



"We live in an age of nuclear giants and spiritual dwarfs."
—Omar Bradley

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Going Nuclear

The big news late this week was that—surprise!—North Korea has nuclear weapons. The planet's growing nuclear family (composed until recently only of the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, and France) now includes India and two somewhat unstable regimes, Pakistan and North Korea, and many would include Israel in this latter group, as it is assumed that the beleaguered Middle Eastern state has and would not hesitate to use atomic weapons if pressed. Nevertheless, among these three nations, Kim Jong-Il is by far the most extreme—some would go so far as to say he is certifiably insane. If nothing else, he is a brutal, egomaniacal tyrant in the tradition of China's Mao Zedong and Cambodia's Pol Pot.

All the nations in the nuclear club are nominal democracies except for China, Pakistan, and North Korea. China, however, as a major power in Asia, has shown restraint in its use of force and, despite its sometimes fiery rhetoric, is generally considered to respect international norms and protocols. Pakistan is ruled by General Pervez Musharaff, who attained his position via a coup and a rigged election, and who is embattled by Islamic fundamentalists of the Taliban variety, the kind that made neighboring Afghanistan the prime U.S. target after 9-11. His subsequent cozying up to the Great [Satan](#), America, has made him quite unpopular inside his own country, and several attempts to

assassinate him have already been made. Despite these strikes against him, Musharaff has said and done the right things enough times over the past three and a half years to earn a guarded trust on the nuclear issue, even from Pakistan's perennial enemy, India.

North Korea, though, is the proverbial horse of a different color. It is the world's most isolationist regime, seemingly on speaking terms with no one but Communist China, which fronts for it internationally. It has made some concessions to its cousin to the south, but reunification plans with South Korea have all but fizzled over its intransigence. Little news leaks out of North Korea, but enough emerges to know that it never has enough food to feed its population and that the government has brutally interned thousands of dissenters in concentration camps. North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il is paranoid and delusional, imagining attacks and invasions from every quarter, and he orders provocative countermeasures frequently. It is a regular occurrence to read of North Korean forays into other nation's territorial waters or, as yesterday, its bellicose, accusative language against America, Japan, or some other perceived enemy.

Conventional [wisdom](#), intoned sagely and repeatedly by talking heads in the media, claims that dictators are more likely to choose the "nuclear option" than democratically elected officials. But is North Korea likely to use nuclear weapons?

Probably not. For starters, with [the world](#) against it, it would be annihilated in response. If North Korea used a nuclear weapon on the U.S., Japan, or South Korea, America's military reaction would be, if not in kind, another but deadlier shock-and-awe campaign. Pyongyang would be a hole in the earth. It is also likely that North Korea has only one or two nuclear devices—a handful at the most. It would not want to deplete its arsenal all at once for fear of not having suitable defensive or second-strike capability. Third, even though it claims to be able to strike America, there is no solid evidence that North Korea has a missile capable of reaching the West Coast—not to mention hitting its target. Finally, nukes are more valuable to the regime as bargaining chips at the international negotiating table than they are as offensive weapons. Ultimately, its aim is to extort aid and security concessions from the United States, and its nuclear arsenal certainly makes America pay attention. Kim Jong-Il may be crazy, but he is not stupid.

What does history teach us? The only member of the vaunted nuclear club to use its atomic weaponry aggressively was and still is a stable democratic state: the United States of America. It dropped two nuclear devices over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in August 1945 to end World War II. The rationale was that, by vaporizing, burning, and/or irradiating a few hundred thousand Japanese civilians in a couple of strategic cities, many more lives—American lives, predominantly—would be saved. The tactic "worked," forcing the capitulation of Imperial Japan, but the end in no way justified the means.

This is not to say that history will repeat itself, but it certainly destroys the idea that a stable, democratic, nuclear state is "safe." Democratic states merely choose their leaders by popular or electoral vote—how those leaders govern, the decisions they make, after they are elected is, for the most part, out of their citizens' hands. And bad, fateful choices are the record of humanity, no matter what nation.

Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said rightly to the House of Commons in 1947, "Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Human governments all have one fatal flaw, human beings, and [God](#) warns us:

"There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." . . . "Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of [peace](#) they have not known." ([Romans 3:10-12](#), 16-17)

Do not be distracted by the antics of "rogue states," as they are somewhat predictable. The trick is not to miss the elephant in the living room.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

The Fear of God

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The church at large has downplayed the fuller dimension of the fear of God by emphasizing awe, respect, or reverence, while ignoring its other dimensions such as fright, dread, or terror. Consequently, many have inadvertently adopted a soft concept of God, disrespecting and showing contempt for God's authority and power. Mistakenly, we transfer or appropriate our fear to human beings, who cannot revoke the penalty of death hanging over us. When Moses and Isaiah recognized God's presence, they became aware of their own vileness in comparison to God's holiness and power. By legitimately fearing God, we lose our human terror, finding sanctuary in God Almighty. Godly fear is a gift given to us as a result of His calling, compelling submission to His purpose and leading to godly knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Valentine's Day and Real Love

by Staff

Valentine's Day is supposed to foster and advance true love between men and women. Its origins—and its tenuous association with the so-called Saint Valentine—clearly point to something other than true love, the love of God!

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