

## Researcher Arrested on Charges of Hiding His Connections to PRC-Sponsored Talent Recruitment Program From His Long-Term U.S. Government Employer

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On May 23, 2019, Dr. Turab Lookman, a decorated physicist who had been employed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for nearly 20 years was arrested for making false statements in 2017 and 2018 to U.S. federal authorities about his involvement in the Thousand Talents Program. Thousand Talents is a PRC state-run program established in 2008 to draw foreign talents in scientific fields with promises of personal compensation. LANL is a federally funded R&D center with national security responsibilities and tasked with research, design, and assessment of nuclear weapons. Dr. Lookman earned his doctorate in theoretical physics in London and established his expertise in materials science.

According to the DOJ indictment, in at least three instances in 2017 and 2018, Dr. Lookman knowingly and willfully made materially fraudulent representations to questions about his receipt of an offer to apply to Thousand Talents as well as his subsequent application to and acceptance by the program. In response to questionnaires and background checks about his recruitment and participation in the PRC program, he had repeatedly denied involvement. He is charged with lying to any branch of the federal government—which typically carries a maximum prison sentence of five years.

This indictment comes in the wake of the federal government's growing concern about intellectual property theft of U.S. technology. In late 2018, Bill Priestap, former Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division, warned the Senate Judiciary of the risks of economic espionage, stating that "China's talent recruitment plans, such as the Thousand Talents Program, offer competitive salaries, state-of-the-art research facilities, and honorific titles, luring both Chinese overseas talent and foreign experts alike to bring their knowledge and experience to China, even if that means stealing proprietary information or violating export controls to do so."

The U.S. Department of Energy (DoE), which oversees LANL, announced that it would restrict DoE employees from participating in foreign talent recruitment programs of countries it deemed sensitive during their tenure or when working under a DoE contract.

**TIP: This case is a prime example of how the risk of cross-border technology theft could implicate national security concerns. It also highlights for companies the prudence of renewing safeguards, screens, and periodic checks to promptly identify and better manage employees who are exposed to high-value information and/or at risk of poaching by private or state-backed competitors.**

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