



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL

Maxwell AFB, Alabama

Issue No. 616, 7 March 2008

Articles & Other Documents:

[FBI, others probe Utah links to Las Vegas discovery of deadly ricin](#)

[U.S. To Broach Nuke Concerns With China](#)

[ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008](#)

[North Korea Says War Games Could Set Back Nuclear Talks](#)

[A Top General Urges New Atomic Arsenal](#)

[Iran To Continue Nuclear Defiance](#)

[US Cities At High Risk For Terrorist Attacks Identified](#)

[Iran says will only talk to IAEA on atomic file](#)

[State Department Gives India A Deadline For A Nuclear Pact](#)

[China in efforts to bridge U.S., North Korea differences](#)

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Salt Lake Tribune

FBI, others probe Utah links to Las Vegas discovery of deadly ricin

By Nathan C. Gonzalez and Melinda Rogers

The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 03/03/2008 02:27:28 PM MST

RIVERTON - FBI agents and area police agencies continue today to investigate Utah connections to the discovery of the deadly toxin ricin in a Las Vegas motel room -- and the occupant of that room, who remained comatose today after exposure to the material.

On Sunday, investigators donned gas masks, air tanks and hazardous materials suits Sunday as they searched a home and three West Jordan storage units for any signs of the substance.

FBI and a slew of local police and fire officials spent the day searching the home of Thomas Tholen, whose cousin, Roger Von Bergendorff, 57, remains in critical condition in a Las Vegas hospital.

Officials recovered vials of the toxin from Von Bergendorff's motel room last week, FBI officials said.

Because agents searched under sealed warrants, FBI officials were tight-lipped about materials recovered from Tholen's home and about what led investigators to search the storage units rented to Von Bergendorff.

"It's pretty bad stuff," Tim Fuhrman, FBI special agent in charge for Salt Lake City, said of ricin. "There is clearly a concern from both a public safety and law enforcement experience, when an individual tests positive for ricin."

Von Bergendorff, the middle child of three sons, grew up in the San Diego suburb of La Mesa. "He used to be a hothead," former neighbor Paul Slade told *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. "When we played football he'd always be the first to get in a fight. When he got older he kind of calmed down." Slade attended Grossmont College with Von Bergendorff.

Von Bergendorff would move back to the La Mesa house to take care of his mother, Lola, the newspaper said. She died in 2001. Her obituary said Von Bergendorff lived in Reno at that time. His father, Frederick, died in 1991. Another neighbor, Steve McNulty, told the *Union-Tribune* that Von Bergendorff kept to himself while he was caring for his mother.

Mike Massaglia and his wife, who now own the family home, told the newspaper they bought the house from a bank last year and had not heard of Von Bergendorff.

Authorities and paramedics descended on Tholen's home at 3004 W. 13400 South on Saturday. By Sunday morning, two blocks of the street - from 2900 West to about 3100 West - were choked by police, hazmat crews, fire engines, an explosive ordnance disposal unit, and an FBI mobile command unit. Traffic was blocked from the area.

It was a similar scene at Jordan Self Storage, 9528 S. Bagley Park Road (5230 West), where crews searched storage units rented by Von Bergendorff.

"We are comfortable we are looking in the right places," Fuhrman said.

Due to the deadly nature of ricin, authorities were being methodical in their searches and weren't expected to complete the task until late Sunday evening, said Juan Becerra, an FBI spokesman.

Shortly after 7 a.m. Sunday, Riverton police Lt. Rod Norton and Mayor Bill Applegarth knocked on doors warning several residents that authorities would be looking for dangerous chemicals in Tholen's home and placed them on a voluntary evacuation, said Lt. Paul Jaroscak, a Salt Lake County sheriff's spokesman. That evacuation was lifted by mid-afternoon.

Tholen, his wife and daughter each tested negative for ricin exposure, and Tholen is cooperating with the FBI, Fuhrman said.

On Feb. 14, Von Bergendorff checked into a hospital complaining of respiratory problems, authorities have said. Tholen visited Von Bergendorff's motel room eight days later.

Las Vegas police later recovered firearms, vials of ricin, and an "anarchist-type textbook" tabbed to a section on ricin and castor beans (from which ricin is made) from Von Bergendorff's room, authorities have said.

"At this point in time, we don't have any indications of any connections to any terrorist act or any terrorist activity, but I will say that is something we will continue to look at," Fuhrman said.

Sunday morning's response concerned many neighbors, some of whom described the area as relatively quiet. Salt Lake County Sheriff Jim Winder said the FBI and police response was to ensure the public's safety.

"The citizens here are extremely safe and we anticipate that they will remain so," Winder said, noting that his department is "deeply integrated" in the FBI investigation.

Once ingested, inhaled or exposed to the skin, ricin binds to cells and prevents them from developing the proteins needed to survive, said Sanwat Chaudhuri, director of the Utah Department of Public Health's Bureau of Environmental Chemistry.

An exposed person who inhales ricin will develop flu-like symptoms and fluid will eventually begin to build up in the lungs, Chaudhuri said.

As little as 500 micrograms of ricin, about the size of the head of a pin, is enough to kill a person. Depending on the amount of exposure, a person can die in three to five days, said Jana Coombs, biological emergency preparedness and response coordinator for Utah Department of Public Health.

The only legal use for ricin is cancer research, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

-- The Associated Press contributed to this story

http://www.sltrib.com/News/ci_8433189

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

(Editor's Note: Hyperlink for referenced report follows article.)

Washington Times

March 4, 2008

Pg. 4

U.S. To Broach Nuke Concerns With China

Doubts peaceful intent of Beijing plan

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

The Pentagon is set to begin strategic arms talks with China amid concerns outlined in an annual report questioning Beijing's control over the military's growing nuclear arsenal.

The annual report to Congress on China's military power, made public yesterday, showed for the first time that the Chinese military has problems communicating with its increasingly mobile nuclear-missile forces.

The report said China's new road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles and ballistic-missile submarines "will create new command and control challenges for China's leadership, now confronted with a different set of variables related to release and deployment authorities."

It added that China's military "has only a limited capacity to communicate with submarines at sea and the PLA Navy has no experience in managing [a nuclear missile submarine] fleet that performs strategic patrols."

PLA is the acronym for People's Liberation Army, controlled by the Communist Party.

Additionally, strategic nuclear missile forces, known as the Second Artillery Corps, showed control "issues" with mobile missile launchers. Recent missile exercises include "scenarios in which missile batteries lose communication links with higher echelons and other situations that would require commanders to choose alternative launch locations," according to the report.

"Pentagon concerns over China's command and control of nuclear forces are growing," said a Pentagon official, who noted that fears were first raised by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld several years ago and are shared by current Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates.

China has refused in the past to discuss the procedures and technology it uses to prepare and launch nuclear forces, which include about 130 nuclear-armed missiles, including 20 silo-based intercontinental-range CSS-4 missiles.

For the first time, the report disclosed that China has deployed about 10 new road-mobile DF-31 long-range nuclear missiles, and is deploying up to five Jin-class missile submarines each armed with 10 to 12 JL-2 long-range missiles.

Missile warhead upgrades for nuclear forces include new maneuvering re-entry vehicles (MaRV), multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV), decoys, chaff, jamming, thermal shielding and anti-satellite weapons. The enhancements are intended to defeat missile defenses.

The strategic force buildup will "strengthen China's deterrent and enhance its capabilities for strategic strike," the report said.

David S. Sedney, deputy assistant defense secretary for East Asia, said in announcing the strategic talks yesterday that they are needed to better understand China's nuclear capabilities.

"I think the biggest thing for people to be concerned about, really, is the fact that we don't have that kind of strategic understanding of these Chinese intentions, and that leads to uncertainty, that leads to a readiness to hedge against the possibility that China's development will go in ways that the Chinese right now say it won't," he said.

China's leaders insist its military buildup is part of a peaceful rise.

Discussions with China on nuclear strategy and policy are "an area that really needs a lot more discussion," Mr. Sedney said, noting that the report refers to concerns about a lack of information on China's nuclear forces. The talks might begin in the next two months.

The report to Congress, required under 1999 legislation, also stated China is speeding its military buildup and developing high-technology forces for waging wars beyond Taiwan.

Excessive secrecy by China about its motivation and key weapons systems are prompting fears over the threats posed by the buildup and that "denial and deception" about its military could lead to miscalculation and a military crisis, according to the report.

The near-term focus of the buildup is on a Taiwan conflict, but "long-term trends suggest China is building a force scoped for operations beyond Taiwan."

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080304/NATION/425232058/1002>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Executive Summary

China's rapid rise over recent years as a regional political and economic power with growing global influence is an important element in today's strategic landscape, one that has significant implications for the region and the world. The United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. No country has done more to assist, facilitate, and encourage China's national development and its integration in the international system. The United States continues to encourage China to participate as a responsible international stakeholder by taking on a greater share of responsibility for the stability, resilience and growth of the global system. However, much uncertainty surrounds China's future course, in particular in the area of its expanding military power and how that power might be used.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is pursuing comprehensive transformation from a mass army designed for protracted wars of attrition on its territory to one capable of fighting and winning shortduration, high intensity conflicts along its periphery against high-tech adversaries – an approach that China refers to as preparing for “local wars under conditions of informatization.” China's ability to sustain military power at a distance remains limited but, as noted in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, it “has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages.”

China's near-term focus on preparing for contingencies in the Taiwan Strait, including the possibility of U.S. intervention, is an important driver of its modernization. However, analysis of China's military acquisitions and strategic thinking suggests Beijing is also developing capabilities for use in other contingencies, such as conflict over resources or disputed territories.

The pace and scope of China's military transformation have increased in recent years, fueled by acquisition of advanced foreign weapons, continued high rates of investment in its domestic defense and science and technology industries, and far reaching organizational and doctrinal reforms of the armed forces. China's expanding and improving military capabilities are changing East Asian military balances; improvements in China's strategic capabilities have implications beyond the Asia-Pacific region.

China's nuclear force modernization, as evidence by the fielding of the new DF-31 and DF-31A intercontinental-range missiles, is enhancing China's strategic strike capabilities. China's emergent anti-access/area denial capabilities – as exemplified by its continued development of advanced cruise missiles, medium-range ballistic missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles designed to strike ships at sea, including aircraft carriers, and the January 2007 successful test of a direct-ascent, anti-satellite weapon – are expanding from the land, air, and sea dimensions of the traditional battlefield into the space and cyber-space domains.

The international community has limited knowledge of the motivations, decision-making, and key capabilities supporting China's military modernization. China's leaders have yet to explain in detail the purposes and objectives of the PLA's modernizing military capabilities. For example, China continues to promulgate incomplete defense expenditure figures, and engage in actions that appear inconsistent with its declaratory policies. The lack of transparency in China's military and security affairs poses risks to stability by increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation. This situation will naturally and understandably lead to hedging against the unknown. . . .

(For complete report, please click link below.)

http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Report_08.pdf

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Times

March 4, 2008

North Korea Says War Games Could Set Back Nuclear Talks

By Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Monday that annual American-South Korean military exercises that began over the weekend could further delay progress on ending the North's nuclear weapons programs.

Although such criticism from the Communist country is routine, it dampened hopes for warmer ties between the United States and North Korea — hopes that had been raised after the New York Philharmonic's concert last Tuesday in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang.

News also emerged from Pyongyang over the weekend that the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, who did not attend the Philharmonic's concert, paid a rare visit to the Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang on Saturday for “cordial talks” — a move that suggested that Mr. Kim was striking a delicate diplomatic balance between the big powers.

The military exercise, which involves tens of thousands of United States and South Korean troops and the Nimitz, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, was “an exercise for invasion to trigger a nuclear war,” the North's official Korean Central News Agency quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying. “This nuclear threat won't work with us, but will only put the brakes on the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula.”

The United States and South Korea have been staging annual joint war games for years, and each year North Korea criticizes them.

The disarmament talks are bogged down over North Korea's failure to meet the agreed-upon deadline of Dec. 31, 2007, to make a complete declaration of its nuclear programs.

Analysts say the main sticking point is North Korea's reluctance to state whether it tried to enrich uranium or to transfer nuclear technology to Syria.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/04/world/asia/04korea.html?ref=world>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Boston Globe
March 5, 2008

A Top General Urges New Atomic Arsenal

The United States needs a new, modern arsenal of nuclear weapons to use as a deterrent for the remainder of the 21st century, the top military commander for strategic warfare said yesterday. Air Force General Kevin Chilton, head of the Strategic Command, said that if the Pentagon develops an improved, more reliable nuclear weapon, it will be able to reduce the number of warheads, now estimated at 1,700 to 2,200. (AP)

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/03/05/a_top_general_urgues_new_atomic_arsenal/

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Boston Globe
March 5, 2008

Iran To Continue Nuclear Defiance

By Ali Akbar Dareini, Associated Press

TEHRAN -- Iran vowed to push ahead with uranium enrichment yesterday, a day after the UN Security Council passed a third round of sanctions that Tehran called "worthless" and politically biased.

The council approved the measures in a 14-0 vote, but unity among the major powers faltered yesterday when Russia and China blocked an attempt by Western nations to introduce a resolution on Iran's nuclear defiance at a meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog agency.

The dispute reflected the often contentious relations between the West and Russia and China about how to deal with Iran's refusal to suspend enrichment and meet other Security Council demands aimed at ensuring its nuclear program isn't trying to produce atomic weapons.

The sanctions approved Monday ordered a freeze on assets of additional Iranian officials and companies with links to the country's nuclear and missile programs, and banned for the first time trade with Iran in some goods that have both civilian and military uses.

"This resolution is contrary to the spirit and articles of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It has been issued based on political motivations and a biased approach. It is worthless and unacceptable," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini was quoted as saying by Iran's official news agency.

He said the sanctions would "have no impact on the resolve and determination of the Iranian nation and government to fulfill its legitimate rights in continuing its peaceful nuclear activities within the framework of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty."

Iran insists its enrichment work is intended to produce fuel for nuclear reactors that would generate electricity. The United States and others worry about Iran's intentions, because higher-grade enriched uranium can be used to make nuclear warheads.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the US ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters in New York yesterday that Tehran's response meant the Security Council had taken appropriate action.

The new sanctions came after an International Atomic Energy Agency report in late February said Iran continues to defy UN demands to suspend uranium enrichment.

In an attempt to keep up pressure on Iran, Britain, France and Germany had hoped to present a resolution before the IAEA board, which is currently meeting in Vienna, that highlighted Tehran's nuclear defiance.

A draft of the resolution made available to The Associated Press called on IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei to continue investigations into the purported nuclear weapons-related experiments.

Although they voted for the Security Council sanctions, Russia and China scuttled the Western initiative at the IAEA yesterday.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2008/03/05/iran_to_continue_nuclear_defiance/

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

CCNews

US Cities At High Risk For Terrorist Attacks Identified

2008-03-05 10:24:51

A University of Arizona researcher has created a new system to dramatically show American cities their relative level of vulnerability to bioterrorism.

Walter W. Piegorsch, an expert on environmental risk, has placed 132 major cities -- from Albany, N.Y., to Youngstown, Ohio -- on a color-coded map that identifies their level of risk based on factors including critical industries, ports, railroads, population, natural environment and other factors.

Piegorsch is the director of a new UA graduate program in interdisciplinary statistics and a professor of mathematics in the College of Science, as well as a member of the UA's BIO5 Institute.

The map marks high-risk areas as red (for example, Houston and, surprisingly, Boise, ID), midrange risk as yellow (San Francisco) and lower risk as green (Tucson). The map shows a wide swath of highest-risk urban areas running from New York down through the Southeast and into Texas. Boise is the only high-risk urban area that lies outside the swath.

The model employs what risk experts call a benchmark vulnerability metric, which shows risk managers each city's level of risk for urban terrorism.

Piegorsch says terrorism vulnerability involves three dimensions of risk -- social aspects, natural hazards and construction of the city and its infrastructure.

He concludes that the allocation of funds for preparedness and response to terrorism should take into account these factors of vulnerability.

"Our capacity to adequately prepare for and respond to these vulnerabilities varies widely across the country, especially in urban areas," he wrote in an article about the research. Piegorsch argues that "any one-size-fits-all strategy" of resource allocation and training ignores the reality of the geographic differences identified in his study. Such failures, he says, would "limit urban areas' abilities to prepare for and respond to terrorist events."

<http://www.ccnmag.com/news.php?id=6023>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

YaHoo! News

Iran says will only talk to IAEA on atomic file

By Edmund Blair

Wed Mar 5, 1:06 PM ET

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran said on Wednesday it would only discuss its nuclear program with the U.N. atomic watchdog, rejecting a call by world powers to hold more talks with the EU's foreign policy chief.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comments, carried on state media, were his first since the U.N. Security Council voted on Monday for a third round of sanctions because Iran has refused to halt work the West fears is aimed at making nuclear weapons.

Tehran insists its plans are peaceful and has long called for its nuclear file to be returned to the International Atomic Energy Agency, instead of being handled by the Security Council.

A statement by world powers on Monday said the group wanted European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana to meet Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, to try to reopen talks with an offer of incentives for Iran to halt its work.

"From now on our nuclear issue is with the agency only and we will not negotiate with anyone outside the agency about Iran's nuclear issue," the president was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

In remarks carried by Iran's ISNA news agency, Ahmadinejad said: "It is not acceptable to us that some people outside the agency would want to negotiate about Iran's nuclear issue."

A senior Iranian official, who asked not to be named, said the president was ruling out discussions with Solana on this basis. "This carrot and stick policy does not work with us. So they should review their policy," the official said.

"We are in a new chapter, a new time for talks without limitations or preconditions," the official said, adding Iran was ready to discuss issues such as energy, regional security, trade relations or nuclear power plants which Iran wants.

INCENTIVES

Ahmadinejad said the latest sanctions resolution, which followed two previous ones in December 2006 and March 2007, "lacks legal credibility," IRNA reported.

Solana has been leading talks with Iran on behalf of the five permanent Security Council members -- the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia -- plus Germany in a bid to try to end the standoff.

Britain's envoy, John Sawers, reading out the statement to the Council by the six powers, said they were willing to beef up the incentives offer Solana delivered to Tehran in 2006 if Iran suspended uranium enrichment but did not elaborate.

The enrichment process is the part of Iran's program that most worries the West because it can be used for making power plant fuel or, potentially, material for weapons.

When Solana met Jalili in January, Solana's spokeswoman had said the meeting had been designed to keep a channel of communication open. Solana has held several rounds of meetings with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator without any breakthrough.

The resolution imposed more travel and financial curbs on Iranian individuals and companies, expanded a ban on trade in items with both civilian and military uses, and called for increased vigilance over Iranian financial institutions.

Iran has dismissed the impact of two previous rounds of sanctions, saying it has a cushion of crude revenues thanks to windfall earnings as the world's fourth largest oil producer. (Additional reporting by Zahra Hosseinian in Tehran and Mark Heinrich in Vienna) (Editing by Ibon Villedabeitia)

http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080305/wl_nm/iran_nuclear_ahmadinejad_dc_4

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Times
March 6, 2008

State Department Gives India A Deadline For A Nuclear Pact

By Somini Sengupta

NEW DELHI — A senior State Department official on Wednesday gave India a three-month deadline to complete negotiations on a landmark nuclear energy deal so that Congress could vote on the issue before its summer recess. Speaking to reporters here, the official, Richard A. Boucher, an assistant secretary of state, said India would have to complete the agreement by the “end of May” so the Bush administration could present it to Congress by June. “We are kind of playing in overtime,” he said. “There’s a lot of work, not a lot of time.”

The Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, declined to set a deadline for the politically contentious deal, but in an unusual swipe at his opponents, made it plain on Wednesday that his fragile coalition government was mustering the political courage to push through the agreement with the United States and readying itself for the inevitable consequence: early elections.

Opposition within India has delayed the completion of the deal for months. The process was initiated by the Bush administration to allow energy-starved India to buy nuclear fuel and technology on the world market to generate nuclear power. Opposition has come primarily from Mr. Singh’s Communist Party allies, who objected that the deal would strengthen India’s ties to the United States. Mr. Singh’s coalition would fall without the Communists’ support, a prospect that the leaders of his Congress Party clearly want to avoid.

Only a few months ago, many in New Delhi and Washington had all but given up the deal for dead. But the tide has begun to shift in recent weeks, suggesting that Mr. Singh’s government is preparing for elections before its term ends in May 2009. Last week, the government unveiled a pre-election-season budget, laced with populist appeals like a major debt waiver for farmers, income tax cuts and large outlays for social services, including public education. The week before, train fares were reduced.

On the nuclear deal, Mr. Singh repeated that his government would “seek the broadest possible consensus in the country to enable the next step to be taken.”

But if the Indians have an interest in prolonging the negotiations, the clock is ticking on the American side, particularly for the Bush administration, which could claim a singular foreign policy achievement if the nuclear deal was completed.

Several crucial steps remain. India must negotiate an agreement on safeguards with the International Atomic Energy Agency before getting approval from the 45 countries of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The agreement then must go to the United States Congress for a final vote. Crucial senators have already warned that the next president may seek to renegotiate the agreement, making it urgent for the current Congress to vote on it.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/06/world/asia/06india.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=State+Department+Gives+India+A+Deadline+For+A+Nuclear+Pact&st=nyt&oref=slogin

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Reuters

China in efforts to bridge U.S., North Korea differences

Thu Mar 6, 2008 8:21am EST

BEIJING (Reuters) - China is in discussions with the United States and North Korea on how to bridge differences and restart talks on ending the North's nuclear ambitions, a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official said on Thursday.

Talks on disarming North Korea have been on hold since Pyongyang missed an end-2007 deadline to give a complete inventory of its nuclear arms program as agreed under a multilateral deal.

"China has raised all kinds of means with both the American and the North Korean sides," Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei told reporters on the sidelines of China's annual parliament session.

"We are still discussing these means."

China hosts the disarmament talks that also include the two Koreas, the United States, Japan and Russia, and, as an old Communist ally of North Korea, it is seen as wielding particular influence over its impoverished and isolated neighbor.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hinted at progress towards implementing the deal, under which the North committed to abandon all nuclear weapons and programs in exchange for aid and diplomatic benefits, following a visit to Beijing last month.

Rice urged China to press North Korea to disclose its nuclear programs so that the stalled accord can move forward and left the chief U.S. negotiator on the issue, Christopher Hill, in Beijing an extra day to follow up on her talks.

Hill made an unexpected return visit to Beijing last weekend, where Japanese news reports said China was trying to broker a meeting between him and the North's envoy, but North Korean negotiator Kim Kye-gwan failed to turn up.

Wu said North Korea and the other parties disagreed over what constituted "complete and accurate", in reference to any declaration of its nuclear programs.

U.S. officials say Pyongyang is reluctant to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations or its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

Wu said it was not time yet to give up on the deal.

"I believe that with the efforts of all sides, the six-party talks can continue to move forward," he said.

"You can be at ease."

(Reporting by Lindsay Beck; Editing by Nick Macfie)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUST21100220080306?sp=true>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)