

## Seyed Hossein Mousavian: Iranian expert, former diplomat

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Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a research scholar in the Program on Science and Global Security at the Wilson School, originally studied engineering, but he is probably most known for playing an important role in the 2003 and 2015 negotiations around Iran’s nuclear program.

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His career plans changed during his undergraduate years at Sacramento State University.

“It was in 1979, two months before the Revolution, that I got one semester break in order to go back to my country and see what was happening,” Mousavian said, describing when he returned to Tehran and witnessed thousands of people protesting in the streets against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

“Practically two months after my arrival, the Revolution was over and the Shah had left the country. I was involved in politics inside my country during and after the Revolution,” Mousavian said.

This experience led him to pursue a career in international relations and diplomacy.

Mousavian has been a visiting research scholar at the University since 2009. He also serves as a member of the International Panel on Fissile Materials, a panel of nuclear weapons experts that receives support from the University.

“Dr. Mousavian deserves as much credit for the 2015 Iran deal as do the key U.S. negotiators,” co-director of the Program on Science and Global Security Frank von Hippel said. “Mousavian helped explain the thinking of Iran and made it clear there was more than one stream of thinking.”

Harold Feiveson GS '72, co-principal investigator at the University's Science and Global Security program, noted that since Mousavian has lived in Iran and the United States, he has been able to experience both nations' policy.

“In understanding the Iran point of view, he adds a very valuable element of understanding what's possible and what should be done,” Feiveson said.

## **Education and Early Career**

Mousavian studied at the Iran University of Science and Technology, Sacramento City College and Sacramento State University, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science in engineering in 1981. In 1998, he received a master's degree in international relations from the University of Tehran and a Ph.D. in international relations from the University of Kent in Canterbury, England, in 2002. He completed his postdoctoral work at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

In 1980, Mousavian assumed the role of editor-in-chief of the Tehran Times Daily, an English-language international paper published in Tehran.

After the Revolution, the original editors of the newspaper fled the country and there was no one to manage the paper. Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, the head of Iran's judiciary at the time and a member of the Council of Revolution of Iran, asked Mousavian to fulfill the role.

“It was practically the first experience I ever had on journalism, but because I had studied in the United States and knew English, they wanted me to go to the paper,” Mousavian said.

## **Diplomatic Career**

In 1983, he was appointed chairman of the Parliament Administration Organization by then-Speaker of the Parliament Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who later became President of Iran. In 1987, Mousavian became the Director General of West Europe at the Foreign Ministry of Iran, handling interactions between West Europe and Iran.

In 1990, Dr. Mousavian was named Iran’s first Ambassador to a united Germany, arriving three days after the reunification.

He helped release two German hostages held by Hezbollah from 1990 to 1993 and contributed to the largest humanitarian exchange of hostages between Israel, Hezbollah, Iran and the Western powers.

“The German chancellor was the mediator, and on the Iranian side I was the contact point,” Mousavian said.

As the principal negotiator in the exchange, Mousavian met with the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, for four hours in Syria. Nasrallah agreed to the exchange, so Mousavian put the chancellor of Germany in touch with him.

As a result, a German delegation managed to finalize a deal with Hezbollah, Syria and Israel in Lebanon.

In 1997, following the murder of four Iranian dissidents at a Berlin restaurant in 1992, German investigators who thought the Iranian government might be complicit in the attacks asked for Mousavian to be recalled to Iran.

The Iranian Embassy in Germany did not respond to a request for comment.

From 1997 to 2005, Mousavian was head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's Supreme National Security Council under President Mohammad Khatami. He obtained international recognition in 2003, when he was the spokesman for Iran during its nuclear negotiations with the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

“We told them clearly that Iran was open for a comprehensive, transparent nuclear program and we didn't want anything beyond a non-proliferation treaty,” Mousavian said.

Iran also was willing to accept limits on enrichment and reprocessing as confidence-building measures, he said.

“The Europeans understood our position and were willing to make a deal, but the United States was opposing the legitimate rights of Iran under the non-proliferation treaty,” Mousavian said.

Ultimately, the deal fell through, and after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, tensions began to escalate as Iran expanded its nuclear program and the United States imposed sanctions.

Both the E.U. and the International Atomic Energy Agency declined to comment.

From 2005 to 2007, Mousavian served as the Foreign Policy Advisor to the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran. He then served as the vice president of the Center for Strategic Research for International Affairs under Hassan Rouhani in Tehran from 2005 to 2008. Mousavian said he was the deputy to Center for Strategic Research chief Hassan Rouhani, who later became President of Iran in 2013.

In 2007, two years after the election of Ahmadinejad, Mousavian was arrested and jailed for allegedly providing classified information to Europe without government permission.

“It took me a year to be cleared of espionage charges,” he said. “But, nevertheless, because I was opposing Ahmadinejad's foreign and military policies, the court deprived me of a diplomatic post and I left Iran in 2009 as a result,” he explained.

## **Inside the Ivory Tower**

In 2008, Mousavian attended a conference in Beirut and met Wilson School professor Daniel Kurtzer, who was a former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State on Middle Eastern Affairs.

“We had dinner together, and Dan told me that he would welcome me if I decided to go to Princeton University,” Mousavian said.

Kurtzer was able to get Mousavian to join the University in 2009 as a result of a collaboration between the Wilson School and the Liechtenstein Project for Self-Determination at the University.

Kurtzer was not available for comment.

Mousavian also chose to leave Iran because Ahmadinejad won re-election in 2009.

“I knew that if I wanted to stay in Iran, I would have to sit at home, so I decided to go to Princeton,” he said.

While at the University, Mousavian has authored numerous articles and books about Iran and the United States, including “Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir,” which compares the Iranian and Western perceptions of the crisis.

“It was the first book ever that explained the Iranian point of view and contains a package I proposed for resolution of the nuclear crisis,” he said.

He also wrote “Iran and the United States, An Insider’s View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace,” which contains both the Iranian and Western points of view on Iran’s history.

“This was again the first book that explained the Iranian perspective on the United States and the history of Iran-U.S. relations after the Revolution,” Mousavian said.

The book enables the reader to compare both perspectives and decide who is right and wrong, Mousavian explained. It also contains a roadmap for peace between Iran and the U.S..

“Dr. Mousavian has been an invaluable addition to the Princeton community,” Research Scientist at the Program on Science and Global Security Zia Mian said. “He offers a uniquely informed and engaged perspective about Iran, Iran-U.S. relations and Middle East politics that commands attention around the world.”

During the 2015 Iran nuclear negotiations, Feiveson said Mousavian would talk regularly with the Iranian negotiators, like Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and several American negotiators.

“He played a very valuable role in the negotiations,” Feiveson said.

Currently, Mousavian is giving interviews, attending seminars and writing articles to promote his roadmap for peace.

“Frankly speaking, there is no time for me to relax, as I have to go to many conferences inside and outside the United States,” he said.

For example, he will sit on a panel in Abu Dhabi alongside General David Petraeus GS '85 GS '87 on November 15.

Feiveson and von Hippel said Mousavian is a great asset for the University, and that his personality makes him very easy to work with.

“He comes across as very fair-minded, and he understands the points of view of Western countries,” Feiveson said.

Von Hippel noted Mousavian's enthusiasm, openness and energy, saying that those qualities make it a pleasure for his colleagues to work with him.

“He is always ready to share with colleagues and with students his deep knowledge and understanding of policy making processes and diplomacy between Iran and the United States, Europe and the Middle East on nuclear issues and regional security,” Mian said. “His door is always open to those who want to learn about and understand these issues.”

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