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## Potential Change in Iran's Nuclear Fatwa?

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An official Iranian statement released on August 9, 2005 at a meeting with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) claimed that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a fatwa forbidding the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons. Recent news reports have raised the question whether the fatwa has changed. Based on research on news stories and commentary by Iranian officials from the past few months, there is no publicly available evidence that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has changed the nuclear fatwa. Whether the Ayatollah considers the fatwa a changeable edict is not open to question, because he may change it if he thinks the national security interests of Iran are threatened.

Two recent articles and an essay raise the issue in the public mind that the Iranian fatwa may have changed. The first, "[Islamic world must have nuclear weapons, says Iran](#)," by Reza Kahlili of *The Daily Caller*, focuses on an essay, "The Necessity for the Islamic World to have the Atomic Bomb" by Alireza Forghani, a former governor of southern Iran's Kish Province and a strategist allied with the Supreme Leader. An editorial by Mohammad Kazem Anbarlu'i, "[The Peaceful Nuclear Bomb!](#)" published on June 21, 2012 by Iranian news source, *Resalat Online*, suggests that the West is pushing Iran through military threats to change the fatwa and build nuclear weapons. Neither the articles nor the essay referred to by Kahlili contain any information suggesting the Ayatollah's fatwa has changed.

In order to understand the fatwa's current status, it is important to consider recent official statements by Iran during ongoing P5+1 negotiations, statements which would be closely aligned with the Supreme Leader's position. In a June 12, 2012 article by *Mehr News Agency*, entitled, "Reneging On Agreements With Iran Would Be Detrimental For 5+1 Group," Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Saeed Jalili, who is Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, explains a five point proposal put forth during P5+1 talks: "The proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran included five points that were about recognition of Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, cooperation with the (International Atomic Energy) Agency, building confidence, nuclear cooperation, and discussion of non-nuclear issues, including regional issues." Jalili continued that the nuclear fatwa supports that Iran's uranium enrichment processes are intended for peaceful purposes.

Later that month at talks in Moscow between the P5+1 and Iran, Iran again discussed the fatwa in a presentation titled "[A framework for comprehensive and targeted dialogue for long term dialogue among 7 countries](#)." The presentation states under a section entitled "Guidelines:" "The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes once again on its commitments under the NPT and its opposition to nuclear weapons based on the Supreme Leader's Fatwa against such weapons."

To date, no official Iranian statements support that the nuclear fatwa has changed. This does not suggest that it cannot change or that the Ayatollah will not change it in the future. The IAEA has internal [evidence from 1984](#) indicating that the Supreme Leader, while president, announced and supported the then-Supreme Leader's decision to authorize the development of nuclear weapons, calling them a "deterrent in the hands of God's soldiers." The fact that the fatwa is being used in negotiations as a justification for Iran's continued enrichment suggests that it remains in place for now. Only time will tell if the religious declaration is binding in any meaningful way or a truthful statement about the Supreme Leader's intentions.