



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

Interviewee: Hilde Frafjord Johnson

Minister for International Development, 1997-2000 & 2001-2005

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[Begin Transcription]

LEONG: OK. So I'm LaiYee Leong with the Center for Presidential History. I'm with Miss Hilde Johnson, former minister for international development of Norway. Today is January 22nd, 2018, and we're in Oslo, Norway. Miss Johnson, let's start with your time in cabinet, in the second Bondevik cabinet. That was when George



W. Bush became president. What was your sense of his priorities in terms of international development?

JOHNSON: Well, there were kind of two things that we were thinking of when the Bush administration took office. One, of course, that September 11 had happened, and the implications of that would have ramifications on a number of fronts, [01:00] including foreign policy, security, but also development. That was one thing we were wondering about: how is this going to play out? The second was that the normal expectation when Republicans take office in the US is that there will be a drive towards cut in development assistance, at least to some extent. And you might also see an impact on the UN and funding of the UN. So as we started our second Bondevik II government, we were anticipating that things would happen in both areas. Of course they did. But surprisingly in the area of development assistance, of aid, we saw a much more progressive willingness to assist people in need. And there seemed to be a genuine engagement [02:00] by George Bush himself. For example, in terms of helping AIDS victims in Africa, making HIV and AIDS a high priority. Over time he established PEPFAR, which has been a groundbreaking and very important contributor to assist AIDS victims all over the world, and actually now has contributed to a major reduction in infections worldwide. And I think also reducing the price of pharmaceuticals, of ARVs, has been a critical part of that. So this was something that I think none of us really expected, that a huge contribution would come in this area. And in many ways taking a lead together with other players like UNAIDS and the Global Fund [03:00] Against Tuberculosis, Malaria, and HIV and AIDS. So that's one. And the other, of course, was in the area of the Millennium Challenge Account, where also additional assistance was put on the table. Of course, a bit cumbersome in the way it was managed in the very rigorous qualifications that countries had to go through with processes that took a lot of time. But still, additional money on the table, and with a focus also on the poorest developing countries and on Africa. So



here I have to say there's a legacy for George Bush and something that really stands in history, and which we appreciated, absolutely. And so that, I think, is important to note, from a development perspective. I think the UN side was a bit more tricky, where there was [04:00] challenges related to funding and where John Bolton, as a US ambassador at the time, was controversial and held quite controversial views. So that was a slightly different story. And of course on the War on Terror, that's another impact as well.

LEONG: I'll certainly be touching on the War on Terror, but very quickly now, since you mentioned the UN, what were the particular areas that you found tricky working with the US? At the UN?

JOHNSON: Well, I think this is more the foreign minister's responsibility, but we at the outset were in the Security Council. And of course in that particular area we saw a US administration through John Bolton as extremely critical of the UN, questioning a lot of allocations on the funding side, threatening with cuts, being very aggressive in the approach. And also in the Security Council [05:00] itself on policy stands, quite I think hard to deal with, and we quickly saw, on, for example, the Iraq issue, how that developed. And so I think most of the experiences with the administration, at least at the outset when John Bolton was there, was really a tough experience. And very much contrary to European views, and particularly the views of Nordic/Scandinavian countries, and Norway held the seat in the council for that first year. And of course later we were not on the council anymore, the Security Council, but followed things very closely.

LEONG: To the War on Terror, then. So of course it started with the invasion of Afghanistan. And Norway participated in that. So from the development point of view, how did that work out? Was [06:00] there a framework for development that was part of the invasion of Afghanistan?

JOHNSON: Well, we first, at the outset, tried to work together among like-minded countries to set up a framework which would make sure we now implemented the



principles of development in practice on the ground. These were local ownership, making sure the country itself is in the driver's seat, making sure we coordinate as much as possible, making sure we lower our flags to put the Afghans in the implementation role as much as we could. This implied for some of us like-minded countries, such as what we called the Utstein Group, which was a group that we formed in the late '90s with Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK, Clare Short among them; Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, the German minister; Eveline Herfkens, the Dutch minister -- all of us, [07:00] a group of four, worked really closely together. We became the big funders of ARTF, the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which was a multilateral trust fund administered by the World Bank, where we could make sure that we coordinated and where we didn't all of us run in different directions. So we made a huge attempt at making this happen. But we quickly saw that military strategic interests almost trumped what we were trying to do. And so, for example, the fact that in the G7 one suddenly, without even consulting the Afghans, divided sectors between them so that one particular G7 country would be lead in this sector, the other would be lead in another sector, without really having done the due diligence: Is this country, donor country, best positioned to do this? Is this really something that the Afghans agree to? [08:00] Have we now made a division of labor which implies that we will all coordinate properly behind this lead country? No. So none of this was really checked with development experience, lessons learned over decades, what works, what doesn't work, how do we do this in practice? So a lot of the principles we had agreed in international fora -- for example, the Rome Declaration, the Paris Declaration, and similar critical principles -- were just disregarded straight. And what ended up being the case, although we worked in parallel with these other structures, was that you got a big uncoordinated, if I may say so, mess in Afghanistan. And I think this has also been confirmed by a Norwegian commission that has reviewed all assistance in Afghanistan from the



very outset [09:00] up to now. And they're also critical of the lack of coordination. Not particularly of Norwegian assistance, but very much on how it all played out collectively on the ground.

LEONG: Who were you most in contact with in the US administration?

JOHNSON: At the time I was mostly in contact with Andrew Natsios, who was the chief, or the head, of USAID. And less so the other officials. What was difficult, which always is the case with US administrations, is that many people have a hand in the pie. Or many entities. So in many cases you're dealing with the NSC, the National Security Council, the State Department, USAID, and military strategic operators, and you don't really know who's taking the decision, when, and how. That makes it complicated for any external actor, because you're not really clear who takes the [10:00] critical decisions and when are these decision points? Except when you know that this high-level coordination committee of all the top officials are meeting to take decisions on something. If you understand that's happening then you know decisions are coming, but it makes it complicated for external actors working with the US to really understand the dynamics. So Andrew was the key partner for me. Of course, in the US administration, the USAID chief will always be the equivalent of a development minister, and we meet in all the international fora. Less so the State Department's head, the foreign secretary. But of course I also met and worked with Colin Powell on other issues. But in terms of aid to Afghanistan it was Andrew Natsios that was my counterpart.

LEONG: Why do you think there was this lack of coordination? I mean, what was happening, as far as you could tell [11:00] from your perspective?

JOHNSON: Well, this becomes a crude impression, right? But my impression is that in situations, and particularly in the War on Terror countries, there seems to be a military strategic complex that tends to trump the rest of what happens on the ground. So when it appeared that this was much more complicated than we initially saw, that there was a resurgence coming from the Taliban, that military



forces had to be deployed in much larger numbers, in a while you had ISAF, then NATO coming in... It became really, really difficult. And so what seemed to be the case from our perspective was that the military strategic part of the US administration actually took the decisions. And [12:00] US officials that I met were sometimes frustrated over this, where one disregarded straight development competence. And I got some really bad examples of decisions that had been made which basically were development assistance mistakes of the '60s and '70s, playing out again in 2002, 2003, or '4 having not really learnt from the past. And, of course, any development expert would know, this is the A, B, C. You don't do it that way. Yet that was what happened. This was reconstruction, building schools, all sorts of things where -- I heard several examples...

LEONG: Is it possible for you to be more specific, to give one or two examples?

JOHNSON: Yeah, these are only --

LEONG: Just stories?

JOHNSON: -- stories that you pick up, right? You haven't verified them. But I heard stories of [13:00] schools and public buildings being set up in places with latrines that were running on water. I mean, water closet -- when you don't even have a stable sewage system? And so from the outset that would never work. This is typical mistakes you don't do. You dig pit latrines. You don't make toilets in the Western kind of sense. If you do have a sewage system, there's every likelihood it's going to fall apart in a very short period of time. Just basic stuff like that, where -- what we heard. So whether it's true or not I don't know.

LEONG: So does this suggest a lack of consultation or just sheer ignorance or arrogance or lack of preparation? I mean, what does it suggest?

JOHNSON: Well, development people that I met were frustrated that they were not listened to. [14:00] They were just pushed aside if they came and said, "Please think about X, Y, and zed." And they were disregarded, basically. I wouldn't label whether that's arrogance or what it is, but clearly not taking development



competence seriously and thinking that, “Oh, this is easy; let us just do it.” You really saw that also in some of the PRTs, the provincial construction teams. They varied according to country. But some of the stories you could hear from them also, where military guys were doing the operational reconstruction and where there was lack of consultation with the local people, lack of understanding of local dynamics. So if you, for example, intervened with building a bridge here and a school there but not knowing that this would favor one part of the community and not the other, not understanding this, creating new local conflicts -- these types of things. [15:00] Development experts would do due diligence, check what’s happening here, doing a proper assessment, and make sure that you’re not throwing yourself into an unknown territory where what you can do can fuel conflict instead of resolving it. Or instead of trying to create platforms for dialogue. This is basic knowledge that development experts would know, but where -- military strategic expertise would know their business, but this was about them putting themselves into a business they don’t know, they don’t have competence, and frankly should stay away from.

LEONG: So there were no administrative distinctions, then, between, say, the more civilian side or the more military side.

JOHNSON: There was none in some PRTs. In others -- for example, when it came to Norway, I actually fought against the establishment of a PRT, [16:00] but in the end had to give in, because I strongly believed this was a wrong approach. And the Afghanistan commission later now is almost giving me the -- they are giving a negative assessment of the PRTs, let’s say. Not all of them bad, but the Afghanistan commission is critical of this approach. And so when we then had to accept that Norway would establish a PRT, as this was now a standard recommendation from NATO, ISAF, whatnot, then we had very clear criteria of how it should work, with a distinction between civilian and military, and where you had civilian staff doing development-related interventions. So some countries



and some PRTs followed this kind of concept; others didn't. And so in others you would find military doing everything. [17:00] But this is just one example. The big mistake in Afghanistan -- and I think what I picked up also in Iraq -- is that when you have a strong strategic military interest in a country, you tend to let that drive the solutions on the ground also on reconstruction. And you ignore competence that has been developed over decades on what you do, what you don't do, what can succeed, what will not succeed, and build on that. And if you ignore that, it's not likely that it would work, and --

LEONG: What --

JOHNSON: -- that's, I think, what you've seen.

LEONG: Sure. I wonder if you could be more specific about what exactly were these security interests or strategic interests that you keep referring to that ran so counter to the interests of development, per se? What was it that they felt they had to achieve [18:00] that led them to ignore the recommendations of development experts?

JOHNSON: Well, if you are using a development approach, it takes time. This very often irritates a military campaign. So, for example -- and I had a dialogue in the NATO headquarters about their Afghanistan approach, and there was much, much more critical self-reflection now than what we experienced during the time when I was minister. And one of the strategies then was to, you win the war -- I mean, no, you don't win the war, but you win a battle, let's say, or push into a certain territory -- and what you do then is quickly bring in humanitarian aid first, then reconstruction [19:00] slash development interventions to stabilize the situation. And you want to make quick wins to make sure that you also win hearts and minds. And believing that schools and vaccines and some bridges and so on would win hearts and minds, you then move to an assumed stable situation, where this area or territory would be under your control. Now, that's the assumption. And so you want to make quick wins, and you would generally be critical of anyone



saying, “You need to take the time to anchor this properly with the local population, to do proper assessments, to make sure that this can succeed; otherwise things can fall apart; otherwise conflicts can be created.” This doesn’t fit very well with winning [20:00] hearts and minds and making sure that the territorial control is the primary objective. Now, the challenge, of course, which I think has been experienced in both countries, both Afghanistan and Iraq, is counterinsurgency is very complicated. And it’s not as if you win territory and it stabilizes and you can remain there and you control it. No, it fluctuates all the time. So you kind of win over this territory, you try to do something; then if you move back you will have Taliban coming in or insurgents in Iraq, and they will take that territory under their control again, they will destroy again, you will move -- I mean, it’s a fluctuating situation. And it’s militarily also very complicated -- although I’m not a military expert. But I think lessons learnt, counterinsurgency is extremely hard. And I think it’s a learning process [21:00] for any military strategic operation. But it’s really important to learn this lesson, and the Afghanistan commission in Norway, which was composed of all -- both military intelligence, foreign policy experts, but also a couple of people from the development side, but really broadly put together from a vast range of actors and interests -- they come to a very important conclusion, and that is that state-building and war cannot succeed together. You can only do state-building when you have achieved peace. That’s when it can be successful. You can make attempts and so on, but you are not going to succeed. And so if you try to do both at the same time, it will fail. And I think that’s an important lesson. And so that’s why I think the political work for peacemaking is the most critical job [22:00] one can do, and a lot of investment should be put into this. So this is more a political statement, but of course the fact that one waited for so long before the dialogue with Taliban started is really regrettable. And Norway started early on but got a problem and was advised, the US wasn’t very much keen on that process. This was later, after the



Bush administration, but it's really regrettable that that acknowledgment of the political track didn't start earlier. Of course, at the time, they were seen as terrorists, and understandably so. What the operations were had every characteristic of being a terrorist operation. At the same time, they were the ones creating trouble. Of course, one hasn't achieved much yet at the table, but maybe things could have changed if things would've started earlier. But then I'm not the [23:00] expert to tell what should have happened. But also the commission, the Afghanistan commission, points out that this is extremely important and should have started earlier.

LEONG: I realize that you're not an expert on terrorism, necessarily, or counterterrorism. Having said that, you were there when it was happening. Do you have a sense that the Americans had a very rigid perspective of what they were doing, that they were there for counterterrorism purposes, and therefore that limited their options, to some extent, their willingness to consider a wider variety of political options? Do you have a sense of that?

JOHNSON: That's difficult for me to tell because I wasn't in all these meetings and the internal discussions in NATO, etc., so I was more in the development fora. But my assumption from the [24:00] political side would be that when you have a war on terror, and you have characterized some groups as terrorist groups, and therefore you cannot communicate with them -- at all -- putting concrete movements on the terrorist list for an incommunicado purposes, then you're also excluding yourself from resolving deep crises in countries on the political side. Some terrorist organizations you cannot talk to, basically, because they are not talkable [laughs] -- you can't use the term "talkable," but you can't really -- they are not interested in politics; they are just interested in using their own terrorist tactics on the operational side. But [25:00] there will be, in some cases, situations where there will be parts of such elements that would be interested in communicating and would be interested in a dialogue. And this is what you saw with Taliban, where



there were parts of Taliban that were more interested in a political solution and in discussing. And I think that was acknowledged much later. But I think that was, in a way, not acceptable at the time and was seen as hearsay. It's understandable from the September 11th perspective that one was really, really black and white. It's a psychology, also, after such a damn terrible terrorist attack. But I think it influenced somehow [26:00] the thinking and limited the options. And you end up only with a military option, and that doesn't succeed. How many soldiers you pour into the place, it doesn't succeed. And we're now seeing more soldiers coming in -- again! So it shows that you need to look for other options because it's not succeeding. And that, I think, is the reason why there has been an opening of recent for that dialogue to happen.

LEONG: There was also criticism later that on the American side there was a lack, or insufficient expertise, in terms of cultural anthropologists --

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEONG: -- and people who just knew...

JOHNSON: There's no doubt about it.

LEONG: There's no doubt about that?

JOHNSON: No.

LEONG: Why do you say that? What was the sense?

JOHNSON: No, because you don't do development in that way. You don't do reconstruction in that way. It is ignoring the local circumstances. And it's not going to succeed. [27:00]

LEONG: And they didn't talk to people elsewhere who did have that expertise?

JOHNSON: Not to my knowledge, but they might have consulted a number of people for what I know, but I couldn't see the impact on the ground. I visited Afghanistan quite often, and we picked up from all the donors what was happening and the assessments that were made and so on. And I think the successes in Afghanistan - - the ARTF's contributions on education and health is by far the most successful



story. And that was done by using established development principles built on decades of experience. That's how they succeeded. I don't see much success on the other interventions that happened. And you also have the National Solidarity Programme, which we helped fund, which was block funding for communities where people themselves were empowered to [28:00] actually implement the projects themselves. And this is also a success story. It's been evaluated numerous times and is building on the basic principles of development where you empower the people, use them, let them be in the driver's seat, take the decisions, and help them implement them. It's just really basic. So the two success stories in Afghanistan had nothing to do with military operations; it was done in the way that we know, building on the competence and experience of numerous people that knew the country, the dynamics, and how you get things done. And it's slow, but it delivers.

LEONG: I want to talk a little bit more about the PRT, the sector that Norway was in charge of. How much interference was there from the US or NATO in terms of what was going on in that sector?

JOHNSON: Well, there was a lot of push from the US [29:00] -- and ultimately and also from NATO -- for every NATO country in the coalition and in ISAF to establish its own PRT.

LEONG: Right.

JOHNSON: And to get one sector each or region each. So I think it was pushed much more on the importance of doing this rather than on the way you should do it. That was much left to the individual country, which is also why we put very strict criteria on how the Norwegian PRT should work.

LEONG: Why were they so keen to be doing this?

JOHNSON: It was part of the same stabilization thing, that you should see visible signs of development in all the different regions of Afghanistan. And it's also totally contrary to any development principle, because you will get different



methodologies and different development approaches in every state in a country, [30:00] which is supposed to have a national standard. If you're going to reconstruct a country, the main way of doing that -- and strengthen the government -- is that the government is the visible entity that is seen to be implementing a program. Now, if you put military in one location with their flags and their uniforms, it is not the government that's implementing anything; it's the military on the ground from X country. So you don't get any benefit in terms of people and people's own kind of belief and kind of trust in the government. And one of the essential things in a country like Afghanistan is to help strengthen the government's hand against the insurgents. So if you're going to do that you need to put the government in the front seat. They have to be seen to be implementing things. They have to be seen to create the standards. They have to be seen to have their flags around. "This is us. We have achieved this for our people." Then people will start believing in the government and not in the insurgents. They did the opposite. [31:00] Yes, they developed the police. However, that also turned to be very much a paramilitary operation with just a few days of police training and then you're suddenly a police officer and whatnot. So that was also a mixed bag. Not that everything was like that on the police side. There were also countries doing very good, proper police training work. But some of it was really not the quality we need to see. But yes, a lot was achieved in many areas. But the PRTs ran totally contrary to what the principle of post-conflict reconstruction really should be.

LEONG: Of state-building.

JOHNSON: State-building! Seeing that this state is doing something for us as citizens of this country. We can trust the state. We don't have to run to the Taliban to get our help. We have somebody helping us. Now, the government didn't have the capacity, but it is then the donors' responsibility to go in behind the government, put the government in the front seat, [32:00] and assist them in implementation.



That's the whole rationale behind it. And instead, you're putting flags in these small islands all around the country with different approaches, different this, different that, different languages, whatnot, and inadequate consultation with the locals, and you think that's going to work? No way. And it didn't. Although some achieved a little bit here and a little bit there, as NATO people told me when we were looking at this a couple of years back.

LEONG: So as far as Norway was concerned in the PRT, in the sector that Norway was in, what in your view was in fact achieved?

JOHNSON: Well, I don't know the details of this now, to be honest, because the PRT was just started I think in 2003, '4. I think there was some construction of some roads and some schools and something like that, but, I don't have a documentation of what was achieved. [33:00] And I think the results that I was reported came much later. And so they were doing things when I was there, but it took time to set it up. And I think the report from the Afghanistan commission shows that some results were achieved, but they were limited -- as one could expect.

LEONG: Were there instances, whether at the sector --

JOHNSON: And by the way, it's very expensive development aid as well.

LEONG: How's that?

JOHNSON: Because the military is very, very expensive. So that's another side of the story. So you could achieve much, much more with the same money if you channeled it through civilian efforts.

LEONG: I'm curious to know if there was a -- whether at the provincial level or at the national level, whether there were conflicts in terms of political aims and civilian aims. And by that I mean I was reading, for instance, that in some instances there was a desire to [34:00] prosecute certain members of the -- not necessarily Taliban, but certain criminal --

JOHNSON: Warlords?



LEONG: -- groups or warlords. But then there were other people who were saying, “No, no, no, let’s not do that because he or she -- or he -- is a potential --”

JOHNSON: Mm-hmm.

LEONG: “-- partner.” How were those conflicts played out?

JOHNSON: I wouldn’t be able to say in detail because then you have had to be on the ground to really make an assessment of that. But it’s a traditional development dilemma in post-conflict situations. Now, this wasn’t a post-conflict situation; this was conflict and development at the same time. And as I mentioned, the Afghanistan commission says that is hardly going to work. But one of the dilemmas in these murky situations is indeed accountability. Because both on corruption as well as on war crimes, many [35:00] around you are culprits. And yet you have to work with them, to make deals so that you don’t get additional conflict. And in some cases it’s worth doing that; in other cases you really have to shy away from it. And it’s really a tricky thing. And of course there are limits as to what the international community should accept in terms of deals with warlords and what they have been up to. But at the same time you can’t have totally clean hands because then you’re likely to not succeed because you will have an insurgent at your hands. So it’s really a very, very tricky landscape to navigate. I’m getting back to the same point: you need to know the players, you need to know what they’ve been up to, you need to know the ethnic composition of the community you’re in, and you need to know [36:00] to which extent will this have a huge consequence. If we make sure that this person is not part of a deal, what would that imply in terms of local dynamics? These things you really, really have to know firsthand. In some cases military people are good at that; in other cases they’re not. So this also depends on personality and training. But generally those with better cultural competence are people who have that background.

LEONG: And in your view, which sectors sort of did better in terms of outcomes than others? Which donor countries?



JOHNSON: Well, I think it's well known internationally that education and education for girls has been the success story of Afghanistan -- and, to some extent, health. I think the National Solidarity [37:00] Programme, definitely, has been a success story. I think on a number of other fronts it's much more mixed. And of course, this is also linked to fluctuations in the insurgency. So where regions have been much more impacted by the Taliban insurgency you'll find even the best successes will fall apart because of the war. So that's a more tricky issue. But I'm pretty sure that if you look at police I think with all the money and all the effort that was put into this it cannot be seen to be a success story. I think here a much more quality-based approach should have been taken by every donor and a much better coordinated approach should have been used. [38:00] So here you had some that delivered well, but I think overall one of the reasons why things have been difficult for years after the Bush administration is also that that hasn't been a success story at all.

LEONG: I'm getting the sense from you that there wasn't much of a sort of directive from the US leadership in terms of coordinating with what was happening on the ground. Was there lateral cooperation, lateral coordination? Did people like you or Norwegian officials try to coordinate with other countries who were also running PRTs? Did that work out?

JOHNSON: PRTs was just a marginal thing. The big money went elsewhere. So I think the PRTs you could never coordinate. That was left by each country, and it was partly coordinated by NATO, paradoxically, so that had nothing to do with development. We established the principles; [39:00] it was military that did it. So no development people were really much engaged, except those few that had development, actually civilians leading some of the efforts in the PRTs. But that's a different story.

LEONG: I see.



JOHNSON: As for the rest, the whole post-conflict reconstruction -- which wasn't post-conflict anymore, which was in the middle of conflict -- I think no, the US was trying very much to drive that effort and was in many ways pushing countries a lot. And the G7 was involved at the outset quite a lot. At the same time, it wasn't really coordinated at all because all the different countries were running their own shop, almost, yeah? At the ground level, though, and as the Afghanistan commission [40:00] report shows, there was a lot of coordination between Nordic like-minded countries. They tried their level best within thematic groups, and all the usual coordination frameworks that one establishes in all these countries was also established in Afghanistan. But it coordinated between those who wanted to be coordinated, and the rest was outside. And of course the US did not want to be part of that coordination. They ran their own shop, basically. And so there's limits as to how much coordination you can achieve then.

LEONG: So with this in the background, when President Bush made his second inaugural address and talked about spreading democracy and so on, what were your thoughts?

JOHNSON: Well, it is difficult to spread democracy in an environment like this, both Afghanistan and Iraq -- and of course with Iraq there was this huge challenge [41:00] of the Shiite/Sunni dimension, which has showed later to be a huge, complex, and difficult issue for Iraq. Now, Norway did not engage in the War on Terror in Iraq in the way the US wanted and expected. And we were, in the end, respected for that. So we were not as engaged in the Iraqi situation. But it's clear to me that -- for example, the Ba'ath military, the efforts that were made to relinquish the whole traditional military that were under Saddam Hussein --

LEONG: The Ba'ath party.

JOHNSON: -- in the end it backfired big-time. And of course we have found the remnants of that in the ISIS [42:00] operation. But of course this also had a huge impact in undermining democracy in Iraq. So reflections will always be an



afterthought, right? But it's important to have democratic principles to fight for and to promote worldwide, and we do that in Norway as well. It's a very big issue for us. But the way to achieve it is very much based on how you manage the situation in different countries: understanding the ethnic dimension, understanding the religious dimension, understanding what is the political dynamics that follows those two. And I think in many ways this complexity has not been well understood in all the international efforts in either of these countries. And [43:00] I think that's backfired since.

LEONG: Now, in one country, though, there was some success, and that's Sudan. And you worked very closely with Secretary Powell on that.

JOHNSON: Yes.

LEONG: Would you tell us a little bit more about that? Why did Secretary Powell give his attention to Sudan, and how did it come about that the both of you were able to be quite successful?

JOHNSON: Well, I think I would go back to George Bush, actually. This is another positive legacy of his. He had a very strong personal engagement on this issue. I think it came from his evangelical background, where -- interestingly, the fate of South Sudanese in Sudan and the liberation war for years and years was a bipartisan issue in the US, where Democrats and Republicans on both sides had a strong engagement. It was linked very much to the African American cause, antislavery cause, etc. And so this has been seen [44:00] as a liberation issue, with strong engagement. And we quickly discovered that George Bush had a personal strong engagement here. And he chose to send Jack Danforth as his first envoy, Senator Danforth, whom I also worked very closely together with from the outset when we started to try to put a peace process together that could credibly achieve something. And so before Powell started his work, Senator Danforth was in the forefront and visited Khartoum, went to meet with the different South Sudanese players -- of course, Dr. John Garang, who was then the head of the SPLMA, the



Sudan Liberation People's Movement and Army. [45:00] And I think his instruction from President Bush was quite clear. And then of course Colin Powell was overseeing this in conjunction with Senator Danforth. And it appeared quite quickly that if we were going to succeed, we needed to actually use top-level engagement with both Khartoum and the SPLMA. Now, interestingly -- and I'm writing this in a book that I've written about the whole peace process, *Waging Peace in Sudan* -- interestingly, I don't think that we would have succeeded in getting an agreement, or even getting Khartoum's engagement, if it hadn't been for September 11th. And the reason basically was the War on Terror scared the Sudanese leadership. They were worried to be lumped together with the Axis of Evil. And so they started [46:00] sending signals to the US that "We're interested in doing something constructive with South Sudan and this terrible war of ours," and then also to cooperate with the US on intelligence issues. This was received in Washington, and that very much was the start of what at then was a process that was put on track and which ended up, after a long period of time, on the ninth of January 2005 with a signature of the comprehensive peace agreement. So at the high level when we managed to facilitate a -- and put pressure on the leaders to meet -- this was in August 2003 -- in particular pressing John Garan to the table when Khartoum was willing to negotiate. Initially he wasn't. [47:00] And so he called me, I called top officials in the US, and then we put pressure on Dr. John, finally came to the table, and from then on the peace process involved the two leaders -- I think it was 16 or 18 months, they were sitting behind closed doors, negotiating. And very much a very strong personal engagement between the two enemies turned into partners in peace. And significantly with a lot of pressure from the US and Norway. This was a partnership that we had together. The UK was also part of it, but it certainly hadn't been possible -- at all -- without the top-level engagement by the US and us. So we saw Colin Powell making calls at the right time -- Jack Danforth was then out, and it was Colin Powell and Charley



Snyder, who was at that time undersecretary in [48:00] -- or secretary for Africa -- in the State Department. We were the ones sticking up with it until the very end. And the agreement was signed on the ninth of January 2005. Now, of course, everything has gone wrong since, which is a different story. And there are many reasons for that, which I've written about in another book. [laughs] But certainly Colin Powell had a huge victory in that, and it wouldn't have happened without him, without George Bush being so keen on mandating him with the authority he had, and, of course, the rest of us.

LEONG: Well, I think that's it. Did we cover everything that you think is important?

JOHNSON: I think so. We're also past time.

LEONG: Is there any area that generally just tends to be ignored that you feel ought to be brought to light? [49:00]

JOHNSON: I think the main things I've said, actually. I think it's OK.

LEONG: OK. Well, thank you.

JOHNSON: You're welcome. And thank you. Good.

LEONG: Well, thank you.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO]