



Iran: Supreme Leader Affirms Ability to Build Nuclear Bomb

OE Watch Commentary: On 22 February 2021, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave one of his semi-regular addresses to the Assembly of Experts. The Assembly of Experts is an 88-member Iranian clerical body that meets periodically and whose major function is selection of a new supreme leader following the death of the sitting one. As it was reported on the Supreme Leader's personal website *Khamenei.ir*, Khamenei focused his remarks on current controversies over Iran's nuclear program. Khamenei's general tone was both defiant and self-contradictory on one hand, and xenophobic and conspiratorial on the other. Khamenei also accused the United States of hypocrisy given its own use of nuclear weapons against Japan in the Second World War and, of course, accused the United States and European states of acting in bad faith vis-à-vis the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

There are many inconsistencies inherent in Khamenei's thinking. He said, for example, that Islamic jurisprudence prohibits nuclear weapons, but still argues that no one can stop Iran from doing what it wants with its nuclear program. Another logical loophole is Khamenei's insistence that utilizing such weapons is illegal against civilians and ordinary people while he and senior members of the Iranian regime have elsewhere categorized Israelis of all ages and occupations as legitimate targets for terrorists. As such, it is likely that Khamenei considers Israelis non-civilians and not "ordinary" people for targeting purposes.

Khamenei continues to address concerns about Iran's motivation in pursuing nuclear energy by suggesting that nuclear power is quickly becoming one of the world's most important sources of energy. He is wrong, however, to suggest that nuclear power would be cheaper for Iran than oil or gas given the differential in supplies. Iran has enough natural uranium to enrich to low-enriched fuel to power eight plants (the number of nuclear plants Iranian authorities say they need) for 15 years, but has enough oil to power itself for three centuries at far less cost in new infrastructure. Nor does Khamenei's concern about environmental cleanliness seem sincere given his government's arrests of environmental activists who have protested Iran's pollution problem.

The broader issue that should be of concern was Khamenei's statement suggesting that Iran could enrich uranium to 60 percent. There is no industrial reason why Iran should need to do so; the enriched uranium that powers nuclear plants has a less than six-percent enrichment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



The Assembly of Experts meets with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 22 February 2021.
Source: Khamenei.ir, https://idc0-cdn0.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/47388/C/13991204_0647388.jpg

“Who are you to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon?”

Source: “‘Biyanat dar Didar ‘Aza-ye Majlis-e Khabargan Rahbari (Statement in the Meeting of the Assembly of Experts),’ Khamenei.ir (Supreme leader's personal website), 22 February 2021. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=47396>

Statement in the Meeting of the Assembly of Experts

Well, some people—including that international Zionist clown – constantly say that they will not let us build a nuclear weapon. Who are you to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon? If we decided to build a nuclear weapon, then you and powers greater than you would not be able to stop us, but we decided not to do so because this is our Islamic thinking. Our Islamic thinking says that a weapon which is used for killing civilians, non-military people and ordinary people is forbidden. It is forbidden, be it nuclear or chemical. Such weapons are forbidden. It is because of the Islamic viewpoint that we do not want to build a nuclear weapon. However, if we wanted to do so, who are you to prevent us...? Our enrichment is not limited to 20 percent. If need be, we might bring it to 60 percent for our nuclear cycle or other things....

Undoubtedly, in a few years, nuclear power plants will be one of the most important sources of energy in the world. The day when we run out of oil or the day when there are other functions for it, nuclear power plants will become common practice in all countries because they provide a healthier, cleaner and cheaper energy. On that day, we will be needing that energy, but we cannot start enrichment on that day, rather we should start it today in order to prepare ourselves, but they do not want this. Arrogant westerners do not want this. They want Iran to be dependent on them the day when it needs the nuclear energy so that they will be able to impose their demands and to bully and blackmail us. This is what they are looking for.