


Chapter 21

Margaret Thatcher and Foreign Policy: Iron Lady

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ABSTRACT

During her three terms in office, Margaret Thatcher pursued a proactive foreign policy heavily influenced by the dynamics of the Cold War. She strategically reassessed Britain's relationship with the European Communities, successfully negotiating a financial rebate for the country. While emphasizing state sovereignty, she engaged in armed conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, ultimately securing their return to British control. Over time, Thatcher became more sceptical about European integration, initially opposing German reunification and advocating for a more limited scope of cooperation focused on economic rather than political issues. This approach resulted in significant tensions both internationally and within her political party, leading to internal strife and ultimately to her political downfall. This chapter comprehensively examines her foreign policy decisions and their impact during her time as prime minister.

Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't
– Margaret Thatcher

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Thatcher is regarded as the most prominent female political leader of the late 20th century. Renowned for her domestic and foreign policies, she encountered significant challenges, particularly in international affairs. Assuming office during the Cold War, she confronted the formidable Soviet Union as a powerful adversary that had effectively divided the European continent and Germany into two distinct entities (Yigit, 2023). Moreover, she grappled with the escalating threat of international terrorism and military aggression, which contributed to a less stable global environment (Yigit, 2023a).

When evaluating women's political representation, one often refers to Pitkin's 1967 framework, which comprises three dimensions: descriptive representation, substantive representation, and symbolic representation. Descriptive representation involves comparing the socio-demographic characteristics of the representatives with those of the group they represent, examining how similar they are. Substantive representation focuses on the representatives' actions and how well these actions align with the interests of those they represent, assessing their effectiveness in advocating for the group's interests. Symbolic representation pertains to the perception of the representatives' effectiveness by those they represent, delving into how they are viewed and evaluated.

The existing body of research on women's political representation has predominantly centred on their presence in democratic institutions such as parliaments, governments, and political parties. There has also been an examination into whether female politicians authentically represent the interests of women. This has led to the question of whether female politicians automatically champion women's rights and gender equality. While some studies indicate a propensity for female politicians to advocate for these issues, critics argue that this viewpoint oversimplifies the diverse array of beliefs and preferences among women.

For example, the divergent positions of elected women on the issue of abortion in Belgium and other countries demonstrate the complex nature of women's political perspectives. Moreover, this perspective overlooks women's wide-ranging experiences and viewpoints. As a result, recent research highlights the significance of considering other social dimensions, such as race, social class, and education, employing an intersectional approach.

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