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INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION AND  
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ON THE IRAN  
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**TOPIC**  
**01**

# Background of the Iran Nuclear Issue & Iranian Domestic Politics

# THE ORIGIN, EVOLUTION, AND PROSPECT OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

《伊朗核问题的由来、发展及走向》



*Author:* Dr. TANG Zhichao

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## Abstract

"The development of Iran's nuclear program started in 1957 when the Pahlavi Dynasty was the strategic pillar of the United States and the West in the Gulf region and Iran was an important strategic barrier of the U.S. for containing the Soviet Union's southward expansion. Initially, Iran's nuclear program was supported by Western countries. However, with the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, the attitude of the West changed. Since the 1990s, the development of Iran's nuclear program has mainly operated under cooperation with Russia in energy and technology aspects. After the exposure of Iran's secret nuclear program in February 2003, the response of the international community had mainly undergone four stages. Stage one was from February to June 2003, when Iran's secret nuclear program was first exposed. Stage two was from June to December 2003, when different parties concerned engaged in mediation on the subject of whether Iran would accept the verification and investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency and sign the additional protocol of the 'Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons' (NPT). The third stage was from December 2003 to November 2004, when different parties discussed issues like the suspension of Iran's uranium-enrichment activities. Stage four was from November 2004 to February, when, although Iran had announced the suspension of full-scale uranium enrichment activities, it still could not be said that the Iranian nuclear crisis had been fully resolved. Uncertainties remain in the Iranian nuclear issue." [The article was written in 2005]

## Comments by iGCU

Although the article was written in February 2005, the author's effort to sort through the history and evolution of the development of Iran's nuclear program provides particular significance for understanding the root cause of the Iranian nuclear issue of today. The author suggested that the main reason the Iranian nuclear issues could not be completely resolved after years of evolution was the irreconcilable interests and differences of all parties concerned. From Iran's perspective, it is its "inalienable" right to develop nuclear energy and technology. Nonetheless, the author argued that in the eyes of the United States, it is "very abnormal" for Iran, a country with large oil reserves and abundant gas resources, to develop nuclear power, especially considering its close relationship with Russia. The author further indicated that although the EU had promoted "constructive dialogues" between stakeholders over Iran, it generally had still been in line with the U.S. in preventing Iran from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Unlike the perspectives of the EU and the United States, who had been concerned about security issues, Russia's concern had been about its economic interests; thus, it had opposed initiatives to address the Iranian nuclear issue in the UN Security Council.

## Reference

Tang, Zhichao [唐志超]. 2005. The origin, evolution, and prospect of the Iranian nuclear issue (伊朗核问题的由来、发展及走向). *Leading Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education (思想理论教育导刊)*. (02): 47-52.

[Published in Feb. 2005]



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# IT IS THE IRANIAN ISSUE, NOT THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

《是伊朗问题，非伊朗核问题》

*Author:* Amb. YU Hongyang

Former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the PRC to Jordan (2008-10), Iran (2010-14), and Turkey (2014-19)



*Author:* Dr. LU Jin

Associate Research Fellow of the Institute of West-Asia and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



*Author:* Prof. QIN Tian

Deputy Director and Associate Research Professor of Middle East Studies at China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations



*Author:* WU Xiaofang

Editor of "World Affairs" Magazine



## Abstract

"The term 'Iranian issue' might be more accurate than the most frequently used term today, the 'Iranian nuclear issue', as the concerns between the U.S. and Iran transcend the nuclear-related issue. While the U.S. has emphasized Iran's nuclear program, its underlying intention has always been to contain Iran's regional influence. However, the current circumstance regarding Iran's nuclear issue does not appear to have evolved into an extremely worrying situation. Moreover, the recent fatwas and statements on the nuclear issue in Iran by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, suggest that Iran no longer intends to pursue the progress of (its) nuclear weapons program. Nonetheless, no evidence shows Iran will entirely halt its missile program and nuclear technology-related research. It is still essential for the U.S. and Iran to conduct in-depth conversations (negotiations) with each other, specifically on their strategic shifts in regional issues. Although the U.S. has been putting effort into containing Iran on all fronts by using the Iranian nuclear issue as an excuse, achieving success remains challenging. The only realistic approach for solving the current 'Iranian issue' involves the comprehensive and effective implementation of the JCPOA, and the U.S.'s abandonment of its 'maximum pressure' policy on Iran. All stakeholders should focus on the big picture, take the long view, and work together to safeguard the JCPOA; adhere to multilateralism, abide by the international order based on international law, and seek political and diplomatic solutions to relevant issues through equal dialogues."

## Comments by iGCU

In the past decades, the regional situation in the Middle East has changed dramatically following the 'Arab Spring' (and other factors). The authors suggest that the Arab world is now in an 'a heap of loose sand' state due to the disruption of the original geopolitical structure and the lack of a fully established new regional order. With Iran's regional influence quickly growing, certain countries, especially Iran's neighboring Gulf states, are getting concerned. The authors argue that the adjustment of the U.S. Middle East strategy provides an important opportunity for Iran to fill the power vacuum and further expand its regional influence. The authors indicate that with the gradual withdrawal of Saudi Arabia from Afghanistan and the shift of the new Iranian president's policy soon after he came to power, it would be unlikely for the geostrategic competition in the Middle East region to be intensified in the short term. However, the incessant attempts of the U.S. to contain Iran might add new uncertainties to the situation in the Middle East.

## Reference

Yu, Hongyang [ 郁红阳 ], Jin Lu [ 陆瑾 ], Tian Qin [ 秦天 ], Xiaofang Wu [ 吴晓芳 ]. 2019. It is the Iranian issue, not the Iranian nuclear issue ( 是伊朗问题，非伊朗核问题 ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (16): 12-21.

[Published in Aug. 2019]

# WOULD THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE USHER IN A TURNAROUND?

《伊朗核问题能迎来转机吗?》



*Author:* XU Chuanyang

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## Abstract

"Iran has always counted on its nuclear program to revive its economy. As a result, the Iranian government has conducted nuclear tests since the 1950s and has made significant progress. Only when the moderate candidate, Hassan Rouhani, won Iran's 2013 presidential election did the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue substantially progress. However, former U.S. President Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and launched a campaign of 'maximum pressure', which once again strangled the Iranian economy. Therefore, Iran has also begun to incrementally violate the agreement, taking a series of measures to scale up its nuclear activities since May 2019. Since President Biden took office, Iran has been urging the U.S. to return to the Iran nuclear deal, but the U.S. explicitly states that the sanctions against Iran would not be lifted. Moreover, the U.S. has required Iran to make more significant compromises, which has incited disapproval in Tehran. Consequently, the prospects of the JCPOA are now entering a critical stage, where huge uncertainties remain."

## Comments by iGCU

The author elaborates on the Iranian nuclear issue from four aspects, including a brief history of the Iran nuclear program, the JCPOA, the silver lining of the current crisis, and the prospect of the Iran nuclear deal. Iran has long believed that developing its nuclear weapons program would be one of the most effective and efficient ways to cope with external threats, enabling Iran to become a strong and independent country. According to the author, the Iran nuclear issue is not just about the technical development of nuclear projects but more about the evolution of bilateral relations between the U.S. and Iran. The author suggests that the U.S. and Iran have experienced four decades of hostility. It seems that Iran nuclear deal is now at a critical juncture. With Tehran and Washington refusing to make compromises first, the negotiations would remain difficult.

## Reference

Xu, Chuanyang [ 许春阳 ]. 2021. Would the Iranian nuclear issue usher in a turnaround? ( 伊朗核问题能迎来转机吗?). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (05): 72.

[Published in Mar. 2021]



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# WHAT IS DIFFICULT ABOUT RETURNING TO THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA)?

《重返伊朗核协议谈判难在哪儿?》

*Author:* Prof. NIU Xinchun

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## Abstract

"The biggest obstacles hindering the U.S. and Iran from moving nuclear negotiations forward are their diverging 'bottom lines'. Neither of the two wants to make concessions. The U.S. is only willing to lift certain nuclear-related sanctions on Iran, but as it regards the sanctions as a 'red line' of its policy, lifting all sanctions on Iran would be equivalent to political suicide to the U.S. However, Iran believes all sanctions should be lifted since its stance and engagement during negotiations would depend on whether the sanctions are removed. Nonetheless, Iran has already figured out several methods to skirt U.S. sanctions in various areas, including establishing transportation, transaction, and payment systems, reducing its urgency to return to the JCPOA. Under this premise, Iran has explicitly noted that its missile program and regional policy are 'non-negotiable' and 'red lines' issues. Consequently, in the short run, Iran is in no rush for negotiations, at least not as much as the U.S. During the period when negotiations are paused, Iran could go all out to develop its nuclear capabilities and continue to export its crude oil. Nevertheless, in the long run, it is believed that Iran would not dare to build nuclear weapons after all. As long as the U.S. has made up its mind, it can still tighten its sanctions on Iran. Hence, Iran's advantages have evident limitations."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that from the U.S.'s point of view, it would be impossible to lift all the newly-added sanctions against Iran since 2018, making Iran less willing to return to the JCPOA. Also, Iran has publicly presented that the missile program and its regional policies are its "red lines" and are non-negotiable, making the U.S. reluctant to return to the JCPOA. Besides, the author suggests that as the U.S. and Iran are confronting domestic political challenges, it is hard for both parties to take bold steps and make concessions over the Iran nuclear issue, resulting in the current impasse.

## Reference

Niu, Xinchun [ 牛新春 ]. 2018. What is difficult about returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ? ( 重返伊朗核协议谈判难在哪儿 ? ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (16): 74.

[Published in Aug. 2021]

# PRESIDENT RAISI'S THREE MAIN POINTS IN IRANIAN NUCLEAR TALKS

《莱希的三大关切将如何影响伊朗核谈判》



*Author:* Dr. QIN Tian

Deputy Director and Associate Research Fellow at Middle East Studies, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

## Abstract

"In August 2021, Ebrahim Raisi was inaugurated as the 13th President of Iran. Three main concerns constitute Raisi's governance concept: to consolidate its regime (while maintaining political harmony and social stability and reinvigorating the Iranian economy), improve people's living standards, retain the existing political system, and protect the supreme leader's authority. These three concerns would directly impact how the Iran nuclear crisis might evolve. Therefore, although reaching a new nuclear deal with the U.S. may help relieve Iran sanctions and enable its economic revival, Raisi is more concerned about stabilizing society and consolidating his regime. Specifically, Raisi would like to downplay the significance and sensitivity of the Iran nuclear crisis domestically, slow the pace of negotiations and adopt strategies that could help Iran raise the price for negotiations. The author believes that the negotiation process will be full of twists and turns and become more challenging than it already is."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that Raisi taking office in Iran marked the complete failure of the Rouhani government's foreign policies, portrayed as a moderate force. The political change in Iran would bring new challenges to the Iran nuclear crisis. After Raisi's inauguration, he noted that he would learn from his predecessor's mistakes and shift the priority of governance away from the nuclear deal – focusing on domestic concerns instead. Consequently, Raisi has no intention to rush into a new nuclear agreement with the United States. If the U.S. withdraws from the deal again or the negotiations breakdown, Iran would be reluctantly stuck in a powerless and passive position. The author points out that Raisi would like to present himself as a hardliner and ensure that Iran would take the initiative in the nuclear negotiations.

## Reference

Qin, Tian [ 秦天 ]. 2021. President Raisi's Three Main Points in Iranian Nuclear Talks ( 莱希的三大关切将如何影响伊朗核谈判 ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (17): 38-39.

[Published in Sep. 2021]



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**TOPIC**  
**02**

# Iran's Relations with the United States

# THE ADJUSTMENT OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S IRAN POLICY

《奥巴马政府对伊朗政策的调整》



*Author:* Dr. SHEN Peng

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## Abstract

"President Obama's Iran policy has fluctuated since he took office. In the early days of his presidency, Obama tried to change the animosity between the U.S. and Iran under the Bush administration and adopted an 'engagement policy' toward Iran. However, Obama's attempts to adjust its Iran policy to ease the tension between the two countries encountered challenges at home and abroad. Under the pressure of Iran's election crisis and the U.S. Congress' insistence on imposing sanctions on Iran (and the influence of other factors), Obama gradually resumed the hawkish stance against Iran, adopting sanctions to contain Iran. In light of U.S.-Iran relations, neither countries' leadership did not seem to have enough strategic urgency to adjust their perception of their core interests. Both parties made small steps toward constructing a positive bilateral relationship, and they would likely return to rivalry when domestic politics and emergent accidents challenge their exploratory attempts."

## Comments by iGCU

The author first reviews the Bush administration's Iran policy and then provides a detailed analysis of the adjustment of the Obama administration's Iran policy and its underlying reasons from the perspective of domestic and international politics. The author points out that as the ineffectiveness of the Bush administration's Iran policy had drawn many criticisms within the U.S., it became an opportunity for Obama to adjust the Iran policy after being elected president of the U.S. The Obama government's new Iran policy also gained the support of its Western allies; the EU had been more supportive of Obama's Iran policy than Bush's. The author reckons that from Iran's perspective, the Obama administration's Iran policy could be seen as a foundation for improving U.S.-Iran relations. Nonetheless, the new policy encountered serious opposition during the implementation phase. First, the influence of U.S. domestic factors, particularly the restraint from Congress, could not be underestimated. Under domestic pressure, Obama did not have sufficient strategic resources and firm determination to take measures to substantially improve the bilateral relationship. Second, the Iranian reformists were side-lined during the election crisis, whereas the hardliners were consolidated. The author perceives that the evolution of the Obama administration's Iran policy has shown the complexity of U.S. foreign policy-making and its implementation. In all, the author concludes that although the president of the United States has the primary responsibility for shaping foreign policy, the personal will of presidents still could not transcend the constraints imposed by the U.S. political system.

## Reference

Shen, Peng [ 沈鹏 ]. 2011. The Adjustment of the Obama Administration's Iran Policy ( 奥巴马政府对伊朗政策的调整 ). *The Chinese Journal of American Studies ( 美国研究 )*. 25(01): 26-44.

[Published in Mar. 2011]



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# TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S IRAN POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

《特朗普政府的伊朗政策及其影响》

*Author:* Dr. CHI Yong

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## Abstract

"The U.S. had once positively engaged with Iran during the Obama Administration, although for a short time. Nevertheless, the Trump government gradually undid its predecessor's policy of engagement and negotiations with Iran, taking hardline (sometimes hostile) positions against Iran, including empowering personnel who advocated tough stances against Iran, withdrawing from the JCPOA, and re-imposing economic, political, and military sanctions against Iran. Besides, the Trump administration attempted to contain Iran due to concerns about rising Iranian influence in the Middle East by reinforcing the U.S. and its allies' geopolitical influence in the region. In addition, the Trump administration had also instigated anti-government activists within Iran to go on a rampage."

## Comments by iGCU

The author suggests several reasons for the differences between the Trump and Obama administrations' Iran policies, such as Trump's antipathy towards Iran, the resistance against Iran within the U.S. society, and Iran's regional rivalries, like Israel, who had been adding fuel to the flame. Besides, the author points out that Iran's rising regional influence was an important reason the Trump administration adjusted its Iran policy. The author believes that the Trump administration's Iran policy would not only affect Iran's domestic order but would also deteriorate the security situation in the Middle East.

## Reference

Chi, Yong [ 迟永 ]. 2018. Trump Administration's Iran Policy and Its Implications ( 特朗普政府的伊朗政策及其影响 ). Contemporary International Relations ( 现代国际关系 ). (09): 44-52.

[Published in Sep. 2018

# THE U.S. AND IRAN TENSIONS ARE ESCALATING FOR THE NUCLEAR ISSUES

《美伊剑拔弩张，所为“核”事》



*Author:* Dr. DING Gong

Assistant Research Fellow at National Institute of International Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

## Abstract

"The article examines the underlying causes of the diplomatic and military standoff between the U.S. and Iran and how the conflict would end. The author investigates different parties' stances on the outlook for U.S.-Iran relations, regional security in the Middle East, and the influences of the deteriorated U.S.-Iran relations. The author believes that the irreconcilable divergence between the U.S. and Iran on the JCPOA fundamentally led to the deterioration of bilateral ties. President Trump's attempts to abandon his predecessor's appeasement approach over Iran's nuclear program directly facilitated the U.S.-Iran standoff. It is believed that the nuclear issue will remain the focus of the U.S.-Iran rivalry in the future. Also, U.S.-imposed sanctions might further stimulate Iran to accelerate its nuclear development. The progress of Iran's nuclear program would worry countries in its surrounding area, causing the U.S. to reinforce sanctions against Iran that might intensify conflicts in the Middle East and trigger a 'reshuffling of camps'. Regional security would deteriorate further, and a new Middle Eastern order might be built."

## Comments by iGCU

The author points out that the Trump administration's "Maximum pressure" campaign against Iran did not achieve its objective of constraining Iran's nuclear activities to the greatest extent possible. It is believed that the U.S. continued intensification of its sanctions against Iran might result in accelerating Iran's nuclear program and potentially the outburst of a U.S.-Iran war. At present, confined by the legacies of Trump's Iran policy and affected by the pressure emanating from inside and outside the U.S., the objectives of the Biden administration's Iran policy did not change much, but only minor adjustments in its policy implementation. The U.S. and Iran still disagree concerning who would take the first step to present its willingness to uphold the JCPOA, whether the specific terms of the JCPOA need to be amended, and the need to incorporate more relevant parties into the Iran nuclear negotiations. In all, the author reckons that the Iran nuclear issue might remain long-lasting.

## Reference

Ding, Gong [ 丁工 ]. 2019. The U.S. and Iran Tensions are Escalating for the Nuclear Issues ( 美伊剑拔弩张，所为“核”事 ). Military Digest ( 军事文摘 ). (08): 30-34.

[Published in Aug. 2019]



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# U.S.'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS

《美国中东政策与美伊关系》

*Author:* Prof. CHEN Hui

Associate Professor of the School of History at Nanjing University



## Abstract

"The author reviews the evolution of U.S. Middle East policy since the end of World War II (until the Trump administration). From the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, the United States was the dominant actor in the Middle East and was dedicated to containing the expansion of the Soviet Union. Consequently, Iran was one of the most important allies of the United States at the time. However, with the outburst of the Iranian (Islamic) Revolution in 1979, the country started to adopt anti-American policies, resulting in the deterioration of the bilateral relationship. The U.S. had also determined its goal of curbing Iran. After the 9/11 attack, the U.S. started to "export" Western-style democracy to the Middle East to enhance its effective control over the region. During Obama's presidency, the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS made the U.S. reconsider Iran's role in the Middle East since Washington saw Iran as a leading source of stability in the region. Thus, the U.S. was unwilling to see a further deteriorated bilateral relationship. Nonetheless, unlike its predecessor, the Trump administration had advocated improving U.S. relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia while isolating Iran. President Trump suggested that the JCPOA 'is not in the U.S. national interest,' and his 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran again harmed the bilateral relations and escalated tension in the Middle East."

## Reference

Chen, Hui [陈晖]. 2020. U.S.'s Middle East Policy and U.S.-Iran Relations (美国中东政策与美伊关系). Weishi (唯实). (03): 86-89.

## Comments by iGCU

The author believes the key to resolving the Iranian nuclear issue and whether the current deadlock could break will primarily depend on the United States' stance. The article shows that since the outbreak of the Iranian (Islamic) Revolution in 1979, the U.S. has never stopped using different coercive means in diplomatic, economic (sanctions), and military actions to isolate the Islamic Republic of Iran, trying to "choke it off." However, according to the author, different from what the U.S. anticipated, various types of sanctions imposed on Iran have spurred its domestic development, pushing Iran to achieve self-sufficiency and construct its institutions for research and technological advancement. Moreover, as Iran has built its clandestine financial system to avoid the Western financial system, it has accelerated the fall of the U.S. Dollar. The author proposes that it is becoming less feasible to use coercive military means to address the issues in the Middle East. The U.S. coercive interventionism would only push Iran away from cooperating, further deteriorating bilateral relations. The author stresses that the U.S. should show the world that it is a responsible and tolerant power. More importantly, the U.S. should work with other countries to help ease regional conflicts through dialogue and conversation.

[Published in Mar. 2020]

# THE IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE AND AMERICAN POLICY: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND LESSONS LEARNED

《伊核问题与美国政策——历史演进与经验教训》



*Author:* Prof. FAN Jishe

Professor of the Institute of International Strategy at Party School of the CPC Central Committee (National School of Governance)

## Abstract

"The United States has been the crucial stakeholder of the Iranian nuclear program until recently. Initially, the US provided Iran with support and assistance for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. However, around the end of the Cold War, the US became concerned about the risk that Iran might militarize its civilian nuclear program. It was not until late 2002 that the proliferation concern from Iran became the focal topic for the international community. Negotiations over the Iran nuclear program lasted for over a decade, with the EU-3's negotiation (Britain, France, and Germany) and the P5+1's negotiation with Iran as the first and second phases, respectively. Through numerous stages of talks and prolonged diplomatic engagements, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or Iran Nuclear Deal) was finally reached in July 2015, when the interests of multiple parties had been considered. The key to the negotiations' success lies in the US balancing Iran's right to peacefully use nuclear energy and its nonproliferation obligations, making the sanctions against Iran a mean of promoting negotiations, coordinating and cooperating with other major powers, and seizing the opportunity and adopting appropriate negotiation strategies. The effect of the JCPOA temporarily solved the challenge of nuclear proliferation in Iran. Nevertheless, with Trump taking office and withdrawing the U.S. from the JCPOA, the Iranian nuclear issue again entered a period of great uncertainty."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons the Iran nuclear issue could be investigated from different angles. The article attempts to answer the following questions from a nuclear nonproliferation perspective: What are the origins of the Iran nuclear issue and its developmental process? How has U.S. policy on the Iran nuclear issue evolved? What lessons can be learned from how the U.S. and other countries have handled the Iran nuclear issue? Hence, the article evaluates the Trump administration's "new strategies" towards Iran, investigating the prospects of the Iran nuclear issue. The author believes that since the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Iran nuclear issue has become uncertain. Likewise, the author notes that three key factors could determine how the Iran nuclear issue would further evolve in the future: Whether Iran would accelerate its nuclear program; how the U.S. and Iran would interact with each other; and how the great powers would compete with one another on the Iran nuclear issue. The author believes Iran's reaction has been restrained, prudent, rational, and controlled since the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA.

## Reference

Fan, Jishe [ 樊吉社 ]. 2020. The Iran Nuclear Issue and American Policy: Historical Evolution and Lessons Learned ( 伊核问题与美国政策——历史演进与经验教训 ). West Asia and Africa ( 西亚非洲 ). (04): 124-143.

[Published in Aug. 2020]



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# ANALYSIS ON U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION

《美国中东政策与美伊关系》

*Author:* Prof. FAN Hongda

Professor of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University



## Abstract

"Ever since the 'Arab Spring' erupted ten years ago, the regional strategic position of Iran had been changing, and its influence in the region had expanded, resulting in the United States boosting pressure and imposing new sanctions on Iran. In the past decade, the development of U.S.-Iran relations has been influenced by the evolution of the Iran nuclear issues. Issues like Iran nuclear talks, the signing of the JCPOA, the U.S. withdrawal of the JCPOA and the U.S. return to the deal all impacted the development of U.S.-Iran relations. The Iran nuclear issue has been an evident outward manifestation of U.S.-Iran conflicts. However, the Iran nuclear issue is not the key factor affecting the relationship between the U.S. and Iran but an outcome generated from the long-standing antagonism between the two. Notably, the confrontation between Iran and the U.S. gradually opposed the national interests of both countries, and it is indeed getting quite urgent for the two to reflect on the current bilateral relations. The relationship now hits rock bottom indeed, if it could not be said that U.S.-Iran relations are currently at their lowest levels. Nevertheless, despite divergences between the U.S. and Iran persist, the general trend shows that the outlook for Iran-U.S. relations could improve in the coming years."

## Comments by iGCU

The author suggests that the relationship between the U.S. and Iran has already improved under the Biden administration, especially compared to the Trump era. After forty years of antagonism, the U.S. had failed to make Iran "behave" in line with its expectations. Iran had also suffered from extensive sanctions imposed on it, struggling to find an effective path for its national development, which had caused dissatisfaction domestically. The author reckons that the mutual antagonism has created a "lose-lose" situation and made it necessary for the two countries to reshape their bilateral ties. The author suggests that it is undoubted that Iran is eager to improve its relationship with the U.S. as it is the biggest external driver that could help Iran evade the dilemma of national development. Also, from the U.S. perspective, not being able to cooperate with Iran means the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan and Iran brought by the (U.S.-led) wars in 2001 and 2003 had made implementing U.S. plans in the Middle East difficult. It is also difficult for the U.S. to ignore the value of Iran, especially in the context of the current strategic perspective of great power competition. The author believes that the relationship between the U.S. and Iran is heading towards a brighter future.

## Reference

Fan, Hongda [ 范 鸿 达 ]. 2021. Analysis on U.S.-Iran Relations from the Perspectives of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ( 伊朗核问题全面协议视域下的美伊关系分析 ). *Contemporary World ( 当代世界 )*. (03): 39-45.

[Published in Mar. 2021]

# ON WHETHER THE U.S. AND IRAN COULD BREAK THE "YOU GO FIRST" DILEMMA AND RETURN TO THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL (JCPOA)

《美伊能否打破“第一步僵局”重返伊核协议》



*Author:* Prof. LIU Lanyu

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## Abstract

"Two elements could positively contribute to the U.S. and Iran's return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). First, the U.S. and Iran have shown a mutual willingness to resuscitate the landmark accord they signed in 2015. Second, diplomats of both sides had participated in the previous nuclear talks and thus are generally quite familiar with one another. However, the U.S. and Iran have been stuck in the so-called 'You Go First' dilemma during the negotiation process; both sides insist that they would return to their obligations only under the conditions of the other party's full compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement. Two reasons could explain this impasse. First, both are suspicious of the reliability and credibility of the other party's commitments. Second, there are divergences between the two parties regarding their goals for returning to the JCPOA. Nonetheless, it is believed that Iran's plan of 'synchronizing return' (to the JCPOA) and U.S.'s 'single-step reciprocal' plan might resolve the current impasse."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that the lack of mutual trust and the different purposes of the U.S. and Iran resulted in the Iranian nuclear issue, currently on the horns of a dilemma. Although it is rather unlikely for the U.S. and Iran to return to the JCPOA simultaneously, the U.S. and Iran have been in communication with each other via third parties, including the European Union and Qatar, and both have shown a certain degree of flexibility. The author further suggests that maintaining contact led to the emergence of Iran's "synchronizing return" plan (to the JCPOA) and the U.S.'s 'single-step reciprocal' plan. The author believes the combination of the two plans might facilitate the U.S. and Iran's return to the JCPOA.

## Reference

Liu, Lanyu [ 刘岚雨 ]. 2021. On Whether the U.S. and Iran Could Break the "You Go First" Dilemma and Return to the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) ( 美伊能否打破“第一步僵局”重返伊核协议 ). *World Affairs* ( 世界知识 ). (07): 56-57.

[Published in Apr. 2021]



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# WHO CAN BREAK THE DEADLOCK ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR IMPASSE?

《冰冻三尺寒意不退，谁能来打破伊核僵局？》

*Author:* Dr. WANG Jin

Adjunct Fellow at the Charhar Institute  
Research Fellow at the Center for Syrian Studies, Northwest University (China)



## Abstract

"The mutual hostility and mistrust between the U.S. and Iran have hindered the effective resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. Considering the current impasse, Europe's role is indeed very important. The European Union is not only one of the signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) but also an important strategic ally of the U.S. In response to the status quo, member states of the European Union have generally suggested the U.S. to lift sanctions on Iran and work together to reset the foundation for Iran-U.S. dialogue. Meanwhile, the EU has also been advocating Iran to return to the JCPOA as soon as possible to allay the concerns of the international community. Only through the indirect dialogues that third parties have been mediating, can the U.S. and Iran break the deadlock on the current impasse, and eliminate the mutual hostility and suspicion."

## Comments by iGCU

As the author points out in the article, the U.S. and Iran have long distrusted each other. In response to the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and U.S.-imposed sanctions, Iranian President Raisi accelerated the development of Iran's nuclear program. The author also notes that the assassinations of the Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani in March 2020 and four Iranian scientists, including Mohsen Fakhrizad, further deteriorated Iran-U.S. relations. The author suggests that the U.S. and Iran had high hopes for Europe in resolving the deadlock but the EU finds itself in a difficult position because of the division between the two. As there is a lack of mutual trust between the U.S. and Iran, third-party coordination is of particular significance.

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Wang, Jin [王晋]. 2021. Who can break the deadlock on Iran's nuclear impasse? (冰冻三尺寒意不退，谁能来打破伊核僵局?). [Online]. Available from: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1696309975442854845&wfr=spider&for=pc> [Accessed 28 February 2023].

[Published in Apr. 2021]

# EVALUATING THE IMPACTS OF U.S. PRESIDENT BIDEN'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY

《拜登的中东政策粉墨登场》



*Author:* Prof. NIU Xinchun

Research Professor and Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

## Abstract

"U.S. President Biden's Middle East policy inherited the ideological legacy of liberalism from his predecessor Barack Obama, believing that a country could change its foreign policy through negotiations, interactions, and international mechanisms. President Biden's Middle East policy could be seen as the 'minimalist' version of the 'Obama Doctrine' aiming to minimize every input and seeking to withdraw the U.S. from the Middle East. Starting from adjusting the U.S.'s relationship with Iran, President Biden has taken the U.S.'s return to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) as its first step and further intends to shape Iran into a 'responsible force'. The current situation shows that certain procedural issues hinder the U.S.'s return to the Iran nuclear deal, reflecting the competition between the U.S. and Iran to gain the upper hand in the nuclear talks."

## Comments by iGCU

The author believes that the Middle East's declining importance to U.S. global strategy forms the basis of President Biden's 'minimalist' Middle East policy. Nevertheless, there is great uncertainty about implementing the shift in U.S. global strategic focus. The author further suggests that though the Biden administration criticized Trump's Middle East policy as "erratic" and "self-contradictory", the issue is not about Trump; instead, it is more about the characteristics of the U.S. Middle East policy in this era. The author reckons that as U.S.-Middle East relations have entered the so-called "awkward period", improving the bilateral ties would require continuous adjustments in the future.

## Reference

Niu, Xinchun [ 牛新春 ]. 2021. Evaluating the impacts of U.S. President Biden's Middle East Policy ( 拜登的中东政策粉墨登场 ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (08): 13-17.

[Published in Apr. 2021]



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# TRILEMMA FACING THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL

《伊核协议面临三重困境》

*Author:* Prof. LIU Zhongmin

Professor and Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University



## Abstract

"The outlook for the Iranian nuclear deal is entering a period of uncertainty. The persistent structural conflicts between the U.S. and Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution have indirectly made the Iranian Nuclear Deal face tough challenges at present. The long-term confrontation between the U.S. and Iran has restrained the positive development of the Iranian nuclear issue and is also the major reason for the Iran nuclear talks always ending in predicaments. Only when the U.S. and Iran overcome hostility inertia and form a constructive bilateral relationship can the U.S.-Iran conflicts (including the Iran nuclear issue) emerge from the dilemma once and for all. Since the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, and especially after the Trump administration's withdrawal from it, the U.S.-Iran rivalry has included both the Iran nuclear issue itself and a series of structural contradictions beyond the issue, the core of which is the ideological struggle and geopolitical confrontation between the two sides."

## Comments by iGCU

The author argues that the "trilemma" facing the current Iranian nuclear deal essentially concerns the "structural contradictions" between the U.S. and Iran. The author suggests that the 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in long-term hostility and persistent structural conflicts between the U.S. and Iran. The author notes that after the conservative hardliner Raisi was elected as the president of Iran, Iran and the West had been putting out feelers and competing by showing their strength. It is believed that three main factors caused the resurgence of tensions over the Iran nuclear issue: the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018 under the Trump administration; the technical change of Iran's nuclear capability; and Israel's continuous application of pressure on the U.S. and Iran over the deal as an important third-party force.

## Reference

Liu, Zhongmin [ 刘中民 ]. 2021. Trilemma Facing the Iranian Nuclear Deal ( 伊核协议面临三重困境 ). [Online]. Available from: <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/43jEqSMfuQG>. [Accessed 28 February 2023].

[Published in Jun. 2021]

# UNDER NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, WHERE IS THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE HEADING TO?

《新形势下，伊朗核问题走向何方？》



*Author:* Dr. ZOU Zhibo

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## Abstract

"With the Biden administration confirming its return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal) and the completion of the regime change in Iran and Israel, the Iranian nuclear issue is now entering a critical stage. Under the current circumstances, both the outcome of nuclear talks in Vienna and the evolution of the Iranian nuclear issue would profoundly impact peace and stability in the Middle East, global security, and the relationships between great powers. In this vein, the United States has now clearly recognized the reality – it has to give up the inclusion of non-nuclear factors in the JCPOA. Two factors would determine whether the two parties can reach an agreement on the deal: the extent to which Iran would accept the conditions the US offers, and the extent to which the US would lift its sanctions against Iran."

## Comments by iGCU

The author conceives that the prospect of restoring the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is now entering a new phase. The Biden administration intends to fulfill its campaign promises by reinvigorating America's alliances, keeping the situation in the Middle East under its control, and containing the development of the Sino-Iran partnership. Meanwhile, Iran has also been trying to cope with the pressure from sanctions and seeking better relations with other countries. From the perspective of both the interests and needs of the U.S. and Iran, the two countries might likely reach an agreement and restore the Iran Nuclear Deal. The author points out that the restoration and successful implementation of the Iran Nuclear Deal would be helpful to the resolution of strategic issues for both the U.S. and Iran. For the agreement to be reached, both parties must make compromises. The author reckons that whether the deal can be restored depends on Iran's willingness to accept U.S.' conditions and the extent to which U.S. sanctions against Iran will be lifted.

## Reference

Zou, Zhibo [ 邹治波 ]. 2021. Under new circumstances, where is the Iranian nuclear issue heading to? ( 新形势下，伊朗核问题走向何方? ). [Online]. Available from: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rRZkSLAeiW6BzboS63ELkQ> [Accessed 28 February 2023].

[Published in Jul. 2021]



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# THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE BIDEN ERA: SUCCESSION AND CHANGE

《拜登政府执政后的美国对外政策：继承与转向》

*Author:* Prof. DA Wei

Deputy Director of Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University  
Professor of School of Social Sciences at Tsinghua University  
iGCU Academic Committee Member



*Author:* HUANG Ting

MSc Candidate at University of International Relations



## Abstract

"Returning to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) has been one of the most important goals of U.S. diplomacy after President Biden took office, and it is also a key component of the Biden administration's Middle East policy. However, the Biden administration began negotiations with Iran while simultaneously undertaking air strikes against Iran-backed militias near the Iraq-Syria border to cater to the needs of the hardliners against Iran. It is evident that President Biden is willing to alter Trump's policy towards Iran and has taken actions and achieved preliminary results. But at this stage, it is still difficult to forecast whether the administration's diplomatic efforts would be successful. With Iran's evolving domestic political situation, Biden has fewer opportunities to keep his campaign promises on the Iran nuclear deal and other relevant issues. Notably, the strategic importance of the Middle East and North Africa has declined, given the U.S.'s strategic pivot shifting to the Asia-Pacific in the past decade. Consequently, the Iran nuclear issue is no longer a matter of urgency or the prime concern of the Biden administration's foreign policy. Until August 2021, many uncertainties have existed concerning the U.S.'s return to the JCPOA."

## Comments by iGCU

President Trump's four years in office witnessed tremendous economic, military, and diplomatic pressure on Iran. The authors indicated that after President Biden took office and introduced the new Middle East policy, tensions in the Persian Gulf greatly eased to a large extent. However, the authors also pointed out that the Biden administration's position on revising and shifting the existing policies regarding the two regional "hot issues" – the Iran and the North Korean nuclear issues – remains unclear, indefinite, and lacks specificity. The authors believe that given the waning significance of Iran and the North Korean nuclear issues in the Biden administration's national security strategy, the U.S. would cease attaching considerable importance to the nuclear issues.

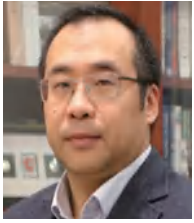
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Da, Wei [ 达巍 ], Ting Huang [ 黄婷 ]. 2021. The U.S. Foreign Policy in the Biden Era: Succession and Change ( 拜登政府执政后的美国对外政策: 继承与转向 ). Contemporary American Review ( 当代美国评论 ). (03): 1-19+120

[Published in Sep. 2021]

# THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS

《特朗普的中东政策与美伊关系》



*Author:* Prof. WU Bingbing

Chair Professor of State of Qatar Chair in Middle Eastern Studies, PKU  
Director of Dept. of Arabic Language & Cultures, School of Foreign Languages, PKU  
iGCU Academic Committee Member

## Abstract

"The Trump administration's Middle East policy has taken Iran as its strategic focus and maintained an 'anti-Iran, pro-Israel, and support the Arab Gulf states' stance. At the beginning of his term, Trump had once proposed establishing the 'Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA)'. However, following the Qatar diplomatic crisis, which had severely hindered the progress of the original plan (MESA), the Trump administration's focus shifted to promoting the 'deal of the century', aiming to facilitate a peace agreement between the Arab countries and Israel and set Turkey and Iran against each other. During Trump's presidency, the U.S.-Iran relationship went through three key stages: the U.S. withdrawal from the Iranian Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), the U.S.'s 'Maximum pressure campaign' on Iran, and the period of acute rivalry. Particularly, two incidents almost led the U.S. and Iran to a military confrontation: Iran's downing of an American drone in 2019, and the U.S. assassination of top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in 2020. Before the 2020 presidential election, Trump further intensified tensions between the U.S. and Iran to boost his chances of winning the US Presidential election."

## Reference

Wu, Bingbing [ 吴冰冰 ]. 2021. Trump's Middle East Policy and U.S.-Iran Relations ( 特朗普的中东政策与美伊关系 ). [Online]. Available from: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vGPKXb1n-YSaVBbQE8K\\_VQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vGPKXb1n-YSaVBbQE8K_VQ). [Accessed 28 February 2023].

## Comments by iGCU

The author indicates that the Gulf states and Israel could not constrain Iran strategically or limit its regional influence; neither could bludgeon Iran into submission without U.S. interference. Although Trump's maximum pressure campaign intended to cause Iran undesirable economic pressures, the author reckons that the outcome did not turn out as expected. Hence, the U.S. (under the Trump administration) could not quickly withdraw itself from the Middle East, potentially delaying the U.S. plan of shifting its strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific region and increasing the likelihood of U.S. involvement in new round(s) of military confrontation in the Gulf region. The author concludes that Trump's Middle East policy and the U.S. global strategic plan contain many levels of paradox.

[Published in Dec 2021]



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# WHERE ARE U.S.-IRAN TALKS HEADED?

《美伊核谈重启的最大障碍》

*Author:* Prof. WANG Fan

President and Deputy Secretary of CPC Committee of China Foreign Affairs University  
Chancellor of China Diplomatic Academy



## Abstract

"The article provides a prognosis for the Iran nuclear negotiations. Two essential elements to reaching an agreement are identified: mutual trust between the U.S. and Iran, and negotiations constructed based on equal footing. The structural contradictions between the U.S. and Iran are further discussed in the article. One is ideological and cultural, where the U.S. cannot accept a theocratic regime in Iran nor tolerate a 'non-democratic', religious and anti-American regime that exerts significant influence in the Middle East. The other is geopolitical, especially considering Iran's crucial geostrategic location, an Iranian regime that is persistently anti-American, exporting anti-American ideology and establishing an anti-American camp poses the biggest obstacle to U.S. hegemony in the Persian Gulf region. Although the two have long been in a state of contradiction, the two also share a common goal: to resume negotiations and ease tensions in the Middle East. However, the divergences between the two and the dilemma facing the U.S. would hinder both parties from achieving their common goal. Considering the factors above, the U.S. and Iran might continue to be caught in a negotiation impasse, where no one is willing to concede first."

## Reference

Wang, Fan [ 王帆 ]. 2021. Where are U.S.-Iran nuclear talks headed? ( 美伊核谈重启的最大障碍 ). [Online]. Available from: <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/20211201/42471.html> [Accessed 28 February 2023].

## Comments by iGCU

The author states that from 1979 to today, different sorts of conflicts and problems between the U.S. and Iran (including the Iran nuclear issue) have been generated from the structural contradictions between the two nations. Specifically, the U.S. could not stand the presence of Iran as an influential, non-democratic, theocratic, and anti-U.S. regime in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region. The U.S. has been worrying that Iran would negatively affect the U.S.'s core interests and American hegemony in the region. The author believes that the contradictions between the two would continue to make it difficult for U.S.-Iran relations to achieve a substantive breakthrough and might put them in an adversarial relationship for a long time.

[Published in Dec. 2021]

# NUCLEAR STICKING POINTS

《美伊核谈判卡在哪里》



*Author:* Amb. WU Zhenglong

Senior Research Fellow at China Foundation for International Studies  
Former Chinese Ambassador to Croatia

## Abstract

"In 2021, not long after U.S. President Joe Biden took office, he had announced his intent to return to the Iranian nuclear deal. In the past few months, much evidence has shown that President Biden wants to negotiate an upgrade of the Iran nuclear deal – to version 2.0. Under President Hassan Rouhani's government, six rounds of talks were held in Vienna between April and June, with no solution reached. Moreover, the Iranian government explicitly rejected the U.S. proposal for a nuclear deal 2.0. The Iran nuclear negotiations over the past two years were fraught with ups and downs, and both countries are again locked in an intense standoff. Therefore, the ongoing nuclear negotiations will be convoluted, with no breakthrough in sight in the near future. The possibility that the negotiations may fall apart cannot be ruled out."

## Comments by iGCU

The author suggests that the U.S. return to the Iran nuclear deal appears to be straightforward. The idea is to lift sanctions (on Iran) imposed by the Trump administration, with Iran reversing its previous nuclear activities and returning to the deal's original terms. In this way, things are supposed to fall into place. However, the author notes that the abovementioned points do not align with reality. As a matter of fact, the Biden administration is using a clear-cut negotiating tactic; the removal of sanctions as bait to secure an incremental approach to the removal of sanctions – partially and gradually – in exchange for Iranian compromise on its nuclear activities, ballistic missile programs, and regional policy. Likewise, Iran will not address issues that are irrelevant to the Iran nuclear deal. The author proposes that a peer into the two years of negotiations reveals that the Biden administration underestimated the complexity of the talks and Iran's resilience, and overestimated the power of the U.S. sanctions. The author concludes that no breakthrough would happen anytime soon, and the possibility that the negotiations may fall apart remains.

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Wu Zhenglong [ 吴正龙 ]. 2021. Nuclear Sticking Points ( 美伊核谈判卡在哪里 ). [Online]. Available from: <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/20211221/42480.html#> [Accessed 28 February 2023].

[Published in Dec. 2021]



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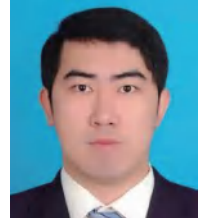


# A PROBE INTO THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY FRAMEWORK

《拜登政府中东政策框架初探——内容、动因、制约》

*Author:* Dr. LIU Chang

Research Fellow at the Department for Developing Countries Studies of the China Institute of International Studies



## Abstract

"The Biden administration's Middle East policy is rooted in the U.S.'s ongoing strategic retrenchment from the region. The Biden administration has been working on resuming nuclear talks with Iran, resolving conflicts and ending wars, reshaping the relationships with its allies, and promoting the so-called 'value-based diplomacy' in the Middle East. These efforts have been geared at its goals to decently retreat from the Middle East, speed up the shift of its global strategic pivot (to the Asia-Pacific region), forge a 'constructive' Iran, and suit the needs of domestic elites back home. However, with its hegemonic power diminishing, the U.S. would find it difficult to put sufficient energy into dominating the Middle East. It remains uncertain if the U.S. will return to the Iran nuclear deal. Meanwhile, it is evident that the U.S. is becoming weaker in controlling its allies, and the fragmented and complex security environment in the Middle East might further hold the U.S. back, constraining the effectiveness of its implemented policies."

## Comments by iGCU

The author points out that although the demands of the Biden administration in the Middle East had shown evident differences compared to the previous administration, the essence of their Middle East policies is identical. The author indicates that after Biden took office, the only "legacy" that he "inherited" from Trump was the decision to pull the U.S. out of Afghanistan, which, in a way, had also reflected the Biden administration's intention of strategic retrenchment (from the Middle East). Faced with the U.S.'s shift of its strategic pivot to Asia-Pacific region, the author suggests China should firmly support the independence and autonomy of Middle Eastern countries, assist the countries vis-à-vis the region's economic diversification and transition, and contribute Chinese wisdom to establishing a Middle Eastern regional security mechanism.

## Reference

Liu, Chang [刘畅]. 2021. A Probe into the Biden Administration's Middle East Policy Framework (拜登政府中东政策框架初探——内容、动因、制约). *Peace and Development (和平与发展)*. (06): 46-66.

[Published in Dec. 2021]



The background of the image is a photograph of a modern building with a grid of windows. Two European Union flags are flying on tall, silver flagpoles in the foreground. The flags are blue with twelve yellow stars arranged in a circle. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

**TOPIC**  
**03**

## **Iran's Relations with the Member States of the European Union**

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S CHANGING ROLE IN THE IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

## 《试析欧盟在伊朗核问题中的角色变化与影响》



*Author:* Prof. LVU Rui

Associate Professor of the School of Political Science and International Relations, Tongji University



*Author:* Prof. ZHAO Jianming

Research Fellow at the Institute of International Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

### Abstract

"After the Cold War, the European Union (EU) identified terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and organized crime as major security threats, advocating the utilization of normative and civilian power for achieving security goals. Consequently, since the exposure of the Iranian nuclear issue, the EU has paid special attention to the issue and has become one of the most important actors in addressing the matter. On the Iranian nuclear issue, the EU's approaches had successively undergone three phases: negotiations, UN-led sanctions, and (international) coalition sanctions phases. At first, the EU strongly opposed the U.S.'s plan (or intention) of launching wars against Iran and had been actively engaged with Iran. Nevertheless, the EU has shifted its Iran policies considering the rapid advancement of Iran's nuclear program and the impacts of the domestic political changes of several major EU member states. Implementing the EU's sanctions against Iran has further strengthened the power of the 'U.S.-EU coalition on Iran sanctions' and facilitated the Iranian Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) to be finally reached."

### Comments by iGCU

The authors suggest that the EU-adopted sanctions against Iran's energy (oil embargo) and financial sectors forced Iran to make concessions and eventually sign the JCPOA. However, the authors argue that it would not be realistic for Iran to eliminate all its "sensitive" nuclear activities, thus, slowing down Iran's nuclear progress. Nonetheless, ensuring it would not cross the "red line" is the only consensus all parties could finally reach for now. Therefore, the authors believe that the JCPOA is an outcome generated from different parties' rivalry over the Iran nuclear issue, and the balance of powers at present is just temporary, indicating that the JCPOA is not a long-term solution. With the U.S. breaking the balance and withdrawing from the JCPOA, the authors point out that new uncertainties are injected into the Iranian nuclear issue, and the new U.S. economic sanctions imposed on Iran have further escalated the conflict between the two countries.

### Reference

Lyu, Rui [ 吕蕊 ], Jianming Zhao [ 赵建明 ]. 2016. An Analysis of the EU's Changing Role in the Iran Nuclear Issue ( 试析欧盟在伊朗核问题中的角色变化与影响 ). 4(06): 37-56.

[Published in Dec. 2016]



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# THE EVOLUTION OF FRANCE'S IRAN POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

## 《法国对伊朗的政策演变及其对伊核问题的影响》

*Author:* Dr. MU Gengyuan

Assistant Research Fellow at the Institute of European Studies of China Institute of International Studies



### Abstract

"France and Iran share a long history of interaction and cooperation in many areas, including commerce, culture, and technology. From the Iranian Revolution until the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), France's policy towards Iran had gone through four stages: containment, engagement and cooperation, dialogue and appeasement, and imposition of pressure. Except for their inherent differences in values, the changing international situation, and political shifts in France, France's 'obsession' with being a major independent power and its nuclear concept are two of the most important factors influencing France's Iran policy. The history of the evolution of their bilateral ties makes France indispensable in (resolving) the Iran nuclear issue. Safeguarding the JCPOA is important to France and the EU vis-à-vis economics, security, and diplomacy. After the Trump-led U.S. administration withdrew from the JCPOA, France has been actively mediating the incompatibility between the U.S. and Iran and leading the EU in preserving the deal. Nevertheless, France's present influence on the issue remains limited. If France is to play a bigger and more influential role on the issue, it should encourage the EU to design and implement more effective counter-measures while also taking the initiative to coordinate and cooperate with other concerned countries outside the EU."

### Reference

Mu, Gengyuan [ 母耕源 ]. 2018. The Evolution of France's Iran Policy and Its Impact on Iran Nuclear Issue ( 法国对伊朗的政策演变及其对伊核问题的影响 ). *Area Studies and Global Development ( 区域与全球发展 )*. (06): 121-134+159.

### Comments by iGCU

Iran's unique geographical location makes it strategically important to France and Europe. The author points out that, on the Iran nuclear issue, France has neither been "blindly following" the United States as the United Kingdom does nor being rather "detached" like Germany. France is relatively more independent, meaning that its actions and policy adjustments on Iran are not overly affected or "controlled" by the U.S. The author further indicates that being one of the Five "Nuclear Weapons States", France's national interests closely connect with the non-proliferation issues. Thus, France has been opposing Iran's development of nuclear weapons. However, as noted by the author, France is also resolutely against the non-peaceful resolution of the Iran nuclear issue, which is in stark contrast to the U.S.'s tough stance. The author proposes that France has gained a sphere of trust from both the U.S. and Iran due to its "autonomous" diplomatic path; its ability to distance itself from the U.S. while still taking the common stance of the Western countries.

[Published in Dec. 2018]

# IRAN STRENGTHENS COOPERATION WITH EU ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

《伊朗在伊核问题上加强与欧盟“捆绑”》



*Author:* Prof. NIU Song

Associate Professor of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai Int'l Studies University  
Editorial Director of the Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

## Abstract

"Despite the profound divergence between the United States and Iran on the Iranian nuclear issue, both parties are reluctant to see the Iran nuclear deal falling apart. Therefore, 'stop-and-go' nuclear talks have become the normality. The restart of the Vienna talks and the initiation of Brussels negotiations have shown Iran's will to strengthen its tie with the EU, which would, consequently, grant Iran a 'double assurance' when negotiating with the U.S.. The Raisi government's stance of tying the Iranian people's livelihood to the Iran nuclear negotiations makes Iran politically fit for the 'prolonged battle'. In contrast, the Biden administration is on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the Biden administration is hasty to pull the U.S. out of the Middle East and speed up its strategy of moving east. On the other hand, it is reluctant, yet incapable, of achieving reconciliation with Iran. Overall, there is still a long way to go in the Iran nuclear negotiations."

## Comments by iGCU

The eighth round of nuclear talks with Iran and the world's major powers restarted in Vienna on February 8, 2022. The author suggests that during this round of talks, the EU and European countries were like the "binder" bridging communications between the United States and Iran. Simultaneously, the EU member states have been trying to maintain the development of EU-Iran relations under the premise of U.S.-Iran tensions cooling off. The author reckons the crux of the Iranian nuclear crisis is still about U.S.-Iran relations. To strengthen ties with the EU, Iran might simply want more guarantees provided for the new potential nuclear deal. The author further suggests that, for now, Iran seems entirely unsatisfied with the new agreements reached after the negotiations. It is believed that the ongoing trilateral talks between the U.S., EU, and Iran will remain necessary. The future negotiations would remain to be a tortuous journey.

## Reference

Niu, Song [ 钮松 ]. 2021. Iran strengthens cooperation with the EU on the Iranian nuclear issue ( 伊朗在伊核问题上加强与欧盟“捆绑” ). <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gj/2021/10-22/9592177.shtml>. Accessed 28 February 2023.

[Published in Oct. 2021]



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**TOPIC**  
**04**

# Iran's Relations with Russia

# IRAN AND RUSSIA RELATIONS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE U.S.

## 《美国影响下的俄罗斯与伊朗关系》



*Author:* Dr. WANG Jin

Adjunct Fellow at the Charhar Institute  
Research Fellow at the Center for Syrian Studies, Northwest University (China)

### Abstract

"Russia sees itself as a 'global power' while Iran considers itself a 'major power' in the Middle East. The relationship between Iran and Russia has a significant impact on the political order of the Middle East. Both countries have shared interests in many areas, including economic, financial, and nuclear technology development, research in military equipment, and counter-terrorism. Nevertheless, in the meanwhile, they still mistrust and disagree with one another, especially over the Syria issue, ties with the U.S., and the geopolitics of the Middle East. As a country that considers itself a world power, Russia's relationship with the U.S. has been complicated – simultaneously cooperative and competitive. Consequently, Russia has been trying to maintain its relationships with the U.S. and the U.S.'s Middle Eastern allies, while the 'regional power' Iran has been opposing the interventions of external forces, including the U.S. and its allies, in Middle East affairs. The pressure from the U.S. facilitated Iran-Russia cooperation in multiple areas. However, the differences between Russia and Iran in perceiving and understanding the U.S. had stood in the way of improving bilateral ties."

### Comments by iGCU

The author suggests that the cooperative relationship between Russia and Iran is a coping mechanism in response to "the U.S. threat". The author points out that Russia sees developing its ties with Iran as an opportunity to achieve its diplomatic and strategic goals, hoping that through its intervention in the Iran nuclear issue, the international order could tilt towards terminating U.S. unilateralism and establishing a new global order that embraces multilateralism. The author believes Russia and Iran have been jockeying for position on the issue of Syria, which has, in a way, reflected their different strategic postures. Hence, it is difficult for Russia and Iran to genuinely "get close" to each other. The author reckons that, on the one hand, although Russia and Iran see themselves as "major countries", both could not stand being recognized as the "little brothers" of the U.S. On the other hand, the divergences and differences between Russia and Iran, specifically how the two had positioned themselves respectively ("major power" vs. "regional power"), hinder the formation of a Russia-Iran alliance.

### Reference

Wang, Jin [ 王晋 ]. 2021. Iran and Russia Relations Under the Influence of the U.S. ( 美国影响下的俄罗斯与伊朗关系 ). Arab World Studies ( 阿拉伯世界研究 ). (02): 17-34.

[Published in Mar. 2021]



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# RUSSIA-IRAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-JCPOA ERA

## 《“后伊核时代”的俄伊关系》

*Author:* Dr. ZHANG Bo

Assistant Research Fellow at Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



### Abstract

"Iran-Russia cooperation has evident strategic and economic interests. U.S.-Iran hostility and the U.S. and Russia's irreconcilable strategic differences are the basic elements that dominate this strategic triangle. For Russia, strengthening its ties with Iran would not only help increase leverage in its competition with the U.S. and European states but could also help Russia play a greater role in the Persian Gulf, which had long been an American sphere of influence. Consequently, it would be conducive for Russia to ensure the security of its southern geostrategic space. For Iran, Russia is a bulwark against Western threats. Even after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached, Iran and the U.S. are yet to trust each other, whilst Iran and Russia would continue collaborating on Middle East issues. The Russia-Iran axis forms the geopolitical structural basis of Eurasia. In general, the JCPOA has contributed to the further enhancement of strategic ties between Russia and Iran."

### Comments by iGCU

The author reckons the JCPOA could not worsen Iran's ties with Russia. On the contrary, regardless of the extent to which Iran's relations with Western states have (or would be) improved, the strategic partnership between Russia and Iran would be further deepened. As a matter of fact, with the U.S. involvement or power in the Middle East slowly waning, Iran and Russia intend to strengthen their influence in the region. The author points out that the remarkable similarity of Russia's and Iran's geopolitical strategic goals has enabled the two to promote broad cooperation. Concerning the gloomy economic outlook for the two countries, it is believed that Russia-Iran cooperation in energy and trade could mitigate domestic conflict and benefit both countries, especially considering Western countries' lingering fear of strengthening economic ties with Iran and Russia.

### Reference

Zhang, Bo [章波]. 2015. Russia-Iran Relations in the Post-JCPOA Era ( “后伊核时代” 的俄伊关系 ). *Contemporary World ( 当代世界 )*. (12): 37-39.

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**TOPIC**  
**05**

## **Iran's Relations with China**

# THE IMPACT OF THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA) ON INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET AND CHINA-IRAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION

《伊核全面协议对国际石油市场及中伊经济合作的影响》



*Author:* Dr. CHEN Mo

Associate Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Division of Middle East Studies at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

## Abstract

"With the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached between Iran and other stakeholders, it is believed that this agreement would bring more trade and economic cooperation opportunities between China and Iran. However, the JCPOA might not substantially increase Iran's oil production and exports in the short run. Specifically, the signing of JCPOA created a 'normal' business environment for China and Iran to cooperate in the energy sector and production capacity. In all, although Chinese enterprises are facing the pressure of their Western competitors' return, there are also opportunities for cooperation in various areas, including the restoration of China-Iran petroleum and oil trade cooperation and new development in production capacity cooperation between the two states."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that the JCPOA had reflected the common expectations of the international community and that China's diplomatic efforts, to a certain extent, had created a better environment for China-Iran economic and trade cooperation. The author noted that the political relationship between China and Iran was built on a solid foundation and was mutually complementary in their economies. The author believes that with the implementation of the JCPOA, China and Iran's economic and trade cooperation will be greatly strengthened. For instance, cooperation between China and Iran could complement each other in production capacity and infrastructure construction. At the same time, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank established by China could also provide financial support for constructing Iran's infrastructure.

## Reference

Chen, Mo [ 陈沫 ]. 2015. The Impact of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on International Oil Market and China-Iran Economic Cooperation ( 伊核全面协议对国际石油市场及中伊经济合作的影响 ). *Journal of International Economic Cooperation ( 国际经济合作 )*. (01): 65-68.

[Published in Oct. 2015]



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# THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF IRAN AND CHINA-IRAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-JCPOA ERA

## 《后协议时代伊朗的战略地位和中伊关系》

*Author:* Prof. JIN Liangxiang

Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for West Asian and African Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)



### Abstract

"The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will soon enter the implementation stage. Although the prospect for JCPOA might not be promising, a so-called 'soft landing' of the Iranian nuclear crisis is a foregone conclusion. Entering the post-JCPOA era, it is believed that Iran could consolidate and broaden the geostrategic interests it has gained in the past decade. With improvements in the external environment and the weakening of sanctions against Iran, Iran is expected to rise and become a regional economic hub. In the post-JCPOA era, the external political pressures affecting the development of China-Iran political and economic relations are decreasing, and the scale of China-Iran economic and trade cooperation has the potential to expand. However, China's surplus production capacity in disadvantaged sectors would face a tougher competitive situation. Moreover, the economic integration between Iran and its neighbors in the region could be further enhanced, which would be conducive to implementing the 'Belt and Road Initiative' in Iran. It seems that China could take the JCPOA as an opportunity to enhance China-Iran political and economic ties in a comprehensive manner, including the official specification of China's relationship with Iran from a strategic perspective and the utilization of RMB settlement for China-Iran trades."

### Reference

Jin, Liangxiang [金良祥]. 2016. The Strategic Position of Iran and China-Iran Relations in the Post-JCPOA Era (后协议时代伊朗的战略地位和中伊关系). *Forum of World Economics & Politics (世界经济与政治论坛)*. (01): 34-46.

### Comments by iGCU

The author believes that with the Iran nuclear deal entering the implementation stage, the external pressures and the economic sanctions against Iran would weaken to a great extent. In this context, the author suggests that not only can Iran rise as a vital geopolitical center, but it can also become an important geo-economic hub. The author notes that the JCPOA would also improve the external political and economic environment for China-Iran relations to develop. The author further analyzes the influence of the JCPOA on the enhancement of Iran's strategic position and China-Iran relations and discusses different possibilities of how China-Iran political and economic relations could be enhanced. Moreover, the author reckons that entering the post-JCPOA era, China could expand economic and trade cooperation at higher levels with Iran, according to its specific production capacity and capital cooperation needs, and Iran's requirements. The author also proposes that China could consider cooperating with Iran in the nuclear industry under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty framework and the premise of not violating the JCPOA.

# CHINA'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

《中国参与伊朗核问题治理的理论与实践》



*Author:* Prof. SUN Degang

Professor at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University



*Author:* Prof. ZHANG Yuyou

Associate Professor at the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Northwest University (China)

## Abstract

"Nuclear proliferation has become an important global governance issue following the end of the Cold War. In the Middle East, countries like Israel, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have developed nuclear programs, challenging the goal of establishing a 'Nuclear-weapon-free Zone'. In recent years, China has actively partaken in the governance of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East to help deal with the Iranian nuclear issue. This paper investigates and discusses the theory and practice of Chinese participation and performance in nuclear governance in the contemporary Middle East from three aspects: its motives, its adopted approaches, and its utilized multilateral/bilateral mechanisms. Research has found that China adopts a multilateral mediative and diplomatic approach to nuclear proliferation governance in the Middle East. China's energy interests, the building of its image, strategic interests, and its diplomatic principle (of sovereignty and territorial integration) constitute four important factors that have led to China's participation in governing the Iranian nuclear issue. In addition, China's efforts are made through multilateral and bilateral mechanisms, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), P5+1, China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogue, and China-Russia strategic security consultation."

## Comments by iGCU

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major developing country, China has been actively participating in global and regional nuclear proliferation governance in recent years. The authors first examine the extent of China's participation in global and regional nuclear proliferation governance and the evolution of its nuclear nonproliferation policy since its founding from a historical perspective. They further provide a detailed analysis of China's motives for participating in the governance of and its diplomatic means in resolving the Iranian nuclear issue in the new era. The authors conclude that handling the so-called "triple challenges" remains the critical subject confronting China and the other Middle Eastern countries' participation in global nuclear proliferation governance. They contend that whether the experience China has gained from partaking in the Iranian nuclear governance could be replicated or further promoted in China's participation in global governance still require close examinations.

## Reference

Sun, Degang [ 孙德刚 ], Yuyou Zhang [ 张玉友 ]. 2016. China's Participation in Governance of the Iranian Nuclear Issue: Theory and Practice ( 中国参与伊朗核问题治理的理论与实践 ). Arab World Studies ( 阿拉伯世界研究 ). (04): 3-19.

[Published in Jul. 2016]



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# THE STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN IRAN AND CHINA: CAUSES AND OBSTACLES

## 《伊朗与中国战略合作的动因及阻力》

*Author:* Dr. LU Jin

Associate Research Fellow of the Institute of West-Asia and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



*Author:* SONG Jiangbo

PhD Candidate of International Relation at Allameh Tabataba'i University (Iran)



### Abstract

"Iran has held a positive attitude toward the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and has been willing to participate in the initiative. After Iran, the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015, a favorable environment surfaced for promoting the construction of the BRI. In January 2016, after Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Iran, China and Iran established a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' and signed 17 agreements on bilateral cooperation. However, trade and economic cooperation between China and Iran developed unexpectedly slow, and their bilateral political ties had not quite reached the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership. The most important reason was the rapid development of Iran's relationship with European countries. Nevertheless, with the U.S. withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and restoring its sanctions on Iran in May 2018, Iran's external security environment changed, causing its domestic politics and economy to face greater pressure. Hence, the Rouhani government's foreign policy gradually began to 'Look East' instead of 'Look West', actively promoting comprehensive strategic cooperation with China. Nonetheless, several factors would restrain Iran from achieving its political goals."

### Comments by iGCU

The author suggests that the relationship between the U.S. and Iran has already improved under the Biden administration, especially compared to the Trump era. After forty years of antagonism, the U.S. had failed to make Iran "behave" in line with its expectations. Iran had also suffered from extensive sanctions imposed on it, struggling to find an effective path for its national development, which had caused dissatisfaction domestically. The author reckons that the mutual antagonism has created a "lose-lose" situation and made it necessary for the two countries to reshape their bilateral ties. The author suggests that it is undoubted that Iran is eager to improve its relationship with the U.S. as it is the biggest external driver that could help Iran evade the dilemma of national development. Also, from the U.S. perspective, not being able to cooperate with Iran means the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan and Iran brought by the (U.S.-led) wars in 2001 and 2003 had made implementing U.S. plans in the Middle East difficult. It is also difficult for the U.S. to ignore the value of Iran, especially in the context of the current strategic perspective of great power competition. The author believes that the relationship between the U.S. and Iran is heading towards a brighter future.

### Reference

Lu, Jin [ 陆瑾 ], Jiangbo Song [ 宋江波 ]. 2020. The Strategic Cooperation between Iran and China: Causes and Obstacles ( 伊朗与中国战略合作的动因及阻力 ). *Journal of International Security Studies ( 国家安全研究 )*. (12): 38-43.

[Published in Dec. 2020]





**TOPIC**  
**06**

# Great-power Competition and Cooperation in Iran

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR CRISIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EU-U.S. RELATIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON THE EU AND U.S. POLICIES TOWARDS IRAN SINCE 2016

《欧美关系视角下的伊朗核问题——基于 2016 年以来欧美伊核政策的比较分析》



*Author:* Prof. LYU Rui

Associate Professor of the School of Political Science and International Relations, Tongji University



*Author:* Dr. ZHAO Jianming

Research Fellow at the Institute of International Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

## Abstract

"The EU and the U.S. share common interests in preventing Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, substantial divergences of opinion concerning the Iran nuclear issue between the U.S. and EU started emerging due to both parties' differences in status, identity, and cognition, especially following (former) U.S. President Trump's adoption of policies contrary to those of his predecessor, Barrack Obama. In May 2018, the Trump administration officially announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and unveiled a new round of sanctions on Iran. Before Trump pulled the U.S. out of the JCPOA, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom tried hard to preserve the deal through diplomatic mediation. After the U.S. withdrawal, the EU updated the blocking statute in August and introduced the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for trade with Iran in September, attempting to 'save' the JCPOA without the U.S. The current disagreements between Europe and the U.S. over the Iranian nuclear issue and the JCPOA have highlighted the differences between the two parties over the approaches to resolving disputes in the Middle East (and other regions). Moreover, it has shown that U.S.-EU competition over how international and regional patterns would evolve under the current international system will be longstanding."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons the Iranian nuclear issue is strategically significant to the EU and the U.S. The author stresses that although both parties' policies toward the issue seem somewhat different, the two also share one fundamental point: never allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the author points out that the divergence between the EU and the U.S. in treating Iran and solving the Iranian nuclear issue still could not be concealed. In the article, the author summarized three major differences between the EU and the U.S., noting that the divergence between the two parties reflects their perceptions of the Iranian nuclear issue, divergent governance philosophy, different geopolitical concerns, and distinct interests in Iran. The EU-U.S. competition is still ongoing. Whether the EU could counter U.S. economic hegemony and Iran could withstand U.S. pressure would be two key determinants of the existence and preservation of the JCPOA. The author noted that the divergent opinion between Europe and the U.S. about the Iranian nuclear issue is unavoidable and will continue to affect their bilateral relationship.

## Reference

Lyu, Rui [ 吕蕊 ], Jianming Zhao [ 赵建明 ]. 2019. The Iranian nuclear crisis from the perspective of EU-U.S. relations: A comparative analysis based on the EU and U.S. policies towards Iran since 2016 ( 欧美关系视角下的伊朗核问题 —— 基于 2016 年以来欧美伊核政策的比较分析 ). Chinese Journal of European Studies ( 欧洲研究 ). 37(01): 22-44.

[Published in Feb. 2019]



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# THE IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF GREAT POWERS' RIVALRY

《伊朗核问题的大国博弈及其影响》

*Author:* Dr. TANG Zhichao

Director of the Division of Middle East Studies at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



## Abstract

"The Trump administration's unilateral decision of withdrawing the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposing tough sanctions on Iran has intensified the situation in Iran after two years of stability. Currently, the great powers' rivalry over the Iranian issue transcends concerns over the nuclear issue in the region. Geopolitical competition has become a key issue of the great powers' rivalry, reflecting the new geopolitics of the Middle East in the 'post-American era'. Whether the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) would be preserved or dismantled, as well as the stability of the Gulf states and the (successful) reconstruction of the security order in the Middle East would largely depend on how the major powers' rivalry evolves. Under the current background, the successful resolution of the Iran nuclear issue would not only depend on the rivalry between the United States and Iran but would also be closely related to whether the international community can develop a regional collective security solution."

## Comments by iGCU

The author indicates that the Iran nuclear issue is essentially about Iran-U.S. relations. After analyzing the origins and causes of the Iran nuclear issue and reviewing the development of Iran-U.S. relations under the Obama and Trump presidencies, the author reckons that the twists and turns in bilateral ties had made the Iran nuclear issue complex to solve. The author further points out that from the perspective of great powers' rivalry, concerning the fact that Iran is a major power in the region, any adjustments in Iran's foreign policy or its policy at home, would have significant impacts on the security and stability of the Middle East. Consequently, the international community was pleased to see the JCPOA reached between Iran and the P5+1 together with the EU. Additionally, former President Donald Trump's move to restore a hardline approach to Iran and unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from the JCPOA has not only changed the relationship between the U.S. and Iran, but also seriously impacted countries in the region and the international community, resulting in the start of a new round of political and geopolitical competitions between great powers. The author further states that the international community should focus on mitigating the Iran-U.S. conflicts in the short run, and ponder over how to establish a fair and inclusive collective security mechanism for the Gulf region.

## Reference

Tang, Zhichao [ 唐志超 ]. 2019. The Iran Nuclear Issue and the Implications of Great Powers' Rivalry ( 伊朗核问题的大国博弈及其影响 ). *Contemporary World ( 当代世界 )*. (08): 42-48.

[Published in Aug. 2019]

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT THE DIVERGENT VIEWS AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND EUROPE OVER THE IRANIAN ISSUE IN AN ERA OF GREAT CHANGES?

《大变局视角下美欧在伊朗问题上的合分分及启示》



*Author:* Prof. JIN Liangxiang

Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for West Asian and African Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)

## Abstract

"Areas exist where the United States and Europe could cooperate concerning Iran (essentially focused on the Iranian nuclear issue) based on their common cultural values and conceptions of security. However, their different interests and adopted approaches to achieve their goals resulted in the divergence of views to a certain extent. Under the administration of Republican presidents (in the U.S.), the disagreements between the U.S. and Europe outweighed the potential for cooperation; especially during Trump's presidency, the U.S. and Europe had once locked horns in disagreements over the issue. On the other hand, under Democratic-led US administrations, the interactions between the U.S. and Europe had mostly been cooperative, paving the way for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to be reached in 2015. The interactions between the U.S. and Europe over the Iranian nuclear issue in the past two decades have thrown light on the international political struggle in an era of great changes. First, the U.S.-Europe coalition, constructed on a solid base of common values, would remain one key reason for the emergence, protraction, and complexity of many major global issues in the first place. Second, reconciling the disagreements between the U.S. and Europe would largely depend on three factors: the (evolution of) U.S. policies, the policies of the different parties involved, and the changes in international political structure. Considering European strategic autonomy would be conducive to positively affecting the international political order and leading it towards a fairer and more rational end, China could learn from this situation and actively promote European policies that could facilitate the development of Europe's strategic autonomy."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that U.S.-Europe cooperation is a vital reason for the formation and development of the Iranian nuclear issue. The divergence of views between the U.S. and Europe also brings opportunities for easing international tensions and political struggles over the Iranian nuclear issue. The author indicates that, on the one hand, the evolution of the Iranian nuclear issue suggests that the U.S.-Europe coalition would still be one key factor for the emergence and prolongation of many other heated issues worldwide. On the other hand, the author emphasizes that it is important to note that there are always disagreements and conflicts between the U.S. and Europe over major issues. Take the Iranian nuclear issue as an example. The alternation of political power between the major parties in the U.S. and changing U.S. policies were crucial factors that led to the disagreements between the U.S. and Europe. The author further points out that Iran's policy, flexible or tough, would also be one key factor Europe would refer to decide whether it would take an opposing stance against the U.S.

## Reference

Jin, Liangxiang [金良祥]. 2021. What can we learn about the divergent views and cooperation between the U.S. and Europe over the Iranian issue in an era of great changes? (大变局视角下美欧在伊朗问题上的合分分及启示). *Journal of International Relations (国际关系研究)*. (02): 86-100.

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# **Iran's Relations with Middle Eastern Countries and the Regional Order in the Middle East**

# THE ESSENCE OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE IS THE ISSUE OF IRAN'S REGIONAL STATUS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

《伊朗核问题：实质是伊朗在中东的地区地位问题》



*Author:* Prof. WU Bingbing

Chair Professor of State of Qatar Chair in Middle Eastern Studies, PKU  
Director of Depart. of Arabic Language & Cultures, School of Foreign Languages, PKU  
iGCU Academic Committee Member

## Abstract

"The Iran nuclear issue is closely related to the complex power rivalry in the Middle East. U.S. President Trump's decision to withdraw the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) has already created great uncertainty in the region. The essence of the Iran nuclear issue is not just about the nuclear matter, but Iran's status in the Middle East; the (Iran nuclear) issue is more about whether countries across the globe could widely acknowledge and recognize Iran's legitimate national interests. Therefore, the discussions surrounding the Iran nuclear issue between the U.S., Europe, and certain Middle Eastern countries frequently reference Iran's regional influence and security-related concerns. After the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, Iran has adopted a 'tit-for-tat' strategy, announcing the resumption of its uranium enrichment activities. The danger is once again approaching. European countries' positions on the issue would be the key to safeguarding the JCPOA."

## Comments by iGCU

The recurring nature of the Iranian nuclear issue, as explained by the author, can be attributed to the varying interests and positions of the stakeholders involved. The Iran nuclear issue has caused a structural conflict between Iran and U.S. allies, including Saudi Arabia and Israel: Saudi Arabia views the nuclear issue not only as a matter of national security but also as a question of national dignity; on the other hand, Israel worries that improved U.S.-Iran relations could potentially undermine its interests. The Trump administration's position tends to align more closely with countries like Israel. In contrast, the author suggests that Europe, with its significant economic interests in Iran, may not have a strong motive to oppose Iran. However, the reality is that Europe is often in thrall to the U.S. under certain circumstances on Iran-related issues. Consequently, under the U.S.-led framework, achieving a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear and security issues in the Middle East remains challenging in the short run.

## Reference

Wu, Bingbing [ 吴冰冰 ]. 2018. The essence of the Iranian Nuclear Issue is the issue of Iran's regional status in the Middle East ( 伊朗核问题：实质是伊朗在中东的地区地位问题 ). *World Affairs ( 世界知识 )*. (14): 26-27.

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# AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE GULF REGION AFTER THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

《美国退出伊核协议后海湾地区安全形势：分析与评估》

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## Abstract

"After the U.S. announced its withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear agreement (JCPOA), the survival and continuity of the JCPOA and the security situation in the Gulf region attracted worldwide attention. The U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA is an inevitable choice for its strategic shift and a manifestation of the 'American first' strategic principle. The resumption of U.S. sanctions against Iran has dealt a blow to Iran's international standing and directly affected its domestic politics, putting the moderate Rouhani government under political pressure from conservatives. Iran still has the dual choices of upholding the Iranian nuclear agreement and creating regional conflicts in response to U.S. sanctions. As the U.S.-Iranian standoff escalates, three major threats challenge regional security: nuclear proliferation, the right of transit passage in the Strait of Hormuz, and the refugee crisis. The Gulf Arab states share the U.S. goal of sanctions against Iran though they cannot afford the consequences of a prolonged regional conflict. Consequently, while these Gulf Arab states are showing support for the U.S. sanctions against Iran, they are also seeking other effective ways to guarantee security in their surrounding area. The Iranian nuclear agreement faces the risk of invalidation. Nonetheless, a direct conflict between the U.S. and Iran is unlikely, and the Gulf Arab states are still seeking a political solution."

## Comments by iGCU

The authors reckon that the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA had significantly affected the security dynamics in the Gulf region. Its impacts are mainly reflected in the following ways: the survival and continuity of the JCPOA, the prospects of military confrontations between the U.S. and Iran, and the changing power dynamics in the Gulf region. The authors suggest that while the JCPOA might be invalidated at some future date, starting a new round of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue would be difficult. Likewise, although the standoff between the U.S. and Iran is gradually escalating, the possibility for a direct conflict to break out remains low. To date, the U.S. has never taken military action against Iran and is still examining the effectiveness of its sanctions on Iran. If Iran compromises and accepts U.S. conditions, it would be unnecessary for the U.S. to take military action against Iran. The authors point out that although the Gulf Arab countries have generally supported U.S.-imposed sanctions on Iran, they are still looking for other routes to secure their regional safety and avert a military conflict, including mediating between the U.S. and Iran.

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Shao, Yuzhuo [ 邵玉琢 ], Lin Luo [ 罗林 ]. 2020. An Analysis and Evaluation of the Gulf Region after the U.S. Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Agreement ( 美国退出伊核协议后海湾地区安全形势：分析与评估 ). *Journal of Foreign Studies ( 外国问题研究 )*. (01): 78-90.

# THE ASSASSINATION OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR EXPERT BRINGS NEW VARIABLES TO REGIONAL SITUATION

《伊朗核专家遇刺给地区局势带来新变数》



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## Abstract

"On November 27, 2020, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the Iranian nuclear scientist regarded as the chief of Iran's nuclear program, was assassinated in an ambush near Iran's capital Tehran. Although the assassination is believed to have had limited influence on decelerating Iran's nuclear progress, it has had a major impact on Iran's domestic politics, where conservatives and hardliners have reached an impasse on the negotiations. Following the assassination, Iran might further weaken its adherence to nuclear deal commitments to appease the hardliners at home. Consequently, it has created obstacles for the current U.S.-Iran tensions to de-escalate and made it more complicated for the Biden administration to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). Some Middle Eastern states might also take 'preemptive' actions on Iran during the power transition period in the U.S. by utilizing 'asymmetric' means of various sorts. Currently, the most realistic option for Iran is to respond cautiously and adopt symbolic acts of retaliation in the face of domestic pressure."

## Comments by iGCU

The author suggests that the Iranian nuclear issue has always been like a "time bomb" in the Middle East. According to the author, after U.S. President Biden took office, although he stated a clear preference for restoring the JCPOA, the stances of the U.S. and Iran are still rather divergent. The successive assassinations of Iranian officials in 2020 had led to growing distrust between the two parties, which had not only overshadowed the improved U.S.-Iran ties but also added new uncertainties to the already chaotic situation in the Middle East. However, as the author points out, there is minimal the Rouhani government can do about the assassinations given the Trump administration's "maximum pressure campaign" on Iran and other constraints from conservative forces at home. Hence, the author believes the assassinations would have limited impacts on the Iranian nuclear issue.

## Reference

Wang, Lei [ 王雷 ]. 2021. The Assassination of Iranian Nuclear Expert Brings New Variables to Regional Situation ( 伊朗核专家遇刺给地区局势带来新变数 ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (01): 52-53.

[Published in Jan. 2021]

# FROM FRIENDS TO FOES: HOW ISRAEL AND IRAN TURNED INTO ENEMIES

《伊朗以色列历史上长期交好，为何如今彻底翻脸了？》

Author: Prof. LIU Zhongmin

Professor and Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University



## Abstract

"Iran and Israel enjoyed friendly ties for decades and had once worked closely together as U.S. allies. Signs of discord between the two countries started surfacing following the outbreak of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. Nevertheless, it is the utterly different stances the two parties had taken over regional issues since the end of the Cold War, including the Middle East peace process, the Iranian nuclear crisis and the JCPOA, and 'the Arab Spring', that eventually caused their bilateral ties to further deteriorate. Concerning the nuclear issue, Israel is the de facto nuclear weapon state in the Middle East; however, Iran's successful development of atomic weapons would break Israel's regional monopoly and might pose a genuine threat to Israel. Additionally, the changes in the U.S. policy for resolving the Iranian nuclear issue have intensified the complexity of the Iran-Israel rivalry, ultimately resulting in the two parties going head-to-head in the military and security fields, and the tit-for-tat continues."

## Comments by iGCU

The author indicates that although Israel and Iran have never engaged in large-scale conflict, they have incessantly portrayed each other as irredeemably evil. Consequently, the animosity between the two has only intensified over the past decades. The author suggests that the conflict between Israel and Iran originates from their different ideologies, influenced by domestic and regional politics and other third-party factors. The author believes that, to a certain extent, the confrontation between Iran and Israel is not inevitable. Also, the author notes that Iran has recently been showing positive, albeit weak, signs of détente with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, which are progressive signs worthy of recognition.

## Reference

Liu, Zhongmin [刘中民]. 2021. From Friends to Foes: How Israel and Iran Turned into Enemies (伊朗以色列历史上长期交好，为何如今彻底翻脸了?). [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_12620406](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_12620406). Accessed 28 February 2023.

[Published in Mar. 2021]

# WHAT DO THE NEW DYNAMICS OF THE GULF COUNTRIES AND IRAN INDICATE? [DR. LI WEIJIAN'S EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH XINMIN EVENING NEWS]

《海湾国家与伊朗的新动向意味着什么？》



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Vice President of the Chinese Association of Middle East Studies

## Abstract

"In light of the recent dramatic changes in the Middle East and the United States' strategic contraction in the region, Middle Eastern countries have been adjusting their regional policies accordingly. Particularly, Iran has proactively attempted to cozy up to Arab states of the Gulf region to break the U.S.-led blockade. With the Biden Administration posturing to be rather irresolute and hesitant over returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its policies being quite inconsistent, Arab states have gradually realized that the U.S. might be unreliable. Hence, countries in the region desire to manage their interstate conflicts and ease the tension within the Middle East by themselves. Specifically, the United Arab Emirates took the lead in improving its relationship with Iran. Saudi Arabia followed suit, proactively adjusting its foreign policies towards Iran and member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Qatar. Iran has seized the opportunity of an improved regional geopolitical environment, actively undertakes balanced multilateral diplomacy, and seeks the support of major powers, including China, Russia, and other European countries. Contrarily, the U.S. appears to be in an even more passive position."

## Comments by iGCU

The author first points out that during Trump's presidency, an anti-Iran coalition was formed in the Middle East, led by Arab states in the Gulf region. However, the process of (re)shaping Middle Eastern regional order based on the will of the United States does not align with the practical needs of Middle Eastern countries, especially the Arab states. The author reckons that the current division has not only undermined regional stability but has also hindered the development of international cooperation. The present U.S. strategic contradiction in the Middle East has resulted in the regional structure and order entering a period of power readjustment and rebalancing. Consequently, the relationships between countries in the Middle East have improved. The author further suggests that under the current circumstance where the COVID-19 pandemic (\*the article was written in 2021) still severely impacts economic growth, different parties in the region generally wish to see peace restored, and are more willing to concentrate their resources and save their energy on combating the pandemic and reviving the economy. Nonetheless, the author notes that the U.S. strategic contradiction is largely a military move, which, by no means, represents that the U.S. would eventually give up on the Middle East. In the future, while the general investment of the U.S. in traditional security issues (in the Middle East) might be reduced, other investments that it deems necessary might be increased, such as for great powers rivalry and competition.

## Reference

Li, Weijian [ 李伟建 ]. 2021. What do the new dynamics of the Gulf countries and Iran indicate? [Dr. Li Weijian's exclusive interview with Xinmin Evening News] ( 海湾国家与伊朗的新动向意味着什么? ). <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1719287875150069372&wfr=spider&for=pc> Accessed 28 February 2023.

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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a vast ocean under a dramatic, cloudy sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the setting or rising sun, creating a palette of deep blues, greys, and soft pinks. The water in the foreground is dark and textured with small, rhythmic waves. A white rectangular box is centered horizontally and vertically, containing the text and a decorative graphic.

**TOPIC**  
**08**

# The Outlook for the Iran Nuclear Issue

A series of thin, white, wavy lines that resemble a stylized horizon or a gentle wave pattern, positioned behind the main title text within the white box.

# WITH THE U.S.-IRAN RIVALRY CONTINUING, IT WOULD NOT BE EASY TO RESTART THE IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS

《美伊博弈持续，重启谈判不易》



*Author:* Ji Cheng

Assistant Researcher at the War Research Institute of the People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Sciences (AMS)

## Abstract

"The minor adjustment of U.S. policy toward Iran has not reversed the tone of the Trump administration's Iran policy, which had been 'hostile and confrontational'. On the key issue of resuming the Iran nuclear talks, the U.S. has been pushing its luck with Iran, creating barriers to reaching the agreement. There is no consensus within the U.S. on whether the U.S. should return to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), so it is not yet the 'right time' to restart negotiations. Moreover, the security concerns of U.S. allies are also key determinants that would affect the U.S.'s assessment of the Iran nuclear issue. Additionally, the U.S. intends to use the 'procrastination tactic' to gain the initiative in the nuclear negotiations. In response to the U.S.'s actions, the Iranian government has firmly adhered to its principles and actively adjusted its strategies. On the one hand, Iran insists that the U.S. should 'comprehensively, unconditionally, and effectively' lift all sanctions against Iran and should also ensure that the negotiations would focus on the nuclear issue only. On the other hand, Iran has been showcasing its military capabilities while actively seeking help from third-party actors, leaving itself enough space for maneuvers. Concerning the geopolitical environment in the Middle East has gone through complex and profound changes in recent years, and the changes that the U.S. and Iran, as the main stakeholders of the talks, are experiencing or about to undergo, the negotiations around the nuclear agreement might last for quite some time."

## Comments by iGCU

The author reckons that the future of security in the Middle East and the U.S.'s adjustments of its Middle East policy would have substantial impacts on the progress of Iran nuclear negotiations. Conversely, the potential outcome of negotiations would also profoundly shape the Middle East's geopolitical landscape to a large extent. The author points out that, on the one hand, Israel and certain Gulf countries have begun altering their usual practices of approaching the issue autonomously and would now collaborate to reconcile their different stances and collectively exert pressure on Iran. On the other hand, the Biden administration has incorporated the Iran nuclear issue into the overall U.S. Middle East strategy in light of the new features and changes in the regional security pattern. The author indicates that while the U.S. would continue to be in "strategic contraction", it would also ensure that its dominance over regional security issues in the Middle East would not be emasculated.

## Reference

Ji, Cheng [ 季 澄 ]. 2021. With the U.S.-Iran rivalry continuing, it would not be easy to restart the Iran nuclear talks ( 美伊博弈持续，重启谈判不易 ). World Affairs ( 世界知识 ). (08): 17-19.

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# IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS RESUME IN VIENNA: THE ONE WHO CREATED THE PROBLEM SHOULD SOLVE IT

《维也纳伊核谈判解铃还须系铃人》

*Author:* Prof. FAN Hongda

Professor of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University



## Abstract

"The current stalemate in the nuclear negotiations can be attributed to the U.S.'s irresponsible withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. However, the U.S. and major European countries continue to exert pressure on Iran, forcing Iran to strictly adhere to the nuclear deal. Such arrogance is unfavorable and counterproductive to progress in the Vienna negotiations. The U.S. should take a more active attitude to face the coming nuclear talks, which entails ceasing coercive tactics while maintaining negotiating with Iran. Meanwhile, China has been actively mediating between different parties during the negotiations, but relying solely on China to solve the current problem by pressuring Iran would not be realistic. Although challenges are expected during the nuclear talks, there is no reason to be too pessimistic about it."

## Comments by iGCU

On February 4, 2022, the U.S. government announced the reinstatement of sanctions exemptions on some Iranian civilian nuclear programs. Such a move reflected the U.S.'s intention of reaching an agreement with Iran and has also encouraged Iran to work on developing its civilian nuclear program. Nonetheless, Iran has presented that only genuine, effective, and validated economic benefits are prerequisites for reaching the deal. It is evident that U.S.-Iran relations have improved after Biden took office, and positive signals are discernible regarding the nuclear talks. However, a potential uncertainty exists surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue if no agreement is reached during Biden's presidency, especially considering the diverging positions within the U.S. Merely lifting several sanctions imposed on Iran may not be sufficient for the U.S. to win over Iran's complete trust.

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[Published in Dec. 2021]

# THE PROSPECTS OF IRAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

## 《伊朗谈判的走向与变数》



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### Abstract

"The Iran nuclear negotiations have entered a critical phase. The Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) is a product of great-powers coordination and rivalry. Consequently, the changing relationships between great powers would bring new influences and variables to the situation, affecting the agreement to be reached. Different parties were already very close to reaching an agreement until the U.S. imposed additional sanctions against Russia, affecting the respective stances of the U.S. and Russia on the Iran nuclear issue. Russia's core demand concerns guarantees from the U.S. that the sanctions would not affect Russia-Iran economic and military cooperation, specifically the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Otherwise, it might adversely impact the nuclear deal. At present, all parties are seemingly willing to return to the negotiating table. However, whether the negotiations would occur or be successful still largely depends on the U.S. attitude towards Russia and if the U.S. would continue to impose additional sanctions on Russia and isolate Russia internationally. Thus, the possibility that the negotiations would be paused again cannot be ruled out. If the U.S. and Russia agree to take a step back and make concessions on the Iran nuclear issue, it might help ease the current tensions created by the Russia-Ukraine conflict."

### Comments by iGCU

The author suggested that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has put the U.S. in a dilemma in its negotiations with Iran. On the one hand, the U.S. wants the JCPOA to be reached as soon as possible to fill the energy gap left by Russia and strategically encircle Russia. On the other hand, the U.S. is also unwilling to see Iran using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to gain leverage in nuclear negotiations. The author noted that for country like Iran, it is important to first "flex its muscles", and show the world that it is capable of causing great damage. Then it could make the West acknowledge the potentially constructive role that it could play. Nonetheless, since the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Iranian foreign policy motto has been "Neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic". Hence, it would be unrealistic to expect Iran to support Russia unconditionally. The author reckoned the Russian-Ukrainian conflict would do more good than harm to the nuclear negotiation process.

### Reference

Yao, Jinxiang [ 姚锦祥 ]. 2022. The Prospects of Iran Nuclear Negotiations ( 伊核谈判的走向与变数 ). [Online]. Available from: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yrTujdu4vBW\\_IONAmLOswA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yrTujdu4vBW_IONAmLOswA) Accessed 19 June 2023.

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# THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S DIPLOMATIC DE-ESCALATION TOWARDS IRAN AND THE TREND OF U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS

《拜登政府对伊朗的缓和外交及美伊关系走向》

*Author:* Prof. FAN Hongda

Professor of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University



## Abstract

"The changing national power and international status of the U.S., as well as the changing dynamics of international political patterns, are important factors that affect the U.S.' policy towards Iran. In the current circumstance of intensifying great power competitions, the U.S. is reluctant to see Iran, a country of great geo-strategic significance, aligning with its rivals. The Biden administration had no choice but to adjust the previous 'maximum pressure' strategy on Iran implemented by the Trump administration. As a country that has long suffered from severe international sanctions, Iran is now showing a strong willingness to improve its external environment for its development. Particularly, the Raisi government's promotion of 'balanced diplomacy' has reflected Iran's internal need to ease the current tension and normalize its relationship with the West. Meanwhile, the Biden administration's participation in the Vienna talks, which aims to revive the Iran nuclear deal, has been an incessant signal to Iran that the U.S. intends to ease the tension between the two nations. However, as the U.S.-Iran antagonism has lasted for decades, persistent problems still exist, with a lack of mutual political trust between the two. Consequently, it would continue to constrain the improvement of U.S.-Iran relations to a great extent."

## Reference

Fan, Hongda [ 范鸿达 ]. 2021. The Biden Administration's Diplomatic De-escalation towards Iran and the Trend of U.S.-Iran Relations ( 拜登政府对伊朗的缓和外交及美伊关系走向 ). West Asia and Africa ( 西亚非洲 ), 2022, No.285 (04):95-114+158-159.

## Comments by iGCU

Since Biden took office as the U.S. President, the U.S. and Iran seemingly have gradually moved into a state of détente. Notably, one of the most outstanding pieces of evidence is the progress made in the Iran nuclear talks. To reveal the underlying reasons for the U.S.-Iran détente, the author thoroughly investigated various multidimensional influencing factors, including the changing international order, different capabilities of regional powers, the evolution of Iran's domestic politics, and the shifting powers in the U.S. government. The author suggested that given the Iranian government's closer ties with China and Russia in recent years, the U.S. has kept a wary eye on the so-called "China-Russia-Iran axis against the U.S. and its allies." On the other hand, the Raisi government-led "balanced diplomacy" strategy, which demonstrates Iran's desire to improve ties with the West, including the U.S., and the Biden administration's relatively experienced team's handling of the Iranian affairs have created a favorable environment for U.S.-Iran détente. Nonetheless, the author also cautioned that the eventual outcome of such détente may not be as positive as expected. The author further explained that considering irreconcilable differences between the U.S. and Iran, the nuclear issue is just the tip of the iceberg. Hence, it would be hard to eliminate the estrangement between the two countries in the foreseeable future.

[Published in Jul. 2022]

# THREE POSSIBLE PATHS FOR THE IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE: A GLOOMY OUTLOOK

《伊核问题 2023 年走向的三种可能，没有更好恐怕更糟》



*Author:* Prof. JIN Liangxiang

Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for West Asian and African Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)

## Abstract

"The Vienna talks aimed at resuming the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is on hold. The underlying reasons behind the prolonged nuclear negotiations and the current impasse are complex. Yet, the fundamental cause is believed to be the interference of anti-Iran groups that had long existed in the U.S. Entering 2023, with U.S. President Biden halfway through his first term and the U.S. readopting the policy of linking the issues of regime change to the nuclear issues, Iran has lowered its expectations of benefiting from the JCPOA. Moreover, following the Israeli politician Benjamin Netanyahu's return as Israel's Prime Minister with an extreme right-wing cabinet, the pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. would further pressure the U.S., impeding the potential progress of the Iran nuclear talks. In this regard, the prospect of the negotiations is growing dimmer. Among many scenarios, it is more likely that the status quo would be maintained, and it is believed that although Iran would keep developing its nuclear technology, it would not cross the line and seek further advancement in its nuclear weapons. But either way, with its current nuclear capability, Iran's nuclear program could be viewed as a strategic deterrent to its rivals."

## Reference

Jin, Liangxiang [金良祥]. 2023. Three possible paths for the Iran nuclear issue: A gloomy outlook (伊核问题 2023 年走向的三种可能，没有更好恐怕更糟). [Online]. Available from: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1754520314672265509&wfr=spider&for=pc> [Accessed 19 June 2023].

[Published in Jan. 2023]

## Comments by iGCU

Combining the new reality facing the Iran nuclear talks in 2023, the author points out that the U.S.'s domestic political factors are the key determinants affecting the progress of the negotiations. According to the author, there have long been three groups of "Iranophobic forces" in the U.S.: political liberals who have been against the Iranian Islamic regime; "Iranophobic forces" that rose after the 1979 hostage crisis; and pro-Israeli interest groups in the U.S. Under the influence of these anti-Iran forces, it is difficult for the U.S. to conduct a rational and comprehensive "cost-benefit" analysis before drafting or revising its Iran policy. Contrarily, the U.S. policy towards Iran is now filled with prejudice and irrational hatred for the country. The U.S.'s antagonism against Iran, embodied in its Iran policy, could hardly be reversed in the short term. Hence, despite the U.S. and Iran, and all parties concerned, having left the door open to resume the nuclear talks, it would not be easy to attain significant breakthroughs in 2023, given a new round of political volatility in the U.S.



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# CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

ON THE IRAN  
NUCLEAR ISSUE