In a year when Barack Obama will be leaving the White House, Great Britain gears up to a Euro referendum and unrest persists across the Middle East. Martin Ince considers how the rest of the world views the UK.
How did Angela Merkel become the leader of Europe and a power broker who is influential across the globe?

**IN NOVEMBER 2016**

Hillary Clinton just might become the most powerful woman on Earth. But until then Angela Merkel’s grip on the title is uncontested.

Born in what was then East Germany in 1954, she has had a political career that would have been inconceivable in the Communist era. She became leader of the CDU, Germany’s principal right-of-centre party, in 2000, and Chancellor of Germany in 2005, making her one of the most durable political figures in any democratic state. In a world where politicians feel the need to parade their spouses in public, she retains her privacy, and her chemistry professor husband, Joachim Sauer, is rarely seen at any official function.

She has always regarded the UK as a vital ally, but is clear that there are limits to her inclination to compromise over the UK’s relationship with Europe to help David Cameron win the Brexit referendum.

There are also signs that her long stint at the head of Europe’s leading nation may be coming to an end. She faces tricky elections in 2017 and her popularity has been dented by her open attitude towards refugees from the Middle East.

Perhaps more menacingly, Germany’s record of economic success on her watch is threatened by the Volkswagen scandal, which it is estimated could cost Germany more than a Greek debt default might have done. This demonstration of lax standards and possible illegality at a company that symbolises German economic achievement and technological prowess has the scope to disrupt assumptions about Germany itself and its place in the world.
India and China remain keen to invest in the UK in businesses such as Jaguar Land Rover and Hinkley Point respectively. Japan is also eager to foster relationships with its fellow island nation.

Despite Russia’s international aberrations of recent years, such as the Ukraine civil war, the London stock exchange is still a big draw for Russian companies as is our cultural heritage.

As the world’s largest international broadcaster, the BBC’s World Service is renowned for providing coverage of events across the globe, in 28 languages, to around 190 million people.

WORLD-CLASS SERVICE

The UK’s ‘special relationship’ with the US remains a valid construct, albeit one that is more likely to be mentioned in London than in Washington.

she thinks, the UK gives out “contradictory messages” that cause it to lose respect. This approach, she says, “chips away at a reputation that has developed over time”. However, the UK also has immense assets. These include the BBC World Service, a major provider of unbiased news to the Global South and a prime instrument of UK soft power. She adds that British professional institutions and universities – not least SOAS – are well-regarded around the world.

Partly because of the many diasporic communities that have found a home in the UK, thinks Amos, there is a high level of global interest in the UK and in the debates going on there, including the EU membership referendum. As she sees it, “The UK is seen as being in decline, so its role in the EU is of growing importance to nations beyond Europe. In addition, regional groupings of nations are becoming more important around the world.”

Amos adds that the Commonwealth is perhaps less influential than it could be in UK relations with the South. “It is potentially important because it includes rich and poor nations, large and small ones, island states, and countries with very young populations. So it could have a bigger voice on issues such as climate change and development.”

Amos is more cautious about the effects of recent UK military interventions on Britain’s reputation in and beyond the Middle East. She believes that they have been “quite damaging in some circles, but not all”. She explains: “The world is getting more polarised in its views on military intervention and we see this in attitudes within the UK as well.” But she adds that her five years at the UN brought home to her the immense damage done by unresolved political crises, which lead to inevitable humanitarian crises. While not completely opposing the idea of military intervention in Syria, she says that this step will only work as part of an integrated approach that includes political and other measures, with the authority of the UN.
Amos’s view of the continuing importance of the UK is echoed by Sankalp Chaturvedi, head of the Gandhi Centre for Inclusive Innovation at the Imperial College Business School. He points out that the UK is home to a business-oriented diaspora second only to the Indian community of the US. The UK has become a significant destination for Indian investment, for example the purchase of Jaguar Land Rover and of much of the British steel industry.

Chaturvedi says: “There is now a very positive vibe in India about dealings with the UK. The fact that English is the language of work in India, and the large Indian presence here, means that the UK is the natural point of entry to Europe for Indians. Of course, it would be troublesome if the UK decided to leave the EU.

At the moment many Indian businesses handle all their European operations from the UK and that option would become less attractive.”

Derek Averre, senior lecturer at the Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies at the University of Birmingham, says that the UK is “without a doubt” important to Russian business and political elites. “The UK is the fifth-largest investor in Russia and the London Stock Exchange is the biggest international platform for Russian companies.” But he adds: “The political class in Russia is disillusioned with the UK because of its role in Iraq, Libya and now Syria. In the Ukraine, Germany is seen as taking a lead among the Western powers and the UK is regarded as more peripheral.”

However, he states that Russians take an enormous interest in British culture, especially music and literature. “And every young person wants to learn English.”

The mass movement of refugees that this chaos has precipitated is one of the UK’s biggest political issues, as well as being a massive humanitarian crisis. In addition, the UK is one of the many European states from which young people have travelled, or tried to travel, to the region to join the supposed Islamic State.

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John Nilsson-Wright, head of the Asia programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs and an expert on Japan, says that there too the UK is held in strong affection. “The Japanese see many commonalities with the UK,” he points out. “They are island nations that share a complex relationship with the neighbouring continent, and a very important alliance with the US. They have a long history of close relations, interrupted of course by World War II.”

THE NEW NORMAL

This relationship is now developing in areas such as security and defence and through inward investment into the UK. But he warns that it is important not to take it for granted. “The Japanese tilt towards China means that there is a danger of the UK disappearing below the radar and ceasing to be politically mainstream for Japan.”
Kaoru Kamata is president of Waseda University in Tokyo. He says: “The UK has had to share power and influence as other nations, particularly in Asia, have grown in economic strength and political importance. But it remains a first-class nation.” He adds: “No nation that sits on the UN Security Council or is a founding member of NATO can be disregarded.” But the UK is important in its own right, not just as a member of international organisations. “Its ambiguous, sometimes contentious, relations with the EU underscore its independence.”

And Kamata is clear that the UK is a cultural pace-setter. “Walk down any street in Tokyo or tune in to any music station, and one encounters Britain.”

China expert Rod Wye, an associate fellow of the Asia Programme, points out that China’s current leaders are happy to make ideological use of Britain’s past record as a perceived oppressor of the Chinese masses. But he adds that most of this invective is now directed at Japan rather than the UK. He says: “The UK is important to China, especially because of its open attitude to trade, and as an export market. It is also a vital financial centre for trading in renminbi, China’s official currency. The Chinese are not keen on Brexit and dislike dealing with the more protectionist European states.”

He warns too that there is no point in anyone in the UK worrying about Chinese investment in Britain’s nuclear power stations, railways, airports and other national infrastructure. “China is going to grow these overseas investments. It’s the new normal and we need to get used to it.”

Martin Ince is principal of Martin Ince Communications. He is a freelance science writer, media adviser and media trainer.
THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU has 28 member states and is made up of seven institutions located in four different countries:

1. EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
   - Function: Mainly shares legislative and budgetary authority over the EU with the Council of the European Union. It is the only directly elected EU body. It is made up of 751 MEPs – 73 from the UK.
   - Location: Strasbourg, Brussels, Luxembourg
   - President: Martin Schulz (German).

2. THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL
   - Function: Comprises all heads of state or government of the EU member states. It decides the EU’s political direction and meets four times a year. It’s the highest political body of the European Union.
   - Location: Brussels
   - President: Donald Tusk (Polish).

3. THE COUNCIL (of the European Union, also called Council of Ministers)
   - Function: Holds legislative and some limited executive powers and is the main decision-making body of the Union, in conjunction with the parliament. It is separate from the European Council. The Council is composed of 28 national ministers (one per state). Those who attend are the relevant ministers to the subject area to be discussed – for example, agriculture.
   - Location: Brussels
   - President: Rotates between the states every six months.

4. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
   - Function: Composed of one ‘commissioner’ from each state, it is designed to be independent of national interests and to promote the general interest of the EU. The body is responsible for drafting all law of the European Union and has a near monopoly on proposing new laws (bills). It also deals with the day-to-day running of the Union and has the duty of upholding the law and treaties.
   - Location: Brussels
   - President: Jean-Claude Juncker (Luxembourger).

5. COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
   - Function: The CJEU is the EU’s judicial branch and is responsible for interpreting EU law and treaties and ensuring that all EU countries and institutions abide by EU law.
   - Location: Luxembourg
   - President: Koen Lenaerts (Belgian).

6. THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK
   - Function: This is the central bank for the Eurozone. It controls monetary policy in the area with a remit to maintain price stability.
   - Location: Frankfurt
   - President: Mario Draghi (Italian).

7. THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS
   - Function: A court of no judicial powers. It ensures that taxpayer funds from the budget of the European Union have been correctly spent. It is composed of one member from each state.
   - Location: Luxembourg
   - President: Vitor Manuel da Silva Caldeira (Portuguese).

FRANCE
- EU | GB | G20 | NA | OE | UFM | UN/SC
- François Hollande President

ITALY
- EU | GB | G20 | NA | OE | UFM | UN
- Matteo Renzi Prime Minister

GERMANY
- EU | GB | G20 | NA | OE | UFM | UN
- Angela Merkel Chancellor

CANADA
- CO | EU | GB | G20 | NA | OE | UN
- Justin Trudeau Prime Minister

UNITED STATES
- EU | GB | G20 | NA | OE | UFM | UN/SC
- Barack Obama President

BRAZIL
- BR | G20 | G77/24 | UN | US
- Dilma Rousseff President

ARGENTINA
- G20 | G77/24 | UN | US
- Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner Prime Minister

INSIDE THE G8

WHAT IT IS: The Group of 8 forum is an annual political gathering of governmental leaders of the wealthiest developed countries – it is not an IGO but an informal forum. The members are: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US and Russia (currently suspended as a result of the Crimea crisis). The EU is also represented, but although it holds the privileges and obligations of membership it doesn’t have the right to host or chair a summit. The forum is held in and hosted by a different member country each year.

FUNCTION: To discuss global issues such as economic growth, crisis management, global security, energy and terrorism.

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Here are a few of the regional organisations and political and economic groupings that along with the UK shape our world – and some of the prominent world leaders at the heart of them.

KEY: AL Arab League; AU African Union; BR One of BRICS nations; CO Commonwealth country; EU Member of European Union; G8 Member of Group of 8 IGO Intergovernmental Organisation; NA NATO; OE OECD; NAM Non-Aligned Movement; SA South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation; UFM Union for Mediterranean; UN United Nations member; UN/SC Permanent member of UN Security Council; US Union of South American Nations *See box on European Union Suspended
G7 (economies)
Finance ministers and central bank governors
The Group of 7 (G7) is a loose coalition of developed
countries – all members of the United Nations
- who meet to promote the members’ collective
economic interests. Although it first comprised
77, the number of founding members of the
UN, it now has grown to encompass 134 UN
members. Chairmanship rotates on a regional
basis between Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin
America and the Caribbean.

G20
This is a more informal international forum for
the finance ministers and central bank governors
from 20 major economies, largely to promote
international financial stability: Argentina,
Brazil, Canada, China, France,
Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South
Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South
Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the
United States - along with the EU.

G24
This loose chapter of the G77 co-ordinates the
positions of developing countries on international
monetary and development fi nance issues and
ensures that their interests are well represented.

G7+ This IGO brings together countries with recent
experience of conflict and draws attention to the
special challenges facing these ‘fragile states’.

EUROPEAN UNION
The European Union (EU) is a regional
collaborative organisation of 28 European
member states. It aims to promote
relations with each other to safeguard
member states. It aims to create close
organisations, with 32 European
member states.

Worldwide

The Arab League (AL) is a regional
organisation of Arab countries, with 22
member states. It aims to create close
relations with each other to safeguard
independence and sovereignty.

The African Union (AU) comprises
54 countries in Africa with an aim
to promote co-operation among the
independent nations of Africa.

BRICS is an acronym for an association of
five major emerging national
economies which discusses how the
countries could better co-operate
in the future: Brazil, Russia, India, China
and South Africa.

The Commonwealth of Nations
is an IGO of 53 member states, mostly
territories of the former British Empire.
Headed by the Queen, it promotes
democracy and individual liberty.

The Non-Aligned Movement
(NAM) is a group of states not
formally aligned with or against any
major power bloc. Its 120 members
from across the globe meet to
represent the interests and priorities
of developing countries.

The North Atlantic Treaty
Organization (NATO) is an IGO military
alliance where 28 member states
agree to mutual defence in response to
attack by external parties.

The Organisation for Economic
Co-operation and Development
(OECD) is an international organisation
of 34 countries aiming to stimulate
economic progress and world trade.

The South Asian Association for
Regional Co-operation (SAARC) is an
economic and geopolitical organisation
of eight countries, aiming to foster
more collective self-reliance and
economic welfare.

The Union for the Mediterranean
(UfM) is a partnership of 43 countries -
the 28 member states of the EU and
15 partner countries from North Africa,
the Middle East and Southeast Europe.

The United Nations (UN) is an IGO
with 193 member states. The UN
Security Council (UNSC) is one of
six main organs of the UN, principally
charged with the maintenance of
international peace and security.

The Union of South American
Nations (USAN) is an IGO comprising
12 South American countries to aid
the continuing process of South
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MORE LEADING ORGANISATIONS WORLDWIDE

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