

Questions for the Record from Representative Russell Fry for Simon Hankinson

Restoring Integrity and Security to the Visa Process

June 25, 2025

President Trump's Executive Order 14161 identified gaps in the visa process, called for maximum vetting, and ordered reviews of countries to determine whether a country is sharing sufficient information to ensure adequate screening of its nationals seeking to enter the U.S. The reviews resulted in visa restrictions for nationals of 19 high-risk countries.

1. Would you agree that foreign adversaries exploit our immigration system?

Yes. Most of the fraud in visa applications is committed by individuals and by organized alien smugglers, but state actors do exploit visas and the visa waiver program to insert operatives. China is notorious for using pressure or bribery to force their millions of nationals and dual nationals, and about 300,000 students and researchers here on visas, to report to intelligence agencies, steal intellectual property, and spy on academic, commercial, and military targets.

2. Is it wise to lift a travel ban for Iranian nationals, or nationals from high-risk nations, who could exploit our immigration system?

There are many foreign policy and national security considerations to balance here. Some countries have such terrible records of visa non-compliance or other abuse that issuing no visas at all might be the best policy. Chad is an example. Other countries could be more selectively targeted, with a focus on high risk sub-groups within their populations. For Iranians, while there are many who support the regime, there are also dissidents and people who strongly oppose it. Some Iranian exiles living outside Iran are deeply antipathetic to the Iranian regime. Other expatriate Iranians, for instance in the middle east and Latin America, can be regime agents and facilitators. We should try and separate the two for immigration and visa purposes, as we do with Cubans and Chinese.

3. Does Executive Order 14161 close security gaps in our visa process more effectively than the previous administration's approach, if so then how?

There has always been tension in consular affairs between efficiency and security. This led a few years ago to the self-contradictory Consular Affairs motto: "secure borders, open doors." Some politicians and State Department officials always want to prioritize speedy issuance of visas, while others want to prioritize national security and vetting. The 9/11 attacks refocused efforts on vetting and security, but slowly the pendulum swung back to speed and volume. Domestic lobbies such as employers, universities, and tourism put pressure on the government to issue more visas more quickly. The balance shifted towards issuance and speed under Obama and Biden, and towards security under Trump. EO 14161 makes clear the president's intent that national security should trump other considerations. It notes that some countries have insufficient records to keep tabs on their own dangerous citizens and cannot provide us with adequate

information to make our own risk assessments. Without that, we have to assume the risks of admitting potential terrorists and criminals. Some countries have high rates of visa fraud, overstay, and abuse – like bogus asylum claims – that should cause us to consider limiting issuances, or whether we should be issuing any visas at all.

The EO also makes it clear that we will not tolerate:

“foreign nationals who have undermined or seek to undermine the fundamental constitutional rights of the American people, including, but not limited to, our Citizens' rights to freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion protected by the First Amendment, who preach or call for sectarian violence, the overthrow or replacement of the culture on which our constitutional Republic stands, or who provide aid, advocacy, or support for foreign terrorists”

4. **Do you agree that if Executive Order 14161 and its ensuing visa restrictions had been in effect during the Biden Administration, the State Department would likely not have issued a K-1 visa to Ribvar Karimi, an Iranian national, who was issued a K-1 visa during the Biden Administration, despite reportedly having served as an Iranian Army sniper from 2018 to 2021?**

Karimi entered the U.S. legally on a K-1 fiancé visa and married American citizen Morgan Karimi (nee Gardner), within 90-days as the visa requires. Karimi failed to then apply for permanent residence. K visas, a relic of our wars overseas, are notoriously difficult to adjudicate because the relationships are hard to verify. There are many genuine K visa applicants, but there is also much fraud. Scrapping this category altogether would lower this risk.

National service is mandatory in Iran, like other countries, so Karimi serving in the army for three years isn't by itself a negative factor. Neither is his being a sniper, vice a cook or a driver. As I said above, it is possible Karimi is against the Iranian regime and could make a loyal American citizen. It's also possible, though perhaps unlikely, that he is still loyal to Iran and could be used by them in future hostile action against targets in the U.S. A careful investigation into his case by the FBI, assisted by other agencies, would be the best way to find out. The U.S. government does not have the resources to do this in every K-1 visa case.

5. **What compromises are made during the screening process when attempting to balance the inelastic tension between speed/cost and decision accuracy?**

In most cases, a short interview is sufficient. . Experienced consular officers can weigh many factors and use their experience in thousands of other similar cases to make decisions which are generally accurate. Every officer makes mistakes from time to time. We have all been fooled. Most officers I worked with were careful, scrupulous, and skilled. There are a few officers who are incompetent or who put their personal beliefs, for example a belief in a right to migrate and against border enforcement, ahead of their duty, but this is rare. Unfortunately, the State

Department makes it very difficult to discipline such officers, particularly when they are from favored identity groups.

6. What would the benefits be to a novel risk technology that could determine with a high degree of precision where potential risk lies based on an individual's answers to key security questions, in real-time, at scale?

Such technology is not novel – it has been around for decades, assessing risk for mortgages, insurance, and law enforcement, among other areas. With artificial intelligence software and other improvements, the U.S. government's ability to assess risk for individual visa applicants is vastly superior to when I first did consular interviews in 2000.

When I was at the Visa Office in 2015-2017, I identified, assessed, and recommended a new visa applicant screening technology platform for trial in the field, and posts where they could be tested. The idea in brief was a free-standing kiosk which could (a) take passport information through a scan, (b) take biometrics including a photo and fingerprints, (c) conduct a short automated interview of 20 or so basic questions, and (d) use sensors to assess physical changes that could provide a rough estimate of an applicant's veracity in answering the questions.

All this data would be collected before the visa interview. It could be collected remotely, outside the secure embassy premises, thus speeding collection and saving officer and local staff time for the actual interview. The data would be combined in a package that could be verified on the interview day using one or more of the biometrics. The data for each individual could also be analyzed to look for fraud indicators and risk factors including place and country of birth, age, occupation, family status, education, travel history, intent in visiting the U.S., relatives in the U.S. Using the massive collection of data on foreign nationals contained in all U.S. government databases, each applicant could be scored on a series of factors, and this score presented to the interviewing officer as background information.

If the applicant received a visa, information gathered subsequent to that issuance such as travel history, compliance with the visa, any asylum or immigration adjustment applications, criminal records, and any other pertinent additions could be added to the individual's case. If desired, the risk factors in some borderline applications could be used to determine an amount for a bond to be required in those cases.

7. Should Congress and the administration utilize such technology to streamline the visa process safely?

Yes, I would recommend this. In fact, I did, when I was a Senior Advisor in the Visa Office at the State Department in 2015-2017, as noted above. As far as I know, nothing was done to follow up on my efforts. In 2012, I wrote an article in the Foreign Service Journal advocating for mandatory DNA testing for all immigrant visas. The idea was not taken up, nor, to the best of my

knowledge, seriously considered or studied. I believe that if this had been instituted, visa processing times would have decreased, fraud would have declined and been easier to detect, and a database of family relationships with a decade of information would be on file to prevent future relationship fraud and speed case processing.

8. Do you think such technology could have prevent individuals who pose a national security risk and lie during their visa screening from being issued visas?

Yes. Advanced technology to assess risks and crunch large amounts of data would be a game changer. Instead of losing all the skills and experience each time an officer transferred off the visa line, that knowledge could be captured and used in assessing all future cases. In time, the accuracy of visa decisions would measurably improve. As this would be done by algorithms, accusations of bias based on national origin, race, sex, age, etc. would be hard to credit. Decisions would be made – as they should – exclusively on the basis of risk assessment as to an individual's veracity and likelihood of compliance with the visa, and considerations of U.S. national security.