

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Aug 27, 2010): <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/hawks-emaalways-em-it%E2%80%99s-1938-3980>

Hawks Always Think It's 1938

| [More](#)^[1]

|
August 27, 2010

[Ted Galen Carpenter](#)^[2]

There is a flurry of [articles in the conservative press](#)^[3] and [blogosphere](#)^[4] comparing today's Iran to Nazi Germany—not just in terms of its bigoted social behavior, but in terms of the [security threat that Tehran allegedly poses](#)^[5] to its neighbors and the world. The *Washington Times* managed to include two such articles in its August 24 edition, one [a relatively thoughtful piece by Tony Blankley](#)^[6] and the other [a laughably simplistic screed by musician Ted Nugent](#)^[7]. (Why Nugent is given space to hold forth on complex international issues is a pertinent question for the editors of the *Times*.)

The notion that Iran, even if it eventually acquires a nuclear-weapons capability, would be a malignantly expansionist threat akin to Nazi Germany is extremely dubious. Germany in the 1930s was one of the great powers in the international system, with a first-class economy and a military that was, pound for pound, the best in the world. Iran is a mid-size power with a weak economy and a second-class (at most) military. Germany was ruled with an iron fist by a bizarre psychopath. Iran's political system is a murky amalgam, in which the most notorious figure in Western eyes, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is not even the most influential player. Indeed, [he constantly has trouble](#)^[8] even [getting his appointees approved](#)^[9] by a recalcitrant parliament. Some Hitler!

[Nor, contrary to the pervasive mythology in the West, does Iran exhibit irrational, much less suicidal, behavior](#)^[10] in its dealings with the outside world. Tehran agreed to a disadvantageous peace accord to end the Iraq-Iran war, because the costs of continuing the fight were too great. Despite having an arsenal of chemical weapons for decades, there is no evidence that Iran has ever given even one weapon of that type to Hezbollah or other clients. That prudence suggests that the casual assumption that Iran would give nuclear weapons to terrorist groups [is](#)^[11] [ill-founded](#)^[12].

But the painfully simplistic equation of today's Iran with Nazi Germany illustrates a much larger problem. The 1930s analogy (or Munich analogy) [is the most overused historical model ever](#)^[13]—and by a wide margin. Hawks make knee-jerk accusations of “appeasement” whenever officials or analysts suggest that compromise rather than confrontation and war might be the appropriate strategy to deal with an opponent. And to most hawks, every tin-pot dictator who

crosses the United States is the “next Hitler.” Over the decades, that label has been applied to Gamal Nasser, Ho Chi Minh, Slobodan Milosevic, and of course, Saddam Hussein. In retrospect, it is clear that such allegations ranged from exaggerated to absurd. Now, that toxic accusation is being used against Ahmadinejad to gin-up support for war against Iran.

The 1930s analogy is utterly threadbare. It needs to be tossed into the trashcan of history.

More by

Source URL (retrieved on Aug 27, 2010): <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/hawks-em-always-em-it%E2%80%99s-1938-3980>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=nationalinterest>
- [2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/ted-galen-carpenter>
- [3] <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/229864/parallels-between-present-day-iran-and-nazi-germany/r-james-woolsey>
- [4] <http://bigpeace.com/tgmccotter/2010/07/15/the-specter-of-chamberlain-obama-iran-and-appeasement/>
- [5] <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/09/the-point-of-no-return/8186/>
- [6] <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/aug/23/prelude-to-appeasement/>
- [7] <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/aug/23/the-middle-east-s-widdle-hitler/>
- [8] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8212574.stm
- [9] <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE67M3VH20100823>
- [10] http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8180
- [11] <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa578.pdf>
- [12] <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa583.pdf>
- [13] http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8777