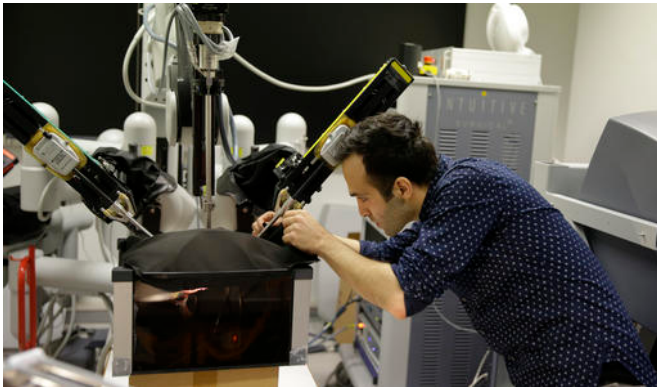


Travel ban throws research, academic exchange into turmoil

31 January 2017, by Collin Binkley



Iranian-born bioengineer researcher Nima Enayati works on a robotic surgery machine during an interview with the Associated Press at the Polytechnic University of Milan, Italy, Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. An Iranian researcher at Milan's Polytechnic University, Enayati was refused check-in Monday at Milan's Malpensa Airport for his U.S.-bound flight on Turkish Airlines after the Trump administration's executive order came down. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

Universities across the nation say President Donald Trump's ban on travelers from seven Muslim countries is disrupting vital research projects and academic exchanges in such fields as medicine, public health and engineering, with untold numbers of scholars blocked from entering the U.S.

For years, schools in the U.S. have worked to widen exchanges with scholars in the Middle East and especially Iran, known for its strength in math and science. But many academics worry those bridges are now in jeopardy because of the ban against Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya and Yemen. Some fear the U.S. will lose its standing as the world leader in research and innovation.

"It's terrifying," said Sarah Knuckey, director of the

Human Rights Clinic at Columbia Law School. "We're damaging international research, including on issues like health and medicine."

Students in Knuckey's clinic have been working with a think tank in Yemen to explore the health consequences of the country's civil war, inviting scholars to lecture and planning a conference in New York this year. Because of the travel ban, they are trying to move the event to Canada.

Research between the U.S. and the seven countries covers a wide range of fields. According to the National Institutes of Health, U.S. and Iranian researchers have teamed up to study cancer, heart disease, hepatitis and opiate addiction.

Navid Madani, an HIV researcher at Harvard Medical School, said collaboration with scientists in Iran has been crucial to her work. Much of that cooperation is now in question. One of her counterparts in Iran was scheduled to teach at Harvard this year but may be prevented from entering the country.

"I've tried to balance my anger and despair with resolve," said Madani, who was born in Iran and is now a naturalized U.S. citizen. "This is something that really has to be reversed."

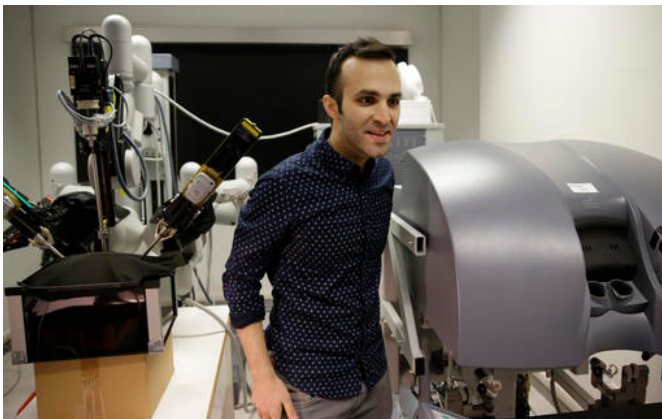
An Iranian researcher working on his Ph.D. in Italy was refused check-in at a Milan airport Monday while trying to travel to California. Nima Enayati, 29, had obtained a visa to conduct research on robotic surgery at Stanford University.

"It is rather disappointing to know that you will not be able at least physically to have more collaboration with them," he said. "And we will see how it is going to affect our work."

At Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, officials were planning to welcome the first class of Iranian graduate students into a new

engineering program in partnership with the University of Tehran. Now it's on hold because the students can't secure visas.

"These are the best and the brightest. They have made tremendous sacrifices to be able to come to the United States," said Gil Latz, the university's associate vice chancellor for international affairs. "In the stroke of a pen, their future hopes and dreams are being questioned or brought to a halt."



Iranian-born bioengineer researcher Nima Enayati stands as he works on a robotic surgery machine during an interview with the Associated Press at the Polytechnic University of Milan, Italy, Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. An Iranian researcher at Milan's Polytechnic University, Enayati was refused check-in Monday at Milan's Malpensa Airport for his U.S.-bound flight on Turkish Airlines after the Trump administration's executive order came down. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

Overall, colleges and universities in the U.S. hosted about 17,000 students from the seven banned countries last year, a fourfold increase over the past decade. Of those here last year, more than 12,000 were from Iran.

Many of the students and researchers here are now stuck in the U.S., afraid they won't be allowed back in if they leave to visit home or travel to academic conferences. Others who were planning to come here are now blocked.

Seyed Soheil Saeedi Saravi, a scientist from Iran,

said he realized a childhood dream when he received a cardiology fellowship at Harvard. He was scheduled to arrive days after the travel ban was put in place, but found that his visa is now suspended indefinitely.

"I only can say Iranians are really sad, depressed and somewhat angry," he said in an email.

In response to the ban, thousands of academics abroad have signed an online petition boycotting academic conferences in the U.S. Some conferences are being pressured to relocate outside America.

Meanwhile, dozens of college presidents have called on Trump to reverse the ban.

"This is not only unbecoming a country built by immigrants on the ideals of liberty and equality, but it is also a self-inflicted wound that will damage the very innovation that lies at the root of our nation's prosperity," said Angel Cabrera, president of George Mason University.

Nicholas Dirks, chancellor at the University of California-Berkeley, said the ban gives an advantage to countries that compete with the U.S. for scholars.

"Allowing them to replace this country as the prime destination for the most talented students and researchers would cause irreparable damage and help them to achieve their goal of global leadership," he wrote.

Some academics say the ban will simply leave the U.S. out of future research.

Caroline Wagner, who studies global collaboration in science at Ohio State University, said the number of papers published by co-authors in different countries has grown dramatically since 1990. In 2013 alone, academics from Iran and the U.S. teamed up on more than 1,000 published papers.

"International collaboration is increasingly the way science is done," Wagner said. "We cannot assume that leadership and science belong to the United

States."

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