

Peace in our 'PyeongChang Olympic' time

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By Ned Forney

With the PyeongChang Olympics opening today, things on the Korean Peninsula are getting a bit crazy.

Breaking news flashes, twitter feeds, and rumors are increasing by the hour, and even my wife's getting "excited." She's been invited to PyeongChang for the much-anticipated opening ceremony.

She's not thrilled about spending three hours in a frigid, wind-swept, roofless stadium nestled in snow-covered mountains, but it's not every day that you get to be part of history. She'll have a lot to talk about when she gets back to Seoul.



Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), is also eagerly anticipating the ceremony. Along with thousands of athletes, entertainers, security guards, soldiers, anti-terrorist squads, and spectators (including an entourage of current and former world leaders that the press will undoubtedly focus on throughout the extravaganza), he'll witness history.

Bach, a German lawyer, believes the Olympic spirit is alive and well and has predicted that North and South Korea's joint procession into the stadium, under the white "unification" flag, will deliver a much-needed "powerful message of peace."

His exact words are worth quoting: "The Olympic spirit has brought two sides together that for too long were divided by mistrust and animosity. The Olympic spirit has brought real hope for a brighter future for everyone on the Korean Peninsula." Wow!

I wish I agreed. I wish I wasn't so cynical. But like so many people here in South Korea and the U.S., I'm not drinking the "peace in our time" Kool-Aid.

Maybe I should just relax, enjoy the moment, and try to forget that the PyeongChang Olympics have become a geopolitical event so hijacked and manipulated that the athletes seem to be only a sideshow.

History books years from now may record the next few weeks as the calm before the storm. I hope not, but unless I've totally misread Kim Jong-un and his regime, North Korea has no intention of living peacefully with its neighbor to the South, or any other country.

It seems somewhat — OK, totally — naive to think that Kim Jong-un has had a sudden change of heart. Does anyone really think his intentions are more than self-serving, survivalist ploys?

After spending the past three years studying the Korean War and interviewing men and women who lived through the nightmare and escaped from the North between 1950 and 1953, I've heard countless tragic, heart-breaking stories.

Understandably, none of these Korean War survivors or former North Korean refugees wants to experience another conflict. They've already seen too much suffering and death.

But they also don't want to experience life without freedom, human rights, or dignity. They detest the North Korean regime and all it stands for.

Many of them still have friends and relatives, even immediate family members — brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters — trapped above the 38th parallel. They pray for peace and the day they'll be reunited with their loved ones, but they don't believe the PyeongChang overtures will bring about any significant changes.

Simply put, they're not amused by Kim Jong-un's "charm offensive." They're not impressed with North Korean singers and dancers who will perform to packed auditoriums in Seoul; they don't like the news of Kim Jong-un's sister visiting South Korea; and they're definitely not pleased with unification flags, a combined hockey team, and other recent decisions made by South Korea's government.

We're all hoping for the best over the next few weeks, but let's be real. Spring, summer, and undoubtedly, more missile tests and provocations will soon come.

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