

Krystal Continued: An inside view of Iran

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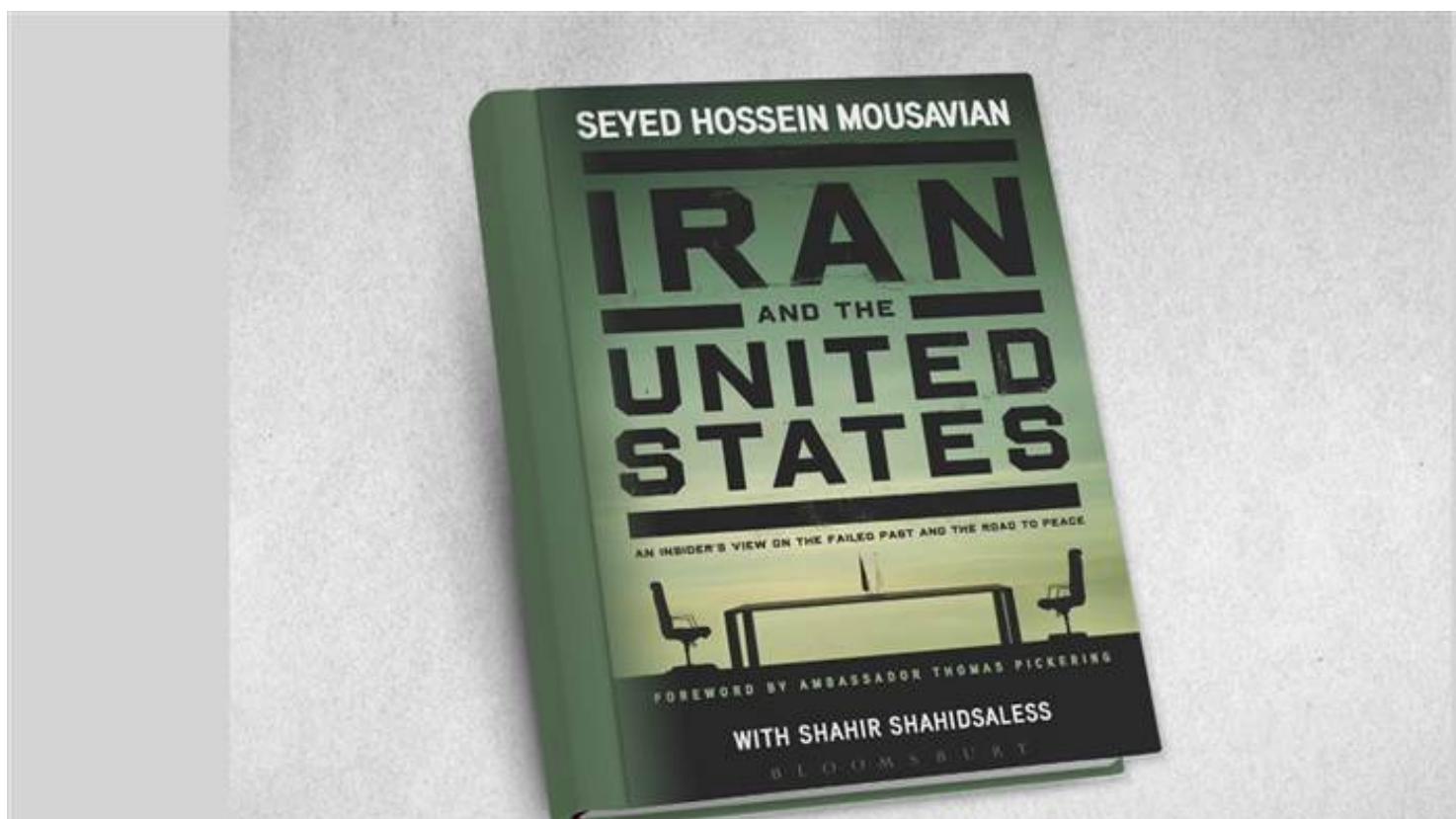
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By Krystal Ball (/person/krystal-ball)

To understand the questions of the present, we have to look to the answers of the past. U.S. relations with Iran carry a long and complex narrative that is overflowing from decades before.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian served in Iran's Foreign Ministry, was an advisor for their national security council, and worked with current Iranian president Hassan Rouhani. His extensive knowledge of the area and their foreign relations with the U.S. led to his latest work, Iran and the United States: An insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace.

Krystal sat down with the ambassador to discuss the path for a peaceful relationship between the superpowers.



Krystal Ball: Do we have any other English book on the Iran-US relations that provides the perspective of a Iranian point of view?

Ambassador Mousavian: Actually when I came to the US in August 2009, I tried to investigate whether there was a book on two major conflicts, the nuclear and Iran-US relations from the lens of Iranian policy and culture. If not all Western scholars or Iranian Americans who have written about Iran and the US, either they have not had a chance of extensive period living in Iran and/or they have not had immediate access to policy-making system of Iran. I had an opportunity to live in the US in the 1970's till the revolution with the Shah, to do my undergrad. Then for 30 years I lived in Iran. I worked in Parliament, Foreign Ministry, and mission to Germany, National Security Consult. I did my PhD in the UK; I really felt this was a unique opportunity, a person who has lived with Americans-five years here meeting with hundreds of scholars, think tanks, and journalists, to discuss and to understand the US point of view. Discussing with Europeans to understand the European point of view. Because the west is more US and Europe, then I decided to write these two books. I have tried to explain that the US point of view on conflicts like terrorism, human rights, nuclear weapons of mass destruction, peace process, and Israel-and at the same time, I have tried to present Iranian point of view, how the Iranians see the US and the US policies.

Krystal Ball: Can you describe the difference in power between the President and the Supreme Leader? Is the Supreme Leader distrustful of the US?

Ambassador Mousavian: By the constitution, the Supreme Leader is ultimate decision maker on foreign policy. But the system is really interesting you see the nuclear policy during Khamenei I was a member of the nuclear negotiation team. Iran had a very different nuclear policy. Iran was cooperating with the IAEA, even for a period of confidence boosting we suspended the enrichment, we implemented the additional protocol, we were very transparent. With the same leader, during another president Ahmadinejad- Iran had a very different nuclear policy. You would see two very different policies on one issue, where you have the same leaders. This is because the process of decision-making is very different. It's not far from the US system. You have a National Security Counsel; all major political and security issues are decided in National Security Counsel. My experience says during Ayatollah Khomeini leadership, he has approved over 95 percent of the decision made by National Security Counsel. And very rarely has he vetoed. Iran and the US is probably the most interesting example. The Iranian leader has maintained his distrust to the US since the early days of his leadership. But what I have explained during the period of Rafsanjani presidency, 1988/1989 to 1997, and then Khatami

from 1997 to 2005, and even Ahmadinejad. We have three presidents 8 years, one moderate, one reformist, and one conservative. I have explained by details many events the Iranian government have approached the US for normal relations.

Krystal Ball: America and Iran currently have shared interests; do you believe there is a real possibility of an agreement?

Ambassador Mousavian: Despite of mistrust, the leader has maintained during the last 24 years, he has never prevented that administrations go for rapprochement with the US. And he has publically mentioned that although I do not publicly trust the US but if you believe that for direct negotiation on nuclear, on Iraq, on Afghanistan... go ahead. The recent issue is about Iraq. But we should not forget under president Khamenei after September 11 terrorist attack the US invited Iran to cooperate on the War on Terror and it was Iran and the US who cooperated to remove the Taliban. And the Iranian leader did not prevent it. And when Bush invaded Iran by Axis of Evil, he told the president look I told you I cannot trust them. You went ahead with it and they rewarded you with Axis of Evil. Some months ago on Geneva Two it was agreed with US and other countries that Iran would participate. The leader had the same opinion- I will not prevent you can go ahead but I do not trust them. And when the UK and US declined Iranian attendance, he said look I told you from the beginning. Therefore if there is a political will to Washington, I believe Iranians are ready for bargaining.

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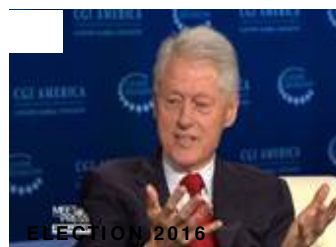
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