Interviewer: Stein Tønnesson  
Interviewee: Pavel Baev  
Place: Pavel Baev’s office at PRIO, Hausmannsgate 3, Oslo  
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Transcribed from video recording by Sverke Runde Saxegaard, lightly edited by Stein Tønnesson and Pavel Baev in May 2019

ST: This is the 15th May 2018. I, Stein Tønnesson, former director of Prio, am in Pavel Baev’s office. Pavel Baev, research professor at PRIO has been here for more than 25 years. I am now going to interview Pavel for the 60th anniversary of PRIO, which was founded in 1959. Pavel, you were born in 1957, the year of the Sputnik. Can you tell us a little bit about how it was to grow up in the Soviet Union, in Moscow in the 1950s and 60s?

PB: Yes indeed. I am born in the same year that Sputnik was launched. Which means that I am two years older than PRIO. Nothing in my childhood, my teens or my twenties really prepared me for the huge change in my life, for being a PRIOite. It was a very stable childhood. Overall, the Soviet Union in my early days, early years... everything was very much on track. School was very much a regular thing and education was generally very good. There were chances then to continue, and I was very lucky to be admitted to Moscow State University. It was a tough competition, more than twenty people for every position. But I prepared myself very seriously for that big advance in my life, and I was feeling very privileged in many ways, because it was the best university in the Soviet Union.

ST: Before we move further with your youth, could you tell a little bit about your parents’ generation and your family? I assume they must have had the experience of the Great Fatherland War and of the Stalin period in the Soviet Union?

PB: Yes, certainly. War was very much present in the generation of my parents, though they were not old enough to fight, it was the war of my grandparents so to say. Both were in the war, and lucky to return home. For my father, war was something very near, because he lived in Moscow and experienced the shock of the short evacuation, when Hitler’s troops came very close. But the family returned soon after. My mother, before the war came for a summer break to her native village in Smolensk region, and in effect was cut off as the village was captured by German troops a few months after the beginning of the war and liberated only in 1944. So for a long time, on my mother’s side of the family, neither my grandmother and her two daughters, nor my grandfather who was at the front, knew anything about one another and had to presume the worst, which never happened. So, my family has certainly memories of the war, but I belong to a generation for whom war was already a distant memory. Somehow the war and the revolution and everything that happened before was already in the history books. And life around us had very little connection with that war. It was very stable and, in many ways, very peaceful. Not particularly tense I would say. Generally, very much a feeling of everything is on track and you generally know what you might possibly achieve in your life. A little bit better or a little bit worse. But everything was very much predetermined.
and a little bit boring. For a teenager, who always looks for adventures, for new horizons, I found my new horizons in the university.

ST: At what age did you get into Moscow State University? And how did you manage to get in to such an elite university?

PB: I still cannot believe my good fortune. Immediately after school, it was ten years of school starting at six, so I was 17 when I entered the university. Five years in the university, that was a very normal schedule for the Soviet Union back then. In fact, everywhere was much the same duration of the education. I graduated fairly young, but I took my chances. Nobody else from my school, from my graduation year, took the chance to try at a top college. Though many of my friends went for different colleges, particularly technical education. And I decided to try geography. Probably my heart was more in history, but the history department already then seemed to me very much full of ideology. History was taught in such a way that Marxism-Leninism was really a dominant theme in every discipline. Even in ancient history. Geography was basically ideology-free, and there were a lot of choices in the department. From meteorology to economic geography of foreign countries, and that was my specialty.

ST: The environment that you lived in, as far as I remember when you talked about it in the past, was a very lucky, or happy period in your life?

PB: Of course! That was suddenly a place where I felt very free. With a lot of new horizons and many interesting friends. With the first love and with a lot of interesting experiences gained through the summer expeditions, which took us to different corners of Russia, and even abroad – that was my first foreign trip on my own – to the German Democratic Republic where I first saw the Berlin wall. So it was really a period when you look out of the window in the room where you study, in the very high skyscrapers on Leninskie Gory and you see not only Moscow below you but a lot of sky and a lot of freedom around you. It was a very happy time.

ST: So, you had a stable childhood in the age of Khrushchev, and then were a student during Brezhnev’s time. What is your view today of those two Soviet leaders?

PB: You know, Khrushchev ended when I was still very young, in my first class. We were given textbooks with a big portrait of Khrushchev and were ordered to remove that page from the textbook. So, my memories of Khruschchev are very... very distant. Not really first hand. Most of that was the long, long Brezhnev era, which then looked very long, while in fact now, Putin’s era has lasted longer. The beginning of that era was in fact full of hope, and full of expectations. There was a feeling that the Soviet Union, the whole country, was on track. That there were big problems in the past, not just with the war but also with internal repression, with this and that, but now everything was getting better and life was improving year to year.
That was the experience I had both in my school years and in the university. Where it seemed that there would be huge and many interesting opportunities ahead, and that nothing would change dramatically. That the country would generally stay on this track and no major breaks or breakdowns could possibly happen. Certainly, it was a very wrong impression, with hindsight I can say that.

ST: I think you finished your studies in 1979; is that right?

PB: Yes.

ST: By that time, you had never been outside the Soviet Union I assume.

PB: Yes, I was twice outside in my student years. Once in the German Democratic Republic and once in Bulgaria on a student exchange. We went there for a short winter holyday. But my family, in fact my father was in the military intelligence, so my family while I was still in school for instance moved away, with my little brother. First it was Yemen, northern Yemen. And then it was Egypt. So, I generally knew what... and I visited them in Yemen while I was still in school. I was not able to go to Egypt. But I had some impression about it.

ST: Okay, so you had international experience already early on. And when you had finished your studies, the first job you got was also for the military, was it not?

PB: Yes indeed. It was a military research institute affiliated with the Department of Defense, doing a lot of hard research on the potential enemy. My specialty was the United States, the various aspects of military policy of the United States. While it was a huge change in my life, because suddenly after all the openness and freedom of the university and various roads open to you, you find yourself in a very restricted and controlled environment with bars on the windows. With no opportunity to travel abroad certainly. And with very rigid discipline. All my superiors were officers, and for them that discipline was very natural. They felt that it was far more relaxed than in normal military units. So for me it was very tough.

ST: I suppose you could have chosen a military career then. You could have been a general perhaps today?

PB: Of course. I was invited to join, in fact several times. Though probably I would never have made it to general because without the proper military education in the military I would always have been kind of a second-class officer, with limited prospects. For me, that choice, to put on a uniform - while it could have been very financially beneficial because the salary would have been doubled and more - never felt right. So, I resisted the persistent invitations. Sometimes you make choices in life that you can’t quite rationalize in hindsight. Much the same way for instance, during my second year at PRIO when I was on a temporary contract, NUPI announced positions in the newly created Center for Russian Studies. Real positions, some of the guys who got them are still there, like Jakob Godzimirsky and Helge Blakkisrud, and I did not apply. While it was really very much my field of studies, by then I already felt
myself a part of the PRIO family, so applying from PRIO to NUPI just did not feel right. I never applied and never regretted that.

ST: And if we go back to the period when you worked for the military you did not pull on a uniform, but you were a civilian working for the military and now in history we are at a time when the relationship between east and west was pretty bad again with the new phase of the cold war. Did you experience this in your environment?

PB: Of course. I joined in September 1979, and in December the Afghan War started. Several of my colleagues, officers, disappears so to say from our corridors, because they were sent south. In all my years in that institute, that was the pattern. Some of them never came back because they were reassigned, and some of them came back very changed people I would say. One of them was killed there. I went with my colleagues to the military airport to receive the coffin. Heavy coffin I would say. That certainly also made an impression. While overall the whole atmosphere changed in those years, quite dramatically. From the hopes of Razryadka (Detente) to very much a new phase of confrontation when the threat of war was real, and in fact my colleagues were very much in the mood of its coming.

ST: But then comes Gorbachev.

PB: Indeed. Which, even in hindsight seemed like a miracle, and a lot of things started to change in the world, in the Soviet Union, and in my life. One of the consequences of Gorbachev pronouncing the world “All-European House” was that a new think-tank was created to develop the concept. The Institute of Europe, in the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and I joined that Institute at the creation so to say in the year 1987.

ST: Two years after Gorbachev had become Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, you joined a new think tank to study his idea of a European House.

PB: Yes, indeed it was a time of incredible change. After very much a period where general secretaries would come and go and nothing was changing, suddenly with Gorbachev the wind of change was starting to blow. And again, one of the manifestations of that change in the foreign policy was the idea that Europe is our common house. We need to put behind us the confrontation and the risk of war. We need to somehow adjust our minds to the fact that we are together in this house and we have to be good neighbors.

ST: Did you meet him?

PB: Several times, but never privately. And never one to one.

ST: Did he read your stuff?

PB: Yes. Most of our stuff was collective products. Some drafts of his speeches, some drafts of the papers that were circulated there and to the Central Committee. So, the think-tank was
very much involved in foreign policy making. With Gorbachev, with Shevardnadze, all these new ideas that were then produced in such abundance.

ST: But when you worked for the military you were an expert on the United States, and now you worked on Europe.

PB: Yes, and again, my area was more arms control and possibilities for a new military détente, and here the connections with the United States were of crucial importance. Because even if it is only an all-Europe house, the United States was still very much a part of a military balance and military equations of any kind. One part of my work there was on the nuclear weapons in Europe. Non-strategic nuclear weapons, which were mostly American nuclear weapons. We tried to prepare ideas, to prepare a tract for possible negotiations. Nothing came out of that so now at the ultimate stage of my research career I would very much want to return to this unresolved problem which has acquired new complexity and new quality. And together with some of my PRIO colleagues like Greg Reichberg and Louise Olsson and possibly Stein Tønnesson if he had any free capacity at all., we might give a new push to that problem which is left over in some sense, but at the same time very much a new quality in that situation now.

ST: That would be really good. When you worked for Gorbachev's new institute, did you then get a chance to travel in Europe as well?

PB: Yes, a year and a half after I joined, my security clearance so to say expired, and I was clean to go. I travelled to several countries, first of all in eastern Europe. A trip to Poland produced a particularly strong impression because suddenly there the Perestroika got an entirely new meaning. The country was really going for very deep reforms, some of them very painful with a lot of inflation but with lots of new hope. The next year, in 89, one of my strongest impressions certainly of my whole life, was a conference in Berlin, in East Berlin, with their think tank EPV. Where we discussed European security and suddenly the wall came down.

ST: EPV?

PB: EPV! I cannot really remember what this abbreviation... what was the German name of this think tank which perished together with the Berlin wall.

ST: Were you there at the moment when it fell?

PB: Yes, we had a conference in Berlin. The venue was a bit outside Berlin. Around was a big park, in which everything was peace and quiet. But it was very easy to come in the evening to Alexanderplatz and see the colossal crowds. With their chanting "Wir Sind Ein Volk!". In the morning we also came there and were surprised to see that everything was peace and quiet. Not a single glass had been broken, and everyone was generally in their workplace. So, a very quiet morning, and colossal explosion of emotions in the evening. On the last day of the conference the wall actually came down.
ST: What were your emotions then?

PB: It was generally a shock. I was feeling that was never an intended result of our work on foreign policy. That we lost control over all the reforms and all the brilliant ideas about how to manage the rapprochement between east and west. That suddenly it gained such momentum and new dynamics so we could no longer manage these events.

ST: What did you feel about Michael Gorbachev then, and what is your assessment of him now?

PB: I think for him it was also something he never quite expected. He was still a Soviet leader. Very much a person who thought that his position gave him firm control over events. So, it is was decisions and his guidance that would always decide and determine the course of events. And at that moment, suddenly the events took their own momentum. I think he was lost after that. His last two years were a period of indecision and inability to regain control. Inability to see where it was really leading.

ST: Now you are, if we are in 89, then you are 32 years old and had you heard about PRIO before that?

PB: No. Not before 1989. My acquaintance with PRIO started perhaps the next year. When I met Sverre Lodgaard on one of the conferences in Europe. I cannot even remember where it was. I met several Norwegians before him, including for instance Johan Jørgen Holst, who was a part of our program on non-strategic nuclear weapons; he participated in several workshops and generally impressed me with his ability to really work at the workshops. To engage in discussions to generate new ideas, to discuss other proposals. Not just to put forward his paper and that’s it.

ST: And Sverre Lodgaard was at that time director of PRIO and you met him in eastern Europe somewhere?

PB: Yes. In one of the conferences around Europe. I cannot remember the place. He invited me to come to PRIO for a week, and that week happened to be a week in January 1991. I came to PRIO for a week with some of my prepared ideas...

ST: Was this your first visit to Norway?

PB: Yes. That was my first visit to Norway, but I had met several Norwegians before that. One of them was the leader of the Conservative Party. I met her in Moscow at a reception in the Norwegian embassy. She introduced herself as Kaci. I was very impressed by her. She was sharp and very interested in what was going on. Not really my idea of a leader of a political party.

ST: This was Kaci Kullman Five?
PB: Of course, yes, that was her. And I was so impressed that I have voted Høyre ever since.

ST: Oh, I see! I never knew that. But I am curious to hear your first impression of PRIO. When you came to the building that was not here in Hausmannsgata, it was in Fuglehauggata, I assume?

PB: Yes, it was Fuglehauggata. The visit did not take place in a very happy atmosphere because it coincided with King Olav’s death. So, on the one hand suddenly it was the Gulf War, and on the other hand it was this sad event. So, my presentations and the seminars were a little bit overtaken by these events. But nevertheless, I felt the place was very friendly and very open to interesting discussions. I came back the following year. My first visit was in January 91, and then I came shortly for the relaunch of Security Dialogue. Magne Barth invited me to be one of the associated editors. And then I came for a whole month, it was February-March 92.

ST: Magne Barth had taken over as editor of the Bulletin of Peace Proposals from Marek Thee and then Sverre and Magne launched into a change process with the Bulletin of Peace Proposals becoming Security Dialogue. So, you got involved in that actually?

PB: Yes, I was present at the conference where we brainstormed about the whole launch, discussed the new name, new design, new set of possible contributors. For me it was a hugely interesting thing because for me it was part of the change happening in international affairs, and I was glad to be a part of that manifestation of the change.

ST: By the time you came back for your second visit, the Soviet Union was gone. How did you experience that?

PB: Well... It was a huge shock. The shock was not only the collapse, the shock was also the 1991 military coup, and that was something I witnessed first hand, because our institute was located in the very center of Moscow. Suddenly you come to your work on Monday morning, and there are tanks all around. In that crucial night at the Moscow State White House I was there with my father. We spent a long and miserable night under drizzling rain, expecting any moment that the storm would come, and suddenly in the morning, miraculously, there was a victory. The troops were withdrawn, Gorbachev returned from his captivity in Crimea and everything disappeared like a nightmare. But again, from that moment something was very seriously broken in the Soviet Union. The dismantlement and collapse came as a consequence of that.

ST: This was Boris Yeltsin’s victory?

PB: Yes, it was. He was there. Standing on the tank in front of the White House. I saw him, it was his moment in history, and he did not chicken out. With all his weaknesses, all his controversial decisions, and all his Soviet past which was hanging heavily on him, that was his one historical opportunity, and he did not miss it.
ST: How did the shift from the Soviet Union ruled by Gorbachev to a Russia ruled by Yeltsin affect you personally?

PB: It was a big change. In many ways for me, Gorbachev was, with all his weaknesses, all his helplessness in the last couple of years, still a better leader than Yeltsin. Not least because Gorbachev was always very attentive to expertise. He invited different opinions. Made his own decisions, but after very serious consideration. Yeltsin was much more impulsive and at the same time did not really trust all those experts who had advised Gorbachev. So, our think-tank suddenly became not very relevant for the policy making. The very close connection with government was interrupted and broken. It was not very clear how our new Russian foreign policy would be directed and managed. At the same time, the salaries we were receiving, in this situation of hyper-inflation were so small that it was very difficult to survive for a family. So, when Sverre invited me to come to PRIO for half a year, maybe a year, I saw that as a fantastic opportunity.

ST: Is there a chance you would have said yes to that invitation also if the Soviet Union had survived under Gorbachev?

PB: That is a hypothetical proposition. It very much depends on how Gorbachev had steered the situation. In his... at least in the middle of his reign, there was a feeling that we were involved in something so profoundly important, we were able to make a difference in such a way that even a short trip abroad was difficult to manage because we might be missing something very important. So maybe not. But again, it is very much a question about an impossible past.

ST: Do you think Gorbachev deserved the Nobel Peace Prize?

PB: Yes. I think he deserved it very much. His first response to that prize was a kind of surprise, what it really meant? And we managed to explain it to him, that it was really a great achievement and a great honor. Because in the Soviet Union, the Nobel Peace Prize was associated with some problematic decisions for instance related to, in literature, Boris Pasternak, which left quite a long and strong aftertaste. So, for Gorbachev, I think the understanding of the significance came only a few months later. But I think now that if he looks back himself he will probably see that it was a very important moment in his career.

ST: So, in 1992 Pavel Baev comes to PRIO in Fuglehauggata for a period of half a year. You have half a year and you go to work every day. You learn how to use a punching card. Did you bring your family?

PB: Yes, we arrived together as a small family of two. A few months later we became a small family of three. In fact that was one of my strong incentives to come, because in Moscow at that time this sort of issues were really logistically and medically very difficult. The only thing that worried me, which I asked Magne during one of our conversations, was how much it would cost in Norway, for me. And Magne did some checking and told me that immediately
after birth, Olga would be payed an amount of money, and then she would receive the same amount of money every month. Which for us appeared something absolutely unthinkable and incomprehensible. That certainly made the decision even easier.

ST: When and how had you met the future Olga Baeva, and when did you marry?

PB: We were in the same institute of Europe together. Present from the very beginning when it was a small think tank with about a dozen people. She was the personal assistant to the deputy director, and I was the head of one of the departments. It is one of those incredible treasures in life that we worked in the same institute in Moscow, and ended up working in the same institute in Oslo.

ST: Yes, she works here as the head librarian now. And so, already in 1992 when you were here for your first longer stay, Fedor was born.

PB: We arrived in mid-October, he was born in late January. That certainly was the hugely important event in our lives, and much of my further effort at PRIO was driven and determined by the fact that we were three and I was a responsible father, and that it would be very difficult to manage things in Moscow, so this opportunity was too important for us all to miss.

ST: It must have been a big move for a family and the wife pregnant, to move to a foreign country, not very far away but still foreign and belonging to a different world during the cold war. How was it to settle down in Oslo for a Russian family and did you get adequate support from PRIO?

PB: Oh yes, oh yes. Absolutely and without doubt. When we arrived my first impression from PRIO was that it had become a smaller institute, and Sverre was no longer there. Several other people left as well. All in all, there were probably about two dozen people then on PRIO’s payroll. Everyone was so friendly and supportive, helping us with finding an apartment and explaining how the system worked. For us, PRIO was really our main support system, because we had nobody else in this country. But still, in Moscow back then, many things were so hard and so impossible really to buy with any money, which we did not have, that Oslo felt like a blessing.

ST: Here in your office you have a big map of Moscow on the wall. Do you sometimes miss Moscow?

PB: Yes, I do. I particularly miss the Moscow which is no longer there. Certainly I miss my mom and my brother who still live in Moscow, which is not that far to travel but still at a distance. Moscow now for me is a very hard environment. I probably cannot imagine myself coming back there. Each time I now come there, the stress and noise, the pollution and the tension are so hard that my system, which is spoiled completely by the Norwegian clean air and clean water and regular life, starts to fall apart in a matter of a few days.
ST: So the Moscow you knew was destroyed in the Yeltsin age?

PB: It was not exactly destroyed. It rather shifted and changed and evolved and became a very different place, with a very different atmosphere. It is a hugely interesting place! It is very dynamic. It is very hard driven. The speed of life there is really incredible. It is hard to compare it to anything else. Even with China, to which we (PB and ST. ST) traveled together, even with New York. At the same time, Moscow is now a very hard place. Very tense, very much elbowing your way in crowds. It is very competitive, and the competition is not always nice and fair.

ST: When you settled down with Olga and then with Fedor in Oslo, I suppose you had only security for that half year. Was it already your intention to try to stay?

PB: My intention was to prolong the half-year into a year, that was my first task. Hilde was the acting director...

ST: Hilde Henriksen Waage was acting director, after your initial contact, Sverre Lodgaard had left.

PB: Yes. Sverre took the position of director of UNIDIR. I was a little surprised not to find him at PRIO, because he was my strongest connection.

ST: He was in Geneva then.

PB: Yes, but I had no problem accepting Hilde’s authority. I think she had more of a problem in exercising authority. For me, always a director is a director, whoever that is, and I take her word as an order.

ST: She was a young woman. Did you have young women directing like that in Moscow?

PB: No. Absolutely not. But you know, everything was foreign in that situation. So, I had to adjust to everything. She explained to me that if I wanted to extend my stay the thing to do was fundraising. Which again was a totally foreign thing for me. In the Soviet Academy of Sciences and Russia, we never did any fundraising. But what you have to do, you have to do. I started writing applications and was surprisingly successful. I got a fellowship from NATO, I had a small grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and another small grant together with NUPI for the project on peacekeeping. One thing led to another, and the half-year was extended to a year. When I now try to explain how I stayed in one place for so long, I generally say that I came for a year, stayed for another, and then it was 25. That is my explanation for this incredible turn in my life.

ST: Did you get Norwegian friends? Did you socialize with other Russians in Oslo?
PB: The only Russians I really socialized with were fellow researchers at the Nobel Institute. Vlad Zubok, and then Constantine Pleshakov. But not with Russians around the embassy, or for that matter around the...

ST: Vladislav Zubok and...?

PB: ...Constantine Pleshakov. Yes. They were historians both of them, and the Nobel Institute back then had a fellowship program. So, I had a little bit of connection, but my main milieu was PRIO and the very young and surprisingly brilliant students who came to PRIO back then. Many of them are still around in different positions. Tor Bukkvoll is at FFI, Nina Græger is at NUPI, Kjersti Strømmen is back in Beijing, she left PRIO to take a position there, and Kjersti Løken is somewhere in the media, and Sven Gunnar (Simonsen) is now going his own ways, and Bjørn Otto Sverdrup has a leading position in Equinor (formerly Statoil). That was the student milieu which PRIO was incredibly happy to have then. Certainly there were comings and goings all the time, PRIO was a very fluid environment so after three years at PRIO, already I felt myself a veteran, with so many newcomers and departures around me. Magne Barth probably was my best connection, but he also left, to the Red Cross. So, I took over Security Dialogue after him.

ST: When you became editor of Security Dialogue, how was that, to edit a journal?

PB: Oh, it was a hugely interesting challenge. I was happy to have a partner in Anthony McDermott, who Dan Smith recruited for that job. For a while I was there on my own, but it was far better to share the job with Anthony, because it left me more time to do my own research. Certainly, editing a peer-reviewed journal was a challenge, probably a bit too high for me. With hindsight I can say that. I did my absolute best, we enjoyed doing it together, but I think Security Dialogue followed much better after us when Peter Burgess took over.

ST: Okay. How would you characterize PRIO as a workplace, in comparison with the workplaces you knew from Moscow earlier?

PB: It was much smaller than most of the institutions in Moscow. For me, what was striking was the independence it had in expressing its views and its opinions. I was also a bit surprised with how many comings and goings there were in PRIO. I was generally more used to more stable environments. It was very interesting to see how PRIO, under a new director, my third, Dan Smith, who took the reins around Easter of 1993, faced with that challenge of a little bit of an identity crisis at PRIO, which had probably become too small and at the same time not financially very sound. Dan’s response to that was more fundraising, which became really a guiding policy. More obligations to do fundraising. And expansion. Both very difficult decisions, because neither sat well with traditional PRIO structures and patterns, but both remarkably successful. Under Dan’s leadership PRIO expanded probably twice in size and gained a new profile. Not only in research and academia, but also in the area of engagement. I think PRIO was more engaged in all sorts of peace efforts under his leadership than ever after.
ST: He cultivated a close relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here and built up the Balkan program, and also the Cyprus program, which we still have at PRIO.

PB: Yes, and there were several other attempts and experiments where PRIO might expand. We traveled with him into war torn Grozny for that matter, which made quite a strong impression. That was autumn 1995. When the first war was just about to end, and the interwar period, the quite unhappy one, was about to begin. Those two you mentioned were the largest initiatives. The Balkan one in particular was huge. But it was also under Dan’s leadership that we really decided to apply for building the Center of Excellence. The initial brainstorming for how to do this application, how to proceed with that, was also a part of the same expansion strategy.

ST: This was what became the Center for the Study of Civil War, directed by Scott Gates. Did you also take leadership responsibilities yourself?

PB: Yes, I was very much involved in designing the application. One of the eight initial research groups under the center was mine, because the idea was at the moment to make sure that the Center was firmly anchored in PRIO, connected with many parts of its research. Not a virtual Center involving mostly foreign visitors. I think we succeeded with that Center, above expectations. The Center certainly became a very strong part of PRIO’s academic profile, but that was also primarily in the period when Stein Tønnesson was director.

ST: Yes, that was from 2001. You mentioned in the beginning of the interview that you had refrained from applying for jobs at NUPI that were right down your alley. You said that this was out of some kind of loyalty to PRIO. Did it also count for you that PRIO is a Peace Research Institute? Has it attracted you that PRIO is about peace, and not security?

PB: That is a question I asked myself throughout my years at PRIO, am I really a peace researcher? I am certainly not a peacenic in the full sense of the word. Many parts of my research are more about security, power relations, wars and conflict, particularly in the Soviet Union, than they are about making peace. But what impressed me at PRIO from the very beginning was how open it was to different perspectives and to different projects. How much this milieu was not about ideological dogma but about banging our heads together and see what we can produce collectively, how we can brainstorm these ideas. For me that was very important. But as for that very noble part of the PRIO identity, that we are not just doing interesting projects, we are not just developing theories and applied research, that our main purpose for existence is to make sure that peace comes closer. Yes I think it was important, though maybe not in a direct way so each of my project applications would contain the idea of world peace, but in a sense that I do not really want to work with another think-tank closely related to foreign policy making like NUPI was in my perception.

ST: Ahh yes.

PB: I wanted something with more independence and with more freedom to shift from one idea to another, not just follow the demand from particular political parties.
ST: That is probably my main reason for being at PRIO as well. I do not want my research to be associated directly with foreign policy. NUPI, of course, is also an institute of international affairs.

PB: It is. It belongs to that family of institutions. It is a good family and I have associated with for instance IFRI in Paris which is also a part of this family. I find no problem... I have worked with colleagues from NUPI through all my years at PRIO, even today. We are always designing joint projects and I find it very productive. There was never any animosity or hostility.

ST: Yes, IFRI is the Institut francais des relations internationals?

PB: Exactly, that it is. I have no French, even if I am affiliated with it.

ST: You were in... you studied... you already specialized in the United States?

PB: Yes, I specialized in the United States since my university years. That was my main subject of research then, and that was what I studied in the military research institute. That is still for me a very interesting object of study, so I travel to Washington several times a year. I am affiliated with the Brookings institution. I value very much this connection, because I still think that with all the ups and downs in US foreign policy making, this is a hugely important place. Not only for global security, but also for global peace.

ST: I have also noticed that you go often to Washington, and you tend to thrive there. You write these short, sharp analyses of current events of a kind that the Americans really appreciate. You also sent your son to study in the United States, or he perhaps decided himself?

PB: That was his own decision. That was very much his own decision, and it was driven not just by the attraction of the United States and the universities, but by the fact that in the United States the education system has college sports. He played from an early age very good tennis. He was in his age group Norwegian champion, and he wanted to continue. In the United States colleges that is very welcomed. It payed more than half of his tuition fee. Otherwise I would not have been able to afford that. But at least, those four years for him were probably as happy and intense as my five years in Moscow State University were for me.

ST: Do you think he will settle down in Norway?

PB: That is a difficult question. Probably part of the same kind of never ending struggle with identity issues which I have. From very early on I have decided that I cannot really become Norwegian, I am doomed to remain a rootless cosmopolitan, and this country is generous enough to accept that. And he, while he now has a good job in the United States, it pays well, and he has a girlfriend there, I think he will never become really an American. A big part of
him is Norwegian, and I think his heart is in this country. I think he probably fancies very much, at some stage in his career, to return.

ST: I wonder if I could ask you about your personal feelings for the United States, since you have dealt so much with that country over the years, and this is also an important topic for PRIO, because PRIO has these double feelings about the United States. It has its origin in very strong criticism of the superpower, the Vietnam War and all that. Later on the Iraq war, now president Trump. And on the other hand the United States is our main partner, perhaps next to Sweden, or together with Sweden, our best research connection. We see the International Studies Association (ISA) as the main organization for our research, and we send huge delegations to its conferences. How has your feeling towards the United States developed over the years, and how do you assess the American presidents that have served in your time?

PB: Yes. When I arrived to PRIO it was the Bill Clinton period. It was a legend at PRIO, that at one stage president Clinton had visited our institute. So, at that moment it was really a... perception that with this president the United States can become a huge contributor to conflict management in the right way. To promoting ideas which are intoned with the PRIO mandate for peace making. It was generally very natural to build those connections with the United States. In particular to academia certainly, and the whole creation of our Center of Excellence facilitated many of those connections as well. Because as far as international Relations is concerned, still the strongest part of academia is there. In many ways that remains, what can I say, a peer review environment. Not just for an article or a project, but for many of our activities. If it is strong enough to make a difference there, if it is convincing as both theory and practical application to be noticed there, appreciated there... I do think connections with this milieu is important, and I value very much my connections with Brookings and with some other thinktanks in the United States. I see that as something very beneficial for PRIO, which contributes to strengthening our international profile.

ST: And who is the best president the United States has had since the 1970s?

PB: I would still give my vote to Barack Obama. Even if he was disappointing in many ways. Even if he was divisive in many ways. Even if you can argue that Trump’s election is very much a consequence of Obama’s presidency, of the deep feelings that were generated in many parts of the American society by that particular president. I would not blame it all on him, it was probably disappointing for many other reasons. I do remember, at the very start of his presidency, when I was asked what would be my suggestions for his first 100 days. What to concentrate on. My point was to ratify the international law of the sea convention (the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. ST). And it never happened. Still it has not been ratified. So, I do not think the awarding of the Nobel (Peace) Prize to Obama at the very start of his presidency was a good idea. But nevertheless, I think he, as a sum total of his presidency, probably deserved that the Prize.

ST: Since we are talking about presidents, could you express freely your feelings about Vladimir Putin?
PB: Oh, I think he is a disaster for Russia. I think he is taking Russia into a very dangerous dead-end. He is presiding not only over Russia’s decline, but very possibly over Russia’s demise. I am very worried about Russia’s trajectory under his leadership, and I hold him responsible for that.

ST: Now we should look a little bit at the research profile at PRIO, and at your research profile. When you came to PRIO you were a Soviet expert on the west, but not really an expert on Russia or the Soviet Union. How did you change your research profile after you had come to PRIO?

PB: Well, it was such a period of catastrophic change, in many ways, that the feeling was we all have to change. We all have to evolve. Everything has changed beyond recognition around us so it is impossible to stay on the track that seemed so stable a few years back. Reinventing myself was natural and also very interesting. One obvious topic for me was the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conflicts that erupted. All in all, the collapse was remarkably peaceful, astonishingly peaceful I would say, but nevertheless the Caucasus in particular became the area where all sorts of small conflicts tended to ignite one another. Where you had chain reactions of conflict. I think for PRIO it was also a very relevant topic. Not only the conflict in the Balkans, which for me was a little bit of foreign territory, but I felt that with my knowledge of that particular area and my ability to draw on connections there, I could deliver some insights, and at the same time be outside and combine these insights with the benefits of researching it from a distance, to produce some useful and also interesting analysis. For me, another very natural topic to address was the Russian army, the Russian military, which I knew a little bit from the inside through my long years behind bars in the research institute, but which also was a prime instrument in these conflicts and at the same time had experienced a colossal identity crisis and colossal shrinking. That change in itself was so interesting that it became the main topic of my first book.

ST: Could you interview your father?

PB: Of course. I discussed many things with my father. The whole family, on the male side at least, was traditionally very much militarized. My two grandfathers were in the military, my father was a military man, my brother back then was in uniform, a young captain. My cousin was in the navy also as a young officer. So, as far as first-hand sources were concerned, I had no shortage. But for many of them the shock and the crisis from that catastrophe was very profound, very bitter. And for that matter, my cousin was never really quite able to take it, he died very young.

ST: But with you an eastern military expert on the west becomes a western expert on the east. Can you tell us a little bit about your first book, its thesis?

PB: It was called “The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles”. It was produced in 1996. It took me probably a couple of years to move with this book project because I was also involved with Security Dialogue. I thought that this very unique period when the Russian army retreated
from Eastern Europe, went through incredibly painful reform and contraction and at the same
time was engaged very deeply in several conflicts. From the former Yugoslavia to Tajikistan. I
think that was a research topic that really was demanding attention and I hope that my book
contributed to a better understanding of that transformation.

----------------PAUSE-----------------

ST: (shows a book to the video camera) This is Pavel Baev’s first book at PRIO. We see that it
is called “The Russian Army in a time of Troubles”. Can you show us the dedication inside?

PB: “To my grandfathers, who both were colonels in the Soviet Army. To my father, Captain
of the First Rank (ret.). To my brother, Captain in the Russian Army. And to my son, who will
– I hope – choose a different career”.

ST: Which he has?

PB: Which he has indeed. That was my first big accomplishment at PRIO, and I hope, one
thing it helped me with was getting a permanent position.

ST: Yes, certainly.

PB: After a few years at PRIO without taking my chances anywhere else I managed to secure a
permanent position. After that I became a Norwegian citizen, and after that I became a
research professor. So, there were steps up in my career, and important landmarks in my life.

ST: Was it evident to you that you would apply for Norwegian citizenship, or was it painful in
any way?

PB: No, it was not painful at all. By that time it was quite natural, and I think the family
settled here very happily. It was also a feeling of at least one member of the family growing up
as a real Norwegian. So, that was a very natural decision. Particularly because it was not
necessary to give up our Russian citizenship. I still have my Russian passport. Which
probably represents my split identity.

ST: And Olga is also a Norwegian citizen?

PB: Yes, of course.

ST: You became citizens at the same time?

PB: Yes.

ST: And your mother in law now lives with you here?
PB: Yes, she moved in with us a year and a half ago. She is a lady of mature age. She cannot really manage on her own in Moscow.

ST: Your first book also made an impression on the Ministry of Defense here, I think. They showed a very strong interest in your knowledge about the Russian military, so they funded many projects of yours here at PRIO. How was it to work for the Ministry of Defense in another country than the country you came from?

PB: It was interesting. I have always been surprised by how flexible they are in many ways. How open they are to discussing ideas. How much more openminded this whole bureaucracy is, compared with the one I knew. While also in uniform, and certainly very much in discipline, but they never really try to prescribe anything. They funded my research, but in the sense that they gave me the opportunity to do it. Never really trying in any way to influence the outcome. That was for me something very important, and that probably was very important for PRIO, an institution for which funding from the defense ministry in the beginning was not very natural.

ST: After a while you broadened your field of expertise from the military to also include the oil and gas sector. Please tell about that expansion from one field into another.

PB: I became interested in that area when I looked deeper into how Russian foreign and security policy is organized and made. How the instrument of oil and gas becomes as important as military power. How that comes into the same equation for what sort of politicized control over this business. For me it was a very natural transition in the same field. But I also found interesting opportunities to fund raise here. Fundraising became for me something that comes very naturally as a part of my research. Whatever brilliant ideas you have, you still need to make sure that there is a sound financial foundation underneath. That was something Hilde advised me to do. And that was kind of a PRIO policy, gradually strengthening under Dan’s leadership. Whenever there is an interesting opening and you feel you can make a difference, in this research, I tend to go for that. Much the same way as the Arctic became another interesting dimension for me since the moment probably when Artur Chilingarov had his famous flag-planting expedition in 2007. I thought, it is not the same Arctic for me as it is for many environmentalists, ecologists and other NGO activists. For me the Arctic is interesting as a direction in Russian foreign and security policy. How Russia is putting power instruments into play in that dimension. Much the same way Russia-China relations became an interesting topic for me. We did together (PB and ST. ST) several interesting trips in that... so projects and ideas are always coming and going, you will never stay in the same track, at least that is my experience at PRIO. That is why I really now see a lot of interesting opportunities to come back to the research on nuclear matters. Where there is an interesting and deep contradiction between nuclear modernization and strengthening of many features of nuclear deterrence systems, and at the same time a very strong drive towards nuclear disarmament. That clash and contradiction, while at the same time they will have to coexist for many years to come. I think for PRIO it will be interesting to try to establish a forum where they can meet, interplay, and find a compromise.
ST: Do you also follow the North Korean question now?

PB: I do. Though Russian involvement there is disappointingly weak. Nevertheless, it is an area for which I have developed a lot of interest and I hope to be able to design some research projects, probably not specifically on North Korea, but on nuclear security matters in East Asia. Where Russia will be part of the equation inevitably.

ST: Do you identify yourself as belonging to one particular research discipline?

PB: Probably I can say that International Relations is my discipline. I am not a great theorist, I can not really design interesting mathematical models or collect databases. So, for that matter I know the weaknesses of my research. Very often I also feel that the pressure of events is such that it is far more important to write a short comment, a short memo with an impact factor, than to try to theorize and think it through while other events are overtaking all your brilliant observations. How to combine the more fundamental and academic parts of research, and the more current analysis, that is for me the most interesting challenge.

ST: When you came to PRIO, you met a small environment, which has become much bigger, but it has all the time been multidisciplinary. You have met historians, legal specialists, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians as well. Was this something you were used to? Has this been stimulating to you intellectually? Or would it have been better to be in a more specialist environment with people who were working with more similar methods, theories or topics?

PB: No, I think for me that came naturally, because besides the military research institute I was very familiar with several other institutes in Moscow like the USA and Canada Institute, where I defended my PhD, and similar institutes. They were always very multidisciplinary. With historians and cultural studies, and even literature. So, that is for me I think a very valuable environment even if sometimes I feel I can’t really quite connect with this particular project at PRIO, or with this discipline. But I think bringing together different perspectives is a huge advantage of PRIO and we should cultivate that further.

ST: How do you see the system of decision making at PRIO? Is it run effectively, is it participatory, does the leadership consult sufficiently with the staff? And how has this changed?

PB: It has certainly evolved. A system that worked for an institute of 25 people cannot be the same for 75 people, plus affiliated researchers and associates. It has evolved, and PRIO now has much more of a structure, with real departments, than the PRIO I arrived to. Decision making is done by the leadership group primarily, and not the Institute Council, as was the case when I arrived. Certainly, there are always issues and problems with decisions. Particularly I think, at least initially in relation to hiring, bringing in new strengths to PRIO. Some of this hiring was quite successful in my early days. Inger Skjelsbæk came and remained at PRIO for many years. Henrik Syse and Greg Reichberg are still my colleagues. Some other decisions of this sort were probably less successful, and some of them were
troublesome, as you know very well. So, probably that part was where PRIO now has a much more established policy, and much more thorough and competitive processes, than was initially the case. Financial discipline was also something which was difficult to achieve, because fundraising is never easy. It is a game where success is never guaranteed. We always take chances. We have to apply for much more than we can handle in many ways, and then suddenly we find ourselves overloaded, or underfunded. But I think, all in all, PRIO managed quite successfully to overcome most of this sort of challenges, and I think the decision making system how it evolved from one director to another went through an evolution in a remarkably conflict-free way, into something we all agreed to. That now, the Institute Council has less decision-making power, is very natural. Decision making is much better done with a smaller group of people around the table, with long discussions in a tight milieu, than in a meeting of 50 people.

ST: Are you thinking about the Board, the smaller one?

PB: The Board was always there. In fact, the Board has not changed much since... and I was member of the PRIO Board for two terms, and that is one part of PRIO’s institutional life which has not changed, and that is probably to the better. That provides stability, and it also enforces financial discipline at PRIO.

ST: What would you see as the biggest change that has happened at PRIO since you came in 1991/92?

PB: Size certainly matters. So growth was probably the most important change. Now when you say, anywhere in Europe, “I work in a research institute in Norway”, a small institute of about 75 people, it is very often a shock. Because, normal size in an European environment, even for the big in London, is still 15-20 people, 25 at best. Probably, we are as big as any European institution of this sort. We are not exactly a thinktank, and not exactly an academic institution. We are an interesting cross-breed. An interesting mixture of several different traditions and patterns, and I think this is probably one of our main strengths. We value our academic profile, that is one of our strengths. Connections with the international studies association, our peer-review journals. At the same time, policy orientation, which is the think-tank part of our activity, and engagement in the field in different sorts of way. These are the three parts of PRIO’s identity. I think they come together very organically. Drawn from different traditions of peace research, but nevertheless always coexisting and never really in conflict.

ST: How influential do you think PRIO is in Norway and in the world?

PB: It is difficult for me to judge about Norway. I have always tried to keep my distance from policy making. But I think that PRIO has managed to connect very profoundly with Norwegian decision making. Particularly with the Foreign Ministry. Probably less with the Parliament. That is a big difference, I feel, from for instance Washington, DC, with the connections a think tank has there with the US Congress. At the same time, PRIO’s reputation is much stronger in the area of academic research. With both the International
Studies Association, our journals and with the heritage, very strong heritage, from our Center of Excellence. We are able really to carve for ourselves a very specific niche in several disciplines. Probably less in the international political decision-making area. We are probably less involved in Brussels than NUPI is, than many other institutions who really make that a profile, to influence the EU and NATO decision-making. Maybe it is good to have a little bit of a difference from that mass, because I think the EU bureaucracy in many ways is its own worst enemy. In how it does the decision-making, and how it funds research, it is so awkward, so cumbersome, and so difficult to deliver on all the requirements and all the paperwork. It is not worth even trying. So, I think PRIO has a profile strong enough, where it matters. The environment where probably we could have made a greater difference with our size, is the peace research environment. I am not entirely satisfied with how the International Peace Research Association works, in how this whole family of peace loving institutions feed themselves. There are certain weaknesses here, and often you encounter various identity crises. The connections, even with SIPRI, are not as strong as they should be.

ST: With the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. One last question: Could you try to describe your travel from home in the morning to PRIO? How you travel, what you think about, what you feel when you enter PRIO, where you enter, what the first things you do are, and how you start your work day?

PB: It is very short travel. I live up the Holmenkollen hill. Three minutes’ walk from Gråkammen T-bane station. Very often I make a longer walk to Ris station, just to have an exercise and clear my head. I love thinking while I walk. Typically, while walking I try to sort out what kind of problems the day has in store for me, what sort of surprises I might expect in my inbox. Then it is a 15 minute ride on T-banen to Oslo Sentralstasjon, and another three minute walk to the backdoor of PRIO. I normally enter through the gate from the back, not our main entrance. Just a shorter way. I think one of the important impressions at PRIO is the smile which is always there at the reception. From Cathrine or anyone else manning the reception. It immediately lifts the spirit of any visitor to PRIO. How friendly PRIO is, how welcoming it is. I think that is a very important part of our identity. Which in fact arrived only here at Hausmannsgata. Clicking in, coming into this office, switching on the computer, generally with a very good feeling that life is interesting, life is great fun, that I expect something I never thought of to change my day beyond recognition. And there are always good colleagues around. I think PRIO is unique in how friendly and cheerful it feels in the morning.

ST: Thank you Pavel.