

T•H•E  
DIPLOMAT'S  
CRAFT

Friendly persuasion, Wiffle golf, and knowing when to pound the table.



INTERVIEW BY SCOTT W. HOOD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM COGILL

July 23, 2007, was an awkward day at the office for Christopher Hill.

The White House had just announced that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would preside over a Middle East peace meeting in the fall – an engagement that critics were calling short on specifics and too little, too late for an administration that had announced early on that it did not want be drawn into the vexing Middle East peace process. But now Rice was making plans for a late November peace meeting in Annapolis. In its July 23<sup>rd</sup> editorial, *The New York Times* suggested that the Secretary seek some expert advice on how to make the session a success.

“She could start by asking, what would Chris Hill do?”

Chris Hill – Bowdoin Class of 1974 – was, at the time, fresh off another success in a diplomatic career that has taken him from one global hot spot to another, most recently to east Asian capitals as head of the U.S. delegation to “the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue,” a multi-national effort to convince Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons capabilities in return for economic and diplomatic gains.

“I took a pretty low profile in the senior staff meeting that day,” remembers Hill.

Since that day – and, in fact, long before it – Hill’s profile has been anything but “low.” Born in Paris, Christopher Hill grew up in Little Compton, R.I., the son of a diplomat. At Bowdoin, he majored in economics and was a standout lacrosse player – a sport he remains passionate about today.

After college, he served for two years with the Peace Corps in Cameroon and then joined the State Department in 1977.

Hill received the State Department’s Distinguished Service Award for his work on the Bosnian agreement and was subsequently named U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia and Special Envoy to Kosovo, a position that frequently put him at odds with Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milošević. In 2000, Hill was named U.S. Ambassador to Poland, a post he held until 2004.

Married with three children – one of whom is a current Bowdoin sophomore – Hill earned his master’s degree at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., and today speaks Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, and Albanian. As a frequent visitor to the Bowdoin campus, he often speaks to students about diplomacy and the intricate negotiations he has been a part of over the course of his remarkable career.

Hill agreed to talk with *BOWDOIN* magazine in December just days after returning from a landmark trip to North Korea. He had been there to observe the agreed-to dismantling of the Yongbyon nuclear plant and to urge his North Korean counterparts to fully disable and declare all their nuclear weapons programs as agreed to in the six-party talks. During an hour-long conversation in Hill’s State Department office, Bowdoin Vice President for Communications & Public Affairs Scott Hood asked the career diplomat about his impressions of North Korea, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and what it’s like to negotiate on behalf of a U.S. government not always willing to talk with its enemies.

**BOWDOIN:** It's mid-December, and you've just arrived back in Washington from North Korea. What is it like to be an American in North Korea?

**HILL:** Well, for anyone who served in the old Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s as I did, it would be strangely familiar. Of course, what's remarkable is that there are just very few countries *today* that look like North Korea. The buildings tend to be very old – sort of a Soviet style architecture – and being there as we were in the winter, I know the Bowdoin campus can get cold, but at least you can duck into the Moulton Union to get warm! Every place [in North Korea] is cold, and the buildings tend not to be heated. You will have individual rooms where you can be warm, but the buildings are just as cold as the outdoors. So, it's really kind of another world. People are not used to seeing Americans. They tend to avert their eyes. They don't feel they should be looking at you. There's not a big police presence, but I think everyone kind of understands that they are not to be too curious.

**BOWDOIN:** So, presumably, they have no idea who they're looking at or why you're there.

**HILL:** Probably not. While the regime may choose to show you on television or put out a press release, people don't have a lot information there, so they probably don't know who you are, and they probably feel that if someone wanted them to pay attention they'd be told to pay attention.

**BOWDOIN:** Did you experience any ill will or anti-Americanism while you were there?

**HILL:** I certainly didn't get the feeling of that, no. Certainly, the people who first went to Yongbyon to begin the site surveys – Yongbyon is the nuclear facility – they felt that the engineering staff was pretty hostile to them, but after the engineering staff got the word that they were supposed to be cooperative, they were very cooperative.

**BOWDOIN:** Why were you at Yongbyon?

**HILL:** Well, we had begun the disabling [of the Yongbyon nuclear facility] in early November, and I wanted to see how it was going, because that's one of the big things that we are trying to get from the North Koreans – disabling the facility so that it can't work again. The second thing was the North Koreans are to give us a list of all their nuclear programs, and this is a so-called “declaration,” and we wanted to make sure that it's a

complete and correct declaration, so I had some discussions about that.

**BOWDOIN:** So they take you to Yongbyon and give you a list. How do you know that's all there is?

**HILL:** Well, first of all, with respect to a nuclear reactor, which is what has been shut down, you can tell by so-called “national technical means,” – i.e., satellites – whether you've got another reactor operating in North Korea. So we have ways of knowing what the universe of their reactor program is. Of course, there are things that are more difficult to see. One of the things that we have been concerned about is a uranium enrichment program, kind of like what Iran has. To do that, you often monitor as best you can purchases overseas of equipment that are entirely consistent with a uranium enrichment program. So we're looking at a number of indicators, but one thing we are not doing is playing “trust me.” It's a process where everything needs to be verified.

**BOWDOIN:** Even if you are ultimately successful in North Korea, can you really “put the genie back in the bottle” when it comes to nuclear technology?

**HILL:** Well, I think the big task through the spring of '08, and perhaps through the whole calendar year is to get them to give up the plutonium that they have already produced and turn that into some international monitor of some kind – to abandon that material. That is going to be a tall order, but that's what they need to do to completely denuclearize. By shutting down the reactor and disabling the reactor, we are ensuring that the thirty, forty, fifty kilos of plutonium – and by the way, we anticipate getting a precise figure on that – we can ensure that it doesn't become a one hundred or two hundred kilo program. So getting the reactor and the production facility is important, but it is an unfinished work until you actually get them to give up the materials already produced.

**BOWDOIN:** But what about just their knowledge? Isn't that the concern? There was a recent report that North Korea was providing nuclear technology to Syria. How do you prevent them from sharing their knowledge?

**HILL:** That's an ongoing proliferation concern, and when you find things out, you have to confront them. We have been doing that fairly systematically. We have a lot of pledges from them that they won't be sharing their knowledge, but we need to ensure that this doesn't go on in the future, and again, we have national technical means to do that.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA WAS DIVIDED ON AN AD-HOC BASIS WHEN U.S. TROOPS TOOK THE SURRENDER OF JAPANESE TROOPS SOUTH OF THE 38TH PARALLEL, AND SOVIET TROOPS TOOK THE SURRENDER OF JAPANESE TROOPS NORTH OF THE 38TH PARALLEL.

**BOWDOIN:** What are the eventual goals here? Reunification with the South? Normalized relations with the U.S.? Is that what they want?

**HILL:** That's what they say they want. Certainly the initial goal is to denuclearize North Korea so that we don't have a situation where there is a danger of proliferating material – this plutonium that I spoke of – we don't want a situation where they sell it to somebody. So, certainly denuclearizing North Korea is the first order of priority, and then it would be in everyone's interest if North Korea could be brought into the family of nations.

Now, this is with the understanding that our problems with North Korea don't end with the nuclear problems. One can argue that this is a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world. Certainly the United States cannot be indifferent to that, nor should it be indifferent to that. In having a relationship with North Korea, it doesn't mean we won't have any disagreements. I can foresee that if we do get to a point where they are denuclearized and we establish diplomatic relations, we will have ongoing differences with them over issues such as human rights.

**BOWDOIN:** Is it realistic to think that a treaty between North and South Korea – and with it, an official end to the Korean War – might come in the foreseeable future?

**HILL:** We have looked and will continue to look at the idea of substituting the armistice agreement for a more comprehensive peace arrangement on the Korean peninsula that would, in effect, turn the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea – and by the way it's not very demilitarized – into an international border (as long as the Korean people want it to be) to reduce tensions, and to create a situation where North Korea will invest less in a military. We're prepared to do all that, but we are not prepared to conclude any peace arrangement with North Korea until they denuclearize. Denuclearization is, frankly, the key to everything, and we hope the North Koreans will see it that way and understand that their security is secured by better relations with its neighbors, including South Korea.



We need to understand one other point on the North-South issue: Unlike in East and West Germany, the Korean people had nothing to do with the division that took place on the Korean peninsula. The Korean peninsula was divided on an ad-hoc basis when U.S. troops took the surrender of Japanese troops south of the 38th parallel, and Soviet

troops took the surrender of Japanese troops north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. It was never intended as an international border, and so Koreans are resentful that their country was divided by outsiders – and it *was* divided by outsiders, although no one could have foreseen that it would be so lasting. It really is one of the great tragedies of the mid-20th century, and Korean people are understandably very sensitive about it. As Americans, we need to be respectful of this fact, and we need to be careful that we are not appearing to tell them how best to do things on their peninsula and how best to deal with their cousins in North Korea. With nuclear weapons we have an important say-so, and with security issues we have an important say, because we are treaty allies of South Korea and we could be drawn into a war. But on issues like social contacts, et cetera, we need to really let the South Koreans take the lead.

**BOWDOIN:** What are the challenges of reunification? Reunifying East and West Germany was difficult, but the situation in Korea is said to present many more obstacles.

**HILL:** For starters, in West and East Germany you had an income differential of maybe three to one. Economists differ on that figure, but three to one seems like a reasonable figure. Between South and North Korea it's ten to one, maybe thirty to one. It's enormous. Seoul is one of the most modern, exciting cities in the world. Pyongyang – let's be diplomatic about it – is not. So you would have an enormous gulf. For example, North Korea essentially has no paved roads outside of the area around the capital city so it would require enormous investment projects. If the West Germans felt they had to pay heavily for German unification, you can imagine how the South Koreans might view that.

**BOWDOIN:** Have you met [North Korean leader] Kim Jong Il?

**HILL:** No, I haven't.

**BOWDOIN:** Do you have an impression of him from your travels and talks with others?

**HILL:** Well, first of all, he is a second generation leader. He derives a lot of legitimacy from his father's role as the first leader of North Korea. He seems to be very



much in charge. He seems to be a politician in the sense of knowing what the various factions and what the various institutions want. You know, people often think that dictatorships don't have politics. Dictatorships can have very serious politics, because you have to deal with various institutions. So, he seems to have a good feel for that. It would be very interesting to get a better sense of how he relates to senior military and things like that. He calls himself a general, in fact, so what does that mean in terms of relationships with the military? Hard to say. North Korea is not a transparent society. It is a very opaque society, and they're proud of it. They consider that a strength of the place, and for that reason Chairman Kim Jong Il is someone who does not put himself on display. He makes it difficult to understand what he is trying to do.

**BOWDOIN:** President Bush has been publicly critical of Kim Jong Il. He has called him a "tyrant," among other things. Do remarks like that make it difficult to do your job?

**HILL:** Well, first of all, it is not for me to critique the President. He can call whoever he wants whatever he wants. What I am doing is following a policy that is really laid down by the President and Secretary of State, and that policy is to try to engage with our partners in what some call the six-party process to get the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear ambitions. For that policy, I have received an enormous amount of support and when I've asked for things in particular, I've been able to get them. Whatever went on before, I don't know what I can say about it except to say that I've gotten the support I need.

**BOWDOIN:** During this latest trip to North Korea, you actually delivered to your North Korean counterpart a letter from President Bush to Kim Jong Il. That seems like a major departure from previous policies intended to



isolate North Korea and its leaders.

**HILL:** Secretary [Condoleezza] Rice has made it very clear that when you engage in a diplomatic process, and in this case, the six-party talks, you better be able to work within that process with the tools available. Certainly having the President convey his

thoughts on that process to the other five leaders in the six parties is entirely appropriate and highly usual. What is *unusual* is that one of the them happens to be North Korean. We have never sent letters to the North Korean leader in the past.

**BOWDOIN:** How was the letter received? Did they know it was coming or was it a surprise?

**HILL:** No, it was a surprise. I tried to deliver it in person, but it was very clear that Chairman Kim Jong Il does not receive foreign diplomats directly, so I ended up giving it just before my departure. So, I don't know how it was received, as we sit here.

**BOWDOIN:** What did the letter say?

**HILL:** The content of the letter is not public. There were five letters, all different – all addressed to the other five members, and the basic concept of the letters was to say that we were getting to the end of 2007, and let's try to get to the end of this phase and move on to the next phase.

**BOWDOIN:** And would it be customary for Kim Jong Il to write back? Is that how that works?

**HILL:** That could well happen. I think we could well see an answer at some point.

**BOWDOIN:** One of the conflicts between the U.S. and North Korea has been over ways in which North Korea has been financing its nuclear activities, including producing counterfeit U.S. currency, and distributing fake cigarettes and methamphetamines. The U.S. responded with intense financial pressure and other tactics that *The Wall Street Journal* has said may be more effective in this day and age than military pressure. Do you agree with that?

**HILL:** Well, the trouble with military pressure is, if you're prepared to threaten it, you need to be prepared to use it. When you threaten war, you need to be prepared to fight a war. Often that's not an option, or even if it is an option, it's not an option we prefer to use. So, you look at other options. Friendly persuasion is one of them, but often that doesn't work either, so you look for not-so-friendly persuasion and for ways to exert pressure, and the idea of economic sanctions come up. The trouble with economic sanctions is that often you end up hurting poor people in the country rather than the leaders whose behavior you are trying to change.

Another way to exert pressure is to try to find financial levers that really get the attention of the leadership. So with respect to North Korea, the banking issue really had to do with our taking defensive measures against North Korean abuse. For example, North Korea unfortunately has a history of counterfeiting the U.S. dollar, specifically the U.S. \$100 bill. It's hard to say who is responsible for it, but we have pretty good evidence that it takes place in the territory of North Korea.

**BOWDOIN:** Are they good at it?

**HILL:** Yes, they are very good at it. So good, that in Asia if you give a \$100 bill to someone, chances are they won't take it. So that's one issue that we have to be very vigilant on, but there are other examples where we were concerned about money laundering, so we went after a particular bank in Macau – an autonomous district in South China — and found out that North Koreans had used this account, in our view, to money launder. We, working with the Macau authorities, we went after this bank and, in effect, we were able to shut it down.

**BOWDOIN:** Is that what brought the North Koreans back to the negotiation table?

**HILL:** Well, we'll have to ask *them* at some point, but some would argue that is what kept them *away* from the table for a long time; others will argue that's what brought them back. The North Koreans kind of pride themselves on having a very high threshold of pain; that they're willing to take a lot of this before they change their behavior, so it is hard to say at this point, and that is the trouble with dealing with North Korea. It is very difficult to determine whether your actions really have the effect that you are looking for.

**BOWDOIN:** Another *Wall Street Journal* article noted – and perhaps it is because of this high threshold for pain that you mentioned – that rather than finding their North Korean counterparts menacing, U.S. negotiators often feel

sorry for them. Have you ever felt sorry for them?

**HILL:** I don't know. I feel sorry for myself a lot, but I am not sure I feel sorry for them.

**BOWDOIN:** Do you get the sense that the North Koreans understand how to interact with the rest of world, or are they so isolated that this belligerence is based instead on a lack of understanding about how things work?

**HILL:** I think there's an element of that, although I don't underestimate their skills as diplomats. I wouldn't want to be a North Korean diplomat. I don't think they are playing with a very strong hand, but they have people who understand the tricks of the trade and who understand the trade craft of diplomacy. It's very hard to say because, frankly, when you don't have relations with a country, and you don't have people in-country, you don't develop a lot of expertise. Much of what we have about North Korea is gleaned from listening in from people stationed in China or in South Korea. We don't have a good sense of how the place works.

**BOWDOIN:** Can you describe the different levels of expertise or what each of the other four parties – Russia, China, Japan, South Korea – brings to the table and how it is to work with them on this issue?

**HILL:** Well, it's interesting. With the six-party talks, everyone has the same goal, which is denuclearization. No one wants North Korea to have a nuclear weapon or a deliverable nuclear weapon or *any* nuclear weapon for that matter. But when you get up closer, you see that everyone has a different approach to the issue.

South Koreans very much want to keep open some North-South channels. They're not interested in having another Cold War descend on the Korean peninsula. They want to keep some sort of notion of communication going in the hopes that somehow this will moderate the system in North Korea and eventually somehow make it possible for normal interaction to take place. A tall order, but that's how they are thinking. Some of them think in terms of reunification, but I think most have a more modest goal of achieving some sort of *modus vivendi* with the North.

The Japanese are very much focused on a series of events that took place in the late '70s and early '80s where Japanese citizens sometimes were literally pulled off the streets of Japan and pressed into service teaching Japanese to North Korean security agents. The Japanese have a great interest – and an interest that I think is even greater at this point than denuclearization – they have a great interest in trying to find closure to this so-called

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abductions question. The Japanese prime minister met with the Korean president in October 2002, and five of these people were released to the custody of the Japanese who took them back to Japan. This is a big issue in Japan, and they are very focused on that.

The Chinese would really like to calm this issue down so that by the time of the Olympics we are not talking about nuclear weapons.

The Russians, I think, want to get paid for a lot of the assistance they have given to North Korea, and they find they would like North Korea's economy to be working a little better. The Russians look forward to having a sort of decent trade relationship if North Korea could modernize and ultimately pay their bills. I probably also associate the Chinese with that thinking, and of course from the U.S. perspective, we want to do something about the nuclear weapons.

What I am trying to do, though, is sketch a picture where you can see that everyone has a slightly different take on events, and the result is that it does make it a little difficult to get everyone together and firmly behind one line of approach. Nonetheless, I think we are doing a decent job of it.

**BOWDOIN:** And we assume you agree with the approach, rather than having the U.S. deal with this on its own?

**HILL:** It's not just a U.S. problem. I don't mind talking to the North Koreans on my own. I think it is very necessary to have bilateral processes embedded in the multi-level framework, but the notion that this is some sort of U.S. problem that the U.S. alone needs to solve is wrong.

**BOWDOIN:** Has this experience strengthened our relationship with the Chinese?

**HILL:** This has indeed had a positive effect on our relationship with the Chinese. Now, that said, we have a lot of problems with China. We have problems on Taiwan. We have problems on Chinese domestic issues, such as their human rights issues. We have problems on Tibet, and we have problems with the trade relationship with China – the enormous surpluses that they're running up against us. So there are many, many issues with China, but this is one issue where I think we are really trying to work together, and I am of the view that

in the long run it is absolutely in our country's interest to figure out a way to work with 1.3 billion people. If the six-party process has helped that process of working with China, I think it is an added benefit.

**BOWDOIN:** How do the Chinese treat you when you're there?

**HILL:** I am treated very well by the Chinese. I have a terrific counterpart. We understand each other really well, and I think the Chinese have high hopes that this process is going to work.

**BOWDOIN:** You have characterized the Chinese as being "extraordinarily pragmatic." Is that good news for the U.S.?

**HILL:** I think so. I think they're very transactional. They understand that to get something, you have to give something. They are natural bargainers in that regard, so I like to think that their pragmatism appeals to our pragmatism, and that we can work together.

**BOWDOIN:** We want to ask you some general questions about diplomacy. You've said that war may be hell but peacekeeping isn't far off. How so?

**HILL:** Peacekeeping is not far off in the sense that it is very difficult. I was referring not so much to the situation in Korea but rather to situations that require conflict stabilization and the difficulty of bringing in peacekeepers and of getting a mandate that fits the circumstances. For example, we had U.N. peacekeepers in the Balkans at a time there was no peace to keep. Then we brought in NATO war fighters at a time when there was no war to fight, but rather there was a peace to keep. You have to have the appropriate troops, and then you have to define the problems in appropriate terms. Armed peacekeepers might not be the right people to deal with questions of civilian governance, if that's the issue you've got to work on.

So, it's very difficult to generate forces for peacekeeping missions, and it is very difficult to come up with terms of reference to determine what, exactly, you want from this force. People often would say, "Send NATO to the Balkans!" with no inkling of what they want NATO to do once they are in the Balkans. So

there are an incredibly complex number of problems, and for that reason I said war may be hell but peacekeeping isn't far off.

**BOWDOIN:** We are now in the midst of a presidential election. What impact does a so-called "lame duck" presidency have on your ability to do your job when other countries might now want to take a wait-and-see approach?

**HILL:** I think there is always that difficulty, where countries will look at the U.S. election calendar and decide to see what the next administration will bring. I like to think, though, that the North Koreans who told me they want to cut the deal with the current administration really mean it, and that they understand they can't really afford to lose that much time in this process. But to be sure, that is an issue, and that is why in the last year of an administration it really has to set certain goals and priorities and to make it clear to the other countries in this process that we really want to reach something in the next year. We can see that with Middle East peace, and I like to think you can see that in North Korea.

**BOWDOIN:** Some have argued recently that as a result of the war in Iraq and for other reasons, American standing in the world is at a low point, even as American power remains unchallenged. Is that fair?

**HILL:** Well, I'm a currently employed government official, so I'm not sure how much I can discuss on that point except to say that I think there are a lot of people in the world who have questions about the United States. The end of the Cold War has meant that we don't enjoy unquestioned support and so, to get support, we will have to earn it and get out there and convince people. I think you do that with a process of give and take. I don't think you can just tell people to support you because of who you are. I think others need to be convinced by our arguments, so I like to think that now, more than ever, we need a few good diplomats.

**BOWDOIN:** But if others around the world see Americans as arrogant, how do you work to change that?

**HILL:** By not being arrogant. I think arrogance is really



something you should avoid as a diplomat, you should avoid it as a freshman at Bowdoin, you should avoid it whenever you can because it never helps, and it will create problems for you throughout life.

**BOWDOIN:** Since you mentioned Bowdoin... how did you end up there? We know your father went to Bowdoin.

**HILL:** Yes, my dad went to Bowdoin. I was at Moses Brown School in Rhode Island. I got a letter from the Brown lacrosse coach and I was thinking, "Do I want to go to Brown?" I wanted to play sports, and Bowdoin gave me the opportunity. At Brown, I don't know if I would have made the top four mid-fielders, but at Bowdoin I lettered as a freshman, so that was one thing on my mind. I also just liked the small classes, loved the atmosphere, and I applied early decision.

**BOWDOIN:** Are your fondest Bowdoin memories on the lacrosse field?

**HILL:** Probably. Either that or in the library working on a term paper – I guess it was lacrosse.

**BOWDOIN:** The last time you were on campus, someone asked you to talk about the one thing you learned in college that helped you in your job. You replied that it was playing on the lacrosse team because it taught you about team work.

**HILL:** Yeah, yeah, I really do believe in that. I think diplomacy is about team work. When I go on these trips to China or wherever, I go with a very able group of people and you have to have a sense of people's strengths. You are often running plays in the dirt and you're improvising a lot but you do that by having a good relationship with people and you stick up for each other.

**BOWDOIN:** You were an economics major. How did that prepare you for this?

**HILL:** I studied resource economics and I took demography courses, studying lesser developed countries. I was very interested in development so it was kind of a macro look at economics. I was never interested in economics from the point of view of going into business.

I was also interested in it from the point of view of how countries work. So, from Bowdoin, I went into the Peace Corps, which was a continuation of that, where I worked on rural credit institutions in rural Cameroon in West Africa.

So, I think to understand a country's economy and to get a sense of how things work is a real skill, and I think I can probably without too much difficulty trace that back to college.

**BOWDOIN:** We assume you remain a strong believer in the liberal arts, especially since one of your daughters is now at Bowdoin.

**HILL:** I sure am. You know – unless you know precisely what you want to do, which I did not, I think it is the way to go. I cannot imagine just going in and studying something as a sophomore and thinking that's what I am going to end up as. So, I think a liberal arts college is best, including English classes because people always ask in the foreign service what is the most important language and the answer I always give is "English." I think a liberal arts degree is the way to go. You haven't closed any doors, and you've probably opened up a few.

**BOWDOIN:** Did you take any science classes when you were at Bowdoin? You've clearly had to learn a lot about nuclear physics.

**HILL:** Well, I think a liberal arts education is a good basis for getting a briefing on nuclear physics and being an educated consumer of it, but come to think of it I don't think I did take any science courses.

**BOWDOIN:** So how did you pick up all the knowledge you needed to go inspect a North Korean nuclear power plant and know that it was being dismantled?

**HILL:** Well, I can't trace it to lacrosse [*laughs*]. You know, if you have an analytical mind... I understand things because I listen well. I think you can be an educated consumer, and that's what I am on these things. I know well enough the things I don't know, and that's why I have people I work with.

**BOWDOIN:** Former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Richard Holbrooke, whom you worked with on the Balkans, has described you as "brilliant, fearless, and argumentative." Fair assessment?



**HILL:** Well, I don't know about the first two things, but yeah, sure – I mean we would discuss a lot of things together... "argumentative" sounds slightly pejorative. I would rather say that I would question things before doing them.

**BOWDOIN:** We also read that you have been described as being unflappable. Have you ever lost your cool in a negotiation?

**HILL:** No.

**BOWDOIN:** But you are also someone who has been described as a person not afraid to pound the table.

**HILL:** Well, there's a lot of "performance art" in negotiation, but I have never lost my cool in a negotiation. Yeah, I've lost my cool when the Red Sox lost a game they shouldn't have lost, but I wouldn't lose it in a diplomatic negotiation. I think it is really important to keep your cool. Occasionally you want to do things that look like you are pretty upset, but you should have command of your actions.

**BOWDOIN:** Have you ever really pounded the table?

**HILL:** Sure, for effect. There are times when you want to make it very clear to people what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, so you may want to walk out. You might want to theatrically tear a piece of paper up in front of people. There are a bunch of things you might do theatrically, but you shouldn't have lost your cool. You should have a reason for doing them.

**BOWDOIN:** And how do you learn all those techniques? Just experience?

**HILL:** I have been in this business a long time. It all comes back to lacrosse.

**BOWDOIN:** We've heard you speak at Bowdoin and have detected what we'll call "verbal eye rolling" at times when you have recounted some of your experiences. Is the work just bizarre at times?

**HILL:** No, I just sometimes have an overdeveloped sense of irony. I am always looking for sort of weirdness in situations, and I have a bit of a sense of humor, which is certainly my constant companion.

IF YOU TAKE THE ARGUMENT THAT YOU SHOULDN'T BE ENGAGING THEN THE QUESTION IS, HOW ARE YOU GETTING SOMETHING ACCOMPLISHED? I DON'T THINK POSTURING IS A GOOD SUBSTITUTE FOR POLICY.

**BOWDOIN:** We heard you took up golf for diplomatic reasons. How is that going?

**HILL:** Well, in Asia – if you're an ambassador in Korea as I was, you need to know how to play golf. So you just learn it. It's not impossible. Some of the worst athletes I've ever known know how to play golf. I got some clubs, took lessons, and then I got some Wiffle balls in the back yard of the residence and pounded out drive after drive and figured out how to drive it straight. The point is that you don't want to put yourself in a situation where you can't keep up with the rest of the people. But frankly, I prefer lacrosse sticks.

**BOWDOIN:** You are among a relatively small number of senior diplomats – including Tom Pickering '53 – who have been successful in both Democratic and Republican administrations. How do you navigate those political waters so well?

**HILL:** I think you would be surprised to know how many things are the same between administrations. Certainly you will see issues of war and peace, and they may be different and how things are handled at the presidential level may be different, but a lot of the issues we deal with can be similar.

In terms of what I am doing right now dealing with this North Korean issue, I am very comfortable with where we are. I have my frustrations with people I fight battles with within the Administration, but I feel I have the allies, and I think I have enough support to win these battles.

A lot of what you do in this business is you reserve your best diplomacy for home. If I was in a situation where an administration just had me in the wrong job, I wouldn't be doing it. In all these jobs – especially in the foreign service where it is not just a nine-to-five job, it's a life – if you're not comfortable with the way the issue is being handled, you probably shouldn't be working on it.

**BOWDOIN:** One of your battles appears to have been with those who believe the U.S. simply should not negotiate or even speak with North Korea.

**HILL:** I completely disagree with that view. I know that was a view that prevailed before I was working on it, but when I was asked to work on it, my first question was, "How are we going to deal with them?" I got all

the assurances that I needed that we would be engaged with them.

I want to emphasize that negotiation or engaging with a country doesn't mean that you necessarily agree with that country. You are engaging with them because engagement is a tool of getting something done. If you take the argument that you shouldn't be engaging then the question is, how are you getting something accomplished? I don't think posturing is a good substitute for policy. I think you should be looking at how to get your way on an issue. If you're not going to engage, you have to tell me, then, why isolating a country is really going to accomplish your goals, and usually people don't have any explanation for that.

**BOWDOIN:** Getting back to the *New York Times* editorial – that Secretary Rice should simply ask you what to do about peace in the Middle East – what *should* be done there?

**HILL:** First of all, I did not talk to anyone from the *New York Times* editorial page that day, I can assure you of that!

Look, I think people need to be careful not to think that all these issues can be solved with a sort of one-size-fits-all approach. I'm not in a position to really say what needs to be done in the Middle East, but I know there is engagement throughout the Middle East, and that Secretary Rice has been in the Middle East more often than in Washington of late engaging these countries. So, I'm not in the position to second guess what anyone is doing there.

These are tough issues. The old cliché is; The reason they are around so long is that they are tough issues. That's very true. They're not easy to solve. What you are trying to do is to get people to do things they don't want to do.

I always remember dealing with the Kosovo issues, and I felt I had a really good solution and this Albanian leader just wouldn't go along with it and I finally said, "What is the problem – what is your alternative?!"

He said, "I don't have an alternative."

"Well, why won't you support this?" I asked.

He said, "You don't understand. If I support this, I will go home and someone will kill me."

I said, "Okay, I understand."

So, you have to know that people often have a different reality they're dealing with, and you try to be respectful of that.