

# Slovenes keep firm grip on their guns

A DAY after the Yugoslav state presidency's ultimatum, which ordered Slovenia to send its defence forces home, khaki-clad youths still patrolled the streets of the Slovene capital, Ljubljana, cradling their sub-machine-guns.

The Slovene armed forces unexpectedly gave the Yugoslav army a bloody nose in the fighting last week. But they are still taking no chances. Despite talk of a new ceasefire and the arrival of European Community observers to supervise the truce, the defence forces of the breakaway republic show no sign of dropping their guard.

On the outskirts of Ljubljana, city council workmen are busily building new and stronger barricades on the roads into the capital. Made of strips of old railway lines, the barricades are overlaid with steel spikes. Underneath most of them are mines.

At Ljubljana railway station yesterday, the Slovene police escorted several hundred Yugoslav "prisoners of war" onto special trains, bound for Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia.

The Slovene Red Cross claims that Slovene forces captured 2,316 Yugoslav soldiers and 129 members of the Federal police force. Only three members of the Slovene Territorial Defence Force died, compared with 36 Yugoslav soldiers.

The Yugoslav Army, moreover, committed the disastrous propaganda bungle of killing 10 foreign nationals, when they bombed Lju-

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From Marcus Tanner in Ljubljana

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blijana airport and strafed a barricade of lorries.

"I think we've already won our independence," was the confident verdict of a Slovene soldier, as he patrolled the mountainous border pass with Austria at Ljubelj.

Since Thursday, all Slovene border crossings with Italy, Hungary and Austria have fallen back into the hands of Slovene forces, after federal troops retreated to barracks. Many soldiers and federal police units had already illegally deserted their posts, leaving the frontier crossings unmanned.

Without electricity and sometimes even water supplies, they fled, fearing night-time attacks from Slovene soldiers.

The scale of the Slovene victory has shattered the 50-year-old maxim, which held that the Serb-dominated army could crush an uprising anywhere in the country within a few hours.

The army has proved an unwieldy giant when pitted against the small but dedicated troops in the Slovene force. While the Yugoslav army tanks thundered across the lowland plains, wreaking massive damage as they bombarded barricades and frontier crossings, the Slovene forces retreated into Ljubljana, or took to the hills, only emerging to harry isolated columns of tanks and troops.

The 68,000-strong Slovene force is not a professional army

but a home guard staffed mostly by students, peasants and workers.

Since the death of President Tito, the territorials have become a thorn in the side of the full-time army, which saw them as a threat to its control. When Communist rule crumbled in Slovenia last year, the army ordered the confiscation of most of the Slovene force's weapons.

Although the Slovene territorials train for only five days a year in peace-time, they have all had a year's full-time training during their national service in the Yugoslav army. Last week, about 38,000 Slovene territorials saw active service, but not all served at once. Janez Jansa, the Slovene Defence Minister, insists that units serve only a few days at a time.

Although the Yugoslav army grabbed 80 per cent of the Slovene force's weapons last year, since then the Slovenia has been buying weapons from abroad, in defiance of the Yugoslav government.

But they still have enough guns for only 40,000 soldiers. Soldiers are equipped with AK-47 sub-machine-guns and short-range anti-tank guns. During the last week's fighting, however, the Slovenes captured — and used — a couple of Yugoslav army tanks. The biggest problem remains the air. The Slovenes have only a handful of anti-aircraft weapons and their humble armoury is no match against an air attack by a MiG.

The Slovene's biggest advantage is the terrain. Slovenia is a land of high mountains and dense forests. The Slovene forces are at home here. "We're all like mountain goats," said a soldier. "The Yugoslav army has no experience of fighting in the mountains."

The Slovenes made maximum use of barricades on the plains, to stop the Yugoslav army from moving their heavy artillery. "Putting up the barricades was easy," said a Slovene soldier. "We came out at dawn, stopped every truck which was going past and lined them up to make a barricade on the road."

But the biggest ace held by the Slovenes is their high morale. They are held together by a common dedication to the cause of Slovene independence. In contrast, the much bigger Yugoslav army was crippled from within by a fifth column of Croats and Albanians, whose sympathies were more with the Slovenes than with their Serbian generals. Hundreds of Croat and Albanian soldiers surrendered without firing a shot.

But few Slovenes labour under the illusion that the Yugoslav army has been defeated. So far, only a fraction of the 20,000 Yugoslav soldiers stationed in Slovene bases have been mobilised. An armada of 180 tanks was moved from Belgrade to bases in Croatia last week, in what may be a preparation for an all-out attack. The Slovenes hope international pressure will keep the army at bay. But if not, they are ready to carry on fighting in the mountains.



A quiet moment in the uncertain calm of Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital, as army and government deadlines approach Photograph: David Rose