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WORLD NEWS

German ex-leader Merkel says she felt sorrow at Trump's comeback and recalls awkward non-handshake



FILE - President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel shake hands following their joint news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Friday, March 17, 2017. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File)

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BERLIN (AP) — Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel says she felt “sorrow” at [Donald Trump's](#) return to power and recalls that every meeting with him was “a competition: you or me.”

In an interview with German weekly Der Spiegel published Friday, Merkel said that Trump “is a challenge for the world, particularly for multilateralism.”

“What awaits us now is really not easy,” she said, because “the strongest economy in the world stands behind this president” with the dollar as a dominant currency.

Merkel worked with [four American presidents](#) while she was German chancellor. She was in power throughout Trump's first term — easily the most tense period for German-U.S. relations of her 16 years in

office, which ended in late 2021.

She recalled as “a typical scene” a famously awkward moment in the Oval Office when she first visited Trump at the White House in March 2017. Photographers shouted “handshake!” and Merkel quietly asked Trump: “Do you want to have a handshake?” There was no response from Trump, who looked ahead with his hands clasped.

“I tried to coax him into a handshake for the photographers because I thought in my constructive way that maybe he hadn’t noticed they wanted such a picture,” Merkel was quoted as saying. “But of course his refusal was calculation.”

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The pair did shake hands at other points during the visit.

Asked what a German chancellor should know about dealing with Trump, Merkel said he was very curious and wanted details — “but only to read them for his own advantage, to find arguments that strengthen him and weaken others.”

“The more people there were in the room, the greater was his urge to be the winner,” she added. “You can’t chat with him. Every meeting is a competition: you or me.”

Merkel said she felt “sorrow” at Trump’s victory over [Kamala Harris](#) in the Nov. 5 presidential election. “It was already a disappointment for me that Hillary Clinton didn’t win in 2016. I would have liked a different outcome.”

The 70-year-old Merkel, a center-right Christian Democrat who has generally kept a low profile since leaving office, is due to [release her memoirs](#) next week.

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