

United Kingdom to hold referendum on exit from European Union

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On June 23, Britain will hold a referendum to decide whether or not it will leave the European Union (EU).

To better understand the push for this exit, it is best to take a close look at Britain's history with its nearby European neighbors.

As an island nation, Britain has always leaned toward isolationism. For centuries, Britain has "lived in splendid isolation, protected by the Navy and the Empire," the historian Vernon Bogdanor said.

From an intense rivalry with Spain during the Elizabethan Age, to the nation's solitary stand against Nazi Germany in 1940-1944, the United Kingdom (UK) views itself as its own best ally.

In more recent years, the severity of this foreign policy has diminished, but a national wariness of outside countries has remained.

This being said, as a member of the EU, Britain has always been uncomfortable with handing off so much power to Brussels, the de facto capital of the EU, which holds the official seats of the European Commission, Council of the European Union, and European Council, as well as one of the seats of the European Parliament.

The EU officially formed in 1945, after World War II. Similar to the formation of other post-war pacts and organizations, the EU was formed with the intention of preventing, and/or mitigating future wars and international conflicts by creating an insular community of nations who depended upon and trusted each other.

At the time, Winston Churchill supported the idea, and even advocated for a "United States of Europe,"

hoping for a consolidated force that would counter the USSR in the upcoming Cold War.

Despite these declarations, Britain declined to join the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and to sign the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) to integrate the economies of Europe.

Even years afterwards, leaders of various European countries publicly voiced their disdain of the UK's decision, including French President Charles de Gaulle who went on record to say that this action proves Britain has a "deep-seated hostility" towards European construction.

As one of the superpowers in the EU, the seemingly small acts of defiance were viewed as clear signs of mistrust. Over the years, Britain's relationship with the Union became a continual point of contention.

At the same time, the UK's clear importance in terms of national power has often prevented much outspoken disdain for the UK's behavior.

Currently, the movement to leave the EU is led by Michael Gove, the justice minister, and Boris Johnson, the former mayor of London.

These leaders are backed by half of the Conservative members of Parliament, as well as the Independence party. These advocates' main issues include sovereignty, immigration, and the ever-disputed Schengen border.

The Schengen Agreement has abolished many of the EU's internal borders, in favor of passport-free movement across the bloc. Although some members of Parliament and the EU believe that this makes travel easier, and creates a more unified Europe, others have blamed immigration and recent terrorism attacks on this agreement, namely citing a



UK Justice Minister Michael Gove speaks in favor of a Brexit.

lack of internal security.

In 1975, this same referendum was held, with over 67 percent of Britons voting in favor of staying with the EU.

Since the time of Margaret Thatcher, a vocal minority against the EU has been growing. Now, the separationists are backed by half of the Conservative Party and the Independence Party, a party that was built on a dislike for the EU. If Britain does leave the EU, it is likely that the vote will be final.

Obviously, the results of this referendum could have potentially major impacts on legislation passed in Britain, but what about the rest of the world?

First, a British exit from

the EU (commonly known as Brexit) would cut economic growth, weaken the pound, and hurt the City of London, Britain's financial center in the short term.

These impacts to Britain's economy could have unforeseen effects on the world's economy and the economies of the nations with which Britain frequently trades.

In regards to America, President Obama has stated that Brexit is a decision "of deep interest to the United States." He has urged British voters to stay in the EU, due to its economic growth, and "far more effective" counter-terrorism efforts.

Others fear that without Britain, the EU would start to

unravel, weakening EU nations and their allies, including the US. Britain is America's primary transatlantic military ally and its role is strategically important to the US.

Many polls do not show a clear victory for either side, as a Financial Times poll tracker indicates support for remaining with the EU averages 44 percent against 42 percent for leaving and 14 percent undecided. At this point, the vote could go either way. If Britain does leave the EU, short-term effects would be drastic, but many are hopeful it would be beneficial in the long run. If Britain stays, it is likely that Parliament would soon push for more power within the Union.

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Congratulations to the Stentorian Editors-in-Chief for 2016-17- Avra Janz, Amruth Sriperumbudur, Margaux Winter, and Claire Yin

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