

The Impact of the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the Iranian Nuclear Issue

Yue Hanjing^{1*}

¹Professor Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China

DOI: [10.36347/sjahss.2022.v10i05.005](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2022.v10i05.005)

| Received: 09.04.2022 | Accepted: 16.05.2022 | Published: 20.05.2022

*Corresponding author: Yue Hanjing

Professor Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China

Abstract

Review Article

Before the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Vienna talks on the Iranian nuclear issue had been going on and off for nearly a year, but there were still differences on some key issues. After the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, although the United States intends to reach an agreement to allow a large amount of Iranian energy to enter the international market to stabilize international energy prices, this may open a gap for sanctions against Russia. Because Russia asked the United States to ensure the normal conduct of its trade with Iran. More importantly, after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the US policy of trying to isolate Russia has put it in a dilemma in the Iranian nuclear negotiations: if Russia is allowed to participate in the negotiations, it is contrary to the purpose of isolating Russia; if Russia is not allowed to participate in the negotiations, Iran disagrees. To some extent, this has hindered the resumption of Iran's nuclear negotiations. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has made Iran further realize the decisive role of nuclear deterrence in maintaining national security, so it will be more firm in the maintenance of its own relevant nuclear rights. The long-term trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the subsequent long-term trend of fierce confrontation between the United States and Europe and Russia have made Iran feel the improvement of its strategic environment and are even more reluctant to compromise on the nuclear issue. Therefore, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a negative impact on the process of resolving the Iranian nuclear issue.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian conflict; Iranian nuclear issue; United States; Iran; Vienna talks.

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Since the start of indirect talks on the Iranian nuclear issue in Vienna on April 6 last year, eight rounds have been held on and off. The last two rounds of talks resumed a few months after Iran's new government took office. In view of the fact that in the six rounds of talks held in the later period of the Rouhani administration, the Biden administration was unwilling to meet Iran's demands for the lifting of all sanctions against Iran, and adopted the de facto delaying policy with attention to Iran's presidential election, so the new conservative Raisi government was not active in resuming talks after taking office, openly claiming that Iran's nuclear talks were not the only priority for Iran's diplomacy. At the same time, the Raisi government continues to improve Iran's nuclear capability, increase its nuclear materials, and increase its 60% enriched uranium reserves. At this point, the US and Europe began to be more eager to negotiate than Iran. They have been putting pressure on Iran to

restart talks, while China and Russia have publicly supported the resumption of talks.

The talks in Vienna finally resumed at the end of November last year, but Iran's asking price was even higher: It not only insisted that the United States must lift all sanctions against Iran (implying the lifting of the designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guards as foreign terrorist organization), but also asked the United States to guarantee that it would no longer unilaterally withdraw from possible agreements. Because in Iran's view, without this guarantee from the United States, it will not be able to effectively enjoy the benefits of the agreement to Iran. On the other hand, the United States and Europe also expressed dissatisfaction with Iran's failure to provide a reasonable explanation for the discovery of traces of uranium in many of its previously undeclared sites, arguing that its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency is far from enough. Some senior officials in the United States have even demanded that the Iranian nuclear talks be linked

to Iran's release of Americans detained by Iran. It is difficult for both sides to meet the requirements of the other, especially for the United States to meet the requirements of Iran. Therefore, although some progress has been made in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, there are still huge obstacles to be overcome.

After the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, there has been a new and important background in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, because the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has a great impact on the world politics and economy. So what is the impact of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the Iranian nuclear issue? In order to analyze the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Iranian nuclear issue, it is necessary to analyze the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the positions on the Iran nuclear issue of the main parties involved in the issue.

Next, the author will analyze the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the positions of the United States and Iran on the Iranian nuclear issue, in order to analyze the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Iranian nuclear issue as a whole.

I. The Outbreak of the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine and Its Impact on the International Energy Market

Following the recognition of the independent status of the two republics in eastern Ukraine on February 21, the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out completely on February 24. Its main feature is that Russia sent troops into Ukraine under the pretext of defending the personal safety of Russian ethnic groups, and gradually launched military strikes against areas including Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. The Russian army mainly targets military facilities in Ukraine and the so-called fascists, and the Russian army tries its best to avoid harming civilians.

Objectively speaking, the main reason for the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is NATO's long-standing policy of eastward expansion. Of course, some people will look for reasons from Russia and / or Ukraine. However, neither Russia nor Ukraine is the main cause of the conflict, because although on the surface, the conflict is one between Russia and Ukraine, the contradiction between Russia and Ukraine is not the main contradiction that leads to the conflict between the two. The main contradiction that leads to the conflict is the contradiction between Russia and the United States and Europe, and the United States and Europe is the main aspect of the contradiction. It is said that the United States and Europe are the main aspect of the principal contradiction because since the end of the Cold War, the United States and Europe have abandoned their original security commitments, ignored Russia's strong

opposition, used the European Union as economic bait and NATO as security bait, and carried out many rounds of eastward expansion, constantly eroding Russia's security space. Russia has been responding passively, but has been ignored.

When the European Union, especially NATO, opened the door to Ukraine, which is of great significance to Russia, and signaled its accession, Russia was forced to draw its own red line with practical actions--annexing Crimea and supporting the independence movement in eastern Ukraine. Russia's red line has highlighted Russia's firm determination to oppose Ukraine's entry into NATO. However, Ukraine, the United States and Europe seemed to have underestimated the firmness of Russia's determination to oppose Ukraine's NATO membership, nor had they followed Kissinger's advice to them eight years ago. The United States and Europe were still unwilling to close the door of NATO to Ukraine, and Ukraine still strongly demanded to join NATO. At a time when the red line was about to be crossed, Russian troops closed in on Ukraine and put forward clear security requirements to the United States and Europe. The United States and Europe did not meet the security requirements put forward by Russia, and Ukraine did not stop carrying out atrocities against the eastern separatists, so Russia recognized the independent status of Donetsk and Luhansk, the two republics between Russia and Ukraine, and took military actions against other areas of Ukraine, including the capital Kiev, and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out.

Russia's special military action has caused great dissatisfaction among the United States and other Western countries. They soon exerted all kinds of pressure on Russia. The most striking of these is the economic sanctions against Russia. Because Russia is not only the world's major exporter of fossil energy (the largest exporter of oil, natural gas and coal in the European Union), but also a major exporter of nuclear fuel (of the 32 countries that use nuclear power, most countries rely partly on Russia for their nuclear fuel supply chains¹, sanctions against Russia have rocked the energy market and led to a rapid and sharp rise in energy prices. International efforts to stop market turmoil have proved futile, even a major move by IEA members to coordinate the deployment of emergency oil reserves for the first time in a decade². The Bloomberg raw materials index is poised for its biggest

¹ PTI, "Ukraine War: Russia's Energy Clout doesn't Just Come from Oil and Gas It's also a Key Nuclear Supplier," Mar. 20, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/energy/ukraine-war-russias-energy-clout-doesnt-just-come-from-oil-and-gas-its-also-a-key-nuclear-supplier-12887492.htm>.

² "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Triggers Biggest Energy Market Shock in Decades," March 5, 2022, <https://financialpost.com/commodities/energy/oil-gas/russia-energy-chaos-triggers-the-biggest-market-shock-in-decades>.

weekly gain since at least 1960 as sanctions against Russia scare away buyers. Coal prices rose an unprecedented 80%, European natural gas prices broke records, and oil futures fluctuated the most in 30 years³.

The oil market was tight before the war between Russia and Ukraine, and as countries are now shunning Russian oil, a major oil producer, traders worry that supply shortages will follow. US oil prices climbed to their highest level in more than a decade in trading on March 1, with Brent crude, the global benchmark, above \$113 a barrel after OPEC and its producers, including Russia, decided to keep production stable. West Texas Intermediate crude futures, the US crude benchmark, rose more than 8 per cent to \$112.51 a barrel, the highest level since May 2011. Brent crude, the global benchmark, rose more than 8 per cent to \$113.94 a barrel, the highest level since June 2014. Many rounds of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have not achieved substantive results, and OPEC has been slow to increase production, further keeping energy prices high.

II. The Impact of the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the Position of the United States on the Iranian Nuclear Issue

Because most European countries are highly dependent on Russian energy, they have been timid in terms of energy sanctions, although they have followed the United States in imposing very severe sanctions on Russia. In order to make European countries sanction Russia with fewer scruples as soon as possible, and gradually realize the energy separation from Russia, and at the same time expand their dependence on US energy, it is necessary for the United States to take effective measures to prevent energy prices from rising further. The United States has set its sights on the Gulf countries in the Middle East, but the Gulf countries are unwilling to increase production. In response to this situation, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: "So, the Americans have been contacting Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Qatar regarding oil and gas. All of those countries, just like Venezuela and Iran, clearly said: when we discuss issues pertaining to the appearance of new actors in the oil market, all of us are committed to the OPEC+ format, where quotas for every actor are discussed and agreed upon by consensus⁵."

³ Grant Smith, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Triggers Energy-market Mayhem," March 5, 2022, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bloomberg/news/2022-03-05-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-triggers-energy-market-mayhem/>.

⁴ Pippa Stevens, "Oil Jumps to Highest since 2011 as OPEC Holds Output Steady despite Russia's War on Ukraine," Mar. 1 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/02/us-oil-jumps-to-highest-since-2013-tops-109-a-barrel.html>.

⁵ "Russian FM: We Never Betray Friends, Iran Very Close to Us," 20 March 2022, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2022/iran-220320-presstv03.htm>.

As we all know, Iran has the second largest natural gas reserves and the fourth largest proven crude oil reserves in the world. If the United States and Iran reach a return agreement, Iran's energy will be able to enter the international market, thus reducing market oil prices, partially meeting the energy needs of European countries, and weakening their scruples about imposing sanctions on Russia. This situation has had a positive impact on the US position on the Iranian nuclear issue and increased its motivation to reach an agreement with Iran. The United States has even sent senior officials to its enemy country, Venezuela, to discuss lifting sanctions against the country in order to stabilize international energy prices. In early March this year, both the United States and Iran expressed optimism about the Iranian nuclear talks in Vienna, and senior Iranian officials even claimed that an agreement was about to be reached.

However, the sanctions against Russia in the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine have also prompted Russia to take counter-measures. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said publicly: the United States must guarantee in writing that the sanctions imposed on Moscow over the Ukraine issue will not affect Russia's right to free and comprehensive trade, economic and investment cooperation, as well as military and technical cooperation with Iran. Lavrov's implication is that any agreement with Iran should be made on the premise of normal economic and trade relations between Russia and Iran. In fact, the Russian foreign minister is trying to use the Iranian nuclear issue to open a big gap in the US-European sanctions suffered by it. Although Lavrov later said publicly when meeting with the visiting Iranian foreign minister that Russia had received relevant written assurances from the United States that anti-Russian sanctions would not hinder cooperation within the framework of the Iran nuclear agreement and allow it to carry out nuclear work stipulated in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, such as obtaining nuclear materials that Tehran must clear in accordance with the agreement, upgrading the Fordo nuclear power plant (which Iran claims is for civilian use only) and building two more reactors at the Bushehr nuclear power plant 6. But the United States has never confirmed this. Sherman, US deputy secretary of state, downplayed when asked that the US would waive sanctions against Russia to allow Russia to enter into a contract with Iran's Atomic Energy Agency, which is said to be worth \$10 billion, to expand its nuclear

⁶ "Iran Calls on the US to Drop 'Excessive Demands' to Facilitate Deal in Vienna," March 15, 2022, https://parstoday.com/en/news/iran-1168876-iran_calls_on_the_us_to_drop_excessive_demands%E2%80%99_to_facilitate_deal_in_vienna.

facilities in Iran. “It makes no sense to me whatsoever,” Sherman told Al Arabiya⁷.

Russia’s request objectively has a negative impact on Iran’s nuclear negotiations: the United States will not be willing to let Russia maintain all kinds of economic and trade relations with Iran in order to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran. Because after the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Biden administration gave priority to attacking Russia over Iran, and the Biden administration had little incentive to significantly reduce the pressure on Iran.

Although reaching an agreement with Iran may lower energy prices in the international market, thereby reducing the power of Russia’s energy stick to some extent, it may make Middle Eastern countries more reluctant to cooperate with the United States in dealing with Russia. The United States cannot fail to know that no government in the Middle east, including Israel, has signed up to support the severe sanctions imposed by the United States on Russia⁸. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, secretary general of the League of Arab States, said on March 28th that an “understanding” might be reached between Washington and Tehran on returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but this would not eliminate Iran’s nuclear threat because “the talks will not end Iran’s nuclear threat, but only freeze it for a few years⁹”.

Moreover, after the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Western countries led by the United States not only sanctioned Russia, but also isolated and demonized Russia, believing that as an aggressor, it was not worthy to participate in resolving the Iranian nuclear issue together with other major powers in the world. The United States and Europe have also tried their best to vilify Putin in order to weaken his legitimacy and expect him to step down. According to CNN, President Biden made another surprising speech in Warsaw on March 26, local time. Speaking of Russian President Vladimir Putin, he said, “For God’s sake, this man can no longer remain in

power¹⁰”. Although Biden publicly clarified the next day that the United States did not seek regime change in Russia, his words actually spoke his mind. After the Bucha incident in Ukraine, Russia was suspended from membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council under the manipulation of the United States. The United States also announced that it would kick Russia out of the G20 and threatened the host country by refusing to attend the meeting, asking it to refuse Russia’s participation. Biden even called Russia’s actions in Ukraine genocide¹¹. As a result, the United States is even more reluctant to allow Russia to participate in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue.

However, it is difficult for the United States to organize negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue without the direct participation of Russia. The U.S. won’t negotiate exemptions to Ukraine-related sanctions on Russia to save the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and could try to strike a separate accord excluding Moscow, a senior U.S. official said, a diplomatic effort complicated by an Iranian missile attack on Iraq that sent American troops rushing for shelter¹². In theory, as the main participant, the United States could even reach a bilateral agreement directly with Iran on the nuclear issue. In fact, after the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the United States has increasingly emphasized the need for direct talks with Iran. Iran’s foreign minister said in mid-April, “The Americans have been talking about the need for direct negotiations, but we have not yet seen the benefits of direct negotiations with the United States¹³”. However, in practice, in the case of a serious lack of mutual trust between the United States and Iran, Iran or even China (for the sake of strategic cooperation with Russia) will not agree to reach a multilateral agreement without Russian participation. Because first of all, such an agreement will be difficult to be approved by the Security Council, resulting in a lack of enforcement and binding force; second, without Russia’s cooperation, Iran’s “surplus” nuclear fuel will be difficult to deal with, unless it is shipped to China, because Iran will not agree to the shipment to the West. In other words, it

⁷ Joseph Haboush & Nadia Bilbassy-Charters, “‘Impossible to Imagine’ Nuclear Deal if Iran doesn’t Release Americans: Sherman,” 18 March, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2022/03/18/-Impossible-to-imagine-nuclear-deal-if-Iran-doesn-t-release-Americans-Sherman>.

⁸ “Russia’s War Forcing U.S. to Reevaluate Revival of Iran Nuclear Deal,” March 25, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/25/world/russia-war-complicates-iran-deal/#:~:text=Russia%E2%80%99s%20war%20on%20Ukraine%20is%20reshuffling%20Middle%20East,of%20reviving%20the%202015%20nuclear%20accord%20with%20Iran>.

⁹ Mona Farag, “Aboul Gheit Says a New Iran Deal ‘does not End’ the Nuclear Threat,” March 28, 2022, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/03/28/aboul-gheit-says-a-new-iran-deal-does-not-end-the-nuclear-threat/>.

¹⁰

《拜登：美国没有寻求俄罗斯政权更迭》，2022年3月28日, <https://export.shobserver.com/baijiahao/html/465838.html>.

¹¹ Kevin Liptak, “Biden Calls Atrocities in Ukraine a ‘Genocide’ for the First Time,” April 13, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-04-13-22/h_8c1806fa6ba3a8bfda0c9f373a057d60.

¹² Tom Whipple, “U.S. won’t Negotiate Ukraine-Related Sanctions with Russia to Save Iran Nuclear Deal,” March 14, 2022, <https://daily.energybulletin.org/2022/03/u-s-wont-negotiate-ukraine-related-sanctions-with-russia-to-save-iran-nuclear-deal-wsj-2/>.

¹³ “Iran’s Foreign Minister Says US has Made Excessive Demands in Negotiations to Revive 2015 Nuclear Deal,” April 11, 2022, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/325606>.

will be difficult to reach a new Iran nuclear agreement without Russian participation, let alone a “return” agreement.

In short, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in order to concentrate its efforts on suppressing Russia and safeguarding its own interests, the United States is unwilling to reach an Iranian nuclear agreement with Iran at its request. Moreover, the policy of isolating Russia has actually put the United States in a dilemma on the Iranian nuclear issue: If Russia is allowed to participate in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue and act as a signatory to a possible agreement, then these conflicts with the goal of the United States to suppress and isolate Russia. If Russia is not allowed to participate in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue, although this will help to achieve the goal of isolating and suppressing Russia, Iran or even China will not agree, so it will be difficult to restart the talks.

III. The Impact of the Conflict Between Russia and Ukraine on Iran’s Position on the Iranian Nuclear Issue

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has also had a negative impact on Iran’s position on the Iranian nuclear issue, thus adding a layer of haze to the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue in Vienna.

The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on Iran on the Iranian nuclear issue is that the “conflict” is very likely to make Iran more reluctant to give up its nuclear rights (This will be indirectly reflected in its more firm demand that the United States lift all sanctions and promise not to “withdraw” in the future.), thus making it more difficult to achieve a substantive breakthrough and reach a consensus in the so-called “return to the deal” negotiations, or Iranian nuclear negotiations. This is because the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has made Iran really see the final decisive role of nuclear deterrence in ensuring national security.

The Biden administration said from the beginning that it would not respond directly to Russian military action because it would lead to World War III. Biden’s words give people the impression that he loves peace and cherishes the better world, but his words are largely false. The United States has a large number of allies, and its political, economic, and military forces are much stronger than Russia’s, but even so, despite President Zelensky’s pleas and later angry sarcasm, it is still unwilling to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine, and even dare not transfer fighter planes to Ukraine. What it can do is to gather allies to carry out extreme economic and political crackdown on Russia. In fact, the reason why the United States and its allies do so is not really because they are worried that a military conflict with Russia will lead to a third World War, but because they are afraid that a military conflict with

Russia will eventually lead to a terrifying nuclear war that no one can win.

At the beginning of the military action, Putin ordered Russia’s nuclear forces to turn into a special state of combat readiness. This is not to say that Putin wants to fight a nuclear war. Putin’s approach is to show the West that the United States and Europe have touched Russia’s bottom line on issues related to Ukraine’s accession to NATO, that Russia has no way out, and that it will not hesitate to conduct a nuclear war on this matter. For the United States and Europe, Ukraine is still only a pawn in a game with Russia, and they are unwilling and dare not risk a nuclear war with Russia to meet the needs of the Ukrainian authorities by engaging in a military showdown with Russia.

In short, the United States and Europe are unwilling and afraid to directly intervene militarily in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, not because of Biden’s fear of starting a third World War, but because of Russia’s formidable nuclear deterrent.

It is Russia’s nuclear deterrent that has prevented the United States and Europe from directly intervening militarily in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Of course, Iran can see this very clearly. Then this is bound to deepen Iran’s understanding that nuclear weapons are the ultimate means of guarding its own core interests. At the same time, during the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Russian army immediately took action to control the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, indicating Russia’s fear of indiscriminate damage caused by the leakage of nuclear material. As a result, Iran may be more convinced that even if it does not build nuclear weapons, even if it has the realistic capability to build nuclear weapons (sufficient nuclear materials and technology), it can serve as a great deterrent at critical moments.

Moreover, Iran must also wonder: If Ukraine had nuclear weapons, would Russia take such action against it? The answer is basically no. When meeting with the stewardess and answering a question from a stewardess about why he launched the military operation against Ukraine, President Putin said that one of the reasons for the action is that Ukraine will build nuclear weapons, and some people will help Ukraine build nuclear weapons on the other side of the ocean, and that once Ukraine deploys such weapons systems, Russia’s fate will be completely different¹⁴. The implication is that it will be too late if no action is taken. This also shows from the opposite side that Putin is also very worried about the real possibility for Ukraine to use nuclear weapons against Russia.

¹⁴

<https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=4721024943141593299>.

Russia's nuclear deterrent has prevented the military intervention of the United States and Europe. If Ukraine had nuclear weapons, Russia would not have taken such military action against Ukraine. This "fact" will make it more difficult for Iran to compromise on the nuclear issue. This will make it more difficult to negotiate and reach an agreement. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's feelings and position on nuclear activities expressed on March 10 local time can illustrate this point. He said it would be "completely naive" to reduce Iran's defense capabilities in accordance with the enemy's demands. "There is no one more naive and less experienced than those who take the initiative to reduce their defenses in order not to arouse the sensitivity of the enemy."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the development of nuclear science is closely related to further meeting the needs of the country, and Iran cannot give up 15.

The development trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has also strengthened Iran's confidence and determination to resist US pressure. Although the conflict between Russia and Ukraine appears to be between Russia and Ukraine, it is actually between Russia and the United States and its allies. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has further intensified the confrontation between the United States and other Western countries and Russia, thus bringing Iran and Russia closer together in resisting pressure from the United States and other Western countries. There are more opportunities for Iran and Russia to work together to combat Western pressure. More importantly, the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has a long-term trend, and the fierce contradiction between Russia and the United States and Europe will also be long-term, which has improved Iran's strategic environment. Why does the conflict between Russia and Ukraine tend to be prolonged?

To analyze the trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it is important to look at the changes in the ground situation in Ukraine. As Crimea has become a part of Russia, the two republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine have been recognized by Russia as independent countries, and Ukraine does not accept territorial changes directly caused by Russia, so although Russia claims that the status of eastern Ukraine is no longer a problem, the issue of Ukraine's national geographical boundary is actually the focus of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It is meaningless to discuss the so-called neutral status of Ukraine if the issue of Ukraine's geographical boundary is not resolved. It is as if Russia

and Ukraine were debating a series of issues, but without a prior agreement on the central concept of the debate: Ukraine. Such a debate is meaningless.

Therefore, the key to the trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine depends on whether Russia can finally force Ukraine to accept the national border changed by Russia. If Ukraine accepts such borders, then whether the new Ukraine will join NATO does not really mean much to Russia because Russia has already obtained a security buffer zone by dividing Ukraine and related geopolitical improvements. In this way, there is a great possibility of peace between Russia and Ukraine.

But it is almost impossible for Russia to eventually succeed in forcing Ukraine to accept the new national border; because Ukraine is strongly supported and even manipulated by Western countries led the United States. There is a general consensus that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is in fact the result of the United States' pursuit of hegemony. The United States is the external environmental condition of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, without which a military conflict between Russia and Ukraine would not have occurred. The purpose of promoting the color revolution and inducing Ukraine to turn to the West is to squeeze Russia's strategic security space.

In the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, if Russia is regarded as an independent variable and Ukraine as a dependent variable, then the United States is a "confounding variable" that deeply affects both independent variables and dependent variables, which reflects the strong strength of the United States. America, the confounding variable, will not agree to Ukraine accepting new borders imposed by Russia.

If Ukraine accepts the new border, then Russia will achieve its main or even bottom-line goal of launching special military operations, and it will gradually stop its military operations against Ukraine, but at the same time, the United States will lose the main basis for sanctions against Russia and military assistance to Ukraine, thus losing the opportunity to deepen the gap between Russia and Europe and promote the de-Russification of European energy. This is an outcome that the United States does not want to see. Moreover, for the United States, if the Ukraine, which recognizes the new border itself, joins NATO, its strategic value will be far less than the Ukraine, which is outside NATO and does not recognize the new border. However, although the United States will oppose Ukraine's recognition of the new border and provide all kinds of support and assistance to Ukraine, it will not risk a nuclear war with Russia to help Ukraine actually restore and effectively control the original border.

Under such circumstances, the trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is generally clear: The conflict (state of war) will continue for a long time, the peace agreement will not be signed, and Ukraine will not join NATO (even if it wants to join). At the same time, Russia will gradually strengthen its control over eastern Ukraine. This is a new dynamic balance and a new cold war between the United States and Russia.

The long-term trend of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine means that the United States and other Western countries have a long-term trend of fierce confrontation with Russia, so there is also a long-term trend in the possibility of Iran and Russia jointly opposing the enemy. Under such circumstances, Iran's confidence in resisting US pressure is bound to increase, and its position on nuclear negotiations will certainly be tougher and more uncompromising. This can be seen in the remarks made by many Iranian lawmakers and Iran's supreme leader on the Iranian nuclear issue around April 11.

"The United States should give legal assurances approved by Congress that it will not withdraw from the agreement again," the semiofficial Tasnim News Agency said, citing a statement signed by 250 members of Iran's 290-member parliament¹⁶. In fact, this requirement is impossible to achieve and goes beyond the content of the original agreement. You know, even the 2015 comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue was not approved by Congress, and the Obama administration barely blocked the passage of a resolution proposed by Congress to veto the deal. The implementation of the comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue in the United States was mainly based on the executive order issued by Obama. The Iranian lawmakers also said the United States should not be able to "use an excuse to trigger the snapback mechanism". This is again calling for the cancellation of an important part of the original agreement. This request is simply a gesture of reluctance to talk, or a euphemistic refusal to negotiate.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, insisted that negotiations on the nuclear deal were "are going ahead properly", although US officials had repeatedly said an agreement to revive the deal might not be reached. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also praised Iran's negotiating team, saying, "So far our negotiation team has resisted before the other party's excessive demands and, God willing, (that resistance)

¹⁶ "Iran MPs Set Conditions for Reviving 2015 Nuclear Deal amid Stalled Talks with US," April 10, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2022/04/10/Iran-MPs-set-conditions-for-reviving-2015-nuclear-deal-amid-stalled-talks-with-US>.

will continue¹⁷". This shows that Iran will not give in on its negotiating position. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also said, "Absolutely do not wait for nuclear negotiations in planning for the country and move forward... whether the negotiations lead to positive or semi-positive or negative results, don't let your work be disrupted¹⁸." This is clearly a statement that weakens the importance of nuclear negotiations.

Iran has also taken some new measures in its nuclear activities. Iran says it will not provide surveillance camera data to the International Atomic Energy Agency until the 2015 nuclear deal resumes¹⁹. According to the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions enacted by the Iranian Parliament at the end of 2020, if Iran's requirements for the lifting of sanctions are not met, Iran will suspend voluntary compliance with the additional Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty two months after the law comes into force. Without meeting its demands, Iran was forced on 23 February 2021 to declare a moratorium on the additional Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The International Atomic Energy Agency's access to relevant monitoring data is therefore greatly limited. The interim supervision agreement reached between the Iranian Administration and the International Atomic Energy Agency also failed to resolve this issue. Iran has now taken reaching an agreement rather than the previous lifting of relevant sanctions as a condition for providing monitoring data, which has gone a step further.

In terms of specific nuclear activities, Iran has also made new developments. Iran is starting to operate a new workshop in Natanz that will produce parts for uranium enrichment centrifuges, using machines transferred there from the now closed Karaj facility. Before moving Karaj's machine parts to Natanz, Iran also told the International Atomic Energy Agency that it was moving activities from the Karaj plant to another location in Isfahan. If Isfahan is put into operation, it will greatly improve Iran's ability to produce advanced centrifuge components²⁰.

¹⁷ Nassser Karimi and Jon Gambrell, "Iran's Supreme Leader Optimistic Though Nuclear Talks Stalled," April 13, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-supreme-leader-optimistic-nuclear-talks-stalled-84037066>.

¹⁸ "Khamenei Says Iran's Future should Not be Tied to Nuclear Talks with World Powers," April 16, 2022, <https://dunyanews.tv/en/World/649241--Khamenei-says-Iran/s-future-should-not-be-tied-to-nuclear-talks-with-wo>.

¹⁹ "Iran Refuses to Provide IAEA with Monitoring Data," April 15, 2022, https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20220415_10/#:~:text=Iran%20says%20it%20will%20not%20provide%20the%20International,country%20until%20the%202015%20nuclear%20deal%20is%20restored.

²⁰ "Iranian Lawmaker: Nuclear Talks have Not Yet Reached an Agreement on Surveillance Footage," April 16, 2022,

CONCLUSION

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine led the U.S.-led Western countries to launch extremely severe sanctions against Russia, while providing all kinds of support to Ukraine. This has led to a rapid rise in international energy prices and sudden tension in Russia's relations with the United States and Europe. This background has had a certain impact on the position of the United States and Iran on the nuclear issue. Although this impact has a positive side, the positive side is far less than the negative side, thus weakening the willingness of the two sides to hold talks. The United States and Iraq are not only unwilling to retreat from their original positions, but also put forward new demands. Most Iranian lawmakers asked the United States to make a legal. Guarantee approved by Congress that it would not withdraw from the possible agreement and that the United States should not find an excuse to activate the "snapback mechanism". Iran has demanded that the United States remove the Revolutionary Guards from its terrorist list and release Iranian funds frozen in other countries such as South Korea and Iraq under US sanctions. In response, the United States says that if Iran wants to lift sanctions on the Revolutionary Guards and other related sanctions, it should ensure that its regional behavior will change. The United States also asked Iran to hold face-to-face talks with it and promised not to retaliate against U. S. officials, which Iran refused. In addition to the nuclear agreement itself, the United States has focused also on the release of American citizens held by Iran²¹. As the United States and Iran are the main parties to the Iranian nuclear issue, the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on their position on the nuclear issue is more negative. Therefore, generally speaking, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has had a negative impact on the Iranian nuclear issue. In the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the prospect of the Iranian nuclear issue is even less optimistic.

<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3594976/iranian-lawmaker-nuclear-talks-have-not-yet-reached-agreement-surveillance>.

²¹ Maryam Sinaee, "Amid Freeze in Nuclear Talks, US Calls Iran 'Sponsor Of Terrorism'," April 19, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202204196620>.