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Cuba seen as cyber-threat to U.S. military operations

WASHINGTON – (AP) – Sen. Ron Wyden didn't think Cuba posed a military threat to the United States and expected that Rear Adm. Thomas Wilson would reinforce that view when he raised the subject with Wilson at a Senate hearing.

Wilson's answer surprised Wyden, D-Ore.

Wilson, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said Cuba has the potential to use "information warfare or computer network attack," enabling the country "to disrupt our access or flow of forces to the region."

Moments later, the public portion of the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing ended and the participants continued their discussion in secret.

The little-noticed exchange took place in February.

Wyden acknowledged later to a reporter that he had thought Cuba was too weak to be a threat to the United States. After hearing Wilson's testimony, Wyden said he thinks the issue "warrants further review."

Concern about a possible Cuban attack on U.S. military websites is not new.

Manuel Cereijo, an engineering professor at Florida International University, said in a 1999 study that telecommunications espionage has been a high priority area for Cuba since 1991.

"Cuba represents a serious threat to the security of the

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United States in the cyber-warfare phase of terrorism," Cereijo wrote.

But a U.S. official, asking not to be identified, said he believes the worries about Cuba's competence in this area can be overstated.

The ability to wage cyber-attacks depends on having a high-tech phone system, which Cuba lacks, the official said.

As for the possibility of Cuba planting agents in the United States to disrupt American military communications, the official said that would be a high risk exercise.

The official acknowledged the possibility that China may be providing technical assistance to Cuba on ways to target U.S. military communications.

Sino-Cuban relations are at a peak following the visit to Havana last month by President Jiang Zemin, but the U.S. official said the administration had no hard information about any collaboration on the issue.

Castro also has been strengthening ties with Iran, which, according to the U.S. officials, is continuing its pursuit of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

Politically, Cuba and the United States appear to be as antagonistic nowadays as at any time in decades.

The hostility gives added context to concerns here about Cuba's alleged development of a cyber-warfare capability.

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