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GOVEXE.COM

Daily Briefing

April 8, 2005

Administration ends largest counterterrorism exercise ever

By Chris Strohm

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The administration will spend four to six months analyzing the results of the largest counterterrorism exercise in the nation's history before releasing formal results, officials from the Homeland Security Department said Friday.

The TOPOFF 3 exercise, which ended Friday, tested the ability of participants from 27 federal agencies, state and local governments, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations and other countries to prevent and respond to simulated terrorist attacks.

A DHS official told *Government Executive* the exercise did not reveal "glaring weaknesses that put the country in immediate harm in the near future."

Final results and recommendations will take up to six months to process, other senior DHS officials told reporters Friday. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, declined to discuss any preliminary findings.

The \$16 million exercise took two years of planning and consisted of a simulated biological attack in New Jersey and a near simultaneous chemical attack in Connecticut, along with a mock subway bombing in London.

The exercise began in March as chatter about upcoming attacks began to filter into intelligence channels. Part of the exercise was aimed at determining whether intelligence and law enforcement agencies could disrupt some plots. On that front, agencies succeeded in preventing a couple of attacks.

Other attacks, however, were not preventable in order that the government could test response and recovery efforts. Those attacks and the ensuing responses were carried out over the last week.

The exercise was designed to push the nation's counterterrorism plans and systems to the limit.

"You stress the system to the point at which it comes to failure or actually exceeds failure," DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff said in announcing the exercise earlier this week. "So we expect failure, because we're actually going to be seeking to push to failure, and that is, in our judgment, the best way to get a 'lessons learned' from what we do here over the next week, and what we've, in fact, done over the last few months."

The scare of a biological attack occurred, however, as TOPOFF 3 was being conducted when possible anthrax was discovered at Defense Department mail facilities. The incident turned out to be a false alarm, but the Pentagon since has been criticized for failing to respond in a timely manner and notify other agencies.

Leaders of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on Thursday [asked the Government Accountability Office](#) to review Defense's procedures for responding to a bioterror incident and to recommend any changes.

The DHS officials said they did not examine the anthrax scare as part of TOPOFF 3, or make adjustments to the exercise based on that scare.

<http://govexec.com/dailyfed/0405/040805c1.htm>

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New York Times

April 9, 2005

North Korea Said To Reject China's Bid On Nuclear Talks

By Joel Brinkley

WASHINGTON, April 8 - After two senior-level meetings between North Korean and Chinese leaders over the last two weeks to discuss the North's nuclear-weapons program, the Chinese have failed so far to persuade North Korea to rejoin nuclear disarmament talks, senior administration officials and diplomats said Friday.

As a result of the continuing deadlock, informal discussions have begun among the five parties to the talks on new, more aggressive strategies that could be used if and when it is decided that the talks have reached a dead end.

Among the steps being discussed, the administration officials and diplomats said, are increasing the frequency and intensity of United States and South Korean military exercises in the region. Even now, North Korea grows incensed with each exercise.

In addition, intelligence gathering operations and reconnaissance about the North would be increased in a manner that the North Korean government would be sure to notice, the officials said. And enforcement activities against North Koreans involved in drug trafficking and weapons smuggling, among other illegal activities, would be expanded, possibly including increased patrols that might lead to interceptions of North Korean ships. Two years ago, Australian authorities seized a North Korean ship carrying 110 pounds of heroin off Australia's southern coast. No decision has been reached to step up the use of these tactics. For the past year and a half, under a program called the Proliferation Security Initiative, the five nations have declared themselves ready to intercept ships that may be carrying illicit cargo, but there has not been an actual interdiction recently.

Senior diplomats said the parties had agreed informally that they would continue holding out for North Korea's return to the talks until June, when a year will have passed since North Korea walked away.

American officials say they have set no deadlines for the North Koreans to return. But now, "there is a palpable sense of frustration," a senior administration official said.

China told the United States this week that North Korea had agreed in principle to return to the talks, " 'when the conditions are right' - the same they have been saying for months," the official said on Friday.

"Nothing has changed, as far as I am concerned," he added.

Also on Friday, Richard A. Boucher, the State Department spokesman, said, "We still do not have a clear commitment from the North Koreans to come back to the talks, or a date that they would come back to the talks."

All of the officials and diplomats said that at least for a few more weeks, they will continue pushing North Korea to return to the talks.

During her visit to Beijing on March 21, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pressed the Chinese to put pressure on North Korea. Since then, North Korea's prime minister, Pak Pong Ju, and the first vice foreign minister, Kang Sok Ju, have visited Beijing. Mr. Kang is in charge of the nuclear issue.

Several officials and diplomats noted that, while Mr. Pak was in Beijing last month, the Chinese government also agreed to grant North Korea significant new loan guarantees, though the details were not known.

Officials also pointed out that Chinese trade with North Korea has increased significantly over the last year. One Asian diplomat put the rate of increase at 40 percent.

Reports from the region suggest that China is still holding out a significant carrot for the North Koreans should they change their minds and return to the disarmament talks - a state visit by President Hu Jintao. It would be the first visit to Pyongyang by a Chinese leader since September 2000. However, Japan's Kyodo news agency, quoting diplomats in Beijing, reported that because Mr. Kang "took a tough attitude" during his meetings in Beijing, China was saying "it has become difficult" to schedule President Hu's visit.

On Tuesday, the head of North Korea's Parliament, Choe Thae Bok, said there was "no justification" for a return to the talks.

The North Korean government has called for a session of its rubber-stamp Parliament for next Monday. No one knows for certain what the Parliament will be asked to do, but given Mr. Choe's remark, some diplomats are speculating that it will be asked to ratify North Korea's decision not to return to the talks.

In the days since Mr. Pak's visit to Beijing, North Korea has issued several bellicose statements that have discouraged the five nations involved in the negotiations with the North - South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States.

Agence France-Presse reported that in a speech on Friday, Kim Yon Chun, the North Korean Army chief of staff, said that Washington's "persistent hostile policy" would prompt the North to further "bolster its self-defensive nuclear deterrent."

North Korea regularly issues statements with conditions, demands or objections on a range of topics, and the senior State Department official said American policy now is to try not to respond to any of them.

On March 31, however, North Korea issued a new statement that caught everyone's attention.

"Now that the D.P.R.K. has become a full-fledged nuclear weapons state, the six-party talks should be disarmament talks where the participant countries negotiate the issue on an equal footing," the Foreign Ministry said, referring to North Korea by the initials of its formal name.

With that, the officials and diplomats said, North Korea seemed to be saying it should be regarded as a legitimate nuclear power on a par with the United States, Russia or China.

"From that, it would be very difficult to go back to the assumption that they unilaterally have to disarm," a diplomat from one of the five nations said. "This one could possibly change the whole basis of the negotiations."

Several diplomats and officials said they learned that even China was unpleasantly surprised by the new statement. The senior State Department official said the United States found the statement "very unhelpful," but added "we're not quite sure what it really means."

The official said he was quite upset when he first learned of the new position but added, "one of my rules is always to apply what I call the North Korean discount to these statements," meaning they may not always be as serious as they seem.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/09/politics/09korea.html?>

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Baltimore Sun

April 10, 2005

Debate On New Nuclear Weapons Renewed

Bush administration still hopes to develop lower-yield 'bunker buster'

By Michael Kilian, Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration is renewing a push to research and develop a new family of lower-yield nuclear weapons, including the controversial "bunker buster," or Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, that could be used against the underground weapons labs and leadership redoubts of the nation's enemies.

Taking a new approach, the administration is insisting that the nation's existing nuclear weapons stockpile has flaws and is ill-suited to meet current and future threats. Officials are seeking to build several prototypes for new nuclear warheads within the next seven to 10 years.

But opponents, including some Republicans, argue that these weapons' smaller radioactive yield would make them more likely to be used and that their very existence could provoke a new nuclear arms race at a time when the United States is trying to curb nuclear proliferation.

Last year, opponents in the House blocked funding for new nuclear weapons research, though the research had been funded in previous sessions.

Trying again with a different set of arguments, the administration is asserting that the U.S. nuclear stockpile is perishable, not appropriate for military needs and difficult to protect against terrorists. Plans call for spending \$22.5 million on developing the bunker buster through the next two fiscal years, as well as spending \$97 million on lower-yield warhead replacements over the next five years.

Opponents vow to fight this new initiative, with Rep. Edward J. Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, announcing Friday that he had gathered 88 co-sponsors - including one Republican, Rep. Chris Shays of Connecticut - for a measure to strip bunker buster funding from the administration's budget.

Appearing last week before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Linton Brooks, chief of the National Nuclear Security Administration, said the existing stockpile was designed principally for the Cold War-era of high-yield, multi-warhead missiles and is wrong for current threats.

He told senators that there were a number of compelling reasons for bunker buster research and replacements for the stockpile. "The stockpile we inherited from the Cold War may not be the right stockpile militarily," Brooks said.

"We have no capability against hard and deeply buried targets. Our systems are unsuited for some specialized missions."

He asserted that the administration was not pursuing the development of new weapons beyond the bunker buster, but he warned that the nation had to prepare for the nuclear armament needs of the future.

"Other than to request completing this modest research and development effort on the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, we aren't investigating any capability changes," Brooks said.

Brooks also warned that the security threats to the nation's nuclear arsenal have changed and that new technologies and safety approaches could make the weapons stockpile more secure, though he gave few details.

During the Cold War, he said, the biggest fear was spies stealing nuclear secrets; now, officials must also worry about a terrorist suicide team infiltrating a site and detonating a nuclear warhead there.

The U.S. stockpile of several thousand warheads was not built to last, he said, and must be annually certified as reliable. The United States ceased underground nuclear testing in 1992, so certification now involves elaborate X-ray examination of warhead structures and nuclear munitions under explosive stress.

Sen. Bill Nelson, a member of the Armed Services Committee, questioned the attempts to play down the new program, saying it was clear the administration is bent on having a nuclear bunker buster weapon, no matter what.

"It would appear that the administration is committed to going forward with this controversial program, not just completing the feasibility study," Nelson said.

"Is [this] an opportunity to have a serious review and discussion of nuclear weapons and nuclear policy? Or is it just an excuse to develop a new nuclear weapon and to return to nuclear weapons testing?"

Markey said, "The development of any new nuclear weapons is a dangerous and wasteful use of taxpayer money.

"The bunker buster should not be funded, because it damages our non-proliferation efforts around the world [and] would, if used, inevitably spread high levels of radiation above ground, potentially resulting in substantial civilian deaths and injuries and property damage."

Peter Stockton, chief investigator for the Washington-based Project on Government Oversight, which has campaigned for improvements in U.S. nuclear weapons security, said he did not understand Brooks' logic in saying that new warheads could be made more secure. He said the danger is not so great with nuclear warheads, which have locking devices that make them extremely difficult to detonate.

"What the terrorists are after is enriched uranium and plutonium," Stockton said.

He said his group has cited concerns over the security at the Y-12 nuclear weapons manufacturing plant near Oak Ridge, Tenn., where substantial quantities of highly enriched uranium are kept.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/nationworld/bal-te.nuclear10apr10,1,6649342.story>

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Washington Times

April 10, 2005

Nuclear Talks Hit Another Hurdle

By Joe McDonald, Associated Press

BEIJING -- North Korea says it won't even discuss dismantling its nuclear weapons until Washington has normalized relations, a U.S. scholar who visited the North said yesterday.

The new demand for formal relations is a victory for North Korean hard-liners and adds another complication to stalled talks on North Korea's nuclear program, according to Selig Harrison, director of the Asia Project of the Center for International Policy and a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

"The chance to negotiate is gone," Mr. Harrison said. "They told me that they are not prepared to discuss dismantling their nuclear weapons until their relations with the United States, economic and diplomatic, have been normalized."

North Korean officials also said they will not return to the six-nation talks organized by China until Washington apologizes for listing the North among the world's "outposts of tyranny," he said.

The North declared in February that it had nuclear weapons, though outsiders have seen no proof.

Three rounds of talks on demands for the North to give up its nuclear ambitions have produced no settlement.

Participants, which also include South Korea, Japan and Russia, missed a September target for holding a new round when the North refused to take part.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested last month that the North could face sanctions if talks fail.

Mr. Harrison said North Korean officials rejected a proposal under discussion in earlier talks to give up their nuclear program in stages in exchange for aid.

China and South Korea supported that plan, though Washington has refused to provide any aid until the North's program is completely dismantled. Washington says it does not object to others providing aid earlier, so long as Pyongyang has committed to dismantling.

Mr. Harrison said he met this week with Kim Yong-nam, head of North Korea's legislature; Vice Foreign Ministry Kang Sok-ju; and Kim Gye-gwan, the North's envoy to the nuclear talks. He said he did not meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

One official issued what sounded like a threat.

"The United States should consider the danger that we could transfer nuclear weapons to terrorists, that we have the ability to do so," Mr. Harrison quoted Kim Gye-gwan as saying, Japan's Kyodo News service reported.

"The body language and my entire experience there this time made me more prepared to believe that they have some operational weapons," said Mr. Harrison, who has visited the North nine times since 1972.

Mr. Harrison said during his visit, a senior North Korean general also warned against Washington trying to impose an embargo, saying it would trigger retaliation by Pyongyang.

"That would be the beginning of a war, and we would have the right to attack the U.S., including the U.S. mainland," Mr. Harrison quoted Gen. Ri Chan-bok, the North's commander on its heavily armed frontier with South Korea, as saying.

Mr. Harrison said North Korean officials fear that President Bush was pursuing a "regime change" in the North, as he did in Iraq.

"They really do feel threatened," Mr. Harrison said.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20050409-110845-5105r.htm>

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Washington Times

April 10, 2005

WMD Doomsday Distractions

By Alan Reynolds

CIA prewar reports on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD), were "all wrong," according to the Presidential Commission on U.S. intelligence capabilities.

That is no surprise. In a June 2003 column "Intelligence without brains," I showed how anyone capable of critical thought could easily see the October 2002 CIA report on "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction" was an amateurish collection of inconsistent speculations, rumors and hunches.

The report lacked not merely facts but common sense. The commission found the CIA's worst errors were due "chiefly to flaws in analysis," and to the "fundamental assumptions and premises of its analytic judgments," and "an inferential leap."

The panel blamed insufficient imagination. The greater danger may be too much imagination -- dreaming up long-shot science-fiction scenarios, like those recently leaked from the Homeland Security Department involving demonstrably ineffective agents delivered by inexplicable devices.

In the partially prescient 1996 Kurt Russell film "Executive Decision," Islamic terrorists hijack an airliner to kill "millions of Americans" with bombs filled with sarin nerve gas. Jet fuel would have been a less thrilling yet more realistic threat.

As the Economist noted two weeks after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: "Although a few molecules of sarin are enough to kill a person, it takes hundreds of pounds of chemicals to achieve that concentration in an open air attack."

On Oct. 2, 2001, The Washington Post's reporters Joby Warrick and Joe Stephens found defense and intelligence agencies had become so enthralled with sarin, smallpox and other hypothetical "weapons of mass destruction" they didn't connect three dots: commercial planes were often hijacked; jet fuel is explosive; suicidal terrorist tactics are common.

The article revealed "elaborate multiagency planning exercises with flashy names such as 'Red Ex' and 'Dark Winter' focused overwhelmingly on biological and chemical threats, while experts urging preparations for a simpler, more conventional attack found it difficult to be heard. ... Lots of money poured into research on chemical and biological threats. Entire research institutes were created for it."

The postwar death toll from bioterrorism is only six -- five Americans from anthrax and one Bulgarian assassinated with ricin. The death toll from chemical terrorism is 26 -- 19 from sarin gas in Japanese subways a decade ago and seven in Chicago in 1982 killed by Tylenol laced with cyanide.

In March 1999, The Post's science writer Daniel Greenberg already sensed a "whiff of hysteria-fanning and budget opportunism in the scary scenarios of the saviors who have stepped forward against the menace of bioterrorism."

Today, the federal cost of this bioterrorism bonanza is \$7.9 billion a year -- nearly \$2 billion for each known victim of bioterrorism. Yet taxpayers are still assaulted by periodic hysteria-fanning studies from opportunistic institutes claiming, "The United States remains woefully unprepared to protect the public against terrorists wielding biological agents."

Lumping nuclear weapons with a hodgepodge of biological and chemical agents as weapons of "mass" destruction is intended to imply germs and chemicals are as dangerous as nuclear bombs. In a January 2003 speech, former Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz claimed Iraq had enough ricin to kill "more than 1 million people," botulinum toxin (botox) "to kill tens of millions" and anthrax "to kill hundreds of millions."

To use ricin to kill many people, someone would have to dump hundreds of tons of it on a small area. To kill many with anthrax or botox, someone would have to first get the victims to sniff weapons-grade anthrax or eat botulism-contaminated food and then shun antibiotics or antitoxins.

Four months before the September 11 attacks, the Center for Strategic and International Studies hosted a "Dark Winter" war game that assumed the smallpox virus could somehow be released in three shopping malls without anyone noticing, leaving 3,000 unknowingly infected. Each victim was (wrongly) assumed to infect 10 more, through casual contact with travelers who didn't notice their pox. Compounding supposedly resulted in a million deaths within two months. Dark Winter was cited as a reason the Bush administration spent a half-billion dollars on 300 million doses of smallpox vaccine and tried to force risky vaccinations on first responders.

Wall Street Journal science columnist Sharon Begley debunked "Dark Winter" in November 2002, quoting Swiss expert Peter Merkle about "the sensationalistic press and marketing hype emerging from the burgeoning biodefense industry." "Dark Winter" assumed everyone infected spread the infection to 10 others, but teams of researchers say the scenario is tenfold too large. "Smallpox spreads slowly and is not very contagious," Miss Begley noted.

Smallpox symptoms are quite visible, which acts like a big quarantine sign. Even a partial quarantine and local vaccinations have proven effective against smallpox.

After the Iraq invasion turned up no WMD, a Wall Street Journal editorial seized on inspector David Kay's mention of Iraqi research on aflatoxin -- a carcinogenic mold that is researched because excessive aflatoxin on nuts can result in export bans. A U.S. lab worker once tried to commit suicide by ingesting a lot of aflatoxin, but failed.

To use aflatoxin, anthrax, botox or ricin to kill more than a half-dozen people, you have to imagine some device for effectively delivering such agents. When it came to imaginary delivery systems, WMD fear-mongering escalated to the absurd.

The 2002 British dossier claimed, "Iraq can deliver chemical and biological agents using an extensive range of artillery shells, free-fall bombs, sprayers and ballistic missiles." But biological agents (except ricin) are living organisms, which would be killed by any bomb, shell or missile. Chemical agents are liquid at room temperature, not gaseous, and most effective in closed spaces like a subway car or building.

Chemical agents can be delivered by artillery shells, but how could terrorists sneak into a city with a 4-ton Howitzer? If terrorists can attack us with artillery shells, free-fall bombs or missiles, we should worry far more about conventional explosives than sarin shellings or aflatoxin bombs.

Former Secretary of State Powell told the United Nations that Iraq had "ways to disperse lethal biological agents widely, indiscriminately into the water supply, into the air." But few biological agents (except anthrax) can survive sunlight, and none can survive chlorine. And it would take many huge trucks to poison a small water reservoir.

What about fears of biological agents dispersed indiscriminately into the air? Scenario spinners speculate about mixing anthrax with water and somehow spraying it (without detection) from trucks, crop dusters or unmanned aircraft. But to die from anthrax, you need to inhale thousands of spores. Those spores clump together and mix with dust, yet they must end up neither too large nor too small, or else they would be sneezed out, coughed up or

swallowed. Even if enough particles of the perfect size could be sprayed into the breezes, the odds are extremely low of infecting more than few dozen people that way. And none would die if they took Cipro promptly. The biggest danger of past and present alarmist statements about biological terrorism is that endless exaggeration of low-probability events continues diverting limited attention and resources away from real weapons real terrorists really use -- airplanes, machine guns, arson, suicide bombs and car bombs.

Alan Reynolds is a senior fellow with the Cato Institute and a nationally syndicated columnist.

<http://www.washtimes.com/commentary/20050409-102738-7969r.htm>

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New York Times

April 11, 2005

North Korea Deals A Blow To Arms Talks

By Joseph Kahn

BEIJING, April 10 - The North Korean government has disavowed a commitment to negotiate a step-by-step elimination of its nuclear weapons program with the Bush administration but may freeze the production of nuclear bombs under strict conditions, said an American specialist on North Korea who completed a visit there this weekend.

The specialist, Selig S. Harrison of the Center for International Policy in Washington, said in an interview that he had been informed by several top-ranking North Korean leaders that the United States must pledge to respect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity before any freeze could be discussed. The Bush administration has rejected conditions for resuming negotiations.

"We have lost the opportunity to negotiate a step-by-step agreement that would lead to the eventual dismantling of their nuclear program," Mr. Harrison said in Beijing after returning from Pyongyang, North Korea's capital. "They are no longer willing to discuss that possibility."

Mr. Harrison has been critical of the Bush administration for not negotiating directly with the North Koreans. He has had a rare high-level access to the North Korean leadership.

On his most recent visit, he said he met Kim Yong Nam, North Korea's second-highest official and the nominal head of state; Kang Sok Ju and Kim Gye Gwan, senior Foreign Ministry officials who oversee talks on the nuclear program; and Gen. Ri Chan Bok, who is in charge of North Korean forces at the truce village of Panmunjom at the border.

Although the North Koreans are willing to return to six-nation nuclear talks that have taken place under Chinese auspices, they are demanding that the United States apologize for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's comment during Congressional hearings that North Korea was an "outpost of tyranny," Mr. Harrison said.

Some of the comments made to Mr. Harrison appear to echo a statement issued by North Korea on March 31, in which it declared itself a nuclear power and demanded that talks on reducing weapons on the Korean peninsula, including any weapons under control of American forces in South Korea, take place between the United States and North Korea on equal terms.

Mr. Harrison said this constituted a "major policy shift" that had taken place since his last visit to Pyongyang a year ago, adding that he attributed the shift to hard-line military elements that have exerted more control in recent months.

He quoted the North Korean officials as saying that they planned to unload plutonium fuel rods from their nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in coming weeks for the first time since 2002, giving them another 8,000 nuclear fuel rods. Mr. Harrison said this could provide enough nuclear fuel to double their existing arsenal of bombs, which some American estimates now place at six to eight.

While that suggests an expansion of North Korea's nuclear program, Mr. Harrison said he was told that there were no plans to conduct a nuclear test. "They said they see no need to test and do not want to test because they are worried about the nuclear fallout, even of an underground test," he said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/11/international/asia/11korea.html?>

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London Financial Times

April 12, 2005

FT Interview: Christopher Hill

Talks 'Still Best Way To Disarm N Korea'

By Anna Fifield, Seoul

Washington is adamant that six-party talks remain the best way to disarm North Korea, in spite of Pyongyang's increasing antagonism and "convincing" evidence that the country has exported weapons-grade uranium to Libya, according to the new US assistant secretary of state for east Asian affairs.

Although the fourth round of talks is seven months overdue, Christopher Hill said Washington's patience had not yet worn thin. "I'm not quite prepared to pull the plug (on the talks process)," said Mr Hill, the former ambassador to Seoul who starts his new job in Washington today. "I still think it is the best mechanism for dealing with this and I hope the North Koreans will come round."

Asked when the stand-off will have reached the point of no return, Mr Hill declined to set a deadline, saying: "We'll know it when we see it but we're not there yet."

The talks - involving China, Japan, Russia, the US and the two Koreas - broke down after Pyongyang rejected Washington's offer of security assurances and energy aid if it scrapped its nuclear activities. Amid increasing hopes for a resumption in talks, Kim Jong-il's regime said in February that it had manufactured nuclear weapons and was withdrawing indefinitely from negotiations.

The urgency to resolve the crisis has increased because of reports that North Korea sent uranium hexafluoride, used to make nuclear weapons material, to Libya through a network operated by Pakistani nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan. "I'm pretty convinced that we have North Korean nuclear weapons materials that appear to be brokered, that showed up in Libya. Our concerns all along have been not only that North Korea could be a nuclear power but also that there is the threat of proliferation," Mr Hill said.

Selling material to a broker did not absolve Pyongyang, he added. "To be dealing with an international broker like A. Q. Khan and to be selling things to him and then not to ask where it is going - I mean they weren't exporting North Korean potatoes."

Mr Hill acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining reliable intelligence from a reclusive nation such as North Korea but said it was "important to understand the consequences of being wrong on nuclear weapons".

Washington has nevertheless rebuffed North Korea's calls to drop its "hostile" policies and some analysts' advice to use more carrot and less stick. "We are not going to negotiate this through press releases and we're not going to be making long-range gestures or concessions whose ultimate effect will be just to encourage further breakdowns in the talks," Mr Hill said.

He dismissed suggestions that Washington would yield to Pyongyang's request for bilateral talks. "Right now you'd be sitting down with the North Koreans in the context of them boycotting the multilateral process and insisting that what is needed to solve this issue is a sort of cold war-style US-Soviet Union arms control process. That would not yield the results we are looking for."

Hopes now rest on China's ability to bring North Korea back to the table. Asked whether Beijing, the North's biggest aid donor, was doing enough, Mr Hill said it was hard to say. "We've left it up to the Chinese how they should get them to the talks. But we have made it abundantly clear that while we all have responsibilities to create an atmosphere for a positive outcome, we think as hosts of the talks the Chinese have the responsibility to get everyone to the table."

A South Korean government official has suggested patience is running out. "We have almost exhausted the options so if something positive doesn't come from this trip (by North Korean officials to Beijing last week), we're very close to endgame," the official said, on condition of anonymity.

A North Korean official said that unless the US changed its policy, Pyongyang would not return to the talks.

"It's very simple," he said. "We're asking them to guarantee that they won't invade North Korea. If they change their hostile policy I think we can normalise relations."

<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/5e37258c-aabf-11d9-98d7-00000e2511c8.html>

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Los Angeles Times

April 12, 2005

New U.S. Point Man On N. Korea Sees Hope

Christopher Hill, soon to be assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs, says long-stalled talks on nuclear arms can work.

By Barbara Demick, Times Staff Writer

SEOUL — It will be one year in June since the last round of multinational talks aimed at pressing North Korea to stop building nuclear weapons. In that time, the communist regime has declared itself in effect a nuclear power, threatened to resume missile testing and boycott further negotiations, hardened its rhetoric and churned out a steady stream of vitriol against the United States.

To even the most casual observer, the talks are going badly indeed.

But Christopher R. Hill, the new assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs, is being paid to be an optimist. So while critics of the Bush administration's approach suggest that American officials are flogging a dead horse, Hill says he is not giving up on talks involving the United States, North Korea, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea.

"I'm not quite prepared to pull the plug," said Hill in an interview Monday at the U.S. Embassy here in the South Korean capital, where he is finishing an eight-month stint as ambassador.

"I still think [the six-party process] is the best mechanism we have for dealing with it, and I would hope that the North Koreans will come around. Certainly the issue is not whether or not we are going to solve this problem ... but *how* do we solve it."

Hill, 53, is a veteran of seemingly intractable international conflicts in the Balkans. He helped draft the 1995 Dayton peace accord that ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and was a special envoy during the 1999 crisis in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

Hill said he would like to convince North Korean leader Kim Jong Il that his regime's insistence on developing nuclear weapons is a relic of a Cold War mind-set.

"I would say, 'Let's look at the top 100 problems that North Korea faces,' " Hill said, reeling off the North's litany of disasters, from food shortages to the collapse of its medical sector. "And then I would ask how nuclear weapons could solve any of them.

"I think it should be clear to everybody, and even North Korean leaders, that international prestige is not available by pursuing nuclear weapons."

At present, it is unlikely that the U.S. will be able to convey its message except in media interviews.

For months, the North Koreans have set various conditions for returning to the talks. To the extent that there have been behind-the-scenes negotiations, they apparently have amounted to nothing more than talking about talking. Among North Korea's demands are one-on-one negotiations with the Bush administration. Pyongyang says the nuclear issue is really a matter between the two governments. The U.S. has long held that it is a regional concern for all of North Korea's neighbors, and Hill summarily ruled out direct talks as "a road that has been closed for permanent repair."

The North Koreans also appear unlikely to receive the apology they have demanded from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for comments she made in her confirmation hearings early this year, when she labeled North Korea "an outpost of tyranny."

Hill refused to discuss deadlines or any ultimatum. When the process has come to a dead end, he said, "we will know it when we see it. We are not there yet."

He also was mum on what the United States might pursue next, saying that even discussing the subject of other options "would suggest we don't think this one is the right way to go. It undermines the chances of success."

Despite Hill's upbeat tone, many observers are decidedly pessimistic about restarting the talks. Charles L. "Jack" Pritchard, a former top U.S. negotiator on North Korea and now a critic of U.S. policy toward the regime, said that privately, many officials in the Bush administration have given up.

"I think internally they've made a decision that this process is not going to work. There is a high level of frustration," Pritchard said in a telephone interview.

Pritchard believes that the administration is preparing to turn to the United Nations, perhaps seeking a resolution condemning North Korea over the nuclear issue, since it is unlikely that the U.S. could muster the support for a stronger measure imposing full-fledged sanctions.

With the U.S. unwilling to acquiesce to the North's conditions and the North Koreans backing themselves into a corner, the best hope of a breakthrough comes from China. There are reports that Chinese President Hu Jintao will visit Pyongyang in the coming months to push for the regime's return to the talks, and a request from such a powerful neighbor might be difficult to resist.

Hill says he hopes China can bring whatever leverage it has to bear on North Korea.

"We have left it up to the Chinese how they should get them to the talks," he said.

If nothing else, a silver lining of the North Korean nuclear negotiations has been better working relations between the U.S. and China. It is more than a slight consolation.

"I consider the six-party process with respect to China one area where we can really work together for a common interest," Hill said. Even if the six-party process doesn't help with North Korea, he added, "it has a lot of positive externalities and spinoffs."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-hill12apr12,1,5688145.story?coll=la-headlines-world>

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Washington Post

Nuclear Plants Not Keeping Track of Waste

GAO Study Faults Federal Government for Failing to Implement Safeguards

By Shankar Vedantam

Washington Post Staff Writer

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Pervasive problems plague the control of radioactive waste at the nation's nuclear power plants, in part because the federal government has been sluggish in instituting and enforcing safeguards, according to a federal report issued yesterday.

The Government Accountability Office's indictment of the nuclear facilities and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is the most comprehensive reckoning to date of problems that have begun to emerge at a number of plants in recent years.

Inadequate oversight and gaps in safety procedures have left several plants unsure about the whereabouts of all their spent fuel, the GAO said, and problems in tracking the materials suggest that radioactive rods could be missing from more than the three plants that are widely known to have problems.

"NRC inspectors often could not confirm that containers that were designated as containing loose fuel rods in fact contained the fuel rods," the report said. "The containers, in some cases, were closed or sealed and, in other cases, the contents were not visible when looking into the spent fuel pool. Thus, spent fuel may be missing or unaccounted for at still other plants."

The commission said it agreed with the GAO's findings of "uneven" control of spent nuclear fuel. NRC spokeswoman Beth Hayden said the agency had been forced to prioritize safety concerns after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and that this had caused delays in implementing security measures to safeguard the spent fuel rods.

The nuclear industry pointed out that the GAO had not found evidence of adverse health consequences. Problems in accounting for the fuel are being addressed, said Steven Kerekes, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute. Critics, however, said close ties between federal regulators and the commercial facilities they supervise has dulled the edge of oversight.

"I would respectfully remind the NRC that the 'R' stands for 'regulatory,'" said Sen. James M. Jeffords (I-Vt.), who, with other members of Congress, had asked the GAO to study the issue. Rep. Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.) added: "The days of letting the nuclear industry self-regulate without proper federal oversight must come to a long overdue end." Three plants have reported missing or unaccounted-for spent nuclear fuel in recent years: Millstone in Connecticut, Vermont Yankee, and Humboldt Bay in California.

The report said federal regulations do not make clear how plants should conduct physical inventories of spent fuel, nor how they should control and account for loose fuel rods and fragments.

Plants had different notions about how to monitor their inventories of spent fuel, consisting of highly radioactive rods that have been removed from reactors and are generally stored in large swimming pool-like structures.

Some plants had failed to match paper records with the contents of spent fuel containers, the report said.

The GAO said the government has sufficient warning of the scope of the problem to begin implementing changes, but the NRC's Hayden said the agency is still in the process of getting the information it needs.

"Until we have that detailed information, we can't just go out and do additional inspections or levy additional requirements," she said. "When we are dealing with nuclear safety and security, we need to move in a very careful and deliberate way."

Hayden said the requirement that the agency fund 90 percent of its budget from fees on the industry in no way compromises its independence.

But Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, a nonprofit group that studies energy issues, said GAO surveys of commission inspectors showed that the public ought to be concerned: Despite the range of problems identified, 28 inspectors said the agency does not need to exercise more oversight, while only 24 said increased control is needed.

Paul Gunter, director of the Reactor Watchdog Project for the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, a nonprofit clearinghouse opposed to the use of nuclear power, said the GAO report is the latest in a string of independent assessments that have found fault with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's oversight of commercial facilities.

"The consistency of these findings suggests the NRC is more interested in shielding production margins at power stations than it is in prioritizing public health and safety," he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A44916-2005Apr11.html>

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Nuclear Regulatory Commission: NRC Needs to Do More to Ensure That Power Plants Are Effectively Controlling Spent Nuclear Fuel.

GAO-05-339, April 21.

<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-339>

Highlights - <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d05339high.pdf>

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