

several relatively small matters. Tudjman replied testily that these so-called technical problems begged the fundamental question, on which he demanded an answer from Milosevic: would the Serbs accept the full reintegration of eastern Slavonia into Croatia? Milosevic replied that the technical issues were really about another core question: would the Serbs have rights as a minority in eastern Slavonia? Milosevic seemed oblivious to the irony that he was arguing a human-rights case on behalf of Serbs from a region that his army had reduced to rubble. Still, he had a point. The Serbs who had lived in eastern Slavonia and the Krajina for generations should have had the same rights as other dispossessed people in the region.

The conversation began with consecutive translation, but as it heated up, we invited the two men to proceed in their native language (or languages), while we tried to follow with the assistance of an interpreter and Chris Hill. Once they were liberated from the civilizing restrictions of English, the decorum of the meeting rapidly deteriorated. "Franjo!" "Slobo!" They shouted with increasing intensity, half in Serb, half in English. Finally I interrupted. "Let's do something about eastern Slavonia right away," I said. "Mr. Holbrooke, you are too unrealistic," Milosevic replied. "This issue must be settled in the field. I cannot control those people in eastern Slavonia."

Nonetheless, Milosevic agreed to "use his influence," which he continued to claim was nonexistent, with the eastern Slavonian Serbs. Given this small opening, I suggested that Galbraith and the U.N. negotiator, Thorvald Stoltenberg, return with Tudjman to Croatia the next day, in order to seek an agreement among the local leaders. I thought of the stoic Stoltenberg, who was at that moment on a plane en route to Dayton; he would have time only to grab fresh clothes and take a short nap before returning to Croatia.

Although there had been no change in the positions of the two parties, Milosevic had made two important implicit concessions. For the first time, he had agreed that eastern Slavonia would be discussed at Dayton. And he had previously claimed he had no influence over the Serbs of Slavonia; now he seemed ready to "recommend" a solution to the local Serbs.

Tudjman had gained a point. Events had given him a central role in the peace process. Some critics charged that we had made a deliberate decision to overlook Croatia's often brutal policies toward Muslims and Serbs in exchange for Zagreb's support of a peace agreement in Bosnia. The truth, however, was different: we did not empower Tudjman, the situation did. Tudjman could prevent a settlement in Bosnia until he got control of eastern Slavonia, the last piece of Serb-controlled land in Croatia. Given his previous behavior, his threats to go to war again soon after Dayton if he did not get the region back peacefully had to be taken seriously. Tudjman's ability both to prevent a