

## **Nuclear issue on Korean Peninsula takes new turn**

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BEIJING, Jan. 14 (Xinhua) -- At the beginning of the year 2010, the conflict between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on one side and the United States and South Korea on the other over the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula took a new turn.

In a statement issued on Monday, the DPRK Foreign Ministry said it is ready to discuss signing a peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement with relevant states within the framework of the six-party talks.

The DPRK indicated in the statement that only with the signing of the peace treaty is it possible for denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula to materialize, and the lifting of sanctions against the DPRK and other obstacle to confidence building would eventually lead to the restart of the six-party talks.

In response, the White house said the DPRK had to return to the six-party talks first and take steps towards denuclearization before discussion on the peace treaty can make real progress.

Meanwhile, South Korea's Defense Minister Kim Tae-yong said Tuesday that progress in the DPRK's denuclearization efforts and the resumption of the six-party talks should come first before South Korea and the DPRK can discuss replacing an armistice with a peace treaty.

In fact, the conflict derives from U.S. insistence on "denuclearization first" and the DPRK's adherence to "peace first." Their different priorities are clear indications of their respective strategic interests.

By making another gesture at the beginning of the year, Pyongyang reiterated that its "consistent position" is to strive for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and contribute to peace and stability in Northeastern Asia and the denuclearization of the world.

While attributing the setbacks of the six-party talks to a lack of confidence among the related parties, the DPRK put forward its own solution -- to discuss among the relevant parties of the Armistice Agreement the signing of a peace treaty to replace it.

It also proposed to hold separate talks on establishing peace mechanism on the

Peninsula, or discuss the issue within the framework of the six-party talks.

Despite the DPRK's emphasis on a new peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement, a close look at its proposal indicates that Pyongyang's understanding of the need to resume the six-party talks and fulfill the Joint Statement on September 2005.

In line with the Obama administration's policy on the Korea Peninsular issues, Washington rejected Pyongyang's new proposal.

"We've made clear, going back several months, we're not going to pay North Korea (DPRK) for coming back to the six-party process," said U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley.

Crowley's remarks echoed with U.S. President Barack Obama's commitments in June when meeting with visiting South Korean President Lee Myung-bak.

Obama vowed to "end a cycle of allowing Pyongyang to create a crisis and then be rewarded with incentives to back down.

Analysts said the U.S. response showed that the Obama administration, while sticking to its current policy on issues related to the Korean Peninsula, is not eager to create a more favorable diplomatic atmosphere with the DPRK for the time being.

However, it does not mean the U.S. does not care whether the DPRK would return to the six-party talks, an expert with the U.S. think tank Cato Institute said.

Some analysts said it might well turn out to be a feasible alternative to have simultaneous talks on denuclearization and peace mechanism on the Peninsula.

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