

RELEASE IN FULL

Press Reaction to Departure of Chen Guangcheng from U.S. Embassy Beijing
(as of May 2, 2012 6:00 pm/6 am Beijing May 3 prepared by PA)

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Initial press coverage of Chen Guangcheng's departure from U.S. Embassy Beijing in the early morning hours EDT was mostly straightforward, with most journalists reporting the Secretary's statement, the background teleconference briefing, and the subsequent comments by Assistant Secretary Campbell and Spokesperson Nuland. These lines largely held until journalists claiming access to Chen reported that Chen was coerced out of the Embassy by threats to his family. By the time of our daily press briefing (1 pm), questions regarding the deal became the focal point and reporting began to turn negative with questions being raised as to whether Chen only accepted the deal under duress and fear for his family's welfare. Some outlets such as AP reported that Chen had been coerced and CNN reported that Chen felt "let down."

CNN Wolf Blitzer's Situation Room just ran a segment with excerpts from an interview with Chen done at 3 am Beijing time in which Chen says:

Chen (via phone and interpreter): The embassy kept lobbying me to leave and promised to have people stay with me in the hospital, but this afternoon, as I checked into the hospital, I noticed they were all gone."

Reporter: Embassy is saying that they followed strict protocol; they asked him 3 times in front of witness, do you want to leave? He said yes. Embassy also says he told them he wanted to make a life in China. He says he fears for his life

Chen (via phone and interpreter): I would like to say to President Obama, please do everything you can to get our family out.

Wolf: these are awful charges against the US, for betraying the activist.

Reporter; yes, Chen is saying he was sent back to those who beat him and kept him under house arrest; the U.S. has insisted they did nothing wrong; they took him on humanitarian grounds; they wanted to get him medical treatment. Say he wanted to leave the US embassy and stayed firm on that point. He said he didn't get enough information to make an informed choice.

Wolf ended the segment by saying that it would be good to hear from Ambassador Locke and hear the Embassy's response to the latest accusations from Chen.

Commentary

Opinion pieces from major think tanks have been mostly positive thus far, acknowledging the sensitivities and challenges in simultaneously negotiating the Chen case while maintaining the overall relationship with China. The Council on Foreign Relations ran a piece calling the deal a "home run." The Brookings Institute also put out a friendly piece by former Obama administration official Jeffrey Bader acknowledging both the "special difficulties" of the Chen

case and the “durability” of the U.S.-China relationship. Social media also reflected this trend with many commentators applauding the U.S., but questioning the details of the deal.

Editorial opinion so far is hedging. A Wall Street Journal op-ed stated that details of the deal remained “murky” but still applauded the United States and Chen for maintaining the “moral high ground.” The Atlantic stated we had not “failed” Chen but we didn’t “save” him either.

SELECT ARTICLES FROM MAJOR NEWSPAPERS

New York Times

As Dissident in China Leaves U.S. Embassy, Questions Arise

May 2, 2012 3:50 p.m.

By Jane Perez

BEIJING — Chen Guangcheng, the blind Chinese dissident who fled house arrest and came under American protection, left the American Embassy in Beijing on Wednesday and immediately ignited a new controversy over the way his case was handled by the United States and China.

In a day of dramatic twists and turns, Mr. Chen went to a hospital in Beijing and gave up American protection after State Department officials said they had secured assurances from the Chinese government that he would remain safe. The agreement initially appeared to ease tensions after a six-day standoff that threatened a major breach in Sino-American relations just as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton arrived in Beijing for strategic talks.

But the future safety of Mr. Chen — and his reasons for agreeing to leave American protection — immediately came under scrutiny, setting off a firestorm among human rights activists, some of whom questioned whether Mr. Chen acted under duress. Mr. Chen also gave evolving accounts of his own decision-making in interviews with Western news organizations, and his lawyer, Teng Biao, said he had “changed his mind” and decided he did not feel safe remaining in China.

American officials had initially described details of the negotiations between both governments and Mr. Chen as well as a telephone call to the dissident from Ms. Clinton after he left the embassy compound for treatment at a medical facility here. They said all the parties reached an agreement that involved significant concessions from the Chinese and was the best that could be achieved given Mr. Chen’s desire to stay in China rather than to seek asylum abroad.

Mr. Chen will be permitted to study law at a major university in the city of Tianjin, far away from his home village where he had been subject to harassment and intimidation for many years, they said.

Mrs. Clinton said in a statement that she was “pleased that we were able to facilitate Chen Guangcheng’s stay and departure from the U.S. Embassy in a way that reflected his choices and our values. I was glad to have the chance to speak with him today and to congratulate him on being reunited with his wife and children.”

“Mr. Chen has a number of understandings with the Chinese government about his future, including the opportunity to pursue higher education in a safe environment,” she added. “Making these commitments a reality is the next crucial task.”

But in a telephone interview with The Associated Press from his hospital bed late Wednesday evening, Mr. Chen said American officials told him while he was under American protection that Chinese authorities had threatened to beat his wife to death unless Mr. Chen left the American embassy, and that Mr. Chen therefore left under coercion.

An American official denied that account. The official said Mr. Chen was told that his wife, Yuan Weijing, who had been brought to Beijing by the Chinese authorities while Mr. Chen was in the American Embassy, would not be allowed to remain in the capital unless Mr. Chen left the embassy to see her. She would be sent back to Mr. Chen’s home village in Shandong, where no one could guarantee her safety.

“At no time did any U.S. official speak to Chen about physical or legal threats to his wife and children. Nor did Chinese officials make any such threats to us,” Victoria Nuland, the State Department spokesperson, said in an e-mailed statement. “U.S. interlocutors did make clear that if Chen elected to stay in the Embassy, Chinese officials had indicated to us that his family would be returned to Shandong, and they would lose their opportunity to negotiate for reunification.”

Mr. Chen told another media organization, Britain’s Channel 4 News, in a subsequent phone interview that he hoped to leave China and seek safety abroad, expressing regret that he no longer had American protection. American officials said he had consistently spoken of his desire to remain in China during the time he was under U.S. protection.

“At no point during his time in the Embassy did Chen ever request political asylum in the U.S.,” Ms. Nuland said. “At every opportunity, he expressed his desire to stay in China, reunify with his family, continue his education and work for reform in his country. All our diplomacy was directed at putting him in the best possible position to achieve his objectives.”

As word of Mr. Chen’s account filtered out on China’s version of Twitter, the community of human rights activists inside China and supporters in the United States questioned the United States’ decision to allow Mr. Chen to leave under a degree of pressure.

Bob Fu, president of the United States-based ChinaAid association, which has defended Mr. Chen and other human rights activists in China, issued a statement saying he feared that the “U.S. side has abandoned Mr. Chen” and that his departure from the embassy was not necessarily voluntary.

“We are deeply concerned about this sad development if the reports about Chen’s involuntary departure (from the U.S. Embassy) are true,” Mr. Fu said. He added that he did understand Mr. Chen’s desire to remain in China rather than to seek asylum in the United States or another foreign country.

The dispute over the terms of his departure erupted even as American official provided fresh details of the six-day saga involving Mr. Chen and his efforts to seek American protection, as well as the negotiations over his status inside China going forward. Mr. Chen entered the American Embassy late last week with the assistance of American officials because of the "exceptional circumstances, including his disabilities," a senior American official told American reporters traveling with Mrs. Clinton. "On humanitarian grounds we assisted him and allowed him to remain on a temporary basis," the official said.

Mr. Chen, a lawyer who had campaigned against forced abortions and sterilizations conducted as part of China's policy of limiting families to one child, suffered an injury to his foot during his escape from his house in Shandong province last week and was walking with the help of a crutch, the official said.

During his time at the embassy, Mr. Chen adhered to his position that he was not seeking asylum in the United States but wanted to stay with his family in China as a free person, said the official, who was involved in the three-way negotiations that involved Mr. Chen and officials from the United States and China.

"He expressed his hope to stay in China and he never varied from that," a second senior official involved in the negotiations, who briefed reporters, said.

On Wednesday afternoon, after Mrs. Clinton's arrival about six hours earlier, and after the Chinese had made commitments to guarantee his safety, the American Ambassador, Gary Locke, asked Mr. Chen if he was ready to leave the embassy.

Mr. Chen, who speaks broken English, said in Chinese: "Let's go," one of the two American officials said.

As he left the embassy for the hospital, Mrs. Clinton phoned Mr. Chen in what the two American officials said was an emotional conversation since both Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Chen knew of each other but had never met.

At the end of the talk, according to one of the officials, Mr. Chen told Mrs. Clinton, also in broken English: "I would like to kiss you." Mr. Chen subsequently told reporters that he told Ms. Clinton he wanted to "see" her, not to kiss her.

The officials said that during the negotiations inside the embassy, Mr. Chen at times would sit with the two main negotiators, holding each one of them by the hand. The two negotiators were the State Department's legal adviser, Harold Koh, and the assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Kurt M. Campbell.

After driving a short distance to the Chaoyang Hospital from the embassy compound, Mr. Chen was reunited with his wife, Yuan Weijing, who was wearing a gray shirt decorated with a rainbow across the front, and their two children, whom he had not seen in some time, the officials said. Ms. Yuan had traveled from Shandong Province the previous day.

He was being treated by American and Chinese doctors, the officials said. Mr. Chen had agreed that his medical records be given to the Chinese doctors, they said.

Under the arrangement agreed to by the United States, China and Mr. Chen, he would be relocated to a different part of China from his hometown in Shandong, where he was under house arrest and where he says his family had been physically attacked, the officials said. The officials said he had been given a choice of seven locations agreed upon by the Chinese and Americans and that Mr. Chen had chosen Tianjin, an industrial port city east of Beijing.

Mr. Chen would be allowed to enroll at a university to pursue his law studies, his self-taught profession, the senior official said. "He will have several university options," one of the officials said.

The American officials said they were satisfied with the pledges from the Chinese authorities that Mr. Chen, 40, would be allowed to live a normal life. The Chinese promised to report any actions against him, they said.

Precisely what the Chinese government offered as a way of protection for Mr. Chen was not immediately clear. The American officials went out of their way to praise the Chinese negotiators. They described them as working "intensely and with humanity."

According to the American officials, negotiations began on April 26. The American negotiators met with their Chinese counterparts, led by the vice foreign minister, Cui Tiankai, at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and relayed the issues to Mr. Chen at the American Embassy. Mr. Chen never met directly with the Chinese officials, the American officials said.

There appeared to be no similar case in which a high-profile Chinese dissident had sought protection at the American Embassy and then returned to Chinese custody. American human rights officials and lawyers have often questioned whether the Chinese would provide the protection they promised in such a situation.

"This was not easy for the Chinese government," one of the senior American officials said. Only hours earlier, the crisis that has swirled around Mr. Chen seemed far from abating as China accused the United States of interfering in its affairs and demanded an apology from Washington for taking a Chinese citizen into the embassy "via abnormal means."

"The Chinese side is strongly dissatisfied with the move," the official Xinhua news agency quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Weimin, as saying. "The U.S. Embassy in Beijing has the obligation to observe relevant international laws and Chinese laws and it should not do anything irrelevant to its function."

The two American officials declined to address the demand that the United States apologize for sheltering Mr. Chen and that the United States investigate the circumstance in which the embassy was used in what the Chinese said was an "abnormal" way.

"Our actions were lawful," one of the American officials said. Mrs. Clinton is in China for two days of scheduled talks with senior Chinese officials on economic and security matters.

She landed in Beijing shortly before 9 a.m. Wednesday local time. Whether she took charge of negotiations was not immediately clear but Mr. Chen was admitted to the medical facility some hours after her arrival. Mr. Chen's case will continue to overshadow the talks, known as the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which are scheduled to begin Thursday.

But movement toward a resolution may ease some of the pressure. The Obama administration and the Chinese government have been anxious to ensure the case did not dominate the talks, which will cover subjects from North Korea to the global economy.

The last Chinese dissident to take refuge in an American diplomatic compound was Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist, who walked into the embassy in Beijing with his wife in 1989, the day after the People's Liberation Army crushed pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square.

The Chinese government regards foreign criticism of its human rights policies and practices as undue interference in its internal affairs, and it will almost certainly use the occasion of the talks to drive that point home, diplomats in Beijing said.

Washington Post

Chen Guangcheng lawyer says dissident feels 'pressure' and fears for his safety

Wednesday, May 02, 2012 2:59 PM EDT

By Keith B. Richburg and Jia Lynn Yang

BEIJING — A lawyer for blind activist Chen Guangcheng on Wednesday questioned a U.S.-brokered deal to guarantee Chen's safety in China and said that, after leaving the protection of the U.S. Embassy here, the dissident may have no choice but to go to the United States.

Chen traveled from the diplomatic compound to a Beijing hospital with U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke on Wednesday afternoon, but soon found himself surrounded by Chinese plainclothes police, with no American diplomats in sight.

While U.S. officials insisted that they had received promises from the Chinese government that assured the safety of Chen and his family, activists and Chen's lawyer said Chen apparently either agreed to the deal under duress or, after arriving at the hospital, began having second thoughts.

"The Chinese government has made many promises on many things, but they never keep their promise," said Chen's lawyer, Teng Biao. "They like to punish people afterward."

A combative statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, including a demand for a U.S. apology over the episode, heightened fears among Chen's supporters that the deal could be unraveling.

Fuming over the U.S. acknowledgment that it had sheltered Chen, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said: "The U.S. method was interference in Chinese domestic affairs, and this is totally unacceptable to China." According to the state-run news agency Xinhua, Liu added: "China demands that the United States apologize over this, thoroughly investigate this incident, punish those who are responsible, and give assurances that such incidents will not happen again."

The tough statement late Wednesday afternoon gave the first hint of a problem with the deal. The call for a U.S. apology was widely carried by China's state media outlets.

Activists who spoke with Chen said he had been told that his wife and children, who had been brought to the capital to be reunited with him, would be sent back to Shandong province and could be beaten to death if he did not exit the U.S. diplomatic compound.

But an American lawyer who said he advised Chen at length by telephone on Monday and Tuesday described the current situation as "confused" and said there was no discussion of death threats against his family.

Chen fled months of de facto house arrest last month and sought refuge for six days at the U.S. Embassy. American officials said Wednesday that they accepted him at the embassy on humanitarian grounds. As part of the deal reached with Chinese officials in four days of marathon negotiations, they said, the Chinese government agreed to allow Chen and his family to move away from their village and pledged to investigate why authorities in the village allowed armed thugs in plain clothes to confine Chen in his house and prevent others from seeing him.

U.S. officials released a photograph showing a smiling Chen with Locke and insisted that Chen left the embassy of his own volition. U.S. officials said they would investigate any threats made to Chen that occurred at the hospital.

"I was there," assistant secretary Kurt Campbell said in a statement. "Chen made the decision to leave the Embassy after he knew his family was safe and at the hospital waiting for him, and after twice being asked by Ambassador Locke if he was ready to go. He said, 'Zou' — let's go. We were all there as witnesses to his decision, and he hugged and thanked us all."

The State Department sharply denied claims that embassy officials or diplomats had told Chen that the Chinese government was threatening his wife or children.

"At no time did any U.S. official speak to Chen about physical or legal threats to his wife and children," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland. "Nor did Chinese officials make any such threats to us."

Nuland said that U.S. officials understood that if Chen stayed in the embassy, Chinese officials would bring the family back to Shandong and they would lose their ability to negotiate for a reunion. She added that at no point did Chen request political asylum.

“At every opportunity, he expressed his desire to stay in China, reunify with his family, continue his education and work for reform in his country,” said Nuland. “All our diplomacy was directed at putting him in the best possible position to achieve his objectives.”

It is unclear whether U.S. officials actually saw Chen reunite with his family. Senior officials earlier on Wednesday went into great detail about the car trip from the embassy to the hospital but did not convey what happened after they arrived, suggesting that they may have left soon after dropping off Chen.

The fact that Chen was told his family would be sent back to Shandong if he did not leave the embassy appeared to undermine the U.S. account earlier that he left for the hospital fully of his own accord. Accounts from fellow activists suggest that he was worried about the repercussions for his family if he remained at the embassy.

Nuland said Chen’s family was brought to Beijing with the understanding that this was what Chen wanted. Having him remain at the embassy, she said, would be “returning to the status quo.”

Zeng Jinyan, a blogger and activist married to Chen’s friend Hu Jia, said on her Twitter account that Chen “always insisted on staying in China,” and that U.S. diplomats at the embassy “asked Chen repeatedly and respected his will.”

She said Chen’s wife, Yua Weijing, said she was the one who persuaded Chen to leave the embassy to meet her and the children. “On the phone tonight, Chen Guangcheng told me for the first time that his whole family wanted to leave,” Zeng wrote.

As activists’ fears over Chen’s fate mounted, they expressed increasing alarm — fueled by a series of Twitter updates — that what initially seemed like a human rights victory for the Obama administration was spiraling quickly into a worst-case scenario.

Chen was no longer under American protection, they noted, and it was not clear whether he had left on his own free will or under coercion. While U.S. officials said they had been promised access to Chen in the hospital, Britain’s Channel 4 news quoted a conversation with Chen in which he seemed confused and upset that no U.S. diplomats were around.

“Nobody from the [U.S.] embassy is here. I don’t understand why. They promised to be here,” Channel 4 quoted Chen as saying.

Teng, the lawyer, told The Washington Post that he spoke with Chen several times during the evening. “He felt his safety is threatened. He feels pressure now,” Teng said. “In fact, from his language, I can tell that the decision to leave the embassy was not 100 percent his idea.”

In the meantime, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner were in Beijing, preparing for a high-level summit between the two countries on trade and security issues.

"I hope the U.S. can do more to protect Chen," Teng said. "But the Obama administration didn't do a good job on China's human rights in the past, so I'm worried that Chen's case will not be fully presented at the dialogue."

Nicholas Bequelin, a Hong Kong-based senior Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch, said: "I'm somewhat surprised by the U.S. government's willingness to accept the Chinese government's assurances or even to get Hillary Clinton to work for Chen's safety in the long term. It seems they've taken a huge risk with this."

Some human rights activists briefed by U.S. officials said Chen may have felt threatened only after arriving at the hospital.

"There's the situation before he left [the embassy], and the situation after," said one activist, who asked to speak anonymously because he was involved in an off-the-record conversation with three U.S. officials — Michael Posner, the assistant secretary of state for human rights; Harold Koh, the State Department legal adviser; and Samantha Power, from the National Security Council.

Frank Jannuzi of Amnesty International said Posner and Koh told him that Chen was "adamant from day one" that he wanted to remain in China. While there is no such thing as a perfect guarantee, Jannuzi said the government officials told him, the Chinese made unusually concrete assurances, and the U.S. Embassy was determined to monitor Chen's well-being.

At the same time, leading Chinese dissidents were deeply skeptical. Bob Fu, president of the advocacy group ChinaAid based in Midland, Tex., said he has not been able to reach Chen since he left the embassy and considers him "missing."

State Department officials telephoned China Aid and other American rights groups Wednesday morning to reassure them that the negotiations had gone well and that Chen had left the embassy in a joyful and confident mood. According to several persons who were called, the U.S. officials said Chen had been reunited with his wife and two children in their presence and then taken to a hospital for treatment. They said he called Clinton from his cellphone and was so happy he wanted to kiss her.

But Fu, the ChinaAid director, said he had received reliable reports that Chen had been directly threatened in the hospital as soon as he was alone and that his whereabouts now were not clear. Fu said Chen was warned that unless he accepted the proposed deal, he would "never see his wife and two children again."

"It was a direct and credible threat," Fu said. "Something is very wrong here. He is now in Chinese hands, in Chinese custody. I am not sure if the Americans are aware of what's going on."

Fu said friends of Chen who saw him briefly after he left the U.S. compound said he had done so "reluctantly."

State Department officials, in their conference call with rights groups, described four days of intense, round-the-clock negotiations inside the embassy with Chen and Chinese officials.

According to Fu and others who were part of the call, the officials said the Chinese finally agreed to allow Chen to study at a university and live as a free man, as he requested. But they also said it was up to rights groups and the international community, not just the U.S. government, to make sure China lives up to those commitments.

Fu described the negotiations as “a hasty effort” by the United States to “save the big items” in the imminent bilateral talks. Fu speculated that Chen had been “pressured by both sides to clear the cloud before the beautiful banquet” that Clinton, Geithner and their Chinese counterparts would attend.

“But the Chinese are not serious or sincere,” he said. “They see Chen as a troublemaker. How can we trust a government that has beaten and imprisoned him and mistreated his family for so long?”

Fu said friends who spoke to Chen’s wife Wednesday said she described hundreds of “thugs with big sticks” waiting at their village compound.

But Jerome A. Cohen, an American lawyer long acquainted with Chen, struck a more cautious note. He said he spoke to Chen on Monday and Tuesday to advise him about whether to accept the deal for release in China. While Chen was very nervous on Monday, he had decided by Tuesday to try to move ahead and create a new life for himself in Beijing, said Cohen, a China legal expert, professor at New York University law school and counsel to the law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison.

On Monday, Cohen said, Chen “was open to this idea of going out and studying law and trying to make a career again outside Shandong province” while saying that it was “very, very dangerous,” given the chances of being detained again.

Cohen said that Chen took heart in part from the example of the artist Ai Weiwei, who has been able to maintain a degree of limited freedom large enough to continue his artistic endeavors while speaking up on political issues from time to time.

“We went back and forth,” said Cohen. “He was worried about his family. No one said anything about them being threatened with death.”

He said Chen had pressed U.S. officials to have President Obama make a statement about Chen to show U.S. commitment to seeing the deal with China upheld.

Cohen said he did not speak to Chen on Wednesday but speculated that Chen “seems to be subjected to various new pressures on arrival at the hospital” and that the inability of some friends to see him may also have fueled Chen’s concerns.

“The situation seems to be evolving in a confused way,” Cohen said, faulting U.S. officials. “The first mistake was they couldn’t leave or didn’t leave anybody in the hospital with him. Maybe he gets a report from his wife about threats, and his fears overcome him. This gets us off to a bad start on what was a daring deal.”

Chen sought refuge at the embassy last Thursday. He was using a crutch, because of an injury to his foot that he sustained when he fell over a wall during his escape. “On humanitarian grounds, we assisted Mr. Chen,” a State Department official said.

At Chaoyang Hospital, Chen was apparently taken to the VIP clinic. The area was blocked off from reporters by hospital security guards and plainclothes police.

Clinton, who spoke by phone with Chen in what U.S. officials described as an “emotional” conversation, said in a statement that she was “pleased that we were able to facilitate Chen Guangcheng’s stay and departure from the U.S. Embassy in a way that reflected his choices and our values.”

“Mr. Chen has a number of understandings with the Chinese government about his future.... Making these commitments a reality is the next crucial task,” Clinton’s statement said. “The United States government and the American people are committed to remaining engaged with Mr. Chen and his family in the days, weeks, and years ahead.”

Chen's case had presented the United States with a thorny diplomatic dilemma. Chen wanted to remain in China to fight for people's rights, friends said. But with security officials rounding up the activists who helped Chen escape and who sheltered him, U.S. diplomats risked seeing Chen arrested if he left the embassy without some formal guarantees for his safety.

The American officials said Chinese authorities agreed to investigate the “extralegal” activities of the local authorities in Chen’s hometown, who have allowed armed men to effectively confine Chen to his farmhouse in Shandong province for 19 months, preventing celebrities, journalists and others who tried to visit him from entering.

Senior officials said they became extremely close with Chen during the negotiations — often holding his hand when they spoke. One official called the talks with Chinese officials as “intense but collaborative.”

Officials said U.S. diplomats “will take a continuing interest in the case of Mr. Chen and his family,” and would be checking on him in “regular intervals” to confirm that the Chinese government’s commitments to Chen are carried out.

Fu, of ChinaAid, said he was concerned that “the U.S. government has abandoned Chen” and that the Chinese government is “using his family as a hostage.”

Chen is not charged with any crime. In a video appeal he made to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao after escaping house arrest, he asked that the local authorities who kept him imprisoned be investigated and charged.

Locke, the U.S. ambassador, spoke to The Washington Post via telephone at about 3:20 p.m. local time to say he was in a van with Chen, stuck in traffic but en route to the hospital. Locke then handed the phone to Chen, who introduced himself: "This is Chen Guangcheng."

An embassy official said Chen specifically asked to speak to The Washington Post, which first highlighted Chen's battle against forced abortions in 2005. Embassy officials said they scrambled among themselves to see who had a cell phone that could be used to allow Chen to speak with his lawyer and with Clinton, and to place the call to the Post's Beijing bureau.

At the end of the call with Clinton, who had arrived in Beijing earlier in the day, Chen said: "I want to kiss you," a State Department official said.

Liu, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, said China was "strongly dissatisfied" with the U.S. role in the affair. "The practice the U.S. has taken interfered in China's internal affairs, which China will never accept."

"The U.S. should rethink their policies and practices and take practical actions to maintain the overall relations between China and the United States," Liu said, according to Xinhua. "China is a country under the rule of law, and legitimate rights and interests of citizens are protected by constitution and the law. Any citizen has an obligation to abide by the constitution and the law."

A State Department official indicated that no apology would be forthcoming from the United States over the episode. "This was an extraordinary case involving exceptional circumstances," he said, "and we do not anticipate it being repeated."

Staff writers Pamela Constable in Midland, Texas, and Steven Mufson in Washington contributed to this report.

Supporters of Chen Guangcheng say US abandoned him by letting him leave embassy
McClatchy Newspapers
Wednesday, May 02, 2012 5:33 PM EDT
By TOM LASSETER

Radically differing accounts of the circumstances under which crusading Chinese legal activist Chen Guangcheng left the protection of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing had critics of the plan wondering Wednesday whether the U.S. officials who'd brokered the deal had simply planned poorly or had been tragically naive.

After a round of optimistic State Department briefings and statements in which officials said the authoritarian Chinese government had given its word that it would ensure Chen's safety, allegations surfaced that the self-taught lawyer had agreed to leave the embassy only because he thought that his family essentially was being held hostage.

A close friend said in a series of online Twitter postings that Chen, who's been blind since childhood, had contacted her and said he'd left U.S. custody out of fear for his wife's safety.

Chen had been willing to leave China if his family could have accompanied him, Zeng Jinyan wrote.

Zeng wasn't reachable by phone Wednesday evening, though her husband, who was traveling, said he'd spoken with her and had confirmed that the conversation with Chen had taken place.

"The (Chinese) authorities brought his wife to Beijing, and said that he must leave (the embassy), so Guangcheng was forced to leave," said Hu Jia, who's also a Chen confidant.

The Associated Press reported that Chen himself told one of its reporters that he'd decided to depart the embassy after six days of hiding when a U.S. official told him that Chinese authorities had threatened to beat his wife to death if he remained.

If some or all of the assertions prove to be true, it would be a considerable blow to the Obama administration during an election year at home and, more broadly, to American standing in China. Republican members of Congress have been critical of the administration's policies toward China, saying the administration hasn't taken a strong enough stand against the communist government's persistent abuse of its critics.

A statement released Wednesday by the China Aid Association, a U.S.-based Christian human rights group that's in regular contact with Chen, said "relevant reports show unfortunately the U.S. side has abandoned Mr. Chen."

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland denied in a statement Wednesday that U.S. officials had spoken with Chen about physical threats to his family or that Chinese officials had made any.

However, she acknowledged that "U.S. interlocutors did make clear that if Chen elected to stay in the embassy, Chinese officials had indicated to us that his family would be returned to Shandong, and they would lose their opportunity to negotiate for reunification."

For Chen, who's said that he and his wife had been beaten severely in their home province, that message probably carried the certainty that his family would be harmed if he didn't allow himself to be given to the Chinese government. In a video recorded last week after he successfully fled house arrest in Shandong province in eastern China, Chen said that during his 19 months of captivity his wife was assaulted so badly that she suffered a broken bone near her left eye and serious damage to her ribs and lower back.

Earlier in the day Wednesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had issued a statement lauding China's guarantee of Chen's safety.

"I am pleased that we were able to facilitate Chen Guangcheng's stay and departure from the U.S. Embassy in a way that reflected his choices and our values," Clinton said.

She added: "Mr. Chen has a number of understandings with the Chinese government about his future, including the opportunity to pursue higher education in a safe environment."

Teng Biao, a Beijing human rights lawyer and longtime colleague of Chen's, expressed skepticism about the deal even before the latest details were known.

"His friends are very worried about his safety. If he leaves the embassy, then his safety has no guarantee," Teng said. Asked about Beijing's assurance of well-being for Chen, Teng replied: "I have no trust in it."

The seeming resolution of Chen's presence in the embassy at first appeared to have headed off what was expected to be tension during two days of high-level talks set to begin Thursday among Clinton, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and their Chinese counterparts over a wide range of issues. But the suggestion that Chen had left the embassy under conditions that were less favorable than U.S. officials had said roiled Washington.

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, a panel of members of Congress and Obama administration officials that monitors U.S. relations with China, announced that it would hold an emergency session Thursday.

Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J., the chairman of the commission, said he was concerned about Chen's safety. "He's in a precarious situation," Smith said, who called himself "disappointed" when he first heard the news that Chen had left the embassy.

"I said from the beginning, 'Who is going to monitor this?' How will it be enforced?" Smith said. "China is not a safe place for any dissident."

Smith said he also wanted to know how insistent State Department officials had been in negotiating Chen's departure and whether officials had pushed for a solution so as not to derail the planned talks on other topics.

"I hope they weren't operating on a get the desk cleared so the more important things can take place" basis, he said. "Human rights should be the most important priority that we have."

State Department officials in Washington and Beijing said Chen's departure from the embassy had been voluntary.

"We respected Mr. Chen's free will, both his desire to depart the embassy, which he did ... of his own free will, and most fundamentally his consistently stated desire to stay and work in his own country and to continue his work," said one diplomat, who spoke to reporters on the condition that he not be identified.

The official, who was involved with the negotiations, said that Ambassador Gary Locke had asked Chen, " 'Are you ready to go?' And he sat there and he said ... 'Let's go.' And he stood up and we walked out together."

A second State Department official at the briefing said, "Throughout his stay at the embassy - and I'm talking about numerous discussions - Mr. Chen made it clear that he wanted to remain in

China with his family, and, frankly, he wanted to participate with what he thinks is ongoing in China, which is a very exciting, dynamic period that he believes that he has an important role to play, as do we."

Chen, who's 40, was delivered Wednesday to a Beijing hospital, where he was treated for a foot injury he'd suffered when fleeing. Reporters who tried to speak with him there caught only a fleeting glimpse of Chen, a small man in a white shirt and sunglasses, being pushed down a corridor in a wheelchair. A large number of security officers then shoved the group of journalists into a holding pen - fashioned with gates and benches they'd dragged over - and took photographs of their identification cards before pushing them into elevators.

Chen had been sentenced to 51 months in prison in 2006 - on trumped-up charges of damaging property and assembling a crowd to block traffic - after he'd campaigned on behalf of women who'd undergone forced sterilizations and abortions amid a local government campaign to enforce China's one-child population control policy.

Upon being released from prison in September 2010, Chen was placed under home detention even though he hadn't been charged with any additional crimes.

After news of Chen's departure from the U.S. Embassy became public, the Chinese state news wire Xinhua said Wednesday that its government was demanding an apology from the Americans. It quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin as saying, "What the U.S. side has done has interfered in the domestic affairs of China, and the Chinese side will never accept it."

Many were dubious of the arrangement from the start.

"There is good reason for skepticism about whether the Chinese government is both willing and able to deliver on the conditional release of Chen Guangcheng from U.S. diplomatic protection to a 'safe' location in China, particularly since neither side has identified that location or defined how it will be safe for Chen and his family," Phelim Kine, senior Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch, said not long after the deal was announced.

(Researcher Joyce Zhang in Beijing and Lesley Clark and Matthew Schofield in Washington contributed to this report.)

Wall Street Journal: Deal Around China Activist Questioned

By Keith Johnson and Josh Chin

May 2, 2012 updated 2:21 p.m.

BEIJING—A highly unusual deal between Washington and Beijing that keeps blind Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng in China was the subject of increasing questions on Wednesday, amid reports that his wife had been threatened if he didn't accept.

After days of silence on whether Mr. Chen was under U.S. protection, U.S. officials said on Wednesday that he left the U.S. Embassy in Beijing for medical treatment after spending the past

week there. Under the deal unveiled on Wednesday, Chinese authorities will allow him and his family to settle in a thus-far-unspecified place in China away from local authorities in Shandong province, which he fled on April 22 and which he has accused of mistreating him and his family.

The agreement strikes new ground for U.S. officials, who in the past usually have helped high-profile dissidents such as Mr. Chen leave the country. The decision to keep Mr. Chen in China despite past persecution could offer a sign of an improvement in dialogue between Washington and Beijing if it proves successful, though Chinese officials on Wednesday demanded an apology over the matter from Washington, which defended its actions as "lawful."

But in a telephone interview late Wednesday with the Associated Press, Mr. Chen said he had been told by U.S. officials that Chinese authorities would have beaten his wife to death had he not left the U.S. Embassy. Meanwhile, some human-rights activists also raised doubts around the deal, citing their contacts with the Chen family.

The accounts couldn't be independently confirmed.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said no U.S. official spoke with Mr. Chen or his wife about physical or legal threats, though she said Chinese authorities made clear that his family would be sent back to their home province of Shandong if he chose to remain in the embassy.

"At no point during his time in the embassy did Chen ever request political asylum in the U.S.," she said. "At every opportunity, he expressed his desire to stay in China, reunify with his family, continue his education and work for reform in his country."

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell also said Wednesday that Mr. Chen chose to leave. "I was there," he said. "Chen made the decision to leave the embassy after he knew his family was safe and at the hospital waiting for him, and after twice being asked by [U.S.] Ambassador [Gary] Locke if he [was] ready to go."

He added, "We were all there as witnesses to his decision, and he hugged and thanked us all."

Representatives from China's Foreign Ministry didn't respond to requests to comment.

Mr. Chen on Wednesday was in Beijing's Chaoyang Hospital for medical treatment for a foot injury related to his flight and couldn't be reached. Police were keeping reporters out of the hospital on Wednesday.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—who was in Beijing on Wednesday for two days of high-level U.S. China talks beginning on Thursday—said in a statement that she spoke with Mr. Chen and that his release was done "in a way that reflected his choices and our values."

"Mr. Chen has a number of understandings with the Chinese government about his future, including the opportunity to pursue higher education in a safe environment," she said. "Making these commitments a reality is the next crucial task."

But human-rights activists warned that the U.S. could do little to help Mr. Chen if he remains in China. That could leave him open to further persecution, which could also expose the Obama administration to accusations of being soft on China as Republicans amp up pressure to take a harder line with Beijing ahead of the November election.

"Chen Guangcheng and his family remain at high risk of reprisals from rogue government officials and security forces," said Phelim Kine, a senior Asia researcher with the advocacy group Human Rights Watch, adding, "the Chinese government's capacity to protect him has yet to be defined and explained."

The situation grew murkier late Wednesday as some human-rights activists criticized the deal.

On her Twitter account, human-rights activist Zeng Jinyan said she spoke to Mr. Chen's wife, Yuan Weijing, on Wednesday and was told authorities had threatened the Chens if they didn't stay. "Guangcheng wasn't willing to leave the embassy, but he didn't have a choice," she quoted Ms. Yuan as saying. The account couldn't be independently verified.

The U.S. urged the Chinese government not to punish those who helped Mr. Chen and said that Beijing had pledged to investigate local officials who Mr. Chen has alleged mistreated him.

He Peirong, one of the activists directly involved in the escape, remained missing Wednesday. The whereabouts of Mr. Chen's nephew, the subject of a manhunt after local authorities in Shandong said Friday he had attacked officials with a knife, were also unclear.

The deal was set to potentially resolve a thorny diplomatic issue one day ahead of the high-level talks, which include Mrs. Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who are expected to meet with their Chinese counterparts in meetings over Thursday and Friday.

Officials said that Mr. Chen entered the U.S. Embassy on April 26 with the help of embassy personnel, in their first confirmation of claims by Chinese human-rights activists who had spoken with Mr. Chen. U.S. officials said they helped Mr. Chen on humanitarian grounds because he injured his foot while escaping, adding that he scaled no fewer than eight walls during his flight.

The U.S. "should learn from the incident in a serious and responsible attitude and reflect on its own policy and moves," said China Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, according to the state-run Xinhua news service.

He called for the U.S. to "take necessary measures to prevent a similar incident from happening again and maintain the overall situation of China-U.S. relations."

A senior U.S. official declined to address China's demand for an apology for allowing a Chinese citizen into the embassy "via abnormal means," but said "this was an extraordinary case, involving exceptional circumstances, and I do not anticipate that it will be repeated." The official added, "we intend to work closely inside the U.S. government to fully insure that our policies are consistent with our values."

—Brian Spegele contributed to this article.

Chinese activist wants to go to U.S.

CNN

updated 5:31 PM EDT, Wed May 2, 2012 .

From Stan Grant, CNN

Human rights activist Chen Guangcheng appears on YouTube after slipping away from house arrest.

Beijing (CNN) -- The Chinese activist who walked out of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing on Wednesday after what officials said was a decision he had made on his own said Thursday that he regrets the move and now wants U.S. officials to help get him and his family to the United States.

"I want them to protect human rights through concrete actions," Chen Guangcheng told CNN from his hospital room in Beijing. "We are in danger. If you can talk to Hillary, I hope she can help my whole family leave China."

Chen was referring to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who arrived Wednesday for trade talks and found herself in the middle of a diplomatic firestorm.

Last month, the 40-year-old blind, self-taught lawyer escaped house arrest in the eastern China village of Shandong and fled to Beijing, where he took refuge in the embassy for six days but left Wednesday for a hospital.

His presence in the embassy prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity between the United States and China and threatened to overshadow Clinton's scheduled meetings on trade this week with Chinese leaders.

Chen said he did not fully grasp what he was facing when he agreed to abandon the embassy.

"At the time, I didn't have a lot of information," he said. "I couldn't keep up with news, so I didn't know a lot of things that were happening."

He said Thursday that he felt that his life and that of his wife would be in danger if he were to remain in the country.

"Anything could happen," he said.

Chen said he left the embassy only after U.S. officials encouraged him to do so.

"The embassy kept lobbying me to leave and promised to be with me at the hospital," he said. "But this afternoon, soon after we got here, they were all gone."

He said he was "very disappointed" in the U.S. government and felt "a little" that he had been lied to by the embassy.

At the hospital, where he was reunited with his family, he said he learned that his wife had been badly treated after his escape.

"She was tied to a chair by police for two days," he said. "Then they carried thick sticks to our house, threatening to beat her to death. Now they have moved into the house. They eat at our table and use our stuff. Our house is teeming with security -- on the roof and in the yard. They installed seven surveillance cameras inside the house and built electric fences around the yard."

Chen said he was told that, had he not left the embassy, "they would send her back (to the family's village in Shandong), and people there would beat her."

He said he also learned that Chinese officials had rounded up some of his supporters after his escape and placed some of them under house detention. He said he was appealing to U.S. President Barack Obama to do more about human rights in China.

Chen's wife, Yuan Weijing, said she does not want to raise her children in China, where she said they would have no future. She said guards at the hospital would not allow her to leave and appealed to Clinton to intervene.

"If we stay here or get sent back to Shandong, our lives would be at stake. Under such circumstances, I hope the U.S. government will protect us and help us leave China based its values of protecting human rights."

Diplomat: U.S. must protect dissident

The situation is testing the Obama administration's approach to relations with China, straining its commitment to uphold human rights even as it maintains steady ties with Beijing.

Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said Chen was repeatedly asked by U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke whether he was ready to leave the embassy voluntarily, and each time he said, "Let's do it. Let's go."

"We're going to be putting some pictures out, and I think what you're going to see from these is, he is excited. He's happy. I think he's anticipating the struggles ahead, but let me say there was a lot of hugging and really quite genuine warmth between him and us," Campbell said.

U.S. officials also said Wednesday that it was Chen who decided to go to the hospital in Beijing for treatment.

"He did so on the basis of a number of understandings. China acknowledged that Mr. Chen will be treated humanely while he remains in China," a senior U.S. official said.

Chen, who was reunited with his wife and two children at the hospital, is to have access to U.S. doctors and other visitors, the official said.

"They will remain together with him as a family," the official said. "He had not seen his son in a few years, and his wife had not seen him either, so this was a family reunification after a long and difficult separation."

Clinton was the first person to call Chen after he left the embassy, a U.S. official said. Chen said to Clinton, in broken English, "I want to kiss you," the official said.

Clinton said she was pleased that U.S. officials "were able to facilitate" Chen's "stay and departure from the U.S. Embassy in a way that reflected his choices and our values."

"I was glad to have the chance to speak with him today and to congratulate him on being reunited with his wife and children," she said in a written statement.

Douglas Paal, a China analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said Chen's reversal may be a way to put Beijing on notice "that the whole world is watching you, and you'd better follow through on your promise and more."

"The Chinese are now under an open and transparent obligation to provide this guy the security and assurances they told the Americans they would. Otherwise, their relations with the United States will take a sharp downturn," said Paal, a former State Department and CIA official.

Last month, Chen evaded guards who had kept him under house arrest for more than 18 months in Shandong.

He was confined to his home after serving four years in prison, apparently over his legal advocacy for what he called victims of abusive practices such as forced abortions and sterilizations by China's family planning officials.

Where is blind Chinese activist Chen?

Escaped blind activist recounts abuse

The activist made his way to Beijing on April 22, moving between safe houses before seeking refuge in the U.S. Embassy. Friends and fellow activists had raised concerns about his health.

Chinese officials had guaranteed that no further legal issues will be directed at Chen and that reports of mistreatment against him will be investigated, a U.S. official said Wednesday, before Chen's change of heart.

He had said he wanted to stay in China and so was to have been moved to a "safe environment" away from the province where he was kept under house arrest, another U.S. official said.

Chen "may attend a university to pursue a course of study," the official said.

"Mr. Chen has a number of understandings with the Chinese government about his future, including the opportunity to pursue higher education in a safe environment. Making these commitments a reality is the next crucial task," Clinton said.

"The United States government and the American people are committed to remaining engaged with Mr. Chen and his family in the days, weeks and years ahead."

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said U.S. officials didn't speak to Chen "about physical or legal threats to his wife and children," and Chinese officials didn't "make any such threats to us."

"U.S. interlocutors did make clear that if Chen elected to stay in the embassy, Chinese officials had indicated to us that his family would be returned to Shandong, and they would lose their opportunity to negotiate for reunification," she said.

China demanded an apology from the United States for its handling of the situation.

Liu Weimin, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in comments reported by the state-run news agency Xinhua, called the U.S. activity "interference in Chinese domestic affairs, and this is totally unacceptable to China." He said Chen had left the embassy "of his own volition."

China called on the United States to stop misleading the public after Clinton made a statement on taking a Chinese citizen "via abnormal means" into the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, Xinhua reported.

CNN's Jaime FlorCruz, Steven Jiang and Jill Dougherty contributed to this report.

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TIME

What Chen Guangcheng Means for the Global Economy

By Michael Schuman

May 2, 2012

Chinese human-rights activist Chen Guangcheng is a brave man who has taken on China's brutal authoritarian government and suffered personally for it, but beyond winning the hearts of sympathetic admirers around the world, his impact has largely been local. That changed, however, when he made his dash for safety from his house-prison last week and ended up under the protection of the U.S. Of course, from his standpoint, it makes perfect sense to seek out the Americans. Who else has the political will, economic clout and just plain chutzpah to stand up to China on his behalf? Yet in making that fateful choice, he has inserted himself into the complicated U.S.-China relationship, and therefore, into the global economy.

How's that? Whatever may impact the bilateral relations between the world's two biggest economies matters to everyone. We can't yet tell how badly the Chen case may sour the relationship. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner landed in Beijing on Wednesday for the regular Strategic and Economic Dialogue between the two countries. The forum is meant to forward Sino-U.S. cooperation, but Chen's status is likely to overshadow the many other important issues in their complex relationship.

That remains the case even though the two sides appeared to reach a deal on Chen's fate on Wednesday. Chen left the U.S. Embassy for a Beijing hospital, and will then be allowed to study at a university in China. Beijing seems to have given the U.S. assurances that Chen will be safe from the torments he had suffered at the hands of officials in his hometown. Whatever the final details of the arrangement, the Chen case still has the potential to create a lot of rancor. China is highly sensitive to foreign support for human rights in the country, which it considers interference in its domestic affairs. China's Foreign Ministry demanded an apology from the U.S. and blasted that it "absolutely cannot accept" the American actions. As scholar John Lee pointed out, both sides had good reasons to stand firm. China's leaders would fear backing down on Chen would be seen as a sign of weakness. The Obama Administration, under political pressure at home to support Chen, would face outrage in an election year and possibly damage its efforts to reassert American leadership in the Asian region.

At the same time, both sides have equally good reasons to find a peaceful way through the Chen crisis. Each economy relies heavily on the other. China needs American consumers to buy its exports, American investment to create jobs, and American technology to improve its industrial base. The U.S., meanwhile, sees the expanding China market as a crucial source of future job creation. American exports to China have increased fivefold over the past decade, while Chinese consumers are becoming an ever more important source of growth for companies ranging from General Motors to McDonald's. China is also the largest foreign buyer of American government debt, with holdings of nearly \$1.2 trillion. The two have far more incentive to forge a cooperative relationship than a combative one.

That is why Chen put the two countries in such a tough spot. We all know that Washington has tempered its approach to human-rights issues in China in part because of the Middle Kingdom's economic might. The U.S. may slap harsh sanctions onto economically insignificant Burma for abusing democracy advocates, for example, but China gets off with no more than occasional slaps on the wrist. That's the benefit China gets for being the world's fastest-growing economy. Yet such a pragmatic policy toward China also leaves Americans with the uncomfortable feeling that it is selling out on its mission to support democracy and freedom. Chen puts that perennial conflict between realpolitik and idealism in American foreign policy into clear focus.

And a heated disagreement over the Chen case could easily spill over into the economic relationship between the two countries. Beijing and Washington already have a long list of problems to sort out on the economic front. The U.S. remains insistent that China engages in unfair trade practices that hurt American business. Washington has repeatedly claimed that Beijing purposely controls its currency to make Chinese exports more competitive. The two are also fighting it out over trade. Washington recently filed a complaint at the World Trade

Organization over China's restrictions on exports of rare-earth minerals. The risk is that a spat over Chen could escalate into a wider war over investment, trade and market access.

Note: The next media summary will be at 9 pm tonight/0900 Beijing