



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

Interviewee: Jonas Gahr Støre

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Minister of Health, 2012-2013

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[Begin Transcription]

LEONG: I'm LaiYee Leong with the SMU Center for Presidential History. I am with Mr. Jonas Gahr Støre, former foreign minister of Norway, 2005 to 2012. Today is June 5th, and we are in Oslo, Norway. Mr. Store, when you were state secretary in



2001, with the first Stoltenberg cabinet, what were your impressions of Mr. Bush, Mr. George W. Bush, as candidate and then as president, in those early days?

STØRE: Well, we had the opportunity to meet the president at the NATO Summit, right before the summer of 2001. He came with his security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, and we had the impression of an incoming administration seeking its policies on international issues, [01:00] connecting with allies. This was a summit that is regularly organized at the beginning of a term of an American president. I think we had followed -- this was the era of Clinton, for a president to not necessarily was building on the legacy of his predecessor, but was seeking his own road, but a bit undecided where that was. And the president that had emphasized in the campaign that he would be more domestically oriented in his policies.

So he made an open impression, I would say, at the NATO Summit. I had a kind of informal conversation with Condoleezza Rice, who was to become my colleague a few years later, as foreign minister. She was basically saying, we are meeting our allies and getting acquainted. Everything, of course, changed a few months later, with September 11th. But at that time, which was June, I believe, 2001, [02:00] it was a bit of undecided, seeking its footing, and where to stand.

LEONG: Was there any concern, given that it was a post-Cold War era, any concern that the United States was going to be a little high-handed, given that was the only superpower left?

STØRE: I think it was more the concern that the kind of policies of the '90s under Clinton had been defining post-Cold War American foreign policy, with a mix of the peace dividend, but at the same time interventionism in some areas, the experiences we've had. I think presidential candidate in George W. Bush saying that, "That will not be my policy. I will do more, focused on our internal issues, and less active foreign policy." It illustrates I think, in a way, how events shape a president's vision and the president's policy, what was to become so fundamental



for the legacy of George W. Bush, [03:00] namely 9-11, then Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on, was in no plans, so to say.

LEONG: Were there any concerns for Norway in particular, given that, of course, Russia is your neighbor, that with the inward turn that President Bush was suggesting at that time --

STØRE: I wouldn't say that. I think Norway has been on the kind of a mainstay on relations with the United States on foreign policy, with shifting presidents, since NATO membership after World War II. We've had Republicans and Democrats inward looking, outward looking -- but always, I would say, good and decent political relations, person to person, president to president, administration to administration. Plus the mainstay of defense intelligence and civil society which have carried through. So I think our attitude, although we felt particularly closer to the Clinton legacy than the incoming Bush administration, we were feeling we'll find a way, [04:00] as we have in the past.

LEONG: So when 9-11 happened, what was your gut reaction when you first heard the news? Where were you? What was your reaction as a person, an individual --

STØRE: Well, we all remember it, this was just after -- the day after we had lost elections. So we were gathered in the Central Committee of the Labour Party to sum up the elections. We got the news from the people out in the waiting room that something had happened in New York. I brought this in to the prime minister and the foreign minister, that something very spectacular has happened. And the next step, as I think many European capitals experienced, was after it was clear that this was a terrorist attack on tall buildings in New York, what about tall buildings in Oslo? How far away are we from the airport outside Oslo? So there was a termination of the meeting, and there was going back to the prime minister's office, at the top of the government building. We had to deal with immediate issues of security of our airports, new mandates to our Air Force. [05:00] We had to issue unheard of mandates to our fighter pilots, eventually to shoot down



planes, if need be. Then very quickly, the day after, came the statement, that this was an Article 5 situation; the U.S. had been attacked. Whereas we had planned always that Article 5 could be operational because of an attack in Europe, here comes Article 5 being mentioned because the U.S. has been attacked. I think there was a strong sense of Atlantic solidarity. A strong sense that we should really think carefully through what we did now, not to end up with the West against the rest, but really try to mobilize that broad global support that was there for the United States at the time.

LEONG: Were you surprised that even though NATO was so quick [06:00] to invoke Article 5 that the United States actually didn't really take it up, they decided to form its own coalition?

STØRE: Well, I think that's a very interesting issue for historians to study, because they could have done both. And in one way, it gave the U.S. more unilateral ability to operate and decide its partnerships and its own decision-making, than continuing on an Article 5 logic, which has never been tested, really. Probably also something reflecting the administration's view on the U.S. freedom of operation, so to say. But we were outgoing administration, so we were caretakers for a month until a new government came in, and the Labour Party, in opposition, were to find its role, as we do traditionally, back the government in its main policy orientations and foreign policy.

LEONG: At that time, Minister Jagland and Minister Godal [07:00] was briefly criticized for not having a stronger reaction in terms of volunteering Norwegian assistance. Why was that?

STØRE: I can't remember that, because I don't think -- I mean, I think Norway was very clear about its solidarity. The U.S. did not request specific assistance, as far as I can remember, during those few days or weeks that we were in office. It took time to define its strategy before striking in Afghanistan, building a coalition. So I can't remember that we were reluctant on that note.



LEONG: Was there any particular advice in terms of relations with the U.S. that you gave to the incoming government?

STØRE: No, briefing them very closely on what we had been working on. We had raised issues here in committees in parliament, so they knew the thinking. I think there was a very smooth transition of responsibility to the new Bondevik government.

LEONG: Now [08:00] of course, you left government, but remain active in politics. What were your thoughts as you began to observe U.S. actions in Afghanistan, and then later in Iraq?

STØRE: Well, this is a very big issue. To be short on it, I personally think that it was necessary to react and for the U.S. to respond. I can understand. I think, however, that the way state-building came about in Afghanistan with the Bonn Conference and the way constitutions were written and principles were formed, created obstacles to the way we were able, in the aftermath, to create stability and governance in Afghanistan. Very, very complex, as foreign powers have experienced throughout history. And perhaps one should have been more inclusive [09:00] of social groups, ethnic groups in Afghanistan at that very defining moment. There were important groups excluded from that nation-building process that started, which I think halted the process.

Then I also believe, as I think we did from a Labour Party perspective, that Iraq was an ill-thought-through strategy. And the attack left too many unanswered questions for the aftermath, which is a long story in itself. But the consequence, of course, was that Afghanistan was downplayed because the Iraq became the intensive issue in 2003. So I think that was a very unfortunate situation, where two such very complex military operations at the same time with big alliances of willing states, at the same time having a political perspective [10:00] of how conflicts could end, not being taken sufficiently serious. These were not issues that you could solve militarily. They had to be solved politically,



although the military force had to be part of the response. But I think our feeling towards 2005, when we came back into government, was that there was a too one-sided view that the military could fix it, and too little thought given to what comes after. That's a contrast, in a way, to after World War II, where the U.S. was in a situation where it really had to deal with defeated enemies by bringing them up on their feet again to take them forward.

LEONG: So what did you think of what the Bondevik government did in terms of their approach?

STØRE: Well, I've been foreign minister. I'm respectful of the fact that when you are not in office, you have to be careful not to criticize in detail. For [11:00] Norway, it's always important to maintain solidarity with the U.S. It's part of our alliance, it's part of our security guarantee. So the U.S. under attack, the U.S. responding -- of course responding differently than Norway would under the circumstances, because we had different roles, different size, different history. I think it's Norway's role to be attentive and to be supportive of American security, as we expect NATO partners to be attentive to our security. At the same time, I think as I just said, I think that the nation-building efforts and state-building efforts were not thought through to the detail that one should have, which I think left the Bondevik government with the conclusion that we cannot be part of this military operation, which was a difficult issue inside the government at the time. But still, I think it was the right decision.

LEONG: Did it surprise you, President Bush's rhetoric? Global War on Terror, with us [12:00] or against us?

STØRE: No, I'm not really surprised, matched against where he came from, politically. But as I said, this was an identity that took shape under the weight of events that shaped his presidency, of course his key collaborators and the environment around him and the language. I was among those who believe that War on Terror is a notion which I would understand. I would also fight those who



would like to terrorize. But it is not a very conducive language to rally the support you need to really get to the roots, because if you declare a War on Terror, which is such an abstract enemy, being people fighting in the hills and mountains of Afghanistan, or it being complex social structures in Iraq, if you wage war in the traditional sense against armies of an enemy state, you can defeat that state, and [13:00] you settle issues. So the war against Iraq in 2003 was won quickly. But the war on winning Iraq afterwards, I think the War on Terror created images in the minds of people which probably led to more opposition than necessary.

LEONG: In terms of trans-Atlantic relations, were you surprised at how quickly tensions built up, especially in terms of relations between France and Germany, and Belgium on one side, in the West?

STØRE: But this was the first test of really post-Cold War reality. This was no longer about how to match the Soviet Union, but this was how to match a threat from, really, outside at a very different scale. And you saw, again, that this unity of focus and purpose was not that unified as one would have perhaps believed. So France took its position. We saw it many years later over Libya. Germany pulled out, was not part of the approach. So that's a diversity that we also may see in the West. [14:00] Still, NATO -- which was not an actor in these wars, I mean in Afghanistan after a while, it became important -- remained vigilant and operational. So I think again, democracies can take these debates, can take these disagreements. Can even take a major state standing at the side. But and here, I would salute American diplomacy that they were able to bring, in the big picture, allies and partners along.

LEONG: While that was happening, though, at the height of those tensions, were you worried for Norway being caught up in this?

STØRE: Well -- and it came to form my term as foreign minister also -- I was concerned with the fact that we would weaken our capacity to be militarily present at home, because we have our neighborhood. Our allies in Europe don't have that



strategic reality close to it. [15:00] You don't choose your neighbors. You don't choose your geography. We are next to Russia. We have Russia close to us, and we maintain high North low tension by being present. So part of our mission in government was to say, let's bring NATO home, and let's make Article 5 relevant for European conditions, because a whole generation on NATO military were trained in the mountains of Afghanistan, really. Really, that's where they had their experience. But we also want them to be attentive of the North Atlantic and the fiords of Norway. Eventually, that could be the case. I think it was right for Norway to say we will participate per capita in Afghanistan. We were among the highest. And we rendered, I think, very valuable efforts there. We trained after a while the special forces in and around Kabul, which have been very important. We were able to demonstrate that as a solid NATO partner, we delivered, because [16:00] it's part of the kind of mutual trust which is in it.

At the same time, I believe it was right that we were not militarily in the dark, in the fighting mission.

LEONG: The defense minister at that time, Kristin Krohn Devold, was known for a very close relationship with Secretary Rumsfeld. What were your thoughts on that?

STØRE: Well, there were a lot of gossip around that being too close. Was she really being pressured in one direction or another? I'm not criticizing that, really. I believe that it's part of modern foreign policy that you should really team up with your partner and your colleague. And for Norwegian ministers of foreign affairs, defense, having a good working relationship with American colleagues, I think it's part of your work description. She found her tone with Secretary Rumsfeld. I wouldn't criticize it.

LEONG: What did you think of Secretary Rumsfeld's categorization of Europe, division of Europe, into old Europe, [17:00] and new Europe?



STØRE: Very unfortunate. Because it's one Europe, which is diverse, and the U.S. has traditionally understood that as Europe's strength, but also to a certain extent vulnerability. You have to work on Europe. Europe is a complex thing. I think that message was more contributing to divisions that were, I think, unnecessary, than really helping.

LEONG: To what extent was Secretary Rumsfeld's tone and approach representative of the American diplomats at that time? Or American officials at that time?

STØRE: Well, he was in office also when we came in. And I think with Vice President Cheney and himself and John Bolton at the time were giving him more kind of hawkish -- as one would say -- image of a presidency, which one would not necessarily find in conversations with the president. We never met him bilaterally in [18:00] the Oval Office, but frequently at international conferences. But we had, I think, a very good tone. I also believe that when she became foreign minister, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had another way of engaging allies, which I firmly believe was a much smarter way, because she could really move people along, rather than creating these either you're with us or against us images.

LEONG: What did you think of the U.S. ambassador to Norway at that time, Mr. John Ong?

STØRE: I knew him vaguely. He left quickly. My first experience as foreign minister was to make a decision on granting the U.S. and the state for building a new embassy, which was a very divisive issue in Oslo, in the city council. I saw it as my responsibility, really, to push through our decision, because we could not have it that our leading ally would not be able to find an estate for building a new embassy. So there I worked closely [19:00] with the ambassador and the embassy to fix that. Then, after a while he left. So I really didn't come to work closely with him.

LEONG: It was divisive in Oslo for what reason?



STØRE: I mean, basically because the U.S. embassy would be a big thing. It would attract a lot of security. So most neighborhoods would say, "Not in my back yard." There was a difficulty in finding the right place. Then finally, the U.S. found a spot with the Municipality of Oslo, and they bought it. There was resistance from neighbors, but with a very narrow majority, there was a vote in favor of granting it. Now the embassy is up and running.

LEONG: Right. Right. So when you returned to the cabinet to the government as foreign minister, what did you see as the first issue that needed the greatest attention?

STØRE: One issue which became an issue was this famous phone call between Prime Minister Stoltenberg and President Bush, where Stoltenberg announced that Norway [20:00] would not be part of the military operation in Iraq.

LEONG: Right.

STØRE: We had very few people there, but we would pull them out while we would maintain the high level in Afghanistan. That was not welcomed, I believe, in Washington. I mean, I don't think they expected to have that at the first call. But I think it was a decent thing to say up front, because it was in the program, it was in the platform. So I think that was a start, which perhaps was a bit rough on the very sensitive issue for the U.S. side.

LEONG: But the U.S. side said that he didn't even -- that Mr. Stoltenberg didn't even say it.

STØRE: No, so there was this kind of -- this was a congratulatory call which I think came from Air Force One when he was flying somewhere. I wasn't present at that conversation, but I think it created in the Norwegian media the image, or the impression that something was a bit tense. But I got to meet with my American colleague very quickly after [21:00] taking office, and I experienced, really, during those years we were together a very straight-forward working relationship. We saw differently on a few issues, but on the main issues, I think -- on Afghanistan,



on East-West, on the Middle East -- I think Norway was valued. And we valued that relationship. And we were open about where we might have differences.

So we got on the working relationship. I was very attentive to appointing what I saw as the best ambassadors we could have in Washington, operational people, maintaining Minister Vollebæk with his network, and then appointing Ambassador Strommen, who I knew would be good networkers for Norway and could do good work for us. Yeah.

LEONG: I actually also spoke to Ambassador Vollebæk, and he said that unfortunately, because of that dispute over what Prime Minister Stoltenberg had said or had not said, [22:00] that Norway did find itself slightly on the outside as a result. Did you get a sense of that?

STØRE: Well, this strange sense that there was a kind of -- we were looked a bit with critical eyes, what is this government, the socialists, are in -- I think we had the very straight-forward government platform, which was really at NATO standards. We maintain our roles as active allies. I think the U.S. gradually understood what we were doing in the North, with our policies in the Arctic as being important for our allies' bilateral relationship and for our interests. And the strange thing, in a way, which I have been thinking on since, that we really never experienced that the American side raised with us concerns across the table, saying we are less than happy with this issue [23:00] or that issue. But there was more kind of this impression. Coming at the bit more junior level -- I'll use one example. I worked on the process of intruding a ban on classed ammunitions. And that was, initially, met from the U.S. side with a lot of skepticism, from the working level. And I came to see my American colleague at her office in Washington, and I was told she will raise this, and you would really hear how displeased we are about this. And waiting out in the wings before coming in to see her, I was pointed out, "Here are the key people who work on that issue, and you will hear it." She never raised it. And in the end when we had 22 NATO allies



signing that ban, which creates a new norm in disarmament, which is important, she told me that we can be neighbors to that treaty. It is working. So I think she was very [24:00] pragmatic and operational. Extremely loyal to the president. But at least somebody who you could work with closely. Even though in the Middle East where I think Norway maintained its position of talking to all sides, which included Palestinian groups, there was dissatisfaction publicly from some sides in the U.S., but it was the traditional reaction. They didn't like it, but then after the meeting, "Can you please tell us what you learned? Can you share with us?" And when the process between Israelis and Palestinians broke down, when the unity government broke down in Palestine in 2007, Condoleezza Rice and the U.S. really chose to emphasize this process of the donor's support group, to the Palestinians that Norway was chairing, and really playing up the role we played to maintain at least some contact. So I think that's been the experience with the Philippines, with Sri Lanka, with the Middle East, with Colombia -- that we [25:00] can do things that others can't do, and the Americans would normally be interested.

LEONG: Why do you think there's this dissonance between the two levels that you just mentioned?

STØRE: Interesting issue. It's worthwhile studying. Why is that? I think politicians are both more ideologically-oriented, but also quite pragmatic. They want to see things done. Whereas at the working level, you may be more, perhaps, influenced in your daily work that people shift on the other side; there are new people coming in, new priorities. And my experience -- which is another big theme -- that part of the diplomats who come and represent the U.S. here in Oslo look at Norway as a pretty small country. They should basically take message and do what we tell them. We don't appreciate that when that is the message. We should be treated with respect, as I have seen American government do, at the government level. But at some of the working level, it is more [26:00] kind of, small states; we can be more direct. Maybe out of that, a kind of irritation -- how can it be that Norway is



speaking to groups in Sri Lanka, or in Palestine that we have put on the terror list? How can this country express criticism against terror lists? I believe some of these terror lists have been a huge mistake. There should be groups that we don't talk to, and the U.N. should have groups on their list that we should isolate and ban and fight and sanction. But there are other groups that we should talk to, not by accepting them or acknowledging what they do, but simply by pushing our interests, by engaging them. So here we could have different views. And I think some American diplomats were looking at Norwegian diplomats doing this with some mixed feelings. And at one side, fascination that we could do it, but also some irritation, because we were sometimes out of line. But out of line on [27:00] tactics. On strategy, I think we were much more united.

LEONG: Did you get a sense that there was perhaps some misunderstanding as to where the Labour Party in Norway stands ideologically as well? That that was grounds for suspicion?

STØRE: Frankly speaking, no. I am composed in the following way: that if you really are uncertain about it, raise it, ask the question. We were delivering on defense reform, on budgets, on participation in Afghanistan. When things came up, if the U.S. picked up the phone to us and have us engage in something, we readily came around. The U.N. needed a new lead person to lead the Afghanistan operation, we provided Kai Eide, a leading diplomat. So we are never difficult to ask when it comes to being helpful and constructive. So I think for the Labour Party, we really have a main staying of being trans-Atlantic, and very loyal. [28:00]

LEONG: Of course you were in coalition with the Socialist Left at that time, which was a new thing. Did that present a problem? Because the platform of the Socialist Left suggested --

STØRE: Yeah, but that's at the moment where you have to say forget about that platform. It's the government platform that matters. And the government platform was very clear. It was going to be operated on the fact that we were



NATO members, active allies, present in Afghanistan, relating to the European Union based on our comprehensive agreement. And that was the platform. So we had debates inside the government, how fighting edge we should be in Afghanistan. Should we be in the South, where you have the hardest fight? Or should we be in the North? We started in the North, and I think we did a good job in the North. And we were able also to be sharp in the way we were training special forces, which we have done up until today. So we could do that with the Socialist Left in government. There was no doubt that foreign policy, security policy, defense policy, was directed by Labour Party ministers.

LEONG: There [29:00] was an unfortunate incident of the then-finance minister from the Socialist Left, Kristin Halvorsen making some remarks about boycotting Israeli products. And that caused some tension. What did you have to do as foreign minister?

STØRE: Well, this was very early on in the term when she made the statement as party leader, not understanding that when you are finance minister, you are nothing but a government minister, that she would advise people not to buy oranges from Israel. And I reacted very swiftly to that. I've been working on Middle East issues for a number of years. I know that for Norway, we are friends with Israel, some Palestinians, and boycott is not our policy. We don't believe that -- that has to be U.N.-voted, as with South Africa at the time. So that afternoon I made it very clear inside cabinet that that has to be corrected swiftly. And the prime minister and I made that clear to Kristin Halvorsen. I think she came around to understand [30:00] that this was not in the platform, and could not simply be done, and it was interpreted out there, perhaps overplayed a bit by the Israeli side, but that this was first step towards Norwegian boycott. And I made it clear in the letter to the American secretary, which was a lot spoken about at the time, that this was to be seen as a mishap. It was not Norwegian policy. Some said that that was heavy-handed from my side. But I thought it was necessary to be



very clear about it. I knew that there may be issues of discussions with the U.S. under Bush and under Stoltenberg. So let's not have discussions on issues which are not issues. This is not an issue. So I had a conversation with my Israeli colleague who said, understood, we know what this is all about now.

LEONG: Ambassador Vollebæk suggested that it did do some damage, nonetheless, in relation to the U.S. Did you get that sense?

STØRE: Well, yes, image-wise, I think -- the Americans, with their role vis-à-vis being a security [31:00] guarantor for Israel, would be very sensitive to any talk of boycott. So that's why I thought we had to react very swiftly, because it could create that impression.

LEONG: In terms of Norwegian involvement in Afghanistan at the time, there's some critic afterwards who said that, well, maybe Norway invested more in Afghanistan than it should have in part, because to make up for not being involved in Iraq. Was that part of the calculus at all?

STØRE: Well, but I thought we wanted to show that we went in with NATO, and we would go out with NATO. And we would demonstrate to our allies that we can be -- we've had the big study here in Norway about our Afghanistan mission.

LEONG: Right.

STØRE: And one of the elements why we were in Afghanistan was also out of NATO solidarity. So I think it was an element that nobody would ever be able to question our loyalty to the Alliance, to [32:00] security council resolutions, during national obligations to be present. And I think we can stand up and be counted on what we did in Afghanistan. And this was to lead the international engagement. We tried also to step up our U.N. military activity, because participation in U.N. operation has gone down. So Norway and Sweden had an attempt to contribute to forces in Sudan, and which basically collapsed when the Sudanese closed the door. So I think we had an active foreign policy on many levels, which made it unnecessary



to compensate by being in Afghanistan. But we were loyal and present, and lived up to our obligations in Afghanistan from day one to the last day.

LEONG: Now you were a chief architect for the policy of returning -- getting NATO attention to return to the High North. [33:00] Was there any -- did you face any challenges in that process?

STØRE: Well, there was a challenge of bringing the message of what is the High North. I mean, colleagues in Europe have very vague ideas of the Arctic, what it looks like geographically, what is the reality, militarily? Strategically, how does it play out? This is our neighborhood. We know about it. So I invited myself to the NATO Council twice to brief NATO colleagues on the High North. And I gave speeches about this in Beijing, in Washington, in Brussels. I spoke to my colleagues on the American side, also. I worked closely with my Russian colleague to terminate negotiations and the limitations in the Barents Sea, which we succeed in 2010, a major contribution to stability and low tension in the North. So there was a major effort of informing allies. Not asking them to come and rush in, because that would not lower tension, but simply [34:00] to get this on the radar screen that this is also NATO. We want low tension, but this is also NATO, the Arctic, the North, the High North. And we are, of course, 50 kilometers from the nuclear arsenal in Russia. We don't confront that militarily, but we are present there with a sensitive and sensible approach.

So the intelligence cooperation between Norway and the U.S. is the least spoken of, but perhaps one of the most important elements of a bilateral relationship. And a lot of that is about the North.

LEONG: Did you meet any resistance?

STØRE: Not that I can remember. An American secretary has this long list of priority areas and areas of concern, and this was not an area of big concern, so we shouldn't add another one to a list where it doesn't belong. But I remember when Condoleezza Rice was in Oslo for a NATO foreign minister meeting; we had a long



session in the morning going through High North issues. And she was attentive [35:00] to that. And that was my -- that was what I wanted. Hillary Clinton was even more interested. She came to the North, she spent time there. But that's -- I never met any resistance on that. I think to the contrary. I think allies felt that this is something Norway knows about, and I think that was one of the reasons that Jens Stoltenberg was selected NATO Secretary General. That we had managed relationships with Russia in the North, in a creative and responsible way.

LEONG: Did you get any sense that Secretary Rice, herself, of course, was a Russia expert as an academic, before she entered public office. Did you get a sense that she had any -- she brought a nuanced understanding to the challenges that you face in Norway?

STØRE: No, but I mean, she understood what it meant to be a neighbor to Russia. And at the time this was very different times with Russia. There was still on the kind of a testing relationship with the Putin administration. [36:00] At the end they felt, I think, a bit -- Hillary Clinton came in with a reset concept, they would reset relations, which meant that at the end of the Bush administration, it was really not a lot of trust for good reasons, which I could understand. But I found it helpful that she was a Russia expert, to explain part of Norway's interest and situation.

LEONG: I have to mention this, in the WikiLeaks that came out later, there was some suggestion that some U.S. officials, at least, thought that maybe Prime Minister Stoltenberg was going too far in reaching out to Putin. Did you get a sense at that time?

STØRE: I didn't. Look at our Finnish colleagues. They have -- we are neighbors. Don't forget, we were neighbors. And neighbors -- the Russia policy on Norway has always been two-handed. If you play the [37:00] piano -- Condoleezza Rice did -- and I mentioned to her, if you're playing the piano, as neighbor to Russia, what we do, we have one dimension, which is hedging our security in our NATO



Alliance, European partners, our defense, where we are part of a broader alliance. You can never be a small country next to a big one without having that dimension. We want to be loyal, and we want to invest in our defense, and we want to participate to support our allies -- Afghanistan example. The other hand is the neighbor hand, day to day. Border crossings, search and rescue, energy cooperation. I think this balance between the two hands is what makes Norway's Russia policy. And sometimes you have to explain to others what that neighborhood relationship really meant. I was able to -- I was foreign minister in years where we really could work on that dimension. We increased border crossings, trade, people-to-people cooperation with the Russians in the North, making that border more of a normal border, which means decreased tension. [38:00] And I was able, after 40 years, to negotiate settlement on the disputed area in the Barents Sea, 170,000 square kilometers divided down to the kilometer in two, according to the most modern principles of the law of the sea. So in 2008, Russia waged war on Georgia, a mountain country of four million people. Two years later they concluded a very modern treaty with another country of five million people, mountain country, Norway. And I think I was invited to speak at Harvard, to speak in Washington about how did you achieve this? This was with the same Putin and Lavrov, and the others. And Medvedev, the president at the time.

So I think those Americans who followed Norway on our foreign policy understood that this was in accordance with mainstay, all our foreign policy, broadly supported in parliament.

LEONG: In the WikiLeaks that came out, there was also some criticism [39:00] aimed at you as foreign minister, that you are perhaps too activist in reaching out to various governments, countries and groups in the world. Did you get a sense at that time that the United States was less than entirely approving of those actions?



STØRE: No. I believe you have to be active when you are in office. You're sitting there managing trust, managing an opportunity for your party, for your government, to make a difference. And I always saw to it that the American allies was informed about the main orientation of our foreign policy. But it's true, we're in our peace and reconciliation efforts, which have become an important part of our foreign policy. We're in touch and in contact with groups that not many other European countries were. And as I said in this beginning, at some working level, people were saying, why is this small country making that much [40:00] noise? But that didn't deter me from seeing that as the right and responsible thing to do. Not only out of activism, but because many came to us saying, how can Norway facilitate and be constructive?

LEONG: What were your relations like with the ambassador at that time, Mr. Whitney?

STØRE: Well, it was a good working relationship. I think we had a personal tone. We went for walks in the woods, we brought our coffee out to the woods and start reflecting. I saw deflections by him on me in the WikiLeaks which came out which were not favorable. And I never met him since. If I were to meet him, I would try to then check it out, did you write that, Ben? Was that your view? Because you never told me. I know that all messages out of the U.S. Embassy are signed by the ambassador, which doesn't mean that he wrote it necessarily. I believe that we have the message of trust. He was quite -- he could be direct on issues, which I appreciated, and I invited. But [41:00] if you ask me now, I felt he was a popular ambassador, he was reaching out to people. He was leading the life on Norwegians; he was walking with his wife in the woods, so I could meet him there with my wife. And helpful. But we would always say, do we reach Washington through the embassy in Oslo, or through our embassy in Washington? And I often felt that it was the latter that really mattered to us. That we really wanted to be close.



LEONG: Did you get any sense from either Ambassador Whitney or other officials that the U.S. were really quite high-handed in how they approached Norway?

STØRE: What do you mean, "high-handed"?

LEONG: Well, expecting more deference than you were prepared to give.

STØRE: No. But I think we were able to have a balanced relationship, that we would be open and direct, and we would agree [42:00] on the main issues of being allies and interest partners, but not on all. I think an independent, sovereign country should have the backbone to be able to stand up to that. So we will defend our views, we will defend our positions. And we will do that when we also don't see eye to eye. We would also do that under the Obama administration. But, I always felt that the U.S. has such an opportunity of having European allies, because they would normally go way out to support them. And Norway has, really. But if you want to do that and be a loyal ally, you should never kind of shy away from expressing also some different views when that matters.

LEONG: You have a reputation for wanting to engage in dialogue with many different groups, being very open to dialogue and using the diplomatic skills that you have very finely honed. Did you find yourself having to apply [43:00] some of these diplomatic skills, in a particular way in dealing with Bush officials?

STØRE: I never found it difficult to deal with Bush officials. I dealt with them, and my colleagues dealt with them. I think I always felt we were on a first-name -- having direct talk. But as a diplomat, as a politician, I believe that dialogue is based on the premise that if I want to be heard by you, I need to let you feel that I hear what you say to me. Because if you don't do it that way, it's a monologue. Even if I talk to people that engaged in violent behavior -- which I don't support, and I would even go militarily fighting it -- I still believe that if I'm going to get anywhere with them -- Palestinian leader, who is engaging in violent opposition -- I need to give him the impression that I hear what he's saying. Then I can be very clear back to him what it means to engage with me. [44:00] I think that applies to



most of the people you meet. But I never experienced that I really had complex or critical issues with American colleagues during these terms. I came very close to Secretary Clinton. But looking back at times, I feel I also value that relationship with Secretary Rice at an equal footing. I think she was highly professional, and she has come back to me a couple of times after she stepped down, staying in touch. So I appreciate her as a person.

LEONG: Was there a change in tone once the Obama administration came in? Was there a distinct change that you noticed?

STØRE: Yes, in the sense that, I think, they -- and to my regret for the Bush years -- really saw that they could work more closely with smaller NATO allies and benefit from it. And I was sometimes surprised that -- knowing that the U.S. has the world as a theater, and you have to deal with so many bilateral relationships, I understand that -- but [45:00] I think the Obama administration was more attentive to see what they could get out of this relationship, and spent time on it. But generally, I think the tone was constructive and positive, with both.

LEONG: In terms of your personal encounters with officials under the Bush administration, what would you say would be the high point, and what would you say might be a low point?

STØRE: Well, I think it was a low point that some people around the president, decided that Prime Minister Stoltenberg should not come and see the president in the Oval Office. It becomes a symbol. I watched them meeting at NATO Summits and elsewhere, and they had a good tone. I think there were a lot of things we could have done together. But some of the people, I cannot point to who they were, around the president, and perhaps here at the embassy, got caught up in some small, symbolic issues, where things were said. And there was [46:00] one moment where I had issued a critical statement on this "Mission Accomplished," which was before we came into office, you know, about how that mission was not accomplished at the time. There was a reaction back from Washington at working



level that they did not appreciate that. These remarks were mentioned as example why they would not receive the prime minister. My advice to the prime minister was that, don't fight your way in there. If they want to make an issue of that, it's their issue. I remember the NATO Summit in Bucharest in March, 2008, President Bush came to Prime Minister Stoltenberg and said, "You have to come. You have to come to the ranch, and we have to go cycling." And Jens was saying, "I'm happy to come. Fine." We took contact with the White House afterwards, and were told, "No way." So, okay. I think that was a bit of a low, because it could have created much more out of good relations than we really had. In terms of [47:00] highs, I think I did a lot of good work with Condoleezza Rice on Afghanistan together, things that are not mentioned in the archives, but sharing the issues and doing things together. I think partly getting American understanding for this High North Article 5, bringing NATO back, and gradual understanding of that was an important achievement for us. And there was a big moment when we decided to buy F-35s fighter planes. Biggest public purchase in Norwegian modern history, which, of course, the Americans appreciated. And we could appreciate it because we did it on quality and price, not out of pressure.

LEONG: Okay. Well, thank you.

STØRE: Thank you.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO]