

Opinion: Khamenei's Nuclear Fatwa Shows the Way Forward

Since reaching an interim nuclear deal last November, Iran and the world powers have been attempting to finalize a comprehensive nuclear deal by late July.

The Iranian stance on the prohibition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction was clearly expressed through a fatwa issued by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Addressing more than 120 heads of state and officials at the 16th Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran on August 30, 2012, he stated: "The Islamic Republic—logically, religiously and theoretically—considers the possession of nuclear weapons a grave sin and believes the proliferation of such weapons is senseless, destructive and dangerous." Ayatollah Khamenei added that Iran "proposed the idea of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, and we are committed to it."

Iran has already declared its willingness to secularize that fatwa. Such a move would facilitate and expedite a final nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers. However, the fatwa, with its strong roots in Islamic belief, could also play a constructive role far beyond resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

As a first step, there could be concerted efforts to have prominent Islamic leaders from both the Sunni and Shi'a sects speak in unison on the issue of banning weapons of mass destruction. Iran could facilitate the process by inviting thinkers and community leaders from across the world to convene, discuss and collectively endorse a ban on all WMDs.

As a next step, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation could approve and submit the decree to the UN General Assembly. Such a move would create a historic opportunity for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to propose the creation of a forum where religious leaders from all Abrahamic faiths could endorse the ban on the production, stockpiling and use of WMDs. The endorsement from religious leaders representing billions of the faithful would go a long way towards creating harmony and unity among the leading world faiths and accelerate efforts to end WMD proliferation.

Following the endorsement of the ban of all WMDs by the world's religious leaders, the UN General Assembly could pass a resolution on non-proliferation. Once the General Assembly passes that resolution, it could be further strengthened by convening a committee of experts at the International Atomic Energy Agency—the UN nuclear watchdog—to address loopholes and shortcomings in current WMD treaties.

More than four decades of WMD conventions and a decade of nuclear negotiations between Iran and world powers have brought the limitations of non-proliferation treaties into view. Further measures to internationalize the fatwa against WMDs and address current challenges and shortcomings of nuclear safeguards could include the universalization of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's (NPT) Additional Protocol, further intrusive monitoring mechanisms, additional transparency measures with robust verification practices, the introduction of mechanisms for the multilateralization of uranium enrichment facilities, and, finally, placing a 5-percent cap on uranium enrichment levels, which safeguards against possible weaponization.

The sequence of steps outlined above could be a path to use the fatwa to generate renewed impetus for a comprehensive international initiative addressing current and future WMD challenges. It would also pave the way for the UN Security Council to take multilateral measures to introduce new international and national arrangements to strengthen and expand current WMD conventions. Not only would internationalizing the fatwa provide leverage for Iran to contribute immensely to non-proliferation, it would also have positive ramifications on multiple regional and international fronts.

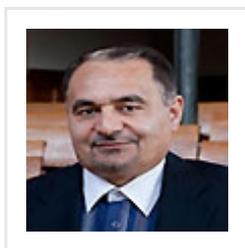
The implementation of NPT by Iran's government and the upholding of the fatwa by religious figures inside Iran can and would pursue the current objective of ensuring Iran's peaceful use of nuclear technology. However, transforming efforts to internationalize the fatwa into a legally binding document through international venues

such as the UN would bring several major benefits.

First, it would strengthen the NPT and assist in efforts towards the eradication of all nuclear weapons worldwide. Second, it would advance efforts towards the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Third, with the religious, social and international endorsements of the concept, all Muslim countries in the region would be obliged to implement national legislation banning all WMDs, which would place added pressure on Israel to join the movement. Finally, it would shed light on WMD proliferation by Western countries, members and non-members of the NPT, as in the case of the provision of technology and know-how for Israel's construction of nuclear weapons and Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons, which were used against Iran in the 1980s.

Such a new international movement towards the dream of a world without nuclear weapons would place additional and specific pressure on all governments to take robust measures backed by national legislation to prevent any form of WMD proliferation.

The significance of the recent nuclear interim deal indicates the world powers have finally given up resisting Iran's right to uranium enrichment within the framework of the NPT — and given up threatening it with further sanctions. Therefore, it is an opportune moment for the world powers to utilize the huge potential of Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa and the possible comprehensive deal with Iran as a model for contributing to non-proliferation. Such a step would bring us a little closer to the goal President Barack Obama outlined during a speech at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin: "Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons."



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