

Former Ambassadors Discuss U.S.-Iran Relations and the Nuclear Deal



Maggie Denoon '20

DECEMBER 1, 2017



Former diplomats Thomas Pickering, left, and Seyed Hossein Mousavian, right, discuss “U.S. – Iran Relations and the Nuclear Deal,” with moderator Emad Kiyaei, Professor of International Affairs. Photo: Nancy L. Ford

Two former diplomats and experts of foreign relations visited Hamilton College on Nov. 30 for a discussion on U.S.–Iran relations and the nuclear deal. [Thomas Pickering](https://www.brookings.edu/experts/thomas-pickering/) (<https://www.brookings.edu/experts/thomas-pickering/>) and [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](https://www.princeton.edu/sgs/faculty-staff/seyed-hossein-mousavian/) (<https://www.princeton.edu/sgs/faculty-staff/seyed-hossein-mousavian/>) answered questions from moderator [Emad Kiyaei](/news/story/former-american-iranian-council-director-emad-kiyaei-named-linowitz-professor-international-affairs) (</news/story/former-american-iranian-council-director-emad-kiyaei-named-linowitz-professor-international-affairs>), the Sol M. Linowitz Visiting Professor of International Affairs, and from the audience.

Pickering is former U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs and ambassador to the United Nations, the Russian Federation, India, Israel, and Jordan, and Mousavian is former Iranian ambassador and research scholar at Princeton University.

The event opened with an examination of the nuclear deal from U.S. and Iranian perspectives and their justifications. Pickering criticized the current administration under President Trump for campaign promises focused on destroying the deal. He commented that this was a case of “the uninformed leading the uncaring.” If the United States were to violate or end the agreement, it would damage, perhaps irreparably, the ability to change the agreement or strike future deals. He noted that even U.S. intelligence agencies had confirmed that Iran had scrupulously abided by the agreements made under the deal.

Mousavian addressed the reason for opposition from Iran. Iranians opposed to the deal view it as much harsher than usual nuclear non-proliferation treaties and want the deal to be more similar to other similar agreements. While this is a legally sound argument, Mousavian says it is not a realistic vision. There is a lack of trust on both sides and so a standard non-proliferation agreement would not work.

He also noted that many Iranians question why the U.S. is so focused on their country when they see neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia have a larger armory. Both Pickering and Mousavian see a “demonization” of Iran by the U.S. that makes diplomacy much harder.

The discussion then shifted to the future of U.S.-Iranian relations. The two former ambassadors agreed that peace and cooperation hinges on facilitating a better understanding of the two countries and their goals. The foreign policy ambitions of the U.S. can often be confusing to other countries. Most recently, the U.S. went from saying regime change in Iran is not their goal, under President Obama’s administration, to President Trump’s Secretary of State Rex Tillerson mentioning it as a goal in a public congressional hearing. But, as Kiyaei noted in his closing remarks, Iran and the Middle East have the tools to flourish, if combined with stronger diplomatic relations built on mutual respect.

The two speakers participated in several local media interviews. Ambassador Pickering may be heard on WIBX news/talk radio [here \(http://wibx950.com/keeler-show-notes-for-thursday-november-30th-2017/\)](http://wibx950.com/keeler-show-notes-for-thursday-november-30th-2017/), and former Ambassador Seyed Houssein Mousavian may be heard on WAMC public radio [here \(http://wamc.org/post/former-iranian-diplomat-discuss-nuclear-deal-hamilton-college\)](http://wamc.org/post/former-iranian-diplomat-discuss-nuclear-deal-hamilton-college).

TRENDING STORIES

[Hamilton Mourns the Death of Eugene Domack \(/news/story/hamilton-mourns-the-death-of-eugene-domack-1\)](#)

[The Media’s Effect on Women’s Body Image \(/news/story/the-medias-effect-on-womens-body-image\)](#)

[Food Harvest Shares With Community \(/news/story/food-harvest-shares-with-community\)](#)



[\(/assets/mmmlibrary/images/original/171130hmliran046jpg.jpg\)](#)

Charles Dunst '18 poses a question to former diplomats Thomas Pickering and Seyed Hossein Mousavian. Photo: Nancy L. Ford

CONTACT INFORMATION

Media Relations Office

198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

 315-859-4680

 [pr@hamilton.edu \(mailto:pr@hamilton.edu\)](mailto:pr@hamilton.edu)

Hamilton College

 198 College Hill Road, Clinton, NY 13323  315-859-4011