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From: Reines, Philippe I <reinesp@state.gov>
Sent: Saturday, July 25, 2009 12:40 PM
To: H
Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: AP/NK

Report: North Korea willing to hold talks with US AP
By KWANG-TAE KIM
Associated Press
Sat Jul 25, 4:51 am ET

SEOUL, South Korea – North Korea has indicated its interest in holding direct talks with the United States, a news report said, after the two sides traded barbs over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs at a security forum. "We are not against a dialogue. We are not against any negotiation for the issues of common concern," Japan's Kyodo news agency quoted North Korean ambassador to the United Nations Sin Son Ho as saying Friday. But the ambassador, speaking in New York, dismissed the possibility of a return to stalled nuclear negotiations involving the two Koreas, the U.S., Japan, China and Russia, saying "the six-party talks are gone forever." The U.S. has offered to hold talks with the North within the six-nation process if it returns to the negotiating table and takes irreversible steps for denuclearization. Last weekend, Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Kurt Campbell indicated that the chances for direct talks between North Korea and the U.S. were slim. "Our bilateral negotiations are between the U.S. and South Korea about our collective approach" to the North, Campbell told reporters in Seoul. Sin said the five other parties to the nuclear talks "cheated" North Korea, accusing them of not implementing what they had agreed under a disarmament-for-aid deal. No more details were given in the Kyodo report. Sin was not available for comment Saturday. The North Korean mission to the U.N. declined to comment. North Korea quit the nuclear talks in April to protest a U.N. statement condemning a rocket launch. North Korea insisted it sent a satellite into orbit, while the U.S. and its allies said it was actually a long-range missile test. North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May and a barrage of missile tests in July, drawing international condemnation and new U.N. sanctions. U.S. and Chinese officials are expected to discuss North Korea's nuclear programs and other regional security issues at a strategic dialogue next week in Washington. "North Korea will be a significant topic, but obviously one among many," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said Friday in Washington. The U.S. and North Korea engaged in a sharp war of words earlier this week over U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's recent comment likening the regime in Pyongyang to "small children" demanding attention. At a regional security conference in Thailand, Clinton also said the North "has no friends left." North Korea's Foreign Ministry described her Thursday as "a funny lady" who sometimes "looks like a primary schoolgirl and sometimes a pensioner going shopping."