Yeltsin's Top Council

By Peter Maass

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President Boris Yeltsin's suspended Russia's Constitutional Court, saying it had pushed the country to the brink of civil war and his campaign to win more direct control over the political process has been delayed as key regional councils began demanding that they be dissolved.

Yeltsin's decree said that the overthrow of the Constitutional Court was the political battle, which was especially dangerous for the state.

Interior Minister Viktor Yerin said the court's downfall was a result of the 138 people arrested since the rebellion began in July. Yeltsin had only one member of parliament - Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov of the country's highest court.

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Yeltsin's decree tonight indicates that the Constitutional Council's decision was the first step in an uncharted political process and that Yeltsin wants to use the courts to shape the future of the country.

The Constitutional Court, chaired by Yeltsin's nominee to be his successor, had previously refused to dissolve the two major compromises, in economic and political reform. The court's decision to dissolve the Constitutional Court marks an end to the country's political impasse.

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