

# Generals seek to claw back territory

The deployment of federal units suggests a plan to establish "Greater Serbia". The Croats will resist, writes **Christopher Bellamy**

THE YUGOSLAV federal army may already have lost the struggle for Slovenia, and could be planning to withdraw and secure a frontier for "Greater Serbia" further east, inside Croatia, including the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croats would oppose such a move, but it could be forced on them if they lost in a civil war.

It also looks as if the Defence Minister, Vjeko Kadijevic, who is seriously ill with cancer, has ceased to be an effective force and the "hard man", the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Blagoje Adzic, is involved in a power struggle with the Yugoslav leader, Stipe Mesic.

But the Croats look still more formidable than the Slovenes, and some experts believe that the Albanian population of Kosovo, although quiet at the moment, may be another flashpoint. The federal army probably struck at Slovenia first because it was seen as a softer target, in order to discourage the Croats. But if so, the strategy has backfired.

There are Serbian enclaves in Bosnia-Herzegovina and eastern Croatia. There is already widespread agreement among the Serbian opposition on a boundary for "Greater Serbia", from Karlobag, on the Adriatic coast, through Ogulin and Karlovac to Virovitica, near the Hungarian border. The border is determined by ethnic considerations, not resources.

The deployment of three columns of federal army units around Osijek in north-eastern Croatia, on the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the Serb area south of Zagreb suggests the plan could be to establish the new "Greater Serbian" boundary. The reports of troops being moved along the coast on Tuesday could also indicate a plan to reach the southern end of the Serbian enclaves by sea.

These forces could also protect

the lines of communication for a withdrawal of federal units stationed in Slovenia. Withdrawing the forces intact is important both to save face and to guarantee future security. It will be wise for the federal army not to get into clashes with the Croats; if they do, their communications across Croatia will be attacked.

A new "Greater" Serbian border would cut Croatia in half. "The Croats would never agree to it", said John Zametica of the International Institute for Strategic Studies yesterday. But, he added, it could be forced on them if Croatia were defeated in a civil war. "There is a saying in Croatia: 'What will be left will be what we can see from the top of our cathedral in Zagreb'", he said.

Meanwhile, four federal army "corps" — in fact, little more than

brigades, of a few thousand men each, remain in Slovenia. There is also one at Zagreb, which is the headquarters of the 5th Military Region. If the "Greater Serbia" plan is implemented, these would have to be withdrawn.

The columns on the border of "Greater Serbia" appear to come from either the 1st Proletarian Armoured Division based in Belgrade — the only Yugoslav division — or the 24th Corps based in Kragujevac. The 1st Division has 200 tanks and 24th Corps has 120, plus supporting infantry and other vehicles. They left on 2 July.

A picture is beginning to emerge of the federal army's operations. On 27 June, 14th and 31st Corps, based at Ljubljana and Maribor, deployed mechanised brigades to secure the international border with Austria. This

may have been to intimidate the Croats, but also was probably to stop more arms reaching the Slovenes from Austria. The federal forces also attempted to secure the international airports at Brnik, Maribor and Potoroz. The operation was controlled in Zagreb from 5th Military Region headquarters.

Shortly afterwards, the Slovene commander, Colonel-General Konrad Kolsek, was replaced by the Serbian Lieutenant-General Zivota Avramovic, who had been commander of the 3rd Military Region at Skopje. There were also reports of an airborne landing in the peninsula south of Trieste, and limited naval activity.

Some Western analysts now believe that Slovenia could mobilise up to 70,000 fighting troops and Croatia 200,000. Although they have few heavy weapons, there is no shortage of small arms. Apart from imported Kalashnikovs and captured army weapons, there are 1.6 million civilian registered firearms in Yugoslavia.

