



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

Collective Memory Project

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National elections had taken place in Norway on September 10, 2001; the Labour-led government had lost and Conservative party leaders were preparing for coalition talks the next day. Those negotiations, however, quickly took a backseat when images of the burning World Trade Center in New York filled television screens in Oslo. As the interviews in this collection suggest, Norwegian policy makers immediately recognized that the terrorist attacks would have far-reaching impact on America. But no one might have expected the demands that US officials would make of allies as President George W. Bush launched two new wars. Norway, a stalwart NATO partner, would also find itself facing unexpected decisions.

The day after 9/11, the French publication *Le Monde* declared “We are all Americans,” reflecting a heartfelt outpouring of sympathy across Europe. NATO invoked Article 5 – the clause for collective defense – for the first time in the organization’s history. Yet within two years US relations with several key European allies had soured. France, Germany, and Belgium expressed vocal opposition to US unilateralism in general and particularly to the US invasion of Iraq, which lacked UN support. American officials referred to these countries dismissively as “old Europe.” Tensions threatened the basis of a strategic framework that had shaped the Western order since the Second World War. This so-called “transatlantic drift” presented an unprecedented challenge to others among the US’s European partners.

Norway found itself compelled to strike an awkward balance between its close ally across the Atlantic and European allies closer to home. At least two additional factors complicated Norwegian foreign policymaking under the new circumstances. First, the US was turning attention and resources to its Global War on Terror, seemingly less engaged with security in the high north, where Norway shared a border with Russia. Second, Norway faced increasing pressure to send combat troops to war zones, which undercut its highly-prized identity as a “peace nation.”

How did Norway’s political leaders navigate these rough trans-Atlantic waters and tricky European cross-currents in the early and mid-2000s? What considerations guided decisions about the extent to which Norway would join the Global War on Terror? What role did individual personalities play in shaping Norway’s relations with the US and other European allies? How did foreign policy demands in the midst of increasingly negative Norwegian public opinion about the US impact Norway’s domestic politics? What does Norway’s experience teach small state actors about managing big power tensions?

These interviews with many of Norway’s policy-makers, security experts, and diplomats seek to answer the above questions. In doing so, they also further understanding of the impact of US foreign policy at home and abroad.