

Special Analysis

YUGOSLAVIA:

Prospects for Military Intervention

Time constraints may be weighing heavily on military leaders as ethnic nationalists take power in Yugoslavia's republics. The Army may soon use limited force against Slovenia, a move that probably would hasten its secession and provoke a major confrontation between federal authorities and the republics.

Defense Secretary Kadijevic said in a recent interview that the Army is ready to disarm—if necessary by force—the republic national guards, which he said are becoming armies. He also called politicians who appeal for foreign support—a clear reference to non-Communist leaders in Slovenia and Croatia—traitors who will be treated as such.

The Army's actions are also becoming sterner, particularly in Slovenia. The Slovenian Defense Minister told the press this week that the Army has ordered Slovenia to surrender control over conscription and will seek republic-held draft records on Monday. Slovenia has refused to supply draftees for service outside Slovenia and Croatia since September

The Mood in the Military

The military high command is the last bastion of orthodox Communists committed to the federal ideals of Tito's partisan movement. Senior commanders genuinely fear the ethnic war they believe would accompany a breakup of Yugoslavia and realize there would be little room for them in the armies of nationalist successor states.

The commanders appear united; relative moderates, such as Kadijevic, are delivering the same message as hardliners. There are signs, however, that younger officers are more divided along ethnic lines. The Croatians are well informed about closed meetings of military officers and appear to be obtaining information from corps-level Croat officers, so ethnic fragmentation may be serious even in these relatively high ranks. Junior officers, lacking the wartime partisan experience that binds their seniors, almost certainly reflect the divisions of Yugoslav society

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Possible Army Moves

Senior commanders have said the Army would forcibly block secession, and guidance they received last month from the federal cabinet to take control of the Slovenian and Croatian national guards give them authorization to take measured action. The Army may try to seize Slovene national guard weapons or draft records soon; any resistance could give them a rationale to topple the governments in Slovenia and Croatia. The Slovenes are providing another reason for intervention in the near future—Slovenes almost certainly will approve an independence referendum set for 23 December.

Senior military commanders probably believe that, to be effective, they will have to move quickly. Ethnic divisions continue to increase and further undermine conscript reliability. Moreover, time is on the side of republics trying to shore up their defenses and win de facto recognition from abroad.

The commanders do not appear to have coup plans and have nothing to gain from trying to take control of the fairly pliant federal administration. Prime Minister Markovic, although a Croat, indicated this week that he would not oppose a limited use of force against republic national guard forces.

Brakes on Intervention

Concerns over international isolation and domestic political repercussions have to weigh in the deliberations of senior military leaders. They also must consider the possibility that a limited use of force would cause Slovenia to move toward actual secession quickly and that Croatia would follow, starting a domino effect and bringing about what they hoped to prevent. Any Slovene casualties probably would speed the process. The likelihood that conscript forces would fragment on ethnic lines and precipitate civil conflict also remains a strong deterrent.

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