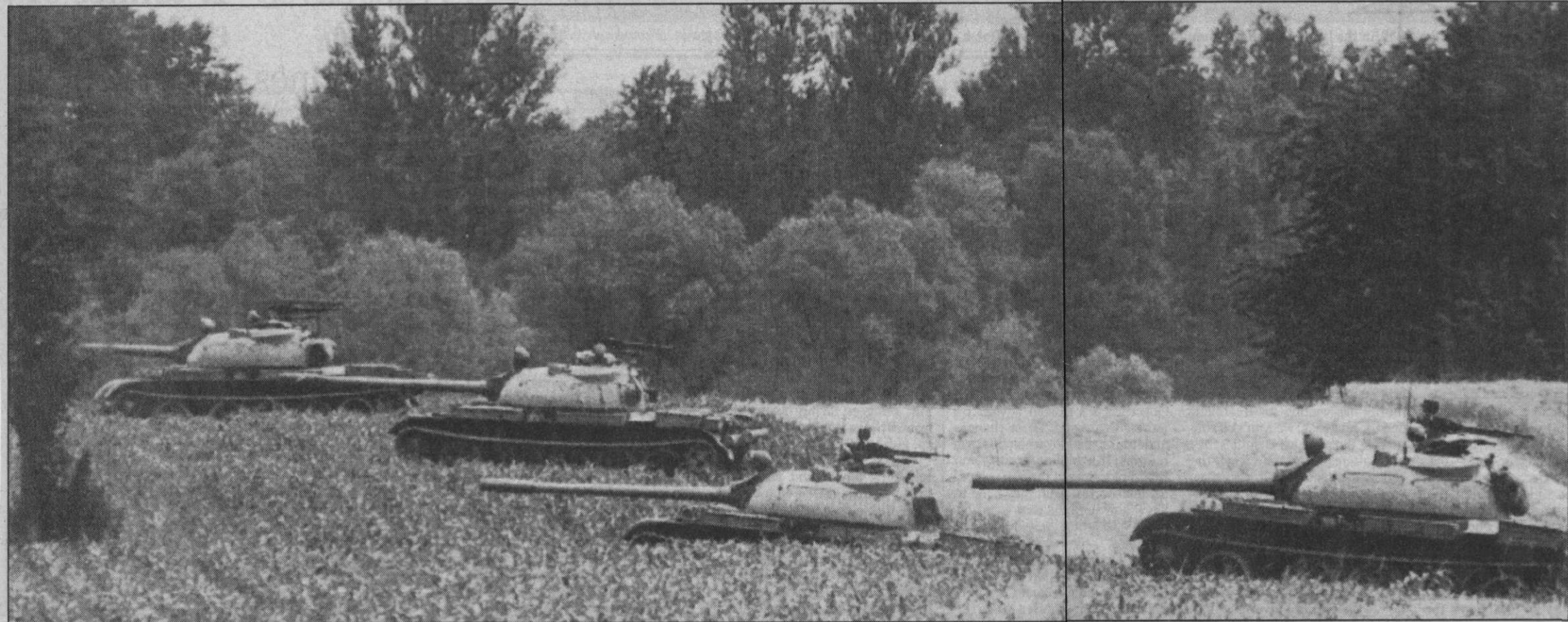


# Yugoslav army stands poised on the borders

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Yugoslav federal army T-55 tanks at Krsko, on the border of Slovenia and Croatia, where clashes continued yesterday as federal troops tried to break out of positions encircled by Slovene units

Photograph: David Rose

YUGOSLAVIA'S armed forces fanned out across the country yesterday in preparation for what their chief of staff called a decisive strike against the secessionist republics of Slovenia and Croatia.

Late last night, however, some Slovene fighters and federal troops were reported to be disengaging, but Slovene leaders suggested the army might be regrouping for a "brutal assault". Radio reports said some federal units were heading south into Croatia.

A Reuter correspondent saw 11 armoured vehicles pull out of the Gornja Radgona frontier post with Austria and drive off under a truce agreement with Slovene forces that had encircled them since Friday. A similar withdrawal was reported at Koruska, and Italian border police said Yugoslav troops had withdrawn from a post at Pese, facing Trieste.

The military denied that it had seized power—but all the signs were that real authority in Belgrade lay with an inner core of generals in the high command. The Austrian foreign minister, Alois Mock, said a meeting of the Yugoslav presidency today would show who was in control. "There is no doubt," he said on Austrian television, "that the political leadership, at least for 24 hours, was shut out." But he added that, following telephone conversations with Yugoslav leaders, "I have the impression... that at least a dialogue has been re-established."

As the West signalled that it might recognise independence for Slovenia

## Tank columns roll and trapped federal troops try to break out, amid coup claims and hints that West will recognise secession

By Tony Barber in Belgrade, Marcus Tanner in Ljubljana and Sarah Helm in London

and Croatia, clashes continued near the border separating the two republics as the Yugoslav army tried to break out of positions encircled by Slovene defence units.

Slovene officials, whose offer of a truce was rejected by the army on Tuesday, said earlier they would let army helicopters fly in to extract stranded troops. But the republic's information minister, Jelko Kacin, denounced the military's actions, saying: "What the army is doing in Slovenia is simply unacceptable."

World leaders responded with ever-stronger words of warning, a degree of punitive action, and frantic consultation. Britain halted exports of arms and high-technology goods to Yugoslavia by revoking all export licences. The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, said in a Commons statement: "The old system is in an advanced state of decay and cannot survive. The army cannot hold Yugoslavia together in this way — indeed they have accelerated its disintegration."

In Washington, the Secretary of State, James Baker, said the United States and the EC were studying a possible arms and aid embargo against Yugoslavia, which he described as "on the brink of fully fledged civil war".

The German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, said the fed-

eral army was "running amok" and, in a telephone call to the Yugoslav leader, Stipe Mesic, repeated Bonn's demand for an "immediate halt to all military actions" by the army.

Participants in the emergency meeting in Prague of the 35-nation Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe appealed for peace and reportedly reached a "broad consensus" on sending in observers.

The army rolled into action in the middle of Tuesday night when a 20-mile column of tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery and supply vehicles with thousands of troops rumbled out of the Belgrade suburb of Banjica on the highway to Zagreb, the Croatian capital. It then split into three detachments. Western sources said the first headed for eastern Croatia, near the town of Osijek, where clashes between Serbs and Croats have flared almost every day since Slovenia and Croatia declared independence on 25 June. The second steamed towards Serbia's border with Bosnia, where tensions are high be-

tween Serbs, Croats and Muslim Slavs. The third unit went in the middle, north-west toward Slovenia.

Fears instantly rose that the armed forces, having apparently taken control of the government, were planning a full-scale assault to bring Slovenia and Croatia to heel.

In Slovenia, alarm grew after Jelko Kacin, the Slovene Information Minister, said officials had intercepted a

top-level army communication that ordered an attack. It came from General Blagoje Adzic, the army chief of staff, Mr Kacin said, and

told all soldiers to prepare for an attack on Slovenia within hours. But Western military sources said the initial objective appeared more limited. Noting that the high command is dominated by Serbian Communists, they said the deployment looked like an attempt to secure Serbia's borders against intrusions from rival republics.

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

column approaching from Belgrade. "They are massing on our borders," said Janez Slapar, chief of the Slovene Territorial Defence force.

Across the border in Croatia, members of that republic's National Guard in jeans and flak jackets and carrying Kalashnikov rifles manned checkpoints and searched cars. "The Yugoslav air force is bombing towns and villages in Slovenia and can do the same thing here," said the Croatian commander in Sotin. "It is a scandal that the world is doing nothing."

In Zagreb, where the army opened fire on Tuesday on Croatian demonstrators throwing petrol bombs and stones at military vehicles, defence officials said the republic would resist any aggression by the Yugoslav army.

Civilian federal authority appeared to have disintegrated. The Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, disappeared from public sight on Tuesday, giving rise to rumours that he had been arrested or murdered. Yesterday his office said he was working normally. A spokesman for the federal presidency, which nominally controls the armed forces, said it had tried without success to meet to discuss the crisis. The implication was that the army was operating with a free hand. The two key figures appear to be General Adzic and General Marko Negovanovic, another high



command member. General Adzic has publicly rejected talk of a truce with Slovenes. However, General Andreja Raseta, deputy commander of the fifth military district, which covers Slovenia, said there had been no military coup and the army would hold its fire in Slovenia unless attacked.

■ The first of 2,400 British holiday-makers were arriving home last night and early this morning from Yugoslavia. Flights from Trieste, where the tourists had fled in chartered boats, were landing at Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester. Another 2,500 tourists still in the country have been advised to leave.