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POLICY STATEMENTS  
(FULL TEXT)

56/79. FOREIGN POLICY: THE WEST IN THE WORLD TODAY

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister,  
in New York on December 18, 1979:

In a major address to the Foreign Policy Association in New York on December 18, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, discussed the situation facing the Western democracies and outlined an agenda for the 1980's.

Mrs. Thatcher was visiting New York on the second day of her two-day official visit to the United States, her first visit to this country as Prime Minister.

Mrs. Thatcher's speech covered the following topics:

- (1) Global interdependence
- (2) Iran
- (3) Ideology
- (4) East/West Relations
- (5) World Economic problems
- (6) Rhodesia and South Africa
- (7) The strength of the West
- (8) Action for the eighties

The following is the full text of Mrs. Thatcher's speech.

Introduction

"As I speak today, 1979 -- and with it the 1970s -- has less than two weeks to run. I myself will have some reason to remember both the year and the decade with affection. But in general few, I suspect, will regret the passing of either.

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"The last 10 years have not been a happy period for the Western democracies domestically or internationally. Self-questioning is essential to the health of any society. But we have perhaps carried it too far and carried to extremes, of course, it causes paralysis. The time has come when the West -- above all Europe and the United States -- must begin to substitute action for introspection.

"We face a new decade -- I have called it 'the dangerous decade' -- in which the challenges to our security and to our way of life may if anything be more acute than in the 1970s. The response of Western nations and their leaders will need to be firm, calm and concerted. Neither weakness nor anger nor despair will serve us. The problems are daunting but there is in my view ample reason for optimism.

### Global Interdependence

"Few international problems today lend themselves to simple solutions. One reason is that few such problems can any longer be treated in isolation. Increasingly they interact, one between the other. Thanks to a still accelerating technological revolution we become daily more aware that the earth and its resources are finite and in most respects shrinking.

"The fact of global interdependence -- I apologize for the jargon -- is nothing new. Four hundred years ago South American gold and silver helped to cause inflation in Europe -- an early example of the evils of excess money supply. Two hundred years ago men fought in India and along the Great Lakes here in America in order that, as Macaulay put it, the King of Prussia might rob a neighbor whom he had promised to defend.

"But the popular perception of interdependence lagged far behind the fact. When I was in my teens a British Prime Minister could still refer to Czechoslovakia as 'a far-away country' of whose quarrels the British people knew nothing; and an American President could still experience difficulty in persuading his people of the need to concern themselves with a European war.

"Today it is painfully obvious that no man -- and no nation -- is an island. What President Cleveland once described as 'foreign broils' are brought into every home. The price of oil in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, the size of the grain harvest in Kansas and the Ukraine -- these are of immediate concern to people all over

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the world. The Middle East and the middle West have become neighbors and will remain so, uncomfortable though they may on occasion find it. The bell tolls for us all.

### Iran

"This has been tragically underlined in recent weeks. The world has watched with anger and dismay the events in Tehran. We have all felt involved with the fate of the hostages. Nothing can excuse the treatment they have received; for hundreds of years the principle of the immunity of the messenger and the diplomat has been respected. Now this principle, central to the civilized conduct of relations between states, is being systematically flouted.

"We in Britain have respected and supported the calmness and resolution with which President Carter has handled an appalling situation. With our partners in Europe we have given full public and private support to his efforts to secure the unconditional release of the hostages. We will continue to support and to help in any way we can. Above all we have admired the forbearance with which the American people have responded to the indignities inflicted upon their fellow citizens. That restraint has undoubtedly been in the best interests of the captives.

### Ideology

"The Iranian crisis epitomises the problems which we face in trying to co-exist in a shrinking world where political, economic and social upheavals are endemic. Some would add religious upheavals to that list. But I do not believe we should judge Islam by events in Iran. Least of all should we judge it by the taking of hostages. There is a tide of self-confidence and self-awareness in the Muslim world which preceded the Iranian Revolution, and will outlast its present excesses. The West should recognize this with respect, not hostility. The Middle East is an area where we have much at stake. It is in our own interests, as well as in the interests of the people of that region, that they build on their own deep religious traditions. We do not wish to see them succumb to the fraudulent appeal of imported Marxism.

"Because, to look beyond the Middle East, I am convinced that there is little force left in the original Marxist stimulus to revolution. Its impetus is petering out as the practical failure of the doctrine becomes

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daily more obvious. It has failed to take root in the advanced democracies. In those countries where it has taken root -- countries backward or, by tradition, authoritarian -- it has failed to provide sustained economic or social development. What is left is a technique of subversion and a collection of catch-phrases. The former, the technique of subversion, is still dangerous. Like terrorism it is a menace that needs to be fought wherever it occurs -- and British Prime Ministers have had reason to speak with some passion about terrorism in recent years. As for the catch-phrases of Marxism, they still have a certain drawing power. But they have none in the countries which are ruled by the principles of Marx. Communist regimes can no longer conceal the gulf that separates their slogans from reality.

### East/West Relations

"The immediate threat from the Soviet Union is military rather than ideological. The threat is not only to our security in Europe and North America but also, both directly and by proxy, in the third world. I have often spoken about the military challenge which the West faces today. I have sometimes been deliberately misunderstood, especially by my enemies who have labelled me the 'Iron Lady.' They are quite right -- I am. Let me, therefore, restate a few simple propositions.

"The Soviet Union continues to proclaim the ideological struggle. It asserts that the demise of the Western political system is inevitable. It neglects the fact that few indeed who live in Western democracies show any sign of wanting to exchange their system for that operated by the Russians. In 1919 Lenin said:

'World imperialism cannot live side by side with a victorious Soviet revolution -- the one or the other will be victorious in the end.'

"The Soviet government have not repudiated this threatening prediction. Indeed they broadcast their ambitions wholesale. They should not be surprised if we listen and take note.

"Meanwhile they expand their armed forces on land, sea and air. They continually improve the quality of their armaments. They and their allies outnumber us in Europe. Their men, their ships, and their aircraft appear ever more regularly in parts of the world where

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they have never been seen before. Their Cuban and East German proxies likewise.

"We can argue about Soviet motives. But the fact is that the Russians have the weapons and are getting more of them. It is simple prudence for the West to respond. We in Britain intend to do that to the best of our ability and at every level including the strategic. President Carter has shown that he intends to do likewise. And the Alliance last week decided to modernize its long-range theatre nuclear weapons. This in due course will help to balance the new and sophisticated weapons the Russians already have targetted on Europe. The strategic power of the USA in the Western Alliance remains paramount. But I would underline the contribution of the European members of NATO -- a contribution which is never overlooked by the Russians.

"Modern weapons are totally destructive and immensely expensive. It is in nobody's interest that they should be piled up indefinitely. It makes good sense for both sides to seek agreements on arms control which preserve the essential security of each. We in Britain have therefore supported the talks on Strategic Arms Limitation and on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions. The British Government hopes that the SALT II agreement can be ratified.

"I have been attacked by the Soviet Government for arguing that the West should put itself in a position to negotiate from strength. But in saying this, I have done no more than echo the constant ambition of the Soviet Government itself. I am not talking about negotiations from a position of superiority. What I am seeking is a negotiation in which we and they start from a position of balance; and if both sides can negotiate, genuinely, to maintain that balance at lower levels, I shall be well content. It is in that spirit that I approach the proposals which have recently been made by President Brezhnev and others.

### World Economic Problems

"The East/West conflict permeates most global issues. But other equally pressing problems have arisen. These affect above all the world economy and the relationship between the developed Western world and the newly emerging countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

"No country can today escape economic involvement with the economies of others. In the U.K. external trade has always been of central importance to our

economy. In the USA this has been less so. But recently you have become much more dependent on overseas countries. 10 years ago you imported 5% of your oil. Now it is 50%. But it is not just oil -- this has obvious consequences for your foreign policy. So, rich and poor, communist and non-communist, oil-producers and oil-consumers -- our economic welfare is increasingly affected by the operation of the market. Increasingly affected by the growing demand of complex industries for scarce materials and by the pressure on the world's finite resources of fossil fuels.

"All of this has coincided with a prolonged period of uneasiness in the world's economy. The immediate prospects are sombre: inflation will be difficult to eradicate; growth has fallen sharply from its earlier levels; there is a constant threat of disorder in the world oil market. News of recent price rises can only have added to the general uncertainty which is one of the most damaging consequences of the present oil situation. The task of economic management, both nationally and internationally, is becoming more and more difficult. The precarious balance of the world economy could at any time be shaken by political upheavals in one or more countries over which the rest of us might have very little influence.

"In these circumstances, we all have a direct practical interest in the orderly settlement of political disputes.

### Rhodesia and South Africa

"These were some considerations which, in addition to the obvious ones, persuaded the new British Government of the need for a decisive effort to secure a settlement in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. As you know, after months of strenuous negotiation, overall agreement was finally reached yesterday on the new Constitution, arrangements for free and fair elections, and a ceasefire. The agreement secured in London showed that even the most intractable problem will yield to the necessary combination of resolve and imagination. Concessions were made by all sides. Many difficult decisions were involved -- not least for the British Government, which found itself acquiring a new colony, albeit for a short period. We are grateful for the forceful and timely support we received throughout the negotiations from the United States Government, and from President Carter personally, especially in the final stages.

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"We have no illusion about the practical problems of implementing this agreement on the ground, against a background of years of bitter conflict. But now is a time for reconciliation, and for restoring normal relations between all the states in the area. The Lancaster House agreement could prove a major step towards peaceful evolution and away from violent revolution in Southern Africa. We are encouraged to persevere with the Five Power initiative to achieve an all-party settlement in Namibia.

"In this context I want to say a particular word about South Africa. There is now a real prospect that the conflicts on South Africa's borders, in Rhodesia and Namibia, will shortly be ended. This, combined with welcome initiatives in South African domestic policies, offer a chance to defuse a regional crisis which was potentially of the utmost gravity, and to make progress towards an ending of the isolation of South Africa in world affairs.

### The Strength of the West

"We must not regard these problems as insoluble. The West has immense material and moral assets. To those assets must be added the clarity to see where our strengths should be used; the will and confidence to use them with precision; and the stamina to see things through.

"Let us never forget that despite the difficulties to which I have referred, the Western democracies remain overwhelmingly strong in economic terms. We are, it is true, more vulnerable than before. Vulnerable because of our reliance on raw materials; vulnerable because of the specialization and complexity of our societies. It is vital therefore, that we keep a steady nerve and that we concert our policies. We already agree on the basic requirements -- on the need to defeat inflation; to avoid protectionism; to use our limited energy resources better. And as we deal with the problems our inherent vitality will reassert itself. There is, after all, no discernible challenge to the role of the Western democracies as the driving force of the world economy.

"The political strength and stability of the West is equally striking. Pre-occupied by passing political dramas, we often overlook the real sturdiness of our political institutions. They are not seriously challenged from within. They meet the aspirations of ordinary people. They attract the envy of those

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who do not have them. In the 35 years since the last war, they have shown themselves remarkably resistant to subversive influences.

"Our democratic systems have made it possible to organize our relationships with one another on a healthy basis. The North Atlantic Alliance and the European Community are -- and remain -- free associations of free peoples. Policies are frankly debated. Of course the debates are often lively and occasionally heated. But those debates are a sign of strength just as the regimented agreements of the Communist alliances are a mark of weakness.

"The argument now going on in the European Community is a case in point. The Community is used to debate, often difficult and prolonged. We are seeing at present something more serious than many of the disputes which have taken place in the past. But the interests that unite the members of the Community are stronger than those which divide them -- particularly when viewed in the light of other international problems. I believe that these common interests will assert themselves. I am confident that an acceptable solution will be found and that the European Community will emerge fortified from the debate. And a strong Europe is the best partner for the United States. It is on the strength of that partnership that the strength of the free world depends.

"The last asset I want to mention today is the West's relationship with the countries of the Third World. Neither recent events; nor past injustices; nor the outdated rhetoric of anti-colonialism can disguise the real convergence of interest between the Third World and the West.

"It is we in the West who have the experience and contacts the Third World needs. We supply most of the markets for their goods and their raw materials. We supply most of the technology they require. We provide them with private investment as well as Government aid.

"We do this not only for our own sake but also because we support the efforts of the countries of the Third World to develop their own economies.

#### Action for the Eighties

"I have only been able to touch on a few current international issues. There are many I have not mentioned. Nor would I wish anyone to think that I underestimate the difficulties, particularly on the

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domestic economic front, faced by Britain and our Western partners, including the United States. But these difficulties can and will be overcome provided we do not undervalue ourselves nor decry our strength. We shall need self-confidence to tackle the dangerous decade.

"It is a time for action, action for the eighties:

- we must restore the dynamic to our economies
- we must modernize our defense
- we must continue to seek agreement with the East
- we must help the developing countries to help themselves
- we must work together to improve the world economy through our international trading and financial institutions
- we must conserve our resources of energy and especially fossil fuels
- we must achieve an understanding with the oil producers which benefits us all
- we must never fail to assert our faith in freedom and our belief in the institutions which sustain it.

"The cynics among you will say that none of this is new. Quite right. It isn't. But there are no new magic formulae. We know what we have to do. Our problems will only yield to sustained effort. That is the challenge of political leadership.

"Enduring success never comes easily to an individual or to a country. To quote Walt Whitman: 'It takes struggles in life to make strength; it takes fight for principles to make fortitude; it takes crisis to give courage and singleness of purpose to reach an objective'. Let us go down in history as the generation which not only understood what needed to be done but a generation which had the strength, the self-discipline and the resolve to see it through. That is our generation. That is our task for the 80s."

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