

Croatia vows to resist federal army

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

CROATIA'S Defence Minister, Sime Djodan, warned yesterday that if Yugoslav tanks moved through Croatia on their way to crush Slovene independence, Croatia would fight them.

His threat came as the Yugoslav army said that the ceasefire in Slovenia had been breached and it would now fire back. There are increasing signs that the military, which has in effect displaced the federal authorities, is unwilling to see Croatia or Slovenia slip out of the Yugoslav federation.

If a confrontation took place in Croatia, it might be even bloodier than the clashes that Slovenia has already seen. Nor does Mr Djodan's warning leave Belgrade with alternative options: from Serbia Slovenia can be reached only via Croatian territory.

Mr Djodan told Italian television that in the event of such a conflict, "it would be wrong to talk of civil war: it would be a war between states, and we would make the conflict international". He also announced his intention to attack the Serbian gunmen who control parts of Croatia and have been involved in running battles with Croat militias.

He said the Serbs were seeking to create a Greater Serbia. "We are determined to liquidate them, as terrorists and the vanguard of Greater Serbia's aggression."

The information minister,

Hrvoje Hitrec, said that 10 armoured personnel carriers had taken up station in the Baranja region near the Hungarian border. He said they planned to attack Croatian forces and claim Baranja for Serbia.

The escalation of tension in Croatia comes as the ceasefire in Slovenia has apparently started to break down. The Yugoslav army claimed yesterday that three of its

facilities had been attacked, though the Slovene authorities denied that.

Slovenia gave a conciliatory answer yesterday to demands put forward by the federal presidency as the condition for a ceasefire. The breakaway republic declared it was demobilising its Territorial Defence Force. "We have demobilised just under 10,000 men within the last 48 hours," said Jelko

Kacin, the Slovene Information Minister. It also released 2,300 prisoners of war.

But Slovene officials said there could be no compromise over the key issue of who controls Slovenia's international border crossings. As part of the ultimatum sent to the Slovene government on Thursday, the federal authorities ordered Slovenia to hand over control of all Slovenian

border crossings to federal police and troops by 6pm tomorrow.

The Yugoslav presidency is to meet in Belgrade on Monday to discuss the country's secession crisis, and the response to its demands. But its authority is increasingly in doubt.

Yugoslav army leaders, dominant in shaping federal policy, made clear yesterday that they wanted the resignation of the civilian prime minister, Ante Markovic. A member of the high command, General Marko Negovanovich, accused Mr Markovic of responsibility for the week of clashes with Slovene forces. "The events in Slovenia are caused by the federal government. Its actions have brought the army to an impossible position and now the prime minister is excusing himself of any responsibility."

Serbia's Communists are believed to be co-ordinating their policy with the army leaders, most of whom are also Communists and Serbs by nationality.

Fifty-six people were killed and 287 wounded in Slovenia's seven-day battle with the Yugoslav army which ended on Tuesday, the Slovenian Red Cross said yesterday. The Red Cross said the army lost 36 dead and 160 wounded while the Slovenians lost only five fighters and policemen. Five civilians and 10 foreigners were also killed.

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