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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Deal or No Deal

BY ARCHIT OSWAL ON FEBRUARY 21, 2019 • (LEAVE A COMMENT)

“And the no’s have it!” On January 15, 2019, Parliament voted down Prime Minister Theresa May’s Brexit deal. Cobbled together over the course of the past two years, the **585-page deal**

(<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/nov/14/brexit-deal-key-points-from-the-draft-withdrawal-agreement>) structured the terms for Britain’s departure from the European Union. As Parliament continues to bicker over the negotiation of a new deal, EU member states are preparing for the possibility that Britain may crash out of the EU without a deal on March 29th, the hard date set for Britain’s departure from the EU. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe has already set aside **\$57 million** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46906046>) for beefing up customs and controls in ports and airports. So what would a no-deal Brexit look like?

Without a trade deal, **WTO rules** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-46892372>) would regulate Britain’s trade with the EU by default. These are the rules that help govern the EU’s trade relationships with the rest of the world, including major trading partners such as China and the United States. They are designed to standardize international trade but still give member states the freedom to impose certain barriers to trade, such as **tariffs on specified** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-46892372>) goods. So while a no-deal Brexit would not bring trade to a standstill nor provoke an economic crisis, it would make British goods vulnerable to EU trade barriers.

However, the economic argument is only half of the story. Brexit is about more than just money — it’s also about a country in the middle of an identity crisis provoked by recent shifts in the world order. Greatly underestimated, the Leave Campaign was a reaction to the period of intense globalization that preceded it. During the Cold War, the UK participated in the new, American-led world order as a means to rebuild after World War II and ward off the Soviet threat. After globalization entered warp speed following the collapse of

communism, the UK expanded its participation in supranational organizations and began trading extensively with China. However, Leave campaigners claimed that by subscribing to the rules and regulations of international bodies, the UK had surrendered its right as a sovereign nation to determine its own laws and policies. They disagreed with the EU's policies on migrants and insisted that European regulations diminished the competitiveness of Britain's economy.

Now the Leave Camp grumbles that Prime Minister May's Brexit deal fails to resolve these grievances. In many ways, they're right. The Prime Minister's deal does not deliver the Brexit that Leave campaigners promised. **Criticism of the deal** (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/francescoppola/2018/11/16/the-brutal-reality-of-brexit/#4376a14c5fb1>) revolves around the ill-defined conditions of the UK's departure from the EU. Among the many concessions made during trade talks, the UK would have remained in the EU's Customs Union until both sides negotiated a replacement trade agreement at some unspecified point in the future. Until then, the UK would have been forbidden from negotiating its own trade deals with other countries and continued to contribute to the EU's budget despite no longer being an EU member state. Since substantial decision-making power would have remained in Brussels, the deal would not have taken back control of British sovereignty. Nigel Farage, a prominent Brexiteer, **moaned that** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/world/europe/uk-brexit-nigel-farage.html>) "Constitutionally, and in terms of sovereignty, the deal's ever so slightly worse than where we are." However, the UK's position as a sovereign nation would decline even further in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Generally, countries must defer to the rules and regulations of larger trading partners. This means that countries like Serbia and Ukraine, which are not members of the European Union, must adopt EU standards when trading with the EU member states. For example, the EU's "**Eastern Partnership** (https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/eastern-partnership_en)" aims to foster Eastern Europe's economic integration with the EU. However, in order to remain in the program, Eastern European countries must adopt policies that show respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. By agreeing to such partnerships, these countries relinquish some of the power to determine their own laws and policies.

The UK is no different. Despite having the fifth largest economy in the world, the UK still pales in comparison to the EU, which has an economy that is **six times larger** (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20170410-1>) than the UK's. Critically, the EU takes almost **half of Britain's** (<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/5-arguments-why-uk-should-vote-for-a-brexit-and-5-against-2016-04-29>) exports, whereas Britain takes less than **10 percent** (<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/5-arguments-why-uk-should-vote-for-a-brexit-and-5-against-2016-04-29>) of the EU's. Therefore, the EU is in a much better position to dictate terms to the UK during trade negotiations. Without a deal of any sort, the UK's special relationship with the EU would cease overnight and it would lose a lot

of the power it once had as a key EU member to solve challenges such as climate change, trade, and terrorism that are vital to national interest.

Sovereignty is the measure of a country's ability to govern itself. As a powerful member of the EU, the UK wielded significant influence during nuclear negotiations with Iran and helped craft an ambitious agenda with other European countries to combat climate change. These international projects made the UK safer and more prosperous. Such qualities are the hallmarks of good governance and show that contrary to what Leave campaigners promised, the UK stands to lose rather than regain some of its sovereignty by leaving the EU. The UK's recent achievements in international affairs were coordinated with the support of the EU and prove that on the whole, participation in the EU doesn't detract from British sovereignty as much as it magnifies it.

Crashing out without a deal would sever even more ties with the EU and further reduce British authority. Critically, calls by MPs to craft a new deal fall on deaf ears. Without much bargaining power, the UK has little room to negotiate a better deal than the one already negotiated by Prime Minister May, and the EU has emphasized this on **multiple occasions**

(<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-juncker/eu-to-step-up-planning-for-no-deal-brex-it-juncker-michel-idUSKCN1P92MI>). Although any deal would entail a loss of some sovereignty, crashing out of the EU without a deal at all would result in a much more substantial loss. A no-deal Brexit would deliver neither prosperity nor sovereignty.

Perhaps Britain's best option is to settle the issue in the same way it began — with a referendum. The question of whether to accept the existing deal, leave without a deal, or craft a new deal can be decided by either the people or Parliament. As Parliament **fractures**

(<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/01/17/brexit-mother-of-all-messes>) into multiple factions, each intent on delivering their own version of Brexit by interpreting and fulfilling the will of the people, it becomes increasingly clear that Britain's legislative body will not arrive at a consensus. Instead of letting MPs guess at what outcome best fulfills the will of the people, let the people decide for themselves.



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