

Articles on the US-North Korea crisis (X) - Pyeongchang Olymics, a disconnect in policy between Seoul and Washington

Wednesday 14 February 2018, by [HAAS Benjamin](#), [KIM Musun](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2018).

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Disconnection

Disconnect between US and South Korea grows amid rapprochement with North

A thawing of tensions between the two Koreas exposes cracks in the alliance between Seoul and Washington.

South Korea has announced it will press ahead with improving ties with North Korea, arranging family reunions between those divided by the Korean war and seeking to cool military tensions - despite the US's commitment to a policy of "maximum pressure" on Kim Jong-un.

The announcement from Seoul's unification ministry comes a day after a high-level North Korean delegation - including Kim's sister - concluded a visit to the South that culminated in an invitation from Kim Jong-un for his counterpart Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang.

The growing rapprochement between the two neighbours - still technically at war - has exposed a disconnect in policy between Seoul and Washington, a split Pyongyang has been trying to encourage since the end of the 1950-53 Korean conflict.

It became plain after US vice-president Mike Pence visited South Korea for the opening of the Winter Olympics at the weekend, experts said.

"There's a definite fissure in the alliance. You can see it in Pence's face if nothing else," said Van Jackson, a former policy adviser to the US secretary of defence. "The US and South Korea want to present a united front, but they have completely different priorities: South Korea doesn't want war, and the US doesn't want North Korea to have nuclear weapons."

Despite Washington's hardline approach to dealing with North Korea, Pence made a small

concession on Monday, saying the US was willing to talk directly with North Korea in what he called “maximum pressure and engagement at the same time”, according to the *Washington Post*.

However, if South Korea’s efforts do lead to direct talks between the US and North Korea, those negotiations would be “laughable”, Jackson said.

“One side demands immediate de-nuclearisation and the other says it will never give up its nuclear weapons.”

But throughout the Olympic venues there was a sense of euphoria. The days of Kim Jong-un’s threats to attack the US seemed like ancient history.

Instead, the focus has been on the combined women’s ice hockey team, the first time in history players from the two Koreas competed together at the Games.

Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, will visit Pyongyang sometime after the Games end on 25 February, according to a Reuters report. Bach met North Korean officials – and watched a hockey match with them – during their trip to Pyeongchang.

“I would love the team to get the Nobel peace prize,” said Angela Ruggiero, a senior US member of the IOC’s executive board, adding she would ask for them to be nominated. “As someone who competed in four Olympics and knows it isn’t about you, your team, or your country, I saw the power of what it did last night.”

North Korean officials watched the game with Moon and state radio hailed a visit by Kim Yo-jong, Kim Jong-un’s sister, as “an important occasion in improving relations”, saying it provided “an environment for peace on the Korean peninsula”.

Meanwhile, media in North Korea took aim at the US.

“Pence must know that his frantic acts of abusing the sacred Olympics for confrontational ruckus are as foolish and stupid an act as sweeping the sea with a broom,” said a commentary in the Rodong Sinmun, published by the ruling Workers’ party. “His behaviour is nothing but an ugly sight being reminded of crazy Trump.”

Pence had attempted to conceal cracks in the alliance, declaring there was “no daylight” between the US and South Korea in policy toward Pyongyang. During his flight back to the US, Pence said: “No pressure comes off until they are actually doing something that the alliance believes represents a meaningful step toward denuclearization.

“So the maximum pressure campaign is going to continue and intensify. But if you want to talk, we’ll talk.”

“It’s a step in the right direction,” said Mintaro Oba, a former US diplomat who worked on North Korea policy, but cautioned pressure would remain the focus of US policy.

“Pence’s strategy in Pyeongchang backfired in a big way,” Oba said. “He lent credibility to the narrative of a US-South Korea split and gave North Korea ammunition to blame the United States if inter-Korean engagement falls apart.

“He should have kept his concerns in diplomatic channels while broadcasting US-South Korea unity at every opportunity.”

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/disconnect-between-us-and-south-korea-exposed-by-seouls-new-approach-to-north>

Kim Jong-un praises 'sincere, impressive' South Korea

North Korean leader expresses 'satisfaction' over visit by his sister and other officials to the Winter Games amid warming of relations.

North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, has praised the "warm climate of reconciliation and dialogue" after a delegation returned from their three-day visit to the South for the Winter Olympics.

Kim expressed "satisfaction" over their visit, according to state media, and gave his gratitude for "sincere" and "very impressive" efforts made by Seoul to receive them.

"It is important to continue making good results by further livening up the warm climate of reconciliation and dialogue created by the strong desire and common will of the North and the South with the Winter Olympics as a momentum," he said.

There was no mention of the offer of a summit made to the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, via Kim Yo-jong - the North Korean leader's sister who was part of the delegation. Kim Yo-jong delivered a letter from her brother while she was in Seoul asking Moon to visit "at his earliest convenience". Moon replied that both Koreas should try to bring about conditions that would make the visit possible.

The omission signals the precarious nature of the offer, with both South Korea and the US demanding Pyongyang consider making concessions on its nuclear programme as a part of any future talks. It is not clear if Washington would support Moon traveling to the North, as the US seeks to further isolate the regime.

Kim Jong-un said Kim Yo-jong also relayed the "movement of the US side" to him, a reference to her brief encounter with US vice president Mike Pence at the Olympics opening ceremony and a signal that relations with Washington remain frosty despite the rapprochement with Seoul.

Talk of an inter-Korean summit, which would be the first since 2007 if it happened, come after months of tension between Pyongyang, Seoul and Washington over North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. An exchange of fiery words between Kim Jong-un and the US president Donald Trump, raised tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Tuesday's report said Kim Jong-un gave "important instructions" for possible measures to maintain the atmosphere of conciliation and dialogue, without offering more details.

Seoul said on Monday that it would push ahead with its plans for reunions of family members separated by the 1950-53 Korean war in order to sustain the dialogue prompted by the North Korean

delegation's visit.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/13/kim-jong-un-praises-sincere-impressive-south-korea>

North Korea's cheerleaders amaze and appal at Winter Olympics

They outnumber the North's athletes and captured global attention at Winter Olympics but a cultural chasm remains.

When the women in matching red coats entered the Kwandong Hockey Centre in the South Korean city of Gangneung on Monday, the crowd erupted in a deafening scream.

Seemingly everyone in the audience took out their phones to snap a picture of the North Korean cheerleaders, who commanded more celebrity than the Olympic ice hockey teams the crowds had gathered to support.

As they found their seats for the preliminary game between Sweden and the Unified Korean team, South Koreans peppered the Northern cheerleaders with questions, but the all-female squad only responded with tight-lipped smiles. Most spectators were more interested in snapping selfies or simply standing near the North Koreans than actually engaging with them.

It was the first time many South Koreans had come face-to-face with their neighbours, with whom they remain officially at war. Pyongyang dispatched the cheerleaders to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics as part of their last-minute delegation, and the squad outnumbers the country's athletes by roughly 10 to one.

Seated in the stand in six separate groups, the more than 180 North Koreans performed synchronised cheers throughout the second game played by Unified Korea's women's hockey team. Every movement was coordinated, every wave of a flag or clap of the hand performed in unison.

But for the two sides, the meeting was a sign of how far they have grown apart after 65 years of division since the 1950-53 Korean war.

Han Sun-woo, 25, who was sandwiched between two groups of North Korean cheerleaders, said: "They're very old-fashioned. I never experienced the 70s, but I imagine it was like that.

"I feel bad for them. If this is what they want to show to the world, think about how backward the rest of the people are."

Plainclothes police ringed each section, blocking fans and journalists eager to get closer to the women.

At the end of each row, older male minders sat still for the entire game, a reminder that despite appearances, these women were also prisoners of one of the most brutal regimes in the world.

Pyongyang had sent them as part of a charm offensive to help distract from the country's prison camps, widespread torture and public executions. For most in the audience, it appeared to have worked.

Lee Soo-ra, 26, a nurse who had come from Seoul for the match, said: "I'm happy they're here. It makes me feel closer to North Korean people.

"They're here to cheer the same team as me. It's like we're one country, which is what I hope for."

After each of Sweden's eight goals, which won them the game in a shutout, the cheerleaders led the stadium in chants of "cheer up".

Ahead of the game, the cheerleaders reached in unison into matching plastic shopping bags and produced identical red and white knit caps. Several minutes later, they removed their red jackets in a coordinated motion, revealing tracksuit tops emblazoned with a North Korean flag.

They cheered a few decibels louder when their compatriots skated out on the ice, but for much of the match, their singing - songs about their hope for unification - was drowned out by the pop music blaring from the arena's sound system.

Despite the cheerleaders' popularity in the arena, the Unified Korean women's hockey team has been highly controversial. About half of South Koreans had a negative view of the concept, according to a poll last week by Korea Society Opinion Institute.

An opinion poll last week found that about 60% of South Koreans preferred "peaceful coexistence" over unification of the two countries.

The team is competing under a neutral flag, a blue silhouette of an undivided Korean peninsula on a white background, and each cheerleader was equipped with a miniature version of the banner. But there were also dozens of spectators waving South Korean flags instead.

For all the attention they commanded, the North Koreans were not the only cheering squad on hand. In stark contrast to the tracksuited women from the North, four South Korean dancers also performed - dressed in cropped white T-shirts and pink hot pants while waving pom-poms - highlighting the cultural chasm that separates the two neighbours.

The North Koreans refused to acknowledge their fellow performers. There were other moments of awkwardness as well. After Team Korea lost and the stadium cleared out, they remained singing to a mostly empty ice rink.

As a foreign couple got engaged and television cameras zoomed in on a man on one knee, the stadium erupted in cheers for the public display of romance.

But the North Koreans were unmoved; instead, they sat stone-faced and silent as the arena played L-O-V-E by Nat King Cole.

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Humble' Kim Yo-jong has charmed the media, but the glow is unlikely to last

With her 'deadly side-eye' and 'nimble' ways, the sister of North Korean leader has been the centre of attention since she arrived at the Winter Games.

Amid a sea of television cameras and journalists, Kim Yo-jong worked her way through the crowd surrounded by a horde of bodyguards. As she made her way through the room she was silent and always smiling.

The younger sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has been the centre of attention since she landed in South Korea for an historic three-day visit as part of attending the Winter Olympics opening ceremony.

As her brother's envoy, she has been deployed to show a softer side of the North Korean regime, which is better known for perpetrating a host of human rights violations and threatening nuclear war.

The strategy as so far worked on the South Korean media, with the horrors carried out by her brother, father and grandfather north of the border largely left out of the wall-to-wall coverage in Seoul and internationally.

"She looked fit and appeared nimble, compared to her brother and other male members of her family who are fat," Oh Young-jin, managing editor of the Korea Times, wrote in a column for the paper.

"Kim's visit couldn't be more effective from the North Korean public relations point of view, especially considering her brother is known to be a ruthless dictator who had his agents kill his older brother with poison in daylight in the middle of an international airport, and his uncle killed by anti-aircraft guns."

Kim has become the latest celebrity in a country that takes to fads with a particular gusto.

Analysts have scrutinised how much makeup she wore, the height of her cheekbones and every detail of her wardrobe choice. Kim Yo-jong's "humble" style in both dress and manners were fawned over and television cameras zoomed in on a badge she wore depicting Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, two former leader and her grandfather and father.

CNN declared that Kim Yo-jong was "stealing the show at the Winter Olympics" and the BBC said North Korea was on a "charm offensive".

At a dinner at an upmarket hotel near the Olympic venues, local media reported she was "wearing a wine-colored jacket and black pants". And commentators in South Korea have drawn countless parallels between her and Ivanka Trump, who will attend the closing ceremony of the Olympics.

A brief glance at US vice-president Mike Pence during the opening ceremony went viral for her perceived "deadly side eye". After meeting with South Korean president Moon Jae-in, her handwriting in a guest book at the Blue House, Seoul's presidential palace, became the next topic

constantly discussed on news networks.

Her message: "I hope Pyongyang and Seoul get closer in our people's hearts and bring unification and prosperity in the near future".

She made an unannounced appearance at a hockey match to cheer a Korean team made up of players from the North and the South, ending a day where she delivered an invitation for Moon to visit Pyongyang.

Still, among South Koreans there is a sense of deep mistrust towards the Kim family.

"I support the hockey players because we are the same people, but Kim Jong-un and the leaders are evil," said Hwang Min-ho, 22, who was watching the game from a crowded pub in a nearby town. "War would kill too many innocent North Koreans, but Kim Jong-un and his family is our enemy and we need to fight."

After Kim Yo-jong's moment in the spotlight, the glow is expected to quickly fade.

"The North Koreans are canny, tough negotiators. The likelihood they'll get carried away by Olympic good feelings and make a dramatic concession is about zero," Robert Kelly, a politics professor at Pusan National University, said. "The talks will be what they've always been: a hard slog characterized by deep distrust which likely won't go very far."

The Olympics would "change nothing but the atmospherics - and that only briefly", he added, saying once US-South Korea military exercises resumed in the spring relations would backslide.

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South Korea: Cautious optimism after North's visit

Seoul - South Korea's government expressed cautious optimism in making progress with inter-Korean relations in the wake of a landmark visit of North Korean officials at the Winter Olympics.

The North Korean high-level delegation's three-day visit that ended on Sunday "shows that North Korea has a strong will to improve inter-Korean relations, and that Pyongyang can make unprecedented and bold measures if deemed necessary," South Korea's unification ministry said in a press release.

It was the first time since the 1950-1953 Korean War that a lineal member of ruling Kim family and the constitutional head of state set foot in South Korea.

The closely-watched 56-hour trip, covered wall-to-wall on news channels, was filled with a string of

symbolic moments.

When North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's powerful sister Kim Yo-jong and its ceremonial head of state Kim Yong-nam paid a visit to the presidential Blue House in Seoul to meet South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Saturday, even the lunch menu reflected the pendulum of the inter-Korean relations.

Food symbolism

Koreans have traditionally attached a great significance to food, so much so that the literal meaning of the Korean word for 'family member' is 'people eating food together'.

The main dish was a soup with fish balls made of dried pollock, a delicacy of Gangwon, the province hosting the Winter Olympics in South Korea, but historically also stretches across the border into North Korea.

Pollock fish are caught off the east coast of the Korean Peninsula, travelling back and forth between the northern and the southern waters. It takes a long winter before dried pollack can be served, as it goes through a freezing and thawing process in the mountains.

"Both the North and the South have spent a very long winter. We prepared this dish in the hope that after a long time of endurance, we can have a hearty and warm time like the deep taste of this dried pollock," a Blue House official explained to reporters.

Other side dishes and desserts were from across the Korean Peninsula.

During the meeting, Kim Yo-jong delivered a message from Kim Jong-un to Moon that he is willing to meet the president in the near future if he visits Pyongyang. A summit would be the third of its kind between top leaders of the two Koreas and first in 11 years.

The delegation met Moon on four additional occasions during their stay in South Korea, putting on a rare show of unity and harmony between the two Koreas.

Moon was joined by Kim Yo-jong and North Korea's ceremonial head of state Kim Yong-nam during the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Olympics on Friday.

As athletes from the North and the South marched together under the unified Korean Peninsula flag for the first time in 11 years at an international sports event, they stood up and applauded together.

Next day, they watched a women's ice hockey match between the united Korea team vs Switzerland in Gangneung. It was the first time the two Koreas form a joint sports team in 27 years and the third time in history.

The united team's crushing defeat of 8 to 0 did not stop them from enjoying the historic moment and cheering the players on.

'Longing for reunification'

On the last day, President Moon bade farewell to the North Korean delegation at a North Korean art troupe's music concert in Seoul.

Seohyeon, of South Korea's popular K-pop band Girls' Generation, made a surprise appearance and sang a couple of songs together with North Korean singers, including a song longing for

reunification.

Kim Yong-nam's eyes were visibly teary, and he wiped them several times, as another song about reunification rang out across the music hall.

As Kim Yo-jong put it earlier at the luncheon meeting with Moon, relations between the North and the South have made faster progress over the last one month than over the previous few years.

Many experts agree that the Moon administration made achievements in opening up channels of communication with North Korea and putting itself in the driver's seat to lead Korean affairs.

However, real challenges lie ahead.

Skeptics say that all this is merely diplomatic manoeuvring by Pyongyang to manage the level of tensions, which spiked last year.

"The North Korean government worries about an increasing probability of a US military attack, which might escalate into a major war. So, they decided to look nice for a while, and they also hope to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington," Andrei Lankov, a professor at Kookmin University in Seoul, told Al Jazeera.

As Lankov pointed out, major fundamentals remain unchanged: Pyongyang is determined to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead that could strike anywhere in the US mainland.

Washington and Tokyo do not seem to be impressed by what is seen as Pyongyang's "charm offensive".

They have stressed that an annual military exercise between South Korea and the US, which has been postponed until the end of the Olympics, should resume. North Korea has reacted to such military drills angrily, calling it a rehearsal for invasion.

The Trump administration made it clear that they would talk for the sake of talks and North Korea's denuclearisation should be a precondition to talks.

The Moon administration has to walk a tightrope.

In response to Kim Jong-un's invitation to Pyongyang, Moon declined to accept it immediately, saying "Let us create the environment first for that to be able to happen".

He called for North Korea to actively come to the table for dialogue with the US, stressing that such dialogue should take place in order to develop inter-Korean relations.

Seoul is hoping that Pyongyang will take bold measures.

"The government is making various efforts to create a virtuous cycle of the development of inter-Korean relations and the progress in the North's nuclear issue," the unification ministry's spokesperson Baik Tae-hyun said when asked by reporters to elaborate during the press briefing on Monday.

"We believe that there is a shared understanding between two Koreas on improving inter-Korean relations and settling the peace on the Korean Peninsula," he added.

Musun Kim

* AL JAZEERA NEWS. 12 Feb 2018:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/south-korea-cautious-optimism-north-visit-180212111300384.html>

North Korea's Kim invites S Korean leader to Pyongyang

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un has extended a rare invitation to South Korea's President Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang.

Kim Eui-kyeom, South Korean president's spokesman, said at a news conference in Seoul on Saturday that the North Korean delegation delivered the invitation letter at a landmark high-level meeting at the presidential palace in Seoul.

The delegation, which includes Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, is in South Korea for the Winter Olympics.

"Chairman Kim Jong Un's envoy Kim Yo-jong delivered a letter expressing a willingness to improve relations," the presidential spokesman said.

"She also delivered a message from Kim Jong-un that he is willing to meet President Moon Jae-in in the near future and that he hopes President Moon visits the North at a convenient time."

The president responded by saying that the two sides should work on establishing the right conditions to realise the meeting, according to the spokesman.

Al Jazeera's Natasha Ghoneim, reporting from the South Korean city of Gangneung, said the meeting would be famous in history.

"Moon is saying that although he is keen to reboot inter-Korean relations, the dialogue between the United States and the North is essential. And he is encouraging both sides to come together."

The North Korean delegation arrived in the South on Kim's private plane on Friday via Incheon international airport to attend the opening ceremony of the Pyongchang Winter Olympics where Seoul and Pyongyang are represented by joint teams.

10 Feb 2018

* AL JAZEERA NEWS. 10 Feb 2018:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/north-korea-kim-invites-korean-leader-pyongyang-180210090851115.html>

Kim Jong-un's sister invites South Korean president to Pyongyang

Kim Yo-jong's meeting with Moon Jae-in was highest-level contact between countries in more than a decade.

North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-un, has invited the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, to visit Pyongyang at the "earliest date possible" for what would be the first summit between the two nations in more than a decade.

Kim Yo-jong, the sister of the North Korean leader, made the overture during a lunch at Seoul's presidential palace.

She is the first member of Pyongyang's ruling dynasty to set foot in the South since the end of the 1950-53 Korean war. Kim Yong-nam, North Korea's ceremonial head of state, also attended the meeting.

The two sides discussed inter-Korean relations, according to the Yonhap news agency, and Moon responded to the invitation by saying: "Let us make it happen by creating the necessary conditions in the future."

Moon has previously said he is willing to travel to Pyongyang, but the US is likely to oppose such a trip as Washington pursues a policy of "maximum pressure". Moon also stressed the need for the US to come to the table.

"An early resumption of dialogue between the United States and the North is needed also for the development of the South-North Korean relationship," Moon said, according to a spokesman.

There has been a dramatic cooling of tensions on the Korean peninsula in the past two months and Moon has made it clear he hopes the rapprochement can continue after the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang ends.

After the lunch, at which the pair ate kimchi and drank soju liquor, it was announced that Moon and Kim Yong-nam would attend the combined Korea women's ice hockey match together on Saturday night. The two men will cheer the team made up of players from both countries, the first ever unified team.

But in a sign that Kim Jong-un is unlikely to give up his nuclear arms, he used the day before the Olympics opening ceremony to stage a massive military parade that included trucks carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles - weapons that could be capable of striking the US mainland.

Saturday's meeting between the two neighbours - technically still at war - is the first since 2007 when North Korea's premier visited the presidential palace. The delegation of 22 officials from the North arrived on Friday in order to attend the opening ceremony for the Winter Olympics.

"You must have had a hard time due to the cold weather," Moon said as he greeted Kim Yo-jong, referring to the frigid temperatures during Friday's opening ceremony.

"It was OK because you, Mr President, were kind enough to care," Kim Yo-jong replied, according to Yonhap news agency.

The warm reception was at odds with the position taken by US vice-president, Mike Pence. He refused to acknowledge Kim Yong-nam during a brief stop at a dinner on Friday night and remained seated when athletes from North and South Korea marched in the opening ceremony.

He said the US would take whatever “action is necessary to defend our homeland” against the North Korean nuclear threat, according to NBC.

“We’re going to continue to put all the pressure to bear economically and diplomatically, while preserving all of our military options to see that that happens,” Pence said.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/10/kim-yo-jong-meets-south-korean-president-in-seoul-as-thaw-continues>

Pence skips Olympics dinner in snub to North Korean officials

US vice-president was expected to share table with head of state before opening ceremony.

The US vice-president, Mike Pence, has skipped a dinner before the Winter Olympics opening ceremony, where he was expected to share a table with North Korea’s head of state, in a sign of Washington’s intention to snub Pyongyang’s officials at the Games.

Pence briefly exchanged greetings with people attending the dinner, including the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, and the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, but avoided Kim Yong-nam, North Korea’s ceremonial head of state, highest-level official ever to have gone to the South.

North Korea’s senior diplomatic delegation, which arrived in the South on Friday, also included Kim Jong-un’s sister Kim Yo-jong, who became the first member of Pyongyang’s ruling dynasty to set foot in South Korea since the Korean war.

In an unprecedented and unexpected display of unity, Moon shook hands with Kim Yo-jong and Kim Yong-nam – a scene that would have been unimaginable a month ago. In another sign of the diplomatic rapprochement triggered by the Games, athletes from both sides of the border marched under one flag.

Pence was also sitting in the VIP section, metres from the North Korean officials he had snubbed earlier. He remained seated as the Koreans marched, while others around him stood. Pence went to another dinner with US athletes, according to South Korea’s presidential office.

Moon will formally meet the North Korean delegation on Saturday and Kim Yo-jong may invite him to visit Pyongyang this year, according to a report by CNN.

Their white Ilyushin Il-62 jet – marked in Korean script “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”, the North’s official name, and its tailfin emblazoned with a North Korean emblem – had earlier touched down at Incheon airport near Seoul.

Kim Yo-jong is a key member of the Kim dynasty, which has ruled the impoverished, isolated nation with an iron fist and pervasive personality cult through three generations.

The last member of the Kim family to set foot in Seoul was Yo-jong's grandfather Kim Il-sung, the North's founder, after his forces invaded in 1950 and the capital fell.

Three years later, the conflict ended with a ceasefire rather than a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula divided by the heavily fortified Demilitarised Zone and the two sides technically in a state of war.

The North is subject to multiple rounds of UN security council sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, while the democratic South has risen to become the world's 11th-largest economy.

Moon has pushed the Games as a "peace Olympics" that will open a door for dialogue to alleviate tensions on the peninsula and seek to persuade Pyongyang to give up its atomic ambitions.

The significance of Pence and the North Koreans sitting in the same box was not immediately clear. He had been dispatched from Washington for the Olympics in part, he said, to make sure people did not lose sight of how the US government perceived the North as a misbehaving and dangerous neighbour.

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