Norway and the US: Partners in peace

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There is an old saying that you should never confuse schooling with education. Education is, of course, a much broader process. Real education is all about changing our life perspective and world view.

I regret to say that I do not have a degree from Harvard. However, it would be true to say that my life perspective changed here. Twenty-one years ago, I joined Professor Roger Fisher and Bruce Patton at the Harvard Negotiation Project for the January workshop, followed by six turbulent months of field work in South Africa. Our aim was to help design a process for political change as apartheid was drawing to an end.

When I left Harvard on a cold January morning in 1986, Roger Fisher invited me to sum up what I had learned. I remember concluding that it felt like having been given an intensive introduction to common sense.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. Had it been a simple matter of common sense, then Roger Fisher and Bruce Patton would not have needed to go on tirelessly writing books and coaching people on how to reach agreement and satisfy their interests. The truth, of course, is that reaching agreement, bridging divides, consolidating interests - all of this is exceedingly complex.

Since 1986 I have regularly returned to the key lessons of interest-based negotiations. The eye-opener that changed my outlook was when I realised that I could get further in satisfying my own interests by spending more time trying to understand the interests of the other side. Not giving in. Not yielding to pressure. But better promoting my own interests when the other side also felt that its interests were being taken adequately into account.

I should not deny that applying this approach is difficult, whether in dealing

with my three boys, my wife, my coalition partners in government or, as Foreign Minister, with other governments. Yet, I see no better way.

It is a daunting task to find outcomes that satisfy interests, that are legitimate and that will last. This goes for a whole range of modern challenges - from the conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, to our shared burdens of fighting poverty and dealing with climate change.

Deep down, Professor Fisher's message was really about culture and civilisation. Today's mantra about a looming clash of civilisations, about their being wrong and our being right, about being either with us or against us - this whole unilateral and confrontational approach takes us further away from bridging gaps, further away from reaching lasting and equitable agreement, further away from proving the extremists wrong.

This is the paradox: In an interdependent world, the need to understand the other side's interests, the need to understand what guides their emotions and motivates their behaviour and actions - this need is increasing - not in any altruistic sense - but as the only real strategy for securing a political outcome that maximises our own interests.

Yet, overwhelmed by the complexity of interdependence, there has been the temptation of reverting to the simple notion that the best approach to getting it our way is to insist that we are right and to use all our might and force to prove the point.

My message this evening is that we must do everything we can to turn this tide of unilateralism in our response to conflict and opposing interests. We must revert to the essence of diplomacy, which is engagement.

This year it is 50 years since late Canadian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech, Pearson put it quite bluntly: "The grim fact is that we prepare for war like precocious giants and for peace like retarded pygmies."

As our men and women in uniform in Afghanistan told me when I visited them a month ago: Do not expect us to deliver a stable Afghanistan. Only political processes and civil efforts can do that; our mission is strictly speaking to provide

the necessary stability for that to happen.

They went on: If you fall short on that critical civil agenda of reconciliation, reconstruction and Afghanisation, if the average Afghan does not see any change for the better in his daily life, then we, ISAF, the military - who are there with the best of mandates and the best of intentions, may end up being perceived as occupiers and part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

Now, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, this is the new dominant paradigm of modern conflict: War, failing states, acts of terrorism, strong religious and cultural sentiments, widespread poverty, human misery, lack of development, the struggle for resources, impending climate change - in most conflicts, all of these factors meet and are intertwined. We cannot address one of them without addressing the others.

The challenge is to apply a comprehensive approach in dealing with this complexity and pave the way for real engagement. Isolation and boycott as foreign policy tools are becoming less and less useful. Because it is virtually impossible to isolate conflicts. They have a tendency to spread, unless we get involved and engaged.

Globalisation means that we are affected by conflicts that we used to define as far away. Local conflicts are emerging as global concerns. As Vaclav Havel put it: "In today's world everything concerns everyone." Terrorists are being trained in the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Failed states in Africa - collapsing under the weight of poverty, disease and conflict - are providing new breeding ground for instability and insecurity. The heroin and cocaine sold on the streets of Oslo and Boston come from Afghanistan and Colombia.

States and groups, whether religious, national, or political extremists, using terror and destroying bridges must be dealt with firmly, including with adequate police and military force when needed. States have a right and a duty to protect themselves. In NATO we all agreed that the terrible attacks on 9/11 were to be considered an attack on all the allies, in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

However, how we protect ourselves matters. Military means may be necessary.

But only by demonstrating that there is a better option, through political and economic means, processes and governance, will we be able to build lasting solutions and stem the flow of recruits to extremist groups.

We need to bring this into our equation: Military action may defeat one enemy. But what if that very action creates ten new enemies - are we then better off?

Seen from our side of the Atlantic, some of the most prominent US foreign policy achievements have been based on engagement combined with strength. This was how we broke out of the Cold War and paved the way for a new and free Europe. The US and the Alliance opposed the Soviet Union, but we kept talking to them and engaging them. This was how a new era in relations with China was opened up.

And more recently, this is how the US and other nations managed to move forward in addressing the North Korean nuclear challenge. There was strength. But it was when this strength was combined with engagement and the application of a variety of measures that new breakthroughs were achieved.

On the other hand, there are not many examples of conflicts where military action or pressure combined with isolation has led to durable peace and stability. On the contrary. Pressure combined with isolation has too often led to a hardening of positions and the perpetuation and widening of conflicts.

Not engaging means depriving ourselves of a much more fully equipped toolbox. Not engaging limits our options and may make us hostage to our own unilateral approaches.

And action to bring about change, stability, freedom, democracy, rule of law - based on military intervention alone, without a comprehensive political strategy - has proven devastating.

In the troubled arc stretching from Kabul to Khartoum, conflicts have not only spread, but in many ways melted together. Each of the conflicts in this area has its own distinctive character, and needs to be addressed on its own merits. But they also fuel and draw inspiration from each other.

I will come back to two of these burning issues - Afghanistan and the Middle

East - but let me first run through Norway's approach to peace and conflict resolution.

This approach, shaped by Norway's history, experience, size and geographical location, differs of course from that of the United States. But we are united as allies. When the United States was attacked on 9/11, we too were attacked, because the security of the United States is also the security of Norway. Because we are allies and partners, united by values, purpose and numerous bonds across the Atlantic.

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Joseph Nye has, with his reflections on the role and nature of "soft power", enabled us to understand the bigger picture of state power. Norway's deep partnership with the US did not spring from respect for your military might, but from the power of American ideas and values. And Norway's ability to weigh in beyond its borders has never been a result of military might or economic muscles.

It has been a shared vision of Norwegians to take a broader responsibility, to engage in the settlement of disputes and to contribute to peace and security. The goal of this government is to increase Norway's official development assistance to 1 percent of our GDP. We are almost there, at a current level of 0.98%.

One mainstay of Norwegian foreign policy is our continous support of the UN led multilateral system, both when it comes to world security and when it comes to driving agendas and programmes for development and the fight against poverty.

Another mainstay is the belief in the pre-eminence of international law that regulates the use of force and creates a level playing field in world markets. Such a legal order is key to our security as well as to our national interest, not least given our position as a coastal state with rights and responsibilities in waters that are six times the size of mainland Norway.

Then there is the tradition of active engagement in peace and development processes. This is a matter of both values and interests. Values, because we - as a

rich nation in a peaceful corner of Europe - have a moral responsibility to engage in the cause of peace and development for others. And interests, because ultimately our security is served by less suffering and less instability and more progress in the fight against world poverty.

We cannot spread ourselves to thinly. We try to seize strategic opportunities where we can make a difference, such as our long-standing engagement with the parties to the Middle East conflict. Such as grasping the opportunity to assist the parties in Sri Lanka to move towards peace, despite all the obstacles. Such as engaging in the Horn of Africa. Or such as taking the lead among governments in the efforts to reach the goal of immunising all children, everywhere.

Looking at the Norwegian involvement in peace processes, we see some key features. Let me mention six:

- First, we seek to be consistent, and history has shown that the nature of our involvement remains stable, even when there is a change of government, thanks to the broad political consensus in Norway on the value of this kind of involvement.

- Second, we focus on the interplay between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peace efforts.
In many cases, our humanitarian activities in conflict areas have served as a gateway for our engagement in various peace and reconciliation processes. At times, this humanitarian experience may give us better insight into the core complexity of conflicts, and - to follow Professor Fisher's logic - enable us to understand key interests of groups that are all too often neglected by those who carry bigger sticks.

- Third, and as a consequence of my second point, there is our close cooperation with NGOs and civil society.
Norwegian NGOs and research institutions have played key roles, both as initiators and implementers of Norwegian involvement in peace processes. About one third of our development budget is channelled through our NGOs. This in turn, provides us with channels to important population groups and civil society. In many cases we can work across boundaries, in close cooperation between state and independent actors.

- Fourth, in many contexts our lack of direct national interests in a conflict proves to be an asset.
We can engage in a conflict without changing the balance of power between the parties or within a region. We have no colonial past and no direct national interests to defend.

- Fifth, our contribution is rarely made in splendid isolation. In one way or another we draw strength from our close ties with the UN, NATO, the US and our European partners.

- Sixth and last but not least, I would mention the importance we attach to dialogue.

In the Middle East, for example, during deacdes of engagement we have put emphasis on maintaining open channels of communication at all times with all states and all groups. Ready to listen, to give our views and to share our reading of other actors' interests. This approach led us to initiate the talks that culminated in the Oslo process and the agreement signed on the White House lawn in 1993.

This was built on our long-standing ties with Israel, but also our channel of communication with the PLO and Palestinian groups since the 1970s. For years that channel was controversial. But it proved valuable. The same was the case in the South African setting. Our long standing dialogue with oppositions groups, including the ANC, proved valuable.

Coming back to my introductory remarks: The lack of dialogue - or the inadequacy of existing dialogue - is among the biggest weaknesses of today's international system.

How can we engage, understand, change or even pressure the other side's interests if we do not talk to them or, rather, do not listen? How can we create a setting for change if our message is that we need not talk because the other side knows perfectly well what they must do? Isn't this one of the main findings of the research done here at Harvard - that poor communication is the most serious obstacle to a good outcome in negotiations?

Coming back to South Africa: How could we have identified the real motives

of the ANC if we had confined ourselves to reading their charter and not taken the effort to talk to them?

And likewise today with Hamas and Hezbollah: Their political horizon differs profoundly from ours. But they are realities on the ground; they cannot be abolished by some Western decree. How can we adequately deal with them, influence them and even pressure them if we do not talk and listen?

A serious misconception shared by many is that talking means agreeing. Talking to the other side does not strengthen the other side's hand, on the contrary.

We all remember the pain in Yitzhak Rabin's eyes when he shook of Yasser Arafat's hand in front of the White House in 1993. But afterwords he said : " You don't make peace with your friend. You make it with your enemy."

It is a sad fact that the parties to most conflicts do not seek dialogue and negotiations before it is too late. Too late means too many deaths, too many injuries, too many people who are marked for life by violence, too late for creating structures of governance that can legitimately run a local or a national administration, too late for bringing the key groups on board.

And as we now see unfolding: Too late means fuelling extremism and weakening moderate forces. Isolation has provided additional inspiration and boosted recruitment to insurgent groups and terrorist movements across a vast area stretching all the way to Afghanistan - with Iraq evolving into a tragic source of instability and spreading insurgency.

Failure to take inclusive diplomatic initiatives and engage the various parties - states and non-states - will continue to leave the arena to extremists and spoilers and leave a space of opportunity for players such as Iran. It should be our guiding policy to create incentives for states and groups to engage in political processes, not turn their back on them.

Norway strongly welcomes the active involvement by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in helping forge new negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Some things do not change: It will take the full engagement of the United States to bring this complex process forward, by engageing both parties - and the US can count on Norway's support.

We need new and bold initiatives to get a negotiation process started that can end the occupation, stop the settlement activity and help create a Palestinian state that can live side with side with Israel within internationally recognised borders. And not least - a process that can proivide security from terror for all.

One key challenge now will be to determine how to deal with a Palestinian Unity Government.

Norway has lent its full support to President Abbas's efforts to create order on the Palestinian side. He is democratically elected, he embodies the standards of the international community as regards the recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and acceptance of previous agreements. As head of the PLO, he is leading the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel and the outside world.

During 2006 President Abbas has sought to end the internal strife and enable the Palestinians to reconnect with the international community by creating a unity goverbment, based on his key principles. We have actively supported this process that led to the Mecca accords.

Then there is Hamas. The Hamas Government was for all practical purposes boycotted by the West, due to its failure to accept the Quartet's requirements and the standars presented to it by Presidenrt Abbas. Norway too was clear in its message to Hamas: You need to change your position if you are to be accepted by the international community.

Now the Hamas Government is history and we are waiting to see a coalition government with a new platform.

The Mecca agreement is not a verbatim re-statement of the Quartet statements. That should come as no surprise. However, the Mecca agreement clearly indicates that both Hamas and Fatah have undertaken to respect all agreements concluded by the PLO in the past.

We then need to ask: Is this a significant step? Has the other side moved? Can we explore what amounts to their acceptance without any reservation of the Oslo accords, the Arab peace initiative and relevant UN resolutions?

These texts contain explicit acceptance of a two-state solution and thus a recognition of Israel, the commitment to pursue goals by political means and not by violence.

How should we respond? I believe we need to acknowledge that what was achieved in Mecca constitutes a significant step on the part of the Palestinians, supported by Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.

We need to await the platform of the Unity Government and our expectations must remain clear. We need to see the essence of Mecca in that platform. But again, we need to engage. We need to signal that we stand ready to relate to a government that is moving decisively in the right direction.

And I believe we would be better served by engageing in a way which may help move Hamas further into a political process that we can influence rather than by seeing them drift further into extremism.

The alternative to a coalition government is civil war and increased Palestinian extremism. It is a weakened President with limited ability to move forward in negotiations with Israel. This would be a disaster for the Palestinians. It would also pose a grave threat to the security of Israel, it would undermine moderate forces in the region and be a serious impediment to the resumption of talks between Palestinians and Israelis.

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Two concepts are key to my remarks this evening: The first is engagement, and I believe that the Middle East is our biggest test. Then there is the need to take a comprehensive approach to modern conflict, and here Afghanistan is a case in point. It could have been Iraq, but I will not explore that further here.

Norway is deeply engaged in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the second largest recipient of Norwegian development assistance after the Palestinians. Here we find by far the largest contingent of Norwegian military personnel abroad - about 700 troops - around 10 per cent of our standing army.

A minister in Kabul told me last month that Afghanistan is not a post-conflict country. It is a post-disaster country. It is a living example of a complex crises

setting.

To build Afghanistan's future, we need a comprehensive approach. The military, political, development and humanitarian dimensions must form part of an integrated and balanced agenda.

Our military engagement must provide space for political and economic processes. It has a supporting role to play and must play it wisely. During our NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels on 26 January, we agreed on the need to ensure that our approach has this right balance. Now we need to follow up on that pledge - not only in NATO, but also in close cooperation with key players such as the UN, the EU and the World Bank.

In order to succeed, we must draw on everything we have learned from 50 years of development cooperation. We must provide what the Afghans need and what they themselves give priority to. And we must ensure that when we leave, the Afghans are able to take forward what we have initiated.

There is an urgent need for Afghanisation. Foreign military forces cannot win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. Only the Afghan Government can. Whatever we do must have an Afghan face and Afghan ownership. This is first of all a struggle between the Afghan Government and the Taliban and other insurgent movements. We will provide security and help fight and deter insurgents. But we cannot fight other people's war.

International presence and solidarity are, and will be, required for many years to come. But we need an exit strategy, even if we are determined to stay a long course. And that strategy must be building Afghanistan's own institutions: army, police, judiciary and civil administration. They have to deliver security, the rule of law and health and education services.

Afghanistan has also brought into focus the question of the roles and mandates of military and civilian personnel. Planners of international military operations sometimes see civilian projects as valuable tools to win the hearts and minds of the local population, leading to a growing presence of non-humanitarian actors within traditional humanitarian domains like health, food aid and emergency shelter. Humanitarian organisations have raised their voices and criticised the presence of such actors. We should take their concerns seriously.

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At the core of our efforts to deal with modern conflict should lie our ambition to improve our ability to prevent. Here too we need a comprehensive approach that will enable us to engage early enough to prevent conflict and disaster, whether caused by man or by nature.

In such a comprehensive approach, we cannot allow ourselves to divide the world into different civilisations, or into those who are with us and those who are against us.

Thomas Friedman has called attention to the obvious fact that we can download information, but we cannot download understanding. And what we so sorely need is not complacency, but better understanding of everything, ranging from facts and figures, to interests.

Maximising our interests can never be a solitary mission. It takes a broader will to achieve real engagement.

Kilde
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Emner
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