

The European Union is an economic and political union between 27 European countries. The EU was created in the aftermath of the Second World War with the aim of fostering peace among its members and thus making war between members impossible. It has built the world's largest single market, allowing goods, services, money and people to travel freely between countries. The EU has therefore brought about peace, stability, and prosperity. Yet, the security of the European Union is being challenged today in a way like never before, with central pillars of the EU being eroded. This brief will discuss this security challenge with reference to the US pulling out from vital treaties along with the withdrawal of troops from Europe under the Trump administration. Furthermore, the after-effects of Brexit on the EU will be examined.



Image source: CNN

## **US Withdrawal from Major Treaties and the Consequences for Europe**

Ever since the United States Presidential Election in November 2016, President Donald Trump has shown a disregard for international agreements that Europeans adhere to. By withdrawing from agreements such as the Paris Agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, European security has been placed under threat.

Most recently, President Trump announced on the 21 May 2020 that the US will be withdrawing from the 1992 Open Skies Treaty (OST). The OST came into effect in 2002 and has been signed by 34 different nations. The OST [allowed](#) the US, Canada, Russia, and various European countries to conduct unarmed observation flights over each other's air space. A country can, therefore, [undertake](#) aerial imaging over another participating state if they provide 72 hours' notice and share its exact flight path at least 24 hours before. The treaty was designed to reduce the risk of war by advancing mutual understanding and promoting openness and transparency among the participating states. The U.S. President [justified](#) his withdrawal of the treaty on the basis that Russia was violating the international agreement. This treaty was the [third](#) of international arms control structures that Trump has withdrawn from since his presidency, following from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty last year and the Iran nuclear deal in 2018.

In a joint [statement](#), 11 European countries including Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, all expressed regret over Washington's decision to withdraw. [Joseph Borrell](#), the EU's foreign policy chief, encouraged the US to reconsider its decision, stating that "withdrawing from a treaty is not the solution to address difficulties in its implementation and compliance by another party".

[According](#) to a Russian deputy foreign minister, the United States withdrawal from the treaty would be a "blow to European security". The OST has been extremely [significant](#) for European countries as it has allowed them to keep track of Russian military movements without the use of spy satellites. Since the US has more extensive intelligence capabilities than many European countries, many EU members have [relied](#) on the US to obtain classified satellite data, which will now be more difficult to access. Consequently, the US withdrawal threatens the return of armed conflict in Europe and will further isolate the US from its NATO allies.

Furthermore, [experts](#) have expressed concern over what might happen to the START agreement, which is set to expire in February 2021. The START agreement with Russia puts a cap on the number of deployed nuclear missiles to 1550 to both Russia and the United States. Given that the US has withdrawn from many other international agreements, there are speculations that the US will not renew this agreement.



Image source: WSJ

## US Withdrawal of Troops from Europe

In addition to pulling out of key international agreements, the United States has withdrawn a large number of its troops from European countries. Last month, President Donald Trump announced that the US will be cutting their troop presence in Germany. Trump announced that he will be [capping](#) American troops in Germany to 25,000, cutting more than 25% of its troop presence. Further, it was announced that the US will be [withdrawing](#) 11,900 troops with around 5400 relocating elsewhere in Europe and around 6400 people sent back to the US.

US President Donald Trump [attributed](#) the move to Germany failing to spend the NATO target of 2% of its GDP on defence. Rather, Germany's military spending was around [1.38%](#)

of its GDP last year, resulting in Trump describing Germany as “[delinquent](#).” Mark Esper, the United States Secretary of Defence, [stated](#) that “Germany is the wealthiest country in Europe. Germany can and should pay more to its defence.” Indeed, it seems that Trump is advancing the ‘American First’ vision and that the NATO alliance can no longer rely on the United States to shoulder the costs of defence.

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Federal Minister of Defence, described the cut in US troop presence as “[regrettable](#)” as it is damaging to the whole of European security. The foreign minister, Heiko Maas, [said](#) that “we think that the US presence in Germany is important for the security not just of Germany but also for the security of the United States and especially for the security of Europe.” The chairman of Germany’s foreign affairs committee, Norbert Röttgen, believes that it will further weaken the NATO alliance. He [stated](#) in a tweet that “instead of strengthening Nato it is going to weaken the alliance.” Further, it could serve as a gift to Russian President Putin who has been hopeful for a [decrease](#) in American military presence in Europe. In addition to these security concerns, the withdrawal of troops is expected to hit the [economies](#) of the German towns where the troops were stationed, as many businesses rely on these troops.



Soldiers from NATO/ Image source: AP Photo/Mindaugas Kulbis)

## After-effects of Brexit on the European Union

In June 2016, the majority of voters signified their [support](#) for the United Kingdom to depart from the European Union and in January 2020, the UK officially ceased to be a member of the bloc. This is extremely significant as it is the first time that a country has voluntarily left the EU. As a result of Brexit, the EU is [losing](#) 15% of its economy, 66 million citizens, 5% of the territory, the financial capital of London and a nuclear-armed member of the UN Security Council. [According](#) to Michael Leigh, an academic director in European public policy at the Johns Hopkins University campus, without the UK, the EU will have less weight in trade and security matters and as a result “it reduces the credibility of the EU.” In essence, without the UK, the EU will be smaller and far less influential.

Moreover, since the EU has been putting much of its resources into Brexit, the EU has been paying [less attention](#) to other issues among member states. Mujtaba Rahman, the managing director of the political consultancy Euroasia Group, [states](#) that “the big cost of Brexit for the EU is that it has distracted time, attention and political capital from addressing the real substantive challenges that the EU itself faces.” Right now, many nations have been undermining key EU values and ignoring the rule of EU law. Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, for instance, has been [dismantling](#) Hungary’s democratic institutions, controlling the media, undermining education systems, and restricting civil liberties. In March 2020, Orbán passed legislation which allowed him to [rule](#) by decree indefinitely. Additionally, he has [controlled](#) the media further by bringing about a new law whereby citizens can face penalties of up to five years for publishing ‘false’ or ‘distorted’ facts. Consequently, if the EU does not stand up for democracy and EU law soon, it will be faced with further damage.

**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

team@thekootneeti.com  
courses.thekootneeti.in  
(+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments