

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 16, 2023

Mr. Christopher L. Eisgruber  
President  
Princeton University  
1 Nassau Hall  
Princeton, NJ 08544

Dear President Eisgruber:

We write to you today regarding former Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) official Seyed Hossein Mousavian,<sup>1</sup> currently a Middle East security and nuclear policy specialist at Princeton University (Princeton).<sup>2</sup> Mousavian was also a recent speaker at the 2023 U.S. Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium, put on by U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM).<sup>3</sup> STRATCOM's decision to host Mousavian concerned members of the Armed Services Committees of both the House and the Senate.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, aspects of this issue trouble us as members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce (Committee).

Prior to coming to the U.S. in 2009, Mousavian worked for the Iranian regime his entire professional life. He started at a regime-connected newspaper and simultaneously served in various other governmental positions,<sup>5</sup> including as a nuclear negotiator for the Iranian regime. He went on to serve as Iran's ambassador to Germany, where he oversaw the same embassy that a German court found "served as the 'headquarters' for the planning of the 1992 assassination of four Iranian dissidents at the Greek restaurant Mykonos in Berlin."<sup>6</sup>

In recent decades, Mousavian's relationship with Iran became more complex and unclear. In 2007 it was reported that Mousavian was "accused by Iran's intelligence chief of supplying

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<sup>1</sup> Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Curriculum Vitae, <https://hosseinmousavian.com/cv/> (last visited Oct. 11, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> "Seyed Hossein Mousavian," Science & Global Security, <https://sgs.princeton.edu/team/seyed-hossein-mousavian> (last visited Oct. 11, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> "Speakers," 2023 United States Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium, <https://www.stratcomds.com/2023/speakers> (last visited Oct. 11, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Adam Kredo, *Congress Investigates US Military for Feting Iranian Official Who Bragged about Efforts to Assassinate American Leaders*, WASHINGTON FREE BEACON (Sept. 1, 2023), <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/congress-investigates-us-military-for-feting-iranian-official-who-bragged-about-efforts-to-assassinate-american-leaders/>; See Press Release, House Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives, Rogers Wicker Press STRATCOM for Answers on Iranian Propagandist Speaking Invitation (Sept. 1, 2023), <https://armedservices.house.gov/news/press-releases/rogers-wicker-press-stratcom-answers-iranian-propagandist-speaking-invitation>.

<sup>5</sup> *supra* note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Weinthal, *Iranian-Americans: Investigate Princeton Prof. for Crimes Against Humanity*, THE JERUSALEM POST (Jan. 4, 2020), <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/iranian-americans-investigate-princeton-prof-for-crimes-against-humanity-612951>.

classified information to ‘foreigners,’ ” including the UK embassy.<sup>7</sup> Although Iran deemed Mousavian as “endangering national security,” he was allowed to leave in 2009 and travel to Princeton while two of his former associates who faced similar charges were sentenced to 10-year terms in Iranian prison<sup>8</sup>. While at Princeton he maintained a persona 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 U.S.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite his supposed disaffiliation with the Iranian government, Mousavian’s ability to travel freely to the United States and act as an unofficial government representative while discussing U.S.-Iranian ties has left his relationship with the Iranian government unclear.<sup>10</sup> Other Iranian regime officials confirm that, while Mousavian left Iran, he did not cease to serve the regime. In a 2016 interview, then-Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that he did not believe “the accusations of espionage against him [Mousavian],” that Mousavian “continued to, and continues to, work hard,” for Iran, and that he “believes in, and is completely tied to, the system of the Islamic Republic and [sic] Iran.”<sup>11</sup>

But for Mousavian’s position at Princeton, it is unlikely that an individual with a such a background of support for and involvement with the Iranian regime would be invited to speak at an institution like STRATCOM. Mehrdad Khonsari, a former Iranian diplomat who is now a prominent opposition leader living in the UK, said that Mousavian used his opportunity at STRATCOM to “enhance his credentials” and “said nothing about the numerous heinous acts committed by the regime he has worked for either at home or abroad.”<sup>12</sup> Mousavian’s position on the faculty of Princeton for the past fifteen years positioned him for this opportunity and raises significant concerns about the influence of foreign hostile regimes on American institutions.

We are concerned about American universities, their employees, and the postsecondary education system providing an opportunity for nations hostile to the U.S. to exercise influence on American soil. The Committee has jurisdiction under Rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives to conduct oversight of these matters.

To inform our oversight, please provide the following documents and information (instructions attached):

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Tait, *Iranian Hardliners Accuse Former Nuclear Negotiator of Leaking Secrets to UK Embassy*, THE GUARDIAN (Nov. 14, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/15/politics.iran>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, *Diplomat Back in Iran After Exile in the U.S.*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Dec. 31, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/01/world/middleeast/ally-of-irans-president-living-in-us-returns-home.html>.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Golnaz Esfandiari, *The Iranian Politicians Rumored to Have U.S. Green Cards*, RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY (Feb. 6, 2015), <https://www.rferl.org/a/iranian-politicians-use-green-cards-political-weapons/26833829.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Kasra Aarabi, *The Future of Javad Zarif: A Foreign Asset in Waiting*, MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE, (Apr. 30, 2021), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/future-javad-zarif-foreign-asset-waiting>.

<sup>12</sup> Susannah Johnston, *Iranian Regime-Supporting Princeton Professor Pressures FWI to Mislead Public*, FOCUS ON WESTERN ISLAMISM (Sept. 7, 2023), <https://islamism.news/news/iranian-regime-supporting-princeton-professor-pressures-fwi-to-mislead-public/>.

1. Did Princeton consult with U.S. government officials regarding the hiring of Mousavian? If yes, who was consulted and what was the nature of these consultations?
2. Was the then-Obama administration directly or indirectly involved in Princeton's hiring of Mousavian?
3. Provide a list of all classes that Mousavian has taught during his tenure at Princeton and is scheduled to teach for the upcoming year.
4. Is Princeton aware of any communications between Mousavian and Iranian regime officials?
5. During Mousavian's tenure at Princeton, one of its students, Xiyue Wang, was held hostage in Iran. Given Mousavian's experience as a former high-ranking official with the government of Iran, did Princeton ask Mousavian to assist in any way for Xiyue Wang's release? Did Mousavian offer to use his contacts to try to free Xiyue Wang?
6. Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Princeton doctoral student, is currently being held hostage in Iraq by Iran-backed militias. Has Princeton asked Mousavian to assist in Tsurkov's release? Has Mousavian offered to use his contacts to try to free Tsurkov?
7. What is Mousavian's salary, and what are the sources of the funding of his salary? Do any of these sources include funding from U.S. government grants, loans, or other federal funds?
8. Princeton's Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies was founded in 2012 by a \$10 million dollar gift from the Center's namesake.<sup>13</sup> Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani is the executive chairman and CEO of the energy firm RAK Petroleum PCL, based in the United Arab Emirates. Was any part of this gift—or subsequent gifts from the Mossavar-Rahmani's, RAK Petroleum, or related entities—dedicated to, earmarked for, conditional on, or otherwise related to Mousavian's hiring by, or continued employment at, Princeton?
9. Has any gift, payment, or funding of any sort, from any foreign or domestic source, paid Mousavian's salary and/or suggested, required, or encouraged the hiring or continued employment of Mousavian at Princeton?
10. Has any gift, payment, or funding of any sort, from any foreign source, influenced any aspect of Princeton's Iran studies program?

We request that you provide answers to our questions no later than six weeks from the date of this letter.

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<sup>13</sup> Office of Development Communications, Princeton University, *\$10 Million Gift Establishes Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies*, (Nov. 16, 2012), <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2012/11/16/10-million-gift-establishes-mossavar-rahmani-center-iran-and-persian-gulf-studies>.

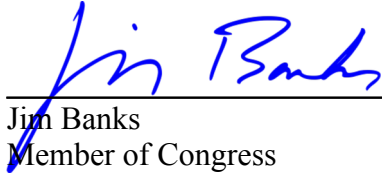
We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



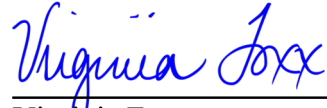
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Lisa C. McClain  
Member of Congress



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Jim Banks  
Member of Congress



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Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Education and  
the Workforce



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James Comer  
Member of Congress



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Elise M. Stefanik  
Member of Congress



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Aaron Bean  
Member of Congress



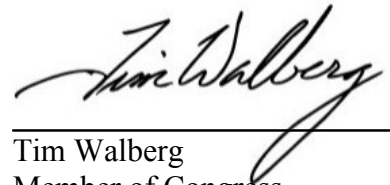
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Burgess Owens  
Member of Congress



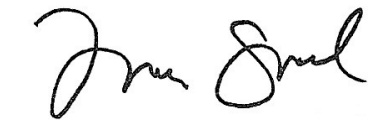
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Erin Houchin  
Member of Congress



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Tim Walberg  
Member of Congress



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Michelle Steel  
Member of Congress



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Mary E. Miller  
Member of Congress



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Bob Good  
Member of Congress