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Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn? An Interview with Lloyd Davis

Podcast Transcript

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Vaughan Turekian (Interviewer)	<p>Welcome to the <i>Science & Diplomacy</i> Podcast. I'm Vaughan Turekian, editor-in-chief of <i>Science & Diplomacy</i>. And today, December 3, 2014, I will be speaking with Dr. Lloyd Davis, the Stuart professor of science communication at the University of Otago in New Zealand. Lloyd is also an award winning author. His newest book, <i>Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn?</i>, comes out in February 2015.</p>
Lloyd Davis (Guest)	<p>Lloyd, this book comes out of a conference that was held in 2011, which was the same title, <i>Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn?</i> What was the motivation for this book and actually this idea and this theme?</p> <p>Okay, well I have to back up a bit and just explain a little about the Otago Foreign Policy School. It's been running since the 1960s every year, and every year they choose a new theme to do with foreign policy. It happened that in 2011 the theme that was chosen was science diplomacy. And the reason for that was that it had become apparent that so many of the issues facing the world were issues that required either a technological solution or technology or science was at the base of the problem. And so, that in some ways because these things were so enormous and transcended boundaries of countries and so forth, it required science to be an important part of diplomacy. And there was a recognition that this was important. And so, the nice thing about the Otago Foreign Policy School is that it tends to draw directives of a particular school together who would not necessarily [work] on day-to-day collaboration, but bring particular skills to a particular topic in a particular year. And this topic, science diplomacy, really lent itself to</p>

	<p>collaboration between myself and Professor Robert Patman. Robert is the head of the Political Studies Department at the Otago University and is well versed in diplomacy and so forth. And I head the Centre for Science Communication, so I'm well versed in the communication of science and its involvement in some of these large issues. So it seemed like a very nice sort of collaboration to bring both of us together and then focus on who could we bring to the Otago Foreign Policy School. Now, I have to say that the book grew out of the conference. The book isn't a proceedings per se; it doesn't represent everyone that was at the conference and it certainly...there are people contributing to the book that weren't at the conference. It was more that the conference, the foreign policy school, was the stimulus to say, hey, this is really important; let's put out a book.</p>
Turekian	<p>Thank you. So the topic that you chose, as you mentioned, was something that was beginning to be sort of percolating both in the academic community and especially in the foreign policy and the ministry of foreign affairs and other areas in the international relations community. It was a very provocative title—I remember participating in the conference and thinking this is the first time I'd seen this cast in this way, which was new day or false dawn. When you conceived of that theme—broadly speaking—what was the message that you were trying to convey or that the school was trying to convey in its relationship with how science was either more or more becoming part of foreign policy or whether or not science diplomacy really was something that was, in fact, taking that place? What was sort of that thinking there in even the theme, the title?</p>
Davis	<p>Well, you're correct that there was an impetus starting with regard to interest in the topic of science diplomacy and, in particular, one Vaughan Turekian in the United States and was leading some of the charge on that. And we were aware of this, we were aware of the developing academic interest, and it was really nascent. It was like things were just beginning. And we were also aware that there was much coverage in the newspapers and on television about some of these big issues facing the world such as health scares and global warming and arms proliferation and things like that. And the thing that was being held up as a way for solving some of these problems was science diplomacy. And it was like this was a new straw that people were grasping at, or maybe it was a stick; we didn't know. And so, the idea was really to say, well, you know, we know that science in some form or another has been involved in diplomacy for eons. But the thing is there's a particular focus on involving it now. And really was this going to be a magic silver bullet that was going to solve some of these problems or really would there,</p>

	<p>you know, business as usual, that really didn't make much difference? And that was really the reason for the provocative title; it was here's something that seems like it could be a new solution to a problem, an international problem, but really isn't an effective solution. And so, that's really what we were sort of at the heart of what we were trying to achieve with some sort of notion of bringing together people—the expertise—to look at this issue of science diplomacy and its involvement in some of the intractable problems that the world faces and really looking at the efficacy of it and really is it anything new sort of thing.</p>
Turekian	<p>And before we get to your conclusion on that—which is actually the conclusion of the book—one of the things in the book that's I think is noteworthy is that you take the chapters and build on a typology that had been sort of developed around science diplomacy, which was breaking it down into its components—diplomacy for science, science and diplomacy, and science for diplomacy—and then break the chapters down from there. Were there things within each of those topics or those theme areas or maybe in the aggregate—that strike you as both at the time of sort of preparing this and editing this volume, and since, you know, with things like Ebola and some other things around climate change that have kind of come up that sort of jump at you as sort of noteworthy to highlight?</p>
Davis	<p>Well, you're correct that we used the sort of existing classification, which had been developed by you and people at the Royal Society, in terms of a way of structuring what's involved in science diplomacy. And so, we weren't inventing or reinventing the wheel there; I think you had laid a very good basis there for what the science diplomacy encompass. And so, that was useful because it provides a structure for the book in the way the particular chapters were organized. I don't know that anything sort of really jumped out as being absolutely surprising to us given that structure because we sort of realized all the things that could be included. But I guess, as you say, some of the tensions that exist in the world and just watching how they're dealt with. Ebola is a good one because we dealt with some of the—at the conference and in the book—some of the health issues around size and things like that. And really it's a similar sort of issue is how do you get a global response to something that's quite localized but can have devastating international effects? And so, it was really trying to I guess draw on some of the lessons out of that, and on the health side it was really quite remarkable what had been achieved. Whereas on the other side of that, it was really quite remarkable what had not been achieved on the climate arena, for example. And so, in some ways, there were successes, and in other places there seemed like for all the talk, for all the diplomacy, for all the meetings, not really</p>

<p>Turekian</p>	<p>much had come out that had really changed the situation.</p> <p>So that gets to the conclusion in the book, which again you draw on the provocative title, <i>Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn?</i> Where do you come out on this in both the book and sort of in the way that you've been seeing this evolve?</p>
<p>Davis</p>	<p>Well, I think what the way we come on it is that we're a little bit on the fence. That we haven't...in conducting this review and drawing together the experts that we have, we see that science diplomacy has such huge potential. And in fact, it's not even potential; there's an absolute necessity to involve science at all levels of diplomacy and to involve diplomacy itself in the way science is conducted because science is an international enterprise now. What we didn't see...I mean we saw, as I said, great success with things that are collaborative—things like space research, building arrays to understand our position in the globe, Antarctic research—things like that that require sort of collaboration in science often with a sort of diplomatic push behind it. But what we really didn't see is the structures that exist in the world, the diplomatic structures, which are still based very much around individual countries, that it makes it difficult to achieve a sort of common good, if you like. And it really was like watching the tragedy of the commons when you're looking at some of the material on climate change, for example. Because individual interests of individual countries seemed to supersede the needs, the obvious needs—the needs that come from science and that—for some action to be taken. And I guess our view was—and I think this is true of both Robert and myself—that there almost needs to be a new sort of international structure to deal with some of these big issues. That, yes, science and diplomacy belong together—they definitely do—but at the moment the mechanisms that are being used to conduct science diplomacy are still based under the old sort of system of individual countries. And that's thwarting the potential benefits that could be had in some arenas. I mean there are obviously, as I said, it's not black and white; there are successes. But there are also some notable failures.</p>
<p>Turekian</p>	<p>And so, when you think about this book—and it's coming out in early 2015—who's your audience? Who would you like to see reading this? Again, it's I think probably the first time that this collection of ideas around, explicitly around, science diplomacy has been put out there. Where do you see the audience for this?</p>
<p>Davis</p>	<p>Well, first of all, we hope that it will attract readership amongst the</p>

	<p>general audience like the general populous. Because I think these issues are so profound for everyone. We all in our lives are affected by science and technology. And whether science and technology is the source of our problems, or whether it's the source of the solutions—and in most cases it's both—we need to understand science and understand how we can incorporate it into the way that we interact with other nations and so forth. And the whole thing is that most of us are somehow dumfounded by science because of its apparent complexity. And that's one of the big problems is the communication of the science to the diplomats, or the diplomats having a good understanding of science or involving the scientist in the diplomatic process. So there are sort of things there that we hope the general population would get hold of and want to have an interest in. But, particularly, I think anyone involved in the sort of diplomatic process—any scientists that are involved in international collaborations or international efforts—I think it would be really good if those were the sort of people that read the book. Because I think one of the things that, you know, does come out of the book is the huge potential but the fact that it's not being realized. And I think the more that people are aware of this and talk about it and think about it the more likely we are to get a solution.</p>
Turekian	<p>I would agree. I would also add that I think that it's going to make a tremendous resource for a lot of the students both at the undergraduate and the graduate level in both the sciences and policy communities that are trying to understand the other ones realizing that more and more of these drivers that they're having to deal with are international in scale and, as you mentioned, underpinned both in their cause and their cure by science and technology. So those communities I think—particularly in the academic community that don't really have this resource right now—I think are going to benefit greatly from this. I teach a class, and I know that it will be required reading for them in the school of foreign service. So I think that hopefully is also a group.</p>
Davis	<p>Yes, no, certainly. It's an academic publication, and we certainly see that being used at tertiary institutions like our own, both in political studies, foreign study programs, but also in places like our own. (I want to say "our own" I mean the center that I look after, which is Science Communication.) And so it's really...it's not so much focused on those that have the, if you like, dealing with the policy, but it's the scientists that have to communicate and the people that have to translate the science for the politicians and the people involved in diplomacy.</p>
Turekian	<p>Well, Lloyd, I really appreciate your time that you've taken to talk to me</p>

<p>Davis</p>	<p>and to talk about not only the book coming out in February that's entitled <i>Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn?</i> but also sort of the philosophy underpinning it. I will say it was really driven home to me when I was down visiting you in Otago, in June, in sort of the height or the start of winter, and we woke up before dawn and made it out to go see the little blue penguins. And really you sort of saw this great sort of natural landscape of New Zealand and the fact that it really is a place where science diplomacy is a very important piece, given not only what happened in the tragedy in Christchurch but the importance that New Zealand plays as an entrée point into what you say one of the important commons, which is Antarctica. So I really appreciate not only this activity, but you taking the time to talk about it.</p> <p>Vaughan, it's been an absolute pleasure, and I couldn't finish without thanking you and your involvement because you were really one of the key people who have set the stage for science diplomacy as a discipline, as an area of interest. And it was fantastic to have you here as one of our keynote speakers. So thank you.</p>
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