



December 31, 2013

Diplomat Back in Iran After Exile in the U.S.

By [THOMAS ERDBRINK](#)

TEHRAN — One of Iran’s most prominent former diplomats, an ally of President Hassan Rouhani, has returned to the country, ending his unofficial exile in the United States, state news media reported on Tuesday.

The former diplomat, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, who for many years was the spokesman of Iran’s nuclear negotiation team, left Tehran for Princeton University in 2009 after hard-liners accused him of espionage during earlier rounds of nuclear talks with European powers.

“I have returned to Iran to stay,” he was quoted as saying by the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency, during a commemorative event for the death of the mother of Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

It was unclear from the news accounts of Mr. Mousavian’s return what role, if any, he might play in the current nuclear negotiations or in other government affairs. But the publicity given to his homecoming suggested that Iran’s top leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, remained confident in Mr. Rouhani’s handling of the nuclear negotiations, which have resulted in a six-month partial freeze of Iran’s nuclear activities in exchange for the relaxation of some Western sanctions on the country.

The six-month deal, reached on Nov. 24, was intended to give negotiators in Geneva more time to reach a more comprehensive agreement that could end the decade-long dispute over the Iranian nuclear program, which Iran contends is for peaceful purposes but the West and Israel contend is a cover for developing the ability to create weapons.

Iranian negotiators and their counterparts from the United States, Russia, France, China, Britain and Germany, the so-called P5-plus-1 countries, ended a 23-hour meeting aimed at completing the technical details of the six-month deal, which is to be carried out in late January.

One of Iran’s negotiators, Hamid Baeidinejad, was quoted by the Iranian Student News Agency as saying that a mutual understanding on the procedure to carry out the accord had been

reached but that all parties now needed formal agreements from their governments.

At Princeton, where Mr. Mousavian was a [research scholar in the Program on Science and Global Security](#), he also acted as an unofficial Iranian government representative, answering queries or commenting for international news media about the nuclear program and the prospects for improved relations between Iran and the United States. It is unclear whether he also met with representatives of the United States government.

Mr. Mousavian was a member of the 2003-5 nuclear negotiation team led by Mr. Rouhani, who was then the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. Mr. Mousavian's future turned uncertain in 2007 when [he was arrested](#) after the president at the time, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, accused him of having leaked information to his European counterparts.

He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for "endangering national security" but was allowed to travel to the United States. Two of his former close associates, sentenced to 10-year terms under similar charges, remain in Evin Prison in Tehran.

Analysts expect Mr. Mousavian, who held several important posts, including that of ambassador to Germany, to remain an Iranian voice in its public diplomacy.

"He has been wanting to return since June, since the election of President Rouhani," said one acquaintance of Mr. Mousavian, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because Mr. Mousavian still has hard-line adversaries and the matter remains delicate. "The fact that he is back in Tehran now shows the political environment is perhaps more receptive to him."