

US Misses Opportunity for Peace Progress at Olympics

Despite President Moon's efforts to encourage diplomacy, childish anti-diplomatic behavior of Vice President Pence undermines opportunity for peace diplomacy

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At a carefully planned dinner to honor Kim Yong Nam, the head of the North Korean delegation and Vice President Mike Pence, South Korean President Moon said that he hoped the Winter Olympics would be remembered as the "[day peace began](#)." But, Vice President Mike Pence did his best to make sure that did not happen. He missed the opportunity created by Moon to further peace on the Korean peninsula. The historic opening created by North and South Korea at the Olympics was an opportunity, but Pence handled the situation like a childish teenager.

At a dinner reception where President Moon sought an opportunity for dialogue between the US and North Korea, [Pence went to great lengths](#) to avoid talking to the North Koreans. [According to Reuters](#), when Pence arrived late to the reception, he told Moon he planned to leave directly after a photo session, but Moon asked him to "come and say hello to friends." Moon was trying to create a dialogue to advance peace but Pence went around the table and shook hands with everyone except Kim Yong Nam of North Korea.

So Pence went around the table and greeted/shook hands with everyone - except North Korea's Kim Yong Nam, who was sitting between the UN sec-gen Guterres and IOC chairman Bach

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[Kim Yong Nam is the head of the North Korean Delegation, Kim Yong Yo is the sister of the North Korean president]

Reuters reports that Moon said,

"There are some who would not want to be in the same room together if it wasn't for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. But what is more important than anything is that we are together."

That seemed to be a statement that described the behavior of Pence. The mainstream political media outlet [Politico described it as a close call for Pence](#):

Vice President Mike Pence's Olympic visit to Pyeongchang, South Korea, began Friday with a close call with the North Korean officials, whom the vice president appeared to avoid at a diplomatic reception before the opening ceremonies.

Since Pence arrived at the dinner late, the seating plan was shuffled. Pence again missed an opportunity created by Moon. Originally, the seating plan showed Pence, with his wife to the left and Moon to his right, seated across the round table from Kim, who was nestled between U.N. Secretary General António Guterres and International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach's wife. Kim's visit is significant as she is the first member of North Korea's ruling family to enter South Korea since 1953. Who knows what kind of conversation could have occurred that furthered the peace process, but Pence avoided the opportunity.

The initial seating plan for the Olympic reception for VIPs had [@VP](#) Pence sitting next to South Korean president Moon and opposite North Korea's head of state, Kim Yong Nam, [@Reuters](#) reports. Then Pence decided not to join the dinner. <https://t.co/BHSVm6KdYG> [pic.twitter.com/AoEVAmlyAr](https://t.co/AoEVAmlyAr)

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Pence left the event after five minutes. Reuters reports that Pence missed the symbolic dessert, called "A Plate of Hope," a "dark chocolate tempered in the shape of barbed wire lay over a map of the Korean peninsula rendered in thin blue chocolate, a representation of the heavily militarized border that separates Games host South Korea and its old enemy in the North."



Reuters reports the diplomatic response of the Moon administration was a reaction to the avoidance antics of Pence:

"A source in the Moon administration said Pence's absence at the reception was a 'mere bump' in an otherwise successful diplomatic event."

At the Olympic stadium, Pence sat one row in front of the North Koreans. Even though Kim Jong Yo was very close to him, Pence did not even try to speak to her. The pool report for the media was that Pence had “no interaction” with Kim Jong Yo. [New York Magazine](#) described it as Pence “avoiding eye contact” with the Korean leader. Another missed opportunity for peace.



Vice President Pence, so close and yet so far from North Korea’s Kim Jong Yo. The two never even made eye contact.



Vice president Mike Pence, second from bottom right, sits between second lady Karen Pence, third from bottom left, and Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. Behind Pence is Kim Jong Yo of North Korea. To the left is President Moon of South Korea and his wife.

While Pence was present, South Korean President Moon Jae-in shook hands with Kim Yo Jong, creating a historic moment and a photograph that gave hopes to many for peace between North and South Korea and movement toward unification and an end of hostilities.



Another show of unity occurred when two members of the Unified Korean Hockey Team, one from the North and one from the South, carried the Olympic torch up the final flight of stairs in the opening ceremonies. They handed the torch over to figure skater Yuna Kim, a South Korean who won the gold medal in 2010 and the silver medal in 2014 who then lit the Olympic cauldron.



A historic moment of unity, two women who play on the unified Korean ice hockey team carried the

Olympic torch for the last leg of its journey at the opening ceremony for the 2018 PyeongChang Games. Park Jong-ah of South Korea and Jong Su-hyon of North Korea carried the flame together across the stage and up a steep flight of stairs to the base of the Olympic cauldron.

We recognize that these images of North and South Korea shaking hands and being friendly toward each other as well as of South and North Korean athletes walking into the Olympic stadium together do not ensure peace on the Korean peninsula. It is a long hard road to peace, much still needs to be negotiated. Peace is made more difficult with the US threatening a 'bloody nose', teenage bully talk for a military first strike, against North Korea. Pence exemplified the worst of US foreign policy with his childish behavior at the Olympics.

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