



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 18, 2017

During Visit to Asia, Pence Warns North Korea and Reassures Japan

Vice President Mike Pence (shown) met with U.S. troops in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea on April 17 before joining South Korean Acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn at a news briefing in Seoul later in the day.



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

Pence also told the troops that Trump wants to resolve the standoff with North Korea “through peaceful means, through negotiations” if possible.

Reuters reported that Pence, speaking alongside Hwang, said Washington would stand by its “ironclad alliance” with South Korea. “All options are on the table to achieve the objectives and ensure the stability of the people of this country,” said Pence.

Though Pence stated the Trump wants to resolve the dispute with North Korea by peaceful means, Bloomberg reported that North Korea has indicated that it is not receptive to U.S. overtures for conciliation. Pyongyang’s United Nations envoy, Kim In Ryong, told reporters in New York on April 17 that the United States has pushed the Korean peninsula to the “brink of war.” The North Korean diplomat accused Washington of creating “a situation where nuclear war could break out at any time” and that Pyongyang’s next nuclear test would take place “at a time and at a place where our headquarters deems necessary.”

Pence’s statement came just two days after the North Korean government conducted a huge display of prototype intercontinental ballistic missiles during a military parade observing the 105th birthday of the communist state’s late founding leader and “eternal president” Kim Il-sung in the capital Pyongyang on April 15. Kim Il-sung’s grandson, Kim Jong-un, currently heads the Pyongyang regime.

However, a display of military might coinciding with the celebration fizzled, as a North Korean missile exploded shortly after being launched. According to U.S. officials, the missile exploded four to five seconds after being launched from a location near a North Korean submarine base in Sinpo along the country’s eastern coast.

“The launch failed very early on, so that makes it harder to know exactly what they were trying to do,” said Susan Thornton, acting assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, on April 17. “But I think that our understanding is that it was not one of the longer-range missiles that they were trying to test there; it was something like a medium-range ballistic missile.”



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After visiting South Korea, Pence moved on to Japan, where he visited a U.S. naval base and met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other leaders. Speaking to reporters, Pence said: “It is our belief by bringing together the family of nations with diplomatic and economic pressure we have a chance of achieving a freeze on the Korean Peninsula.”

“We will not rest and will not relent until we obtain the objective of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula,” Pence continued and reassured Japan’s leaders that the United States would continue to support them.

“We appreciate the challenging times in which the people of Japan live with increasing provocations from across the Sea of Japan,” he said. “We are with you 100 percent.”

Speaking at the event, Abe said that Japan also hopes for peaceful dialogue with Pyongyang, “but at the same time, dialogue for the sake of dialogue is valueless.”

During his visit to Japan, Pence also said that the United States will continue to work with China, since the world’s most populous (and communist) nation is in a position to exert much influence on North Korea. “The era of strategic patience is over and while all options are on the table, President Trump is determined to work closely with Japan, with South Korea, with all our allies in the region and with China to achieve a peaceable resolution and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” Pence said in Tokyo before having lunch with Abe.

Reuters cited a statement from a Japanese government spokesman who said that Pence and Abe agreed that they needed to persuade China to play a larger role in dealing with North Korea.

The Reuters report also cited a statement from Susan Thornton noting that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and China’s top diplomat, State Councilor Yang Jiechi, agreed in a phone call on April 16 on the need for strict enforcement of UN resolutions.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi repeated China’s position that the crisis could only be resolved by diplomacy. “I’ve seen that the United States has reiterated it is willing to use political and diplomatic means to resolve this, as this is their first choice,” Wang told reporters in Beijing. “Of course I think that any country will feel that political diplomatic means are of course the first choice,” Wang said.

While Pence assured both South Korea and Japan of our continued support, in [our article on April 11](#) we posed the following question: “Why should the United States bear the heavy financial cost and risk of involving American servicemen in an Asian war by maintaining a large military presence in Asia, when we could sell (not give, but sell) weapons to our allies so they can defend themselves?”

We concluded that article with the following recommendation:

The next step would be to bring home the 54,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan and another 25,000 troops in South Korea.

A militarily strong South Korea and Japan could do what they should have been doing since the end of World War II and the Korean Wars, respectively — provide for their own defense. Then, our government would follow its own Constitution and use our military for the only thing it is constitutionally authorized to do — provide for our own defense.

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