

Milosevic Controlled Rebel Serbs

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Witness says Milosevic played a leading role in Croatian Serb insurgency.

A former Croatian Serb official testifying at Slobodan Milosevic's trial told the court this week that the former Serbian president controlled both the Croatian Serb military and the Yugoslav National Army, JNA.

Milan Milanovic, a former deputy minister of defence in the Republika Srpska Krajina, RSK, told the court on October 8 that the majority of the officer corps in Croatian Serb military came from JNA and later the Army of Yugoslavia, VJ, as it was renamed after Croatia and Bosnia seceded.

Also, he said, all RSK military personnel were formally members of VJ and on its payroll.

In August 1991, Milanovic told the court JNA units from Serbia moved to Slavonija, Baranja and Western Srijem, the easternmost parts of Croatia along the border with Serbia. The JNA first acted as a buffer between Serbs and Croats, but then openly sided with the former.

Milanovic said the JNA acted jointly with local Serb forces, territorial defence units and volunteers from Serbia, including the infamous paramilitary unit, the Tigers, led by Zeljko "Arkan" Raznatovic, "Volunteers were part of territorial defence, and JNA controlled the territorial defence."

The territorial defence commander was Radovan "Badza" Stojicic, a senior official in Serbia's ministry of interior affairs, MUP; and another MUP official, Miodrag Zavisic, was appointed as chief of police in Slavonija and stayed in that position until the beginning of 1992, when the UN deployed in Croatia under a peace plan brokered by Cyrus Vance, the former US secretary of state.

"I don't think Badza was in Slavonija as a volunteer. We thought he was sent by the government of Serbia," said Milanovic.

Stojicic also took part in the work of Slavonija's government, and what he said carried a lot of weight.

Milanovic and Stojicic remained friends after the latter returned to Belgrade, where he would rise to the position of deputy Serbian interior minister. Milanovic also said that he had a direct telephone link from his office to MUP in the Serbian capital.

During his stay in Slavonija, Stojicic regularly reported to Belgrade. "He sent reports to Belgrade, I don't know to whom," said Milanovic.

When the VJ pulled out its troops from Slavonija in 1993, Milanovic phoned Stojicic to complain.

Leaving the line open, Stojicic called Milosevic - at the time president of Serbia - from another telephone in his office and told him what had come to pass, said Milanovic.

Milanovic then heard Milosevic say that he would call Mimcilo Perisic, then VJ chief of staff. "I heard Milosevic say to Perisic to return the troops to where they had been," said Milanovic.

Before the Vance plan was accepted in February 1992, Milanovic was summoned to Belgrade, together with other Croatian Serb officials. In a meeting with General Blagoje Adzic, JNA chief of staff at the time, they were told that they should accept the plan. In the event of the Croats violating it, Adzic told them, the JNA would swiftly move into Croatia to protect the Serbs.

Three years later, in June 1995, Milanovic was summoned to Belgrade to see Milosevic.

The meeting took place after Milanovic had ordered a group of VJ officers whom Perisic had sent to Croatia to return to Belgrade. "We needed officers who had a different expertise from those Perisic had sent," Milanovic told the court.

Shortly after he sent them back to Yugoslavia, Stojicic phoned him and told him to come to Belgrade. When he arrived, Stojicic directed him to Milosevic's office.

"He asked me what the matter was and when I explained he said that he would talk to Perisic," said Milanovic. He also said that Milosevic had his order, probably given to him by Perisic.

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