

Margaret Thatcher and the Cold War

Karolína Kollárová

Bachelor's Thesis
2022/2023



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2022/2023

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení:	Karolína Kollárová
Osobní číslo:	H190273
Studijní program:	B7310 Filologie
Studijní obor:	Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi
Forma studia:	Prezenční
Téma práce:	Margaret Thatcher a studená válka

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza shromážděných materiálů
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce


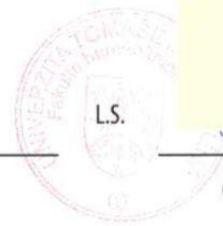

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Brown, Archie. *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Moore, Charles. *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*. London: Penguin Books, 2014.
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Wapshott, Nicholas. *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: A Political Marriage*. New York: Sentinel, 2008.
Westad, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: A World History*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Oldřich Kopeček**
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **15. června 2023**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **17. srpna 2023**

Mgr. Libor Marek, Ph.D.
děkan

doc. Mgr. Roman Trušník, Ph.D.
ředitel ústavu

Ve Zlíně dne 29. června 2023

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá Margaret Thatcher a jejím vlivem na konec studené války. Jako premiérka Velké Británie, která v této funkci zastávala tři volební období, zaujala tvrdý postoj ke komunismu a byla nekompromisní k politice Sovětského svazu. Práce nejprve dokumentuje její dětství a politické začátky, zaznamenává vývoj její vytrvalosti a zásad, které se následně promítly do její politiky. Thatcher své druhé a třetí období věnovala otázce zlepšení vztahů mezi východem a západem a navázala zásadní vztahy s Michailem Gorbačovem a prezidentem Ronaldem Reaganem. Tyto vztahy jí umožnily se podílet na rozvolnění komunistického režimu, což nakonec vedlo k pádu železné opony, konci Sovětského svazu a znovusjednocení Německa.

Klíčová slova: studená válka, Margaret Thatcher, Spojené království, Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, komunismus, zahraniční politika

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis deals with Margaret Thatcher and her influence on the end of the Cold War. As a three-term prime minister of the United Kingdom, she took a hard stance towards communism and was uncompromising towards Soviet Union policies. The thesis first documents her childhood and political beginnings, recording the development of the perseverance and principles subsequently reflected in her politics. Thatcher devoted her second and third terms of office to the issue of improving relations between East and West, establishing essential relationships with Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan. Such relationships allowed her to broker a thaw, ultimately leading to the fall of the iron curtain, the end of the Soviet Union, and the reunification of Germany.

Keywords: Cold War, Margaret Thatcher, United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Communism, Foreign Policy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor Mgr. Oldřich Kopeček for his guidance and valuable advice while I was working on my bachelor thesis. I also wish to deeply thank my family for their endless support through my studies and my friends for being by my side when needed.

I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

In response to the death of Margaret Thatcher in 2013, the 1939 *Wizard of Oz* song “Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead” rose to number 2 on the BBC radio charts.¹ This “controversial” happening quite accurately illustrates how Thatcher, a three-term British prime minister (1979-1990) and the first female to hold the office, was a truly polarizing figure. That Thatcher’s death was deserving of such a response is debatable. Clearly, it had much to do with Thatcher’s domestic policies, including her conservatism and her belief and support of small government with limited intervention. Of no debate, however, is that Thatcher was a Cold War warrior who devoted her political career to opposing communism, both within the United Kingdom and abroad. This thesis documents that devotion, contending, contrary to the opinions of some, that Thatcher’s political involvement in Cold War-era affairs, and especially her well-cultivated relationships with U.S. president Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, allowed her to successfully play the middle man and hasten the fall of the iron curtain, thereby justifying her moniker, the “Iron Lady.”

¹ “Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead Enters Chart at Number Two,” BBC, 14 April 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-22145306>.

1 MARGARET THATCHER

1.1 Childhood and formative years

1.1.1 Upbringing and education

A second child, Margaret Hilda Roberts was born on 13 October 1925 in Grantham. The family was conservative and religious, both of which would become characteristics she would adopt.²

Margaret's father, Alfred Roberts, was a successful grocery shop owner, but he was also frugal, so she lived with her parents and sister in a modest flat above their shop. Margaret's mother regularly volunteered to help the poor, and instilled in Margaret the importance of doing so.³

According to her biographer, Margaret was a dedicated and diligent student who took her education seriously right from the beginning. At age ten, she won a scholarship to a prestigious girls' school. It was at this school that she developed what would become a lifelong interest in chemistry. In fall 1943, during the height of the Second World War, she was admitted to Oxford. Although a successful student there, she had few friends. This was in part because she was an educated and opinionated young woman, and in part because she gravitated more towards male friendship, and many of the men were off at war.⁴

She took four years to complete her bachelor's degree in chemistry. While thus engaged, she also took an active interest in politics. She joined the Oxford Union Conservative Association (OUCA) and subsequently became its president. Even so, her political opinions differed from most at Oxford. Her outspoken conservatism frustrated many.⁵

² John Campbell, *The Iron Lady* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), chap. 1.

³ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), chap. 1.

⁴ Dean Palmer, *The Queen and Mrs. Thatcher: An Inconvenient Relationship* (Cheltenham: History Press, 2015), chap. 2.

⁵ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 1.

1.1.2 Parent's influence

“Never go with the crowd” was supposedly her father's mantra, and these words stuck with her throughout her life, informing her decision making.⁶ Indeed, she repeatedly recognized her father as a great influence on her life, largely ignoring her mother. What is more, Margaret's discomfort while being around other women or even not having a friendships with girls at school is said to be a result of Margaret's relationship, or lack thereof, with her mother. There was no dispute between them; they just lacked a bond.⁷

The most significant behaviour Margaret took from her father was a highly developed moral sense. She knew right from wrong immediately, and she was confident in this knowledge. Such a sense of rectitude would inform her attitude during the Cold War. Democracy was right, and communism was wrong, and there was no grey area in this regard.⁸

Alfred Roberts, Margaret's biggest influence not only in politic, witnessed only a small part of Margaret's political career; he died in 1970. His death further intensified Thatcher's convictions in her political positions.⁹ However, both, her father and her mother did live long enough to see Margaret Thatcher becoming a Member of Parliament.¹⁰ During Margaret's upbringing, she developed a sense of social responsibility and financial literacy. Furthermore, due to her mother and her emphasis on helping the poor, Margaret continued also in her politics and supported vulnerable groups within society through unemployment benefits or health care services.¹¹

1.2 Margaret Thatcher and politics

Her dad was involved in politics, and since she held him in such high regard, it was natural for her to have political leanings as well.¹²

1.2.1 Beginnings

Her first steps into politics, after finishing her studies, were in 1948 at the Llandudno Conference. Soon after, she became president of the Dartford Conservative Association. Her inauguration speech was witnessed by her father Alfred, and her future husband, Denis

⁶ Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011), chap. 1.

⁷ Palmer, *The Queen and Mrs. Thatcher*, chap. 2.

⁸ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 1.

⁹ David Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), chap. 2.

¹⁰ Margaret Thatcher, *The Autobiography* (New York: Harper Press, 2011), chap. 4.

¹¹ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 1.

¹² Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, chap. 2.

Thatcher, whom she would marry three years later. Denis was also a significant supporter in her political life. Eleven years her senior, his financial security helped her in the beginnings in her career. Two years after their marriage, their twins, Mark and Carol, were born.¹³ These are the only children they would have.

Years of failing in parliamentary elections followed, but although Margaret was not winning, she was reducing the Labour majority in each election.¹⁴ In 1959, Thatcher finally won election and, with twelve other women, became a Member of Parliament as a conservative.

In 1961, Margaret stood for Joint Parliamentary Secretary of Minister of Pensions, an office that she won and held for three years. Then, between 1964 and 1970, she held 6 shadow posts. As a result of these posts, Margaret was gaining valuable experience for the position of prime minister. When Ted Heath replaced Alex Douglas-Home as leader of the Conservative Party in 1965, Margaret shifted to shadowing Housing and Land. Thatcher and Heath did not share mutual sympathies. However, their likeminded political and professional points of view induced Margaret to support Heath as leader for nine years.¹⁵

The election in 1966 led to another change of position. Even then, Margaret was a cause for concern among the men around her, but some, such as Iain Macleod, admired her ability, perseverance and enthusiasm. With the permission of Heath, she joined the Treasury team, and her portfolio expanded to include the post of Treasury and Economic Affairs spokeswoman. She also shadowed the Ministry of Power, thereby gaining knowledge of another public sector.¹⁶

In June 1970, the Conservatives won the general election, and as a result, she was appointed the secretary of state for education, her most prominent role to date. In February 1975, she won her party's leadership, becoming the first woman to hold the post.¹⁷

¹³ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Bibliography*, chap. 5.

¹⁴ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 1.

¹⁵ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 2.

¹⁶ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 4.

¹⁷ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 2.

1.2.2 As prime minister

On May 4, 1979, she became the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom, a post she would hold until 1990 as the longest-serving British prime minister.¹⁸

Foreign policy under Margaret Thatcher had two significant elements with their roots in her growing up during the Second World War. One of them was her innate reverence for the United States and her relationship with Ronald Reagan. Her innate disdain and mistrust of Germans served as the second element. She formed her opinions about them in the 1940s, when her age was most susceptible to influence and shaping. Thatcher's sense of national pride during the war was piqued by Churchill's presentation. With this in mind, she saw how firmly the people of her country stood together in the desire to overthrow Nazi Germany's oppression.¹⁹

During Churchill's reign, he introduced the "Three Circles" policy in 1948 that reflected varying degrees of relevance and engagement for British foreign policy, where Britain's main international interests were concentrated in three overlapping circles: the British Empire and Commonwealth, the English-speaking world and the partnership of Britain and America, and Europe and the rest of the world. When Thatcher took Churchill's position as prime minister, her foreign policy priorities were reshaped from his. Thatcher's foreign policy focus was America and its well established partnership with Britain. This was spurred by a combination of similar principles, economic interests, and a desire to have more influence during the Cold War era.²⁰

Each of her three terms as prime minister had defining moments. For the first term, it was the Falklands War. For the second term, it was the economy and "The Troubles" in Ireland. For the third term, it was the end of the Cold War, which is the subject of the rest of this thesis and will be dealt with in chapter 3.

The timeframe she was prime minister was quite similar to the period during which Ronald Reagan was a president of the United States. He was elected in 1980, and Thatcher admired him right away and endeavoured to work more closely with him.²¹

¹⁸ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 2.

¹⁹ Jonathan Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), chap. 27.

²⁰ David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (London: Red Globe Press London, 1989), chap. 6.

²¹ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 11.

2 THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was a result of political disagreements among the world's great powers, the so-called Grand Alliance, after the Second World War. Post-war, these allies had different world views and opposing social and political ideologies.²²

The disagreements between capitalism and communism date back to the Russian Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the establishment of the Soviet Union as an alternative to capitalism.²³ However, with the world in the throws of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and with Germany as a common enemy, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union were able to sideline their differences. Then came the Yalta Conference in February 1945, during which U.K. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, an ailing U.S. president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin came to an agreement not only about spheres of influence in post-War Europe, but about cooperation against the Japanese.²⁴

Just two months later, Roosevelt was dead, and the new American president, Harry S. Truman, was not happy with the results of Yalta or with Stalin, whom he distrusted. He accused the Soviets of not cooperating and not respecting Yalta's agreements.²⁵

The Potsdam Conference took place in East Germany from July 17 to August 2, 1945. In this conference, the important issues discussed by the representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were the Polish borders and the war in the Pacific. Stalin reiterated his intention to get involved in the war in Asia. Little did he know that he was about to be denied the chance.²⁶

It was in Potsdam that Truman ultimately decided to drop the newly-developed atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Doing so ended the Pacific war before the Soviet Union had a chance to get involved, thereby limiting the post-war Soviet sphere of influence in Asia. This disrupted the relationship between the Big Three, leading Churchill in spring 1946 to refer to the Eastern European areas then under Soviet influence as being behind the "Iron Curtain."²⁷

²² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (London: Penguin Press, 2005), chap. 1.

²³ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), chap. 1.

²⁴ Office of the Historian, "The Yalta Conference, 1945," U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/yalta-conf#:~:text=At%20Yalta%2C%20Roosevelt%20and%20Churchill,of%20influence%20in%20Manchuria%20following.>

²⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 2.

²⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 2.

²⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 2.

In 1947, Truman announced his policy of containment, which came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. The United States would go anywhere in the world and do anything within its power to stop the spread of communism. A key tool to the Truman Doctrine was the Marshall Plan, which gave financial incentives to countries that would reject communism. Indeed, this kept Greece and Turkey from turning communist in 1948. However, it met stiff resistance in Asia, especially after the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb in 1949, thereby balancing might with might.²⁸

2.1 Cold War Military Conflicts

One of the wars happening during the Cold War was a civil war in China between communist leader Mao Zedong and nationalist general Chiang Kai-shek. The USSR supported the Communist party of Mao Zedong, and the allied states supported Kai-shek's government. When the Communists seized Beijing, and Chiang Kai-shek asked for help, he received no response, and China became a fully communist state in 1949.²⁹

The unification of North and South Korea under communist influence was mainly the idea of the leader of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, who convinced Stalin that an attack on South Korea was a good idea. This conflict began in 1950 and lasted for three years, ending in a stalemate, a cease fire that still exists to this day.³⁰

Another war that took place in Asia and directly involved the armies of the Cold War states was the Vietnam War (1962-1975). This conflict was initially neglected because its origins date back to when relations between Washington and Moscow were deteriorating, and when Vietnam was still a French colony. Stalin had died in 1953, replaced by the hardliner Nikita Khrushchev. When Vietnam gained independence from France in 1954, an ideological struggle ensued that divided the country into two halves: a communist north and democratic south. Khrushchev supported the north with money and weapons, while President John F. Kennedy decided to support the South with American troops.³¹

The most critical point in the Cold War era and the event that came closest to nuclear war was the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. The crisis began when Khrushchev decided to install nuclear missiles in Fidel Castro's Cuba, just 90 miles off the U.S. coast. When American spy planes discovered missile sites, the United States imposed a naval blockade on Cuba to stop additional Soviet missile supplies. Heated last-minute

²⁸ Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role*, chap. 6.

²⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 6.

³⁰ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 6.

³¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 6.

negotiations ultimately led to Khrushchev giving up on his efforts to supply Cuba with missiles in exchange for Kennedy agreeing to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey.³²

³² Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 11.

3 THATCHER AND HER IMPORTANCE

Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of Great Britain, played an important role when it came to the fall of the USSR and the decrease of communism in Eastern Europe in general. With her attitudes and opinions, she also did not let her country act with lenience towards this aggressive regime. Although, she was not a head of a global superpower, she still managed to influence the global political situation.

3.1 Thatcher's Alert Diplomacy

3.1.1 Alarming Events

An event that is considered to be the beginning of a period when the United States and Great Britain began to pay close attention and focus on relations with the Soviet Union was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This crucial event that intensified tensions started in December 1979 and raised the concerns of Prime Minister Thatcher and, at that time, American President Jimmy Carter. Both were well aware that it was time to improve East-West relations. This invasion in 1979 supported Thatcher's opinion about the great aggressiveness of the Soviet Union and was deemed by her to be even worse than the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Thatcher was fully aware of the threat of the USSR and tried to mitigate it..³³ The invasion surely had a serious impact on U.S. and U.K. foreign policy. In response, the United States and United Kingdom supported Afghanistan with diplomatic efforts and humanitarian assistance.³⁴

The reaction from the United States was similarly downbeat. Carter stated that the Cold War had been reignited. He increased his criticism of the Soviet Union, exaggerating the situation by labelling Afghanistan as the most significant danger to world peace since the Second World War.³⁵ For the Soviets, Afghanistan was not a direct threat, but for the United States, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was. The United States began supplying Afghan soldiers with weapons. Even so, Thatcher spoke negatively about Carter, evaluating him as a powerless politician uninterested in defending his country.³⁶ When Ronald Reagan became president, he took the Afghan war even more seriously, which was much to Thatcher's liking.³⁷

³³ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 3.

³⁴ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 6.

³⁵ Ian Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster: Europe 1950-2017* (London: Penquin Books, 2018), chap. 7.

³⁶ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 3.

³⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 18.

Moscow labelled this invasion as necessary. Although Afghanistan was not a direct threat to the Soviets, the intervention in Afghanistan aimed to be a defensive action taken to prevent the country from being controlled by forces hostile to the Soviet position. There were also economic connections between the Soviets and Afghanistan that the Soviets desired to protect.³⁸ However, despite a concerted effort, Soviet troops could not achieve a positive result in the fight against the Afghan nationalist rebels.³⁹

On the other hand, this failed military action, combined with continued economic decline, led to a change in political power.⁴⁰ In the end, Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, ordered the full withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was completed in 1989. He took this step as part of his efforts to reform the Soviet system, the ever-deteriorating economic situation, and also to improve relations with the West.⁴¹

Another alarming event for Thatcher, before she set up a meeting in Chequers and thus started to actively engage in improving the international situation and globally icy rapports, was Poland in 1981. The reform movement was never permissible for the Soviets, and the Polish Solidarity movement caused worry and resentment in the Soviet Union. Thatcher was sympathetic to this movement, believing that after long years of Soviet domination, better times were coming with the idea of a freer regime. In 1980, Thatcher had the opportunity to talk to the Polish deputy prime minister during his visit in London and expressed her strong support and excitement about the new, communism-opposing movement and possible changes that might occur.⁴²

Although Solidarity was a Polish concern, the Soviets exerted pressure because they feared that these movements and ideological threats might spread to the rest of the countries under communist rule. At that time, Reagan expressed strong Soviet opposition and threatened a more robust response. As Soviets strongly disagreed with this anticommunist movement, it was obvious that there would be consequences. Thus, Thatcher together with Peter Carrington, the Foreign Secretary and later Secretary General of NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization) began to contemplate actions that would result in consequences for the USSR. They reached a consensus that the imposed

³⁸ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 7

³⁹ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), chap. 20.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Modern Times*, chap. 20.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Modern Times*, chap. 20.

⁴² Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), chap. 6.

sanctions should have a stronger impact on the Soviet Union than on any other country. Subsequently, they had to consider and navigate the intentions of both the Soviet and Polish Governments. Meanwhile, Alexander Haig, the U.S. secretary of state, communicated with Carrington and clarifying that the United States sought immediate political and economic sanctions, with additional measures held in reserve for a potential escalation. They unilaterally announced such sanctions against the Soviet Union.⁴³

The sanctions ordered by the United States, mainly restrictions on technology transfers, trade, and financial transactions, harmed European countries more than the Soviet Union. In her autobiography, Thatcher mentions concerns of British, German and Italian companies and the West Siberian Gas Pipeline. Sanctions ordered by the United States were reconsidered after Thatcher's active approach and efforts to limit them as she was aiming not to harm European allies and minimize negative impacts on Western European economies.⁴⁴

In reality, the Soviets exerted increasing pressure until these events led to the intervention of General Jeruzelski, who decided to declare martial law for the good of the country. Although it might have seemed that Solidarity would help to lead to a better and freer life, the Soviets stuck to Breznev's doctrine, which limited the sovereignty of the Eastern Bloc countries.⁴⁵

3.2 Attitudes to foreign affairs and her anti-communist stance

Margaret Thatcher, a confident leader with complex standards, was well known for her opinion towards communism and the Soviet Union. She supported the European Economic Community (later the European Union), and was interested in books expressing opinions against communism. They strengthened her convictions on the benefits of personal freedom, free enterprise, and minimal government involvement. Her sympathies towards the free market increased and were influenced by her colleague from the Conservative party, Keith Joseph, who established a Centre for Policy Studies, which Thatcher chaired in 1974.⁴⁶ The free market became a key feature of her political ideology.⁴⁷

⁴³Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 6.

⁴⁴ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 6.

⁴⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 6.

⁴⁶ Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), chap. 6.

⁴⁷ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 8.

Her ideology of political and economic policies was controversial, and while her approach resonated with some, it turned off many others. She took a straightforward approach when it came to decision-making, which divided the citizenry. Regarding economic issues, her opinions remained in line with 19th-century liberalism. She claimed that “free trade and market regulations without government intervention and control were the keys to national prosperity and strength.”⁴⁸ Thatcherism is based on the idea of privatization, self-reliance and deregulation.⁴⁹ Johnson considers Thatcher and Thatcherism as “a global influence.”⁵⁰

Thatcher’s domestic politics attitudes and opinions were also reflected in her foreign policy and, more importantly, in her opposition to communism. Her thoughts in this direction began to be shaped by her father’s upbringing, and developed over time. Later, as a conservative, she automatically held policies that were directly in conflict with the ideology of communism. Her emphasis on human rights, individualism and equality was fundamentally at odds with Soviet policies. Her hostility to communism was also strengthened during her travels to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, where she observed the lack of individual freedom and many political restrictions. Further, Thatcher’s views were buttressed by Reagan’s. Both were opposed to totalitarian systems and were supporters of free-market capitalism and individual liberty.⁵¹

The initial years of her premiership were not overly positive, as unemployment in Britain rose by three million within four years. Despite the controversy that was coupled with her name at home, Margaret Thatcher remained determined to maintain these policies and persevere.⁵²

Going back to foreign policy, an immense influence on Margaret Thatcher’s foreign attitudes was Hugh Thomas, who significantly impacted Thatcher by putting her in touch with prominent experts who favoured a harsher approach against Communism. Their influence was more extensive during the times before she took office. She also benefited and learned from the opposition, where she relied on political allies for guidance and in government, and she profited from her experiences in the Foreign Office. Thatcher’s

⁴⁸ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 7.

⁴⁹ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 7.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Modern Times*, chap. 20.

⁵¹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 6.

⁵² Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 7.

relationship with the Foreign Office was not friendly and cheerful, but she still found people there whom she could trust and whom shared similar views.⁵³

During Thatcher's eleven and half years as prime minister, she worked with several foreign ministers, but she got along best with Geoffrey Howe. Their cooperation was a balance between her assertive behaviour and his measured manners. At first, Howe shared Thatcher's political opinions, and meetings between him and his counterparts in Eastern European countries contributed to the improvement of West-East relations. Subsequently, their opinions began to divide, and this dispute resulted in Howe's resignation followed by a resignation speech criticizing Thatcher in 1990.⁵⁴

Her stance towards communism became known to the world through her speeches. Thatcher's first significant speech after becoming a leader of the Conservative Party focused on her approach to the Communist bloc, which was a harbinger of things to come. She adopted a more aggressive stance than the Labour administration and Reginald Maudling, whom she had chosen to serve as her shadow foreign secretary. Margaret Thatcher presented the speech to Lord Home, who offered encouraging comments after Robert Conquest had been enlisted to counsel her and compose the address. In that speech, Thatcher unequivocally criticized communism and the Soviet regime, considering it a misguided and foolish ideology.⁵⁵

With another speech in 1976, she strengthened her anti-Soviet credentials even more. In the speech, she wished to emphasize the severe threats the Soviet Union posed. This "Iron Lady speech" was delivered in Kensington Town Hall.⁵⁶ Many politicians were proud of her, even from the other parties and the opposition. All in all, her views towards the Eastern world and the Soviet regime were still forming and later were clearly defined, but fundamental political changes and engagements did not occur until after the Chequers meeting in 1983.⁵⁷

In the fight against communism, Thatcher was often criticized. Some, whether citizens or politicians, later held the opinion that she had gone too far with the engagement with Mikhail Gorbachev and USSR. To illustrate this point, George Urban had been directing Radio Free Europe since 1983 and was happy with her communist attitudes at first.

⁵³ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 6.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 16.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 6.

⁵⁶ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 10.

⁵⁷ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 6.

However, his opinion on this later changed since he felt that her sympathy towards Gorbachev was too much. He was by no means the first or the last of her critics.⁵⁸

On the other hand, that determination went a long way towards improving the whole East-West situation. Gorbachev knew he could count on having Thatcher as an essential foreign partner, and this was significant in the communication of these two leaders.⁵⁹

When it comes to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Thatcher did not share sympathy with their politics.⁶⁰ Their opinions and attitudes on the matter were such that changes in the Soviet Union were not on the agenda, so trying for a change would not make any sense. Concerning the Foreign Office, the views on international affairs varied. A small group of politicians within the FCO shared similar views as Thatcher. They, as a minority in the FCO, advocated more emphasis and determination for changes and were convinced that they had to go against it thoroughly and confidentially. Later, she separated the FCO into two groups based on their opinions. The first one was the one that she still did not like at all, that was the FCO as the institution itself, and in the other, there were people who shared the same views as her and with whom she had a close relationship based on political opinions and opinions on the Soviet Union. These also worked in her office and stayed by Thatcher's side at 10 Downing Street.⁶¹

It is essential to note that while Thatcher was very active in foreign policy, although sometimes criticized for her approaches and leadership style, it was not as much criticism as she had to endure domestically. Her domestic policies have come under fire for having considerable influence on many facets of society. Critics claim her reforms frequently disproportionately benefitted certain groups while ignoring the interests of others. These worries fuelled the extreme polarization of opinions about her politics. All in all, even Thatcher was not a politician who managed everything brilliantly in all positions and in all sectors. It is common for most politicians, and she was no exception.⁶²

3.2.1 Her accomplishments and turning point in foreign affairs

One of the crucial moments and accomplishments during her first term and the event that shaped her as the prime minister was the Falkland War in 1982, when Argentina attempted

⁵⁸ George R. Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher: An Insider's View* (London: Tauris, 1996), at, e.g., 168–69 and 190–91. Quoted in Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 6.

⁵⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 5.

⁶⁰ FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) was later changed to FO (Foreign Office) as a simplification of the name without any crucial change of in the functions.

⁶¹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

⁶² Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 8.

to occupy the Falkland Islands. Then, Thatcher did not give up and responded harshly, orchestrating a British victory in 74 days.⁶³

It was the election in 1983, when Thatcher entered her second term as prime minister. At that time, she had her significant accomplishment in the Falkland War and felt it was time to examine different parts of her policy. Furthermore, as the British politicians were concerned that the Cold War was not going well, John Coles and Sir Anthony Parsons assisted her in realizing that when it came to the relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, she should take a look at recent events and the potential future of it.⁶⁴ After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Reagan and Thatcher shared the same fear that events could quickly escalate and wanted to discuss the issue of weapons with the Soviet Union. Based on these circumstances, a seminar was held in 1983 at Chequers. Under the direction of Thatcher, prominent members of the British government gathered to collect as much information as possible regarding East-West relations and the Soviet Union.⁶⁵

The FCO was in favour of a new assessment. However, they also added their belief that the FCO should be involved in the Chequers seminar and that they would play their part.⁶⁶ Thatcher disagreed and was uncompromising.⁶⁷ Overall, it is demonstrable that the meeting in 1983, and the advice and comments of all who attended, contributed to a change in foreign policy and in the British and international approaches.⁶⁸

A year after the Chequers seminar, another meeting based on this topic was held, but on an international level. It was between Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in December 1984. This summit was held at Camp David, with the main aim to discuss issues such as defence, global affairs and at the same time to strengthen the relations and international cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States. They discussed their approach to the Soviet Union and broader strategy during the Cold War. Part of the talks concerned Soviet policies and how their activities affected Eastern Europe. During this summit, talks regarding the Strategic Defence Initiative prevailed. Reagan introduced SDI to Thatcher, describing it as a needed defensive system.. As one of her tactics to achieve her political goals here, she took an aggressive position on matters of national security and pushed for a strong defensive stance and tight coordination with the United States. The issue of East-

⁶³ Claire Berlinsky, *There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), chap. 3.

⁶⁴ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

⁶⁵ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 16.

⁶⁶ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

⁶⁷ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 7.

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

West relations became Thatcher's political subject number one, and she was determined about it.⁶⁹ When it came to foreign affairs, her experiences since her first term in office improved.⁷⁰

3.3 Thatcher's political relationships

Above all, Thatcher was known for her deep relations with the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States. The most crucial political relationship, which was important from a historical point of view and significantly influenced more than one political event, was undoubtedly the one with Ronald Reagan.⁷¹

Thatcher was the politician to whom Ronald Reagan felt the most genuine and closest relationship. For Gorbachev and the political situation between East and West, Thatcher made sure that a well-built rapport was established too. She knew that if she wanted to contribute to the relations between East and West, it had to be done by influencing more powerful leaders with her views. Among the other prime ministers, she managed to stand out from the crowd, and, as a representative of Great Britain, she tackled the relationship with the Soviet Union with great determination. To exemplify, apart from Churchill, who met with a representative of the Soviet Union no fewer than a few times in the framework of the alliance with America and the Soviet Union, she had the most meetings and discussions with the leader of the Soviet Union, at that time, with Mikhail Gorbachev.⁷²

Percy Cradock, her foreign adviser, wrote, "Mrs Thatcher came close to claiming that she had discovered, even invented, Gorbachev; her meetings and debates with him were deliberately high profile and added to her, and Britain's, international standing. More seriously, she acted as a conduit from Gorbachev to Reagan, selling him to Washington as a man to do business with and operating as an agent of influence in both directions."⁷³

This statement by Cradock describes the influence Thatcher had on the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States. It was the relations of the leaders with Thatcher and the relations between the leaders themselves, who sometimes needed a little help in

⁶⁹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

⁷⁰ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 16.

⁷¹ Nicholas Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: A Political Marriage* (New York: Sentinel, 2008), introduction.

⁷² Brown, *The Human Factor*, introduction.

⁷³ Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London: John Murray, 1997), 201. Quoted in Brown, *The Human Factor*, introduction.

discussing and solving military issues, as these were the most frequently discussed topics, and not every meeting ended with a resolution.

On the other hand, there is also the opinion of Cannadine, who describes Thatcher as an unimportant player in the solution of the East-West relations. According to him, she presented herself higher than she should have, and even though she was the first one to find Gorbachev as a significant politician with reformist thoughts, he claims that when Gorbachev met Reagan, they got along, and Thatcher's opinions did not have any weight.⁷⁴

Thatcher had the most significant influence on foreign policy events when she, Gorbachev and Reagan were all three in power. Her position became important when she initiated the discussions between East and West in the mid-1980s.⁷⁵

3.3.1 Thatcher and Reagan

This relationship of two conservatives worked from the beginning. Thatcher, the fresh leader of the Conservative party, and Reagan, the governor of California, first met in London in 1975.⁷⁶

The UK's prime minister and the U.S. president had multiple things in common from many stages of their lives. As leaders, they had different leadership systems and principles, and their attitudes from time to time differed. They kept in touch often, which confirmed their sincerely-made rapport. Not every time did they agree with each other, but they publicly presented that they were in lock-step. It was probably a defence mechanism so they would still act as self-confident leaders who stick together both humanly and politically.⁷⁷

Ronald Reagan was born in 1911, and, like Thatcher, his childhood and adolescence influenced him in his later political life and the ideas and thinking therein. Reagan grew up with his mother, Nelle Clyde Reagan, alcohol-inclined father, Jack Edward Reagan, and his older brother Neil Reagan.⁷⁸ Reagan felt a solid and nice relationship towards his dad. He adored his speaking ability, which he inherited and which helped him in Hollywood and later in his political career.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 1.

⁷⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 3.

⁷⁶ Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher*, introduction.

⁷⁷ Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher*, introduction.

⁷⁸ Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher*, chap. 1.

⁷⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

Reagan was not initially aiming to be a politician after graduating from a college, instead hoping to become an actor. He began his career as a radio sports announcer. Later, he made many connections, including contacts in the film industry, and became a trendy actor.⁸⁰

Before becoming a Republican in the early 1960s, he was a Democrat following his father's example and was a big fan of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As for his opinions on foreign policy and thoughts on other ideologies, his anti-Communist attitudes began to take shape in the late 1940s.⁸¹

After winning the presidential election in 1980, he made sure that Thatcher was the first foreign leader to visit Washington. By doing this, Reagan aimed to show the importance of Thatcher as a significant Western political leader. This rapport happened to be personal and honest, and also beneficial from the political point of view.⁸²

If there was some disagreement on Thatcher's side, then she expressed herself strongly and directly. The Cold War was the most significant issue for their discussions, where their views, opinions and thoughts coalesced clearly most of the time.⁸³

The main misunderstandings and disagreements between Thatcher and Reagan were about the nuclear-free world and the reunification of Germany. With this in mind, while holding meetings and summits that were aimed to improve relations and possibly end the Cold War, the main topics discussed were the reduction of nuclear arms and also disarmament in general. The essential talks were usually held between Reagan and Gorbachev, while Thatcher played an influencing role between them. Although not every meeting was fruitful, and naturally, there were several disagreements, these meetings were slowly improving East-West relations.⁸⁴

The relationship Thatcher and Reagan was solidified by her trip to the United States in February 1981. At that time, there was advice from The National Security Council and the State Department that the Conservative administration was not that popular and that the economic measures did not have the desired effects. Nonetheless, Reagan overcame these qualms, expressing his satisfaction with the similarities between his and Thatcher's overarching ideologies in economics and attitude towards foreign affairs with stress on

⁸⁰ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁸¹ Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher*, chap. 1.

⁸² Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁸³ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁸⁴ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

military might.⁸⁵ However, there was massive disagreement in the case of nuclear weapons. She stated that the argument which forced her not to accept the idea of a world without nuclear weapons was that science could not be stopped and there would always be new weapon inventions.⁸⁶ With her concern about denuclearization, she still supported the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) agreement and this despite fearing that British nuclear weapons could be in danger of becoming obsolete. Her unwavering support for nuclear deterrence was one of Thatcher's most notable accomplishment. She understood the value of preserving a robust defense as deterrence to eventual Soviet Bloc assault. She pushed for NATO's INF to be stationed in Europe, sending a strong signal of Western cooperation and commitment. Regarding the Reykjavik summit in 1986, attended by Reagan and Gorbachev, it was the similarly positive views of the two leaders on denuclearization that Thatcher was worried about.⁸⁷

One of the other shared mutual misunderstandings was in October 1983 when Reagan gave the green light to the American invasion of Grenada, a former British colony that had just recently left the Commonwealth. Furthermore, although U.S. soldiers assaulted a left-wing gathering, in the eyes of the British government, it should have been handled differently, and steps should have been taken under the thorough consideration of all parties involved. Based on this and Thatcher's disagreement with Reagan's actions, she was accused of being weak on communism. These accusations were misplaced, since the meeting in 1983, she had been constantly working on improving relations and confirmed this with her visit to Communist Hungary in February 1984.⁸⁸

3.3.2 Reagan and the Soviet Union

For a better understanding of the conflicts and how Margaret Thatcher contributed to the end of the Cold War with her stances and influences, it is essential to describe Reagan's relationship with the Soviet world.

Reagan's foreign policy throughout his two terms as president, it varied. His first years in office were dedicated to robust foreign policy. He was aware that to ensure superiority in dealing with the Soviet Union, the United States had to improve defence and its foreign posture.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 5.

⁸⁶ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

⁸⁷ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

⁸⁸ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

⁸⁹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 18.

After delivering quite a calm policy, Reagan gave two speeches that caused several parties to be confused and alert. In one of the speeches, he called the Soviet Union the “evil empire,” contrasting the new foreign policies where the United States only called for some, not particular crucial changes. In the other speech, Reagan introduced the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), which confused the Soviet Union authorities as well as the associates from Europe. Nevertheless, as the Soviet Union’s relations with other countries and their leaders worsened and the Cold War grew colder, Reagan was open to any options to protect the United States from a possible nuclear attack. Although opinions on SDI varied it became official American policy in 1983.⁹⁰

SDI raised many questions, but the leadership of the Soviet Union did not react immediately and directly. Instead, they made sure that there were quite a few responses against the stronger opinions from the US towards the Soviet Union. The most fundamental component of the response was to sustain the Soviet Union’s arms program fully, and the Politburo also decided to meet their East European partners to discuss their unity and partnership. Parts of the discussion were also relationships with China and Japan, as they wanted to build a united front against Reagan’s new behaviour towards the Soviet Union.⁹¹

Thatcher claimed that SDI had been fully developed and examined before its proper role was known. Still, it was considered a significant factor in the unsuccessful summit in Reykjavik in October 1986 attended by Gorbachev and Reagan.⁹²

Meanwhile, there was still a greater tension between the superpowers. The countries noticed every detail and looked for a pretext for danger in almost everything. There was NATO training in 1983, in which nuclear weapons were tested, making the Russians insecure.⁹³

With these tensions, George Shultz, the US secretary of state, united administrative members such as Secretary of Defence Weinberger, CIA chief Casey, Marine Corps officer McFarlane, Vice-President Bush, Attorney General Meese and Foreign Service Officer Matlock. These meetings aimed to generate ideas on establishing a peaceful line between the United States and the Soviet Union. They wished for a discussion with the Soviet

⁹⁰ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁹¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 7.

⁹² Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

⁹³ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 7.

Union, the aim of which would be some concrete actions and improvements and not only words.⁹⁴

Reagan stated that ‘if the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace. Together we can strengthen peace, reduce the level of arms, and know in doing so, we have helped fulfil the hopes and dreams of those we represent and, indeed, of people everywhere. Let us begin now.’⁹⁵ Meanwhile, a slight change in Reagan’s opinion on the Soviet Union appeared. It was 1984 when he met Mika Spiljak, the president of Yugoslavia, who advised him to try to reach the leadership of the Soviet Union and be more open towards new possible agreements and rules. He also noted that Reagan should try to realize that he was not the only one afraid of the conflict with the Soviet Union, but also the ordinary people of the Soviet Union were afraid of Reagan’s defensive steps and attacks, and so the fear was mutual. However, Reagan and Shultz, reaching Chernenko, the leader of the Soviet Union and Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, were not successful at all.⁹⁶

The feedback from the Soviet Union came in June 1984, when a US delegation was invited to Vienna for a meeting. The calculated action was designed to be rejected, thereby making the United States look bad. Deputy National Security Advisor McFarlane responded with a counter-proposal, that if SDI was to be addressed, INF and START should also be discussed. With this, the Russians backed out of the meeting.⁹⁷ The Soviet Union then counted on the fact that Reagan would not win re-election, but when this appeared unlikely, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko finally accepted an invitation to the White House. It was not the first time these leaders had the opportunity to see each other in person, but the first time while Reagan was the president of the United States. The discussion did not lead to any significant conclusions or possible changes, but at least it was done with decency.⁹⁸

Ronald Reagan first met with Gorbachev at a summit in Geneva in November 1985. In June of the same year, Gorbachev proposed the improvement of their countries’ rapport in a letter. Before the Geneva summit, Thatcher made a few comments on the best possible

⁹⁴ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁹⁵ Robert Blackwell to Laurence S. Eaglebruger, United Kingdom (01/31/1983–02/05/1983), Box 20, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Country File, Reagan Presidential Library Archives. Quoted in Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁹⁶ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

⁹⁷ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4; INF stands for Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force, and START stands for Strategic Arms Reduction Talks

⁹⁸ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

scenario. Gorbachev requested her support in banning nuclear weapons, and Thatcher sent a letter to Reagan with topics that needed examination. She proposed topics such as arms control, SDI or a detailed examination of Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty possibilities. They were also discussing human rights. She also expressed how crucial it was for international relations to be actively engaged at that meeting.⁹⁹ The summit was not fruitful from the political point of view, but at least they established a positive relationship.¹⁰⁰

3.3.3 Thatcher in Hungary

In order to develop relations with the Soviets, Thatcher made a trip to Hungary in 1984. She was well aware that a closer rapport and cooperation with the Soviet Union was difficult and could be eased by starting to engage with Eastern Europe.¹⁰¹

This occasion took on importance and symbolism for the reason that it was her first visit to a country behind the Iron Curtain. Hungary, a member of the Warsaw Pact, was not chosen by chance, but based on several factors that set it apart from other communist countries under Soviet rule.¹⁰²

Firstly, she pointed out that Hungary was a country with increased liberation and reform-minded thoughts compared to other Soviet countries. However, when she met György Lázár, the prime minister of Hungary, who appeared to be loyal to the communist system, she was immediately told the reason why loyalty was that important. Questioning the Soviet system was not tolerated, and economic reforms, together with extended freedom, stemmed from the fact that Hungary was obediently devoted and loyal to the Soviet system and communism. Subsequently, the better economic conditions in the country were also influenced by the actions of the Hungarian president János Kádár, who utilized economic connections with Western countries so that he could provide his citizens with a decent standard of living.¹⁰³

Another factor that contributed to the choice of Hungary was Thatcher's interest in getting some overview of the current happenings in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴ However, the leader of the Soviet Union, Andropov, passed away shortly after her visit. With the

⁹⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 2.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 16.

¹⁰² Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, chap. 16.

¹⁰³ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

decision to attend his funeral, she aimed to get to know a new person appointed to the position of the Soviet leader, and that was Konstantin Chernenko.¹⁰⁵

Thatcher appeared to be determined to create closer ties with the Soviet Union, and in her autobiography, she again describes the circumstances of the first invitation to Gorbachev, who was not yet a Soviet leader at that time, to Great Britain. She felt that inviting Gorbachev and not the current leader, Chernenko, was a better idea and marked that invitation as an important one.¹⁰⁶

Besides the fact that Thatcher visited Hungary in order to deliver a message of support for the Eastern Bloc aiming for further independence and reform, there was also an effort to work on economic and political relations between Hungary and the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁷

3.3.4 Thatcher and Gorbachev

Thatcher's first contact with the Soviet Union was in 1979 during her flight to Tokyo for the G7 summit (organization of countries with world's largest economies). Her plane was permitted to refuel in Moscow, and because everyone was curious about the British Iron Lady, the petrol pump turned into an almost 2-hour visit with dinner at the airport, where the British crew were well taken care of and entertained. The main representative of the Soviet Union at this meeting was Alexej Kosygin, who, despite the fact that he was considered one of the possible reformists, still promoted the Soviet Union as peacekeepers and harmless. Thatcher openly disagreed with this, and after talking about the issue of armaments and defence, their airport meeting ended with a discussion about people fleeing the horrible regime of communist Vietnam, where Thatcher stood on their side, and Kosygin viewed these people as criminals.¹⁰⁸

The first opportunity for Thatcher and Gorbachev to meet was Gorbachev's trip to Great Britain in December 1984. At that time, Gorbachev was not yet the leader, but the meeting had a major influence on his ongoing political thinking.¹⁰⁹

Being a representative of the Communist Party since 1952, it was March 1985 when Gorbachev came into power as the Soviet leader. In this period, East-West relations continued deteriorating, and the dissension was unbearable. Gorbachev's attitude towards foreign policy made him aware of the possibility of the Cold War going beyond control.

¹⁰⁵ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹⁰⁶ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹⁰⁷ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

Having a perception of this catastrophic scenario, his mindset and thoughts led to significant changes in the entire Soviet Union as a whole. They simultaneously led to the dissolution of the tensions among the countries involved in the Cold War.¹¹⁰

Mikhail Gorbachev was born on 2 March 1931, and from the beginning of his political career, he was optimistic about the possible changes in the regime and liked the idea of more unrestricted communication and a free exchange of views, both at that time taboo topics.¹¹¹ However, he was aiming to reform the existing system, not end it permanently.¹¹² His thinking and opinions about increased political freedom were still evolving, but that being said, the thought about a radical change of the whole system came no earlier than 1988.¹¹³

Among the Soviet Union's top leaders, whether in foreign or domestic policy, Gorbachev demonstrated the greatest desire to acquire knowledge. Various sources of information document his ideas and thoughts. One of them was his international visits. Before becoming the leader of the Soviet Union, he made three important international excursions. Except for the significant trip to Great Britain, there was also a trip to Canada in 1983. The Soviet delegation accepted the invitation of the Canadian Minister of Agriculture, Eugene Whelan, as a return visit. As already indicated, the purpose of this visit was primarily agricultural. However, from a historical point of view and Gorbachev's thinking, the impact was much greater. Among other things, Gorbachev also got into a conversation with the Soviet ambassador to Canada, Aleksandr Yakovlev, who would later become a significant associate of Gorbachev at the time of the Soviet *perestroika*. He provided Gorbachev with his experience and opinions and had the strength to face the military-industrial complex despite being a Second World War veteran.¹¹⁴

Gorbachev was well aware that there was already a well-established relationship between Reagan and Thatcher. So, he did not hesitate to learn about both countries' foreign policies and for the first meeting with Thatcher, he came well prepared. The UK Parliament sent the invitation, but it was the conversation and discussion with Thatcher

¹¹⁰ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 1.

¹¹¹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 1.

¹¹² Theodore R. Brotmund, "How Margaret Thatcher Helped to End the Cold War," The Heritage Foundation, September 28, 2009, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/how-margaret-thatcher-helped-end-the-cold-war>.

¹¹³ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 3.

that was highly expected. This meeting took place in December 1984 and meant much in terms of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵

Thatcher entered the discussion by criticising the functioning and the politics of the Soviet Union, via examples. Considering the world situation at that time, international relations were the main topic. Thatcher wished to discuss arms control. From what she learnt in Hungary, these important topics should be discussed in a calm tone.¹¹⁶

Part of the topic was President Reagan's defence system, SDI, which led to many opinions at the table. While Thatcher was on Reagan's side on this, Gorbachev was the opposite. However, her opinion was under the conditions that this anti-ballistic program was only intended for defence and that, realistically, it probably would not even be used. Additionally, while defending Reagan's SDI, she was well aware that she was just an intermediary between Gorbachev and Reagan for East-West relations to develop for the better.¹¹⁷

Later in his life, Gorbachev said how major the U.K. trip was for him and his thoughts. In conclusion, Gorbachev, at the 1984 meeting, presented himself as a politician who was knowledgeable, capable of open discussion and not afraid to express his opinions and attitudes. The conversations at the meetings flowed without any problems, with Gorbachev relying only on himself, and the political representatives from the United Kingdom were delighted with his political performance. He made a good impression. Regarding this, Thatcher and Reagan saw the possibility of change, and both knew that not letting go of the well-established relations with Gorbachev could help relieve the aggravated situation with the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ Denis Healey, as Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary and an experienced and respected gentleman, stated that Gorbachev was an unusual Soviet politician with good a personality and solid politics.¹¹⁹

Gorbachev's progressive outlook on political issues and situations came from various origins and experiences. Studying at Moscow University, his education was higher than the others in the Politburo. Another factor contributing to his behaviour and political choices was living out of the capital for a long time and experiencing the centralized bureaucracy. Equally significant factors were discussions with those experienced internationally and who knew how the system works in other countries. These politicians

¹¹⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

¹¹⁶ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹¹⁷ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 3.

¹¹⁹ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 28.

from the top Soviet leadership with the knowledge of the Western countries influenced his thoughts as much as did the crucial visit to the United Kingdom and meeting with Thatcher and others.¹²⁰

Some concerns were also raised. These were mainly about his age and lack of experience before becoming the General Secretary and the style of his leadership together with educational background. Criticism came, for example, from the older generation of politicians who figured during the Stalinist government and did not recognize the younger generation's capabilities. His openness towards reforms was criticized by hardline communists and traditionalists who felt like it is weakening the regime.¹²¹

Still, there were those who saw potential and a new perspective in him, be it within the Soviet Union or internationally. He was viewed as a possible actor who might lead the Soviet Union toward political and economic changes in centralized structure that had defined Soviet politics for many years. With this in mind, it was the mid-1980s when Gorbachev introduced *perestroika* and *glasnost*, his two major reforms. Perestroika (transformation/reconstruction) was mainly an economic reform promoting private ownership, greater autonomy and influence over decisions. It aimed to revive the Soviet economy. Glasnost (openness), was aiming to encourage political openness and transparency as a whole new political strategy. It included more freedom of speech, political debates and less censorship. These and other reforms allowed new possibilities for the communist world and modernization of the system. At the same time, they played a part in the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 by creating an unstable situation inside the Soviet Bloc.¹²²

3.3.5 Thatcher in Moscow and Poland (1987-1988)

These two visits, which Thatcher made at an advanced stage of negotiations on relations with the Soviet Union, take on importance precisely because they took place in the course of already implemented reforms and a slowly changing system in the Soviet Union. For these visits, a wave of criticism fell on Thatcher for several reasons. She has been criticized for focusing on foreign affairs more than her domestic politics, and also for drawing attention to herself ahead of the upcoming elections.

¹²⁰ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 3.

¹²¹ Raymond Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Red Globe Press, 1997), chap. 7.

¹²² Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, chap. 6.

In addition to being symbolic, Thatcher's trip to Moscow in 1987 had other goals too. She visited Moscow well prepared to discuss significant points and next steps in East-West relations. But, she was not aiming to make the visit in order to represent the West. The trip was preceded by a meeting in Chequers, where Thatcher discussed the situation in the USSR with Sovietologists of two opposite opinions. During this debate, they jointly came to the opinion that the end of the Soviet era is not foreseen despite the introduced reforms and changes. Gorbachev still retained the communist regime and all the powers that go with it. Still, while Thatcher made sure that she is familiar with Gorbachev's speeches and his newest political opinions, she felt that there might be a slightly different message in them. More precisely, it was the speech from January 1987 that Thatcher found different, with Gorbachev's positive thoughts on democratizing Soviet politics. Gorbachev expressed an open mind towards upcoming elections and the number of seats that would be democratic in practice. Gorbachev's reforms had already begun to show modest economic improvement, and progress in human rights had also been seen. Thatcher also discussed those during her visit to Moscow. But, what they still needed to work on was greater freedom. Concerns were also about the reaction from the army and the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*). The last part of Thatcher's Moscow visit preparation was gathering in No. 10, where she gathered her last opinions and got an idea what exactly to discuss. Advice came from the Soviet Ambassador, the Pentagon's Director of the SDI programme, and also from human rights activists.¹²³

The visit was also preceded by Thatcher's proposal to the Americans, regarding greater awareness of the Soviet Union about their SDI system, in order to avoid unnecessary uncertainty. However, this proposal was met with disapproval by the Americans. Other leaders that Thatcher contacted for a meeting before Moscow were French president Mitterrand and German chancellor Kohl. They all agreed that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev had a chance to succeed in loosening the regime and bringing about change.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, none of them had any idea that the changes would come so quickly and on such a scale.

The trip itself was full of visiting places and also talking to Russian people, especially those in a Russian Orthodox monastery. She expressed her solidarity and good intentions. A significant point of this visit was obviously the discussion between Thatcher and Gorbachev in the Kremlin. They both seemed well prepared with studying each other's

¹²³ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

¹²⁴ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

speeches and knowing their latest political actions and opinions. First, they entered the discussion with talks on both conservatism and Communism, and how they viewed the systems in their countries. Then, discussion turned to the central topic of arms control and nuclear disarmament. Thatcher and Gorbachev contributed to continued efforts to reduce Cold War tensions by looking at ways to reduce nuclear arsenals and advance global security. This issue was generally a tricky one, as Gorbachev was not yet willing to accept this option. And as Thatcher was not quick to accept either, this problem remained unsolved. The discussion then proceeded to the human rights and economics. She went there to mainly show goodwill, but it also gave her the opportunity to have an in-depth conversation on important topics and contribute to the still ongoing debate between the Western countries and the USSR. Finally, the interesting part of the visit for Thatcher were three TV interviews, which, as she saw later, influenced the Soviet opinion on arms control. Generally, it was very important for her to be talked about in foreign media and to get her view's into people's minds. She saw it as a path to possible change and good publicity.¹²⁵

The other trip, where Thatcher visited Poland in 1988, was an important diplomatic occasion. It was intended to interact with Polish political figures, such as General Wojciech Jaruzelski, and to encourage current reforms and political changes in the nation. Jaruzelski urged Thatcher to visit Poland, when the Polish economy was failing and the Solidarity movement strengthening. She came, but under the condition to meet the Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa. Her goal of this visit was to promote her strategy that began in Hungary in 1984 to approach the nations of the former Soviet Union and to help them with human rights and reforms. This visit demonstrated her dedication to working with Eastern European nations and her determination to further peace, collaboration and democratic principles.¹²⁶

The very influential person during her visit in Poland was the leader of the Catholic Church and a respected person on Poland, Pope John Paul II. Due to his status as a potent defender of freedom, human rights and the symbol of opposition to communism, he was of great significance to Poland and its people. He provided moral support, symbolism of Solidarity and symbol of change.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 16.

¹²⁶ Claire Berlinsky, *There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, chap. 5.

¹²⁷ Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, chap. 38.

4 THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Multiple factors contributed to the end of the Cold War. Gorbachev's decision to change liberalization with partial democratization was crucial to new foreign policy.¹²⁸ Gorbachev's reforms and willingness to cooperate with the leaders from the West also played a significant role. Coupled with the bad condition of the Soviet economy, all of these factors led to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Socialist states faced a significant challenge not only in Europe, but the scale of these changes was worldwide.¹²⁹

As it was for the beginning of the war, there were also different opinions about the end. For Gorbachev, the Cold War ended in 1989 due to his reforms that made the system volatile, allowed for revolutions in the Eastern Bloc countries, followed by the rejection of the Brezhnev Doctrine and support for the reunification of Germany.¹³⁰

Thatcher played a variety of roles towards the conclusion of the Cold War. The combination of alliance building, diplomacy, and commitment provided a strong reaction to the changing international environment. Many players and facts contributed, but Thatcher's determination, influence, dynamic leadership and political relations cannot be understated.

4.1 Democratization of the Eastern Bloc

The end of the communist era by the end of the 1980s was predicted based on the economic situation and on improving East-West relationships thanks to Gorbachev's reforms. Therefore, the surprise was not the fall of the Soviet Union and the liberalization of the Eastern Bloc but rather the speed with which the changes took place.¹³¹

With the gradual loosening of the regime and signs of the establishment of democracy, the Eastern Bloc had the best chance to finally get rid of the Communist regime. During 1989, new regime rules in Moscow and increased tolerance contributed to the fact that any attempt to end communism might be successful, and citizens did not hesitate to act towards freedom. These factors served as catalysts for change throughout the Eastern Bloc, where Western insights were still becoming more present. The changes in Poland and Hungary were the ice-breakers. Additionally, Gorbachev did not take any preventive measures to

¹²⁸ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 7.

¹²⁹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 21.

¹³⁰ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 22.

¹³¹ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019), chap. 24.

prevent the coup from happening. Instead, he wanted Eastern Europe to apply his *glasnost* and *perestroika*.¹³²

The first remarkable elections were held in Poland. The Solidarity movement began to resurface in 1988. With Gorbachev's blessing, discussions were held, and the Polish opposition had quite a fruitful conversation with the government. Solidarity could not be more satisfied with the result as they agreed that in the upcoming parliamentary election, about half of the seats would be allocated to their movement.¹³³

Following Poland, Hungary took its chance too. Compared to the other Warsaw Pact Countries, Hungary's communist policies were already weaker. Still, improvements were much needed. At first, the law allowing more than one political party was voted on. Then, there was a discussion between the communist party and the opposition, leading to the possibility of free and direct presidential elections. Lastly, Hungary became a republic without the status of a Communist state. The start of the collapse of the GDR began with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 December 1989.¹³⁴

The fact that some countries of the Eastern Bloc essentially freed themselves from Soviet domination without any interference by the Soviets provoked other countries to act too. Bulgaria's political coup happened right after the Berlin Wall had fallen. At a later stage, the process of change known as the Velvet Revolution, also began in Czechoslovakia.¹³⁵

Romania happened to be the only country where the government used brutal measures to maintain power. In addition, it was a country where the Soviets did not have that much power. Ultimately, the communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife were killed on Christmas Eve in 1989.¹³⁶

Thatcher has been criticized for attributing these events entirely to herself and her collaboration with Reagan, when in fact they played only minor and unimportant roles.¹³⁷

Despite Thatcher being happy to see these world changes, she was subsequently unhappy with some of the results, especially coming out of Germany.¹³⁸

As a part of Thatcher's ongoing involvement in international matters following the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, she made trips to Eastern European

¹³² Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, chap. 6.

¹³³ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 22.

¹³⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 22.

¹³⁵ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 12.

¹³⁶ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 12.

¹³⁷ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 7.

¹³⁸ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 7.

nations. Some of the aims were to build ties between the UK and the newly independent countries, to help the developing democracies, and to advance free-market reforms. Shortly before her resignation, she visited Hungary and Czechoslovakia in September 1990.¹³⁹

Both trips served as symbolic for the wider change in global politics. Thatcher's interactions with Czechoslovakia and Hungary demonstrated her dedication to build deeper links. She was warmly welcomed in both. In Czechoslovakia, she was impressed by President Havel. They shared the same values when it came to human rights and democracy.¹⁴⁰

The trip to Hungary had similar goals and although the economy and system there was better than in Czechoslovakia, she still met with Hungarian leaders and discussed the improvements and next steps.¹⁴¹

4.2 Relationships at the End of the Cold War

Relations between the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain during the resolution of the Cold War were influenced by the connections between the leaders of these countries. Most of the time, they respected each other, although their actions were not always positive and with some definite result for the development of the situation between East and West, be it over the issues of weapons or human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc.¹⁴²

Reagan was the first to leave this trio when his second term ended in January 1989. On this occasion, he and Thatcher exchanged letters of appreciation similar to when he took office in 1981.¹⁴³

When George Bush took office, Thatcher felt that his foreign policy quite unexpectedly turned to Germany and behaved like Germany would be their most important European ally. She suddenly lost a significant leader that she could count on, which was not pleasant due to the current events happening in the Eastern Bloc, where the communist system was on the verge of falling.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

¹⁴¹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

¹⁴² Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 12.

¹⁴³ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 12.

¹⁴⁴ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

Bush did not want to be that close to Thatcher and aimed not to be influenced by her.¹⁴⁵ The chilly relationship between Bush and Thatcher was the most visible after the revolutionary events in 1989.¹⁴⁶ In reference to the politics of the Soviet Union, Bush was careful. It was under consideration whether to build on the already established relations of his predecessor.¹⁴⁷

Gorbachev also did not feel as comfortable as he did in cooperation with Reagan. After Gorbachev arrived in London, Thatcher assured him that he was to continue with the reforms that had already started and that he had to complete them, and she also assured him that it would work with Bush as American president too. Another change in the positions of leaders was when Boris Yeltsin took Gorbachev's position and also became the first President of the Russian Federation from 1991 to 1999. Thatcher had some second thoughts about him until they met in London in April 1990. She mentioned her support for Gorbachev there but simultaneously, she admitted that while Gorbachev played his role during applying the reforms, Yeltsin was the right person to move beyond the reforms. He became a prominent figure in the turbulent years that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. His goals were to mainly establish a democratic government and move the nation toward a market economy, which met Thatcher's satisfaction.¹⁴⁸

4.3 Multi-opinion Germany

After the liberation of the Eastern Bloc from the communist regime and the political revolution taking place in each of these countries, the focus turned to the potential reunification of Germany.¹⁴⁹ Thatcher was against reunification. She had several reasons for this. She claimed that a united Germany would make a country that would be too powerful too quickly, throwing off the diplomatic balance in Europe. She also feared it could slow or stop the already ongoing liberation of the Soviet world by making Gorbachev uncertain about it. Bush was willing to continue in ongoing changes and remained consistent with the foreign policies previously set by Reagan. He was determined to deal with arms control and global security issues with Gorbachev. Still, opinions on who will be his closest European ally differed. The new US administration viewed Germany as

¹⁴⁵ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy*, chap. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, chap. 22.

¹⁴⁸ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 12.

its primary European partner, which raised Thatcher's concerns. She argued that Bush overlooked the need for a robust nuclear deterrent and was aware that the US-UK partnership was weakening.¹⁵⁰

Despite Thatcher expressing herself clearly that she disagreed with German reunification, she had no power to stop it from happening. Thatcher's significance when it came to international relations has already passed, and her influence did not work as it had with Reagan. Later, her view on German reunification in the framework of a unified Europe changed from one of hostility to one of pragmatic acceptance. She highlighted the need of keeping NATO strong and asked for guarantees that a united Germany will continue to be committed to both NATO and European Integration.¹⁵¹

German reunification came in September 1990, and a year later, the Soviet Union fell apart.¹⁵²

4.4 Resignation

It was 22 November 1990, when Thatcher decided to resign from the positions of prime minister and the leader of the Conservative Party. As a result, the U.K. political landscape underwent a substantial change, marking the end of one era and the start of a new one.

There was increased internal disagreement in the Conservative Party over a number of topics, many of which involved Thatcher. She was criticized for her attitude on the poll tax, leadership style, and economic issues including high interest rates and unemployment. As a result, her popularity declined. Subsequently, the Conservative Party did poorly in the first round of elections, which was an indication of weak support. What is more, her colleague Geoffrey Howe, previously supporting Thatcher, resigned on November 1, 1990. His resignation played a pivotal part in the circumstances that ultimately led to Thatcher's resignation and served as a turning point in the Conservative Party's leadership crisis.¹⁵³

After careful consideration, she resigned. Afterwards, she received a few letters from international politicians. The one from Gorbachev was full of words of thanks and admiration. He was also not afraid to mention that she was a great figure in British but also world history, who had made a positive difference.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 26.

¹⁵¹ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, chap. 9.

¹⁵² Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 13.

¹⁵³ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, chap. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *The Human Factor*, chap. 14.

CONCLUSION

Although Margaret Thatcher's government was often criticized, and her policies divided citizens, her opinions and occasional ruthlessness brought her country and the world good results.

When she convened a meeting in 1983 in Chequers in order to gain as much knowledge as possible regarding the topics of the Cold War, communism and possible solutions to get out of this unpleasant situation after the invasion of Afghanistan and crisis in Poland, not everyone believed in her competency and abilities. Moreover, some historians credit her with only a minor contribution to the relaxation of East-West tensions and the end of the Cold War, claiming she gave herself too much credit. However, other historians disagree, arguing that her Cold War role was definite. She managed to establish good relations with world leaders, through which she could exert her influence. Undoubtedly, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev both turned to Thatcher before summits and other meetings for advice on possible topics, solutions to current issues, and possible alternatives. In addition to maintaining relations with Gorbachev, she also established good relations with Eastern European leaders, specifically those of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. And finally, the letters of praise she received after her resignation should not be underestimated.

In conclusion, if Thatcher had not influenced Reagan and Gorbachev, the outcome of the Cold War could have been different. Although Gorbachev was a progressive leader, and his desire for reform was significant, it was necessary to guide him in the right direction. The fall of Communism was influenced by several factors, but Margaret Thatcher's role was one of them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
GDR	German Democratic Republic
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
NATO	the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OUCA	the Oxford University Conservative Association
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UK	the United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics