

YUGOSLAVIA

The Blood Flows

The future of a country is at stake as Slovenes and federalists clash



Centrist: a wounded federal army captain

By MICHAEL S. SERRILL

For No. 2 Battery of the 580th Mechanized Artillery Brigade of the Yugoslav People's Army, trouble struck near the village of Velika Vas in western Slovenia. The unit's 60 men and 12 armored vehicles had been on the move for five days. Ordered into action as part of a campaign to reassert federal control over the breakaway republic of Slovenia, which had declared its independence on June 25, the battery had initially

moved westward toward Ljubljana, the Slovenian capital. Then, held up repeatedly by Slovenian roadblocks, it received orders to return to its base in Karlovac, Croatia.

At Velika Vas, however, the convoy ran into another roadblock, this one formed by buses that had been pushed together across the highway. The unit pulled up, its progress stopped. Twenty-four hours went by; food was short and medical supplies exhausted. Then, without warning, the column came under fire from militiamen of



Secessionist: a Slovenian militiaman

the Slovenian Territorial Defense Force, who attacked with antitank weapons and rocket-propelled grenades. Scrambling for cover, the soldiers returned fire with their anti-aircraft guns and called in an air strike. When the smoke cleared, the barricade was in flames, but two artillerymen were dead, four were wounded, and morale was shattered. "We just want to survive and get back to Karlovac," said Corporal Nebojsa Jankovic, 20, a conscript from Serbia who said he had not eaten for two days. When someone asked him about the army's push

The pain of war: a Slovenian mother weeps over the body of her 19-year-old son, shot when he deserted from his army unit



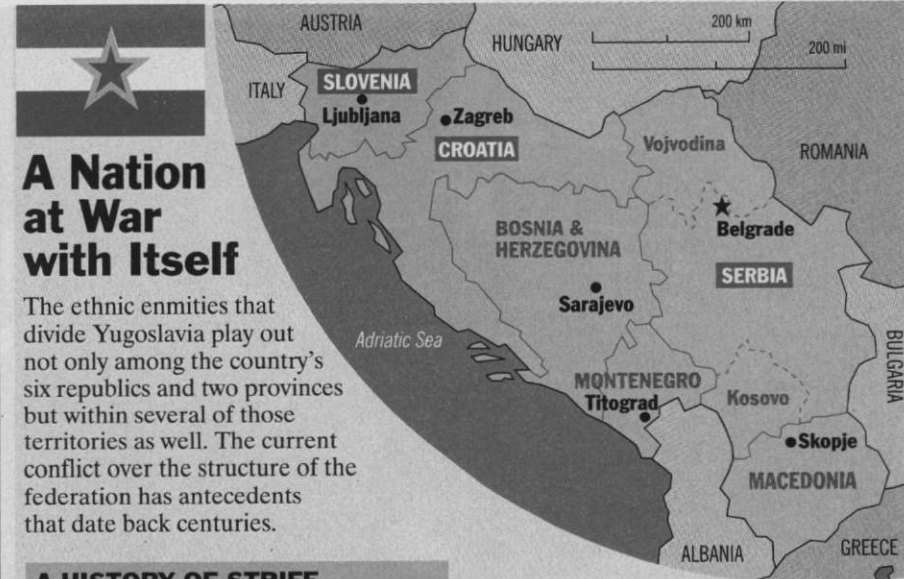
DELAHAYE—SIPA FOR TIME

into Slovenia, he replied, "In my mind, it was a mistake." Mistake or not, a bloody struggle for Yugoslavia had been joined—the latest and hottest flare-up in a crisis in which nothing less than the future shape of Yugoslavia is at stake. Would the federation splinter into so many pieces? As Slovenia's bid for secession began to gain international support, a fracturing of the nation seemed certain. Increasingly, the concern was whether other regions would break away and if some form of confederation was still possible. Most important of all was the question of whether the map of Yugoslavia could be redrawn peacefully. The skirmish at Velika Vas was only one of several brief but furious clashes that day between federal army troops and Slovenian militiamen, many of them in and around frontier posts along Yugoslavia's borders with Italy, Austria and Hungary. At one point, it appeared that the army had shrugged off civilian control and was acting on its own, which provoked quick criticism around the world.

Sporadic clashes between army and Slovenian forces during seven days produced 57 dead and 280 wounded until a truce, originally brokered by a European Community mission, went into effect after two false starts. A large column of armored vehicles that had rumbled out of Belgrade toward the breakaway republic halted at the Croatian border after the truce was declared. At week's end both sides appeared to be taking a step back from the brink when Slovenia demobilized 10,000 of its men under arms and turned army prisoners over to the government, while the army sent some besieged units back to their barracks. But the truce was shaky, and tension remained dangerously high.

The crisis not only had Slovenia and Belgrade in a state of nerves but also left all Yugoslavia in a tremulous balance. A single false move might bring the house down. If one did not strike first, one's enemy might. While the face-off in Slovenia commanded immediate attention, the situation was also dangerous in Croatia, which declared independence on the same day as Slovenia but avoided provocations like taking over border posts. Clashes between Croatian police and members of that republic's large Serbian minority, which have been going on for months, intensified, with numerous reports of dead and wounded. The armored units perched on the Croatian border thus appeared to be not only a warning to Ljubljana and Zagreb of the dangers of secession but also a potential rescue unit for Croatian Serbs.

In Slovenia territorial units still menaced some army garrisons, and the Slovenian republic's flag—white, blue and red stripes behind a shield emblazoned with a mountain and three stars—continued to flutter over 27 international border posts.



A Nation at War with Itself

The ethnic enmities that divide Yugoslavia play out not only among the country's six republics and two provinces but within several of those territories as well. The current conflict over the structure of the federation has antecedents that date back centuries.

A HISTORY OF STRIFE

The lands now known as Yugoslavia served for hundreds of years as a battleground between the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Slovenia and Croatia fell under Western cultural influences and are Roman Catholic. Serbia and the other regions belonged to the Turks, adopting Eastern Orthodox and Muslim observances.

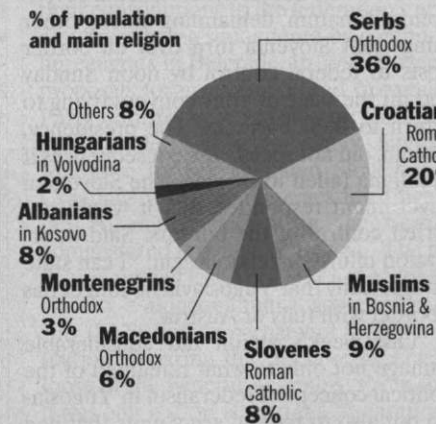
After the cataclysm of World War I, the south Slavs forged a single state. During World War II, Croatia sided with Hitler, and the ensuing civil war cost a million lives. The communists, who took over in 1945, suppressed ethnic tensions, but following Tito's death in 1980, the age-old enmities began to flare again.

UNEQUAL ECONOMIES

| | % of Yugoslavia's exports | GNP per capita | Average monthly wage |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| SLOVENIA | 29% | \$12,520 | \$533 |
| CROATIA | 21% | \$7,110 | \$512 |
| VOJVODINA | 8% | \$6,790 | \$440 |
| SERBIA | 21% | \$4,950 | \$423 |
| MONTENEGRO | 2% | \$3,970 | \$371 |
| BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA | 14% | \$3,590 | \$365 |
| MACEDONIA | 4% | \$3,330 | \$300 |
| KOSOVO | 1% | \$1,520 | \$254 |

Source: Planicon

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

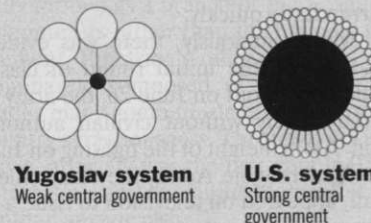


OPPOSING FORCES



FRACTURED GOVERNMENT

Yugoslavia is a federation. Unlike the U.S., it has strong local government and weak central control. The collective presidency is composed of eight members, one from each of the six republics and two provinces. The chairmanship of the presidency is rotated every 12 months among these eight.



TIME Graphic by Holmes/Wells