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WTOP Radio

'Earth-Shattering' Events Worry Chertoff

February 11, 2008 - 10:48am

J.J. Green,

WASHINGTON - Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff's eyes narrow and his voice develops a stern, urgent tone as he reveals America's biggest vulnerability to terrorism.

"The great weapon they have is persistence and patience, and the one weakness that we have is the tendency to lose patience and become complacent," Chertoff tells WTOP.

"It strikes me as hard to accept that anybody would believe the threat is over. There is nothing these terrorists are doing or saying that could lead a reasonable person to believe that they have somehow lost interest. Our biggest challenge is making sure we do not drop our guard because time passes."

Chertoff recognizes it has been more than six years since al Qaida launched the Sept. 11 attacks, but some experts say that's how long it took to plan them, suggesting the U.S. may close in on another spectacular attempt by Osama bin Laden to topple the U.S. economy.

"If you're asking me what keeps me up at night or what I most worry about -- in the short term, obviously, you worry about homegrown terrorists or somebody coming in with an explosive device or the kind of act of violence or terror that we've actually seen occasionally carried out in this country by people who are simply nuts or like a Timothy McVeigh.

"But in the longer run, in terms of something that would really be earth-shattering, the kinds of things I'm worried about are a nuclear or a dirty bomb attack or a nuclear or biological attack. Now I don't believe that the capability to do that is around the corner."

What worries him, worries U.S. intelligence officials as well.

CIA Director Michael Hayden told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence last week that al Qaida will continue trying to "acquire chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials (CBRN), and would not hesitate to use them in attacks."

Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell said at that same hearing that "al-Qaida remains the pre-eminent threat against the United States."

Europe is at the top of the list of possible launch points for an attack against the U.S.

"One of the things we've become concerned about lately is the possibility of Europe becoming a platform for a threat against the United States," Chertoff told the British Broadcasting Company in mid-January.

Chertoff tells WTOP he's convinced by evidence from 2007 that the stakes are high.

"Just look at what's happened in the last year. We had the attacks in Britain. We had the disrupted plot in Germany. We had the arrests in Spain," Chertoff said. "Clearly terrorists and militants are able to operate within Europe."

The special travel relationship between the U.S. and Europe is worrisome for Chertoff.

"We have a visa waiver program with respect to Europe that allows people to come without getting visas. There's an obvious concern that people might seize that as they tried in August 2006 to use Europe as a platform to attack us." And CBRN attacks, which are most likely from an organized al Qaida threat, would require the largest protective investment.

"I don't believe that the capability to do that is around the corner, but I also think that the preparations that we need to have in place to deal with this threat are going to take a while to build, and we're building them as we speak.

"But they're not going to be done in six weeks or even six months. So what is important is to stay focused on making the investments now that we will be very grateful for in several years if someone does get their hands on nuclear materials or a biological agent."

What is the Department of Homeland Security doing to prepare for the possibility? Chertoff recites a long list, including scanning capability, the ability to disarm, better intelligence focus and better capability to make sure that the radioactive material in this country is properly accounted for and secured.

"With respect to biological agents, we've got widely deployed biological sensors, but we now want to move to the next generation of sensor, which would be quicker, cheaper and even easier to disperse. We're creating an integrated intelligence fusion capability focused on biological threats, so that we can merge intelligence, clinical information and sensor data in order to rapidly identify and characterize a biological attack."

Chertoff is not sleeping any better than he was last year at this time, but he's not sleeping any worse. He feels the pieces are being put in place to counter an attack from al Qaida, and win the war on terror.

But there is one lingering question that has yet to be answered: Will the nation remain focused enough to finish it?

"We're moving properly and efficiently, but it only works if we don't lose interest in it. If we decide that it's no longer a concern, then we're going to be putting ourselves in danger."

<http://www.wtopnews.com/index.php?nid=251&sid=1342138>

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Los Angeles Times

February 13, 2008

Air Force's nuclear focus has dimmed, studies find

The two independent reviews were ordered after a B-52 carried warheads across the country last year.

By Peter Spiegel, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. military has lost focus on its nuclear-weapons mission and has suffered a sharp decline in nuclear expertise, factors that may have contributed to a mishap last year in which a B-52 bomber unknowingly carried six nuclear warheads across the country, according to two new independent reviews.

Both studies found that levels of nuclear training and alertness at the Air Force slipped after the end of the Cold War. But one of the reports was much more critical, saying accidents far worse than the errant B-52 flight could occur without immediate changes in nuclear procedures.

"The task force and several of the senior [Defense Department] people interviewed believe that the decline in focus has been more pronounced than realized and too extreme to be acceptable," said the report compiled by an outside panel chaired by retired Air Force Gen. Larry D. Welch.

Both reviews were ordered after the August bomber flight, in which Air Force weapons officers accidentally loaded the B-52 in North Dakota with nuclear weapons.

The bombs were flown to an air base in Louisiana the following day, where they were eventually discovered and belatedly secured.

Dozens of officers have been either disciplined or relieved of command, but the Welch report's findings raise new questions about whether failures within the Air Force were more systemic than originally believed. The first Air Force investigation into the incident, completed in October, pinned much of the blame on individual officers at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota.

Neither Welch's study nor an internal Air Force review, conducted by Maj. Gen. Polly A. Peyer, found any failures in the security of U.S. nuclear weapons. But at a Capitol Hill hearing, Welch testified that the military units responsible for handling the bombs are not properly inspected and, as a result, may not be ready to perform their missions.

"We have uncovered no safety issues," Welch said. "If you look at all the areas and all the ways that we have to store and handle these weapons in order to perform the mission, it just requires, we believe, more resources and more attention than they're getting."

Both studies could put new pressure on Gen. T. Michael Moseley, the Air Force chief of staff, to reorganize the service's nuclear forces.

After the Cold War, the once-vaunted Strategic Air Command, which controlled all Air Force nuclear weapons, was dismantled. The military's nuclear missiles were assigned to a division responsible for operations in space, and its nuclear bombers were moved to Air Combat Command, which also includes nonnuclear fighters and reconnaissance aircraft.

Although the internal Air Force review has not been made public, a copy of its executive summary obtained by The Times asserts that the split organization has led to fragmentation of policies and accountability, without a single commander responsible for nuclear missions.

In an interview, Peyer, who headed the 30-person internal review, said that her report does not specifically recommend re-creating the Strategic Air Command, and she warned against attempting to go back to Cold War policies with a nuclear force that is now much smaller than in the 1980s.

"We can't go back to where we were in 1991," Peyer said. "We don't live in the same world. It's not the same environment."

However, the Welch report is highly critical of the split commands. The report concludes that combining nuclear forces with nonnuclear organizations has led to "markedly reduced levels of leadership whose daily focus is the nuclear enterprise and a general devaluation of the nuclear mission and those who perform the mission."

Welch's report was completed at the request of Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who has already raised concerns with Air Force officials that the original investigation into the B-52 incident may have unfairly limited blame to midlevel officers. The internal Air Force investigation was ordered by Moseley.

Air Force officials said they are already implementing many of the recommendations in both reports but insisted that existing regulations governing nuclear procedures were adequate.

Testifying alongside Welch, Lt. Gen. Daniel J. Darnell, the Air Force's head of operations, said that while Peyer's blue-ribbon commission showed that the service could improve its nuclear programs, the underlying policies and procedures were validated.

"The Air Force portion of the nuclear deterrent is sound, and we will take every measure necessary to provide safe, secure, reliable nuclear surety to the American public," Darnell said.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-b52s13feb13.1.756755.story>

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Washington Post

Panel Cites Drop in U.S. Attention to Nuclear Arsenal

B-52's 2007 Flight With Warheads Prompted Review

By Walter Pincus

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, February 13, 2008; Page A02

The Defense Department is displaying a "precipitous decrease in attention" to the security and control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, according to a Defense Science Board task force that examined the broader causes behind the U.S. flight in August of a B-52 bomber that inadvertently carried six cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads.

"The decline in DoD focus has been more pronounced than realized and too extreme to be acceptable," the task force said in a report released yesterday by its chairman, retired Air Force Gen. Larry D. Welch, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

Welch, who served in the 1980s as head of the Strategic Air Command and later as Air Force chief of staff, told the senators about his concern that "the nation and its leadership do not value the nuclear mission and the people who perform that mission."

The six cruise missiles, which were mistakenly believed to be carrying dummy warheads, were loaded on an Air Force B-52 and flown 1,400 miles from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

"No one knew where they were, or even missed them, for over 36 hours," said Sen. Carl M. Levin (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate committee. "This entire episode really is a wake-up call."

The Welch panel pointed out that Air Force colonels, Navy captains and mid-level civilians are now responsible for managing the Pentagon's nuclear programs -- a task that during the Cold War was handled by senior flag officers or senior civilians. One of the panel's recommendations is the appointment of an assistant secretary of defense for nuclear enterprise reporting directly to the defense secretary, as well as the naming of flag officers in each of the services who would focus solely on nuclear weapons.

The task force's findings were reflected in a statement made before the committee by three senior Air Force officers who had supervised two other inquiries after the B-52 flight. They said the Air Force's once-central focus on its nuclear mission "has diminished since 1991," after the end of the Cold War. At the same time, they said, "the Air Force began 17 years of continuous combat including conventional air power commitments" using aircraft, such as B-52s, once reserved for nuclear operations.

The Defense Science Board is made up of experts from the private sector and from research groups who are assigned by the defense secretary to study complex technology and research problems facing the Pentagon. It found that almost the entire B-52 bomber force is focused on conventional missions "as the accepted permanent or semi-permanent state of affairs." There is a "widespread perception in both the Navy and Air Force that a nuclear forces career is not the highly promising opportunity of the past era," the panel of experts said.

In the wake of the August incident, seven officers, including the wing commander at Minot and two group commanders, were removed from their positions; 90 airmen were decertified, some temporarily, from working on nuclear-related jobs.

The Air Force is also reviewing its inspection process for units charged with nuclear weapons maintenance; the unit at Minot Air Force base had received a favorable inspection rating shortly before the incident. Air Force Lt. Gen. Daniel J. Darnell, deputy chief of staff for operations, told the Senate committee that the Air Force is considering reducing the advance notice that units receive before inspections.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Polly A. Peyer, director of resource integrations, said that nuclear safeguards were restored after the incident but that more funding will be sought in the fiscal 2010 budget.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021202498.html>

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Time.com

Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2008

Return of the Plague

By Laura Blue

Like no other disease, plague evokes terror. One of the most lethal illnesses in human history, it killed probably a third of Europe's population in the 14th century. It may also have been one of the first agents of biological warfare: It's said that in the 1340s, invading Mongols catapulted their plague dead over the city wall into Kaffa in the Crimea. Yet the plague is not just a disease of the distant past. While cases tapered off in the mid-20th century, the World Health Organization (WHO) now classifies plague as "re-emerging." No one is predicting another pandemic like the Black Death that devastated Europe. The WHO now records at most only a few thousand cases worldwide per year; and, if detected early, the disease can be treated effectively with antibiotics. But since the early 1990s, plague has returned to places — including India, Zambia, Mozambique, Algeria and parts of China — that had not seen it in many years or even decades. Its global footprint has also shifted, according to a paper published last month in the journal *PLoS Medicine*. In the 1970s, most plague cases were in Asia; today, more than 90% are in Africa. The conundrum for epidemiologists: Why is human plague reappearing now, even though nearby animal populations have likely harbored the culprit *Yersinia pestis* bacteria all along?

Plague lives in many rodent species, and is most often transferred to humans by the animals' fleas. Scientists know which regions of the world harbor infected animals, but they are only just beginning to understand the dynamics of plague infection. Its spread depends not just on *Yersinia pestis* but also on interactions among rodents and, crucially, on contact between humans and wildlife. Madagascar is a good example. For decades, plague was restricted to the highlands, according to a 2004 paper by researchers in Madagascar, Senegal and France. But it showed up on the

coast in 1991, when the Asian shrew somehow picked up infected fleas. The plague's earlier comeback in the inland capital, Antananarivo, arose as city sprawl and shoddy housing put residents in closer contact with black rats. In 1998, inland villages reported cases, too, perhaps caused by rats displaced through deforestation.

Even in the antibiotic age, then, containing plague requires monitoring more than human cases, says Nils Christian Stenseth, head of the Center for Ecological and Evolutionary Synthesis in Oslo, and lead author of the *PLoS Medicine* paper. Working with nearly 50 years of animal, human and bacteriological statistics from the former Soviet Union, his team found that human plague in Kazakhstan occurs only when the local gerbil population reaches a certain threshold in winter. Warmer winters mean more gerbils. That, says Stenseth, suggests plague's "re-emergence might have a climate component."

If so, global warming may exacerbate the threat — an unsettling thought, given the viciousness of the disease. "The plague bacillus is probably the most pathogenic infectious agent on the planet right now, and we still don't know why it's so virulent," says Elisabeth Carniel, a plague expert at the Institut Pasteur in Paris. It may no longer make history, but plague hasn't lost its terrifying power.

<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1712255,00.html>

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Washington Post
February 14, 2008
Pg. 19

Diplomats: Iran Using Gas In New Centrifuges

By George Jahn, Associated Press

VIENNA, Feb. 13 -- Iran's new-generation advanced centrifuges have begun processing small quantities of the gas that can be used to make the fissile core of nuclear warheads, diplomats said Wednesday.

The diplomats emphasized that the centrifuges were working with minute amounts of uranium gas. One diplomat said Tehran has set up only 10 of the machines -- far too few to make enriched uranium in the quantities needed for an industrial-scale energy or weapons program.

Still, the information revealed details about Iran's experiments with its domestically developed IR-2 centrifuges, which can churn out enriched uranium at more than double the rate of the machines that now form the backbone of the Iranian nuclear project.

The existence of the IR-2 was made known only last week by diplomats accredited to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, which is investigating Iran's nuclear program for any evidence that it might have been designed to make weapons.

Diplomats said last week that the new centrifuges appeared to be running empty and that they could not quantify the number of machines that had been set up at the experimental facility linked to Iran's growing underground enrichment plant at Natanz.

Fleshing out previous information, a diplomat said Wednesday that the IR-2 centrifuges were set up Jan. 20 and began processing minute amounts of uranium gas soon afterward as part of the machines' testing process.

He and other diplomats who discussed the latest details of Iran's program agreed to do so only if granted anonymity because they were not supposed to be releasing the confidential information.

Iran is under two sets of U.N. sanctions for ignoring Security Council demands that it suspend uranium enrichment, which Tehran started developing during nearly two decades of covert nuclear activity built on illicit purchases on the nuclear black market.

Iran insists the program is meant only to produce fuel for atomic reactors that will generate electricity, but the revelation five years ago of the secret work heightened the suspicions of the United States and others that Iran wants to develop nuclear arms.

In rejecting U.N. demands that enrichment be halted until suspicions are cleared up, Iranian leaders have argued that their country has a right to a peaceful nuclear program and insisted they would expand the project rather than freeze it.

Until last week's revelations that Iran had developed its own advanced centrifuge, Tehran had publicly focused on working with P1 centrifuges, outmoded machines acquired on the black market in the 1980s.

More than 3,000 of the older centrifuges are processing uranium gas near Natanz, a city about 160 miles south of Tehran.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/13/AR2008021303248.html>

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Putin repeats threat on missiles

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeated his threat to target missiles at neighbouring states if they site parts of the planned US missile shield.

Mr Putin said the US proposal to base interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic "threatens our national security".

The Russian leader said earlier this week Moscow might target Ukraine if it sited elements of such a system.

The US says it is designed to block any missiles from North Korea or Iran.

But Mr Putin reiterated Russian objections to the shield, during his annual news conference at the Kremlin.

"We will then probably be forced to retarget some of our missile systems at these systems, which threaten us," he said.

"We are warning people ahead of time: if you take this step, then we will make this step."

Russia holds presidential elections next month, which are widely expected to be won by Mr Putin's chosen successor, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7244495.stm>

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New York Times

February 15, 2008

Pg. 9

U.S. To Produce Data On Iran's Nuclear Program

By David E. Sanger and Elaine Sciolino

The Bush administration has agreed to turn over to international inspectors intelligence data it has collected that it says proves Iran worked on developing a nuclear weapon until a little more than four years ago, according to American and foreign diplomats.

The decision reverses the United States' longstanding refusal to share the data, citing the need to protect intelligence sources.

The administration acted as the International Atomic Energy Agency is scheduled to issue a report as early as next week on Iran's past nuclear activities. Administration officials hope that the nuclear inspectors can now confront Iran with what the Americans believe is the strongest evidence that the Iranians had a nuclear program.

The Bush administration's refusal to turn over the data has been a source of friction with Mohammed ElBaradei, the director general of the agency, who has argued that Iran must be given a fair chance to examine some of the case that Washington has developed.

But it remains unclear how much of the data Dr. ElBaradei will be allowed to disclose to the Iranians. In particular, it is not clear if the information includes diagrams and designs that were secretly taken out of Iran on a laptop computer in 2004 and turned over to the Central Intelligence Agency.

Under the terms of a "work plan" concluded last summer, Iran was to have met a series of deadlines set by the agency to resolve any unanswered questions about its nuclear activities.

Dr. ElBaradei is eager to resolve all of the outstanding questions before he issues his next report to the agency's 35-member board, which could be as early as the end of next week.

The Bush administration's decision came two months after the publication of a National Intelligence Estimate that concluded, with what it terms "high confidence," that Iran was designing a weapon through 2003. But the assessment indicated that Iranian officials ordered the work halted later that year, perhaps because they feared it would ultimately be discovered.

The publication of the new estimate in early December undercut efforts to toughen sanctions that were initially imposed because Iran refused to follow a United Nations Security Council demand that it stop enriching uranium.

On Sunday, in an interview with Fox News, Mr. Bush made it clear that he disagreed with the idea that the intelligence estimate lowered the threat from Iran. "Iran is a threat, and that's what the N.I.E. said, if you read it carefully," he said. "It showed they had a weapons — secret military weapons program, but that doesn't mean they can't have another secret weapons military program."

According to American and foreign officials interviewed about the contents of the laptop, the information found there included descriptions of the so-called Green Salt Project. That project, which involved uranium processing, high explosives and a missile warhead design, demonstrated what the agency suspected were links between Iran's military and its ostensibly peaceful nuclear program. If that evidence were substantiated, it would undercut Iran's claims that its program is aimed solely at producing electrical power.

The documents on the laptop described two programs, termed L-101 and L-102 by the Iranians, describing designs and computer simulations that appeared to be related to weapons work.

Iran, while dismissing as baseless the assertions that such a program existed, agreed to examine documents that the United States said pertained to Green Salt. But Iran has said it wants to take possession of the documents, something the United States has refused to allow.

Iran could cry foul unless the Americans turn over the documents, which Dr. ElBaradei said it has a right to have. "We have to give them access to the documents — I think it's fair," he said in an interview last August. "I'm a lawyer, and due process will tell me that I cannot accuse a person without providing him or her with the evidence." He added, "I can't accuse a country saying, 'You will get your charges but I am not going to tell you what the charges are.' "

Officials cautioned that they did not know whether the information to be shared with Iran would be enough to persuade the country to be more forthcoming about certain aspects of its past nuclear activities.

The most likely outcome, officials said, is that Iranian officials will be allowed to view a sanitized presentation, similar to the one that American intelligence officials showed in 2005 to countries it was trying to persuade to vote for sanctions against Iran.

The presentation included selections from more than a thousand pages of Iranian computer simulations and accounts of experiments that, according to the American officials, showed a longstanding effort to design what appeared to be a nuclear warhead or similar "re-entry vehicle."

In recent months, France, Britain and Germany have been strongly urging the United States to turn over to Iran any relevant intelligence information, including documents found on the laptop, that could shed light on Iran's nuclear history, European officials said. The Europeans did not want Iran to avoid cooperating fully in revealing its past by trying to blame the United States.

While Dr. ElBaradei is trying to bring the outstanding past issues to closure before he issues his report on the status of the Iranian program, the officials said that they were doubtful that Iran could clear up the remaining questions in such a short time.

On Thursday, Dr. ElBaradei met in Paris with President Nicolas Sarkozy and other senior French officials, who urged him to be firm with Iran, stressing that the credibility of his agency was at stake.

France has taken a hard line against Iran, joining the United States and Britain in pressing for new, tougher international sanctions against the country for flouting Security Council resolutions demanding that it stop making nuclear fuel.

In a speech on Wednesday night to France's Jewish community, Mr. Sarkozy called on Iran to "renounce military nuclear power" and "live up to its word." He added that Iran's uranium enrichment program "has no civilian purpose."

David E. Sanger reported from Washington, and Elaine Sciolino from Paris. William J. Broad contributed reporting from New York.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/15/world/middleeast/15iran.html?_r=1&sep=1&sq=&st=nyt&oref=slogin

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Washington Post
February 17, 2008
Pg. 21

N. Korea Slowing Disarmament, U.S. Nuclear Delegation Reports

North Cites Delays on Energy Aid, Delisting as Terrorism Sponsor

By Edward Cody, Washington Post Foreign Service

BEIJING, Feb. 16 -- North Korea has slowed nuclear disarmament to a snail's pace because it has received only part of the energy aid it was promised in return and does not believe it has made progress toward being removed from the U.S. state terrorism list, a delegation of U.S. experts reported Saturday.

The experts said they had broad access to North Korean nuclear facilities and held discussions with senior Foreign Ministry officials in Pyongyang, the capital, during their four-day private visit to the isolated nation.

Siegfried S. Hecker, a Stanford University professor and former director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, said he and his colleagues -- Joel Witt, a former diplomat associated with the National Academy of Sciences, and W. Keith Luse, an assistant to Sen. Richard L. Lugar (R-Ind.) -- were told that North Korea remains committed to a landmark Oct. 3 agreement. Under terms of that pact, it promised to carry out a staged disarmament that includes, as a first step, disabling the plutonium processing plant at Yongbyon that is its main source of nuclear weapons material.

But, said Hecker, who led the group, the officials added that North Korea will not move further until it receives the full measure of what it was promised in compensation by the United States and other countries in the six-party negotiations.

The talks, comprising North and South Korea, Japan, Russia, the United States and China, have been conducted off and on under Chinese leadership over the past five years. After many rounds without progress, they produced agreement last year for North Korea's full denuclearization, including an end to its nuclear weapons program, in return for energy aid and steps toward better diplomatic relations with its Asian neighbors and the United States. But the North Korean officials told Hecker and his team that their country had received only 200,000 tons of heavy fuel oil of the 500,000 tons that were supposed to be delivered. In addition, only a small amount of the equipment and parts necessary to repair North Korea's wheezing electricity grid has been shipped in despite a commitment by the six-party nations to do so in lieu of a second 500,000 tons of oil promised in the agreement, the visitors said they were told.

North Korea also complained that the Bush administration has not moved fast enough toward removing Kim Jong Il's Stalinist government from the U.S. lists of state sponsors of terrorism and countries barred from U.S. commerce under the Trading With the Enemy Act restrictions left over from the 1950-53 Korean War. As part of the Oct. 3 accord, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator, pledged that the administration would move on both fronts, but without making any known commitment to get North Korea's status changed within a certain time.

Hill said in recent congressional testimony that the United States would not change North Korea's status until the administration is satisfied it has a complete account of any North Korean attempts to build nuclear weapons with enriched uranium, in addition to dismantlement of the plutonium-based program. Hecker said North Korean officials repeated to him and his companions that they have already given a complete account, creating a second facet to a standoff that has dimmed what last fall looked like the promise of rapid denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Hecker said he was told North Korean technicians have removed 1,442 fuel rods out of 8,000 in the plutonium-based fuel-producing facility at Yongbyon, a large nuclear complex near Pyongyang. Although they and the U.S. and U.N. experts monitoring the process have determined that as many as 80 a day can be removed safely, only 32 a day are being pulled out now because of the dispute over energy aid deliveries, he added.

"It would take many months at that rate" to disable the facility and shut it down," Hecker, a nuclear disarmament specialist, said at a briefing in Beijing.

In addition, he said, North Korean officials said they were not going to present the United States with a complete declaration of their nuclear program until they are satisfied with the other issues, creating what Hecker described as "significant hurdles" to moving the process forward.

Despite the double standoff, Hecker said, he came away from his conversations convinced North Korea would be willing to carry out the rest of its obligations under the accord once the promised energy aid arrived and the other issues were resolved. North Korean officials said the disputes arose over technical rather than political problems, Witt added, suggesting they were not putting U.S. good faith in doubt.

"At least that's the posture they're taking at the moment," Witt said.

Before the decision to slow things down, North Korea had carried out 10 of 12 agreed disablement procedures at the Yongbyon facility, Hecker said.

"I judge these actions to be serious, because it would take a considerable amount of time to resume operations at the Yongbyon facility," he added.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/16/AR2008021602368.html>

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Washington Post
February 17, 2008
Pg. 4

Ranks Of Nuclear Experts Dwindle

Few Replacements for Forensic Specialists When They Retire

By Spencer S. Hsu, Washington Post Staff Writer

Two leading U.S. scientific groups warned yesterday that, in the next 15 years, as many as half of the nation's relatively few experts in identifying smuggled nuclear materials and detonated-bomb components may retire.

The pipeline of young researchers who could replace the nation's 35 to 50 nuclear specialists is almost empty, the American Physical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science said in a new report at the association's annual meeting in Boston. They called for an invigorated program of university-research funding,

more graduate school and laboratory positions in related disciplines, and new incentives for industry support of university positions.

The study's authors, led by Michael May, director emeritus of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, said that boosting U.S. nuclear forensics capability will help deter the black-market smuggling of nuclear materials or a nuclear detonation in a city.

Nuclear forensics can be used to trace the source components of a bomb to the government that produced them and potentially to the experts behind such an attack, subjecting them to the prospect of quick retaliation, the 64-page report said. "A credible . . . capability may deter some who are principally motivated by financial, rather than ideological, concerns," the report added.

The scientists' report called for the development of faster and more accurate field equipment, as well as modeling and simulation technologies; the creation of a comprehensive sample-matching database of nuclear materials; national simulations; and the establishment of independent expert panels to measure progress and advise the U.S. government in case of an emergency.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/16/AR2008021602370.html>

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REUTERS

North Korean, U.S. nuclear envoys meet in Beijing

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BEIJING (Reuters) - Nuclear disarmament envoys from the United States and North Korea met in Beijing on Tuesday, seeking to advance a stalled agreement to dismantle the North's atomic weapons program.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill told reporters that his talks with his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, were "good, substantial discussions".

But Hill gave no sign of an immediate breakthrough in disagreements with Pyongyang, which has said it wants more energy aid and diplomatic concessions before it fulfills its pledge to fully disable its key Yongbyon nuclear site and declare all nuclear activities.

"We discussed ideas that China had had and how things could be moved, so it was a good, substantial discussion," Hill told reporters at Beijing airport before heading to Seoul.

"I think they (North Korea) understand our point of view, but won't have a complete and correct declaration until we have a complete and correct declaration".

Under disarmament terms announced in October last year, North Korea was offered 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil or equivalent aid, and the United States agreed to move to take the North from a sanctions list aimed at sponsors of terrorism.

In return, North Korea agreed to "disable" its Yongbyon nuclear facility and fully declare all nuclear activities by the end of 2007.

But those two steps have stalled after North Korean complaints that the energy aid and U.S. concessions were not coming soon enough.

North Korean officials appeared willing to proceed with disarmament steps, but only after their own demands were met, Siegfried Hecker, a Stanford University researcher just back from a visit to the North, said at the weekend.

North Korea held its first nuclear test blast in October 2006, alarming Washington and also Asian neighbors.

(Reporting by Chris Buckley and Ben Blanchard in Beijing and Rhee So-eui in Seoul; Editing by Ken Wills and Alex Richardson)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSSEO35556320080219>

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