



The Chancellor and the Presidents

Angela Merkel's 16-year run as chancellor has come to an end, prompting reflection on the German-American relationship forged between her and the many U.S. presidents she worked with.



President George W. Bush
2005–2009

2005 Angela Merkel became chancellor in a time when German-American relations were in what is described as a "diplomatic ice age." This was in large part due to disagreements between Merkel's predecessor, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and former President George W. Bush on the handling of the war in Iraq. It was up to the new chancellor, Angela Merkel, to rebuild the relationship—and she did.

2006 In January 2006, Bush and Merkel met for the first time at the White House. The two talked about contentious issues such as the United States' prison in Guantanamo Bay and Iran's nuclear program. This day set the foundation for a strong relationship, with Bush later saying that Merkel was "really refreshing to work with."

That following July, Merkel invited Bush to her home state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The two enjoyed roasted wild boar and toured Merkel's parliamentary district.

2007 Bush invited Merkel to visit him on his ranch in Texas. It was at this meeting that the two agreed to work together to find a diplomatic solution to the rising tensions over Iran's nuclear program.

2021 In Merkel's final months as chancellor, Bush spoke fondly of Merkel in an interview, saying that she "brought class and dignity to a very important position; [she] made very hard decisions, and did so with what's best for Germany, and did so based upon principle."



President Barack Obama
2009–2017

2009 Due to their differing leadership styles, the world leaders did not start off with the strongest of relationships. The two had differing views on the global financial crisis, a key issue at the 2009 G20 in London.

2011 In June 2011, Merkel received the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House, the United States' highest civilian award. Obama praised Merkel's commitment to European unity.

2013 Merkel welcomed Obama on his first visit to Berlin as president in 2013. While Merkel had denied Obama the chance to speak at the Brandenburg Gate when he was campaigning for his presidency, she allowed him to speak at the gate during this visit.

2014 After the downing of Malaysian flight MH17 on July 17, by what Western countries say was a Russian-supplied missile, Merkel and Obama's diplomatic relationship found strong footing as they developed a strategy to deal with Russia.

2015 At the G7 Summit in the Bavarian Alps in 2015, the two were able to count on each other for support on many topics, one of the primary ones being climate change.

2016 In April 2016, Obama praised Chancellor Angela Merkel's handling of the refugee crisis. Her party was jilted by the decision to aid refugees fleeing war and poverty. In a news conference, Obama said, "She is on the right side of history on this."
Obama picked Merkel to be his final official call in office, bidding farewell to his "closest international partner."



President Donald Trump
2017–2021

2017 The relationship between former President Trump and Chancellor Merkel is notorious for being the most contentious of all her relationships with U.S. presidents. In March of 2017, Merkel made her first visit to the White House under the new presidency. The two walked away from this initial meeting with much unresolved.

Throughout Trump's presidency, Chancellor Angela Merkel found herself having to explain how trade works in Europe. Despite Trump's attempts to negotiate a trade deal with just Germany, Merkel explained deals could only be made with the EU.

2021 Merkel condemned the acts committed by Trump surrounding the attacks on the Capitol on January 6. During a press conference, Merkel said, "A basic rule of democracy is after the election there are winners and losers, both have to play their role with decency and responsibility so that democracy itself remains the winner. I regret very much that President Trump did not admit defeat in November and again yesterday."



President Joe Biden
2021

2021 After four years of a tumultuous German-American relationship, President Joe Biden was warmly welcomed by Merkel. Biden immediately moved to rejoin NATO and the Paris Climate Agreement, a move that was positively received by European leaders.

In early February 2021, Biden stopped the Trump administration's move to withdraw 9,500 from U.S. military bases in Germany. Berlin welcomed the freeze, saying that the move "serves European and transatlantic security and hence is in our mutual interest."

Merkel met with Biden in Washington D.C. for the last time on July 15, 2021. The two covered topics such as COVID-19, climate change, and economic issues.



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The new Reichstag dome, finished in 1999 along with other Reichstag renovations, symbolizes the reunification of Germany. Photo: Pixabay