

## THERE ARE MANY REASONS TO STRIKE IRAN, THE HOLOCAUST ISN'T ONE

By [Anshel Pfeffer](#) Haaretz 10 02 2012

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For Israelis, New Zealand has long served as a symbol for a faraway land of peace, where no one has the kind of worries that afflict this warring region - the exact opposite of the Promised Land. As the Israeli pop band Ethnix sang in 1995 - "just to live in New Zealand, and to hear a cannon only on the Queen's birthday." But things might not be all that different there.

This week the Kiwis celebrated Waitangi Day, the commemoration of the signing of the Waitangi Treaty on February 6, 1840, whereby the islands of New Zealand became a part of the British Empire and its indigenous Maori people were recognized as British subjects and were guaranteed rights to their lands. In recent decades though, the national anniversary has become a major source of tension between the government and the Pakeha majority, and Maori activists who claim, with a good deal of historical justification, that the treaty was ignored by the colonists who massacred tens of thousands of Maoris (many more died from epidemics contracted from the new arrivals ) and confiscated almost all their lands.

While the situation of many of the Maoris, who today constitute around 15 percent of New Zealand's population, has improved in the last few years, partly due to the settlement agreements with the Auckland government, most of them still belong to the more deprived parts of society and Waitangi Day remains a focus for their grievances.

The similarity to a certain country in the Middle East where the national Independence Day is seen as the Nakba (catastrophe ) of a different community does not stop there. A Maori academic, Keri Opai, drew criticism this week when in a radio discussion he said that the Maori had experienced "awful stuff that really does break down to a holocaust".

According to the New Zealand Herald, Mr. Opai did not actually compare the Maori tragedy to the Holocaust in Europe, but this was enough for Jewish Council president, Stephen Goodman, to denounce his words as "highly inappropriate" and say that he was "trivializing the Holocaust and diminishing the suffering and sheer horror of it all."

While one certainly has to sympathize with the community president's attempt to find a better historical context for the national traumas of his homeland, you have to admit that he has not been given a helping hand by the Jewish state. The sad truth is that while Jews justifiably object to the use of the Holocaust in describing mass murders and other genocides in other parts of the world and different periods of history, we don't always apply that rule to ourselves.

A prime example is the little speech given by Benjamin Netanyahu last week at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting, referring to International Holocaust Remembrance Day. "Seventy years ago, the Jewish nation was defenseless," said the prime minister. "It had no capability - political, military or diplomatic - to organize its defense and so a third of our people were exterminated. The difference between 1942 and 2012 was not the lack of enemies, the same will to exterminate the Jewish people, first of all the state that was founded - that will exist and has not changed. What has changed is our capability to defend ourselves and our resolve to do that. The Jewish people, the government of Israel, have the right, the duty and the capability to prevent another extermination of the Jewish people or attack on its state."

And just to make it clear what he was speaking about, in a second speech, two days later, to the Knesset, Netanyahu took the international community to task for its silence at "Iran's promises to wipe Israel off the face of the earth."

The real lesson of the Holocaust, he said, was that while Israel must continue to try and rally the world against the Iranian nuclear program, "it is our duty to rely on ourselves when we are concerned with a threat on our very existence - we must not forsake our future in the hands of others."

We seem to have become so inured to the use of the Holocaust in political speeches, or someone would have stood up and said to the prime minister that not only is the Shoah too singular and terrible to be used over and over again in this fashion, but the Iranian bomb is also a crucial strategic issue over which the decision makers cannot allow their judgment

become clouded by erroneous historical comparisons. Precisely because 2012 is not 1942, the Iranians are not the Nazis and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not Adolf Hitler.

If Tehran's program does reach the brink of a nuclear weapon test and the United States does not take the necessary measures to forcibly prevent that from happening, then Israel will have to carry out an attack on Iran's nuclear installations. The world cannot allow Iran to achieve the same kind of immunity North Korea created for itself by carrying out its two nuclear tests. That would destabilize the entire Middle East and launch a nuclear arms race involving Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and perhaps others, and if for various reasons no-one else will take the responsibility, then it falls to Israel.

But the repercussions of such an attack, if it is carried out in the wrong timing and circumstances, will be so great that no amount of hiding behind the Holocaust will suffice.

The Begin doctrine mandates that on no account can Israel allow one of its enemies to possess a nuclear weapon, and while that remains valid, it would do us all good to remember that Menachem Begin suffered from his own Holocaust complex. He felt that sending the IDF to Beirut in 1982 after Arafat was "like sending an army to Berlin to finish off Hitler in his bunker." Fourteen years later, Netanyahu, the heir of Begin, was meeting that same Arafat for peace talks while it took Israel nearly two decades to extricate itself from the Lebanese quagmire after creating a new enemy in the shape of Hezbollah.

In the debate on how best to deal with Iran, we must not delude ourselves we can simply play a rematch against the Nazis. For Netanyahu, using the Holocaust is a way of shutting off that debate. A war with Iran may no longer be avoidable, but Israel cannot afford to embark on such a war based on the murky premise of "never again."

There are a number of crucial motives for a possible Israeli strike on Iran in the near future. There are compelling reasons for not carrying out that attack just yet. Neither of these lists of pros and cons includes the tragedy that befell the Jewish people 70 years ago.