

**The 6th Broadyard Workshop**  
**Studies on Iran from International, Regional**  
**and National Perspectives**  
**May 17, 2018**

The 6th Broadyard Workshop(博雅工作坊) entitled “Studies on Iran from International, Regional and National Perspectives” was held by the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) on May 17, 2018.

The first half was presided over by Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, and the second half was chaired by Wu Bingbing, an associate professor of the Department of Arabic Language at PKU.

The first presenter Lu Jin, a research fellow of the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, discussed her own thoughts on the changes in the Iranian situation and China-Iran relations.

From 1991 onwards, Lu Jin went to Iran at least once a year, and both long-term stays and short-term visits enabled her to witness domestic development and changes in Iran over the past twenty years. Lu Jin conducted research in Iran for two months from the end of the 2017 Iranian presidential election to the inauguration of President Hassan Rouhani. She also conducted a field survey in Iran for one month after the outbreak of demonstrations against Iran’s government that lasted from the end of 2017 to the beginning of 2018. Based on her empirical observations, Lu Jin gave her reflections on the changes in the Iranian situation and the development of China-Iran relations. According to Lu Jin, intensified political conflict and an

economic downturn have doubly put the Iranian people under pressure since the second half of 2017. After US President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the Iranian nuclear deal and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, the hardliners in Iran launched a new round of attack against President Rouhani. Incidents during the armed conflict in Syria involving Iran and Israel made the Iranian people more anxious.

These internal and external troubles have resulted in this being called a sensitive period by Iranians. With Trump pursuing a “maximum pressure” policy, the Iranian government will face serious challenges of maintaining domestic stability and dealing with external threats. Under the circumstances, Lu Jin thinks that the Chinese government should adhere to the stance of maintaining the Iranian nuclear deal and utilize diplomatic resources for multi-party mediation. Meanwhile, Chinese companies should stick to the Iranian market.

Lu Jin argues that the main purpose of Trump’s withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal, ignoring opposition from the international community, was to contain the expanding regional influence of Iran. Furthermore, Trump believes that an opportunity has arisen at this moment to overthrow the Iranian regime.

After the Iranian moderates came to power in 2013, political struggles within the Iranian ruling class were gradually relaxed. For example, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former Iranian parliamentary chairman and president, and Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor in international affairs to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, joined the camp in support of Rouhani although they belong to the traditional or moderate right. However,

struggles inside the Iranian regime have intensified since the preparation stage of the 2017 presidential election, especially after the sudden death of Rafsanjani. After President Rouhani was reelected, major political factions in Iran started to make arrangements for the 2020 parliamentary elections and the next presidential election.

Lu Jin said there are three mainstream political factions in Iran. The first faction is the Moderates represented by Rouhani. Rouhani could not overcome constraints imposed by multiple forces including Supreme Leader Khamenei, senior officials of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iranian hardliners. He has made many concessions because he knows clearly that otherwise he could have few achievements in his second term. As Iranian hardliners exerted themselves to undermine Rouhani's public reputation after the US abandoned the Iranian nuclear deal, it can be fairly argued that the US withdrawal has struck a heavy blow to the pro-US Rouhani government.

The second mainstream political faction is the Reformists, which were marginalized in Iran's 2009 presidential election but re-engaged in Iranian politics after Rouhani's election in 2013 by forming a coalition government with the Moderates. Most votes in favor of Rouhani come from voters in the Reformist camp. The Reformists, who have given firm support to Rouhani after Trump stopped implementing the Iranian nuclear deal, are currently arranging to take part in the next presidential election independently.

The third mainstream political faction is the Conservatives, who have experienced a deep split since the later period of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's term.

The moderate Conservatives and Rouhani share a similar political stance. The hardline Conservatives attack Rouhani's domestic and diplomatic policies. Ahmadinejad, who represents the new Conservatives and populism, has lost influence due to pressure from a coalition of traditional Conservatives and Reformists.

Lu Jin said that another domestic problem in Iran is the supreme leader's successor.

Khamenei's heir and the Iranian political system in the post-Khamenei era are both crucial issues for Iran's future. As Khamenei's health continues to worsen, some analysts think that Rouhani is striving for the succession, while political forces against Rouhani are doing their utmost to thwart his efforts. Iran's separation of church and state and the institution of the supreme leader have consistently aroused domestic controversy. Religious figures who advocate the separation of church and state have been suppressed for a long time, and Iran's clerical faction is now at a disadvantage due to problems such as aging, so the future development of this institution is difficult to predict. In addition, there are powerful voices for amending the constitution in Iran. After a constitutional amendment in 1989, the constitution has been increasingly inconsistent with reality and thus needs changes to keep up with the times.

In addition, Lu Jin mentioned that the economic development of Iran is falling short of expectations due to factors such as the lack of vision for national development, the nation's economic structure, its governance capability, and external sanctions.

Domestically, national security has taken a priority over

economic development, because the supreme leader only attaches importance to regime stability and is indifferent to economics. Accordingly, he is only concerned with energy resources, because controlling oil and natural gas is a determinant of maintaining regime stability. The Rouhani government's action of introducing foreign capital has caused concern from the supreme leader, who fears Western ideologies entering Iran along with foreign capital. Affected by factors such as low oil prices and US economic sanctions, Rouhani has garnered few economic achievements since he came to power.

Lu Jin said the Iranian nuclear deal is favorable to Iran because it can at least ensure Iran's energy income, which would guarantee the Iranian regime's stability. According to an Iranian public report, Iran's economic corruption is mainly caused by institutional problems of decision-making, and is rooted in the administrative and executive departments. The authority of the political system is guaranteed by the sale of oil and natural gas rather than by the government's core responsibility or its investment in society. This means there is no need to improve social governance based on guidance provided by elites, and there is a lack of institutional constraints or supervision over the government, parliament and executive institutions. Perhaps given Iran's economic downturn, Trump wanted to impose pressure on Iran by withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear deal, in order to extract concessions from Iran.

The second speaker was Ding Yifan, a research fellow of the Institute of World Development at the Development Research Center of the State Council. His presentation was entitled "China's Foreign Trade and Economic Relations and

China-Iran Cooperation.” Ding Yifan mentioned that the bilateral trade volume between China and Iran grew by 20% in 2017, but still accounts for less than 1% of the total volume of China’s foreign trade. Therefore, we can see bright prospects for China-Iran trade relations, which depend on several crucial factors.

The first factor is the oil pricing mechanism. The US dollar has been used to date in China-Iran bilateral trade, and crude oil in the international oil market is traditionally priced in dollars. As the oil price in the international market largely depends on the changing value of the US dollar, it is impossible for petroleum exporting countries to maintain a stable export volume. Under these circumstances, China-Iran trade will be affected by the strengthening US dollar.

The second factor is the degree of the US sanctions against Iran. The volume of China-Iran trade has increased a lot because the US relaxed its sanctions against Iran in accordance with the Iranian nuclear deal. However, the US re-imposed unilateral sanctions, mainly financial sanctions, on Iran after the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal. Consequently, in considerable need of US dollars, Iran has suffered many negative consequences.

The third factor is the situation in the Middle East, which determines the growth of China-Iran bilateral trade. If the situation in the Middle East becomes unstable, some countries, especially Israel, will exert heavy pressure on China, which would then constrain bilateral trade between China and Iran. Therefore, the possibility of significantly developing China-Iran trade remains low even though China has demonstrated a strong

willingness to do so. China cannot control factors that would influence China-Iran bilateral trade.

Ding Yifan pointed out that China has many problems with its bilateral trade with Iran, such as the quality of Chinese goods and the image of China. Unlike what many people have imagined, China's image in Iran is somewhat negative, while goods made by Germany and other European countries enjoy the best reputation in Iran. This is a problem that requires improvement at the country level.

He emphasized that it is impossible for China to enter the Iranian market on a massive scale if Chinese goods are always considered rubbish. Iran would rather accept investment from European countries than from China. While China's negative image in Iran is caused by many lawbreaking traders, the Chinese government has not yet connected lawbreaking activities with its national image and taken measures to solve this problem.

Regarding diversity in payment methods, Ding Yifan said that China and Iran have negotiated a lot on this issue, but no measures have yet been taken. This problem still needs to be resolved. A yuan-denominated oil futures market has been established in Shanghai and developed rapidly with the participation of many Arab countries, but the degree of Iranian involvement remains unknown. He thinks that China should encourage relevant countries to eschew financial sanctions by participating in the Chinese market. Therefore, the involvement of more petroleum exporting countries in the Chinese oil market will complicate the relationship between oil and the US dollar. The growing participation of countries like Iran is needed,

otherwise both sides may lose out. From Ding Yifan's perspective, China needs the participation of more international players, including both the buyers and sellers of oil futures, to gradually develop an active and lively market and weaken the relationship between the US dollar and oil.

Ding Yifan offered some conclusions. First, measures taken by Trump after he came to power have made China realize again that trade is a means of implementing diplomatic strategies. However, for Chinese government officials, trade policy is only about trade, and they tend to separate trade from politics. This is a serious problem, because China has to play a passive role in international struggles as long as the Chinese people do not acknowledge the connection between trade and politics. It will be very difficult for China to make constructive contributions on the international stage if China does not actively use trade as a substitute for non-interference in others' domestic affairs.

Ding Yifan underlined China's current position as the world's biggest market. As a result, Trump's trade war against China will encounter wide opposition in the US and cannot be put into practice. China is the world's biggest market, so the US, European countries, and Japan cannot sever ties with China, even though their relations with China are very complicated. Meanwhile, developing countries cannot develop without China, the only country capable of making technical investments in them. Therefore, China must have an appropriate recognition of its strength. If China does not, it will be difficult for China to play a constructive role on the international stage.

With regard to the Iranian issue, Ding Yifan thinks that China and Russia should promote more cooperation with Iran,



which can maintain balance in this region. Of course, one of the biggest challenges to this cooperation is the US unilateral sanctions. Although some Chinese companies will suffer a loss under the US unilateral sanctions, there is no reason to indulge in indefinite introspection. The ZTE issue, which was discussed by many people a while ago, had emerged long before. However, it can hardly be depicted as a problem because ZTE did nothing wrong. It merely annoyed the US for its violation of US rules. In Ding Yifan's opinion, since the US is destroying the multilateral trade system, it cannot gain support from other countries. Unexpectedly, the US trade war against China has made European countries and Japan hold an improved attitude toward China because they rather admire China's capability to confront the US, which they do not possess.

Ding Yifan emphasized that China's previous foreign policy of hiding its strength is actually problematic because the world needs someone to uphold justice. China should withstand the pressure from the US sanctions, which, if China can successfully achieve, will help China gain more support in the international community. When other countries realize that China is strong enough to deter the US from coercing China, such recognition will have a significant impact on international relations.

The third presentation, entitled "Russia's Policy toward Iran under the Syria Crisis," was delivered by Prof. Wu Dahui from Tsinghua University.

Wu Dahui mentioned that while the Americans consider Russia the most reliable ally of Iran, the Russians do not share the same view. When Vladimir Putin talked about allies in his State of the Nation Address on March 1, he said that Russia

reserves the right to retaliate with all means, including using nuclear weapons, against any attack on Russia or its allies. Then Pushkov explained that Russia's allies are confined to the member states of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, while other countries would not be regarded as Russia's allies.

This expression provoked a strong reaction from Iran, as it has considered itself an ally of Russia for a long time. Wu Dahui thinks that Russia and Iran have a special security partnership in reality, which maintains cooperation with neither institutional constraints nor treaty or legal obligations, in contrast to a contract-based partnership. With regards to the counterterrorism issue in Syria, Bashar al-Assad's regime might have fallen long ago without Iranian support. Among the tens of thousands of Iranian ground troops in Syria, the number of casualties has exceeded 3,000. If we make a calculation according to the typical casualty ratio of modern war, we can conclude Iran has a force of over 30,000 ground troops in Syria. Qasem Soleimani, chief commander of Iran's Quds force, always visits Moscow before important events, and thus the counterterrorism cooperation between Iran and Russia determines the fate awaiting Assad.

Wu Dahui believes that Russia and Iran play an equally important role in the Syria crisis, but their divergences on counterterrorism in Syria may be a potential flashpoint in the future. Still in dispute is whether to liberate the whole country by force or to conduct negotiations when victory is in sight, and whether or not the future government should include the opposition. Because there is no divergence between Iran and the

Assad government, both of them regard those who refuse to lay down their arms as terrorists, and thus hope to liberate the whole Syria. By contrast, Russia, who worries that Western countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries would intervene if the war continues, expects both sides to come to the negotiating table instead of continuing fighting. Although Russia, Iran, and Turkey have dominated the Astana Peace Process, Iran has a sharp divergence with Russia on the establishment of the Syrian constitutional committee.

Wu Dahui thinks that another divergence between Russia and Iran is whether Syria can serve as an outpost for attacking Israel. The Iranian deployment in Syria surpasses the need for counterterrorism. In addition to ground force bases, missile and unmanned aerial vehicle bases have also been established, which apparently targeted at Israel. This is not what Russia wants to see.

Wu Dahui emphasized that Russia regards counterterrorist cooperation with Iran as a favorable turn in their technical and security cooperation. Russia expects Iran to purchase large amounts of Russian military equipment after sanctions are lifted by the Iranian nuclear deal. In addition, given Iran's considerable influence in western Afghanistan, Russia hopes that the two nations can work together to solve problems in Afghanistan. Russia once organized a Moscow security conference on Afghanistan, but the US refused to attend. The original Moscow-Afghanistan security conference became a conference held in Kabul to avoid too much Russian involvement in the Afghan issue. However, Iran supported Russia in holding the conference, and thus the two countries also

have special security cooperation over the Afghan issue.

According to Wu Dahui, the most active supporters of the Iranian nuclear deal at this stage are Germany and Russia. Maintaining the deal can not only help solve the Iranian nuclear problem, but also offer a platform for coordination between Russia and the European powers, which is impossible without the deal. While the relationship between Russia and the Western world has been at a low ebb since the Ukraine crisis, such a communication platform also serves to foster diplomatic ties. With regard to the Iranian nuclear deal, Russia has had close coordination with France and Germany and improved relations with them.

Wu Dahui underscored that Russia puts great emphasis on Iran's role as a major energy power in the Middle East. Both sides have signed many deals on energy cooperation, and Russia also expects to strike a deal with Iran on the mutual exchange of oil and natural gas for export. There is also a proposal for multilateral energy cooperation. Iran is considered one of the most important member states for Russia to establish a "gas OPEC." Given that China is not active in this regard, Russia needs to involve India and Iran in its plan, which, in particular, would be difficult to implement without Iran's participation. Currently, Russia is working in coalition with countries including India, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan to build up this "gas OPEC," and this project has been moving forward step by step.

Wu Dahui emphasized that these situations have shaped a highly special relationship between Iran and Russia. Although the two countries are as close as allies, they still have many

divergences. For example, after both sides signed a secret deal to allow Russia to use the Hamadan military base, Russia revealed the deal to demonstrate its close relationship with Iran. This made Iran very angry and refuse to renew the deal. Despite the alignment between Russia and Iran on the Syrian issue, Russia opposes the growing Iranian presence in Syria, especially Iran's making Syria an outpost for attacking Israel. But Russia keeps its opposition private. As the situation develops, their cooperation in Syria will be further strengthened in the future. The Iranian nuclear deal will only barely be able to survive with the insistence of Russia and the coordination of European countries. However, if Russia and Iran cannot effectively coordinate their policies in Syria's post-war reconstruction as well as their attitudes toward Israel, their counterterrorism cooperation in Syria will be harmed as a consequence.

The fourth presenter was Prof. Cheng Tong, dean of the School of Asian and African Studies at Shanghai International Studies University, whose presentation was entitled "Analysis of Hot Social Issues in Iran."

Cheng Tong pointed out that water scarcity is the major problem of natural resources in Iran. With successive years of drought, it is said that half of Iran's underground water has already been consumed and the situation will continue to deteriorate, which endows water security with strategic importance. Iran's water crisis will become much more serious in several years. Worse yet, its food security will be negatively affected as a consequence. Claiming that Iran is self-sufficient in grain, the Iranian government has attached great importance to agricultural production.

Another problem relates to Iran's population. Cheng Tong emphasized that influenced by the Iran-Iraq war and Islamic ideology, the Iranian government encouraged couples to have more babies. Now Iran has a population of more than 80 million. Population growth should fit in with economic development, otherwise a series of problems will arise. This is reflected in the following aspects.

First is the urbanization of the Iranian rural population. Because of the deterioration of living conditions and water problems, half of villages in Iran have been abandoned. Furthermore, rural hollowing and aging problems have occurred at the same time. Due to the economic downturn, cities cannot accommodate this large amount of newcomers, resulting in urban slums. As a consequence, destabilizing factors will become increasingly conspicuous in the future.

Second, in order to alleviate unemployment, Iranian universities significantly increased enrollment during Ahmadinejad's term. Now, Iran has 4 million graduates every year. One million new active job seekers are entering the Iranian market every year, but the economy under this government can only offer about 600,000 positions. As a result, many graduates join the ranks of the unemployed.

Third, the Iranian population will face an aging problem in the next ten years. Forty percent of the Iranian population is aged 30 to 65, which means that Iran will become an aging society in a decade. A demographic dividend expected from the birth of so many young people after the Iran-Iraq war will disappear rapidly.

Cheng Tong concluded by summarizing Iran's current

problems. The first problem is the population issue and water crisis mentioned above. The second problem includes external crises—mainly financial and military pressure—and domestic division due to struggles for power. Although Iran is outwardly considered a major power in the Middle East, its powerful image is actually shaped by the decline of neighboring countries. Third, while the legitimacy of the Iranian regime relies on support from ordinary people at the bottom of society, the rural hollowing as well as the extreme poverty of urban life will make them consider mullahs unreliable.

As the people at the bottom gradually get a precise understanding about vested interests, their increasingly clear minds will in turn pose a threat to the Iranian regime.

Cheng Tong emphasized that Iran's strength lies in its potential as a market and its favorable geographical location for the Belt and Road initiative. China needs stability in Iran while the US, to benefit its global strategy, wants a chaotic but still controllable Iran.

Cheng Tong forecasts Iran's turmoil and Trump's policy of stirring chaos in the Middle East is just beginning, and a decisive change will occur in the next three to five years. The pivot points are the problem of natural resources, in particular the water crisis that needs to be solved within two years, and the health of Khamenei. In addition, the present king of Saudi Arabia is over 80 years old. Saudi Arabia will probably slide into chaos when a new king comes to power after the old king's death. The whole Middle East is enveloped in gerontocracy: Putin will significantly grow old after three or five years and Israel is also ruled by old people. In addition, Trump remains a

source of problems as well. Since there are no sound solutions at this stage to these problems, China can only try its best to maintain Iran's stability.

The fifth presentation, entitled "Limited Counter-responses: A Brief Discussion about New Foreign and Domestic Policies of Iran after Trump's Withdrawal from the Iranian Nuclear Deal," was delivered by Shi Guang, an associate professor of PKU's School of Foreign Languages.

Shi Guang believes that the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal is a highly controversial topic in American society, in particular for the Democrats. Although the US was not fully supportive of the withdrawal, Trump's decision to leave resulted from Iran's expanding influence in the Middle East, after previous US measures to contain Iran failed to achieve the desired effects.

Shi Guang emphasized that Iran had prepared itself in advance for Trump's withdrawal. Compared with Obama's middle-of-the-road Iran policy, Trump has expressed a lot of unfriendly views toward Iran. As a consequence, Iran has had no good impressions about Trump and regarded Trump as a troublemaker since the beginning of his term. During French President Emmanuel Macron's recent visit to the US, the French president strived to dissuade Trump from abandoning the Iranian nuclear deal. Emphasizing that the EU did not have much time to save the deal, Macron said that the US would disgrace itself by pulling out a US-led deal. Then, after briefly visiting Beijing and Moscow, Macron issued a crucial statement.

The major points of this statement were that Security Council Resolution 2231 should be comprehensively



implemented, which is a key factor in the nuclear non-proliferation regime. France expressed regret over the US withdrawal, but said the US and France promise to discuss several important issues, hoping to work out a practical scheme in the future. These issues include: continuing to sell Iranian oil and natural gas; allowing effective banking transactions with Iran; continuing to carry out marine, land, and air links; guaranteeing support for the financial sector and insurance industry in EU countries; facilitating financial cooperation and offering support; increasing investment in Iran; supporting EU activities; and protecting the reciprocal treatment provided by Iranian laws.

Shi Guang said in recent years Iran's rise in the Middle East has caused considerable concern in the US and Israel. Iran would make Syria an outpost for a head-to-head confrontation with Israel. After taking ineffective measures for several years, the US finally withdrew from the Iranian nuclear deal. Iran has greatly reduced its military personnel in Syria. Mainly offering civilian and military aid, Iran has withdrawn most of its combat troops from the frontlines. Iran denied firing rockets directly into Golan Heights in a recent incident. On April 14, the US and its allies announced military attacks on Syria. Iran will continue to maintain its presence in Syria without deliberate provocations.

Shi Guang emphasized the mitigation of the Palestine problem amid the Syria crisis. Recently, Iran has become estranged from Hamas, which it used to support. Regarding the controversial move of the US embassy to Jerusalem, Iran has not made provocative remarks.

Shi Guang believes that dealing with a US economic offensive is a major task for Iran. Since the Iranian nuclear deal was reached in 2015, Iran has made economic issues the main priority of its government. Its second major task is to maintain the stability of its regime and deal with the pressure posed by anti-governmental forces of enemy states in the Middle East. In fact, while the media heatedly sensationalizes the situation, more than 70 percent of the news, real or fake, comes from the two major powers in the Middle East. The ineffectiveness of US efforts to overthrow the Iranian regime is due to the lack of a reliable or influential agent in this region.

In addition, Shi Guang argues that although Iran is a religious country with multiple ethnic groups, the dominant position of the Shia may help to eliminate factors that trigger domestic conflicts in other Middle Eastern countries. The small-scale turmoil in a few southwestern regions of Iran is under control, and the national security department of Iran will maintain vigilance against terrorism.

In summary, Shi Guang said the failure of the Iranian nuclear deal, which took more than ten years to reach, is unacceptable to Iran. But at the current stage, economic recovery is the focus of the Iranian government. Trump's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal indicates that US-Iran relations cannot see an improvement during his term. The dynamics of the US, Iran, and other relevant countries will inevitably have an impact on the domestic stability of Iran as well as the future of regional and global development issues.

After this presentation, Prof. Wu Bingbing led an in-depth discussion of relevant issues.

Wu Bingbing: A while ago, the US imposed sanctions on ZTE Corporation due to ZTE's sales to Iran, which could be a topic for today's discussion. After the US abandoned the Iran nuclear deal, what impact will US sanctions have on the economic, trade and financial ties between China and Iran? From the US perspective, Iran now regards Europe as a pillar of maintaining the deal and hopes that Europe can sustain economic ties after the US pulled out. If successful, this would make Trump's withdrawal a vain effort. Therefore, the US will place Europe under heavy pressure. Many American experts claim that Europe could not withstand the US pressure. If this is the case, how should China cope with the pressure from the US?

The second question is how to continue energy and financial cooperation. Europe says that a special financial arrangement between Europe and Iran should be made to avoid using the US dollar in transactions, and it wants to establish a financial institution without US involvement that only manages trade with Iran. However, whether such an arrangement could succeed is still in question. With the timely opening of the Shanghai Crude Oil Futures Exchange, there is news today that Iran and China have signed the first yuan-denominated oil contract. Under the circumstance that Iran and China conduct yuan-denominated trade, Iran may ask other trade partners to adopt the Chinese yuan to settle transactions as well. If this is the case, China is likely to become a prime target of the US sanctions.

Another question is about the military confrontation in Syria between Iran and Israel. Iran wants to make Syria a base for launching military attacks, but Russia is unwilling to accept

this idea. Making things more complicated and confusing is the emergence of fake news about Syria. To date, Israel has mounted over 40 assaults on Iranian military targets in Syria, while Iran has exercised restraint. It was not until the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal that Iran fired rockets into the Golan Heights, which is not Israeli territory. Therefore, the target for attack was chosen meticulously by Iran, considering Israel's bottom line that its territory cannot be attacked. In addition, this rocket attack confirmed the limited interception capability of Israel's Iron Dome system.

Ding Yifan: In fact, the problems for ZTE are not new. Fearful of China's 5G development, the US is dredging up old stories to deal a devastating blow to ZTE. However, the US greatly overestimates its own abilities and underestimates the strength of others. According to a report from the Financial Times, if the US imposes sanctions on ZTE, the latter's sales will decrease 38% and 18% respectively in the first two years but feel no impact in the third year. If the US bans chip sales to ZTE, the company will find an alternative source. Given that China accounts for 58% of the global chip market, it is the US companies that should feel worried about the risk of bankruptcy three years later. In addition, the level of the technology needed to produce chips is considerably overestimated. It is not true that China is incapable of making chips.

Huawei and ZTE import a large number of chips due to the cost advantage. Since only several companies in the whole world need chips, chip manufacturers must make a financial calculus. Large manufacturers like Qualcomm have the ability and money to develop technologies that attract less attention

only after they have achieved a market monopoly. This is due to the cost rather than the difficulty in developing technology. As long as Chinese leaders are determined not to leave these technologies to others' discretion, China's relevant research and development will succeed in the short term. The crux of the matter is whether or not the government is willing to provide chip companies with subsidies, because otherwise companies will suffer a loss. Therefore, the issue of chips is not an enormous difficulty.

Many people studying trade wars actually do not understand technology. Recently, more than 1,100 American economists wrote a joint letter to Trump, protesting his trade war against China. The participants include four or five Nobel Prize laureates in economics as well as four or five former economic advisers of the US government. The reason that Trump appointed Steven Mnuchin as the leader of negotiation team to China is that Mnuchin advocates that the trade war should cease at a proper time, while other officials like Peter Navarro support a tougher policy. Their divergences belong to the domestic affairs of the US. In my opinion, the trade war will conclude without concrete results, as a consequence of Trump's insistence to lose 1,000 of his own soldiers only to kill 800 of the enemy's men.

As for the future development of trilateral trade relations among Europe, Iran and China, whether the EU can withstand the heavy pressure imposed by the US depends largely on the results of the US-China trade war. If the trade war concludes without any concrete results, the EU will not allow the US behavior to continue unchecked. As long as China can cope with

the trade war, the EU will follow the lead of China. Therefore, the outcome of the US-China trade war will have an impact on the development of the international situation. Since the Europeans can only rely on the multilateral trade system to maintain the so-called justice of the international order, they bitterly detest US unilateralism, which has damaged this just international order. This is a matter of principle. Unlike the Chinese, who always weigh the benefits against the costs over principles, the Europeans attach great importance to principles. If China can stand up to the trade war, Europe will not compromise with the US.

Therefore, the development of the situation will definitely depend on US-China trade talks. Although the Americans gave the Europeans a lot of time, the US presented China with an ultimatum that would expire in June. Therefore, if the US-China trade war comes to an end, Europe will no longer follow the Americans. The crux of the matter is the trade currency. Since currency is the key to trade, this issue probably affords an opportunity for the internationalization of the yuan. Of course, the euro is the main currency for the EU to trade with Iran, but the problem is that Iran does not have sufficient euros to conduct various transactions. Therefore, we can propose that EU-Iran trade should use the yuan in addition to the euro, which should be acceptable to the Europeans. The Iranian currency is not stable, as its recent performance has indicated.

This is a repeated story in history. Our yuan was not a stable currency in the past, so we used the common currency of the European Community in addition to the US dollar to trade with Europe. After the establishment of the EU, we used both the

euro and the US dollar. However, since the US imposed unilateral sanctions on two big banks in France and Germany in 2010, the EU adopted the euro and yuan for transactions, and the previous dollar-denominated trade is all in yuan now. As a result, the yuan has replaced the dollar to become a major currency in Europe-China trade.

To a large extent, it is because of the use of the yuan in Europe-China trade that the yuan has become the world's third most-used currency. China's usage of the yuan in transactions with Iran gives Iran sufficient yuan. Therefore, the EU can propose using the yuan in addition to the euro in EU-Iran trade, which will in turn promote the growth of China-Iran trade. China can use the yuan for its investment in Iran to increase the Iranian gains denominated by the yuan, with which Iran can make more international transactions with the EU, forming a new triangle relationship that would benefit all parties except the US. In this way, we can eschew the US threat and further impair the American influence in the Middle East.

Qian Chengdan: Today's Iran has a series of severe problems, including the growing rural-urban disparity, the huge gap between the rich and the poor, and long-term economic stagnation, which is similar to the situation in the late period of the Pahlavi regime. Under such circumstances, does the existence of the Islamic regime, compared with the Pahlavi regime, still have a rational basis? I think this may be the key for us to understand Iran.

Lu Jin: I quote Ambassador Hua as saying that he believes that Iran's current situation is worse than that in the late Pahlavi period. The Iranian people are also reflecting on the question:

What has the regime brought to us? In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, people at the bottom of society who acquired land and received subsidies were the main beneficiaries. This is very important because the Islamic Republic maintains its legitimacy by subsidizing the masses at the bottom of society. After the revolution, a group of people at the bottom were promoted into the government or made a big fortune. However, their children, as Ambassador Hua says, are now more corrupt than anyone else. After a US flag was burned in the Iranian parliament, a thread was posted on the Internet saying that the children of those who burned the US flag are all living in the West. Therefore, while some people get promotions or become rich, those who benefited most from the initial revolution still remain at the bottom of society. Moreover, people at the bottom of society are living a tougher life than before. I was told by some members of the Iranian middle class that they have suffered the heaviest blow under sanctions. While the upper class can rely on smuggling, the assets of the middle class have shrunk dramatically, and the life of people at the bottom becomes increasingly difficult due to a shortage of subsidies.

Qian Chengdan: So, on the other hand, was it good for Iran's national development to overthrow the Pahlavi regime?

Tian Wenlin: The collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty at that time was the inevitable consequence of the long-term accumulation of various problems. At first, the White Revolution enjoyed the wide support of the public from top to bottom, but a series of problems occurred in the process of reform, including polarization between the rich and the poor, excessive Westernization, a pro-US foreign policy and so on,



which were unacceptable to the Iranian people. Their final choice of the Islamic path was fortuitous to a certain extent. The dynasty was eventually overthrown by the secular petty bourgeoisie as well as Islamic forces. But after the Pahlavi regime collapsed, there has been competition between the so-called secular petty bourgeoisie and religious forces. The latter, with more effective organization and more successful execution of strategy, has expelled other forces that advocate a secular path, including the opposition group now living in exile and the Islamic Jihad organization of Iran, both of which were left-wing organizations in the past. Therefore, the current path was selected by chance to a certain extent. This is the first point. Second, the current Iranian regime, compared with other regimes in the Arab world, is an Islamic theocracy. It is not a backward regime as we might imagine, but fits in with the Iranian national conditions.

In Egypt, for example, the discourse of ideology and the power of the regime are separated from each other. A religious force like the Muslim Brotherhood controls the discourse of ideology with its own set of theories of political philosophy, while both Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Hosni Mubarak lapsed into silence in this regard. Why did Egypt choose this path? Where is the commanding point of the theory? With no answers to these questions, organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood are able to criticize secular regimes frequently, making them feel compelled to use brute force for suppression.

In contrast, this problem has been solved in Iran, whose discourse of ideology and legitimacy of authority are united. Therefore, the Iranian regime is more stable than the Egyptian

one. I think this is the saving grace of the Iranian system, which can avoid unnecessary internal friction.

Third, it is said that Iran now has many problems because the people in power have deviated from their original aspirations. While they rose in rebellion against the corrupt ruling class that had caused various problems, the current regime, with a notable populist nature, emphasizes the equality of distribution and has implemented many financial policies to solve the problem of corruption. After three or four decades of development, however, the previous clerical class in Iran has become highly authoritarian, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has become the vested interest that neither Ahmadinejad nor Rouhani can touch. They are not promoting economic development, but this problem has no solution. With regard to economic policy, Ahmadinejad's policy has a notably populist flavor. Putting oil money on everyone's dinner table represents equality in the field of distribution, but it does not solve the problem of production. In contrast, the distribution of oil currency caused higher inflation and consumed the development funds accumulated in the early years of the revolution. Therefore, a populist distribution policy is problematic. Rouhani's policies, consistent with those of former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Rafsanjani, aim to solve problems by promoting privatization, but beneficiaries of such reforms are still those who hold power. This situation, coupled with external sanctions, has caused a lot of problems in Iran.

Cheng Tong: There is inherent rationality in the Iranian system. During a hundred years of development, Iran has tried a wholesale Westernization as well as a socialist path with local

Soviet regimes, both of which ended in failure. Finally, the Islamic republic succeeded, whose rationality can be proved from the perspective of historical legitimacy. The current system has achieved real independence, at least from a political aspect, rejecting both Western capitalism as well as Eastern socialism. Such genuine independence, in accord with the Iranian goal of achieving rejuvenation as a regional power, gives Iran a strong sense of pride. However, Iran cannot extricate itself from the inherent continuity of history. There are two powers within the historical framework of Iran's development: One is royal power, and the other is religious power. With social development, royal power was gradually weeded out and finally overturned by religious power. Iran's religious power has deep historical roots. After the Indo-Europeans entered Iran, they formed a fixed clerical class that kept control of the ideology.

The king had to maintain ideological independence because with a geographical location between the East and the West, Iran would always be in a state of struggle and war. In addition, there were foreign ethnic groups constantly entering this region. Therefore, Iranian society, with highly distinct class and racial divisions, can only be maintained by ideology, and the defender of ideology is the clergy, whose collapse would have a terrible impact on Iran. This problem has been fully understood by the Iranian people. Another problem is internal fragmentation. On the one hand, the masses who hold simple ideals about the Islamic Revolution exert their utmost strength to maintain the current regime. On the other hand, there is a Westernized middle class as well as vested interests whose ancestors belong to the aristocracy. At the beginning of the Iranian revolution, Ruhollah

Khomeini and other members of the religious aristocracy mobilized the underclass, who mostly came from rural areas. After the White Revolution, the urbanization process sparked riots and a backlash among the urban poor. Now the situation has changed significantly. As the Islamic Revolution has confronted difficulties, the number of people from rural areas is dropping while new vested interests have emerged. People who used to identify with the masses are becoming increasingly aristocratic. Therefore, the legitimacy of the Islamic regime has been increasingly called into question. Moreover, the aging of the initial leadership of the Islamic Revolution will engender gerontocracy. Iran's second generation of elites is currently incapable of inheriting the Islamic system. For example, though the grandson of Khamenei is now a mullah, he should have stepped up to that position a long time ago. In comparison with the Chinese system which continuously brings in new blood, the Iranian political system cannot bring about the participation of the second generation. The rigid boundaries in the Iranian clerical class, together with endogamy, enables a family's clerical title, such as priesthood, to be passed down for tens of generations. In fact, Iran implements a type of caste system, which still has an impact on Iran's domestic society. However, as mullahs' sons all become businessmen, there are no second-generation heirs in Iranian politics.

Wu Bingbing: I think such an assessment of Iran is too negative.

Cheng Tong: I am also reflecting on the reason why the Iranian system is able to continue. I think Iran's education system has a positive aspect. Every year there are many

graduates from various classes, which ensures that each field has a group of elites to form a stable team of new blood for the national system and professional bureaucracy.

Wu Bingbing: In the early days of my Arab studies, I always wanted to analyze Arab societies from the perspective of tribalism. Why is tribalism, which has existed for two thousand years, still a basis for our analysis today? Where are the changes, and what is the process of modernization? Is this a rigid and unchangeable society? In fact, this is the problem of Orientalism.

I think the current Iranian system is different from the previous one in the following aspects. First, Iran has constructed an independent ideology in the Middle East, namely nationalism masked in a coating of Islamism. The pro-left nationalism from the 1950s to the 1970s has developed into nationalism wrapped in Islamism since the 1980s. Nationalism did not fail; it gradually separated from left-wing thought and then merged with Islamism. Therefore, such nationalism contains a strong sense of pride in the Iranian nation.

While Iraq and Lebanon have gradually followed this nationalist line, Saudi Arabia is also constructing a Saudi nationalism combined with Islamism. Nationalism has changed, but it was not defeated by Islamism. This is a very important phenomenon initiated by Iran.

The second aspect involves Iran's political system. As a republic, the Islamic republic also needs to reflect Islamic ideology and values. So Iran has two political systems: an electoral system and a non-electoral one. This combination can respond to popular opinion, because in any case, Rouhani's

domestic and foreign policy is completely different from that of Ahmadinejad. In domestic affairs, Ahmadinejad implemented a populist economic policy, while Rouhani adopts a liberal economic policy. Some people think that a liberal economic policy cannot exist without liberal political and social policy, but Iran is exploring the possibility. Unique in the Islamic world of the Middle East, this system has only taken hold in Israel and Iran. Therefore, the political system of a stable Islamic republic is an original creation.

Third, I think that as a sub-state actor, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) actually links the interests of the central regime and the masses, rather than serving as a mechanism to weaken the central regime. It mobilizes a large number of Iranian people at the bottom of society through militias to support the government. Of course, it has enormous resources to mobilize the Iranian masses. This experience has been learned from by Hezbollah in Lebanon, Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, the Houthi movement, and Hamas, and is now being studied by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Under this system, the IRGC has a unique effect on ensuring domestic security and mobilization, a role which is not fulfilled in Saudi Arabia.

The fourth aspect involves regional security. With Shia's emotion and the IRGC's mobilization, Iran has established a new political organization in domestic affairs, which other Middle Eastern countries have failed to achieve with regard to regional security. Learning from Iran, UAE also set up its own armed forces in Yemen. Since this measure is very effective, UAE's control over southern Yemen is much stronger than that

of other countries.

Finally, I think it is important to recognize the role of Shia's unique religious mechanism in the Iranian system. As an artificial mechanism for top-down social governance, the Shia's hierarchy makes it highly difficult to launch a bottom-up subversive movement within the Shia community. The Muslim Brotherhood cannot do this because its top-down hierarchy is not stable. The Shia's religious system has been stabilized from top to bottom by focusing on the Shia's religious traditions and education; it is a social system that can promote the stability of the whole society. All of these factors are new, evolving out of the current situation, and are the reasons for Iran's stability from my perspective. The negative factors that you mentioned earlier also exist, but it is because the positive side outweighs the negative side that the situation of Iran is relatively better in the region as a whole. Comparing Iran with other Middle Eastern countries, we can see that the Iranian system is not an abandoned object but a model for other countries in this region to learn from.

Qian Chengdan: Is what you just said a fulfillment of the ideal of Islamic Modernism, represented by al-Afghani, more than a century ago?

Wu Bingbing: The mechanism with IRGC as a sub-state actor was first set up by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose practice, nevertheless, has never been successful. This is a problem that we need to think about. Instead of emphasizing al-Afghani's influence, the establishment of this organization after the emergence of al-Afghani's thoughts should be attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan

al-Banna. While Khomeini learned a lot in this regard from the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Jama'at-e-Islami in Pakistan and achieved success in practice, his role models for learning all ended in failure. Then why should we analyze this problem? This type of Islamic organization has three functions: providing social services, encouraging political participation, and waging military struggles. Why did Khomeini succeed but others not?

Cheng Tong: About IRGC, I have some points to add. In my opinion, there is a historical tradition as Iran has always had two armies throughout history. The Achaemenid Empire could launch military campaigns around the world because of the Immortals. The empire had two armies, namely the imperial guard and local armed forces. As an elite heavily-armed army, the Immortals were able to fight everywhere. Another historical climax occurred in the Safavid dynasty. Despite an initial position of inferiority in the fighting with the Ottoman dynasty, by the time of Abbas, another great dynasty in the Islamic period was created by combining Georgian slave soldiers with advanced Western military technology.

Although Khomeini embodied many positive factors, his belief in the necessity of an army was deeply rooted in Iran's historical tradition. With the core idea of mobilizing people through the army, he could maintain the Iranian system by controlling the army as long as the link between mullahs at the top and IRGC could be preserved. I once asked about the situation of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army (the Iranian Army). Actually, the Iranian Army is of two minds because it is the armed force left by the preceding dynasty. While the Iranian Army doubtlessly remains loyal in terms of patriotism, its



attitude toward maintaining the Islamic system is problematic. Therefore, the Islamic regime has adopted an approach of replacing senior officers in the Iranian Army with those in IRGC. In addition, the Iranian Army has always had considerable combat experience in sending military advisers during conflicts with neighboring countries. Therefore, the current regime is stable both internally and externally. The future development of Iran depends on how it manages this army.

Wu Bingbing: Historically, it is common for Middle Eastern countries to have two armies. In addition to standing armies, both Iraq and Syria have their Republican Guard while Saudi Arabia has the National Guard. Therefore, check and balance between two armies is a common tradition in the Middle East. (Question: Do nomadic tribes also have this tradition?)

It is impossible for nomadic tribes to establish a mechanism like this, because even one army would become too heavy a burden for them. Iran has kept two armies since the 7th century BC, one of which played the role of Imperial Guard to protect the monarch, like the Republican Guard in Arab countries. Instead of being an instrument for forging links with people, this army stands on the opposite side of the masses. A slave army in the Arab world is called Mamluk. Its most important characteristic is having troops from overseas, such as Georgia, Mongolia, Armenia, Bosnia and so on. Having no connections with the local community, Mamluk can completely dedicate itself to the monarch. Because Bahrain today recruits Pakistani mercenaries on a large scale to suppress its own people, a large number of Baloch people from Pakistan have

flowed into Arab countries to that end.

The biggest difference between mercenary armies and a revolutionary guard corps is that the latter does not serve the monarch but acts as a conduit for communication between the central regime and the people at the bottom of society. Due to its ability to penetrate into society, a revolutionary guard corps can support Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is an endogenous rather than exogenous mechanism created by the Lebanese people and a representative of the Shia. Without Iran, Hezbollah would also have emerged but could not be as strong, so it needs to provide social services.

As a sub-state actor, a revolutionary guard corps will generate elites when it controls significant resources, but it plays a role in mobilizing the masses and consolidating the regime, which marks the biggest difference with the ancient system. According to this pattern, for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and the Houthi movement in Yemen, successfully mobilizing the people at the bottom of society leads to becoming a sub-state actor and a powerful political force. Thus these groups must take responsibility for providing social services. This is what has happened to the Muslim Brotherhood, which has done a good job but failed to achieve sustained power. Both ancient and modern states have two armies, but the armies performed different functions.

I agree with what has just been said, that the revolutionary guard corps is more effective than the standing army in defending a regime.

Forty years have passed since 1979, and it would be an evident failure if Iran could not win over the loyalty of an army

during such a long period. Therefore, now the Iranian Army and IRGC are equally loyal to the government, but they bear different responsibilities in Iran. While nuclear and missile projects belong to the IRGC, regular military combat capabilities are held by the Iranian Army. While the Iranian Army controls special combat forces, the IRGC is in charge of domestic defense. (This division of labor is made sufficiently clear in Iran's constitution.) Moreover, the ground force, air force, and navy are controlled by the Iranian Army, but the IRGC is the provincial command post of these three armed services to safeguard domestic security. In addition, the IRGC has enormous capabilities for infrastructure construction because it needs to make money from infrastructure construction to fund its nuclear and missile projects. In contrast, the Iranian Army cannot provide such support because it is forbidden from infrastructure construction.

Wu Dahui: I just found some data from the website of the Ministry of Defense of Israel. Over the past six years, Hamas has fired 737 rocket bombs and 245 of them were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome system. According to my calculation, the interception rate is 33.2%. However, the cost of interception, \$36,000 for each rocket, is so high that Israel's interception is selective. Because detection radars can figure out where the missile is flying to and a large part of Golan Heights is uninhabited, the 737 rockets did not inflict heavy casualties. Iran fired 40 BM-27 hail rockets at a time. Not an artillery complex, these rockets are not controllable and only fly to a single target after being launched. Therefore, detection radar will figure out their impact point rapidly. If the impact point is not in a

residential area, Israel may not use the expensive interception missile. After building an interception system that covers all its national territory, Israel has the ability to intercept rockets flying to the Golan Heights and other mountain areas, but such interception is selective.

When I discussed Trump's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal with some Russians during the May Day holiday, they thought that Russia had foreseen that the nuclear deal would become problematic if Iran refused to exercise restraint in Syria. Therefore, Iran's military presence in Syria should be moderate and its military actions should be restrained. Iran's limited counterattack against Israel may have something to do with Russia's involvement in this issue. Russia expects Iran to reduce its military presence in Syria and withdraw military forces, including 20,000 Hazara armed personnel, after the completion of counterterrorist operations. When Russia suggested that unmanned aerial vehicles, but not missile troops, be deployed in Syria, Iran did not listen to Russia's advice. Therefore, officials in Putin's office said that they had foreseen Trump's withdrawal, and the US hoped that Russia could help to influence Iran. Apart from Iran's further development of missiles and insufficient restraint on the development of nuclear weapons, the more direct reason for the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal is that Iranian actions in Syria continue unchecked.

The afternoon session of the workshop was presided over by Wu Bingbing. The first presenter was Jin Liangxiang, an associate research fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies. With the theme of "Impacts of the Collective Rise of Regional Powers on Iran's Policy toward

Neighboring Countries,” his presentation discussed the Iranian issue from a regional perspective.

According to Jin Liangxiang, when many people talk about the bipolar structure or the recurring Cold War trend in the Middle East, one of their assumptions is the competition between the US and Russia in this region. Not totally agreeing with this view, Jin Liangxiang argues there is a unipolar power structure in the Middle East, and believes that after the Cold War, the US has established its strategic order in this region, which was marked by the Gulf War.

However, this unipolar structure is now facing a severe crisis, which started from the 2003 Iraq War that followed the war in Afghanistan. The two wars indicate that the US-led unipolar structure in the Middle East has entered a period full of crises. Previously the influence of regional powers, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, was relatively weak, but then a power vacuum was left due to a crisis in the US unipolar order and the US strategic contraction in the Middle East.

Jin Liangxiang pointed out three reasons for the US contraction in the Middle East.

First, the US contraction reflected a need for adjusting America’s global strategy. In particular, Obama’s Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy required the US to put more strategic resources into the Asia-Pacific region. Second, the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War have consumed US strategic resources. Now Trump also complains that the US has spent too much money in the Middle East. Third, the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War have broken the US will to meddle in the Middle East. Jin Liangxiang said that he once met an American

veteran in Hawaii, who had scars all over his body and bitterly detested the Iraq War. Obama's Middle East strategy for the US represented a contraction, and in fact, this is also what Trump is doing now. The question is: Who would fill the vacuum in the Middle East left by the US contraction? It was frequently debated in 2013 whether China would fill this vacuum. The US is ambivalent about the possibility of China's involvement. On the one hand, the US will feel itself suffering a loss if Chinese strategic resources do not enter the Middle East. On the other hand, the flow of Chinese strategic resources into the Middle East will make the US anxious. In fact, the vacuum left by America's strategic contraction in the Middle East will be filled not by China but by two other forces—Russia and the regional powers.

While the Trump administration still implements contraction as its Middle East strategy, Israel is at the core of US policies. Taking a series of actions, including the withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal, the re-involvement in the Syrian issue, and the State visit to Saudi Arabia, Trump is looking at problems from a commercial rather than strategic perspective. In particular, Trump's emphasis on the US retreat from Syria indicates that he wants to cut strategic investment in Syria and put resources into domestic infrastructure construction. As Syria has great significance for Russia to exert influence on the Middle East, Russia's involvement in Syria is defensive. Russian is not an economic great power but a military one. Considering the outstanding importance of Syria for Russia to enter the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Russia must ensure the stable position of the Assad government. Therefore,

Jin Liangxiang thinks that regarding Middle Eastern affairs, the US is implementing strategic contraction while Russia is conducting strategic defense.

Jin Liangxiang underlines that although facing different problems, regional powers are all trying to expand their influence in the Middle East. The collective rise of regional powers does not mean that the strength of regional powers is increasing. For example, Iran has many domestic problems, and the economic strength of Saudi Arabia sees no growth. However, these regional powers' influence on the Middle Eastern affairs is strengthening.

Jin Liangxiang used the five major Middle Eastern powers as examples to demonstrate the collective rise of these regional powers. First of all, Iran has had a significant impact on Iraq since the Iraq War, and both Iran and Saudi Arabia have a strong influence on Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. Meanwhile, Turkey, whose role in the Middle East has always been peripheral, interfered in the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis with a tough posture, and took advantage of this crisis to achieve a military presence in Qatar, the interior of the Middle East. This is a very important step for Turkey. In addition, Turkey has also played an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite Egypt's temporary low-profile role in Middle Eastern affairs due to various difficulties, Egypt will not resign itself to stepping down from this stage. Finally, Israel used to be trapped in its conflict with Palestine, but now its role has changed from the biggest security threat in the Middle East to an actor shaping the regional power structure, while Iran now poses the biggest threat to regional security. This is a success of Israeli strategy.

Under the collective rise of regional powers, great powers are likely to be dragged into the Middle Eastern mess. An example is Syria's chemical weapons crisis, which has reached a climax three times. The first climax occurred in August 2013. While many countries called upon the US to interfere in Syria's chemical weapons crisis, the Obama administration was unwilling to get involved. After the reported production and storage of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, the Obama administration had to make a statement that the US would intervene if the Syrian government used chemical weapons against civilians. This statement was then followed by a chemical weapons crisis. The second phase was in April 2017. The crisis arose when the Trump administration's foreign policy remained unclear. The third climax was reached in April 2018 when Trump announced the US retreat from Syria. A chemical weapons crisis happened again. Therefore, Jin Liangxiang believes that some forces do not want the US to retreat from the Middle East. Also, Iran does not want a Russian withdrawal from this region.

Finally, Jin Liangxiang talked about the impact of the collective rise of regional powers on Iran's foreign policy. He believes that the US strategic contraction in the Middle East not only provides Iran with strategic space but also imposes a strategic burden on Iran. With the ambition of becoming a regional power, Iran has encountered heavy pressure from the rise of other regional powers. Iran sometimes feels compelled to get involved in Middle Eastern affairs, and thus overreaches its national strength. Some of the Iranian participation in Middle Eastern affairs is active, but Iran is also forced to passively



accept what happens in some cases.

In the future, Iran will adopt three approaches in the Middle East. First, Iran will continue to take advantage of proxy war. Second, Iran will invest more resources in its military. Third, Iran will adhere to a religious geostrategy. Generally, great powers will use military and economic means to pursue strategic interests, but in the Middle East, religion is an important factor in relations among nations. Disagreeing with some people's opinion that the Middle Eastern problem is caused by sectarian conflicts, Jin Liangxiang thinks that religious identity is exploited by some countries for geopolitical expansion. For instance, Saudi Arabia has adopted this strategy in Bahrain and Yemen.

The second speaker was Tian Wenlin from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, and his presentation was entitled "The Middle Eastern Situation after the US Withdrawal from the Iranian Nuclear Deal."

First of all, when discussing the US impact on Middle Eastern politics, Tian pointed out that external factors exert greater influence than internal factors in this region, and the US is the most important external factor. To a certain extent, US Middle East policy determines the regional structure. Since Trump came to power in 2017, it is difficult to define his foreign policy in consistent terms, and Trump has taken several unexpected measures. The recent relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has caused a considerable stir. Although a relevant bill was passed decades ago by the US Congress, none of the previous presidents put it into practice. This time, Trump's action sparked off conflicts and caused

heavy casualties among Palestinians. Another unexpected measure was the withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal. Over the two years since the deal was signed, the other five signatories as well as American political elites have advocated for maintaining the deal. The US needed to declare its decision on whether or not to pull out of the Iranian nuclear deal by May 12, but Trump made an early announcement on May 8, demonstrating his tremendous eagerness to have it done.

Trump has repudiated almost all the Middle East policies made by the Obama administration. Obama's effort to improve US relations with the Islamic world has been seriously damaged since Trump's inauguration. In particular, the Iranian nuclear deal, the most important political legacy of the Obama administration, is now also abandoned by Trump. While Obama kept Israel at arm's length because he saw no benefits of maintaining an intimate relationship with Israel, Trump openly sides with Israel with no qualms since he came to power. Tian Wenlin pointed out two reasons for this phenomenon. For one thing, with his "America First" diplomatic philosophy, Trump considers matters only from an American perspective. Even though the Iranian nuclear deal was signed with multilateral participation, it was natural for Trump to abandon a deal he believed unfavorable to the US. For another, the principle of Trump is to treat friends better and treat enemies worse. Trump is dissatisfied with the lukewarm attitude of America's allies toward the US and Obama's active engagement with Iran, an enemy of the US. Therefore, considering the Obama administration's foreign policy abnormal, Trump determined that abandoning the Iranian nuclear deal could make US allies,

namely Israel and Saudi Arabia, feel pleased while delivering a heavy blow to America's enemy, Iran. Trump is provoking a struggle between Middle Eastern countries. He adheres to Obama's strategic contraction to avoid increasing investment, while creating conflict among regional countries to maintain offshore balancing. Provoking antagonism between Iran and the anti-Iran camp is in accord with America's plans. Because Qatar expressed pro-Iranian views, Trump incited Saudi Arabia to sever diplomatic relations with Qatar during his state visit to Saudi Arabia. To improve their relations with the US, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar purchased a large number of munitions from the US, which made Trump feel very content.

We can see from this sequence of events that America's Middle East policy has largely been pushed by Israel as well as the Israel lobby in the US. Furthermore, we can argue that America's Middle East policy is actually serving Israel. From a historical perspective, the US made use of Israel during the Cold War to confront the Soviet Union and Arab nationalism. In the post-Cold War era, Israel began to take advantage of the US to wipe out threats posed by its enemies in the Middle East, which synchronizes with the infiltration of the Wall Street financial capital into the US government after the 1980s. US policy has been steered by capital since the Reagan administration. Israel has drawn support from the US to eliminate its enemies in the Middle East, including Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi in the past as well as Assad and Iran at present. While this is a highly resource-consuming process for the US, Israel becomes the only beneficiary enjoying an improved geopolitical environment. Now, Trump is also working for Israel. The relocation of the US

embassy does no good to the US and only benefits Israel. In addition, the objective of America's Middle East policy is to profit from making the situation chaotic but controllable. Given the high-level financialization of the US economy, it is an important approach for the US to advance its interests by creating crisis in the context of financialization. Moderate turbulence in the Middle East can keep oil prices at a relatively high level, just like what happened during the two oil crises in the last century. At that time, the rise in oil prices occurred after the Bretton Woods system collapsed and the US dollar was tied to oil, which prompted many countries to store dollars for purchasing oil and thus strengthened the hegemony of the dollar. With the current rise of emerging countries, the US needs to restore the hegemony of the dollar through certain methods, and creating disturbances in the Middle East is a very good way to maintain economic hegemony.

Tian Wenlin holds his own view on the impact of the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal. Based on Trump's Middle East policy, Tian thinks that Trump's decisions might be very beneficial to China, and it could be a blessing for China to deal with Trump, whose policies will gain short-term profits for the US but incur long-term losses. What Trump is doing now seems to have a very limited negative effect on the US. Because the Arab world is deeply split and Saudi Arabia is seeking American and Israeli help, the Arab world has had little reaction to the relocation of the US embassy. After the US withdrew from the Iranian nuclear deal, Iran still adhered to the deal, which means that the US could impose sanctions on Iran while the latter continued abiding by the deal. Thus, the US is currently at

an advantage. However, Tian Wenlin believes that due to the electoral system, the policy of Western countries needs to have an immediate effect during the term in office, and thus will lead to the short-term behavior that focuses on short-term interests and emphasizes pragmatism. As a businessman president, Trump lacks long-term strategic considerations and tries to maximize America's interests in every bilateral relation. This is a defect in Trump's thinking, which has three consequences.

First of all, strategically, the US has to stretch its tentacles to every corner and dilute its strength. During Obama's term, the US considered its global strategy as a whole. With the rise of China, the US needed to concentrate its energy on containing China, and to that end built a broad anti-China front. Therefore, the US strived to improve relations with some hostile countries. For example, the US reached the nuclear deal with Iran, restored diplomatic relations with Cuba, and tried to cultivate good relations with North Korea and Myanmar. All these actions shared the same goal, namely to concentrate all efforts on confronting China. By contrast, Trump launched a trade war and imposed sanctions on ZTE, and called for imposing sanctions on Russia, which pushed Russia and China closer together. Moreover, the withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal has deepened the antagonism between the US and Iran. Confrontation with these forces at the same time will inevitably spread US strength thin. Meanwhile, the US now has poor relations with European countries. Therefore, Trump's foreign policy is worse than the multilateral foreign policy of the Obama administration.

Second, the Iranian regime is not fragile. During Iran's

confrontation with the US over the past decades, US unilateral sanctions against Iran have failed to impede Iran's expanding influence in the Middle East. US behavior has made it difficult for pro-Western factions in Iran to continue gaining domestic support. The Iranian people will not forget what the US has done to Iran, which reduces to approximately zero the possibility of achieving future detente between the US and Iran. Since all of Rouhani's foreign policies are closely tied to the Iranian nuclear deal, it is impossible for Iran to abrogate the deal. Nevertheless, the future Iranian government must adopt a hardline, anti-US posture and emphasize national security. If Iran gives first priority to security and resumes nuclear projects, this would eventually lead to a path similar to that of North Korea and bring great disaster to the US. By then the US would either face a nuclear-armed Iran or wage a local war.

Third, America's international credibility, alliance system and institutional hegemony have been severely undermined. As the global hegemony, the US can promote its interests through international institutions so as to obtain maximum benefits without provoking strong antipathy. However, America's unilateral withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal has sacrificed its relations with allies. Furthermore, exchanging institutional hegemony for immediate interests casts a deep shadow on the future of the US. This is not a bad thing for China. Although Trump's behavior, similar to that of George W Bush, brings difficulties for Chinese companies' economic activities in Iran, it also plunges the US into the Middle East mess, even the mire of war, and seriously damages both the soft and hard power of the US. It could bring China a decade-long

period of strategic opportunity.

With the theme of “Pluralistic Habits under a Compromise System: A Case Study of Iran,” the third presentation was delivered by Prof. Liu Yingjun from the School of Foreign Languages at PKU. He analyzed two specific cases in Iran: the issue of women wearing the hijab in public and the code of conduct for the Ashura Day parade.

To begin with, Liu Yingjun explained the relationship between habits and institutions. While habits are formed by internal consciousness, institutions are formed by external constraints. Compared with habits, institutions are more artificially established.

There has been a long-term struggle between habits and institutions over the issue of women wearing the hijab in public, and it is necessary to trace back the history of this issue. In the Islamic era, there were no special rules or specific regulations related to this issue, but an institutional shift occurred by the time of the Persian Constitutional Revolution and the White Revolution. For example, in order to promote modernization, the Pahlavi dynasty issued a decree forbidding women to wear the hijab in public. After the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government acted in a diametrically opposite way by repeatedly issuing decrees requiring women, including foreign tourists, to wear the hijab in public. But the issue of wearing the hijab has gone through several stages since the Islamic Revolution, three of which are relatively important. First, in 1979, the revolutionary leader Khomeini mentioned in a speech that women should wear the hijab in public. Then the Islamic parliament passed an amendment to Islamic criminal law in

1983, which made this requirement clear in the form of legislation. In 1996, another amendment specified punishments as well as criteria of imposing penalty for lawbreakers. From 1997 to 2005, the term of reformist President Khatami witnessed a more liberal social mood. But when Ahmadinejad was in power from 2005 to 2013, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution passed a decree introducing the Plans to Further Promote the Culture of Chastity. Soon afterwards, the General Culture Council approved an implementation plan for promoting chastity and the hijab, so as to put the issue of women wearing the hijab into practice. The issue of women wearing the hijab has always been highly controversial both in Iran and at abroad. In 2014, Masih Alinejad, an Iranian female activist living in exile after the Iranian Green Movement, launched a movement called “My Stealthy Freedom” on Facebook, which encouraged Iranian women to quietly take their hijab off in public and post their photos without the hijab on social media so as to promote women’s autonomy in dress. Western media, as well as some Chinese media, overwhelmingly supported this movement. In May 2014, a former Iran-based correspondent for Xinhua News Agency published an article on xinhuanet, saying that the struggle between liberalism and conservatism in Iranian society has never stopped and is such a complex issue involving Iran’s long history, culture, religion, region and classes that no simple assessment should be made. At that time, however, there were also large-scale demonstrations in Iran in support of women wearing the hijab. Currently, Iran is trying to strengthen Islamic norms, but the enforcement intensity of institutions is not absolutely invariable. There are multifaceted differences in



terms of women wearing the hijab, and situations in the north and south of Tehran can be completely different. Historically, different phenomena occurred in the Pahlavi dynasty and during the respective terms of Khatami, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani. The enforcement intensity of the regulations on wearing the hijab reflects the trend of Iran's national policies. There are different enforcement means in Iran, such as morality police and economic means, but enforcement intensity changes, which reflects the adjustment of Iran's general and specific policies.

The second case is the Ashura Day parade. As an important core of Iranian culture, this issue has a long history and involves participation of the whole Iranian people. For Iran, a Shia-dominated Islamic country, the Day of Ashura is one of the most important religious anniversaries in commemoration of the martyrdom at Karbala of Hussein, the third Shia Imam. On this day, religious observances are held throughout the country to mourn the ancient sage. Many of the young men marching in procession use iron whips with sharp blades to flagellate themselves until blood streams from their bodies, which can cause infection and death. Therefore, some Shia countries, including Iran, have imposed a ban on this behavior. The Iranian government and experts in Sharia also oppose self-harm on the Day of Ashura. While street parades were at first forbidden in the Pahlavi period, the ban was lifted in the 1940s with the prerequisite that parades had to be reported in advance. For more than a century, over 20 leading experts in Sharia have proposed a ban on self-harm and bloodletting. The current supreme leader Khamenei has also made it clear that serious physical harm is against the Islamic spirit and should be banned.

Therefore, from the Persian Constitutional Revolution to the modernization transition and to the post-Islamic Revolution era, successive governments have all opposed the self-harm of some Iranians on the Day of Ashura. However, this phenomenon has not yet become extinct, which also demonstrates the long-term struggle between institutions and habits. In recent years, the international and geopolitical structure faced by Iran has been highly complicated. In order to avoid linking Islam to bloodshed and preserve Iran's international image, the Iranian government has banned self-harm on the Day of Ashura. According to Prof. Liu Yingjun's summary, the special mourning and extreme behavior of the Shia that institutions try to curb have persisted without being eradicated for complex reasons. The actors are usually young men with little education who have no awareness of the international impact of their behavior. The deeper reason is that Iran, including the Shia, has constantly been subjected to foreign invasions and cultural integration. As a result, the Iranian people have generated a tragic mentality, hoping to mourn the miserable collective memory of the past by self-harm. In the contemporary world, the US-led West holds a hostile attitude toward Iran, and other regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, are competing with Iran. Therefore, the Iranian people have a strong sense of crisis and the Ashura Day parade becomes an outlet for Iranian collective awareness. In addition, those who are dissatisfied with the current Iranian government also take advantage of the parade to make appeals. All these factors have limited the effectiveness of the ban issued by the Iranian government.

Prof. Liu Yingjun concluded that from these two cases, we

can see that the interaction between habits and institutions in Iran is determined by many profound factors. The beliefs of Shia Islam have played a dominant role in ideology ever since Iran's transition from its agricultural era to its modern era. The Iranian government is capable of maintaining the stability of Iranian society. In the face of citizens' demand for modernization, institutional and theoretical innovation within the system is supposed to be the main path of Iran's political development. During the long-term struggle between institutions and habits, one force rises while another falls. In the decades after the Islamic Revolution, Iran's experts in Sharia have made constant efforts to reach a compromise between conflicting social habits in Iran.

The fourth presenter was Sun Hua, a former Iran-based journalist of the Shanghai-based Wenhui Bao, and his presentation was entitled "Observation of Tactical Changes in Iran and Turkey under Evolving Bilateral Relations." From the perspective of the media, he briefly reviewed Iran-Turkey relations after the victory of Islamic Revolution and reflected on the changes in their bilateral relations over the past two years.

First of all, both Iran and Turkey are geopolitical powers. Since the second half of 2016, the political and economic relations between the two countries have seen an improvement. Despite increasing interaction and cooperation, divergences still exist, which in essence demonstrates the antagonism of their strategic objectives. Therefore, in the future Iran-Turkey relations will fall into strategic competition. Sun Hua divided the development of Iran-Turkey relations into three stages. In the first stage from the victory of Islamic Revolution in 1979 to

2002, the political system established by the Islamic Revolution changed the development path of Iran and influenced the evolution of the regional structure. Iran-Turkey relations were mostly confrontational and went through a sensitive period for the 24 years, with occasional short-term cooperation.

This situation resulted from the comprehensive impact of roughly four factors. The first factor is ideology. Iran's new regime began to export revolution and thus caused panic in Turkey and other neighboring countries. In September 1980, the then Turkish Chief of the General Staff Kenan Evren launched a successful coup, turning a domestic crisis into an international incident. As a result, Iran's export of revolution, on the one hand, and Turkey's coup, on the other hand, intensified the confrontation and competition between the two countries. With an upsurge of Islamism among the Turkish people in the early 1990s, the Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan won the general election and formed a coalition government, which gave rise to a short-term improvement of relations with Iran. For example, Erbakan chose Iran as the destination for his first state visit and signed a large energy deal with Iran. But their bilateral relations soon deteriorated due to another coup mounted by Turkish secular political elites and military generals, with ambassadors recalled and diplomatic relations demoted to charge d'affaires. On the Iranian side, after Khatami came to power in 1997, his policy of downplaying ideology and strengthening realism again pushed Iran and Turkey closer together.

Second, economic development requires promoting bilateral relations. In 1983, Turgut Özal won the general election and

became the prime minister of Turkey. He made economic reconstruction the top priority and declared Turkey's neutrality during the Iran-Iraq War without participation in the sanctions against Iran, which became the political prerequisite for Iran to develop relations with Turkey.

Third, changes in Turkish domestic politics also affected bilateral relations. While Iranian politics maintained continuous stability under the regime of the Islamic republic, the political situation in Turkey changed frequently. After Ozal's death in 1993, his successor Süleyman Demirel served as the president of Turkey for 7 years, during which Turkey had five prime ministers successively covering six terms and the position of non-religious pro-Western forces in the leadership was strengthened. As a consequence, Iran-Turkey relations weakened with economic and trade exchanges declining, and the Turkish media took up a stronger anti-Iranian stance.

Fourth, changes in Turkish diplomatic relations have an impact on bilateral relations. With strong continuity, Iran's foreign policy became more realistic after Khomeini's death. But affected by the international structure and domestic politics, Turkey's foreign policy was subject to change. During the terms of President Ozal and President Demirel, Turkey gave priority to developing relations with the US and other Western countries, while relations with Iran were put in a trivial position of no importance. In the middle and late 1990s, Turkey made great efforts to foster its relations with Israel and allowed Israel to enter Turkish airspace through the Mediterranean Sea. According to Sun Hua, the conflicts between Iran and Turkey in this period were mainly demonstrated by the antagonism

between Islamism and secularism, the differences in the two countries' political systems, the competition for regional influence, and the divergence on their relations with other countries, especially great powers. The conflict also involved the two countries' support of domestic terrorism in the other country.

During the second stage from 2003 to 2015, Iran-Turkey relations warmed up rapidly but then cooled down. In 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the prime minister of Turkey, inaugurating the Erdogan era. With a turning point marked by the 2011 upheaval in the Middle East, especially the Syria crisis, this 12-year period was separated into two small phases. From 2003 to 2010, as their bilateral relations developed rapidly, the two countries continuously grew closer together. Turkey took a very cautious approach at first. For one thing, it had no intention to damage its previous diplomatic achievements in relations with the US and other Western countries. For another, it had concerns about domestic secular forces. As for Iran, though the reformist government tried to downplay ideology, it was still enthusiastic about the Turkish Islamic government. The two countries ushered in a period of amity and peace and grew closer together with the promotion of factors involving regional changes. For example, the two wars after the September 11 attacks imposed an increasing sense of insecurity on the two countries. Both of them opposed the Kurdish independence that would tear Iraq apart and showed vigilance against the US military presence. After coming to power, Erdogan implemented a regional policy framework based on a series of factors, such as common security, political dialogue, bilateral economic and

trade ties, and cultural connections, which enhanced the cohesion of Turkish people and political parties. Turkey increased its regional involvement and returned its focus to the Middle East, and both Iran and Turkey behaved prudently due to a lack of mutual trust while they also hoped to strengthen exchanges and chose cooperation areas with pragmatism. In 2004, the two countries entered a new stage of deepening cooperation and mutual trust in four fields: security, economic and trade cooperation and energy, nuclear issues, and politics. The second small phase is from 2011 to 2015, when the Iran-Turkey relations suddenly cooled and became stiff but unbroken. The upheaval in the Middle East intensified competition between external powers in this region. With America's strategic contraction, Russia returned to the Middle East, which formed a sharp contrast between the declining US control and growing Russian influence in the Middle East. While the US became estranged from its regional allies, Russia got closer to its regional partners. Meanwhile, with changes in relations among regional countries, the Islamic State expanded its influence. In this context, Iran-Turkey relations entered a new phase. First, the two countries waged a tit-for-tat struggle on the Syrian issue. Second, they were engaged in a secret battle in Iraq. Third, they held an antagonistic attitude toward the Islamic State. Iran pursued a strategy of resisting the enemy outside the country, while Turkey implemented a policy of appeasement and concealment in front of the enemy. During this period, Turkey and Iran's bilateral relations worsened but did not rupture. After Rouhani won the 2013 election, high-level visits and contacts between the two countries increased, leading to an improvement

of bilateral relations in 2014. The “Muslim Brotherhood Crescent” formed by Erdogan was cut off and Turkey fell out with Saudi Arabia. In response, Rouhani intended to improve Iran’s relations with neighboring countries. The Middle Eastern upheaval shows the limitation of observing and forecasting Turkey-Iran relations from an ideological perspective, because the antagonism between the two countries over the Syrian issue is essentially a conflict of strategic objectives. After two wars, Iran gradually established its position as the leader of the Shia in the Islamic world. As for Turkey, although the Justice and Development Party had concealed its Islamic tendency in the beginning by maintaining good relations with the West, Erdogan considered the Middle Eastern upheaval a good opportunity to popularize its model, which served as the starting point of Turkish policy.

The third stage started in 2016 and continues until now. The attempted coup in Turkey marked a turning point in the warming of Iran-Turkey relations, and both sides have the need to improve their relations. Therefore, it is a practical imperative that accelerates the pace of adjustment. Facing refugee problems, political crises, and security threats, Turkey has proactively made diplomatic adjustments, including normalizing bilateral relations with Israel and improving relations with Russia. As for Iran, the Iranian nuclear deal turned out to be fruitless as the Rouhani government failed to transform it into a badly-needed economic boost. However, getting closer to Russia, especially after Russia’s military interference in Syria, has given Iran an obvious advantage in regional security issues. For one thing, Turkey needs to adjust its foreign policy to



improve bilateral relations. For another, Iran places hopes on Turkey's role in the Iranian nuclear issue and thus has made adjustments. Seeking common ground and setting aside differences, the two countries have strengthened coordination. Despite their different stances in specific issues, the two countries still have a willingness to seek peace and increase their efforts in coordinating their actions. On the Syrian issue, Turkey and Iran have achieved a mutual understanding and made concessions. On the Iraqi issue, the two countries hold opposite intentions but share a consensus on preventing Kurdish independence. With regard to their relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia, the two countries still act in their own way. In addition, the two countries promote close cooperation in economics and trade. By 2014, Turkey had become the fourth largest trading partner of Iran.

In conclusion, the wide divergence between Turkey and Iran at both the tactical and strategic levels is essentially the antagonism of objectives. At present, the two countries are neither enemies nor friends, and they will have a long-term strategic competitive relationship in the future. However, competition does not exclude cooperation, and their problems are still controllable. Therefore, the two countries will together explore a new pattern of regional countries solving regional problems in the future.

### **Discussion Session**

Wu Bingbing: Trump's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal is generally favorable to China. How can these benefits play out?

Tian Wenlin: To begin with, Middle East studies must face the question of how to treat Iran. If we adopt American standards, we will emotionally develop an aversion to it. How we view these countries and what stance we adopt should be based on our interests. Our attitude toward Iran is irrelevant to whether the Iranian theocracy is good or bad, or whether Iran complies with us or not. What really matters is that this country has distracted America's attention, which lays a base for the period of strategic opportunity we mentioned before. The American invasion of Iraq after the September 11 attacks was not instigated by us. We objectively enjoyed the period of strategic opportunity instead of actively promoting it. Second, Iran's situation deserves our sympathy. Helping Iran not only brings us benefits, but also accords with moral principles. While Iran has difficulty with its economy, China is good at economic and trade cooperation. We can ensure normal economic and trade exchanges with Iran and provide help for Iran's oil trade, which is of great help to Iran.

Lu Jin: This morning I elaborated on the necessity of China helping Iran, which in itself is based on a moral stance. However, companies tend to ignore morality and only care about their own profits. The withdrawal of France's Total from Iran yesterday was an unwise decision, and the EU has clearly declared its stand. Many Chinese people thought that China National Petroleum Corporation would take Total's stakes given the tripartite cooperation between Total, China National Petroleum Corporation, and Iran. In order to tie the Europeans down, Iran asked us to bring Total in, but now France has run away. Should we take its stake? I just heard that China National

Petroleum Corporation would not do it while some people said the opposite. I cannot confirm. In the process of operations, enterprises will only behave based on their interests without considering national strategies. As the government neither provides compensation and subsidies nor shares risks and losses, we have experience and lessons that loss can come unexpectedly. When comprehensive financial sanctions were imposed in 2011, only Chinese companies chose to remain in the Iranian market. The Iranian people think that we had considerable gains during the sanctions, but this is not true. After sanctions were lifted, preferential policies were all given to the West but not to us.

Therefore, we made heavy sacrifices but gained only a few benefits. Carrying out projects in Iran requires massive expenditures, which are difficult to meet without the support of a banking payment system. The second difficulty is that our major projects all have Western equipment, which would be affected by sanctions. If the US re-imposes sanctions, we will still lack sufficient funds. Since Iran will not do us a favor, once our projects miss a deadline, our companies will be fined for violating the agreement. Considering all these lessons drawn from our previous experience, should we venture to follow the same disastrous road now? When it comes to the interests of companies, things become very difficult because everyone is pursuing profits.

Qian Chengdan: According to my superficial understanding of the Middle East, besides problems among countries, there are many other factors, such as religion and ethnicity. The differences and conflicts between religions, ethnicities,

countries, and regions are inextricably intertwined. Which one of these factors would determine the future direction of this region?

Ding Yifan: Prof. Qian posed a very good question. When considering intricate and complex problems, we must focus on the major conflict and its major aspect so as to solve the problem. The principal conflict in the Middle East is about the great power struggle, while ethnic and religious conflicts have persisted for thousands of years without evolving into large-scale ethnic cleansing and war. The intervention of great powers sparks off conflicts, and great powers also take advantage of these conflicts. In particular, as the Middle East was carved up by European powers after World War I, the US inherited the imperialist practice of creating ethnic and religious conflict so as to maintain its local advantages. Although today there seems to be a variety of outstanding conflicts, it is great powers that have ultimately provoked these tensions. Since the US possesses great strength in the great power competition, the major conflict is the great power struggle, and the major aspect of the major conflict is the US, which considers the Middle East to be a means of controlling other countries. The Middle East is the world's energy depot and the transportation hub of global trade routes. Therefore, whoever controls the Middle East will control the lifeblood of potential rivals. Only from this perspective can we understand why the US is willing to interfere in this region. The US mainly relies on Israel to create instability and maintain control over the region, thus controlling the lifeblood of its rivals such as China and Russia. If the problem caused by the US factor is solved, other factors would be easier

to deal with. For example, religious conflicts are unlikely to become unmanageable.

Qian Chengdan: I accept Prof. Ding Yifan's view. A military expert should make his main target clear. If the US realizes that China is a challenge, it should concentrate its attacks on China. Stirring up trouble in the Middle East is to hit out in all directions under threat from all sides, which is a military taboo and a stupid action.

Tian Wenlin: The Trump administration lacks strategic thinking. The US has a grand strategy, which requires the US presence in the Middle East with military bases and American allies. To portray Iran as an enemy in all aspects through various means is part of the US grand strategy. What the Trump administration is doing now is like trying to squash fleas with all five fingers but failing to kill even one. This is not a reflection of the US strategy but a special state of the current government. With an unreliable president who has a lot of stains on his reputation and faces constant judicial investigations, many decisions are made due to domestic politics. In other words, Trump hopes to remove his burden by shifting attention from domestic issues to foreign affairs. Therefore, now many of the US foreign policies are irrational and unreasonable. The major goal of Trump's behavior is to lift his own burden. This is not a rational move.

Tian Wenlin: I totally agree with Prof. Ding Yifan that ethnic and religious conflicts are not the crux of the Middle Eastern problem. As Henry Kissinger said, the Middle Eastern issue is a modern problem instead of an ancient one. The great power game is the main external factor. From my perspective,

the country that did the greatest harm to the Middle East is the UK, who divided the complete geopolitical domain of the Middle East into a number of small states through the Sykes-Picot Agreement after the World War I. The fragmentation of political domains is the root of the Middle Eastern problem. Moreover, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 that announced British support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine sowed the disastrous seeds of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That external forces can easily meddle in the Middle East is due to the internal frictions between the Middle Eastern countries. As the root of all Middle Eastern problems, the fragmentation of geopolitical domains cannot be solved. Therefore, my general perception of the prospects for the Middle East is relatively pessimistic.

Jin Liangxiang: I believe that ethnic and religious issues have been exaggerated. The greatest impact on the Middle East is exerted by its fragmentation. The geopolitical location of the Middle East, which is called the meeting point of three continents and five seas, is of extreme importance. This is also the reason why the business of Middle Eastern airlines is flourishing and booming with a large number of people transferring flights there. The important geographical location also drives a lot of people to scramble for this region. This is an advantage for a unified empire whose influence can radiate outward, but serious problems will emerge when the empire breaks into pieces. In the late period of the Qing Dynasty, China faced the same fate as Ottoman Empire, but Chinese political elites maintained the unification of China under very difficult circumstances, while Ottoman Empire was dismembered by the

British. Another factor is religion, a type of ideology and values, which has been politicized in my opinion. Now Saudi Arabia and Iran are using religion, rather than military and economic means adopted by the US and Russia, to expand their sphere of influence in the Middle East.

I also want to talk about the security of Chinese enterprises in the Middle East. Over the past decade, with the fast development of Chinese enterprises and major economic and personnel exchanges, almost no security problems have occurred because of the mutual trust between us and the local people. We show no disrespect for others' religious beliefs.

Student: What is the role of State-owned enterprises (SOEs) in advancing Chinese interests in the Middle East? Will SOEs and the central government recruit more intellectuals with professional backgrounds into the decision-making circle for policy planning?

Ding Yifan: What you said is indeed a defect. The behavior of our enterprises is market behavior that follows the changes of the market. Sometimes State-owned enterprises also serve as the executive unit for national cooperation. While SOEs have no strategic consideration in this region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also lacks a comprehensive means to achieve its objectives and puts little effort into designing China's international strategy, which is very regrettable. Now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to catch up and has established many advisory committees, but it still lags behind the US Department of State and the UK Foreign Office. In the future, our think tanks may be able to offer good ideas. After all, both the US government and enterprises rely on think tanks.

Therefore, it is impossible for enterprises to conduct research by themselves. In the future, both enterprises and governments will entrust research work to think tanks. They will pay the think tanks to provide research reports, and then decide whether or not to adopt their suggestions. This is more likely to be the future trend.

Sun Hua: Prof. Lu, what does the nuclear deal bring to Iran? What benefits does China gain from the nuclear deal?

Lu Jin: I disagree with what you said about the Iranian nuclear deal being fruitless for the Rouhani government, because it lifted the UN sanctions against the Iranians, for whom national dignity is very important. Beginning in 2002, the Iranian nuclear talks had always tried to avoid UN sanctions and thus adopted an approach of “one step back, two steps forward” at critical moments, insisting that no UN sanctions should be imposed. The four UN sanctions were a matter of national dignity for the Iranian people and also caused considerable inconvenience to Iran in the international community, such as Iran’s inability to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. If there was no benefit, the Iranian people would have abandoned the nuclear deal long ago. As a wise man, Khamenei began to promote the conclusion of a nuclear deal before Rouhani took office, but the problem was that Westerners, who were unwilling to accept the hardline Ahmadinejad government, refused to make a deal with Iran. After Rouhani came to power, the Americans opened direct negotiations with Iran. The nuclear deal is so important for Iran that it cannot withdraw from the deal at this moment. If Iran could find any method to overcome difficulties in 2011, it would not sign the deal. But now Iran has



no choice. Despite the termination of international financial sanctions and the fairly high oil prices, the deal has failed to improve the domestic situation. This is why Iran cannot pull out of the nuclear deal. Once lifted, the UN sanctions can still be reimposed, which is a crucial issue for Iran.

After the US waged two wars in this region, Iran re-planned its foreign policy, pursuing regionalism and expanding its regional influence in order to elude containment. The nuclear project is part of this plan, which aims to make Iran a globally influential country. Ahmadinejad's policy incurred sanctions and irritated Khamenei, which is a matter of Iran's dignity. Without the Iranian nuclear deal, Iran's oil revenue would be zero. Iran is a country propped up by oil revenues, which only account for a third of Iran's GDP but are the biggest source of income for the regime. The fact that the masses win no benefits does not mean that the country gains nothing. With sanctions lifted, the country begins to have earnings even though the masses gain no benefit. The inequality in distribution makes the interest groups richer.

Cheng Tong: With the Iranian nuclear deal signed, the legitimacy of the Iranian government has been recognized by the UN, which signaled that business with Iran is allowed. This is a prerequisite. A large number of Chinese and European tourists in Iran have brought money because they pay in cash during their vacations. So, the breakthrough created by the Iranian nuclear deal can be exploited to develop tourism. With the development of tourism and transportation, the economic situation in Rouhani's term will be improved.

Student: How can we understand relations between the Trump administration and the Israel lobby? And how do their

relations influence the recent US policy?

Tian Wenlin: Here I have a book written by John Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, which put a very clear interpretation on this issue. The author worries that US foreign policy is increasingly manipulated by the Israel lobby. Also, I want to add a point that Mao Zedong said in the 1960s that the US belongs not to the American people but to monopolies and financial capital groups. I wrote an article last year, entitled “War and Peace in the Era of Financial Capitalism,” which elaborates on this issue in detail.

I want to use the last minute to talk more about area studies. A student just said that translation should be strengthened. In this regard, I totally agree with Prof. Cheng Tong’s view that our area studies should draw lessons from others at first, but instead of building our work on the foundation of Western research, we should adhere to the Chinese stance, Chinese school, and Chinese style. Much of Western social science is based on an idealistic view of history. This is an outstanding problem in many of the books that we have introduced over the four decades of reform and opening-up. Therefore, to strengthen area studies, the studies of history, politics and economics are all very important. Only by synthesizing several aspects can we have a relatively comprehensive understanding of a certain country.

### **Conclusion**

Qian Chengdan: I have gained great benefit from today’s discussion and also learned a lot of new knowledge. I have a keen interest in new knowledge and believe that our area studies require a broad base of knowledge. By broadening knowledge, your research on a certain point, region, or country will benefit

greatly. Today we discussed many important issues. Some of them are basic theoretical issues, and some are specific technical and practical issues. After the meeting, we will sort out every presenter's presentation exactly as it is in detail and make a summary. In the future, we will consult you about various issues and we look forward to your further support.