

Letter to the Editor

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Striking North Korea First Is a Bad Proposal

In “The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First” (op-ed, March 1) John Bolton argues, in essence, that the mere possession of nuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems by an adversary constitutes an “imminent threat,” justifying an immediate use of force.

By Mr. Bolton’s measure, North Korea has a better case for preventive action than does the U.S. Our forces regularly exercise outside North Korean territory. The U.S. has already deployed nuclear delivery systems capable of utterly destroying North Korea, a force far more threatening than North Korea’s fledgling nuclear arsenal.

The United Nations Charter forbids the threat or use of force except in self-defense or when authorized by the U.N. Security Council. Threats to peace—which do indeed exist in the confrontation between North Korea and the U.S.—must be referred to the Security Council. In all of its resolutions on the matter, the Security Council has stressed the need to pursue a peaceful resolution of this dangerous standoff. The council has been clear in its refusal to authorize the use of military force by any party.

Mr. Bolton’s position is dangerous nonsense. He would have us drive a final nail in the coffin of international law—and quite possibly in the coffin of civilization.

Andrew Lichterman
Western States Legal Foundation
Oakland, Calif.

John Burroughs
Executive Director
Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy
New York