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FULL

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Subject: SUMMARY OF CHEN MEDIA COVERAGE (As of May 3, 2012 8:00 pm EDT/0800 Beijing May 4)

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

(As of May 3, 2012 8:00 pm EDT/0800 Beijing May 4)

Two of the three major evening news networks, CBS and NBC, led their broadcasts with Chen Guangcheng's "change of heart." Many provided a play-by-play of when U.S. negotiations began and where we currently are. With Chen speaking to the media, many networks featured correspondents that spoke directly with Chen. They each had excerpts of Locke interview. While most are provided a straightforward account, ABC began to question whether we should have let Chen go in the first place

Major news articles continue to focus on Chen's call to Congress, his fear for the safety and security of his family, decision to leave China and criticism by U.S. politicians of the Administration.

Editorial opinion continues to be skeptical and is focusing on what Chen's "change of heart" means for the administration and how the U.S. will negotiate on new terms Chen has requested such as coming to the U.S. to rest.

EVENING NEWS SUMMARIES

CBS – Evening News with Scott Pelley

Scott Pelley led the evening news with the Chen Guangcheng story calling it a "diplomatic crisis." Scott provided a play-by-play of negotiations, Chen's call to Congress as well as Ambassador Locke's interview highlighting that Chen "did not want to go to the United States," and instead wanted to be a "freedom fighter." Scott mentioned that Chinese officials have Chen and that U.S. officials have not been allowed to see him since he had the change of heart. Sky News reporter, Holly Williams contributed to the segment and said when she spoke to Chen earlier, he "sounded worried, tired, anxious, warm and friendly" from his hospital bed. Williams acknowledged that "[Chen] did not blame U.S. officials for not doing more."

ABC – World News with Diane Sawyer

As the second story on the broadcast, Diane Sawyer covered Chen by acknowledging that a blind activist has asked to leave on Sec State Hillary Clinton's plane and all eyes of world are on Hillary Clinton in Beijing, long a champion of human rights. State Department Correspondent, Martha Raddatz reported that Chen changed his

mind and is now a symbol of human rights abuses in China and a blog sensation. He was being treated in the hospital and was kept away from U.S. diplomats today, meanwhile he was reaching out to friends and others. Bob Fu, ChinaAid also contributed saying he did not know that his wife had apparently been beaten while Chen was at the Embassy and Chinese officials told the wife that they would kill her if her husband did not leave the Embassy. The broadcast featured a "dramatic call into a U.S. congressional committee" and that Ambassador Locke said the U.S. wants to sit down with Chen and his wife. The most salient question that was raised was "should the U.S. have handed over Chen in the first place and can we get him to safety?"

NBC – Nightly News with Brian Williams

The nightly segment was lead with the Chen Guangcheng story and Brian Williams calling it a "political storm back home." Brian summarized the situation and how Chen's change of mind has put the U.S. in a tough spot in an already complicated relationship with China that has "rickshayed back here" and even the race for President. Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent, Andrea Mitchell reporter that Chen's "dramatic reversal" of wanting to leave China has given fodder to Republicans to speak on the case. Mitchell reported that Chen wants more help from Hillary Clinton and acknowledged her warning to China to not punish dissidents. The segment featured Romney's criticism of the U.S. handling of the case as well as Ambassador Locke's interview including that it was Chen who made the decision to leave the embassy. Mitchell mentioned that Chen has made a series of emotional calls and that now both countries must now focus on Chen during S&ED talks. Mitchell concluded her reporting by noting that there "may be no other way to avoid offering him political asylum" but ultimately it is up to Chinese to decide whether he can leave.

CNN – Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer

Covered Chen's call to Congress specifically when Chen said "I want to meet with Secretary Clinton. I hope I can get more help from her. I also want to thank her face to face." Acknowledged Mitt Romney's criticism "it's also apparent, according to these reports if they're accurate, that our embassy failed to put in place the kind of verifiable measures that would assure the safety of Mr. Chen and his family... if these reports are true, this is a dark day for freedom and it's a day of shame for the Obama administration." TIME Editor, Rick Stengel contributed to the segment calling the Chen situation a "moving target" and noted that he didn't think this is the "finest hour for US diplomacy."

Also from CNN

Activist expresses 'deep gratitude' to Americans

From Steven Jiang, CNN

updated 7:40 PM EDT, Thu May 3, 2012

Beijing (CNN) -- The Chinese activist at the center of a diplomatic firestorm told U.S. lawmakers on Friday that he wants to leave China for the United States.

"China pledged to guarantee my constitutional rights and called me a free man," said Chen, who spoke from his hospital room in Beijing to congressional commission members who listened by speakerphone.

"I want them to keep their commitment by allowing me to travel abroad to recuperate. I want to go to the United States and rest for a while, since I haven't had a Sunday in seven years."

The 40-year-old blind, self-taught lawyer added that he wants to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "to thank her in person."

But he said he was worried about his relatives in the hometown in the eastern province of Shandong, which he fled last month. He said he has not been able to contact some of them, and blamed Chinese officials for his living situation there.

"They have installed seven surveillance cameras in my house," he said. "In addition to have the guards stay in my place, they are building an electric fence around my house. They even scoffed, 'Let's see what this blind guy can do to us.' "

He asked that Congress help him ensure his relatives' legal rights are respected. "This is what concerns me greatly right now," he said.

In a telephone interview with CNN, Chen expressed optimism that the lawmakers would act on his behalf. "I believe they will help me," he said.

Last month, the activist escaped house arrest in Shandong and made his way to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, but left it Wednesday for medical treatment in a Beijing hospital, where he was reunited with his wife and two children.

When Chen left the embassy Wednesday, U.S. officials announced they had worked out a deal with China for his future and that Chen was leaving of his own free will.

U.S. officials said the Chinese government had committed to relocate him to a "safe environment" away from the province where he and his family say they had suffered brutal treatment by local authorities. In addition, the officials said, China agreed to investigate those allegations of mistreatment, and promised Chen would face no further legal issues.

Under the agreement, Chen was to be granted the opportunity to pursue university studies in the safe location. U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke told CNN that one of the proposals "allowed for the possible transfer some day to an American college or university."

But on Thursday, Chen said he regretted having abandoned the embassy.

From the hospital, Chen said he had spoken by phone on Thursday with U.S. representatives who had also met with his wife, Yuan Weijing.

Chen disputed the suggestion that he had a change of heart about staying in China after he left the U.S. Embassy.

Chen said Friday that he wanted to focus on getting treatment for his foot and for other unspecified ailments.

He mollified his tone from what it had been Thursday, when he said he was "very disappointed" in the U.S. government because American officials who had been lobbying for him to leave the embassy and who promised to have people stay with him at the hospital but who failed to appear after he checked in.

Chen said embassy officials told him later Thursday that Chinese security officials had prevented them from entering his hospital room.

Chen expressed "deep gratitude" to American officials in Beijing for having treated him "extremely well" during his six-day stay in the U.S. Embassy.

On Thursday, Chen had said he and his family were "in danger. If you can talk to Hillary, I hope she can help my whole family leave China."

Clinton arrived Wednesday in Beijing for economic talks.

Chen's comments left the U.S. government battling to defend the deal it brokered with the Chinese authorities over Chen, with human rights advocacy groups questioning whether China would uphold its side of the bargain.

U.S. officials in Beijing said Thursday they would continue to help Chen where possible, but that the decision to leave the embassy had been his own.

Escaped activist leaves U.S. embassy

"I can tell you unequivocally that he was never pressured to leave," Locke told reporters.

The United States will do what it can to help Chen and his family leave China if that is what they want to do, a senior U.S. State Department official said, but added that Washington doesn't have "a magic wand" to get him out of the country.

"We do not yet have a full view of what he wants to do at this stage," the official said. Once a clear understanding of Chen's desires has emerged, "we will do what we can to help him achieve that," the official added.

"There are ongoing discussions happening in Beijing," a senior administration official told CNN. "Can't comment beyond that."

"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," Clinton said Wednesday in a statement.

But human rights advocacy groups questioned whether Beijing would stick to its promises.

"There are serious concerns over whether the Chinese government will honor commitments it made to the U.S. government to not persecute Chen and his family members," Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

Chinese officials did not comment on what deal may have been reached. Comments reported by state media focused on "interference" by Washington.

"This is totally unacceptable to China," Liu Weimin, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said in comments reported Wednesday by the state-run news agency Xinhua. He demanded an apology from the United States.

Turmoil and intrigue bubble in China

Nevertheless, senior officials from the two countries -- including Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner -- met Thursday in Beijing for scheduled talks about strategic and economic issues.

In a speech, Clinton referred to human rights without mentioning Chen. "As part of our dialogue, the United States raises the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms because we believe that all governments do have to answer to citizens' aspirations for dignity and the rule of law and that no nation can or should deny those rights," she said.

On the Chinese side, President Hu Jintao said Washington and Beijing "should approach our differences in a correct way, and respect and accommodate each other's interests and concerns."

Chen had been confined to his home for 18 months 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.

Yuan 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," she said.

Friend of Chen: He wants his rights

CNN.com

May 3, 2012

Jerome Cohen, an American lawyer and friend of Chen Guangcheng, appeared on Amanpour today. He has been in contact with the Chinese dissident ever since his escape from house arrest, advising him on how best to secure his freedom and safety with the help of U.S. authorities.

According to Cohen, "Chen's first choice was to stay in China...to study law, to take part in China's further legal development, and to have free communication." Cohen quoted him as saying, "I want simply the rights of every other Chinese citizen."

At first, it seemed that the Chinese had agreed to let Chen remain in the country. Said Cohen, "We know the bare bones of the agreement. How flesh would be put on those bones remains to be seen."

Cohen added, "China is evolving. This is the twenty-first century. The political system lags behind the rest of China's progress. The time is right for legal progress."

Everything changed when he got to the hospital

However, Chen appeared to have a change of heart after he left the protection of the U.S. embassy in Beijing. He questioned his safety and that of his family, and appealed to the U.S. to help them leave the country.

"Everything changed when he got to the hospital," said Cohen. Exhausted by their efforts to secure his future, embassy and state department officials went home to sleep. Chen's doctors examined him and they left him, as well.

"All of a sudden," said Cohen, "his (human) rights companions...got a hold of him. And they said...don't do this, you're just totally unrealistic, it will never work."

Cohen added, "At the same time the media were getting through to him and his wife, who had encouraged him to take this deal (with the Chinese government) and leave the embassy and reunite the family – she changed her mind when her friends were getting a hold of her. And so he's in a very fragile emotional state."

The most humane appearance possible

Still, Cohen remains optimistic. "One thing we share with the Chinese is the belief you must change a vice into a virtue. This debacle may leave him (Chen) better off if he really wants to come to the United States."

Said Cohen, "He's now reunited with his family, he wouldn't have been had he stayed in the embassy, and the whole world is watching." He said of Chinese leaders, "They're practical people. They're going to want to get rid of him and his family in the most humane appearance possible."

Cohen's assessment was later echoed by Madeleine Albright, also a guest on Amanpour today.

The first female Secretary of State, and the author of Prague Winter, she had her own dealings with China's rulers when she served in President Bill Clinton's cabinet. Like Cohen, she believes the Chinese ultimately will decide to let Chen leave.

"I think they (the Chinese leaders) do want to work something out," said Secretary Albright. "The question is what is the best way, what is the timing and then what are the arrangements."

She added, "They know, and we know, that we will always raise human rights."

SELECT ARTICLES FROM MAJOR NEWSPAPERS

The New York Times

A Dissident in China Is Much Discussed, if Not By Name

By MICHAEL WINES and SHARON LaFRANIERE

May 3, 2012

BEIJING — Those outside of China know him as Chen Guangcheng, the sightless and self-trained lawyer whose crusade for individual rights has led him to confinement, escape and now, an international diplomatic incident. Ordinary people inside China refer to him in a different, coded way.

First he was "blind lawyer;" then "blind man," then "A Bing," a reference to a nationally famous blind singer. All were blotted out by the Chinese government's pervasive, highly computerized security apparatus. Lately, his plight has been referred to as "UA898" — the daily United Airlines flight from Beijing to Washington which, this week, has come to symbolize Mr. Chen's demand to emigrate to the United States rather than face an uncertain future in his homeland.

Mr. Chen's demands to be treated like any other Chinese citizen have galvanized much of the world, and incited a global debate over China's human rights policies not seen since another Chinese dissident, Liu Xiaobo, was awarded a Nobel Prize.

But in the airless space for discussion that is contemporary China, neither Mr. Chen nor Mr. Liu is a suitable topic for debate. They are nonentities, or, if they are referred to at all, they are vague threats to the harmonious society that President Hu Jintao promised when he assumed power at the start of the last decade.

"The West and its supporters in China always need a tool to work against China's current political system," the nationalistic state-run newspaper Global Times wrote this week, in one of the first official mentions of the Chen dispute. "Those who want to plot against China by making use of Chen Guangcheng may be just deluding themselves."

The official position was stated most doggedly, perhaps, on Thursday, when the foreign ministry spokesman, Liu Weimin, was asked to explain why Mr. Chen had long been held a prisoner in his own home, an incarceration long described in written and video reports, accepted worldwide, as brutal and unending.

"After Chen Guangcheng was released from prison, he is a free person as far as I know. He has been living in his own house," Mr. Liu stated. Challenged on that, he responded, "That's what you said. As far as I know, he's living in his hometown." He also deflected a spate of other questions about Mr. Chen and Liu Xiaobo's wife, Liu Xia, mostly saying that China's legal system ensures proper treatment of all citizens.

The facts of Mr. Chen's detention are, of course, undisputed. But in a year of change, when China's entire leadership is poised for decennial turnover at a Communist Party congress this autumn, there is scant incentive to rock the boat.

Little about the reported deal between Chinese and American diplomats about Mr. Chen's future, the scheme that unraveled on Thursday in the global press, has become known inside China. Instead, Chinese authorities on Thursday again castigated American officials for unspecified violations of international law in their efforts to

give Mr. Chen refuge at the American embassy, and repeated their demands that Washington apologize for its actions and punish those who helped Mr. Chen escape.

On Thursday, in contrast to their reported agreement to stop persecuting Mr. Chen, Chinese authorities stepped up already onerous security restrictions on a number of friends and supporters who had encouraged or helped carry out Mr. Chen's flight last week from Shandong.

In a post on Twitter, Zeng Jinyan, a rights activist and the wife of Mr. Chen's ally Hu Jia, said she was visited Wednesday evening by state security agents and ordered confined to her home. "This morning they followed me in a black car when I was sending my child to kindergarten," she wrote. "They told me they would accommodate me and my child's needs to go to kindergarten, but I won't be able to leave my house for a few days. This is the beginning of my house arrest."

Ms. Zeng and some other activists have begun to ask journalists to stop calling them, saying the conversations are endangering their safety.

Nicholas Bequelin, a Hong Kong-based researcher with Human Rights Watch, noted that forced confinement at home is the same punishment — albeit without beatings and some other severe measures — that Mr. Chen was trying to escape.

He said that the mishandling of the Chen case had cost the United States considerable leverage in its dealings with China, but that it still could salvage the situation by demanding guarantees from China's top leaders that Mr. Chen would be well treated or allowed to emigrate.

That, he said, would probably require the White House to make resolving Mr. Chen's case a precondition for normal United States-China relations, including the current Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

"I can't see much of a middle way" to settle the issue without a forceful American response, he said.

The New York Times
Activist Asks to Leave China, Deepening U.S. Predicament
May 3, 2012
By JANE PERLEZ

BEIJING — A senior Obama administration official said Thursday that the United States recognized that the blind dissident lawyer Chen Guangcheng wanted to leave China, an apparent reversal of Mr. Chen's earlier stance that injected new uncertainty into a tense diplomatic situation that had briefly appeared resolved ahead of high-level economic talks here.

As the State Department tried to reassess options for Mr. Chen, who according to American officials had eagerly embraced a plan to remain in China, American diplomats were barred from seeing Mr. Chen at the hospital in central Beijing where he is receiving treatment for an injured foot. Speaking from the hospital, Mr. Chen has told reporters in a series of telephone interviews since being admitted on Wednesday afternoon that he and his family feel insecure in the hands of Chinese authorities, and would like to go to the United States.

"It is clear now in the last 12 to 15 hours they as a family have had a change of heart about whether they want to stay in China," said the State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland.

What had for a short time looked like a deft achievement by American diplomats on Wednesday appeared to rapidly unravel only hours after Mr. Chen's release and thrust the dissident's fate into the center of a diplomatic crisis between China and the United States that the Obama administration had sought to avoid during two days of high-level economic and strategic conference meetings attended here by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham

Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner. The two cabinet members spoke Thursday, along with the Chinese president, Hu Jintao.

During her speech, Mrs. Clinton urged China to protect human rights, saying "all governments have to answer our citizens' aspirations for dignity and the rule of law."

Meanwhile, the administration's handling of the Chen case drew a harsh attack from Mitt Romney, the presumptive Republican candidate for president. Campaigning in Virginia, Mr. Romney accused the Obama administration of rushing to complete the deal before Mrs. Clinton arrived for the high level meetings and failing "to put in place the kind of verifiable measures that would assure the safety of Mr. Chen and his family."

"If these reports are true," Mr. Romney said, "this is a dark day for freedom and it's a day of shame for the Obama administration."

Mr. Chen's dramatic reversal from wanting to stay in China after his escape nearly two weeks ago from harsh house arrest in eastern China and his six-day stay at the American Embassy left the administration struggling to come up with a new solution that would satisfy Mr. Chen, and be amenable to the Chinese government.

A key question facing the Obama administration will be the reaction of the Chinese government if Mr. Chen insists on leaving China.

If Mr. Chen requested asylum in the United States, he would have to get a passport, and apply for a visa. Another possibility would be Mr. Chen leaving China and going to a third country.

For his part, Mr. Chen suggested leaving the country with Mrs. Clinton. "My fervent hope is that it would be possible for me and my family to leave for the U.S. on Hillary Clinton's plane," he said in an interview with the Daily Beast.

The Chinese government, which issued a harsh statement Wednesday criticizing the United States for its handling of Mr. Chen, skirted the issue on Thursday. A Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Weimin, said at a regular briefing at the ministry that Mr. Chen was a free person and, as far as he knew, was living in his town in Shandong Province.

The circumstances of Mr. Chen's departure from the American Embassy on Wednesday were also still in dispute. The American ambassador, Gary Locke, reiterated Thursday that Mr. Chen had not been coerced into leaving the embassy on Wednesday and insisted that the dissident lawyer had left of his free will after a plan had been worked out with the Chinese government that he and his family could relocate to a city close to Beijing where he would pursue his law studies.

On Wednesday evening, American officials said they would do all they could to see Mr. Chen starting early Thursday morning. By not being able to talk to Mr. Chen in person, the administration was unable to determine a precise path forward for him, a senior official said.

Whether the Chinese government was actively preventing American officials from visiting Mr. Chen in the hospital, even during visiting hours that start at 3 p.m. local time on Thursday, was not immediately clear. But the longer the American officials were cut off from personal contact with Mr. Chen the more difficult it could become for the United States to reach a solution that satisfied the Chinese authorities.

American officials spoke to Mr. Chen by telephone Thursday, and met with his wife, Yuan Weijing, at a location near the hospital, the official said.

As if to reinforce Mr. Chen's fears, Chinese authorities on Thursday stepped up their already onerous security restrictions on a number of friends and supporters who had encouraged or helped carry out his flight from Shandong.

In a post on Twitter, Zeng Jinyan, a rights activist and wife of Mr. Chen's ally Hu Jia, said she was visited Wednesday evening by state security agents and ordered confined to her home. "This morning they followed me in a black car when I was sending my child to kindergarten," she wrote. "They told me they would accommodate my and my child's needs to go to kindergarten, but I won't be able to leave my house for a few days. This is the beginning of my house arrest."

Ms. Zeng and some other activists have begun to ask journalists to stop calling them, saying the conversations are endangering their safety.

Blind since the age of 1, Mr. Chen is one of the most high-profile human rights dissidents in China. Mrs. Clinton has mentioned his case in public, and the Chinese authorities are aware that he has managed to attract a wide range of Chinese followers who admire his efforts to stop forced abortions.

Mr. Chen, 40, served four years in prison on what supporters said were trumped up charges of disrupting traffic and damaging property. After his release in 2010, Mr. Chen was placed under house arrest with his wife and daughter. His eldest son went to school elsewhere and was reunited with Mr. Chen at the hospital on Wednesday.

One explanation for Mr. Chen's reversal was his meeting with his wife at the hospital Wednesday for the first time since his escape from their home.

In the telephone interviews with reporters, Mr. Chen, said his wife had vividly described threats against her and their two children by security forces surrounding their house in Shandong.

After a harrowing 300-mile journey from his hometown to Beijing, six days sequestered in the American Embassy, and a sudden release into a large Chinese public hospital where he did not have the protection of the American officials he seemed to expect, Mr. Chen was likely traumatized, his steely demeanor in tough times finally punctured.

Mr. Chen had plotted his escape over several months but suffered an immediate setback when he injured his foot after jumping over a fence at night while fleeing his home. By the time he reached Beijing, where he was kept for days in a series of safe houses, his foot was causing severe pain and he hobbled as he walked.

Since his arrival at the hospital, he appears to have been bombarded with advice by telephone from supporters and advisers, many of them apparently angered by the plan for him to remain in China.

His lawyer, Teng Biao, who confirmed Mr. Chen's change of mind, sent a message via Twitter asking reporters to stop calling Mr. Chen because the family needed rest and "need to make more important calls."

The American officials who negotiated with the Chinese Foreign Ministry to allow Mr. Chen to stay in China, said they consulted frequently with him about the plan to for him to stay in China, but they did not speak at length to his wife, an American official knowledgeable about the process said. In retrospect, that may have been a mistake, the official said.

In a telephone interview on Thursday, Ms. Yuan said that her husband had left the American Embassy voluntarily, but circumstances had changed after his departure.

Under the original plan, China promised to “guarantee his freedom and rights, and the U.S. made some efforts,” she said. “But after he’s out, the situation has not been optimistic and has not been improved.” She said communications with their extended family had been cut.

“We can’t get in contact with our family,” she said.

Michael Wines contributed reporting and Edy Yin contributed research.

Activist Chen Guangcheng: Years of fearless advocacy, and a week of anguish

The Washington Post

By Peter Finn, Thursday, May 3, 8:06 PM

By the time he took the case that would cost him his freedom, Chen Guangcheng had established his fearlessness. The blind and self-educated legal advocate had fought polluters and tax authorities in Shandong province and had pushed for the rights of people with disabilities since the late 1990s.

In 2005, the authorities decided to rein in Chen after he took on the cause of peasants who were being forcibly sterilized or taken to abortion clinics. Incensed by the practice, Chen decided to confront the bureaucrats who were still pursuing a coercive one-child policy long after the state had declared such measures illegal.

“He is a genuinely idealistic person shaped by his rural experience and especially that of being a blind man,” said Jerome A. Cohen, a professor at New York University and a friend of Chen’s. “He is a very driven person. Can you imagine the steely determination to live through what this guy has lived through, and what he has accomplished?”

Chen’s decision to challenge the authorities in court ultimately led to a four-year prison sentence on what human rights groups called trumped-up charges. When he was released in September 2010, Chen was immediately subjected to a new form of incarceration — an unofficial, even unacknowledged, house arrest.

His modest farmhouse in a village outside Linyi city, about 400 miles southeast of Beijing, was surrounded by high walls and cellphone jammers. His detention was enforced by a band of police and locally hired thugs.

Chen broke through this cordon last month and into the center of U.S.-China relations when he sought and received refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

It was a typically daring moment for the mop-haired, 40-year-old gadfly, who has been defying the odds for much of his life.

Chen, who is married with two children, lost his sight in infancy because of a fever and inadequate medical care. He received no formal education until he was a teenager, starting and finishing elementary school between the ages of 17 and 20.

He attended a university in Nanjing where he studied traditional medicine. But it was the law that attracted him most, and he believed he could use it to redress discrimination faced by people with disabilities. With help from his four older brothers, who read textbooks to him, Chen immersed himself in the subject.

After returning from university studies in Nanjing, Chen quickly became known in his hometown as someone who was willing to go to court to defend the rights of ordinary citizens.

For a time, his activism was tolerated. Chen was not a traditional democracy advocate. He did not attack the Communist Party or the system, but repeatedly exposed failures to abide by the law as it was written.

When Chen stood up against the ostensibly illegal but widespread use of forced sterilization and forced abortions, however, he became a target for the provincial government in Linyi, a city of 10 million people.

Local people described women who were eight months pregnant being forced to have abortions. One or both parents of two children were forcibly sterilized, and relatives were held hostage until they complied, Chen reported. All this happened even though the government had outlawed coercion to achieve its development and population goals.

"To Chen, it was another maddening example of the party ignoring its own laws, and when his neighbors asked him what they should do, he suggested a class-action lawsuit against local officials," wrote Philip P. Pan, a former Washington Post reporter, in his book "Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China." "In the quarter century since the party adopted the one-child policy, no one had ever attempted a mass legal challenge against the state's power to compel sterilization and abortion."

When Chen went to Beijing to discuss the case, he was followed by security agents from Linyi who, after several attempts, detained him and bundled into a car. Pan, who was called to the scene after Chen was held, said he saw him pinned face down in the car and he could hear "muffled screaming."

Chen was eventually sentenced to four years in prison for organizing a mob to block traffic and damaging property. When he was released, he was immediately imprisoned in his home.

The Chinese authorities, when asked, insisted he was a free man.

"I was in a small prison, and now I am in a larger prison," said Chen in a video that was smuggled out, an act that brought such a severe beating that the dissident was left unconscious, human rights groups said.

As the house arrest continued, dozens of people attempted to visit Chen, most famously the actor Christian Bale, who in December scuffled with Chen's guards in an episode that was captured by a CNN film crew.

For several months before his escape on April 22, Chen feigned illness to lull his guards into complacency. On the night he fled his home, Chen scaled the wall that had been built to keep him in, badly injuring his foot as he fell to the ground. He struggled on to a rendezvous point.

Friends drove him to Beijing and sheltered him while they contacted the U.S. Embassy. He was picked up by U.S. officials who eluded a Chinese tail and whisked him into the American compound. He stayed there for six days before leaving Wednesday, after many hours of tense talks between U.S. and Chinese authorities about his future.

In an interview Thursday from his hospital bed, where Chen was admitted for treatment of a cracked bone after leaving the embassy, he said he wanted to continue "to promote social progress and judicial system improvement in China."

"Society must become more and more fair in the future," Chen said. "It's just a matter of time. It depends on how many people make efforts, and how big the efforts we make are."

Cohen said Chen's fluctuating statements in recent days — expressing a desire to remain in China, then asking for asylum, and then requesting only a temporary stay in the United States — reflect his conflicting priorities and the avalanche of advice he has received.

Cohen said he believes Chen is torn between the legal work he wants to continue and the safety of his family, which fellow activists say has been threatened with retaliation by Chinese authorities.

"He is uncertain about what he wants," said Cohen. "How could he not be conflicted? On the one hand, he has his work. On the other he has a wonderful wife and two lovely children."

Staff writer Keith Richburg in Beijing contributed to this report.

The Washington Post**Chen Guangcheng, Chinese activist, calls into House hearing on handling of his case****By Emily Heil, Updated: Thursday, May 3, 6:08 PM**

Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng called in Thursday to a hearing on Capitol Hill at which senior House Republicans criticized the Obama administration's handling of the negotiations that preceded Chen's departure from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing this week.

Earlier in the hearing, Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.), who heads the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, had quoted Chen as saying he was "very disappointed" in U.S. officials and said he would seek to find out during a hearing next week whether their approach to the talks was affected by a desire not to let Chen's case disrupt a visit to Beijing by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner.

Later, Chen himself called Bob Fu, a rights activist with the Texas-based Christian group ChinaAid who was testifying at the hearing. The dissident lawyer, who is under watch by Chinese authorities in a Beijing hospital, reached Fu on his cellphone and addressed the room over speakerphone. Fu translated as Chen thanked those present for past efforts on his behalf.

"The thing I am most concerned about right now is the safety of my mother and my brothers," Chen added, according to Fu.

Smith promised Chen help. "We will be unceasing in our efforts to secure your freedom," he said.

Chen left the U.S. Embassy on Wednesday, six days after fleeing de facto house arrest in his village, and joined his wife and children at a local hospital. He remains there under the control of Chinese police and security authorities, despite efforts by U.S. diplomats to meet with him and Chen's reported desire to seek asylum.

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), too, said White House officials had questions to answer.

"The most generous read of the administration's handling of the situation was that it was naive," Wolf said, adding that he planned to review all the cable communications — classified and not — pertaining to the Chen deal.

Smith said he had tried to place a call to Chen on Tuesday, after hearing that the dissident lawyer wanted to speak to him, but that a U.S. official did not connect him. After the unnamed U.S. official said Chen would call him back, the call never came, Smith said.

Smith added that the administration must answer a number of questions, including how any agreement to keep Chen and his family safe in China might be enforced, how the United States would respond if they experience retaliation, and the fate of Chen's nephew, Chen Kegui, who was reportedly taken into custody after his uncle's escape.

"The Obama administration has a high moral obligation to protect Chen and his family," Wolf said. "To do anything less would be scandalous."

Michael Horowitz, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, told those on the mostly empty dais that the diplomats in Beijing deserved "an F on bargaining." The hearing was called only Wednesday, during the congressional recess, and no Democrats were in attendance.

Other witnesses stopped short of criticizing the administration outright on Chen, but urged further action.

Sophie Richardson, China director for Human Rights Watch said that Clinton and Geithner should demand a meeting with Chen. "It is incumbent on the U.S. government to insist on access to him," she said.

However, if Chen does decide to remain in China, she said, U.S. officials should monitor him closely to ensure that the Chinese government does not retaliate.

Horowitz said Congress should urge the administration to act quickly to open up the Internet in China, allowing citizens access to information that is now blocked.

"We have it within our means . . . to tear down the Internet firewalls that are the real source of the government's ability to isolate its people," Horowitz said. "Let's honor and protect this man by tearing down the Internet firewalls."

Fu, who said he had been in touch with Chen and his intimates earlier in the week, gave the lawmakers an account of what had happened to Chen before he left the U.S. Embassy. Fu said Chen told him that while he was at the embassy, U.S. officials had relayed to him a threat by the Chinese government: If he remained under U.S. protection, he would never see his wife and children again.

"After hearing that message by the Chinese government, conveyed by the U.S. official, his heart was heavy and [he] felt like he had no other choice," Fu told the lawmakers.

U.S. officials have given a different account of events, denying that they relayed threats to Chen while he was at the embassy.

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

The Wall Street Journal

Chinese Activist Makes Plea to U.S. Congress

By KEITH JOHNSON and JOSH CHIN in Beijing and JAY SOLOMON in Washington

May 3, 2012

Amid mounting criticism, U.S. officials reignited talks with Beijing over the fate of a blind Chinese activist whose about-face on a deal keeping him in China threatened a cascade of humiliating diplomatic and political embarrassments.

A dramatic day of negotiations ended with the most extraordinary moment yet in the week-old affair: the dissident, Chen Guangcheng, addressing a U.S. congressional panel over a cellphone held up by an American Christian activist.

Mr. Chen phoned into the Capitol Hill hearing from his hospital room and requested free passage to the U.S. and a meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in Beijing until Friday for economic talks. "I hope I can get more help from her," he said, his comments translated to a congressional briefing room filled with lawmakers, journalists and human-rights activists.

"I want to come to the U.S. to rest. I have not had a rest in 10 years," Mr. Chen said. "I'm concerned most right now with the safety of my mother and brothers. I really want to know what's going on with them."

The direct appeal to Congress by an activist under Chinese watch heightened the stakes in one of the most serious U.S.-China showdowns in a decade.

Mr. Chen's surprise call-in seemed to settle any lingering doubts about his current wishes and sharply illustrated how rapidly the dissident's case was morphing into a dire political challenge for President Barack Obama and the White House. Republicans, including Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, demanded that the White House take steps to ensure the safety of Mr. Chen and his family. Critics questioned whether the Obama administration hurried the deal surrounding the dissident's fate to solidify its standing with Beijing ahead of the high-level U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue meetings Thursday and Friday.

Developments Thursday also raised questions about the deal negotiated by top State Department officials for Mr. Chen's relocation within China that collapsed Wednesday in a drama that unfolded hours after he left the safety of the American embassy in Beijing.

Throughout the day Thursday, U.S. officials insisted that Mr. Chen had had a "change of heart" and diplomatic officials scrambled to ascertain what he really wanted, meeting with the dissident and his wife at a Beijing hospital where he is undergoing treatment for injuries sustained during a risky escape from his home detention.

But as U.S. officials worked to salvage the deal, they were confronted with a far more challenging negotiating environment—and the likelihood of rising Chinese impatience.

U.S. officials said Mr. Chen had insisted that he remain in China right up to his departure from the safety of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing on Wednesday. Activists, U.S. officials and others have suggested that Mr. Chen's change of heart came after he reached the hospital in Beijing on Wednesday. A person familiar with the matter suggested that only when Mr. Chen reunited with his wife did he grasp the gravity of the security situation, leading to a desire for a wholesale escape for the family.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal on Thursday, Mr. Chen cited the treatment of his family after he fled de facto house arrest in his hometown in eastern Shandong province on April 22. "While I was in the embassy, the situation back home was awful," he said. Local authorities "were in my house, in my room. They wouldn't let my family close the door."

"I feel my family members aren't very safe in China," said Mr. Chen. In a separate interview, he said he is in good health "but my heart is tired."

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell was in negotiations with Chinese officials on Thursday, according to a person familiar with the matter. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman declined to comment.

U.S. officials also began negotiating again with Mr. Chen and his wife, Yuan Weijing. It wasn't clear how much access they had, however; U.S. officials said they spoke only by phone with Mr. Chen who was with his family at Beijing's Chaoyang Hospital. Mr. Chen said on Thursday that U.S. officials had told him that they weren't permitted inside the hospital.

"We need to consult with them further, and get a better sense of what they want to do, and together consider their options," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on Thursday.

The Capitol Hill hearing Thursday was organized by a congressional and executive branch commission formed to monitor China's human rights record. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China is led by two Republicans, Christopher Smith of New Jersey and Frank Wolf of Virginia.

But the panel of experts that testified included an array of human rights campaigners, Chinese bloggers, and women's rights activists – all of whom aggressively criticized the Obama administration's handling of the Chen affair.

Mr. Wolfe said he would introduce legislation seeking access to all State Department and White House communications and memos related to the handling of Mr. Chen's case. Rights campaigner Sophie Richardson of Human Rights Watch said Mrs. Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner should show solidarity with Mr. Chen by visiting with him before leaving Beijing.

"This much is certain: the Obama administration has a high moral obligation to protect Chen and his family," Rep. Wolf told the hearing. "To do anything less would be scandalous."

Also testifying Thursday was Bob Fu, a Chinese-American pastor and human rights activist, who regularly communicated with Mr. Chen during his flight last week from his home in Shandong.

Mr. Fu, who leads an activist group called China Aid, repeated his charges that American diplomats coerced Mr. Chen into departing the embassy Wednesday by telling him that his wife and children would face physical harm if he didn't leave. He said the Americans stressed that Mr. Chen's family would be returned to Shandong, which Mr. Fu said was a clear signal to Mr. Chen that they would be harmed.

"It was a Chinese government message conveyed through the U.S. government official that if [Chen] didn't leave the embassy he wouldn't see his wife or children again, Mr. Fu said.

State Department and White House officials have repeatedly denied allegations by Mr. Fu and others supporters of Mr. Chen that U.S. officials passed on threats made by Chinese officials. Administration officials have confirmed that Mr. Chen was informed that his wife and children would be returned to Shandong if he didn't depart the embassy.

They have insisted that he left of his own accord after requesting that the Chinese authorities show good faith by transporting his family to Beijing.

Mr. Chen in the interview left open the possibility that he could return to the embassy, where he sought safety on April 26. "The U.S. embassy never said whether or not I could go back after getting out of the hospital," he said.

It is unclear whether Chinese authorities would permit such a move. Media coverage of the Chen affair has been almost nonexistent, but on Wednesday, the state-run Xinhua news agency published an article on Mr. Chen, which cited a Foreign Ministry spokesman as criticizing U.S. meddling in Chinese affairs. The U.S. "should learn from the incident in a serious and responsible attitude and reflect on its own policy and moves," spokesman Liu Weimin said.

The U.S., meanwhile, may have less leverage after furious negotiations over the past week to reach the original Chen agreement. Officials said that the potential for getting Mr. Chen out of the country also was complicated by the need to get permission for him as well as for Ms. Yuan and their two children.

Still, Mr. Chen's public disagreement with the U.S. has helped draw attention to his situation, potentially making it difficult for China to move against him without drawing international criticism.

"He has the protection of world opinion," said Jerome Cohen, adjunct senior fellow for Asia studies with the Council on Foreign Relations and an adviser to Mr. Chen. For Beijing, "he's an embarrassment. Something's got to be done. If I'm the Chinese government, I may say we just want him out of here."

"The U.S. government needs to be absolutely clear in the aftermath of this deal that its plans to ensure Chen Guangcheng's safety take into account the very real threats to him and his family," said Phelim Kine, senior Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch.

U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke said on Thursday that U.S. officials repeatedly asked whether Mr. Chen wanted to flee to the U.S., and were told no every time. He also said Mr. Chen would have been allowed to stay at the U.S. embassy for years rather than accept a deal he didn't like and was never pressured to leave. "I can tell you that he knew the stark choices in front of him," he said.

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Mr. Locke on Thursday said he spent several hours each day with Mr. Chen to determine what he wanted. Among the concerns about safety for his family, Mr. Chen—a self-taught legal activist—expressed an interest in studying law, as well as asked for protections for the activists who helped him and met with him after his escape. He also asked for an investigation into the local authorities in Shandong province who held him at home without arrest or charges.

U.S. officials advised that such a deal was possible. Mr. Cohen cited the example of Ai Weiwei, the Beijing-based dissident artist who faces charges of tax evasion and is confined to Beijing but is out of prison and enjoys some limited freedoms.

Discussions heated up Tuesday, a U.S. official said, when the U.S. presented an offer to Mr. Chen and a response from the Chinese government with specifics about which universities he might be allowed to attend to study law. Mr. Chen declined the offer, Mr. Locke said, and then demanded to speak with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

What Mr. Chen needed was a demonstration of faith from China, Mr. Locke said. The activist asked officials whether the Chinese government would send his family to Beijing. U.S. officials passed on the request to their Chinese counterparts, who put his family on a high-speed train to Beijing. Mr. Chen said he would agree to a deal once he met with his wife, Mr. Locke said.

Mr. Locke said, officials repeatedly asked Mr. Chen if he was comfortable with the decision to leave the embassy. The questions continued until he got into the van to go to the hospital.

Once reunited with his family, Mr. Chen gave his final assent to the deal, Mr. Locke said. But by that evening, after calls from other activists, Mr. Chen began telling reporters he had changed his mind. He cited what his wife said were threats of bodily harm from security forces who tied her up to a chair for two days and threatening to hurt her after he had escaped.

Mr. Chen said he isn't bitter toward the U.S. embassy over the affair. "I feel the work the embassy has done with this business has been not bad," he said. "I understand completely that this is something they can't solve on their own."

Activist Affair Damps Hope Of Shift in China Atmosphere

The Wall Street Journal

By JEREMY PAGE, ANDREW BROWNE and BRIAN SPEGELE

May 3, 2012

BEIJING—China's strident tone in its limited statements about the affair around Chen Guangcheng's sojourn to the U.S. Embassy highlights the changing dynamics in the U.S.-China relationship.

China has a history of using dissidents as pawns in relations with the U.S., using releases in the past to extract concessions on trade and other issues. However, an economically ascendant China no longer sees itself as a supplicant but as a global power able to dictate terms.

The notion that the U.S. would be able to impose conditions on Mr. Chen's release in China was always optimistic, given the Communist Party's long history of seeking to destroy its political opponents rather than

engage them. Now that the issue has exploded into the public realm, analysts say that the hands of Chinese leaders are further tied. They cannot be seen to back down on an issue of sovereignty.

The harsh tone of the Chinese statement demanding an apology from Washington after Mr. Chen walked out of the embassy points to the pressures on the Chinese leadership to be seen to stand up to the U.S. superpower.

Analysts say that Chinese hard-liners often think in terms of conspiracy theories, and will be convinced that Washington engineered the whole Chen episode to embarrass China and create domestic instability. Further demands in the wake of Mr. Chen's change of mind regarding his decision to stay in China will be seen as adding insult to injury.

The episode points up the limitations of Beijing's control over its provinces. In this case, local officials were given leeway to mistreat an internationally prominent dissident in a way that has set back China's efforts to portray itself as a benign power ruled by law. A multibillion-dollar effort to project China's "soft power" has effectively been hijacked by village thugs, human-rights advocates say.

The extended abuse of Mr. Chen in Shandong emphatically demonstrates that the party's overriding concern is survival, which means never bending to political challenge, regardless of the cost in terms of the country's international reputation, political analysts say.

Mr. Chen, however, presents an unusual challenge to authorities. He commands sympathy partly because of his blindness but also because he has been fighting abuses in China's one-child family policy that is widely hated by the public, and believed by demographers to have outlived its usefulness—if there was ever a scientific rationale.

Mr. Chen, a self-taught lawyer, has connected with Chinese political activists and legions of Internet users who have pressed authorities for his freedom in recent months.

His case has highlighted a grass-roots push for political reform.

Party leaders in recent months have come under increasing pressure to abide by the country's own laws, even as China's security forces and other hard-liners have pressed to quell dissent at all costs.

Just as villagers in the southern fishing village of Wukan last year staged mass protests to press authorities to halt illegal land grabs there, Mr. Chen and his growing numbers of supporters have pressed for greater rule of law in China at a time when lawyers and other legal advocates are facing some of their toughest restrictions in decades.

The Chinese government's handling of the case is also likely to damp any expectations that the downfall of Bo Xilai will change the political atmosphere by emboldening reformists in the Communist Party.

Ever since the former high-flying party chief of Chongqing was dismissed from his party posts, political insiders and analysts have suggested that the balance of power may have swung toward the reformist wing of the party, led by Premier Wen Jiabao, who has repeatedly called for unspecified political reform in the past two years and who disliked Mr. Bo's top-down model of government and advocate a greater role for civil society and the rule of law.

There has been widespread talk in political circles in Beijing that Zhou Yongkang, the party leader who oversees domestic security and who greatly strengthened police powers in recent years, has been weakened by the scandal surrounding Mr. Bo.

That could be one reason Mr. Chen, one of China's most politically astute activists, appealed directly to Premier Wen in a video message posted around the time he fled his home on the YouTube channel of Boxun, a Chinese-language website based in Durham, N.C.

But the Chinese government's response suggests that the current leadership is still overwhelmingly concerned with maintaining its grip on power, restoring unity within its own ranks ahead of a generational transfer of power in the fall, and being seen to stand up to the U.S.

The response once again raises the issue of whether the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which probably negotiated the terms of Mr. Chen's departure from the embassy, has been overruled within the Chinese system by the state security apparatus that is responsible for monitoring and restraining political activists.

That may be because the security forces were embarrassed by Mr. Chen's escape, especially coming so soon after a former Chongqing police chief sought refuge in the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu.

The saga is also damaging for Jiang Yikang, the party chief of Mr. Chen's home province of Shandong, who had been considered a front-runner for promotion to the Politburo—the top 25 leaders—this fall.

Write to Jeremy Page at jeremy.page@wsj.com, Andrew Browne at andrew.browne@wsj.com and Brian Spegele at brian.spegele@wsj.com

Social Media

Chatter on Twitter has shifted from a play-by-play of what was happening to speculation on whether CGC will be able to leave China after his change of heart and what this whole episode will mean for the bilateral relationship. Twitteratti have also focused on the hearings today on the Hill by the Congressional Executive Commission on China and reaction to Guo Yushan's (a Beijing based human rights advocate who has campaigned on Chen's behalf) account earlier today of what Chen told her:

--Chen never requested political asylum, but simply wants to go to the U.S. for a few months to rest. He has a standing invite from NYU to visit, he's a free man, and maybe he'd like to go to the U.S. for travel for a bit, then return to China. He sees the ongoing efforts, restraint, and respect in U.S.-China relations, and knows that bilateral relations between two big countries is not small stuff.

--Chen never criticized the U.S. Embassy for "forcing" him or inducing him to leave the Embassy. He left the Embassy of his own willingness, and expressed heartfelt thanks to the Embassy for its help over the past week. He expressed thanks to Secretary Clinton, Ambassador Locke, and the other State Department people who have helped him. He never blamed them.

--The first day he was in the hospital a situation arose that made him unhappy and he and his family nervous. He knew that some officials from his township in Shandong province were there. He hopes that the Chinese government can legally deal w/ the officials in Shandong who illegally persecuted him and his family.

--He thanks the worldwide media for their attention and care, and hopes they can understand his complicated situation. He does not wish for anyone who has helped him or is currently helping his friends to be pulled into any misunderstandings. For example, in the case of the help provided by the U.S. Embassy, he never criticized them, but rather is very thankful.

@KaiserKuo - Chinese-American long time Beijing resident who is Int'l Communications Director for Baidu (Chinese internet portal) Encouraged after reading latest statement by Chen Guangcheng relayed by Guo Yushan. Now everyone stop indignantly raging at the State Dept!

@nytimesworld Chen Guangcheng Case Much Discussed in China, but Cautiously nyti.ms/IN28zk

@adriennemong - NBC London/Beijing. It was Bob Fu who called #ChenGuangcheng MT @joshrogin Chen calls into congressional hearing: Get me out bit.ly/KtyjnT

Note: The next media summary will be at 5am tomorrow/1700 Beijing