

Paul Chu, Anthony Leggett and Warren Pickett in Iran

Breaking Boundaries and Stigma: Scientific Collaboration in Iran

In 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran, for the first time since its government replaced the Shah's government after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, came to the forefront of the international community to negotiate a deal—a deal that would limit its nuclear weapon stockpiles which it has kept hidden from the world even in the face of political isolation.

For the past 35 years, the US-Iran political relations have been strained, preventing either nation from reaching any mutually constructive resolution and has kept Iranian intellectuals, who are shielded from Western ideologies, from engaging in academic exchanges with the rest of the world. Though many of Iran's scientists and professors graduated from Western universities and their faculty and students are able to visit the US after going through harsh immigration barriers, international collaboration in the Iranian science scene has been minimal. After its massive military spending hike during the Iran–Iraq War in 1988, Iran's crippled economy has had little to spare for scientific research, receiving low priority and few resources. The

Iranian Sanctions Act of 2010 has made it not only impossible for Iranian institutions and their limited funds to purchase state-of-the-art equipment but also extremely difficult for their scientists to submit their work to Western publications.

Paranoia and hate-fuelled rhetoric without accurate information have warped both Western and Iranian depictions of one another, stopping governments and individuals from venturing into international partnerships, especially concerning science. It is no secret that science, in particular physics, lies at the heart of nuclear reactions powerful enough to devastate a country for decades. However, a group of American scientists have travelled to Iran in an effort of 'science diplomacy' in recognition of a genuine desire to work together with similar minds. They were met with the same enthusiasm, both sides eager to improve relations and promote rational, scientific thinking.

In the wake of the US-Iran Nuclear Deal, sanctions have been temporarily alleviated, setting the climate for a new era where the international community can benefit from another breed of scientists that are yet to reap its full potential.



Right to left: Nasim Akhavan, Warren Pickett, Mohammad Akhavan (above), Jill Pickett (below), Farzaneh Akhavan, May Chu, Anthony Leggett, Yasaman Akhavan and Paul Chu



Right to left: Paul Chu, Mohammad Akhavan, Anthony Leggett and Warren Pickett.