

~~Top Secret~~

YUGOSLAVIA: Without a President

Serbian-backed efforts to prevent the election of a Croatian as federal President threaten to destroy the last significant federal executive organization and to leave the military as the only potential arbiter of Yugoslavia's future.

The eight-member collective Presidency yesterday failed to approve the scheduled succession of Croatian Stjepan Mesic to its chairmanship. Mesic was rejected when Serbia cast its ballot and those of its two provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo against him, and Serbia's ally Montenegro abstained, moves almost certainly orchestrated by Serbian leader Milosevic. Mesic later said that his rejection would begin the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Legislative leaders today reportedly will attempt to broker a compromise under which Serbia would agree to Mesic's presidency and in return, Croatia and Slovenia would accept Serbian control over the Kosovar and Vojvodina delegates. some Presidency members are considering appointment of an acting president until an agreement is reached.

Croatian and Slovene leaders will be under popular pressure to walk away from the Presidency rather than yield to Serbia, and they may not accept an interim president. This could mean the collapse of the federal Presidency, leaving the Yugoslav Army as the only federal institution of consequence. Senior military leaders, including Defense Minister Kadijevic, probably will press Croatian and Slovene officials to compromise, but if unsuccessful, will approach the point where the military must choose between holding the country together by force or accepting its dissolution. If the Army steps in, it may look to Prime Minister Markovic to provide a facade of legitimacy.