

## **U.S. expert urges Washington to begin peace treaty talks with N. Korea**

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A U.S. expert urged the administration of President Barack Obama to accept North Korea's demand to hold peace treaty negotiations, claiming the current standoff benefits no one and the communist regime is better behaved when talks are under way.

It is not new that North Korea wants a peace treaty with the U.S. to formally end the 1950-53 Korean War. But Pyongyang has been pressing the demand harder in recent months since Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong made the demand during a speech at the U.N. General Assembly in early October.

The North has since repeatedly called for peace treaty talks, as recently as Thursday.

The U.S. says the demand is a nonstarter as long as the North pursues nuclear ambitions. U.S. officials have stressed that the communist regime has got the order wrong and should first focus on negotiations to end its nuclear program.

On Friday, Doug Bandow, a Korea expert and senior fellow at the Cato Institute, claimed, however, that the U.S. should "should respond yes, proposing a time and place."

"In the past Pyongyang's proposals appeared pro forma. But now might be different," he said in an article that appeared on the website of the National Interest magazine. Citing a South Korean expert, he also said that the North's repetition of the demand could be a sign it's serious about holding a conversation with U.S.

No one should have any illusions about how smoothly such a process is likely to go or how much practical difference a signed piece of paper would make as long as the North maintains oversize military forces along the inter-Korean border, the expert said.

Still, talking is better than the status quo that he said "benefits no one."

“Pyongyang is better behaved when involved in negotiations. Exactly why is hard to fathom. After all, preparing to fight in order to talk seems a bit odd. But the mere act of negotiating seems to reduce the likelihood of military confrontation. So talk,” he said.

Such negotiations would also meet China’s calls for reducing the “threat environment facing the North,” the expert said. By meeting the demand, the U.S. could in turn press Beijing harder to “apply real pressure on North Korea to at least moderate its behavior if not disarm,” he said.

“Pyongyang says it wants to negotiate a peace treaty. Let’s negotiate. The worst that can happen is nothing. Maybe, just maybe, something positive might occur. But it won’t if we don’t try,” he said.