
Reagan Centennial

Remarks as Delivered by Liam Fox, MP, Secretary of State for Defense for the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington, DC, Tuesday, May 24, 2011

Check Against Delivery: Thatcher and Reagan speech

It is impossible to assess the contribution of Ronald Reagan to the history of the 20th century without considering another political giant of the era- Margaret Thatcher- his friend, ally and intellectual soul mate.

Lady Thatcher has asked me to say this. "I am thinking of you all tonight and am with you in spirit as you celebrate the momentous anniversary of this remarkable man. He was a truly great President and a wonderful friend."

What did the Reagan- Thatcher partnership bring that made them so synergistic?

At a time when leadership was so needed they brought values, vision and valour.

The Cold War did not end. It was won.

It was not an accident. It came about because the leadership of the free world was committed politically, militarily, politically and morally to the defeat of totalitarian ideology and the triumph of liberty and freedom.

It was not an exercise in expediency but the application of conviction.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher understood that our strength lay in people not governments and that liberated from the dead hand of the state-of the self perpetuating bureaucracy- the innovation and drive of free people would triumph.

They believed that competition is to be welcomed not feared- that it is the means by which we judge our talents, one against the other, without recourse to conflict. They understood that there is a difference between tolerance and surrender and that the moral relativism that blurs the distinction between right and wrong needs to be confronted.

They knew what they believed to be right and had the courage to say so- and they knew what they believed to be wrong and had the fortitude to confront it. They knew that in a free society the market works – that the combined wisdom of millions of individuals, acting in their own interests, is always likely to trump the wisdom of the self selecting elites of government.

In welcoming Prime Minister Thatcher to Washington in Feb 1981 President Reagan said "I do hope you agree Prime Minister that this city is an excellent vantage point from which to see the brilliant sunlight that still falls upon the Empire. I don't mean the empire of territorial possessions. I mean the empire of civilised ideas, the rights of man under God, the rule of law, constitutional government,

parliamentary democracy, all the great notions of human liberty still so ardently sought by so many and so much of mankind.”

They came to power within months of one another. Their inheritance was a dark one with the menace of the Soviet Union, the threat of nuclear holocaust and economic pessimism. When they left the stage the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union was crumbling and the oppressed peoples of Europe liberated. Economic supply side reform had transformed not only the British and American domestic outlook but change the terms of economic debate across the globe.

Fundamentally, they instinctively recognised that defence and security is not simply a matter of military hardware. They recognised in the Cold War that it was necessary to de-legitimise the views of the Communist world not least by having a clear and credible alternative of their own based on liberty, law and the application of constitutional government.

On Nov 26 1988 as the last official guest under the Reagan Presidency, Margaret Thatcher said: “Mr. President, when you welcomed me to the White House on my first official visit to Washington under your Presidency, you forecast two things: first, that the decade would be less dangerous if the West maintained the strength required for peace; and second, that Britain and America would stand side by side in that endeavour. Both promises have been honoured and honoured handsomely.”

We are still honouring those promises today as our Armed Forces stand shoulder to shoulder in Afghanistan in the pursuit of peace and liberty or in the skies over Libya facing down tyranny and oppression.

Tonight President Obama is dining at Buckingham Palace following a day of discussions with Prime Minister Cameron. There is much talk again of strengthening the Special Relationship.

It is good to remind ourselves that when Winston Churchill first used the phrase it was as a wartime leader who understood the value of military and intelligence cooperation. It was not some “duey eyed Disney-esque emotional love-in”. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher instinctively understood the reality of the security imperative as the basis for the special relationship despite their close personal bonds.

They would have applauded the close military cooperation between our two countries and the leadership shown in difficult times.

They were giants of history when history needed giants.

We may never see their likes again in our lifetime.

But living and nurturing their legacy is the greatest honour that any of us can do their dreams, their endeavours and their hopes. Let us not let them down.