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Iran Review > Interviews**The State of Public Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy**

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Interview with Seyed Hossein Mousavian**Former Iranian ambassador and former member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team**

Seyyed Hossein Mousavian is a former Iranian ambassador and former senior member of the country's nuclear negotiating team. For long years, he has been single-handedly shouldering a heavy burden, which under normal circumstances and in advanced countries it is burdened on several think tanks and former senior officials of those countries' foreign ministries. Mousavian's good knowledge of various fields of Iran's foreign policy, including West Asia, Europe and Americas, has caused him to be considered without a doubt as worthy of carrying the title of the master of Iran's public diplomacy. The most important part of the effort launched by Mousavian in past years has been to explain and elaborate on the nature of Iran's realistic foreign policy, whose priority is to maintain stability in the West Asia region. The international character and profound impact that Mousavian has on those media, which analyze Iran's foreign policy, are outcomes of this very important effort. Let's hope that Iranian policymakers and decision-makers would make coherent plans to take advantages of potentials that exist in this field and pay special attention to importance of this form of diplomacy.



What follows, includes the answers that Hossein Mousavian has given to three questions asked of him about the level of Iran's public diplomacy.

Q: What is your opinion about the current state of Track II (public) diplomacy between Iran and the United States?

A: Under the current circumstances, the Israeli and Saudi lobbies in the United States are more unified, efficient, and active than ever against Iran. In order to counter Iran in the region, Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries in the Persian Gulf have established think tanks and study centers in Washington; have paid hefty sums of money to prominent lobby institutions in the United States; have transferred some people with dual nationality from other countries to Washington and supplied them with a lot of money; have formed numerous Track II groups; have established active contacts with mass media; and have taken various measures to prepare the public opinion, politicians and the scientific and academic centers for hostile measures by the US administration, including by inviting them to their country.

On the opposite, there is no effective and determining lobby and "track II diplomacy" between Iran and the United States, or at least, if such lobby exists, it is weaker and less efficient than ever. Even those Iranians with dual citizenship, who on their own discretion make efforts to counter the existing sanctions and pressures against Iran and modify the US public opinion, are not supported and are even under mounting pressure from lobby groups affiliated with Israel, Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries that are active against Iran.

Q: What are the most important obstacles on the way of pursuing and taking advantage of the Islamic Republic of Iran's track II diplomacy potentialities?

A: The main reason [why this form of diplomacy is not used by Iran] is that the Islamic Republic establishment basically does not believe in the necessity of having a lobby in the United States and has never pursued a serious plan in this regard. Therefore, some efforts that have been made in this respect have been generally occasional and unremarkable efforts.

I believe that the most important obstacle is that the importance of this issue has not been correctly understood by the totality of the Islamic establishment of Iran, and officials are not fully aware of how effective track II diplomacy and

lobbying in the United States could be. Even people like [Iran's incumbent Foreign Minister] Dr. [Mohammad Javad] Zarif, who are well aware of this issue and know effective ways to use it, do not enjoy adequate support and backing inside the country to be able to put their plans and ideas in action.

Q: What solutions you propose for improving the state of this form of diplomacy during President Hassan Rouhani's second term in office?

A: There are many important solutions in this regard of which I enumerate six important ones:

First: There must be domestic consensus about the importance of this issue. Without domestic consensus, it would not be possible to make an impact and in some cases, it may even backfire.

Second: We need a comprehensive plan which would be supported by all Iranian organs and there must be national coordination about its implementation. This is not a task that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could pull off singlehandedly.

Third: The third factor is to take advantage of the huge potential of the Iranian community in the United States most of whom have dual nationality. The majority of that community believes in the need to deescalate tensions between Iran and the United States and are opposed to imposition of sanctions on Iran. Tens of thousands of Iranians are working in different fields in the United States and have good connections through which they can be effective, and are ready to serve their country without expecting anything in return. However, in view of the dominant atmosphere inside the country, which does not believe in tapping into this humongous God-given potential, Iranian expatriates in the United States are not willing to take the risk.

Fourth: The people of America must be also taken into account. There are many Americans who believe that hostility toward and using sanctions and pressures against Iran are not to the benefit of the United States and, therefore, welcome improvement of relations with Iran. This potential must be taken advantage of, especially within framework of track II diplomacy.

Fifth: Shoring up relations among people in various fields like tourism and sports as well as scientific and academic fields can be very helpful in introducing Iran in a correct way to the American society and do away with the venomous propaganda against the Islamic Republic. Most American tourists returning from Iran are influenced by the country's culture and realities and once back in their country, they tell everybody that the Iran that they have seen is much more different than the Iran introduced via American media.

Sixth: We must take advantage of the potential provided by American media outlets. There are many independent media crews and correspondents, who will publish positive and effective reports after traveling to Iran and getting familiar with the realities of the Iranian society and interviewing officials. A number of articles written by Mr. Zarif and published by mainstream American media, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, have widely reverberated and been very effective.

Almost concurrent with Mr. Zarif's article in the *New York Times*, Mr. Fareed Zakaria, who is a very famous media personality in the United States, wrote an article for the *Washington Post* titled "[How Saudi Arabia played Donald Trump.](#)" Saudi media were enraged at the common line of thinking followed by Zarif and Zakaria. This came despite the fact that Mr. Zakaria had written his article without any contact with the Iranian side and only on the basis of his political conviction in order to defend national interests of the United States and his writing was in the same direction as that of Zarif, whose article meant to defend Iran's national interests. This is that huge potential, which exists in the American media and to which due attention must be paid.

The democracy that exists in Iran is not comparable with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. Iran's true and positive confrontation with terrorism in the region is also not comparable with the negative role that Saudi Arabia has been playing. Along the same line, Iran's positive role in regional stability and security cannot be compared with Saudi Arabia's destructive role in this regard. These three issues have been also the main axes of anti-Iran propaganda. Therefore, why Iran must appear so passive in the face of all destructive measures that are taken by Saudi Arabia?

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