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**Margaret Roberts THATCHER**

**UNITED KINGDOM**

*Prime Minister (since May 1979)*

*Addressed as: Prime Minister*

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Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has led the Conservative Party since 1975 and dominates British politics. She is a demanding leader with unshakable self-confidence and conviction in her ideological and policy views. Furthermore, she sees any willingness to compromise as a weakness.



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Thatcher's unyielding attitude and passionate commitment—once admired by Britons—are now widely viewed as reflecting a preachy, authoritarian attitude. As a result, her popularity rating has dropped to its lowest level since 1982. Nonetheless, her depressed standing has not affected her party's overall standing—it topped all others in a recent opinion poll. Thatcher will lead the Tories into the next election, which we expect by mid-1987.

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**Thatcher's Dented Armor**

During the past year the Thatcher government's image has been tarnished. After leading the Tories to an overwhelming victory in the 1983 election, Thatcher chose men for her Cabinet who were steeped in her own strain of conservatism. Since then she has replaced many of them with younger, moderate Tories in an effort to give her administration a more dynamic, astute, and compassionate look. Most of the new Cabinet members owe her little personal loyalty, however, and several have parted with her on some issues. Moreover, many observers believe her Cabinet still lacks charisma, dynamism, and political skill.

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Thatcher has also suffered from several self-inflicted wounds, particularly her muddled handling of the Westland helicopters affair in early 1986, which prompted many observers and Tory elders to question her control of the government. Furthermore, the press accused her of misleading Parliament on Westland; although she was subsequently exonerated, her integrity was tarnished. Thatcher's decision to focus her second administration's energies on first-term goals—reducing the government's role in the economy, creating an enterprise culture to boost job creation, and battling socialism—has left her open to charges that she may be running out of steam; many Britons also consider Thatcher overly confrontational and out of touch with popularly held views. while her position is still secure, she is a diminished force in British politics and that the upcoming election will in many ways be a referendum on her desirability as a leader

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Thatcher responds to her critics by saying that her government's policies have put Britain on the verge of economic success not witnessed since the 1950s. She points to several years of low inflation, economic growth, and increased private ownership in stock, homes, and other areas as proof of her policies' effectiveness. She attributes her government's image problems to inadequate presentation of those successes. Nonetheless, her government's failures in dealing with unemployment—now nearly 12 percent—have largely negated public perceptions of its gains elsewhere. Also, we believe there remains an underlying dissatisfaction among Tory parliamentarians with Thatcher's priorities and leadership,

[Redacted]

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envinced by several instances since 1984 when Tory backbenchers have forced her to reverse policy direction [redacted]

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### Foreign and Defense Policy

Thatcher often acts as her own foreign minister. Well known for her sharp criticism of the Soviet Union, she has vigorously challenged Moscow's initiatives on a host of security matters, particularly during the aftermath of the Reykjavik minisummit. At the same time, however, she has been a leading voice promoting the expansion of dialogue and greater understanding between East and West and plans to visit Moscow in early 1987. She is a firm ally of the United States and has publicly stated that Britain cannot defend itself without this country, which she calls the "final guarantor of Europe's liberty." A great admirer of President Ronald Reagan, she believes he shares her views on the importance of private enterprise and the way to meet the Soviet challenge. Thatcher has repeatedly stated her support for research on SDI. She has also been the most visible West European leader supporting US policy toward Libya—she defended the April 1986 airstrike against vicious domestic criticism—and South Africa. [redacted]

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### Personal Data

Thatcher, a graduate of Oxford, has degrees in chemistry and law. She has served in Parliament since 1959. She is widely known as a scathing debater, hard worker, and fast learner who has little patience for bureaucratic delay. Her poise, charm, and keenly feminine manner when out of the spotlight, however, contrast sharply with her no-nonsense public image. Thatcher, 61, is also a devoted wife to her husband, Denis, a retired oil executive. In October 1984 she narrowly survived an assassination attempt when the Provisional Irish Republican Army detonated a bomb in the hotel where she was staying.

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13 November 1986