

Christopher and I met with each President privately, reviewing once more the ground rules that we had presented to the parties almost a month earlier. The most important rule, of course, was that no one should talk to the press. Carl Bildt had agreed to our proposal that State Department Spokesman Nick Burns would be the only authorized spokesman on Dayton, and he would brief the world from Washington. We did not even have a press briefing officer in Dayton.

Each President made his priority clear in these initial meetings. For Tudjman, of course, it was eastern Slavonia; he did not even mention Bosnia. We told him eastern Slavonia could be settled only within the framework of a larger agreement. For Milosevic, it was sanctions. Christopher offered a slight change in the American position: we would agree to suspension of the sanctions upon *initialing* an agreement, instead of waiting for its formal signing. This was significant because we anticipated that about a month would elapse between initialing in Dayton and signing at a formal ceremony. This small change in our position would give Milosevic more incentive to reach agreement in Dayton, and simultaneously relieve some of the strain within the Contact Group over the sanctions issue.

Izetbegovic and Silajdzic told Christopher again that we had to renegotiate the Federation agreement before the start of serious territorial discussions with the Serbs. We had already agreed to this, even though it would delay us. The Federation was indeed weak, and no peace with the Serbs would work unless Croat-Muslim tensions, especially in Mostar, were contained. I asked the number-two man in the German delegation, Michael Steiner—the most knowledgeable and tenacious of the Europeans working on Bosnia—to lead the Federation negotiations, along with Dan Serwer, our tenacious Federation special envoy.

With our calls completed, Christopher and I walked the hundred yards to the Hope Center for lunch with the Contact Group. Handling them at Dayton would be a problem. They could, of course, meet whenever they wished with the Balkan leaders. But the real negotiations, with the exception of Steiner's Federation efforts, would be conducted by the United States. "Some of you," Christopher said at lunch in an effort to prepare them for some frustration, "may not be happy with every aspect of the negotiations, but we are all pursuing the same result together. Let us not lose sight of that."

Finally it was time to begin. The opening event was planned for maximum symbolic value: a public face-to-face meeting among the three Presidents, the first in more than two years, and the first ever under American auspices. In the B-29 Superfortress Room (each room at the Hope Convention Center carried the name of a military plane)* hundreds of journalists waited behind ropes.