## **Restrictions On Foreign Scientists Counter-Productive To Biodefense Research**

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## Abstract

The United States is a land created by immigration. Our strength, so we like to tell ourselves, comes from the brave and entrepreneurial people all over the world who left their homes to build a life in a new land.

This is particularly true of the scientific community. The United States serves as a training center for the most able scientists all over the world who come to acquire knowledge not available in their countries. Anyone working in medical research today knows that as many as half of the researchers and graduate students were not born in the United States. No one has objected to their brain power in developing new treatments for cancer, diabetes and infectious disease. No one until now.

The regulations rushed through the Congress as the U.S. Patriots Act puts dramatic constraints on non-U.S. Citizens, ranging from Canadian to Chinese, Indian, participating in biodefense research.

Such blanket restrictions are counter-productive and foolish. No one questions the need to protect the security of the United States. Certainly this is made more difficult given the tradition of freedom of movement within the United States. While a westerner can be tracked and followed in Iraq, an Iraqi can freely come to live and work in the United States without attracting attention. Yet are we to base policy on the fact that a person "looks" like a foreigner?

There is a mechanism in place for not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Every non-citizen working or studying in the United States is here on a visa. These visas are issued at U.S. consulates outside the country. Often stressed and under-staffed, these consulates could be re-engineered to provide meaningful security checks on applicants.

While it is true that the plurality and diversity of the United

States will always carry with it the danger an undercover operative being planted in a specific lab, the real danger is much less than it is assumed to be. First, of course, we must consider the dismal history of U.S. government employees, citizens all, caught spying for foreign powers. [Aldrich Ames, Robert Hansen.]

Second, the work done in these labs is primarily nonclassified. The fruits of knowledge in these labs are intended to be published and widely disseminated. These are not state secrets.

The restriction on foreign scientists, however, raises the ugly specter of university labs being converted into branches of the military. Will the next step be, as some fear, that research conducted with government funds will subject to publication bans thus ending the free flow of scientific information that has been the strength of the United States research community – so far the envy of the world.

While it is too facile to analogize to the Japanese detainees during World War II, and remember these were American citizens, it is not overstating to ask, where will this attempt to control "foreigners" stop? Currently there are numerous legal aliens living in the United States. Some are in the process of becoming citizens, others are here to study and intend to bring the knowledge they gained back for the betterment of their countries.

The United States has been proud to see its role in international development as one in which educational opportunities are open to all who seek the. Foreign citizens are so integrated into the U.S. research community that to arbitrarily remove them would leave a gaping hole that would hinder substantially the research going on in these institutions. References

## **Author Information**

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