

STATEMENT AND INTERVIEW BY MRS THATCHER FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW
OF MR GORBACHEV: 11.00am, AUGUST 19TH 1991

First, I think the situation is very grave indeed.

Mr Gorbachev has brought new hope to the Soviet people, he has brought democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom of travel, he brought new hope to the World. To the countries of Eastern Europe, to the World, we are going into a new era of international cooperation. A great deal of that is due to his courage and his determination and also to the strength of the West and its realisation that there were these changes in the Soviet Union. So the whole World will be watching very carefully indeed what happens to Mr Gorbachev. This is an old fashioned style attempt at a coup belonging to the Stalin and Brezhnev era to keep people down by tanks and the army and the KGB.

Now that brings me to my second point, the real battle going on in the Soviet Union now is the battle for democracy. Democracy was coming. Mr Yeltsin was elected, the Mayor of Moscow was elected and the Mayor of Leningrad was elected, the Congress of People's Deputies were elected, the parliament in the Ukraine was elected, one of the Presidents of one of the republics has been elected. The people have got used to democracy. I doubt whether

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they will give it up easily. And we, let there be no doubt, in Britain and I believe in the United States, we are on the side of continuing democracy. We hope that it will continue to grow and that it cannot be snuffed out. We have seen elsewhere in the World, no power in the World can stop people who want democracy and are determined to have their civil rights.

It brings me to the third point, which is very important indeed. It concerns defence. We in Paris in November, signed defence agreements with the Soviet Union in the faith that under the old Helsinki Agreement she was putting into place far more action on human rights and so we signed an agreement to cut conventional forces very substantially and as you know the United States and Soviet Union signed one on nuclear weapons. Pursuant of that, there was a defence review in this country and also a big defence review in NATO. Those cuts which were going to be implemented should not be implemented now, we must pause to see what happens. It is strength and determination on a military context which brought about the changes in the Soviet Union. It is not a time for weakness so we should not implement those cuts, we must pause to reflect and see what happens. That will effect this country and it, of course, will also effect the NATO review and it reminds us once again that the defence of our freedom and liberty has been the strength of NATO and foremost in that has been the strength of the Anglo-American Alliance.

Not a Western European Union or anything like that, but NATO. And I am glad that the NATO ministers will meet soon and urgently

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and they too must consider whether it is a time to go ahead with cuts; in my view it is not, we should wait. So we have to hope that the forces of democracy will prevail in the Soviet Union and the hope which the World had seen, and was almost relying upon, may once again come.

Finally, there will of course be many countries in the World deeply worried. The countries of Eastern Europe and we hope that they will draw ever more closer to the European Community, that has been our objective. The countries of the Middle East who were relying on the new found agreement between the countries of the West and the single communist world. The communist hard liners want to take time. We shall judge whether the Soviet Union will keep her international agreements or not by how she treats her people at home. What she has done is unconstitutional by the rules of the new Soviet Union. We will have to consider very carefully how we react internationally because constitutional matters, keeping your agreements, upholding the law, matters very much indeed.

Now your questions:

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, shouldn't the West have seen this coming, first the warning of a potential coup from Mr Shevardnaze then only last week from Mr Yakovlev. Did you see this coming?"

A: "I don't think anyone saw it coming, and we still hope that

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democracy will prevail. Don't forget there is an elected President of Russia, elected by a great majority, an elected Mayor of Moscow, there is an elected Mayor of Leningrad. I have had this morning an invitation to speak in Leningrad to the newly formed Association of Leaseholders and Entrepreneurs to speak there in October. There have been elections in the Ukraine, very important the Ukraine is going ahead with her own ideas. There have been elections in other places as well. Do not assume that this coup will be successful".

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, how do you think that people should resist what has happened?"

A: "In the only way they can, by making their views known as the people of East Europe made their views known. They came out on the streets to make them known, they came out in great masses. It is for those who have led democracy - and, of course, the congress of the Soviet Union, they too have been elected".

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, Mr Yeltsin has called for a general strike against the state of emergency. Would you support him in that view?"

A: "Mr Yeltsin as a leading democrat and as an elected President of Russia will decide how best he can fight the coup. It is not for me to say that, it is for the

democrats there to decide how best to fight it. I think it is a great sorrow that Sakharov has died, he would have been very forthright in speaking out. It is for them to decide how they should do it."

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, do you know any of the people now in charge?"

A: "I don't know the new vice President. I know Mr Yakovlev as you know. I know Mr Shatalin who was the Economic adviser, and Mr Shevardnaze. These people will be very prominent now in deciding what to do and also so will many of the republics because they said that they don't want a looser Soviet Union, they allege it is ungovernable and I do not believe that for one moment. They may find they have brought about the desire in some of the republics, the very situation ~~that~~ they say this coup is made to"

Q: "What does this mean for democracy now?"

A: "This means those that have gone to democracy [].

Q: "Should the West have given more money to help economically Mr Gorbachev?"

A: "I had hoped and it is far from and perhaps just before then that we should through the IMF be able to give some help, what I call structural help. Not just in

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economic credits, that would not help make very much difference, they would have spent them and some of them would have gone on to the black market. I had hoped that as Mr Gorbachev was doing the very changes which he promised to do - all of the reforms, private property, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, elections, elected presidency, putting in place all of those, putting in place the law for business of contract and trying to go to independent courts. We would say you are doing what you promised to do therefore we must help you now to get a distribution system for food, how to set up a law of contract. Because what industry wants and much industry was going there, they will have to wait now. What they wanted was certainty that the law would be upheld but to have an unconstitutional coup it will be difficult. And I would have hoped that we would say that you are doing your bit, we therefore, make no mistake, will do ours. I think that would have helped."

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, you met Mr Gorbachev many times, and most recently at a time when he was becoming increasingly unpopular at home, did he ever talk to you of the possibility of being overthrown?"

A: "No, of course he didn't. Nor would you expect him to do that. But just make no mistake the economy is in difficulty in the Soviet Union. It has been in difficulty for years because communism does not produce plenty for the

people. It only produces privileges for those in charge and in power. Communism came to power by a coup, a coup against Sherenki who had just had an election. The Soviets did not like the result of that election. There was a coup in 1917. That was the first one. Secondly, Kruschev was trying to make some reforms as you know. They got rid of his power in a similar kind of way and thirdly, no one has done as much for the World and for increasing freedom in the Soviet Union as Mr Gorbachev. So I don't think we did expect it. I, myself, do not conclude that it will be successful. I think democracy has got too far but even if it were, that would be terrible, they wouldn't have sorted out the economic problem. The way to sort out the economic problem is to disperse power and responsibility as was just about to come about with the nine plus one agreement to be signed today - and that is why they probably had the coup, they didn't ~~not~~ dispersal of responsibility - and by getting far more enterprise going and that is the invitation I have had to go and speak to a Conference of the Soviet Enterprises in Leningrad."

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, I was just wondering what you thought this would mean for the rest of the World?"

A: "At the moment are waiting for more information, but we are not merely waiting, we have to use the power of words. Firstly, to condemn what has happened. Secondly, to say that we are very concerned as to what has happened to Mr

Gorbachev. Thirdly, to make it clear that it is quite unconstitutional - even by the Soviet Union rules, they have acted unconstitutionally - if they do that then what they are going to do with keeping their international agreements and we have to pause with disarmament to see what will happen. And also there will be many people in the Middle East that will be concerned because there was a new rapprochement there between the United States and the Soviet Union hoping to bring about a Middle Eastern conference. So we clearly, totally and utterly condemn, we hold up the defence cuts to see what will happen and we are totally behind those who believe in democracy in the Soviet Union and we hope that they will manage to rally and their views will prevail."

Q: "Mrs Thatcher, you got to know Mr Gorbachev very well, what part do you expect him to play now? What do you expect him to do?"

A: "Poor man, I don't believe that he is in a position to play a part, that is why the World must look very carefully. He brought new hope to the whole of the World. We had the settlement in Namibia, in Africa, that would not have come without Russia's cooperation. A new settlement in Angola, we are looking forward to a settlement in South Africa, which I believe, myself, will come about. The whole World has brought and we are very concerned to see that he

is treated properly and that he is able to speak freely."

Q: "Do you see a danger, Mrs Thatcher, that there could be a return to the Cold War"

A: "A coup is a military coup by tanks and soldiers inside the Soviet Union. Whether or not it will succeed we do not know. We hope that democracy will win. Not only is it a military coup but it is unconstitutional by the new rules of the Soviet Union - if they wish to change their President there are ways of doing it. And, of course, next year the president too is going to have to be elected. If we

I think that they will make their own mind about it. But I expect that the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Office will be very much aware of the views that I hold. Don't forget we would never never never have had the new period in the Soviet Union unless we had made it quite clear to them that they could never win militarily. It was on the basis of the new regime of the Soviet Union that made for lower defence expenditure. They are having unconstitutional moves in the Soviet Union then we have to see clearly whether they will truly honour the agreements which have been made. I think I must leave you to go and get some more comments. Thank you."

MICHAEL WILSON: (Presenter)

President Gorbachev, former President Gorbachev perhaps, was a person with whom one of our former Prime Minister's said she could do business with. This is Margaret Thatcher's first reaction to Mr Gorbachev's present precarious position.

MARGARET THATCHER MP: (Former Prime Minister)

May I start by making three points. First, I think this situation is very grave indeed. Mr Gorbachev had brought new hope to the Soviet people, he brought democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom of travel. He brought new hope to the world, to the countries of Eastern Europe, to the world that we were going into a new era of international cooperation. A great deal of that was due to his courage and his determination and also to the strength of the West, and its realisation that there were these changes in the Soviet Union. So the whole world will be watching very carefully indeed what happens to Mr Gorbachev. This is an old fashioned style attempt at a coup belonging to the Stalin and Brezhnev era to keep people down by tanks and the army and the KGB.

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We hope that it will continue to grow and it can not be snuffed out. We've seen elsewhere in the world, no power in the world can stop people who want democracy and are determined to have their civil rights.

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[Transmission was cut to live coverage from Moscow.]

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