

U.S. Diplomat Tells Court of Milosevic Influence

By REUTERS

AMSTERDAM, June 25 (Reuters) — Slobodan Milosevic wielded huge influence over Croatian Serbs who drove out non-Serbs from their breakaway republic in Croatia in the 1990's, a former American ambassador to Croatia said today at Mr. Milosevic's trial in The Hague.

The ambassador, Peter Galbraith, who was also a peace negotiator in the Balkans, is the latest international official to testify against Mr. Milosevic, the former Yugoslav president, at the United Nations tribunal.

Prosecutors have accused Mr. Milosevic of providing money and military support to the Krajina Serb Republic during a campaign in 1991 and 1992 to expel non-Serbs from about a third of Croatian territory.

Mr. Galbraith told the tribunal that the Krajina Serb Republic did not deny that Mr. Milosevic exercised considerable influence over its destiny. He told the court that the leaders with whom he negotiated "said they regularly consulted with the defendant, and further, the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina was itself completely dependent on Serbia."

"The Krajina Serb leadership," he continued, "would not take any substantive decision for a peace agreement without his approval."

Mr. Galbraith was the United States ambassador to Croatia from 1993 to 1998 and took part in the Dayton peace talks that ended the Bosnian war in 1995. "It was apparent to me," he said, "as indeed it was to virtually all the other international mediators, that the defendant was the key to any peace settlement."

He said he believed that Mr. Milosevic was behind the rebels' rejection of an international peace plan in January 1995. Failure of the plan was followed by renewed fighting in which Croatian troops recaptured rebel-held territory.

Mr. Galbraith said the failure of the plan helped to usher in Operation Storm in August 1995, which prompted 200,000 Serbs in Krajina to flee their homes, the largest single exodus of the 1991-95 Balkan wars.

He said he had no doubt that the Krajina Serb leaders, Milan Babic and Milan Martić, deferred to Mr. Milosevic.

Mr. Milosevic is charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990's. He is to cross-examine Mr. Galbraith on Thursday.

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