SMU | CENTER FOR PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY

Transatlantic Diplomacy after 9/11: The U.S. and Norway
Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Kristin Krohn Devold
Minister of Defense of Norway, 2001-2005
Member of the Norwegian Parliament, 1993-2005

Interviewer: LaiYee Leong
Fellow, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University
Senior Fellow, John G. Tower Center for Public Policy & International Affairs, Southern Methodist University

Date of Interview:
October 27, 2017

Editorial Note and Disclaimer:
This transcription has undergone a verification process for accuracy, according to the strictest practices of the academic and transcription communities. It offers the CPH's best good-faith effort at reproducing in text the subject's spoken words. In all cases, however, the video of the interview represents the definitive version of the words spoken by interviewees.

Normal speech habits—false starts, incomplete words, and crutch words (e.g. "you know")—have been removed for purposes of clarity. Final transcriptions will conform to standard oral history practices. Editors will conform all transcription quotations to the Center for Presidential History's final edition.

Please contact the editors at cphinfo@smu.edu with any corrections, suggestions, or questions.

Citation:
Interview with Kristin Krohn Devold, interviewed by LaiYee Leong, 27 October 2017. "Transatlantic Diplomacy after 9/11: The U.S. and Norway" Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University.

[Begin Transcription]

LEONG: I'm LaiYee Leong. I'm with Kristin Krohn Devold, former Defense Minister of Norway. Today is the 27th of October, 2017, and we are in Oslo. Minister, thank you for sitting down with me.

DEVOLD: Thank you. Don't call me minister, call me Kristin, because I'm not the minister any more. [both laugh]

LEONG: When you became minister in 2001, could you tell me what you had said earlier, about the circumstances related to 9/11 and so on.

DEVOLD: Yes. For Norway, 9/11 was the day after we had the national election, and our side, the conservative side, we won the election the 10th of September, and we knew that we would spend a few weeks to form the new government. [00:01:00] So, my party chairman, he said, "Now you should all take time off, because it will be very busy for you in a few weeks time." So I decided I would like to go two weeks, to the United States. I had bought the tickets and I was in the gym, watching CNN, where I saw the planes, a terrible attack on the World Trade Center, and I realized that probably, the trip to the United States would not be possible to go through with. But then I talked with my colleagues that I was traveling with and we said, now this is the time we really should go, we need to find a way to get there. So we took the plane, the 12th of September, to London, and no airplane went directly to the United States any more, and not even to Canada, but we found an airplane to Mexico. So then we flew to Mexico, Mexico City first, another plane [00:02:00] to Mexicali, hired a car, and drove over the border and drove all the way up to L.A., because we were going actually, to attend a fishing contest at Catalina Island, marlin fishing. But to be there, in the United States, when no one else was allowed to travel in there, and to see how 9/11 had affected ordinary people, seeing people walking around in the street crying. I listened to President Bush making his first speech while we were there, on television. It made a great impression on everybody and we realized that for the Americans, this was like Pearl Harbor, or it was like it was for Norway back in 1940, when the Germans entered our borders. So, some of the sentiments and the deep fear and the shock [00:03:00] of the American people, we saw it on the streets for two weeks. And I think that that was a very helpful background for the five years

to come, when I was minister of defense, to try to understand maybe also why the American rhetoric was like it was, and why the eagerness to do something about the terrorists was so extremely strong in your country, and with a different sentiment than the sentiment in Europe, and a lot of it was connected to feelings.

LEONG: Did you already know at that time, that you were going to be in the Cabinet?

DEVOLD: I suspected I would be offered a place in the Cabinet, but of course it was up to the prime minister and the party leaders to decide who was going to put on the different posts. So I was actually on a fishing boat outside of Catalina Island, when I got a telephone from the prime minister, and I was asked whether I would [00:04:00] like to be the minister of defense. That was also a very special situation, to know what job I would have to come home to after the two weeks visit of the United States. So it was a very special start.

LEONG: Did you have any acquaintance or familiarity with U.S. officials, on the defense side?

DEVOLD: Absolutely, absolutely none. I had been in politics in Norway for many years. I had been in the Business and Industry Committee in the parliament, and I had been the chairman of the Justice Committee in the Parliament. So I had worked a lot with police and courts, and security that way, and I had also attended the National Defense College for education, so I had some educational background and I was up-to-date on the need to transform the forces from the more Cold War style, and to the more style where [00:05:00] you had to move quick and operate together with other countries. So I had a background that was good but no connections outside the Norwegian political environments.

LEONG: So once you got this call, what ran through your head in terms of thinking -- in terms of U.S./Norwegian relations on the defense side?

DEVOLD: I knew that those ties were very strong. My family had to escape during Second World War and they escaped with a small fishing boat, first from Norway,

to Britain, and then over to Nova Scotia and Canada, North America. I lived in Halifax through the whole war. So I know that the relationship in the transatlantic region was very, very deep in the Norwegian people, in all generations, and I know that this had to be strong once again, and that probably [00:06:00] would be renewed in many ways in the weeks and years to come.

LEONG: Now you led a restructuring of the Norwegian Armed Forces when you were in office.

DEVOLD: Yes.

LEONG: To what extent was that restructuring affected or shaped by the events of 9/11?

DEVOLD: It was speeded up, but the decision to reform the forces was taken in June, 2001, and I was part of that discussion, and we had quite a dramatic decision. We had decided that we should reduce the personnel with 25 percent, and to take them away from more staff, kind of personnel, and more over to the sharper end of the defense. We should reduce old barracks and old buildings with 33 percent and we should reduce the head, the top administration of the forces with 50 percent, to make it much more lean and efficient, [00:07:00] and all the money that was freed should be put into new capabilities that were more useful. The fact that September 11 came just months after the decision, and the parliament had to speed up the process and actually help people understand why this was important. Because we needed to make sure that all the Norwegian capabilities could also be used abroad, which means they have to be smart, easy to transport, and we also had to have the same kind of capabilities as our allies, so that we could join operations together. So I was very, very happy that we actually had taken that decision in June, so that it was more of a rolling it out.

LEONG: It was considered, from my understanding, it was considered quite a change from the focus on domestic defense, to looking abroad.

DEVOLD: Yes, but that change actually came [00:08:00] in Yugoslavia, with Kosovo and Bosnia, and all the other operations there, because Norway had participated in Yugoslavia and that's, for instance, where we find out that even if we had very, very good air fighters, the F-16s, they didn't have the necessary equipment to be maximal useful in an operation like Yugoslavia. So we had already started to buy new and more modern equipment that we actually got to use in Afghanistan, but it was Yugoslavia that learned us how we had to change, and that was also why the decision was in June.

LEONG: So connect the dots for me. How did 9/11 confirm or speed up, your understanding that Norway's military had to be prepared for action abroad?

DEVOLD: In the first NATO meeting before Christmas or in the autumn after [00:09:00] September 11, of course there were questions from our allies; What do you have of capabilities in your defense that is useful in Afghanistan? And every country in Europe was focusing on do we have something that's useful. Of course then we discovered we had a few capabilities that not all other countries had. For instance, mine clearing equipment that was excellent, that even the United States didn't have, so we found that what we had, like mine expertise, also some special forces expertise, other expertise, also the F-16 pilots. We had things that were very useful and that helped also. We could ask all parts of the military, it you're not able to do anything about your country, are you really relevant any more? And people actually wanted to participate, they wanted to show that their capability was useful, [00:10:00] even if you were in the navy or in the air force, or in the armed forces, everybody wanted to show that we are comparable with the best.

LEONG: And what was the attitude of the United States in terms of this discussion?

DEVOLD: The attitude were actually, they were asking; What kind of capabilities do you have, that you should be able to send, to join us with? So, we suggested, and they said yes, thank you or no, thank you, and I think almost everything we suggested from the Norwegian side, they said yes, thank you, because it was useful.

So it's kind of, it's a NATO cooperation. Even if the first operation was Operation Enduring Freedom, that was not NATO led, it was American led, it was still major -- it was still the NATO countries that participated, together with a few others.

LEONG: Right. [00:11:00]

DEVOLD: And I think that we used the NATO framework, we used the NATO meetings, to actually sit down and find what kind of capabilities could we mix together, who can talk together, who can operate together, and it functioned.

LEONG: Before we go more into Afghanistan, I also want to ask you a question about, were some of these thoughts about reform and restructuring of the armed forces, how much of that was perhaps motivated by the idea that this is now a post-Cold War period and therefore, the role of smaller countries like Norway could be different.

DEVOLD: Yes, that is right, because we are a technically advanced country because everything costs so much here, that we try to use equipment instead of people. So, it's the same with digitalization, we have a quite advanced society there also. And we saw that we had [00:12:00] equipment, since we had ability to invest in inexpensive equipment, we had the ability to do something different from the countries that had, first of all, many, many soldiers. We've never been a country with many soldiers, we are only five million people living here all together, but the more technical, advanced warfare, we had the opportunity to play a different role. We also decided that this role was easier to play if it cooperated closely with other countries in our situation. So for instance, the Netherlands and Denmark, we formed a cooperation with them, buying the same airplanes, training the pilots together, supporting the equipment for the planes together, and we cooperated together. We traveled together out, we traveled together home, and this way of working made it also possible for smaller countries actually to contribute [00:13:00] more than their size should suggest.

LEONG: One thing that might surprise Americans, is that Norway's defense expenses at that time was actually very high, in per capita terms. Most people have the notion of the Nordic countries as being very peace loving and contributing to peace works.

DEVOLD: Oh, there's a big difference between the Nordic countries. I'm very glad you asked this question, because neither Finland nor Sweden are part of NATO. Finland has a history, they're living too close to Russia to dare. Sweden has traditionally been neutral, and it was a very, very tough situation between Norway and Sweden during Second World War, because Sweden were neutral and we were invaded by the Germans and actually, the Germans went through Sweden. So, there was not a good relationship just after the war, so we have a very different military [00:14:00] history and tradition. We participated in the Second World War, Sweden did not, and this is also why we are a NATO member. Norway has been one of the countries in NATO with the highest percentage of GNP spent on budget and we still are.

LEONG: Let's move on to Afghanistan. When you found out, and your Cabinet found out about the intended invasion of Afghanistan and to overthrow the Taliban, what were your thoughts? Did you agree with U.S. motivations?

DEVOLD: You know, we didn't discuss the motivations so much. I think in Norway, we are very formal, so what we are guided of is the principles of the international law and specifically, the NATO laws, and the Article 5 situation in NATO that says that if one NATO country is attacked, and U.S. [00:15:00] definitely was attacked, then the other allies have to support. And it's up to the country that is attacked to decide whether you want NATO to run the operation that came afterwards, or whether you want to do it yourself. So it was the Article 5 situation that made it totally clear for everybody in Norway, Norway shall participate. There was not a lot of discussion about that. So we didn't discuss feelings or sentiments or rhetoric. We did go directly into Article 5, of course we should participate. You

know, after having been invaded ourselves, my father was one of those who had to escape, he's still alive. We know that, what if this was Norway, what if Norway was invaded? We would of course expect the United States and everybody to come to our assistance the way we wanted. So, we did go directly [00:16:00] to the paragraph of NATO, and based on that, formed a broad coalition in Norway, in the parliament, to support.

LEONG: Did it surprise you that even though there was Article 5, the United States was already using rhetoric such as, you're either with us or you're against us. Were you surprised by that?

DEVOLD: I think that everybody that has been to the United States know that the United States rhetoric is a bit different, and it's becoming more and more different, I have to say. [laughs] So, it's about culture, the way you speak. From a Norwegian point of view, we think sometimes in America, you speak more in headlines, and express yourself in a way that we wouldn't do, because it's not our nature. So, we try to say okay, that's their way of talking, it's their rhetoric, and maybe they need that rhetoric inside their own country, because you also need to -- there's a lot of emotions [00:17:00] in America after an attack like that, and the people living there need to know that their leaders will do everything, but the rhetoric way of feeling this in the United States, except when you're watching it from outside in Europe, it's different and the culture is different. We are more like the British, a little bit understatement way of expressing ourselves.

LEONG: So what did you think of the Bush Doctrine? So it was one thing to -- right immediately after 9/11, all that rhetoric and the attack on Afghanistan, and then after that, there was the NSC paper that essentially laid out what came to be called the Bush Doctrine, and I'm sure you're familiar with it.

DEVOLD: Yes, but we didn't focus much on this doctrine. We realized that the United States needed to have their own way of expressing it, both in documents and in public. We have different words. For instance, [00:18:00] the word "war," I

think it means something else in Norway actually, and it has to do with perception. Because we had a war that people still remember, the Second World War, where we were occupied for five years. For us, a war is something else than an operation to get rid of Taliban, it's absolutely warfare, but the war for us, people are thinking about the more traditional way of having a war. That's why we used other words; we used military operations, for instance. Most of our time in Afghanistan was actually after the Taliban had left and we had President Karzai being elected, we had the first election process in Afghanistan and it was try to build a democracy. People can ask well, did you succeed? Probably not, but at least that was the issue. So you can't say [00:19:00] that the whole stay in Afghanistan was actually a war, not in a traditional form. That's why we used different words.

LEONG: So if that's the case, what did you think of the idea of the phrase "the war on terror" or "the global war on terror?"

DEVOLD: I don't think most Norwegians like the phrase, but they agreed that we should be in Afghanistan, but they used other words.

LEONG: But what about this idea of global war?

DEVOLD: That's also, it's a big word, what is "global?" Global is, in my head it's everywhere, and the war wasn't everywhere. So again, we used other words and for us, this was about keeping the NATO family together, being loyal, follow the rules that we had signed and agreed upon, and try to build a better society for Afghanistan. And I think that it was very important, [00:20:00] to try to get support from as many countries as possible also, in the UN, and sometimes your rhetoric is in the way for getting the support that you really want to have.

LEONG: Did you play a role? You got on well -- and we'll get to that. You got on quite well with Secretary Rumsfeld. Did you, in your way, ever try to, when you meet with U.S. officials, say you know, maybe you guys could just chill a little bit on the rhetoric?

DEVOLD: I remember once, the way I remember it, Donald Rumsfeld asked me "why do they criticize us so much," and now we're talking about the allies. "Why can't they see that we do so much more than them?" And I said that, "You are like the big brother in the family. The big brother should be stronger, [00:21:00] should be wiser, should be nicer; everybody expects that and he should do more. Actually, they always expect that the big brother is much nicer than the smaller brother, you know? Because he also has to take care of the younger. You have to think of it as a family and you are the big brother."

LEONG: Some people criticized President Bush for using that phrase "global war on terror," because they say that it also implies, almost a war on Islam. Was there that concern as well?

DEVOLD: well, I'm sure that a lot of people have a lot of different views on that expression, but I had heard President Bush speak when I was in the United States, just after September 11, and I did not think that President Bush was having a war against Islam. I think he was quite clear on that. But again, if your ambition is to make most [00:22:00] countries in the world support you, you have to be a little bit careful with the rhetoric. Sometimes the rhetoric fits in your own country but not necessarily in other countries around. That is a strategic question and it's a rhetoric question, and there is not one answer. Maybe your home base demanded you to use that kind of strong rhetoric, at least in the beginning.

LEONG: Now, by participating in Afghanistan, Norway got itself mentioned by one of the al-Qaeda leaders, as a target.

DEVOLD: Yes.

LEONG: When that happened, what was your reaction?

DEVOLD: We knew that for a terrorist organization, they build their power on fear, so we knew that probably all countries that participated in Afghanistan could be in some kind of danger, to be a target for terrorism. But like any other countries in Europe, Britain and our other allies, [00:23:00] we can't be interfered with that.

We need to do our job and we need to be a reliable ally. That is, for a small country with experience from a war, to be relied on, it's extremely important.

LEONG: So no regrets on that score.

DEVOLD: No. Norway is a very innocent country, we are very peaceful. As you say, you're pretty safe to move all around in this country, and that's of course the way we want to keep it and so far we have managed that also.

LEONG: Some people have criticized the United States for its counterterrorism approach, saying that -- at least at that time -- it was too focused on the military aspect. In fact, some people said that the approach was wrong, because it took a military response, rather than a sort of civilian policing response [00:24:00] to the problem of counterterrorism. Now you, as you mentioned earlier, was actually working with the Justice, when you were a parliamentarian, you were on the justice side of things in Norway. Was that something that you also considered; how to balance military versus a more sort of judicial approach to counterterrorism?

DEVOLD: Well, we needed that. For instance, in a country like Afghanistan, you needed to do both. But I was quite clear that it's not necessarily the soldiers that should do the civilian building. We need to try to get it so peacefully that others can do that, the civil society, and with help from NGOs from all over the world, et cetera. We think it's important that when you're a trained soldier, you're a trained soldier with a purpose, and that is of course to restore peace. The relationship I had professionally, at that time, with the United States, was of course [00:25:00] on the Defense side, which was in the first place, to try to get ride of the Taliban, who definitely supported al-Qaeda, and after that, creating enough peace to be able to have a democratic election and development of democratic institutions. Personally, I think that we should have all been more clever in the beginning, to fund civil institutions and to fund help for the ordinary people, so that they could see that it was actually better to live in Afghanistan. I remember once, I was up in

Maymana, in Mazar-i-Sharif. I talked with ordinary people in the streets. At that time it wasn't -- it was quite safe there. They told me that we are so glad that the war is over, now we are waiting for the help, why are they not coming? A lot of the NGOs was of course still too afraid to really go in and do a job, [00:26:00] so there was a lack of development that ordinary people saw. I don't have the solution, how we could have fixed it, but still, it was not the military's job to do it. Maybe we should have been even more clever, to bring in more civil institutions earlier, and money.

LEONG: How much coordination was there between -- at least on Norway's side. How much coordination was there between your ministry and say the Justice Ministry, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, in terms of bringing in these civil society groups?

DEVOLD: Well, the Justice Ministry did not participate, because they are mainly focusing on Norway, but the Foreign Minister -- and we also had a minister that was only working with development of third world countries, and who got quite a lot of money to try to do development in Afghanistan. But still it was [00:27:00] difficult to really make the organizations want to work there, because it was dangerous and they would depend on, for instance, military vehicles, military protection. And there was a bit reluctant to accept that, because I thought it wasn't clear enough, borders between the military forces and the NGOs. So it was not an easy situation, but at least we tried to cooperate, but we could definitely have been better on the Norwegian side as well.

LEONG: Did you get a sense of whether the U.S. side understood this, or was there too much emphasis on the military aspect?

DEVOLD: There was a different tradition, definitely, definitely. So there is another tradition in the U.S., I think, to focus more on the military means. In Norway, we have a very strong tradition of development, help to third world countries. I think we are the country in the UN that gives most to third world countries per capita,

that's very strong in our [00:28:00] genes, that we combine it as different traditions.

LEONG: Was this something that ever came up on conversation with Rumsfeld?

DEVOLD: No. We discussed the military purposes mostly, and reorganizing of NATO and the NATO command structure.

LEONG: You of course know about the Godal report that said that in terms of Norway's involvement in Afghanistan, it didn't really achieve very much in terms of state-building, it didn't achieve too much long-term, in terms of fighting terrorism, that the main achievement seems to have been that Norway proved that it was a trustworthy partner.

DEVOLD: But you know, the Godal report evaluates the whole period we were in Afghanistan.

LEONG: Right.

DEVOLD: I participated in the report for my period, which was the first four years. It's also clear that more positive things happened the first four years, than later. [00:29:00] And then you can always discuss what did we do wrong later, but there is a difference there. There was much more optimism in the beginning, and particularly around the democratic building process, et cetera.

LEONG: Do you think that was because of factors from within Afghanistan, or did it have to do with the allies?

DEVOLD: I don't think I would speculate, because I try not to speculate about periods that are under other ministers than myself, because I remember, I hated that when I was a minister, with older ministers having stronger views on my period, you know? So I try to focus on my period, because that period I know, and I don't speculate too much about the rest.

LEONG: In terms of going back to the global war on terror, the rhetoric of it aside, the idea that terrorism was everywhere, was that something that Norway agreed with?

DEVOLD: [00:30:00] At least we didn't experience it. Terrorism was, and still is, not an everyday issue, I mean, we've always had terrorism in Europe. Most of the time it was actually non-Muslims. We had the IRA in Ireland, we had the Red Brigade, we had Baader-Meinhof. They were white from Germany, they were white from Italy and white from Ireland. So we had terrorists in Norway and in Europe. So, the fact that terrorism is everywhere, and it's not the experience of at least the Norwegians, but of course there is a growing danger of terrorism, because it's easier, in many ways, to hit the civil society. That we were aware of and that's one of the reasons also, we wanted to transform our own forces.

LEONG: I think at some point [00:31:00] you said something to the effect of the best defense is a good offense. Could you maybe elaborate a little bit on that? Do you remember?

DEVOLD: Well, at least you have to be able to frighten those who want to attack your country, and if you have Norwegian forces that are only possible to use in Norway, probably they wouldn't be very useful the day we really needed them. So it's more about being used, you have to have some experience to know that the forces you have are useful. I actually used the parallel more to a national football team. If the national football team only attends training and never play a match, how do you know [00:32:00] how good they are? It's more like that, but that doesn't mean that we want to have a war for, just for the training or the exercise purpose, but we need to be sure that what you have can be used.

LEONG: Moving on to the war in Iraq. There was some concern, well not concern. There was speculation at that time, as to whether, because you, and also the foreign affairs minister at that time, were from the Conservative Party, there was maybe some talk that you might want to -- you were more likely to support the United States in attacking Iraq, compared to the other parties in Norway. Was that in fact the case?

DEVOLD: No. Actually, we had very good discussions inside the government, and it included all the ministers; the minister of education, minister of police, everybody [00:33:00] discussed the situation, and the main problem for Norway was that there was no proof of an immediate threat and that there was no UN support for the action. The UN support was, for most Norwegians, the most important thing, and in Norway, it's not one party who can go to any kind of war. We need strong support in the parliament, and we had very strong support in the parliament for the operation in Afghanistan. It was only one party, as far as I remember, who didn't support it, and we have several parties or something, in the parliament. We know that if we are going to have the support for our soldiers, that they need when they're out, we can't do it with a 51 percent majority. You need to do it with a stronger mandate with that, and that's why we had these very open debates with all the ministers, and we also had a very open debate [00:34:00] with the leaders of the majority party, the biggest parties in the parliament, and we agreed on that as long as there are no UN mandate, we cannot join in the beginning. Not very much later, there was a UN mandate, because everybody saw, after Saddam fall, that you really needed to restructure the site, bring in electricity, have security forces, and then we joined. So we joined, but a bit later than the others, and the reason for that was that we needed this broad support from the parliament, and not a very short or very tight majority. So, and I think this approach in Norwegian foreign policy will always be there, no matter who is in power, that we need to go for the broad support. If not it would be very, very unpleasant for our soldiers to participate.

LEONG: Was there any concern that, especially since [00:35:00] President Bush has said, you're either with us or against us?

DEVOLD: Yes.

LEONG: Was there any concern that somehow this would be bad for U.S.-Norway relations?

DEVOLD: So, we knew that United States wouldn't like the decision, but we also trusted that we would be able to take our part of the responsibility, but just a bit later. And we did, we did send forces to Iraq, we sent them down to Basra, together with the UK contingents. We had both army soldiers and engineers, and different kind of capabilities. I also remember some criticism, I don't remember exactly who it was that said it, "You came late but you came good." [both laugh]

LEONG: Did Secretary Rumsfeld talk to you about this, did he try to persuade you?

DEVOLD: No. No, he didn't, and it's an important difference actually, between the minister [00:36:00] of foreign affairs and minister of defense. Those discussions are more on a minister of foreign affairs, what operations to join, what are the basis in international law for the operation. Do we have an Article 5 situation, is there a UN mandate, is there some other kind of mandate? And then when the decision is taken, then the defense minister is coming in and saying okay, how can we help, with what capabilities, and to run the ongoing operations. Then it's my job. So, I was occupied with a lot of operations at that time. We were little, Norway, we were engaged in Africa and UN forces, we were engaged in the Mediterranean Sea, in Operation Active Endeavor. We were occupied in Afghanistan, in both Enduring Freedom and ISAF, NATO. I think we had five, six, seven [00:37:00] operations going on at the same time, a small country, so I think almost all the capabilities we had, had been sent out somewhere during those four years. But we have to do it our way and we focus a lot on two things; international law and that we're sure that this is legitimate, and that we have broad support in the parliament.

LEONG: Now --

MALE SPEAKER: We just have to make a stop.

LEONG: Oh? Is there a problem?

MALE SPEAKER: There is a problem because --

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

MALE SPEAKER: And it rolls.

LEONG: Did you have conversations with the foreign minister at that time, the foreign affairs minister? After all, you were from the same party.

DEVOLD: We had a lot of conversation. Jan Peterson, he is and was a very good friend of mine. He was my party leader in the Conservative Party. He was the one who asked me in June, "If we win the election, what post [00:38:00] would you really want to have, because I want to take you with me into the --" And I said, if I win, if we win, I would really like to be the minister of defense. So we had a very close relationship and I knew he wanted to be either prime minister or minister of foreign affairs.

LEONG: Right.

DEVOLD: So we talked a lot and discussed a lot, but we were also part of a government and when you're part of a government with three parties, you know that there's nothing such as two views in a government, it's one. And since we also needed the parliament and the broad support, we chose to wait with it, we knew that our American friends, they wouldn't be angry, but they would be disappointed. But sometimes friends disappoint each other but you're still friends.

LEONG: Did he share with you, perhaps [00:39:00] how Secretary Powell perhaps, might have tried to reach out to him?

DEVOLD: I talked directly to Secretary Powell about the issue at one point.

LEONG: Oh, okay.

DEVOLD: We had actually a very nice meeting in the United States, a one-to-one, and I know that he was disappointed, but I think actually it was he who said, "You came late but you came good." Yeah.

LEONG: Now, as you know, France and Germany, and to some extent Belgium, came out very strongly against the war in Iraq.

DEVOLD: Yes, and also France.

LEONG: France, Germany, and Belgium.

DEVOLD: France, Germany, and Belgium, yes.

LEONG: Did that put Norway in a difficult position?

DEVOLD: Not necessarily, but what we had in NATO, and in NATO meetings, we had at times, a very divided Europe. [00:40:00] And there was strong rhetoric on the American side, but there was also very strong rhetoric, at least from the three countries you mentioned there. And of course we didn't like it, because it's like seeing your parents quarrel. I mean, what you really need to do is to keep the marriage and to be sensible and to respect each other, et cetera. We also knew that the Eastern European countries, they were very supportive of the United States, because they were newly arrived in NATO, they were there for a reason. They were there for the same reason as Norway, joined NATO. We know we have a neighbor that is not necessarily nice all the time. We need the protection and if you want to have protection, you also need to contribute. So they had much more of the same background that Norway had, so there was a division, but we tried to form a close cooperation with some European allies that had [00:41:00] a different approach from Germany, Belgium, and France, and that was what I call the North Sea countries. We even call it a North Sea strategy inside the Ministry of Defense, to do as much as possible together with the European North Sea allied UK, Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway. Norway and Denmark, we always had—and Netherlands—the air for cooperation is very strong. We had a very strong naval cooperation with Britain, we had a very strong also, link, with the armed forces, with the army in Britain. So we saw that to try to strengthen that alliance was our contribution, to try to bring more peace and understanding inside the NATO family. It ended up good, but there was a time there where the rhetoric was [00:42:00] tough. We of course, with our strong transatlantic link, we didn't like that period, at least I didn't.

LEONG: From your perspective, what was driving that? Why was there such --?

DEVOLD: It was about what political parties were represented, from for instance Germany and France, and also Belgium. It was also the fact that this time, Europe started feeling very confident, the European corporation, the EU, that they could do all kind of things, maybe even military operations. There were people in the EU who thought that Europe could have their own military operations. I actually never believed that, not into a larger extent, because the main capabilities are in the United States. Europe didn't have AVEX airplanes, there was a lot of things they didn't have. So to go to any kind of war [00:43:00] without the United States was not likely to happen. But we were -- we are not an EU member, so of course for Norway, to see EU want to take a position who is more similar to NATO, that's not in our interests. So we wanted to make EU and to keep it as an economic area, corporation, also of course cooperate on difficult law issues, et cetera, but on a military, the main organization had to be NATO for us. That's why we understood that there was also some interests, legitimate interests from these large European countries, to build something else in Europe, but we didn't think it was wise.

LEONG: But the war in Iraq wasn't about military capabilities.

DEVOLD: No. It was about Europe decide for themselves, [00:44:00] if you come to these countries, but it wasn't only in that debate, it was in a lot of the debates in NATO. You had some tendency to see that the different countries grouped up along these lines, and that was also why, I think Don Rumsfeld used the expression "old and new Europe," because of course Germany and France is old, old, large, powerful countries; new countries were the Eastern Europeans. But of course it wasn't totally -- I could understand that he used the rhetoric, but it wasn't perfectly correct, because you always had what I call the North Sea alliance.

LEONG: What did you think when you heard him say that, and you saw the response?

DEVOLD: No, I understood him at the moment actually, I did. He wanted to [00:45:00] -- well, it's a way of saying that you're not so relevant any more. But it was of course, I mean take the United Kingdom. They've been loyal in every war together with the United States and they're definitely old Europe.

LEONG: Did Norway try to mediate in any way?

DEVOLD: No. When it comes to rhetoric, we lean back and watch, and we try to find a way to express our feelings to our own people in Norway, and to try to build coalitions in our parliament, and then we need to use the rhetoric that is functioning in Norway.

LEONG: You attended of course, all these ministerial meetings.

DEVOLD: Yes, there was some time with just, we call it "himeøyne,"[1] you just lift your eyebrow. [laughs] But of course most of the discussions, they were relevant, it was about ongoing operations. [00:46:00] So it wasn't the big part of the everyday work in NATO, it wasn't.

LEONG: What about Norway's relations with Germany and France and Belgium? Was that affected by all of this?

DEVOLD: I don't know actually. I would think that maybe France and Belgium found us a bit irritating. We always had a very good relationship with Germany. Germany is our main trade partner in Europe. So, we didn't have problems with anybody, no. I don't think we important not to be very irritated with us either.

LEONG: Did they ever come to you and say could you stop being so nice to the United States?

DEVOLD: No, they didn't, not to me anyway.

LEONG: So coming back to your relationship, your working relationship with [00:47:00] Secretary Rumsfeld, as you are aware of course, it was reported widely, how well you got along with him and so on.

DEVOLD: I liked him.

---

[1] The Norwegian ""himeøyne" loosely translates "rolled eyes." In context, "we would roll our eyes."

LEONG: Yeah.

DEVOLD: He had an extremely difficult job, and I really respected the way he acted from day one, after September 11, and he was almost a rock star in the United States at that point, and he had a very, very difficult job. But you know, I was warned, before I met him first time, that he was very tough, strict, and I think actually, a lot of people are a little bit afraid of him, because he could be very direct. What I did was that I interviewed a friend of ours, that was the ambassador from United States to Norway, Mr. Ong, do you know him?

LEONG: Mr. Ong.

DEVOLD: Mr. Ong. He was a very nice man and he knew Rumsfeld, and I said [00:48:00] mister ambassador, do you have some good advice for me, because I'm going to have my first meeting, it's in the United States, I was invited as -- I think we were country number four or something, that was allowed to meet him. Mr. Ong said that he is only interested in practical solutions, if you can help him, be useful to find good solutions, then you will be useful, but there's no point in going over there, and just like a lot of the European leaders did, went over there and told the Americans what they wanted. We would like you to -- you know, that's no point. How can you be useful, that's the point. And we really tried to make a suggestion, how NATO's command structure should look like, that we knew would help the Americans with their ambitions to modernize the structure, and we also could provide some useful resources into that new structure. [00:49:00] We presented this idea to the people working around Rumsfeld before we went over there and got this meeting. Mr. Ong said, when you are in your 30 minutes meeting, because that's normally what you get, you will see the way he -- I hope it was Mr. Ong who said that, it might be one of the others. But anyway, what the advice was that if he says interesting, interesting, it means it's not interesting at all, it's absolutely boring and not useful, but if he says this is helpful, this is helpful, then you're on the right track. So it was quite funny, we were just looking to get

the right wording and the right expression, and during the meeting, after presenting our views on the new command structure, he said, "This is helpful, this is helpful," and then he sent all the others away and just me and him in his office, where we discussed a lot of things. [00:50:00] We got also, this private contact, and we kept that through the whole period.

I have to tell you, I had a grandfather that I loved very much. He was strict on the outside but with a warm heart on the inside, and I got some of the same feeling when I was with Secretary Rumsfeld and there were only the two of us, or a few people. I also met his wife several times and I think she was a lovely lady. Sometimes, you can also tell, say by the people you are married to, what kind of person you are, and I think they were a great couple and that's why I was never afraid of him in any way. I could actually tease him a bit, and I think that's a good way of communicating.

LEONG: Now of course, Secretary Rumsfeld was not terribly popular in Europe.

DEVOLD: No. No, but people respected him [00:51:00] and maybe they were a bit afraid of him, because he was a no nonsense talker, but no one underestimated him. They knew he was very bright and they knew he was set out to do a job, to run a lot of difficult operations and to transform both the American forces and the NATO structure. So they knew he had to do a difficult job, so they respected him.

LEONG: Did you ever feel under any pressure --

DEVOLD: No.

LEONG: -- because of the criticisms against him?

DEVOLD: Oh, pressure in Norway of course.

LEONG: Yes, in Norway.

DEVOLD: Yes, absolutely. I mean, the left side in Norway, if you speak good about the Americans, you're always the enemy. You know, we have a tradition of a strong socialist, almost communist parties, with ties to both China and Russia, in the old days. Of course the Social Democrats are not like that, but half of the Social

Democrats, at least their voters, [00:52:00] are very skeptical to the United States, the other half is much more positive. So the most aggressive part of the opposition were always defined U.S., servant for United States, if you were too positive in the way you express yourself. So, but we knew that, so that didn't bother us.

LEONG: You were probably aware that back home at that time, there was also some tensions within the Cabinet, especially differences between Secretary Powell and Secretary Rumsfeld, and to some extent that came down the line.

DEVOLD: But not in the beginning, not in the beginning, not during the Afghanistan period, I think. I think it was more closer to the Iraq issue. Well, from a Norwegian perspective, we liked both and my colleague, Jan Petersen, had an excellent dialogue with your Colin Powell. So we observed more from [00:53:00] the outside, that there were different personalities.

LEONG: Did they ever have different messages?

DEVOLD: Not as I discovered. We also had Condoleezza Rice, who was an excellent lady, one really of my favorites. She should be, in my view, the next president of the United States. She was working for them all and for President Bush, and also was a good person to try to sort out some of the differences, I think. So there was actually four persons we had close relationships with, with Bush and Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Donald Rumsfeld.

LEONG: And they were quite consistent in what they were saying, there was no inconsistency?

DEVOLD: Yes. At least to us in Norway. I don't think there was a very big difference, but we of course, we read the newspapers, but we didn't attend the same meetings, you know? There were the meetings, so the foreign ministers there [00:54:00] and a meeting of the defense ministers there. We didn't have them in the same room at the same time.

LEONG: Right. But there were never any cross messages or confusion?

DEVOLD: No, not on my side, and I cannot remember my colleague, Jan Petersen, to mention something like that either.

LEONG: Moving on to NATO then. NATO, of course, greatly expanded in that period. What was Norway's role? What was your view, first of all, in terms of NATO expansion?

DEVOLD: Get them in, get them in. We consider the three Baltic countries to be Nordic countries; Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia. If you go back to that history, there's a lot of history in common with Finland and the Nordic region. It goes all the way back actually, to the Viking time. Even our old Viking king, Olaf, the saint, he has this church in one of these countries. So there is a strong, old relationship. [00:55:00] So, we wanted them to be free Nordic countries, and we really wanted to help them. Of course Sweden and Finland is not in NATO, so they couldn't help them with that, but we could. So for instance, when Latvia needed to present some force, that they had some capabilities, we more or less gave them our old fleet of missile torpedo boats, because we were renewing our fleet, so we could give them, for cheap money the old one, and we could be there to train them how to use it, et cetera. And the same we did with Poland. We had two different submarine classes in Norway. Poland needed to build up some capabilities, so we sold them, very cheap, one of the submarine classes, and helped them with officers, et cetera, to train them how to use them. Actually, I got one medal from Latvia, and one medal from Poland, for [00:56:00] helping them achieving something useful, that was a way of getting them becoming serious NATO members. So we were very focused on this in Norway, thought it was important, and to draw a clearer line towards Russia. We really had a lot of sympathy for Poland also, all the way since Lech Walesa, and he got the Nobel Peace Prize. So for us, they are the little brother of Germany and should definitely be in the European group. So, we both helped them and liked them and we attended also,

this U.S., Nordic, Baltic meetings, together with Secretary Rumsfeld, and to one of those meetings, I actually hitchhiked with Air Force One with him. [laughs]

LEONG: And I believe it was [00:57:00] reported as well.

DEVOLD: Yeah.

LEONG: Because you're one of the rare ministers who got to do that.

DEVOLD: Yeah, because I think I was the only minister without a private jet, and we were going from Brussels up to Estonia, and the only way you could reach the meeting was actually to have a jet. It was my military assistant who said, "Why don't you ask Secretary Rumsfeld if he has a back seat in the plane." So we asked and so I was invited, of course not to the back seat, but in the main room together with him, and it was a very interesting trip because a lot of things happened during that trip also. There was actually a terrorist attack, I think, on the U.S., in the Philippines, so we had to land and he had to attend to that crisis, from Germany, I think it was Geilenkirchen. He had promised to give a report from the NATO meeting, to officers in the NATO base of Geilenkirchen, and because of this terror attack he couldn't do that so he said to me -- I think it was actually [00:58:00] the first meeting I was in the NATO in Brussels, "Could you please step in and do the briefing?" I said, okay, and I think he liked that. He could give me tasks in three minutes warning and I tried the best I could. I think he liked that attitude, yeah.

LEONG: You didn't mind that he sort of took you under his wing?

DEVOLD: I didn't see it that way, no I didn't see it that way. I saw it the way that we had some chemistry, and that's important actually, in politics, that chemistry with the ones you have to deal with. I think people underestimate that. I think we should put much more effort into having good chemistry with other political leaders. I had also good chemistry with the defense minister of Russia, and I think that's -- it can always be a situation where that helps actually.

LEONG: I want to come back to that in just a second, but just to pursue this thought on chemistry. [00:59:00] In terms of the tensions between Germany and France

and the U.S. at that time, and Belgium, how much of that, do you think, will be put down to personalities and chemistry?

DEVOLD: Oh, I think it was basically actually political long-term goals, but there's always a chemistry issue also. Of course, around the NATO table, it wasn't everybody around that table that liked each other so much, and maybe there were even persons there which you feel like my God, what an idiot, and of course that hurts the relationship. There are always people who act in a bad way, disrespectful of others, et cetera, and you hold it against the whole country, it's a dangerous sport. So, but I think it's always, or most often at least, it is really long-term issues behind it. [01:00:00]

LEONG: So going back to your mention of Russia. What was the role that Norway played in terms of U.S./Russian relations and NATO?

DEVOLD: This was a time where Russia had a totally different approach that they have today.

LEONG: Yeah.

DEVOLD: Putin didn't take the road he is on today. And to have this NATO/Russia meetings was very interesting and we really wanted to develop Europe together with Russia. There were even talks about maybe Russia, some time in the future, could be a member of NATO, and that they were modernizing the society, opening up a bit. They had suddenly, a minister of defense who spoke English and was willing to speak English socially with the others; it was a major difference. They were from St. Petersburg, which is definitely a European city. So there was [01:01:00] a lot of cultural issues also, that were different. So, I think that if that way had continued, I wouldn't be surprised if Russia was suddenly a member of NATO. This was, at the same time where Tom Clancy wrote the book, *The Bear and the Dragon*. I don't know if you read that.

LEONG: I have not.

DEVOLD: It is actually a book that describes a scenario where Russia and the United States become allies towards, of all things, China. I remember the first time I met the minister of defense of Russia in Norway, he was visiting me, and I asked him, "What are you reading these days?" And he says, "I'm reading *The Bear and the Dragon*." [laughs] So it was some kind of sentiment, because Tom Clancy always tried to write about something that were -- he will have very good [01:02:00] intelligence, he knew a lot of information from the army side and from the military side, and he always tried to write something that had a touch of probability in it. So that's why, in these days, people really are hoping for an opening up. Later of course it didn't happen, it went the other way, what we saw in Ukraine for instance.

LEONG: Even so, of course compared to now is very different, but even so, back then, I think there was still some suspicion between the U.S. and Russia, as to how it was going up and down.

DEVOLD: Absolutely, absolutely, and in Norway always suspicion and realistic suspicion, absolutely, but it doesn't mean that it's not right to try to have a good dialogue.

LEONG: What was the sort of issues, specific issues that you talked about?

DEVOLD: We started on military issues. It was actually, to try to have some kind of common [01:03:00] exchange of officers visiting each others military exercises, things like that. It was very, in the beginning, to have some kind of Nordic perspective, with the Nordic ministers, including Sweden and Finland, invited Russia. To have also, an opportunity to discuss the situation in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, with Russia directly, and it was a more open dialogue than we had had for some time, so it's a pity that it didn't develop more along those lines.

LEONG: Did the U.S. work with you to maybe convey certain --?

DEVOLD: No, no, because we have this great border towards Russia, so we have to handle the Russia border and the dialogue with Russia ourselves. But in front of

the whole NATO, including the Americans, we actually had these NATO/Russia meetings, and there was a reason [01:04:00] for it. It was that we needed also, somewhere we could actually talk a little bit freely, have a lunch where we could discuss things freely, test out ideas on each other, and to also then have a minister that actually spoke English and were willing to improvise during lunch, and have some point of views, it was very interesting and a good development.

LEONG: Moving on to NATO itself. There was a lot of talk at that time, about reform within NATO. What was Norway's view?

DEVOLD: It was along two lines. It was capabilities. We had a lot of old tanks that couldn't be traveled to anywhere, we had a lot of old planes that couldn't be traveled anywhere, had a lot of soldiers that couldn't operate with anybody else than their own country, and so we had capabilities on paper but they couldn't be used. We had a very, very old fashioned command structure, we had so many levels, so many headquarters. We spent half [01:05:00] the money on headquarters and not on capabilities. So it was, in many ways, the same thing we had done in Norway. Take down the number of barracks, the number of people you don't need any more, and spend it on new capabilities, new investments, and also reform the command structure so that you have fewer officers, but they have larger power in many ways. So, I think that a lot of the smaller countries played a positive part, because we saw that we could contribute in that way, like Denmark, like Netherlands, like UK and Norway. But of course, some of those countries who had big forces but maybe couldn't be used so much, had a tougher job to start with the restoration that we had in Norway, they were a bit behind actually. So it was important to make everybody see that [01:06:00] we all need to do this, even if it will be unpopular in our own country. People will lose their jobs, people will lose their local bases, but we need to do it.

LEONG: What was the response?

DEVOLD: Everybody said of course that they did it, and they did it to different extents. Yeah. But when we talked about a command structure, everybody was afraid to lose their base, so when everybody traveled over to the United States, saying we would like you to keep our base, we were told by our -- Mr. Ong, that it's not a very wise approach. I don't think we would have taken it anyhow. Go over there with a suggestion, how the command structure should look like, what it should look like, and we did that. To have much more training and development and transformation focus, and we also made Jåttå our base, play a part in that, because it could be some kind of training command, [01:07:00] using the Norwegian areas for allied training. One thing, we have plenty of place.

LEONG: Yes, that is true.

DEVOLD: And good weather, and that is good for training.

LEONG: Right.

DEVOLD: Bad weather, I mean.

LEONG: No bad weather, just bad clothing.

DEVOLD: Yeah, yeah, but it's very good for training, because you test your clothing and you find out that this doesn't function, we need to change that. Yeah.

LEONG: Absolutely. Who were the most difficult NATO partners to work with in this regard?

DEVOLD: I don't think, from the Norwegian side, that anybody was difficult, because actually, we worked mainly with the UK and the United States, because we had to transform ourselves, that was a handful in itself, it couldn't go deeply down into what should Germany do or what should Turkey do. What we needed to do was to make sure that the way we structure our own forces fitted into, the long way, [01:08:00] long way thinking of the modern American forces. That's why we needed a very close contact, because Norway, when we deploy, we always deploy together with others, as I've told with the F-16s and Denmark. When we went to Iraq, we deployed into a British unit, because we communicate very well, have the

same kind of mentality, so we could go into Basra together with them, fitted very well. When we went into Maymana in Afghanistan, we went into a British unit. It's very, very easy for us to work with the British, and to make sure that what we plan is also useful for Britain and for the United States. That's a way to make sure that we are relevant, so that's why we didn't go into the other countries, what do they do. We defined who were our closest cooperation parties on the capability side. And then it was the North Sea Alliance [01:09:00] and also with UK and U.S.

LEONG: So by the time you left office, were you satisfied as to how it was going?

DEVOLD: Yes, we were actually finished with our transformation, and we even got a public -- a white paper report, saying that it was amazing. It was the first time actually, I think the Norwegian defense was hearing some praises. It was amazing, how much they had been able to change in four years, and we actually achieved all the goals that were set up in the four years plan decided on in June, 2001. So in many ways, we were finished with that round of transformation, and then of course there's a new one now.

LEONG: Right.

DEVOLD: Yeah.

LEONG: Right. So looking back on those years that you were defense minister, what was the most challenging part of it in terms of U.S.-Norway relations?

DEVOLD: Oh, that was Norwegian newspapers. [laughs] I think for all politicians, the journalists in your home country is always the most difficult, [01:10:00] because you are portrayed either as, you don't have your own views, you don't have your own mind, you're just doing what the United States says, or you're described as a person who likes war, likes sending soldiers to war, you're presented as a cold person, as an angry person, all these kinds of -- the way the press treats you when you have small children, because I have children and your family always reads and they are hurt much more than yourselves. So the difficult thing was definitely the press. The parliament was not a problem. We got the support for both the

transforming of the military inside Norway and for the operations abroad, and so we had good relations in the parliament, a good relationship in the government and good relationships with our main allies. [01:11:00] So from my point of view, it was a lot of positive things that happened. It was action every day and I've said it many times, it was the top of my work career. There will never be a job again, that is on the same level or on the side of that kind of job. I love the work I have today but that was four years of action every day, because of the situation after 9/11.

LEONG: Did you ever have a meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld or any U.S. official, in which you said ooh, that was a tough one?

DEVOLD: No. No, I don't think so, but we had a very good meeting after the change of government in Norway, because we lost the election in 2005. So I went over and visited Rumsfeld in January, 2006, and I was awarded a Pentagon medal, and I was invited to the Alfalfa board, [01:12:00] together with Donald Rumsfeld, which was -- and his wife, of course, it was very nice. And then we also had this, the way you can talk after you're finished the job. But I never had problems with any relationship to other countries or to the United States as well. The problems was only all of the noise from the leftists and the press.

LEONG: Has Secretary Rumsfeld said anything to you after he left office, that made you think --?

DEVOLD: He said one thing, he said if you ever need to borrow my -- he didn't call it cottage, but my uh, my house, my recreation house, in New Mexico, please come. But of course I've never done that. [both laugh]

LEONG: Perhaps you should.

DEVOLD: No, but I follow him, I follow him on Facebook. I bought the book he gave out in 2011, [01:13:00] and I think it's good to see that he's still going strong.

LEONG: But he has not spoken to you about his thoughts after?

DEVOLD: No, no, no, we don't do that, we don't do that you know. In politics, when you're off, you're off.

LEONG: Okay. Well, was there anything that I did not cover, that perhaps you feel is important and should have been mentioned?

DEVOLD: No. I think we've covered most of it, there's nothing that comes to my mind that we should add actually.

LEONG: Okay.

DEVOLD: It must be at least one thing about rhetoric, and that is that I realize, and I observe, that both President Obama and President Bush values to have a pleasant rhetoric these days. I think that's good, and it also shows the quality of those two presidents.

LEONG: Thank you very much. [01:14:00]

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO]