



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 8, 2020

## Reports: U.S. Border Patrol Detaining Iranian-Americans for Hours

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In the aftermath of the Trump administration's assassination of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, agents of the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) at a crossing in Washington State are reportedly detaining Americans of Iranian descent.



The Washington State chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-WA) is assisting more than 60 Iranians and Iranian-Americans of all ages who were detained at length and questioned at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington.

Many more were reportedly refused entry to the United States due to a lack of capacity for CBP to detain them.

Other Iranian-Americans are about to cross the Peace Arch Border as they return back to their homes in the United States from an Iranian pop concert that was taking place on Saturday in Vancouver, Canada.

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Those detained reported that their passports were confiscated, and they were questioned about their political views and allegiances. CBP officials contacted at the Blaine Port of Entry provided no comment or reasons for the detentions.

CBP denied these reports.

The stories told by those claiming CBP detention are compelling, however.

The CAIR-WA press release recounted the following story:

Crystal, a 24-year-old American citizen and medical student was allegedly detained and interrogated for more than 10 hours with her family at the Peace Arch Border Crossing before being released early this morning. "The vast majority of people being held last night were American citizens," said Crystal. "We kept asking why we were being detained and [were] asked questions that had nothing to do with our reason for traveling and [were] told, 'I'm sorry this is just the wrong time for you guys.'"

*USA Today* published the story of another Iranian immigrant who reported being held by CBP:

Negah Hekmati, 38, an interior designer, was among those who claimed during a news conference in Seattle on Monday that they were detained by border authorities.

Hekmati was born in Iran, moved to Canada and lives in the USA. She has citizenship in all three countries and was in Canada last week on a skiing vacation with her family, including her Iranian-



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born husband, who is a computer software engineer for Microsoft, and their children.

Hekmati says all her family members have U.S. passports.

She said they were driving back into the USA around midnight Saturday and used their NEXUS fast-access border crossing card and were taken aside for secondary inspection.

Hekmati said they were held in a room for five hours as CBP officers asked them repeated questions about their backgrounds. She said only Iranian Americans were pulled out for secondary inspection while everybody else sailed through. They had their belongings taken away, including passports and car keys, she said.

“As an immigrant, I’m used to it, unfortunately. But I’m here today because of my kids. They shouldn’t experience such things,” Hekmati said. “We used to live in a country that freedom was not a very, very important thing. That’s the reason we moved to the U.S.”

Hekmati said her 5-year-old daughter pleaded with her to not speak Farsi so the agents wouldn’t take her away.

As for how far up the chain of command came the order to detain those believed to be of Iranian extraction, CAIR-WA reports that a source at CBP reported that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued a national order to CBP to “report” and detain anyone with Iranian heritage entering the country who is deemed potentially suspicious or “adversarial,” regardless of citizenship status. CBP at the Peace Arch Border Crossing did not confirm or deny this report.

In a statement, CBP outright denied any order to detain Iranian-Americans: “Social media posts that CBP is detaining Iranian-Americans and refusing their entry into the U.S. because of their country of origin are false. Reports that DHS/CBP has issued a related directive are also false.”

Notably, the CBP statement does not address whether the agency has been detaining Iranian nationals trying to enter the United States.

Washington Governor Jay Inslee is not convinced, however. In a statement, he said, “Reports are deeply alarming. Washingtonians, who happen to be Iranian-American, were detained at the Canadian-U.S. border because of their ethnicity or country of origin. This is wrong and rife with constitutional and moral problems. No one should be treated differently due to where they come from, how they look or what language they speak.”

He added the CBP’s “denial of these reports are simply not credible.”

Another source of stories of detention was quoted in the *USA Today* report:

Jorge Baron, executive director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, tweeted a thread of his experience at the border crossing after the reports of detainment.

“This evening I spoke to a permanent resident who spent 11 hrs at this ‘secondary screening’ overnight along w/ 40+ others. The only issue they all had in common ... was their place of birth: Iran,” one tweet reads.

According to a story published in GlobalNews, CBP may actually have adjusted its procedures as a result of the assassination of an Iranian general by the government of the United States: “An official speaking on background said that U.S. Customs and Border Patrol is adjusting its operations at ports of entry due to the current threat climate, among other reasons, and said they weren’t staffed to handle such large numbers of people crossing the Washington border during the holiday season.”



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For now, the amount of evidence of a policy of detaining people of Iranian descent or appearing to be so is compelling and continues to increase. The government, thus far, has denied that the bricks of evidence are sufficient to build a wall of proof of a policy.

It is certainly not consistent with American principles to punish an entire population for the acts of one man of their nationality.

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