

Vice President Pence in South Korea: 'We Are With You 100 Percent'

Vice President Mike Pence's first major foreign visit came over the Easter holiday weekend with several stops in South Korea.

Sunday, the vice president and Second Lady Karen Pence visited U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan in Seoul. After attending Easter services with base personnel, he spoke briefly to the troops and their families, and then the second lady gave a blessing over the meal that followed.

Monday morning, the vice president made an unscheduled visit to the Freedom House in the Demilitarized Zone. This time, he spoke to soldiers from both the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, stating that while the U.S. seeks to "peaceable" outcome, "all options remain on the table" for dealing with North Korea and the threats made by its dictator, Kim Jong-un.

Members of the media were allowed to ask questions. In the first, he was asked about the possibility of preemptive military action against North Korea and the willingness of the Chinese to rein in their neighbors. He said:

"I know the president is hopeful that China will use its influence here on the Korean Peninsula with North Korea to achieve that objective. And we are heartened by some initial steps that China has taken in this regard, but we look for them to do more.

"Our hope is that we'll be able—working with China, working with our partners here in South Korea, working with Japan and other allies across the region—to achieve this objective through peaceable means.

“As the president has made clear, we will never discuss military tactical decisions. But the president has made clear, our administration has made clear, we stand with the people of South Korea. And all options are on the table to achieve the objectives and ensure the security of the people of this country and the stability of this region.”

Asked to send a message to the people of North Korea, the vice president said:

“I think the message of the people of the United States of America is that we seek peace, but America has always sought peace through strength. And my message here today standing with U.S. Forces Korea, standing with courageous soldiers from the Republic of Korea is a message of resolve.

“The people of North Korea, the military of North Korea should not mistake the resolve of the United States of America to stand with our ally. The alliance between South Korea and the United States is ironclad. We will fulfill that alliance for the sake of our people and the people of South Korea. And we will continue to stand strong to achieve our shared objective across this region and across the world of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.”

Finally, the vice president was asked to differentiate the Trump administration policy from that of the Obama administration. He said:

“I know President Trump is very hopeful that China will take actions necessary to bring about a change in policy in North Korea, an abandonment of its nuclear program and its ballistic missile program. We’re hopeful that they’ll use the extraordinary levers that they have and relationship they have with North Korea to achieve that objective.

“But as the president has made very clear, either China will deal with this problem or the United States and our allies will.

“Now with regard to a change, we have literally gone through decades—it was more than some quarter-century ago that we first learned of the presence of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula in the possession of North Korea. There was an agreed framework. There was a period of strategic patience. But the era of strategic patience is over.

“President Trump has made it clear that the patience of the United States and our allies in this region has run out, and we want to see change. We want to see North Korea abandon its reckless path of the development of nuclear weapons. And also its continual use of and testing of ballistic missiles is unacceptable. That clarity we hope will be received in North Korea, and that they will understand that the United States of America, the people of South Korea, our allies across the region are resolved to achieve our objectives through peaceable means or ultimately by whatever means are necessary to protect the interest, the security of the people of South Korea and to bring stability to the region.”

The vice president, later in the day, held a joint press conference with South Korean acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn. Both reflected on Pence’s father’s service during the Korean War and reiterated their commitment to an airtight bond between the U.S. and .

The following a partial transcript of the vice president’s comments:

The United States of America stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the Republic of Korea, and the service and vigilance of some 37,500 U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines on this frontier of freedom stand as a testament to the enduring partnership between our people.

The alliance between South Korea and the United States is the linchpin of peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and indeed throughout the Asia Pacific.

The United States' commitment to South Korea is ironclad and immutable. And under President Trump's leadership, I know our alliance will even be stronger, our nations will be safer and the Asia Pacific will be more secure.

Nowhere is that more evident than with our commitment to confront the region's most dangerous and urgent threat to peace and security—the regime in North Korea.

Since 1992, the United States and our allies have stood together for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. We hope to achieve this objective through peaceable means. But all options are on the table.

Just in the past two weeks, the world witnessed the strength and resolve of our new president in actions taken in Syria and Afghanistan. North Korea would do well not to test his resolve—or the strength of the armed forces of the United States in this region.

We will continue to deploy the THAAD missile-defense system as a defensive measure—called for by the alliance, and for the alliance. We will continue to evolve a comprehensive set of capabilities to ensure the security of South Korea. And as our secretary of defense made clear here in South Korea not long ago, we will defeat any attack, and we will meet any use of conventional or nuclear weapons with an overwhelming and effective response.

Strategic patience has been the approach of the last American administration and beyond. For more than two decades, the United States and our allies have worked to peacefully dismantle North Korea's nuclear program and alleviate the suffering of their people. But at every step of the way, North Korea answered our overtures with willful deception, broken promises and nuclear and missile tests.

Over the past 18 months, North Korea has conducted two unlawful nuclear tests and an unprecedented number of

ballistic missile tests, even conducting a failed missile launch as I traveled here for this visit.

The era of strategic patience is over.

Earlier this month, President Trump spoke with you, Acting President Hwang, to reaffirm the strength of our alliance. As I reassured you today, we will continue to closely consult with South Korea and your leadership as we make decisions moving forward.

We also call on other regional powers and the entire international community to join us to confront North Korea and demand that it abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, to turn away from renewed hostility towards its neighbors and to end the repression of its own people.

Earlier this month, President Trump met with Chinese President Xi at the Southern White House. The two leaders noted the urgency of the threat posed by North Korea's weapons programs and each of them reaffirmed their commitment to a denuclearized Korean Peninsula during that meeting on April 7th.

They also committed to fully implement U.N. Security Council resolutions and to increase cooperation to convince North Korea to abandon its illicit weapons programs.

It is heartening to see China commit to these actions. But the United States is troubled by China's economic retaliation against South Korea for taking appropriate steps to defend itself. The better path would be for China to address the North Korean threat that is actually making such defensive measures necessary.

Now while issues like that remain, the president and I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea, but as President Trump made clear just a few short days ago, if China is unable to deal with North Korea, the

United States, and our allies, will.

So today it is my privilege, on behalf of President Trump, to reaffirm the United States' enduring commitment to the security and prosperity of South Korea and to assure the people of South Korea of our unbreakable bond. We are bound together by our shared values, but also by our shared sacrifice. A free and democratic South Korea was forged in the fires of sacrifice by soldiers from both our lands. And my father was one of them.

Sixty-five years ago, Second Lieutenant Edward J. Pence, of the 45th Infantry Division in the United States Army, fought alongside brave South Korean forces, to win the freedom of this land.

While he came home to raise a family, he had friends in uniform, from America and Korea, who went home to eternity. So, too, the friendship between our two free nations is eternal. We have bled together. We have prospered together. And on that foundation, the people of the United States of America and South Korea, will face the future together.

With courage, determination, and faith—we go together—Katchi Kapshida. {eoa}