



Centre for Global Security and Governance

Undergraduate Interview Project

Interview with Professor Michael E. Smith: The EU's Grand Strategy

Interviewers: James Hallé and Andrew Seale

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Andrew Seale:

A key component of EU policy towards neighbouring states has been the enlargement process, also known as the most successful aspect of EU foreign policy. As of 2007 there are now 27 members, and excluding the Balkans and nations who have already rejected membership (Norway and Switzerland), there do not appear to be many more potential candidate countries. How do you see EU Grand Strategy evolving once the 'barrier' to further enlargement is reached?

Prof. Smith:

A very important but difficult question, because this barrier is going to be closed to new member states pretty soon. Turkey is the critical question after Croatia and Serbia are allowed in. Once the Turkish situation is resolved then the only incentive the EU will have is offering neighbourhood policy incentives to neighbouring states. Creating incentives to do what the EU wants them to do; we're looking at Northern Africa, we're looking at former Soviet Union member states, the southern Caucasus as well, all of whom are part of the neighbourhood policy. The neighbourhood policy works well in principal, on paper, but the critical incentive within that is access to the EU's single market, the promise of free-trade with these countries. The EU has shown no incentive to lower that barrier to those countries. So until the EU adopts a political will to trade freely with all of its neighbouring countries, most of whom are much poorer than EU member states, then the EU's Grand Strategy is going to have serious limitations in the near future. Until it overcomes these problems I don't see any political will in the short term for any changes in this direction, especially in the light of financial crises, recessions, and economic problems within the EU member states. So at the moment the Grand strategy is going to be a bit wobbly until the EU opens up its free trade especially with the countries of North Africa.

Andrew Seale:

In your lecture on 4th May you suggested that the EU's influence was stronger in the realm of value projection. Should there be a concern that, as you suggested, in Economic and Military terms the EU cannot really compete with the US or NATO, that this attempt at value projection will ultimately be unsuccessful as it not underpinned by a strong and fully integrated economy or military?

Prof. Smith:

I don't think the military is as critical to value projection as the economic side, and here this is one

problem that the EU has to address in terms of what its military forces are really for. The problem here is that if the EU uses military force unwisely, like the US has done, it could undermine its value projection and normative power aspects. So the EU has to think very carefully about the extent to which it wants to become a military power. If it goes down the current path that it is on, only using military power as a defensive or humanitarian component, then things should be okay. But if it tries to emulate NATO and become a more offensive military power and bombs or punishes certain countries, then its value projection capabilities will be greatly undermined. That leaves economic power, and here again the critical thing is whether the EU can get its own internal economic affairs in order to cause other member states to adopt European principals and norms. The critical issue at the moment is the Euro crisis with Greece, and that is still yet to be resolved. But as the way things are going the EU will have to make some serious decisions about the Eurozone especially, in terms what requirements are involved to be participating in that zone, before it can think about projecting economic power abroad. So this is why I think again, if it shouldn't be emulating military power and it has limitations with economic power, it should try to bolster its normative power, its value projection, to kind of overcome those deficiencies.

Andrew Seale:

How does the recent bilateral naval agreement between France and the United Kingdom challenge the EU attempts to strengthen its foreign policy 'persona'?

Prof. Smith:

They have the potential to improve the EU's foreign policy because the EU has never prevented or prohibited bi-lateral or multi-lateral cooperation among EU member states. So long as British-French cooperation supports European principals there is no reason why it can't enhance the broader European project. But if the UK and France try to act in ways which undermine it, then obviously we're talking about a serious crisis or potential crisis within the European order. Again this is why this question has to be understood within the broader debate about: what is the purpose of EU military force? And that debate has yet to be resolved within the EU, but it's being discussed at the moment, particularly in light of interventions in Libya and other humanitarian problems around the world.

Andrew Seale:

In your lecture you highlighted the establishment of the EAS (European Extern Action Service) as one part of the Lisbon treaty that has been implemented slowly, and also one that has proved controversial. Do you believe that the current set up with the High Commissioner and the EAS staff will, once firmly established, be an adequate diplomatic corps for the EU, or are there structural problems that may require further treaty reform?

Prof Smith:

I think that there are inherent structural problems based on the way it has been developing over the past 18 months that are too detailed to go into at the moment. But the general point is that the EAS has institutionalised certain political problems/cleavages that had already existed within the European system. Mainly between the security view of foreign policy versus the trade development view of foreign policy. However, I don't think the EU has a lot of stomach for a major treaty reform in the next few years to overcome this problem. I think what is going to happen is the same pattern that we have seen in previous treaty changes: the Maastricht treaty, the Amsterdam treaty, the single European act, and going even further back. Where officials on the ground try to make the best use of the treaty instruments as they can. But this process, as in every case, takes several years to work out,

and that's what is going on with the Lisbon. It's already going on with the Lisbon treaty. It has been 18 months since the treaty entered into affect and the EAS is still not only being staffed but being reorganised on a regular basis in ways that the treaty doesn't actually require or anticipate.

Andrew Seale:

You mentioned that there is likely to be an increasing conflict between the 'American dream' and the 'European dream', and that this was the basis for the EU's value projection. What is the fundamental difference between the two 'dreams'?

Prof. Smith:

The American dream is pitched at a very personal and individual level of analysis. It involves to a large extent material and consumer comforts, namely revolving around home and to a second extent car ownership. But there is very little reliance or involvement of a public sphere, or a social sphere within the context of the American Dream. It is very individually driven. Whereas I think the European dream makes a much greater role for a public/social sphere, where people are embedded in local networks- at the local, national and even regional levels- in how they pursue their values and goals. So that fact plus the fact that the EU has a high degree of interdependence between its member states requires a higher degree of social networking and social justice. A greater role of the state in allowing people to pursue their individual goals. So I think these two visions of how individual liberties should be pursued are going to come into increasing conflict. As we've already seen with many issues involving security rights, privacy rights, trade in food, genetically modified foods, issues where the U.S. has a more laissez faire approach as to what people should get away with, as opposed to the European approach. This can be seen also with the economic crisis of the past several years, where the US prefers to take a less regulatory hands-off approach, versus the European structural and regulatory approach. We're going to see that increasingly happen with issues related to technology, trade, economic and financial problems coming down the road. Not to mention traditional security issues:immigration, international crime, piracy and all these different problems.

Andrew Seale

One of the key challenges for the EU strategy is to articulate the conditions under which the EU will use deadly force. Have there been any tentative moves in this area, and given that this has already happened in theatres that the EU has been involved in, is a more formal agreement likely to be on the agenda in the near future?

Prof. Smith:

I don't think you'll see a major change at the level of a treaty reform in terms of a formal document. What you will see, what we are seeing, is more informal statements in terms of individual operations what the rules of engagement are and what the circumstances are where the EU could use deadly force. In most of these cases the EU has taken a very modest view of the role of military force within the context CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) operations. The one potential is the anti-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia, where the EU has been authorised to not only police the area, but also to capture and incarcerate suspected pirates; to turn them over for prosecution in various countries. So that is one outside example of the extent that the EU will go to to protect security interests, but again, it still falls very far short of what the US or NATO will do in terms of using missiles or bombs or attack different countries or kill civilian populations. So the EU has not gone that far yet, and at the moment I don't think it has the stomach to go down that path, to use a more aggressive military posture. I think the anti-lantern, anti-piracy operation is as far as the EU is

willing to go at the moment, and I don't see that changing in the near future.

Andrew Seale:

Will the inability of the EU to present a unified voice in the current Libyan Civil war lead to attempts to 'tighten' up the EU foreign policy, or has it set a precedent whereby this aspect of the EU will remain ineffective vis-à-vis the members states and their national interest?

Prof Smith:

All important EU foreign policies are national interest dependent. It depends, of course, upon the extent to which there is a consensus among most if not all EU member states. In the Libyan case obviously there was not a consensus, but that consensus was lacking for a very good reason, which relates to some of the previous questions. Which is the idea that there is no general consensus on how the EU should use military force, but there is a specific point of view that the EU should avoid turning itself into another NATO or another American approach to military force in which military force can be used in a full range of policy operations, and be used to punish or to threaten other countries. The EU has not gone that far. This is because there is no general political will within the EU for that type of approach. So I think that some EU member states were reluctant to take the EU down that path, down a new path, towards a more punitive approach to foreign policy. That is why they were reluctant to support the Libyan operation. If it had been primed in another way to do something else in support of the humanitarian effort in that country, which did not involve such punishing military force, then it is possible that a consensus could have been achieved. But I think that some member states, mainly the UK and France, were too quick to go down the path of a punishing approach. Which obviously did not suit the other EU member states, they quite naturally opposed it, and that's where things are today.

James Hallé:

Over the last couple of years the EU has had to deal with certain controversies within its member states. For example, the media row in Hungary and the subsequent debate as to whether they would be eligible as a candidate for the EU's Presidency has been discussed in the last two years. What affect do these rows have on the EU's strategy of 'Value Projection' and what would be the impact of a member leaving, voluntarily or because of a sanction?

Prof. Smith:

Well, a state leaving or being forced to leave is kind of the nuclear option in EU internal politics. There have been several crises over the last 30-40 years that might have resulted in that outcome. A case is France in the mid-1960s: the empty chair crisis where France refused to play its leadership role in the rotating presidency; the British rebate crisis in the 1980s; most recently involving the Austrian government a few years ago and then the Hungarian government more recently. So these crises periodically happen, but they never go to the extent of actually leading a country to leaving or being forced to leave the EU. But if that did happen then that would perhaps be the most serious crisis to face the EU in its entire history. Especially if it had been a country which is large, or a member state going back to the 1950s: one of the original six member states. Since that has not happened yet, doesn't mean that cannot happen, but if it did happen it could be the nail in the coffin of European intergration. It would take quite a lot to get the system back on track the way it had meant to be. The one related problem is the issue of the Eurozone and whether a country can be kicked out of the Eurozone, such as is the case with Greece. That would not be as catastrophic as kicking a country out completely. But if a country was forced to leave the Eurozone then the EU would still have to have a major re-think of its purpose. Particularly in the economic realm where

everything began in the first place, they would need to have a new understanding of the responsibilities and obligations of EU membership in ways that does not currently exist.

James Hallé:

In your lecture you suggested that one of the main areas the EU is able to contend with the USA and China on the global stage was its unified economic strength. Over the last decade what has the introduction of the Euro meant in terms of EU's Grand strategy?

Prof. Smith:

It has made the EU a player in world monetary politics. It not only replaced a lot of weak currencies within the EU member states, but it's also given the international monetary system an alternate currency to dominance by the US Dollar, Japanese Yen, British Pound and the Swiss Franc. But having said that the EU has to follow through and maintain the credibility of the Eurozone. Again, as with other aspects of major EU treaties, the devil is in the details. There were a lot of things that were left out of the Euro-plan which are now coming to cause crisis in the system, one of which was the idea of what happens when one member of the EU gets into its own financial economic difficulties as in Greece at the moment. This problem was foreseen in the EU and it was anticipated if countries like Greece were allowed to join. Now we are ten years later and we're coming to see the results of that mistake, of allowing countries to join without clear obligations in terms of their financial circumstances. I can't personally say how it is going to turn out; they will have to deal with bailing out Greece on a constant basis, unless the Greek economy is restructured in a way which allows it to create more tax revenue, in ways that currently exist. So I think this is the most important EU crisis of the last 15-20 years and it is unclear as to how it will be resolved. I think that in the long-run the EU will proceed with the Euro-plan because going back to individual and national currencies would be too costly and difficult to imagine, especially for the larger EU countries that are part of the system. They will find a way out, they will muddle through as they always do, but they will need to have a major understanding in terms of future Euro obligations before other countries are allowed to join such as other Eastern European countries and the Balkan states.

James Hallé:

Subsequently has the absence of countries like the UK and the sixteen other member states from joining the Euro affected the efficacy of this strategy?

Prof. Smith:

Well, the UK is critical, other countries not so important in terms of joining the Euro, but the UK is because it has such a large financial standing and market. It could have been critical to how the Euro was devolved, if it had joined, but again this is a major counter-factual because we don't know exactly what British policies would have been towards the Euro, towards Greece, if it had been part of this system. In principal if the British had joined and followed the more Germanic approach to monetary policy as opposed to the French one, which involves keep interest rates at a level which prevents inflation and keeps the credibility of the currency very high, then it's in principal possible that we would never have gotten to this stage with Greece. The controls would have been put in place long before the crisis and some of the weaker EU countries, but because of the UK was not part of this system and had its own financial problems to deal with, it is impossible to say what Britains policy would be. The more general issue is the fact that the EU and the reasons that the UK joined are very different from the one it joined in the 1970s. If the EU had just maintained itself as a free-trade area or a single market, then the UK I think would have no problem being a full member of this system. But the EU has developed to such an extent that it actually challenges a lot of British views

on foreign policy and national identity in ways call to question if the average British citizen thinks they should be part of the EU. So if you put that question to a lot of British citizens today they would probably think that we should not be part of it, and the Euro is just one example of that. So trying to make counter-factual reasoning about how Britain would act in this system, based on other circumstances, is extremely difficult, because it is a major outlier in terms of normal approach to European integration which France, Germany and smaller EU countries share.

James Hallé:

During your lecture you mentioned that the EU cannot be accurately compared to the US or China as in terms of a global body. Do you think there is significance that the EU is a collection of member states rather than a single united nation, that it cannot really draw upon a single nationalistic feeling from its public?

Prof. Smith:

Well, there is such a thing as European identity, or that European-ness is felt among individual European citizens. This has been documented in opinion polls, elite-opinion polls, and various sociological studies, that the people particularly on the continent, not a lot of British people, but on the continent in particular there is an innate sense of European-ness. However that doesn't necessarily translate into a political expression in terms of nationalism or supporting the European army or currency. It's a more social networking- informal type of feeling. I think it is a good thing for the European Union as a general project that people feel this way. But this does not mean you can re-form or change it into something that looks like the European Nation State. I think you should be sceptical of any claims that by building Europeans from the ground up we will create something that looks like a European super-state which looks like the United States or China. In other words there are limits to how far European-ness can be taken, from the sociological expression to the political nationalistic expression, and politicians should be especially aware of that limitation- in terms of obligations like a European army.

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