

# Powerful hardliners form a junta in waiting

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**A**LMOST exactly 50 years after Yugoslavia's last military coup, in March 1941, the spectre of the junta is again stalking the land. Are the generals taking over? Will the coup be overt, or covert? Has it already taken place and they have just omitted to tell anyone?

These were some of the questions perplexing analysts and diplomats yesterday as "the war of Slovene independence" entered a lull and the war of nerves in neighbouring Croatia continued.

While the state presidency in Belgrade struggles to reassert a modicum of authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, there is little doubt that a clutch of senior military officers in their fifties and sixties, supported by a bigger group of some 60 younger, mainly Serbian, officers, are the most formidable immediate power in Yugoslavia.

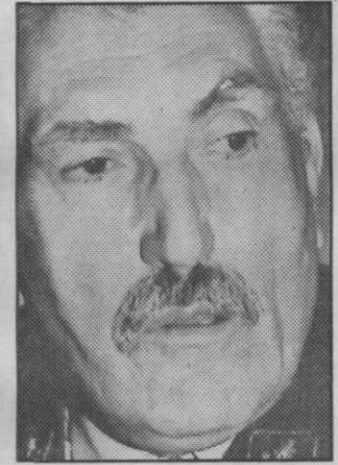
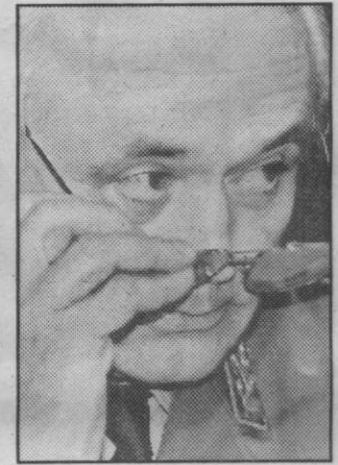
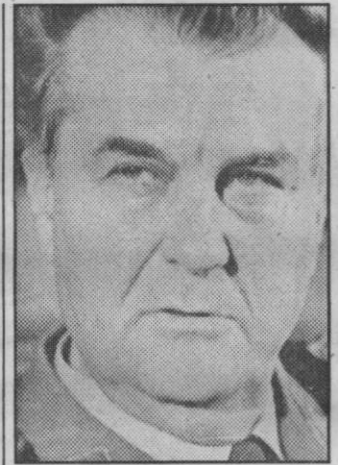
The senior officers are concentrated in a shadowy, little-known body called the supreme command, which emerged in March with the tacit support of Borisav Jovic, the hardline Serb who resigned as President in a failed attempt to pave the way for a military takeover.

It is headed by General Veljko Kadijevic, the defence minister and Yugoslavia's only four-star general, sources say.

"This is the military junta waiting in the wings," says Anton Bebler, a professor of military science at Ljubljana University.

It includes Gen Kadijevic's deputy, Admiral Stane Brovet; General Blagoje Adzic, the tough-talking army chief of staff; General Marko Njegovanovic, another hardliner who is chief of army intelligence; and General Mico Cusic, who is responsible for officer appointments and personnel.

Two other important military players, whose roles are un-



In the wings . . . From left, Veljko Kadijevic, Marko Njegovanovic and Blagoje Adzic

clear, are Branko Mamula, a retired admiral and former defence minister, and Stevan Mirkovic, a retired general and former chief of staff. Adm Mamula has a reputation for arrogance and reluctance to compromise.

"Mamula would head the junta and Kadijevic would be his deputy," says Professor Bebler. The two men spent years together in charge of the Yugoslav defence industries, and Gen Kadijevic was deputy

defence minister to Adm Mamula before replacing his boss. But there are believed to be differences between the doctrinaire Adm Mamula and the pragmatic Gen Kadijevic.

All of them belong to the priv-

ileged caste of Tito's Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav people's army officer corps. All are pronounced communists, many of them leading lights in the new Yugoslav Communist Party reconstituted by the generals after it collapsed in January 1990. And all of them, with the exception of Adm Brovet, a Slovene, are Serbs.

The coincidence of their ethnic origins has created fears of a Greater Serbian junta, rather than a Yugoslav junta.

But although the generals may have interests in common with President Milosevic and other Serbian hardliners, their primary loyalties appear to be to the army as an institution, and to the maintenance of Yugoslavia.

Earlier this year a leaked memorandum from army intelligence — its veracity was never denied — revealed the top brass's determination to maintain Yugoslavia as a unitary, socialist, centralised fed-

eration, pledging to roll back the tide of anti-communism in eastern Europe and accusing the West of plotting Yugoslavia's disintegration.

The memorandum reflected Adm Mamula's known views that the military must be treated as an equal in any negotiations on the future, and not as subordinate to the political authorities.

Several of these aims are shared by the top brass and Mr Milosevic's ruling Serbian Socialists. But on two key points the military are at odds with Mr Milosevic.

Firstly, Mr Milosevic built his career on destroying the myth of Tito, still the patron saint for the generals. Secondly, by cruising to power by exploiting Serbian nationalism and thus raising nationalist passions across Yugoslavia, Mr Milosevic has made it more difficult for the officers control ranks drawn from the conflicting ethnic communities.

But the biggest question surrounding any seizure of power is what comes after. The generals may be in a position to take over. But how would they run the country?

"There can't be a coup yet, though not all of [the generals] understand that," says Milovan Djilas, a former close associate of Tito who turned dissident. "That would mean civil war at once and the separation of Slovenia and Croatia. It would be crazy."

The classic coup scenario — toppling the government, seizing strategic points, and broadcasting news of the establishment of the "salvation council" — is not feasible in fragmented Yugoslavia.

Slovenia would fight, a bigger conflagration would be almost certain in Croatia, the other non-Serbian republics could then cut and run, the army ranks would disintegrate, and the international community would be hostile.