

YUGOSLAVIA: Republics Agree to Referendums

The republic leaders' agreement Wednesday to hold referendums on Yugoslavia's future reduces the immediate risk of confrontation, but Slovenia still intends to leave the federation by June, and Serb-Croat tension persists. [REDACTED]

The referendums, to be held by the end of May, reportedly will give voters in each republic the choice of remaining in a federation or of effective independence in an "alliance of sovereign states." The latter, backed by Croatia and Slovenia, would allow a common economic market and possibly monetary and tariff unions. [REDACTED]

Slovenia's President Kucan has told other republic leaders Slovenia intends to become an independent state regardless of the results. Slovene officials believe their legislature may consider immediate secession next week, [REDACTED] Croatian leader Tudjman has repeated that Croatia will "disassociate" from Yugoslavia unless there is agreement on reshaping the country as a loose alliance by 30 June. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Army and Croatian forces remain aligned against each other in Serb-populated areas of Croatia and in Zagreb, where protests have delayed the treason trial of Croatia's defense minister. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The referendums will help keep the struggle between the republics in the political arena for now but are unlikely to affect the largely irreconcilable positions of republic leaders; only Serbia and Montenegro favor a strong federation. The balloting could increase tension between Serbs and Croats if votes are counted on a republicwide basis and the large and militant Serb minority in Croatia finds itself without representation. [REDACTED]

The Army recently put a substantial armored and mechanized force in Croatia on alert and almost certainly plans to deter or suppress renewed violence. It undoubtedly regards as provocative Croatia's announcement this week that the republic defense ministry has assumed control of local paramilitary forces, but it is unlikely to respond with force. It probably has avoided repeating last week's highly visible troop deployments so as to lower its profile and help keep ethnically mixed areas quiet. [REDACTED]