrade suburb of Banjica at 2am and headed off on the main road towards Ljubljana, 300 miles away.

Fears in Slovenia of an imminent army attack mounted after Jelco Kacin, the Slovene Information Minister, said they had intercepted a top-level army communication which ordered an attack on Slovenia.

The communication came from General Blagoje Adzic, the army chief of staff, and allegedly told all soldiers to prepare for an attack on Slovenia within hours.

During the day, groups of tanks from military bases in Croatia massed at several points on the frontier with Slovenia, waiting for the massive reinforcements from

From Marcus Tanner
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the big column approaching from Belgrade. "They are massing on our borders," said Janez Slapar, chief of the Slovene Territorial Defence Force. "The army is keeping up its thrust."

Last night the column of tanks and troops was reported to be advancing slowly on tank transporters towards the Croatian capital, Zagreb. Two groups of 20 tanks peeled off, one heading north into Slavonia, in eastern Croatia, and the other south into Bosnia.

Slovene military experts said the army was clearly preparing to carry out a three-pronged assault on the republic.

In spite of the advance of the tanks, the Slovene government yesterday ordered its forces to fight only in self defence. The order was designed to give the Yugoslav army enough time to reply to a last-minute ceasefire offer put forward on Tuesday.

Helicopters from the Yugoslav army were permitted to fly unmolested to military bases in Slovenia during the day, to replenish diminishing food supplies and remove wounded soldiers to military hospitals.

The latest ceasefire proposal offered the army a chance to withdraw to barracks, taking its tanks and weapons. Slovenia had earlier insisted that troops retreat on foot and leave their tanks and weapons behind.

The proposal received backing from Stipe Mesic, the newly elected President of Yugoslavia. But the army, which now clearly acts quite independently of political control, was not party to the agreement. Unconfirmed reports said Gen Adzic had rejected the proposal out of hand.

Defences in the Slovene capital, Ljubljana, were placed on maximum alert during the day, in expectation of attack by land or air. Slovene units spent much of the day laying mines on roads and directing the building of fresh

barricades of trucks and buses on the few remaining unblocked roads into the city.

While Slovene leaders professed confidence in the ability of their hastily raised army to turn back the aggressor with sub-machine guns and anti-tank weapons, many Slovene troops remain terrified of armed attack from the air.

"This AK-47 won't stop a MiG," said one Slovene soldier, guarding the Yugoslav army barracks at Vrhnika, near Ljubljana. "We need help from abroad against the Yugoslav army, at least to guard our airspace."

But inside the barracks, the news of the advance of the convoy of tanks from Belgrade had clearly raised morale among the 1,000 mostly Serbian soldiers, who have been virtually barricaded inside the barracks since Thursday last week. "We were caught by surprise by the Slovene forces last time," said Major Radomir Kostic. "But it won't happen again."