

Breakaway republic's refusal to return border posts to federal control threatens fragile peace

Slovenia rejects ultimatum

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From Tony Barber in Belgrade, Marcus Tanner in Ljubljana and Steve Crawshaw in Zagreb

THE BREAKAWAY Yugoslav republic of Slovenia yesterday rejected a demand by the country's state presidency to return all border posts to federal control.

Rejection of the demand, part of a prospective peace deal, seems certain to worsen relations between Slovenia and the federal government and threaten the fragile ceasefire in the republic. Tension is also rapidly increasing in Croatia, where a large federal force is poised to intervene. A running battle in the small town of Borovo, in eastern Croatia, left two members of Croatia's People's Guard dead and three wounded.

The federal presidency met yesterday for the first time under the leadership of Stipe Mesic, a non-Communist from Croatia. It ordered Slovenia's defence forces to return to their bases and release all prisoners by midnight, and to lift completely their blockade of federal troops in the republic by noon today. The presidency also

ordered the restoration of Slovene frontier posts to Yugoslav control by noon on Sunday.

It balanced its demands with a directive that both sides in the conflict should show absolute respect for a ceasefire.

The Slovene government reacted with deep scepticism. The republic's leaders said the Yugoslav army was out of all political control and was preparing for another attack. "No one controls the army but the army itself," said Jelko Kacin, information minister.

The Prime Minister of Slovenia, Lojze Peterle, rejected the ultimatum and called for European Community recognition of his rebel republic. He said he would attend a meeting of EC foreign ministers in The Hague today.

Control over the republic's frontiers is a deeply sensitive issue. The maintenance of Slovene flags and customs posts on the borders is widely seen as the litmus test of the republic's commitment to independence. Ante

Markovic, the federal Prime Minister, said a ceasefire was holding between the army and Slovenia's defence forces. Two previous attempts at a truce have broken down since the republic joined Croatia in declaring independence on 25 June.

But fresh barricades were set up on the main roads leading into Ljubljana, the Slovene capital, last night. Barricades of vehicles were replaced in several spots with fences of torn-up railway lines, mounted with long steel spikes.

Croatia, the other breakaway republic, was also bracing for further violence. The information minister, Hrvoje Hitrec, said yesterday that federal army troops and Serbian nationalist fighters had crossed into the republic. They planned to attack Croatian forces and claim part of Croatia for Serbia as a region with a pre-

dominantly Serbian population, he claimed. Western analysts speculated yesterday that the federal army might already have lost the struggle for Slovenia, and was planning instead to secure a frontier for "greater Serbia".

A state of emergency was also declared yesterday in Macedonia, a southern republic where nationalist feelings are running high. Disturbances were also reported in Pristina, in the ethnically Albanian province of Kosovo. Additional units of the Yugoslav federal army were reported to be moving in the city.

The presidency is nominally in control of the armed forces and should include one member from each of Yugoslavia's six republics and two provinces. But the Slovene representative, Janez Drnovsek, did not attend yesterday's session. Mr Markovic, mak-

ing his first public appearance in three days, did little to dispel the impression that federal power in Yugoslavia had fallen into the hands of Serbian generals in the army.

Looking tired and haggard, he said that he had had no authority to stop the Chief of Staff, General Blagoje Adzic, appearing on television on Tuesday to announce that an army truce with Slovenia was impossible and that military intervention was imminent.

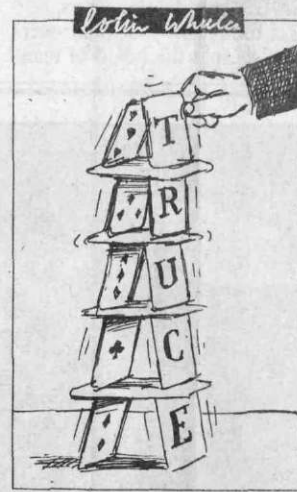
"I emphasise that the general staff is in no way run by the federal government. Never, literally never, was there a link between the federal government and the general staff. The general staff was not obliged to consult the federal government, nor did it do so. I heard the statement of General Adzic at the same time as you did," he told reporters.

He said federal and Slovene negotiators had worked out a truce that covered all major issues except those relating to Slovenia's

declaration of independence and control of the republic's borders. "Since 4.30 yesterday afternoon no fire has been opened. The units that have been confronting each other are being separated. Most units are back in their barracks. Some are still to make their way back," he said.

Mr Markovic appealed for a 90-day moratorium to let passions cool so that a settlement could be reached. "Are we too emotional to muster the modicum of reason needed to reach a solution? I do hope that we use the next three months rationally."

Diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis are still under way. An emergency meeting in Prague of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe made progress yesterday when the head of the Yugoslav delegation said his government was now prepared to accept the offer of a mission of "good offices". Earlier Soviet objections that such a mission could set a sensitive precedent were



overcome, but Moscow was said still to be opposed to the idea of a CSCE-backed team of observers from EC states to monitor a ceasefire.

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