

AN ALLY SUPPORTS U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

An Interview with John Dauth

by Jonathan Schechter

When the United States announced military action in Iraq on March 19, 2003, Australia was one of the nations that offered support. They were one of the few countries that provided any kind of logistical backing to the war effort. Australia has pledged and pledged again its support for the military effort and the subsequent humanitarian and reconstruction effort. The Honorable John Dauth is the Australian Ambassador to the United Nations. He has had an extensive career in the Australian foreign service prior to his appointment at the UN, including positions as the First Secretary and Deputy Head of Mission in Islamabad, Charge d'Affaires of the Australian Embassy in Tehran, and Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

BardPolitik In a statement to the UN Security Council on March 26, you said “Let us be clear: the Council failed the international community.” How do you prevent, as you put it, “a trend towards impotence?”

Dauth Well, I think that it needs to be a much more unified body, it needs to be a body where members, particularly permanent members, don't use it as a forum to posture. [...] It needs not to be used as some sort of counterweight to the power and authority of the United States. That's how, I think, regrettably some member states saw it at that time.

BardPolitik To what extent does the Australian government see the doctrine of unilateralism behind the Bush administration as a permanent foreign policy norm, and to what extent would your government agree with it?

Dauth Frankly, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding of what's described as unilateralism. The U.S. is in a unique position in the world: it is the most powerful country, militarily by a very long way. The U.S. also

comprises a third of the world's economy, and so, whatever it does, in whatever circumstances, and in whatever company, it's going to have an enormous impact and it has available to it, always, the option of acting alone. [...] And no irritation on the part of others should deter you from exercising foreign policy options where those options are in your interests. That's not to say, I think, that the U.S. is going to blunder around the world, always acting alone and acting ignorant of the interests of others. It probably won't do that. It can't, for example, on trade issues, where I think it will remain actively engaged with the WTO and with the trading partners with which it concludes free trade agreements. [...] Sometimes it will exercise its unique capacity to act alone, and that is a reality that the rest of the world has to get used to.

BardPolitik Do you feel there is any sort of effective counterweight, any sort of deterrence, to the United States in terms of military action?

Dauth I think if the United States decides to commit itself to military action there can't be many people in the world who will stand in their way. The U.S. spends

twice as much on its military as all of its allies put together. [...] I think people can be critical of the U.S. deciding to use military force in Iraq. We are not, but others can be. But I think that not even its strongest critics, internationally, would say that the President decided on a whim, or decided lightly, to exercise military options.

BardPolitik The United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 calls for an exchange of information and cooperation among countries to prevent terrorist attacks. Has this legitimized international regional organizations as effective tools in combating terrorism? And if so, which ones?

Dauth I don't think it's particularly set out to legitimize any regional organization. What it did was impose Chapter 7, that is, mandatory obligations on member states to take measures and to exchange information to combat terrorism. It also establishes the Counter-Terrorism Committee, which until now has been chaired by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the British ambassador to the United Nations. [...] That committee certainly encourages regional activities with that aim. [...] The committee has looked very favorably on the bilateral agreements that we have reached with some of our neighbors – Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand – to work together to counter terrorism.

Sovereignty is a fundamental principle of international relations. There's no question but that we infringed on the sovereignty of the Iraqi authorities, and we did so both because we had a good cause and because we thought we had a legal basis for doing so.

BardPolitik It is no secret that Australia became one of the leading supporters of anti-terrorist actions. Can you recount the actions Australia has taken to prevent

further attacks?

Dauth Well, I think that the Indonesian government is also concerned, because there are undoubtedly *Al Qaeda* cells operating within Indonesia. And they have been very happy, for example, to have the Australian federal police work with the police of Indonesia to find the people who were responsible for the Bali bombing, arrest them, and try them. It's a model of cooperation. But also they have been very keen to exchange intelligence. So our intelligence agencies are working closely with the Indonesian agency and the other counterparts in exchanging information about terrorist activities.

BardPolitik What is your opinion on the value of state sovereignty versus international security?

Dauth Sovereignty is a fundamental principle of international relations. There's no question but that we infringed on the sovereignty of the Iraqi authorities, and we did so both because we had a good cause and because we thought we had a legal basis for doing so, the legal basis being in the [UNSC] Resolution 1441 and the previous resolutions.

BardPolitik It was recently leaked that the U.S. has a contingency plan to bomb North Korea's reactor if necessary. How do you feel about North Korea as a threat, to the world in general and to Australia specifically, and how do you feel about potential military action against North Korea?

Dauth Well, I don't think anyone should be troubled about the United States having a contingency plan for anything. It would be irresponsible for them, frankly, not to have a contingency plan. [...] We, like the U.S., are very hopeful that the issue of North Korea's nuclear program can be resolved peacefully. [...] And this is of direct relevance to us, because what happens in North-East Asia has a direct impact on what happens in South-East Asia and Australia. And there is a risk [...] that North Korea will sell the technology, including potentially to terrorists. And so it's a very serious

threat, it's a very serious problem, and it will require extremely determined efforts, I think.

BardPolitik Is East Timor the beginning of a new foreign policy for Australia? Having become the main factor in aiding and stabilizing a newly independent country, is Australia signaling a new type of approach to regional security?

Dauth No, I don't think so at all. I think we seek security with our neighbors, not against them. We were faced with an unusual situation in East Timor – a situation where at the behest of the Indonesian president, the East-Timorese were offered a choice about their future, and they chose, very decisively, to be an independent country. The Indonesian military then behaved disgracefully and that required a response. We were the only country in a position to provide that response, and we did it. We attracted, I think, a great credit, both in the region and globally, for what we did. It was not something we planned; we very much would have preferred for there not to have been the terrible events of 1999 in East Timor. So in no sense was it the start of a new policy approach.

Jonathan Schechter majors in two divisions, International Affairs and Government and Law, at Lafayette College. At BGIA, he was an intern at the Carnegie Council for Ethics and International Affairs.