

What was Thatcher attitude with regards to the Soviet Union, and what might this reveal about her broader political project? How effective and impactful was the position taken by Thatcher to the Soviet Union, and what insights might this offer about how she transformed British politics?

Margaret Thatcher's view of the Soviet Union as Prime Minister was shaped by her strong dislike of communism and her determination to protect Western democracy from what she saw as a deep ideological danger. She saw the Soviet Union as an oppressive state found on principles totally opposite to all she held dear, such as individual freedom, free markets, and the rule of law. Her foreign policy was shaped by her deep suspicions about the Soviets' goals, which made her even more determined to improve Britain's military and strengthen allies, especially with the US. No wonder Thatcher was called the "Iron Lady" by the Soviet press.¹

Thatcher's ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union was rooted in her belief that communism was not only politically oppressive but also economically inefficient. Thatcher thought the Soviet model was wrong from the start and went against the ideas of freedom and personal responsibility that she believed in. Because of this, she spoke against Soviet policies, especially in her first few years as a premier, when it seemed that the Cold War would last for many years to come and tensions between East and West were rising once again.

Making Thatcher's Britain, which was written by Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, puts Thatcher's attitude toward the Soviet Union in the context of how she ran the country as a whole. Thatcher's political beliefs were formed by her support for free-market economics and her dislike of government control, which coincidentally was one of the foundations of the Soviet, communist system.² Her strong dislike of communism translated into very forceful actions. She pushed for higher defense spending and backing NATO's strategic goals. Thatcher also wanted to

¹ Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 1, 97.

² Jackson, B., & Saunders, R. (Eds.). *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 132-135.

put American nuclear weapons in Britain to protect against the Soviet danger because she thought that only a show of force could put a stop on the spread of communism around the world and would deter potential Soviet attack on the West.

With the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, Thatcher's views on the Soviet Union started to change. Thatcher was one of the first Western leaders to see that Gorbachev could mean a change in Soviet policy, even though she was still very wary of Soviet power. She changed her approach from direct confrontation and adherence to the principles of containment to cautious engagement. This openness to working with Gorbachev showed how pragmatic Thatcher was; she was ready to change her mind if she thought it would help the relationship between the West and the East get better. Despite all that she still had a lot of doubts about the Soviet system, and even after diplomacy lines opened, she kept pushing for a strong defense.

Thatcher's deep distrust for the Soviets was there even when things seemed to be getting better in terms of communication with its leaders. She viewed with skepticism the assessments of some Western experts, who thought that the Soviets were doing well, both economically and politically.³ On the contrary, just like Reagan, she thought that the West should fight to demolish communism rather than live with it.⁴ Thatcher didn't trust the Soviet government and thought the West needed to be vigilant and stay united to avoid the return to the Cold War hostilities.

Overall, Thatcher's view on the Soviet Union was shaped by her strong moral opposition to communism, softened by her practical awareness of the chances that Gorbachev offered. She took a strong and determined stance because she believed that the only way to deal with the Soviet Union successfully was from the position of power. On top of that, this stance wasn't just about foreign policy; it was also part of her larger political plan to boost Britain's confidence and make it a strong champion of Western values around the world.

One cannot fully understand Margaret Thatcher's connection with the Soviet Union without looking at how close she was to Ronald Reagan and how involved she was with Mikhail Gorbachev. These three leaders brought the end of the Cold War and ushered in a new era in the

³ Archie Brown, Michael Kaser Eds., *Soviet Policy for the 80s* (Oxford: St Antony's College, 1982), 56.

⁴ "...when she took part in the discussion and learned more about the serious problems the Soviet Union was facing, she remarked that if it was 'in such a parlous state, the system was bound to collapse before long'. Brown, *The Human Factor*, 102.

world. Thatcher's approach was key to building a bridge between the two superpowers. She strongly supported Reagan's tough stand against communism but at the same time saw in Gorbachev a reformist leader that the West could communicate with in a useful way.

Thatcher and Reagan worked together because they believed in the same things. Both leaders spoke out against communism and thought that free-market capitalism was better than the centrally planned economies of the Eastern Bloc. Because their ideas were similar, and they had mutual chemistry, they were able to stand together against the Soviet Union, which made the Western bloc's stance stronger in negotiations. Brown talks about how Thatcher's unshakable support for Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and his larger military buildup showed how dedicated she was to a policy of defense. She agreed with Reagan that a strong military was needed to get the Soviet Union to the bargaining table.⁵

But at the same time Thatcher was one of the first leaders in the West to see that Mikhail Gorbachev was different from the old Soviet leadership. Gorbachev seemed more open to change and discussion than his predecessors. One of the most important moments in the Cold War was when Thatcher tried to convince Washington that the West could "do business with" Gorbachev.⁶ This was more than just empty words; it was a message to the rest of the world that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev could be negotiated with. This helped set the stage for the talks between Reagan and Gorbachev that led to the signing of important arms-reduction treaties.

Thatcher played a key part in making it possible for Reagan and Gorbachev to talk to each other. A lot of people saw her as the person who could bring together Reagan's strict anti-communism and Gorbachev's reforming goals. In the book Brown, Thatcher is portrayed as a key figure in maintaining the delicate balance between pressure and dialogue, helping Reagan to see Gorbachev as a genuine partner in peace. This one-of-a-kind international role showed how smart Thatcher was as a politician. She knew that the Soviet Union was still an enemy, but that the chance that Gorbachev's leadership offered could not be missed. Her pragmatism allowed her to adjust her strategies, ensuring that the West was not only prepared militarily but also willing to engage diplomatically when the moment was right.

⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, 100.

⁶ Id, 4.

Thatcher's strategy toward the Soviet Union wasn't just about keeping everyone safe; it was also a way for her to share her vision for Britain, which was for a strong economy, a strong military, and a patriotic population. In other words, to make Britain great again. Jackson and Saunders write in their book that Thatcher's opposition to communism was a central part of her political identity and a strong support for her general dislike of all types of socialism. By being firm against the Soviet Union, she was also, in a way, firm against the type of state-controlled economy that she thought had made Britain less strong after the war. The authors also mention how the victory in the Falkland War "coincided with an apparent increase in the Soviet threat during the 1980s and with the Labour Party's move to unilateral nuclear disarmament. "Over half the electorate believed that Britain would not be adequately defended under a Labour government and about half of voters believed that the Conservatives had the best defence policy."⁷

On the domestic, economic front, Thatcher made her economic policies, such as deregulation, privatization, and limiting union power, seem like part of a bigger ideological fight by drawing a clear line between the "free world" of Western democracies and the oppressive communist governments. She didn't just criticize the Soviet model; she also criticized the British welfare state, which she saw as a form of socialism that crept up on people and limited their economic freedom. Thatcher often used the threat of the Soviet Union to defend her policies at home. She said that Britain could only avoid the economic stagnation and authoritarian rule that marked the Eastern Bloc by fully embracing free-market capitalism.

Thatcher's view of the Soviet Union affected how she handled defense and foreign policy, which supported her goal of making Britain strong and independent. She fought hard for Britain to keep its nuclear deterrent and increase military spending, which she saw as vital to protecting the country from the Soviet danger. This stance was part of her larger political plan to boost national pride and keep Britain as a major player on the world stage. Thatcher thought that Western unity and military power were very important to deter the Soviet Union from staging a surprise attack on the West. In her home country, her support for NATO and the placement of American cruise

⁷ Jackson, B., & Saunders, R. Eds., *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 204.

missiles in Britain caused a lot of debate, but they showed how determined she was to make sure that Britain was seen as a strong and trustworthy partner.

It is undisputable that Margaret Thatcher's approach to the Soviet Union changed the course of the Cold War and led to the fall of the Soviet Union. Her method was a mix of clear ideas, strong military power, and diplomatic involvement. This made her a key figure in the complicated chain of events that brought down the Soviet system. Thatcher's relationships with both the Soviet leadership and her Western partners showed that she could handle international politics with a balance of firmness and realism. This had a long effect on late-20th-century world politics.

During the most important parts of the Cold War, Thatcher's strong opposition to communism helped keep the West united. By criticizing Soviet policies over and over again, she helped other Western countries come together for a shared cause. Thatcher's push for a firm stance against the USSR was a big reason why Western leaders, especially Ronald Reagan, decided to deal with the USSR from a position of strength. During the 1980s, the West's approach was largely shaped by her belief that real talks with the Soviet leadership could only happen through pressure.

Thatcher's policies toward the Soviet Union contributed to a large degree to the fall of the “empire of evil”.

Margaret Thatcher's stance on the Soviet Union was not only a significant factor in ending the Cold War but also contributed to the transformation of British politics. Her focus on military power, fighting socialism, and Western unity became important parts of the Conservative party's platform and continued to affect the party's policies long after she left office. The ideological clarity she brought to her foreign policy also showed up in her domestic agenda. This helped the Conservative Party become more powerful and more devoted to its core principles of free market economy and small government. This shift in the party's character and policy priorities is a key part of what is now commonly known as "Thatcherism."⁸

British public opinion was also changed by Thatcher's handling of the Soviet Union, which helped to change how people felt about defense and national security. Thatcher was able to convince the majority of the British society that the Soviet Union is a real threat, which helped to unite the country behind a shared goal. This made it easier for her to implement unpopular

⁸ Saunders, R. Eds., *Making Thatcher's Britain*, 62.

policies at home. People became more in favor of higher defense spending and a strong military presence during her time in office, in part because she kept warning about the Soviet danger. This change in public opinion gave Thatcher the political support she needed to make investments in Britain's defense, such as the controversial choice to let American cruise weapons be stationed in Britain. She put a lot of effort into creating formidable defense forces and saw Britain as an important part of the Western alliance. This helped change culture to value national security and military power, which is a big part of her legacy. Thatcher was extremely suspicious of détente, because she did not believe in the good faith of the Soviet Union”⁹ and changed her mind only after she saw how serious Gorbachev’s reforms were.

Furthermore, by aligning her anti-Soviet stance with her domestic economic reforms, Thatcher was able to frame her fight against communism as analogous to her fight against socialism at home. She often drew parallels between the economic inefficiencies of the Soviet system and the failings of Britain’s welfare state, arguing that both were fundamentally flawed due to their reliance on state control.

In the end, Margaret Thatcher's strategy toward the Soviet Union had a big and long-lasting effect on British politics. By dealing with the Soviet Union with both strong beliefs and practical strategy, she not only helped end the Cold War but also changed the way domestic politics. She reshaped the Conservative Party, changed how people thought about defense, and reaffirmed Britain's place in the world through her strong leadership style, focus on power and resilience, and clear anti-communist stance. So, Thatcher's policy toward the Soviet Union was not only about foreign relations, but also a key part of her larger plan to change Britain's political character and give the country a feeling of national pride and purpose again.

⁹ Moore, C. *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Vol. 1: Not for Turning* (London: Penguin Books, 2013) 644.

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