
One on One

An Interview with Lynn Davis U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs

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As one of the handful of senior U.S. government officials charged with crafting U.S. national security policy, Lynn Davis is perpetually focused on attaching meaning to the catchall post-Cold War phrase "new world order."

From her seventh-floor State Department office suite down the hall from Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Davis maintains a cautious watch on global hot spots, recommending policy initiatives she says will contribute to regional stability.

Since assuming the job at State in February 1993, Davis has had a hand in White House attempts to contain myriad crises and diplomatic sore spots, from North Korea and China to the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and Africa.

As the State Department's senior official on arms control, Davis spearheads White House efforts to control the spread of nuclear, chemical, biological, and conventional weapons. For the past 21 months, she has been struggling to codify a conventional arms transfer policy that satisfies often-competing goals of nonproliferation and industrial competitiveness.

A former professor, think-tank vice president, and Pentagon policy official under former President Jimmy Carter, Davis is widely considered a champion for the arms control community and an irritant to those in the defense industry who seek to sell arms. She discussed her agenda with Staff Writer Barbara Opall.

Question: What is the status of the conventional arms transfer policy? When will the U.S. Government have a firm policy in place?

Answer: First of all, the Clinton administration has had an arms transfer policy from the beginning. For the past 21 months, we've been making arms transfer decisions. But, as we saw the world changing, we needed to [adapt] those decisions so that they were consistent with changes in the world.

Our approach to the thinking about security policy in the post-Cold War world has been regional. We must see how individual requests from countries in a region would support or undermine security in that region and how it would or would not contribute to the security of our friends and allies in a regional context.

Question: When will this new regional arms transfer policy become official?

Answer: The president in the coming weeks will be articulating that new policy and formally putting it in place. It will have to be signed in the form of a presidential decision directive, and exactly how and when it will be publicly articulated is still to be determined.

Question: Do you support the establishment of a defense finance facility that would allow U.S. arms manufacturers to seek government-backed financing for their export customers much in the same way that Export-Import Bank guarantees loans for commercial purchases?

Answer: We have made the decision that in the 1995 budget there will be no such facility. So the issue is whether we take [it] up as we put together our 1996 budget.

Question: Where do you stand on the issue of defense exports as a way of maintaining U.S. commercial strength, global competitiveness, and preserving the defense industrial base?

Answer: Our arms transfer decisions will not occur and are not approved simply for commercial considerations. Our policy will not evolve simply because there are commercial interests and jobs at stake or because other countries are trying to sell potentially destabilizing equipment and technologies.

Sure, we need to have an industrial base for our security. And you can contribute to that base by having export sales. But you wouldn't want to depend on export sales to preserve the industrial base.

Question: How will President Bill Clinton's conventional arms transfer policy differ from policies under Ronald Reagan and George Bush?

Answer: We look at arms transfers on a case-by-case basis against a set of goals and criteria. We take individual requests and make decisions and then we step back and look at how they may or may not compare to previous administrations. It is not a question of being different in the abstract, but a question of being sure that arms transfers serve our national security purposes.

A major difference is how we approach multilateral aspects of restraint. We believe our approach is marked by change and innovation in how to bring about restraint in the transfer of conventional armaments by making restraint multilateral and making it focused on new threats to security in the post-Cold War world.

Question: You are referring to White House attempts to put together a successor regime to the Coordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Control (CoCom). What purpose will this new regime serve in controlling the spread of conventional weaponry?

Answer: Obviously, a major element to our overall conventional arms transfer policy is the effort to put in place a multilateral approach to arms transfer restraint. The centerpiece of that is the initiative that the president outlined more than a year ago to establish an international regime that would cover both armaments and dual-use items. The regime would bring in all the major suppliers, including Russia and countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

We sought to define the goals of this new regime, again consistent with how we see threats to peace and security. Our focus in this regard is on individual countries whose behavior is such that it poses a threat to security, not only to the United States, but also to other members of the world community. Here I am referring to the rogue states of North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya.

Question: Is there general agreement on who these rogue states are?

Answer: There is agreement as to the characteristics of behavior that is of serious concern. The only issue is how we might go about describing those policies.

Question: What is the criteria for membership in the CoCom successor regime?

Answer: One is that participants would adhere to all the guidelines of other nonproliferation regimes, so that they were already supporting each other's goals with respect to restraint in nuclear, conventional, and biological weapons and technology.

Second is that effective export controls have to be in place to enable responsible licensing and trade for the items in question.

Third, countries must agree to take on the obligation that national policies reflect the goals of the regime, meaning there is no trade in armaments to rogue states and that sensitive technologies would be denied to rogue states.

Question: How do you intend to enforce the policies and nonproliferation goals of this new regime?

Answer: The CoCom regime was unique for a particular time when there was a clear and present danger from the Warsaw Pact and the need to cooperate and deny any trade in sensitive technologies and armaments. That was clear and everyone understood it and believed in it. The nature of the world has changed dramatically and there is no longer such a danger. There still are threats and it is these threats that we focus on through this successor regime.

Question: When will this regime be formally established? Earlier this year, you said it would be in place by this month.

Answer: We set target dates to keep the pressure on. Critical to the success of this regime is the participation of Russia, eventually China, and all the major suppliers. So while we wish we would already have the regime in place, we have taken major steps, and I believe early 1995 is another good target to shoot for.

Question: How does the United States intend to reward Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinians and others who have gone out on a limb for peace with Israel?

Answer: I think the American people are willing to support peace in the Middle East. They have for a number of years and I don't think this is changing. What we must do is help put in place the requisite security for each of those countries so that they can stand up to all those who are seeking to undercut the peace process. As far as what you described as rewards, we have to examine on a case-by-case basis what is necessary to reinforce the security.

We're just beginning to discuss what might be appropriate in response to the King of Jordan's ideas for assuring his security, and no decisions have been made.

Question: And Morocco?

Answer: Again, individual countries and how they might need or use our assistance is something we're in the process of examining as part of our 1996 budget review.