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

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LEONG: Today is November 14, 2017. We're in Oslo. I'm LaiYee Leong, with the Center for Presidential History, and I'm with Asle Toje, the Research Director at the Nobel Institute. Asle, let's start with transatlantic relations or the

Transatlantic Bargain, as it stood in the year 2000, 2001, just as President Bush was coming into office. What was the status?

TOJE: Well, the Transatlantic Bargain was influenced by some developments that happened in the 1990s. Many had assumed that NATO would go the way of the Warsaw Pact or the Warsaw Treaty Organization, with the end of the Cold War. What surprised many commentators was how stable it remained, and far from [00:01:00] moving towards disbanding NATO, NATO changed its *raison d'être*, away from defense of the member states and towards crisis management operations and towards enlargement. This was quite controversial, seen from a Russian point of view, as would become apparent later. During the 1990s, Russian concerns were not very much on the NATO agenda. Rather, there was a lot of back and forth between the United States and the Europeans regarding the burden sharing and the power sharing within the transatlantic alliance. The EU, in the mid-1990s, launched its common security and defense policy that was a part of the CFSP, the Common Foreign Security Policy, [00:02:00] which caused some concern in the United States. Especially because it looked, to some American viewers, as if the Europeans were finally getting ready to take charge of their own security. George Bush Sr. put this in very plain terms in Rome, where he said listen, if this is what you're up to tell us now and we'll leave. It's not that kind of alliance where the United States will stay where not wanted. But the Europeans wanted the United States to stay and what we saw in the 1990s were that the Europeans, while being rhetorically committed towards a common security and defense policy, the European states were far from willing to pay for it. We saw, through the 1990s, declining defense budgets. This became painfully clear at the determining event just prior to the Bush presidency: the [00:03:00] Kosovo War.

The EU had been given free rein by President Clinton to address the Yugoslav conflicts of the mid-1990s and had failed to do so. The EU ended up in a position where they were issuing declarations, scattered peacekeepers, and odd

sanctions, but did very little to actually bring the fighting to an end. In the end, the United States came out and intervened in the Yugoslav situation, ending with the Dayton Peace Accords. When fighting erupted in Kosovo, again, many had assumed that this would be what Jacques Poos, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, of all places, called the "hour of Europe," that was what he called it during the Yugoslav Civil War. This was another test for Europe to get their act together and maintain [00:04:00] peace and security in their own neighborhood. Again, the EU failed to do so, but this time the Europeans were taken for a ride by the United States, going against the UN mandates by intervening militarily without a resolution from the UN Security Council. Of course as we now know, that has become a bit of a festering wound.

What I can say about the allies and how this campaign was carried out was that the consensus in all quarters, at that time, was that this must not be done again. We cannot do this again. The all for one, one for all, where all NATO countries are expected to move in concert in the spirit of Article 5: Collective Defense article of the Atlantic Charter, that was not going to work. [00:05:00] There were too many caveats. Too many of the European states were frankly, not delivering what the Americans assumed, and from an American point of view, it seemed that it was not really worth all the hustle, when the United States delivered most of the diplomatic initiatives, the bulk of the actual war fighting capacities for bringing this resolution to an end, this conflict to an end.

From a European point of view, the Kosovo war was deeply problematic because it questioned a core tenet of European order but also of global order, and that is the ever fault question of secessionism. Was it right for the Europeans to go in and effectively lob off a part of the country, or what was then called the rump, rump Yugoslavia? At the end, [00:06:00] many Europeans felt that the American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, had taken the show and she had gained the upper hand in the Washington infighting, and once that was out of the way, after

James Baker and others had been sort of sidelined, and the American president who was less than enthusiastic from the outset about this conflict, had all been brought aboard. The Americans didn't have all that much interest in what the Europeans might think about it. This was really the first war that the NATO allies fought together, and it wasn't a very happy coincidence, or occurrence. Then, the United States goes to the polls. It's important to keep in mind, at least for American viewership, that in [00:07:00] Europe Republican presidents tend not to be popular. It's not really so much about Reagan or Trump or George Bush Sr. or Jr. Europeans instinctively have a tendency to prefer Democrat presidents, maybe because of the international tradition in the Democrat Party, there is perceived to be a greater community of interest between Europeans and Democrat administrations. So when the American president came into power, there was a fair amount of concern in European countries about this. This was also something that came to the fore quite quickly after September 11th.

There's much discussion about who decided that they should invoke Article 5 following the 9/11 attacks; it just happened a few days after. NATO came out and declared this to be an Article 5 [00:08:00] operation. Most likely it came from the institution itself, a NATO that felt that the tectonic plates were shifting, that the European willingness to take American leadership in NATO was being diminished, that they were underfunding their militaries and that there was a need for a new project after this Kosovo affair. Article 5 was then announced, America started carrying out strikes in Afghanistan, not calling on NATO. So you could see that there was still -- it was taken as basically a declaration of sympathy from the United States, saying oh that's nice, Article 5, that's nice, but we will move ahead with this new concept and this is a concept that would be determining for allied security policies for the next decade or so, [00:09:00] the concept of coalitions of the willing. So basically, the United States would bring in those allies who were willing and able to participate and to play their role in the American orchestra.

This was something that was no surprises, what countries were at the front of the queue.

It's usually seen in Europe as if that the United States worked with concentric circles in terms of their allies, so some allies are very close and the United States share technology and intelligence on a different level with those countries than they do with other allies. In this closest circles, you find countries like Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. These were countries that came onboard very quickly when it came to Afghanistan. Norway found itself in a bit of a difficult situation politically because Norway had a [00:10:00] capacity that the Americans wanted, our special forces. The Norwegian Special Forces, known as the FSK, are experts in mountain warfare and during the hunt for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, Norwegian Special Forces were called on to try and flush out the remnants of the al-Qaeda networks on the border to Afghanistan. This was something that was kept very much under-communicated in the Norwegian media. This was also because President Bush was fabulously unpopular in Norway, perhaps even undeservedly so, but he was routinely portrayed as a blundering buffoon, somebody who didn't have the stature, or frankly the intelligence, to lead such a powerful alliance as the west is. Of course, from an American [00:11:00] point of view, that would be different. Of course, some Americans would agree, but I think in Norway, the liberal media in the United States were recycled into the Norwegian mainstream, while the more pro-Republican outlets made much less of a dent on Norwegian perceptions. So there we were. We were in a situation where we felt that it was necessary to get on board with the United States. Most allied countries felt that. The Americans had been attacked, we had used Article 5, and all of Europe, there were discussions about how to use this, how to do this. For Norway it meant sending special forces, for Britain and for Denmark it meant large troop deployments in the Helmand Province. Norway ended up basically owning the Faryab [00:12:00] Province, and this dragged on for more than a decade. The

Afghan operation was, to perhaps a greater extent even than the Iraq War, a moment that served to define the transatlantic relations under President Bush.

LEONG: So let's back up a little bit. Why do you think Bush was portrayed in the way that he was? What was it about him?

TOJE: Well, he was error prone in terms of his rhetoric. And we must keep in mind that he was following upon a president, Bill Clinton, who was fabulously popular in Norway. President Clinton had visited Norway as a young student. He developed close personal relationships with some of the key personnel in Norway, he knew them, [00:13:00] and it would be difficult for anybody to fill that role. When President Bush entered the White House, there was a great deal of swagger seen from a European point of view. Of course, this must be seen in the context where militarily weak Europeans felt that the Americans' emphasis on their armed might, as George Bush was in the habit of displaying, you know, posing on aircraft carriers and that kind of thing, would never be very popular in Europe. But I think the key reason was that George Bush Jr. was the first American president in the history of the United States that didn't really have a particular soft spot for Europe. Clinton had gone on the grand tour, as you do, and he knew Europe, [00:14:00] he admired Europe like all American presidents before him. There was a sense that the United States and Europe were joined at the hip in the sense that the Americans were an all-American people. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt put it, that we are basically the same people and that we are joined by fate in a sense. George Bush, to him it became quite clear that it didn't really matter all that much to him whether he was in Oslo or in Bratislava, which was difficult for some Europeans. We have to remind a little bit, keep in mind that after the Cold War there was at least a decade, maybe even two, where Europeans had grown in the habit of viewing some states as a bit less European than others. Those countries that had been in the [00:15:00] communist bloc were seen as, in many ways, sort of prospect Europeans, and when the Bush administration was lavishing attention on the East

Europeans, as the infamous Donald Rumsfeld old Europe-new Europe, it seemed that there was a change of pace in American policy towards Europe, and that the good old days, the close personal relationships, the back and forth between Maggie Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, that that was becoming a thing of the past and that somehow the relationship was now going to be more instrumental. It was going to be more about the needs of the United States and less about the input from the Europeans. This was also at a time when voices in Europe, notably in France, were openly arguing that maybe it was [00:16:00] time to show the Americans the door and that the European Union should be taking care of security in Europe and not the Americans.

LEONG: What did the Europeans make of the United States' approach to coalitions of the willing rather than NATO itself?

TOJE: I think that operations in and around Kosovo was deeply frustrating for a great many countries. It brought to the fore, some quite disturbing facts about the alliance, one being that a great many European countries were unable to put even very limited troop contributions into the field and do worthwhile things with them. So that was something that frustrated European countries on the same level as the United States. You heard that a lot from the able countries, [00:17:00] such as Britain and France, they felt that a lot of the European countries were not living up to their obligations. At the same time, we saw that the Europeans were uneasy about particularly Madeleine Albright and her view of the diplomacy, and it's a little bit perhaps about anthropology. A much cited story goes that Madeleine Albright, being a partial Czech speaker, attempted to negotiate with the Serbs in Czech, which is something that you really wouldn't do if you were a European, because it's not the same language. So you know, it's a nice gesture but it didn't really go well down with the Serbs, and the Europeans felt that American bravado, [00:18:00] in some ways, had cornered the Serbs, not allowing them a way out, and forced this war upon them, and the question was what on earth are we going to do

with Kosovo. You know, there was never any question of course, the west was going to win this conflict, but what are we going to do with Kosovo? It seemed that the Americans were very much in the view now that they would do the heavy lifting and then they would make the food and the Europeans would do the dishes. A lot of Europeans felt that the Americans were underestimating the problems they were creating in what has been a very, very war torn region of Europe, and that the Americans, with Richard Holbrooke as still a chief force, was not taking into consideration the end game. This is something that, [00:19:00] even to this day, there are questions as to the viability of the two states that came out of the Yugoslav wars, Bosnia and Kosovo. These remain still, very difficult for the Europeans.

LEONG: So with the lessons of the Kosovo War in mind, how did the war in Afghanistan pan out from the European perspective?

TOJE: Not well. The Afghan conflict started off as a coalition of the willing, where it was quite clear that the Americans wanted to call the shots and they wanted to tell other countries what to do, when to do it, and where to do it. And after some initial back and forth, we started to get the problem of the caveats. You've got European countries with their parliaments stepping in and saying well we can deploy our troops in this way but not in that way. [00:20:00] Our fire drills, our rules of engagement will be different from those of the United States. We'll do this or we won't do that. And of course, unsurprisingly, everybody wanted to deliver field hospitals and build schools, and very few wanted to do the actual war fighting. For countries such as Norway and Germany, this led us into a situation where we were parking very substantial troop contributions in Afghanistan, but without the rules of engagement that would allow them to actually do the job, which became quite apparent. I think this was back in 2006, when Norway had been handed the Faryab Province, it was the biggest troop deployment abroad since we had peacekeeping forces in Germany following World War II. At the end

of the day, the Americans had to send in their Mountain Division to kill Talibans, because the Norwegian soldiers were not [00:21:00] allowed to go out and hunt for Taliban. We got to the situation where our province, that had not been a province where the Taliban had had much of a presence, even when they were running the country, was becoming sort of a hotbed for their activities, and that was much because the Norwegian rules of engagement didn't allow for sort of the pitch battles and black helicopter operations that the Americans were carrying out. At the end of the day, it led to, in NATO, among the Europeans, a very strong sense in all quarters, that the Americans were not appreciating the contributions of the Europeans. The Americans were deeply frustrated that this conflict was not going the way that they had hoped and there was very little willingness on behalf of either party, to question whether the Europeans should send troops [00:22:00] abroad without a functioning mandate to actually deliver what they were intended to do, but also on behalf of the United States, where President Bush seemed to be persuaded by the so called nation building, that has come into such disrepute later, that this was somehow going to work out, that somehow, the allies would take control of the countries, get a regime in place, have the loya jirga elect sort of a quasi-parliament and stabilize the country. This was very unlikely from the outset, but it was the policy that we have continued to this day, even if, amongst the experts on Afghanistan, there are very few that believe that the order that has been created will prove sustainable for the long run. I'm not saying that it will be wholly unsustainable. I'm just saying that the game plan that the Americans [00:23:00] had, the end result that we were working towards, was never very likely, and this was something that many Europeans already knew. I remember discussing this with a German colleague, ex-colleague, in the German Armed forces, he's from a German military family, if I said the surname, people would know it from World War II. We were having lunch and he said, I know it is politically incorrect for me to say this as a German, but it really looks like the

Americans have never occupied anybody before. This was, from a German point of view, the Americans did everything wrong in Afghanistan. And from the American point of view, the Germans were in no position to tell the Americans about what they were doing wrong, because the Germans were not delivering themselves. Their rules of engagement were ludicrously strict and their soldiers were not leaving the barracks a lot at all, [00:24:00] so they were just parked out on a field in Afghanistan, and the Americans felt that this was sort of the story of the Europeans. For a long time, it was these concentric circles were operating even there. The Americans persuaded themselves that the French were unreliable because they didn't do as they were told, the Italians were useless, the East Europeans, the Latvians or Hungarians or Polish, where they wanted well but didn't have the training.

And then there were some countries that were actually doing something, for Denmark and Britain, who were sort of the favorites of the United States because they were doing heavy war fighting in Helmand. For a long time it seemed that there were two tiers in NATO, and you could distinguish them by who were wearing aviator [00:25:00] sunglasses at the NATO summit. So you would have the Americans and the British and the Danes arriving at the NATO summits with aviator sunglasses, being very fresh from the battle. It was sort of very much of the General McChrystal type of ethos, like very masculine, very sort of gung-ho that there are some weaklings here but don't worry, we will sort this out for all.

But towards the end of President Bush's second term, it became quite clear that even the relationship between the United States and these favorite allies was fraying, and that was, I think something that, for President Bush, became difficult to handle. It became difficult to handle his allies. How difficult this had become [00:26:00] evident in 2008. In 2008, there is a big NATO summit in Bucharest and President Bush wanted the allies to sign up to so called MAP agreements for

Ukraine and Georgia. So basically, they were going to be put into the first phase of becoming NATO members, so NATO would start moving towards making them full members of the NATO alliance. On the floor it became clear that President Bush didn't have the support amongst European allies. This is quite interesting in NATO history because, historically, NATO has been run by the United States and the United States have been calling the shots, and this has been seen as also the right of the United States, being the country that delivers the overwhelming majority of resources [00:27:00] to this alliance. Without the United States, no NATO. So the Americans felt that if we decide that Ukraine and George could become NATO members, that's for us to decide.

But at this time, Russia had a president that was becoming a political force in Europe, with President Putin. Putin went to Bucharest and had a speech to the NATO assembly. Of course, the whole speech is off the record. I interviewed a lot of people who heard it, and apparently, there were two points to the speech of the Russian president. One was that the Russians felt that under President Bush Sr. there had been a promise made that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe. This is something, a discussion that has been much discussed by academicians, and I think the consensus now is [00:28:00] that yes, there was indeed, this was discussed, in the most plain terms, with the German Foreign Secretary, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. But in fairness, the Russians are not naïve. They would know that the German foreign minister is not the person who would make that kind of call, it would be the American secretary of state. And if such an agreement had been made, I'm sure the Russians would, triumphantly, present the piece of paper where there were signatures stating this, and this never happened. Nevertheless, the Russians felt that NATO had reneged on an agreement and that Russian considerations had not been taken into account. This was the first part of the speech. The second part of the speech was quite new in the sense that Putin said the reason why you did this to Russia was because Russia was weak. And we have

learned this lesson that you don't respect agreements, you don't [00:29:00] respect dialogue, you don't respect us, and you don't respect our interests. Therefore, I'm here to tell you that we're not weak anymore and we'll fight you on this. This was a message that I think President Bush, who himself had a cordial relationship with Putin, I don't think that Bush took this all that seriously, but the Europeans did. So what happened on the floor was that the Germans, who traditionally, and this is when we're talking over the centuries, Germany has been the country that has had a particular interest in Russia, the only country really, in Europe at this stage, that were on par with Russia in terms of power, and the Germans said this is not going to happen. The Germans didn't want to stand up and go against the United States in NATO, in front of the entire alliance, so what they did was they got the Norwegian foreign minister, current leader of the Labour Party, [00:30:00] Jonas Gahr Støre, to go between the desks, and apparently, to happen like that. The Norwegian foreign minister went from desk to desk and said we're not going to sign off on this. The Americans lost the vote. It would be interesting to see how history would have worked out if the Ukraine had been a NATO member, but from a Russian point of view, I think Putin was being very, very honest and plain about this, that this was a red line. The Europeans listened to it. The Americans did not. This one issue, I think goes to the heart of many of the difficulties that Europe and America found themselves in during the presidency of George W. Bush.

George Bush didn't have what we in Europe call the *Fingerspitzengefühl*, the particular nose for understanding and handling the Europeans. During the Cold [00:31:00] War, I think it was a great understanding that in the United States that the Europeans were useless in a great many ways, but the alliance made America into the world's oldest superpower, and by having all these allies, it was a testimony to the greatness of the United States and to the greatness of the American system, liberal democracy. During George Bush, getting bogged down on the heels of the Kosovo conflict, first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq, I don't think

you can underestimate how much of the mutual goodwill that was drained out of the alliance during these years. For Norway, this had a particular and quite curious effect. When Jens Stoltenberg became the prime minister of Norway, [00:32:00] he was called by George Bush, to congratulate, as is customary, and this conversation lasted for five minutes or so, but became a huge diplomatic problem for Norway.

I've been told this, I don't know if it's true, but here goes. International relations is very different from domestic politics, because there is no authority that you can turn to when somebody has done something wrong or somebody has lied or has proven untrustworthy. Therefore, in my opinion, in international relations, a man or a woman is as good as his or her word. The discussions that state leaders have with each other, they have to be completely sure that what they said is what emerged from the meeting. What the Norwegian prime [00:33:00] minister did was he had the conversation with George Bush and then he went in front of the Norwegian television cameras and said that he had discussed, with the American president, that Norway would withdraw our troops from Iraq. Norway had sent a very small troop contribution to Iraq and it was, as some may recall, that this was the coalition of the willing in the Iraq War, included countries such as Palau, and it seemed that the Americans were really scraping the bottom of the barrel in order to get a multinational coalition behind them and therefore, even a small troop contribution from a country like Norway, being a small country but a reliable country, I would imagine seen as, was important for the Americans. So when the Norwegian prime minister went in front of the cameras and said he had told the American president that we were pulling out of Iraq. [00:34:00] The problem was that this had not happened, that the words had never been uttered.

To make things more difficult, at that time, the American ambassador in Oslo, Barry White, was a friend, a personal friend, of the president, as I've been led

to believe. He was one of the American ambassadors who could actually call the president. People imagine that every ambassador can but they can't.

LEONG: Right.

TOJE: So, what came to pass was that the embassy here in Oslo went over the transcripts from the conversation, as is customary, and found that the Norwegian prime minister had not been truthful. That was the end of the relationship between Stoltenberg and George Bush, because George Bush doesn't talk to people who he sees as liars. That was at least the message that I got out of interviews in [00:35:00] D.C., that he's sort of old school in that sense. You get one chance. If you lie, I will never talk to you again, because I can't rely on what I say being what emerges from our meeting, so therefore, you will talk to my advisors, we can communicate in writing, but I will not meet you. It came to that curious situation where Norway, who was doing a disproportionate amount of the lifting in Afghanistan, and who had actually come to the fore both in Kosovo and in Iraq, was effectively shunned by the White House. The Norwegian prime minister was not invited to the White House, even when he was in Washington, D.C., which is of course against protocol, that when a state leader visits the United States, the capital, on official business, he will be received by the president, even if it's just for a few moments, and that did not happen. So there was a deep freeze in the relationship between [00:36:00] Norway and the presidential administration over this. I don't think anybody in D.C. ever lost any sleep about this. These were the days of UN Ambassador Bolton for the United States. There was a new shock every week that the Americans had said something or done something that European media found to be distasteful and frankly, a lot of European politicians as well.

So I would say that during President Bush, the relationship between Europe and America became qualitatively different and it was, as I write in my book about the Iraq War, the Europeans and the Americans found new and surprising ways to

disappoint each other, and this was basically the story [00:37:00] of the Bush presidency. A great deal of turmoil, a great deal of new initiatives that came to naught, America's attempt at revitalizing the alliance didn't find any takers, the EU attempts at developing a security and defense policy got bogged down, they didn't really go anywhere, and as the Iraq -- now, the war in Afghanistan rattled on without any end in sight. It seemed that the overall conclusion from the Afghan War, the coalition of the willing war, was much the same as it had been over the Kosovo War. That had been an Article 5 sort of -- Article 5 wasn't used for the Kosovo War but it was very much a all-in-it-together type of conflict. While in Afghanistan they tried to [00:38:00] shift it to the coalitions of the willing and it didn't really work out all that well and everybody agreed afterwards that let's never do this again.

LEONG: I want to ask you more about the Iraq War in just a second. But while we're on the topic of Europeans and Americans disappointing each other. How much was that was inevitable? How much of that was for structural reasons and how much of that was personalities?

TOJE: I don't think it was, -- if you read the media during those years, you would come away with a very strong sense that this was a question of American arrogance and personalities, an American president who wasn't up to the task, who wasn't able to corral his allies, who wasn't able to play the politics of the alliance in an effective way. I think that would be wrong. I think NATO was in a very difficult situation following the Yugoslav [00:39:00] conflicts, and for the United States a decision was made that we need to find a new way to use the alliance, and there was a great deal of support for the crisis management operations, as a theory, also in Europe. I think history just caught up with NATO. If Afghanistan had been the cake walk that everybody kind of assumed it would be, this was a country without a strong army, underdeveloped, facing the most powerful army, armed forces in the world, flanked by the two, three and four other most powerful armed

services in the world, surely, we would be able to pacify the country and get a working regime in place, surely. And when we didn't, recommendations followed and I think it exposed a lot of the [00:40:00] frail and fractured underpinnings of the alliance, because what is the purpose of NATO after the threat that it was joined to ward off no longer exists? What is the point of NATO after the Soviet Union? These were years when Russia was in deep trouble, wasn't really seen as a danger to any other state then themselves. Later, Russia has reemerged and is playing the role of the great unifier as Stalin did, in the early phase of NATO, but during those years, it was an alliance that was seeking a purpose and where it became quite evident that political time in Europe and in the United States was not synchronized.

The election of George [00:41:00] Bush, from a European point of view, seemed to be almost impossible somehow. I remember when Bush went up against Kerry in the leadup to the second term. In Europe, in the Norwegian media, it seemed all but certain, surely, that this French speaking diplomat, this intelligent, thoughtful man, would beat Bush, but he didn't. This would become much more plain during the Clinton campaign, that what was going on in the United States was becoming increasingly difficult for the Europeans to comprehend. This is maybe something as simple as to the narrative about who won the Cold War. Joschka Fischer, then German Foreign [00:42:00] Minister, had a speech where he was discussing the two sort of stories. One story was the preferred American story. That was that the Americans had basically competed the Russians into the ground, that by turning up the heat, by developing more sophisticated systems of weaponry, the Soviets no longer could keep pace and had to cry uncle. From a European point of view, as Joschka Fischer pointed out, the view was that the Soviet system had lost to a superior system of governance, liberal democracy, which was very much the ethos of the European Union, a new way for states to deal with each other, a system where sovereignty would become a scarce

commodity, where it was the goal to get rid of as much armaments as possible and to carry out international politics in a different way. [00:43:00] This was sort of the preferred European way, and the result during the Bush presidency was that we had a lot of incredibly wordy and high-minded resolutions often, sort of thought out by the Europeans. Under George W. Bush's great friend, Tony Blair, this ethos that the west had sort of a manifest destiny, if you will, to make the world safe for liberal democracy; it was a spinoff of Francis Fukuyama's, *End of History* thought, that the alliance now, after having defeated the Soviets, would go out and fight repression and bad governance on a global scale. It became clear under President Bush, that his view was much [00:44:00] more national, that the "America First" rhetoric that became so ubiquitous under President Trump, was first paraded out during President Bush, and it was felt to be distasteful by many Europeans.

LEONG: Let's talk more about Iraq.

TOJE: Okay.

LEONG: So you've got the war in Afghanistan, which at least on the surface, superficially, seemed to have inspired a degree of unity among the allies, despite the troubles that will come later, but with the Iraq War it was very different. Why was that?

TOJE: Well, the Iraq War came very close to doing irreparable damage to the [00:45:00] transatlantic alliance, and we should keep in mind that the leadup to the Iraq War was probably even -- we're now in 2017, but since the end of the Cold War and up until now, this was probably the low point. From an American point of view, the Iraq regime had to be changed, and much has been written about this, what the Americans knew and to what extent they knew that their WMD allegations were untrue. But as things progressed, and as it became clearer that the Americans would take this to the UN Security Council, it set the stage for one of the great dustups between the Europeans and the Americans, and the Europeans here, [00:46:00] led by the French, taking a very strong line against

giving the United States a mandate to go to war against Iraq. This was felt as a betrayal from the Trump administration. It was seen as a mistake, to go to the UN. It seemed that the Americans had somehow been stabbed in the back by Europeans, who were not willing to view American national interests the same way as the Americans. One might ask that, so why didn't the United States, if they saw it that way, why didn't the United States go there alone? I think that has something to do with the legacies of the Gulf War, part one, under George Bush Sr., which curiously had been seen as a positive thing, I believe, in the American foreign policy and [00:47:00] security establishment. Apparently, the United States even made money from that war by getting Japan and Germany to pony up cash for their lacking contributions, military contributions to that conflict, and it seemed that the United States had gone out and enforced international order and had received the respect and support that they deserved. I think that for George Bush the younger it was, I'm sure, that he would have remembered his father's experiences and must have questioned why things suddenly had gotten so hard.

This had also to do with Great Britain, where Tony Blair went out on a limb and decided to support the United States, [00:48:00] not least by the famously flawed intelligence over the yellow cake fissile materials that were supposed to have made its way to Iraq, and later we found that it hadn't. This created one of the most nasty public debates ever, in Britain, where Tony Blair soon found himself without the foreign secretary, Robin Cook stepped down over the Iraq War. It became clear that he didn't have the British people on side for this war, and much like with Afghanistan, I think a lot of this would have sort of dissipated had the war gone differently, because you see sort of the spikes. There was a tremendous amount of discussion and debate prior to the war. There were attempts from the United States to try to get [00:49:00] a NATO mandate after failing to obtain a UN Security Council mandate. The United States found themselves rebuffed again, went on to assemble a coalition of the willing and to

win the conflict with Iraq decisively and very quickly, as the Europeans, as everyone else in the world was watching CNN live on television. I think there was, in many European countries, not least in Norway, there were sort of two layers to this. One was that we were deeply uneasy about the precedents that were being set, uneasy about the intelligence that the Americans had put forth, uneasiness about the Americans not feeling a need to persuade their allies that their cause was just, that was on one side.

On the other side, [00:50:00] there was still an assumption that the Americans knew what they were doing, that the Americans would not drop the ball on something this important, that surely, the Americans had something that justified going to war, even if they weren't disclosing it. And second, that once going to war, the most fabled and most powerful armed forces on the face of the earth would surely be able to topple a dictator and get a regime working again, and that Iraq would become an ally of the west. This was a narrative that was not least from Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, there's this assumption that Iraq would become sort of the lighthouse of democracy in the Middle East. A lot of Europeans bought into that, sort of okay, maybe not a just war, okay maybe the Americans didn't [00:51:00] go out of their way to persuade us, but all in all, this is probably going to be a good thing. And, as things progressed in Iraq, you saw the countries that had sort of dipped their toes into Iraq, were very eager to get out and to, like Norway, to increase their troop contributions to Afghanistan, anything to get out of Iraq. And for Great Britain, who did most of the heavy lifting alongside the United States, they found that their armed services were being run down, or worn down to the nub, very, very quickly. They also met themselves sort of being confronted with sort of -- the ethos that had grown up in Europe was that the Americans didn't know how to do peacekeeping, somehow that yes, we understand, after the revolution and military affairs, the Americans have capacities that we don't have, but we're much better at [00:52:00] the sort of on the ground

peacekeeping, sort of anthropological, sociological approach, to building societies, that the Europeans somehow were better placed than the Americans, do deliver this. And what the British found, that they didn't really succeed much better than the Americans and this was a great shock for the British.

LEONG: Why were France and Germany, in your view, so particularly forthright and bellicose in their rhetoric?

TOJE: For Germany, this has everything to do with the postwar ethos of Germany being, they don't have the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution but they might as well have it, this view in Germany that the country is inoculated against aggressive wars. The American rhetoric, nationalist [00:53:00] and in many ways threatening, in Germany, it sounded ominous. It had also to do with what President Clinton had done to the Germans over the Kosovo War, where the Americans had basically backed the Germans into a corner. So at the end of the day, after the Germans had been sort of procrastinating and trying to find, should we contribute to this non-UN sanctioned conflict in Kosovo? The Americans squeezed them to a moment where the chancellor and the foreign secretary, Joschka Fischer and Gerhard Schröder, were sitting in a limousine and were given half an hour. You've got 30 minutes to decide whether you're with us or you're not, and the Germans came down on the side of the Americans, but there was an understanding in Germany that we didn't do this right. We allowed ourselves, by just going along for the ride, we got to a point where [00:54:00] we couldn't say no, and this is not going to happen again. Therefore, the Germans came out swinging over this, that they were completely unwilling to give any mandate that they felt that the Americans might use to deploy NATO in Afghanistan, now in Iraq.

It must be said here, at the same time, there had been a lot of initiatives in NATO during the 1990s, for it had many incarnations, they called it the alphabet soup, but the most famous one was the rapid reaction force. The notion was that NATO would put together and field a strike force of 60,000 men, sustainable for, I

think three months, within a very, very short period of time. In Germany, there were concerns that if a NATO mandate was given, the Americans would turn around and say listen, now we have the mandate, better start getting the [00:55:00] troops on the plane because we're going to Iraq, and the Germans wouldn't go along with that. It has also very much to do with the perceptions of George Bush in Germany. George W. Bush was seen as callous, as a cowboy, as a person who lacked the culture and understanding of diplomacy, to command that sort of, not respect, but the kind of support that the Americans assumed was theirs for the taking. From the French point of view, this had very much to do with a triumph that they celebrated in 1998, in the French port of Saint-Malo. In the EU, with the treaty on the European Union that came into force back in '95, the Europeans had put in place the institutional framework for a security and defense policy. It hadn't really amounted to much. That was until [00:56:00] the French and the British, on a bilateral summit, decided to put some oomph into what was then the ESDP, European Security and Defense Policy. They agreed that the Europeans should have a capacity for autonomous action. From the French point of view, this was quite clear, that the capacity for autonomous action in real terms meant that the military powers of Europe would get to business and start integrating their armed services. The Europeans are spending enough on defense to be a superpower, but it's spending it in the wrong way, and with the two primary military powers in Europe, France and Britain, together agreeing, the French saw that now, the big step had been taken, and the French were not disposed to giving NATO a new lease of life by going off war fighting in the Middle East, they were very skeptical [00:57:00] towards this. That's sort of the sinister part of this.

When I interviewed French decision makers in the Quai d'Orsay, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in the Elysée Palace, the French Presidential Palace, there was a story, I don't know if it's true, but the story goes like this. Jacques Chirac met George W. Bush for the plenary session in the UN, in New

York, and he took him to the side. The French president spoke English but didn't enjoy speaking English, it was a bit like Putin. I had dinner with Putin two weeks ago, it's very, very interesting, he understands English perfectly and he will just say short snippets in English, but he prefers speaking German. But on this occasion, the French president decided to speak English to the American president and he said listen, [00:58:00] I know that from an American point of view it looks like the French are just being difficult, but hear me out. We have done this. We did this in Algeria, France did this in Algeria, this is going to end in tears. This is our great lesson from military interventions in the Middle East without a mandate and without firm support in the population, this is going to come to tears, and this is our advice, don't do it. And apparently, George Bush said to the French president that mister president, I've listened very closely to what you have had to say and I disagree profoundly. Something kind of broke between France and the United States. Of course, from an American point of view, it's often easy to forget the national egos of the European states. France has the legacy of being a great power and views itself as a great power. It's only two countries left in Europe [00:59:00] that have a geopolitical tradition in a sense that they have the frameworks to even consider operations such as the Iraq War. And so the French were able, through their intelligence, who was arguably much better than the American intelligence in Iraq, to have their own handle on this, and they didn't really like it.

That said, every French president since the end of World War II has had pretty much the same story, with the notable exception of Emmanuel Macron, the current French president. They have a deep desire to develop a bilateral relationship with the United States. Anand Menon has written about this, this idea that the relationship between France and the United States is fraught, that with this new French president, we are going to [01:00:00] get back to our great shared history, that we are going to sort of rule the world together. Of course, from an American point of view this sounds like hubris in a sense, or even a bit

strange, that a country like France should even see itself on par with the United States, and this is part of the reason why this relationship always ends in tears. Usually, during the first six months of the new French president, when they realize that the United States, it's not about Clinton or about George Bush, Jr. or Sr., it's about America being the most powerful country on earth. America doesn't cooperate with any state on par. Some countries have a privileged relationship, but that privilege, even for the British, doesn't go into actual decision making. From the American point of view, the Europeans are policy takers, not policymakers, and for France, this [01:01:00] was difficult, because they felt that they had much more history in the region than the United States, that they had much better intelligence than the United States, and frankly, that they had a better understanding of what might happen, what might go wrong, and that the Americans had persuaded themselves, in sort of a fit of liberal internationalism, that all countries are the same and that in every Iraqi there was an American screaming to get out. So as soon as the big green machine had kicked down the doors, the Iraqis would throw off the yoke of dictatorship, the yoke of Islamism, and become a prosperous democratic nation allied to the United States. Of course, later everybody says well, Iraq is not going to become Sweden. Well it wasn't really, like in order to make it into Sweden, but it was a clear ambition to make it into a democracy, and this was where [01:02:00] the French profoundly disagreed, because they had tried with Algeria, to put a regime in place and pull out, and what they found out was that they had to continue a particularly nasty civil war, supporting a side in a civil war for the best part of two decades, with huge amounts of casualties, and which served to bleed France.

The Algerian War led to a sense in France, that France was no longer right. And this is problematic for great powers, this certainty in the rightness of your cause, is important. It's important for public opinion, it's important for a country's standing in the world, and also important for what kind of decisions they feel they

can make. For France, being [01:03:00] sort of shunned or not being gathered up by the United States and pushed towards giving this administration, led by people, notably Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, who the Europeans knew quite well for a great many years, they felt that this was a massive mistake and they wanted no part in it.

LEONG: So just to round off our conversation. You did say that it wasn't so much personalities as really what was happening after the Kosovo War, which was by the way, a really interesting thesis that I haven't come across that much. Having said that, when Obama came into office, and Obama of course was hugely popular in Europe, did that make a difference?

TOJE: It made a difference, but not really in terms of European support for American [01:04:00] objectives, and this is why I say this is structural, this isn't about personalities. I think Barack Obama, being lifted on sort of adoring hands through Europe, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, having huge crowds meet him in Prague and Paris and Berlin, he felt that he had a mandate from the Europeans to do this, to bring the war in Afghanistan -- by this stage, the Europeans had more or less pulled out of Iraq and America was owning it all by themselves, but to fix Afghanistan. I think this was the opening act for sort of the third or fourth phase in Afghan War, which was tragic in many sense. Barack Obama got persuaded for the troop surge, [01:05:00] the amount of casualties in Iraq rose rapidly. It became difficult, in the American public opinion discussion, even to discuss all those young men and women who lay down their lives in Afghanistan, a war that nobody really wanted to know about and everybody wanted to be over already. And at the same time, Barack Obama found himself with the Europeans that had become as transactional as the Europeans perhaps had accused George Bush Jr. for being. The Europeans had been complaining that the Americans had become -- where's the love, now it was all about business and saying you owe me that and I want this. Suddenly now, the Europeans, under Barack Obama, were driving very hard

bargains in order to get out of Afghanistan, and there was a sense, for many of those years, [01:06:00] that the only way this was going to end was with our embassies being evacuated from the roof Saigon style, and that the Americans, their attempts under particularly Generals Petraeus and McChrystal, were laying down a non-winning strategy. This attempt to change facts on the ground through military force were not delivering the dividends and from the European point of view. By the time Obama has settled into the white office, it was an assumption that this was a lost cause, and for Obama, NATO became much the same headache as it was under George Bush Jr.

LEONG: All right. Well are there any other key points that perhaps we have missed? I feel like we've covered a lot of ground.

TOJE: Yeah, we covered a lot of ground. I think [01:07:00] George Bush Jr., or the younger, is an interesting president in the United States, belonging to one of the great American political dynasties, being very much at the core of the Republican Party, having that support, and sort of inheriting a world that -- key people in his administration, I also believe the president himself, swore that the Cold War order within the west, that had been continued through the 1990s and towards the early 2000s, was no longer sustainable and that it would be up to the United States to change that. What he found that was that alliance politics had not gotten any easier than it was during the Cold War, and [01:08:00] that the American diplomacy that was carried out during those years was ineffective in the sense that -- I saw this myself, and it's a qualitative thing. It's kind of difficult to put a number on, but after 9/11, the Americans stopped staying at the same hotels as everybody else during NATO summits. This is just a small thing, but in the good old days, it would be like American decision-makers and the people around the president would sit down and have drinks with Europeans, they would know each other, they would know each other's wives, they would get on, to have that feel good factor about the alliance, that we're all in it together. That kind of changed

under George Bush. The Americans took to wearing this sort of massive American flags on their lapels, and [01:09:00] it seemed to be also, sort of a bit of a competition amongst the Americans, who could have the biggest American flag on their lapel. They would stay in a different hotel, so we wouldn't meet them, and they would arrive sort of as a phalanx. The Americans would arrive together, walking sort of determinedly to the table, and not being so interested in all the schmoozing, all the little side bargains that the Europeans are so accustomed to and have grown accustomed to in the European Union.

In the European Union, whenever anything is discussed, even issues that you would surely be seen as being for the greater good, there's always side payments. There's always somebody with their hand out saying yeah well, we're discussing this matter, maybe we should raise the question of our fishing quotas. It's completely unrelated to this issue but hey, I'll throw it on the table anyway. This is how they make deals in Europe. This is why the European Union is so difficult to understand, it's because that every bargain is hugely [01:10:00] complex and an amazing amount, immense amount, of sounding out is how this is done. It moves slowly, through deliberations and through personal relationships. This is how decisions are made in Europe. The Americans, under George Bush, was trying to run NATO, run it like the Americans did back in the 1960s, in the leadup to the Harmel Report, that led to the so called flexible response, after the Americans had told the Europeans, you need to spend more on your conventional forces. Otherwise, we will have to reassess the military doctrine for NATO. The Europeans failed to live up to that, and the Americans just railroad through the so called Harmel Report, where NATO agreed that we would take to nuclear weapons at quite an early stage in the conflict with the Soviet Union. Unpopular in Europe, but there had been so much discussion, and the drafting of the [01:11:00] report was done in such a way that the Europeans, in the end, rallied around the Americans. Under George Bush Jr., the Americans were less interested in doing

what key people in the administration, like Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney, wasn't all that interested in that part of it.

Henry Kissinger has pointed this out as well, that in order to keep the transatlantic bargain going, it's necessary for the United States to do a lot of tedious consensus building. Here we saw a United States who wasn't interested in that anymore and who just wanted to put the proposition on the table and get people to vote for it. And time and again the Americans found that they were not getting the votes. That the Europeans were not abandoning the alliance, but abrogating it, failing to deliver upon what the Americans [01:12:00] assumed that the Europeans would deliver. Again and again, the Europeans came up short. This left a legacy in the United States and in the Pentagon, that is working to this day, and I think this is quite important about the Bush presidency, and I would not put it as the fault of the president, because as I said previously, I see this as structural, more than a question of personalities. But I do think that had the American president had other people in his administration, people who were more willing to do this diplomatic footwork with Europeans, the experience from particularly the Afghan operations would have been different for NATO.

LEONG: You mentioned 9/11. Do you think there was a fundamental misalignment perhaps, in how 9/11 was perceived in the U.S. versus how [01:13:00] it was perceived in Europe?

TOJE: Yes, yes I do think so. I think in the days immediately after 9/11 there was a strong sense of community amongst the European states. Keep in mind, this was when the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, called the American president and basically said anything you need, anything, we will back you to the hilt on this one. This message was the same from every European capital. NATO would invoke Article 5, and then America wasn't all that interested. It was a sense that this was, somebody has struck against the United States and the United States will take its own counsel about how that was going to be addressed.

Soon, 9/11 took on its own life in American mythology, and that was where it departed from Europe. In Europe, what happened on 9/11 was a crime, it was not an act of war. And I know I'm contradicting myself, because [01:14:00] after all the Europeans signed up for Article 5, so it must have been an act of war, otherwise, why wouldn't they have? I've spoken to decision makers all over Europe, who felt that it was a very poor decision, to go for Article 5, but once it was on the table it was impossible to vote against it, because then it would be seen as being ill-loyal to the United States in their time of need, even if the Americans have not asked for it. Later, when 9/11 becomes a bit of sort of a talisman for the United States, becoming sort of the ultimate case where we are right to do this because of what happened in Washington and in New York. This was not really seen the same way in Europe. Europe forgot 9/11 as quickly as we tend to forget terrorist attacks. They tend to flame out within sort of six months and then we move on. But in the United States, during all the [01:15:00] years of the Bush presidency, it was only after Obama that 9/11 got into the rearview mirror for the United States, but under George Bush, 9/11 was something that was trotted out time and again. And many Europeans felt that especially during the process of the attempt at getting a UN mandate for a war in Iraq, that the Americans were being disingenuous, overplaying their hand, were being even somewhat manipulative, taking this tragedy, this terrorist attack, and turning it into a possibility to do everything else that was on the American agenda. It became quite clear that the Europeans weren't persuaded that Iraq had anything to do with 9/11 and didn't buy into this, that, well, 9/11, Iraq, and connecting the dots, I think was easier to do in the United States, because of sort of the mood in [01:16:00] the country.

I'm sure many of the people who will be watching this will remember. I was in the United States just a few weeks after 9/11. I remember talking to some people, I was in a town in Minnesota, and this little town was just draped in the American flag. There was flags everywhere, and it was just a strong sense that this

generation had been charged. People didn't know quite how, but it was somehow World War II all over again. There was evil in the world, they had lashed out against the United States, this was a time for America to do what America does best, to stand together in American values and defeat the enemies of freedom. This was very much the rhetoric of George Bush the younger as well. From a European point of view, it seemed [01:17:00] that the Americans were going out looking for monsters to destroy and with many countries in Europe having colonial pasts, there was a great degree of reticence on this point. Not to mention the fact that very few Europeans had any desire to write letters to the moms of their own soldiers, saying I'm sorry to inform you that your son died in Iraq. For what? Because it wasn't really seen as our war, and I think the somewhat lackluster performance of the Europeans, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, comes down to that, that it wasn't seen as our fight. We did it because we're allied to the United States, we did as little as possible, and from the European point of view, this was a venture that was doomed from the outset and we saw it first, we tried to tell you, you shouldn't have done it. From the American point of view, [01:18:00] I think especially in the Pentagon, there was a view that useless Europeans had sort of messed it all up and if the Europeans had only sort of gotten off their high horse and done some of the heavy lifting, we would be in a different place. It's counterfactual, we will never know, but these two narratives continued to remain very, very strong in Europe and in the United Sates, to this day.

LEONG: Is there anything else that we might have skipped?

TOJE: No, I think we've covered sort of most of the ground. I think the one thing that I think that we haven't been touching upon is the question of EU security and defense. Traditionally, the Americans have been very pro-European integration. Back in 1954, the Americans tried, [01:19:00] and almost succeeded in putting together a European defense community. It was vetoed by the French Parliament, but basically the Americans wanted the Europeans to have a centralized military

command. This didn't really happen and for the duration of the Cold War, the Americans ended up doing most, or delivering most of the capabilities for the alliance. When the Europeans started dabbling in security and defense again, the Americans were first enthusiastic, thinking great, you do that. But then suddenly, some people, especially in the Republican Party, people like Madeleine Albright, who is a Democrat, but I was thinking more about the people who would come into power with George Bush the younger. There was -- sorry, I lost my [01:20:00] train of thought here. Where was I? I completely lost my -- I have a fever, sorry.

LEONG: Oh, that's okay.

TOJE: What was I going on about? Yes, European security and defense policy. The Europeans were moving slowly towards a common security and defense policy and the Americans felt the need to warn the Europeans about what sort of security and defense policy they could allow, and basically what the Americans wanted was that the Europeans should pony up more capabilities and that NATO would have primacy. So basically, spend more money on armory like tanks, cars and guns, and we will use them when we see fit, and then you can use it for whatever, crisis management operations that we agree on, under your own flag. This was the view under the presidency of Clinton. It was quite interesting to see, under George Bush, the Americans became [01:21:00] much less worried about European security and defense cooperation. People like Victoria Nuland, later under Barack Obama, came to the point where, made the full journey from being opposed to European security and defense policy to becoming the strongest proponent of European security and defense policy. And under George Bush, and I think this was one thing that the presidential administration got right, was that it wasn't necessary to spend any time trying to prevent or preclude the Europeans from developing an existing force in Europe. Of course, like the specter haunting the Americans, whilst Europeans would become a separate pole in a multiple world order, and that they would not be following the Americans anymore and that they would be

their own entity. But under George Bush, it became the good luck in D.C., [01:22:00] that it wasn't worth spending any time thinking about the Europeans, because the Europeans were useless and that they wouldn't get anything done. Even if the Americans didn't do anything to shape this initiative, the Europeans would surely just keep on talking and not delivering anything, and I think they got that right. We have a security and defense policy for the EU, it's delivering absolutely nothing of value, and this is yeah, almost 20 years later.

LEONG: Okay.

TOJE: Thank you so much.

LEONG: All right, thank you.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO]