

Analysis of the political assassination of margaret thatcher history essay



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Margaret Thatcher is the one and only female prime minister in Britain's 300 years democratic history. The Chinese people know and remember her mainly because it was her who negotiated with the former Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Deng Xiaoping, on issues regarding the sovereignty of Hong Kong. Her nickname 'Iron Lady' is also widely known by ordinary Chinese people.

Mrs Thatcher succeeded as the British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, during which time Britain has experienced a series of social changes just like China. However, few Chinese people know how Thatcher, once a glorious and powerful political figure transforming her country and the world politics, resigned from 10 Downing Street against her will.

This purpose of this report is to briefly introduce how Thatcher has become the 'Iron Lady' and how she had to give up her career after eleven years
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being one of the most influential political figures of all time (Evans, 2004). A series of incidents that have contributed to the fall of the Iron lady are also briefly discussed.

The legendary iron lady

Born into a humble but deeply patriotic family, the iron lady has shown her interests in politics at a young age (Evans, 2004). In 1950, when she was only 25, she fought the constituency of Darford for the Conservative party (Blundell, 2008). Unlike China which has only one political party that has guaranteed power to run the state, Britain's government is usually run by two parties- the Labour party and the Conservative party. Thatcher's political career started from being the youngest woman candidate in the Conservatives.

Margaret Thatcher came to power as a result of election with determination to stop the national breakdown and distress in 1979, during which time Britain had faced various economic and social problems. 1979 marked the start of the Thatcherism (Reitan, 2004). Also as the leader of the Conservative party that advocates economic liberalism, Thatcher attempts to see a bigger picture to solve the economic and social problems, not by merely privatising industries to defeating inflation, but by demoralising society, creating a nation of old values expressed by secure marriages, self reliance and savings, restraints, good neighbourliness, and hard work (Marr, 2008). She was very determined and put great effort into her political ideology. Shortly after Thatcher's coming into power, Britain has experienced double digit unemployment rates, giving her one of the most difficult moments. She has received significant pressure to abandon her monetary

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policies and use other economic stimuli to boost the economy. However, she famously quoted that she will not make a 'U-turn' and the statement 'there is no alternative' became one of her hallmarks.

During her time as the Prime Minister, Thatcher initiated and enacted a series of radical economic and political reforms that reflected her 'iron' personality and her implacable self-righteousness. In her memoir *The Downing Street Years* she wrote 'Once I begin to follow a train of thought I am not easily stopped.' Her personality has reflected in her policies: include privatising economy, sorting out colonial affairs, reducing the power of trade unions, supporting the US and fight against the Soviet Union, opposing the idea of the European Union and the Euro.

Her early years of political career were very similar to that of Deng Xiaoping: they both came to power in 1979, they both overturn and refined the spirit of the post war age; they both transformed the political landscape of their countries (Caryl, 2009). However, their political careers ended differently. Whilst Deng's resignation is a natural outcome of his old age and his wish to retire, Thatcher's, on the other hand, was the outcome of a series of incidents that marked as the political assassination of the Iron Lady.

The incidents that lead to the Fall of the Iron Lady

Many incidents, one after another, have led to the fall of the Iron Lady. Her demise to the European Community, the poll tax and the Trafalgar Riot, the deteriorated economy, the loss of electoral support and back-bench fears, the betrayal of her closest politician fellow are the mostly frequently incidents or reasons that have contributed to her stepped down as the Prime

Minister. There are many political theoretical theories based on these claims. Some of the incidents and reasons causing her resignation are discussed in this part of the report.

3. 1 The deteriorated economy

Whilst the middle class has been benefited from the decade of Thatcherism, people classified as underclass dramatically increased. From 1979 to 1987, the number of people below the poverty line doubled (Evans, 2004). This has been recognised as the dark side of Thatcherism. More and more public become resentful towards Thatcherism and the Thatcher government.

3. 2 Issues with the US and the European Community

Mrs Thatcher has vivid memory of the World War II. She understands the threats of the unified Germany as the dominant power in the European Continent. However, her disagreement with the concept of the EC did not stop the falling of the Berlin Wall. In the same year, the Bush administration drew their attention closer to the unified Germany, viewing it as the centre of the Europe. Bush and Secretary of the State James Baker have viewed Mrs Thatcher as a tiresome woman offering advice that was neither wanted nor needed (Reitan, 2004).

Mrs Thatcher's lack of cooperation with the idea of the ' European Community' has isolated her in the G7 and some other European countries. She viewed consensus as the process of abandoning beliefs, principles, value and policies. She warned the European elites that they have come closely to the danger of getting out of touch with their people in the pursuit of Maastricht and the federalism (Walker, 1993). In a degree, her attitude to

the European Community (EC) is in line with the British general public, who were reluctant to accept Britain as a member of the EC, but this as alienated her from the US and other European countries.

3.3 The Poll Tax and the Trafalgar Riot

As the leader of the Conservative party that represents small business and homeowners, Mrs Thatcher decided to have 'everyone pay something' in housing when house valuation increased in the late 1980s as a result of the development of economy. The enactment of the poll tax brought the hatred from the underclass. Protests and riots against the poll tax have been initiated all over Britain. On 31st of March, 1990, 200, 000 public assembled in London's Trafalgar Square in a protest to the poll tax (Evans, 2004). This riot is sometimes called the Battle of Trafalgar. This incident has marked as the blasting fuse of Thatcher's later downfall as the prime minister. The Iron Lady was defending to the tax whilst only 2 % of her people supported it. In a democratic country such as the UK, the direct opposition from the public would ultimately result in the closure of a politician's career, no matter how popular he or she has been.

3.4 The unpopularity of Mrs Thatcher in the cabinet

In the late years of Thatcher's political career, the effects of Thatcherism have begun to show: the economy was expanded, unemployment has fallen, the income of the middle class was boosted, to name a few (Reitan, 2004). However, her iron and presidential style in the ministry has also given her unpopularity among her fellow politicians. Also, her frequent cabinet dismissals and reshuffles had created her many influential enemies in the Conservative Party (Reitan, 2004). She admitted that she was not an easy
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colleague. She commented ' Of course, in the eyes of the " wet" Tory establishment I was not only a woman, but " that woman", someone not just of a different sex, but of a different class, a person with an alarming conviction that the values and virtues of middle England should be brought to bear on the problems which establishment consensus had created '(Thatcher, 1993, pp. 129-30).

Just as the famous Chinese saying goes ' A just cause gains great support, an unjust one gains little'. No matter whether what she did was just or not, she has mishandled her once faithful political allies. Those who once supported her faithfully in the cabinet began to alienate her.

4. 5 The resignation of her Foreign Minister and Chancellor

Thatcher was increasingly ruthless in her dismissal of colleagues as her own security increased (King, 1985). Her Chancellor of the Exchequer as well as her Foreign Secretary, later became her unforgiving assassins (Clarke, 2002). In late 1980s, chronic economical recession has come again, the Soviet Union was falling, and the world political atlas was changing. Her friends in her cabinet ceased to be irritating and become intolerable instead (Clarkes, 2002). Her Chancellor, Nigel Lawson resigned in 1989. Short after that, Geoffrey Howe, the Deputy Prime Minister of that time also announced his resignation from the position after being Thatcher's most " loyal and self-effacing" supporter for 15 years. The betrayal of her best colleagues one after another finally leads to her stepping out of the cabinet in 1990 against her will.

Among others, the author considers the direct cause for the fall of Margaret Thatcher against her will is her losing key figures in her cabinet, or in other words, her over dependence of other people in her cabinet (Clarkes, 2002). She has become vulnerable to the external factors and a series of incidents happened in the late 1980s.

Margaret Thatcher had a leadership crisis that leads to her down fall. Initially, Thatcher was relatively dependent on senior ministers but attempted to become increasingly dominant. She did not realise the level of dependence on her ministers, which ultimately led to her downfall. As the Strategist Sun Tzu's most famous quote in his military strategy book *The Art of War* says ' To know the enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat.' The Iron lady fails to adopt a strategy that recognizes her own resources and the resources other people hold that may be turned against her.

She also felt resentful about the disloyalty that later destroyed her. She thought that her 11 years of standing in the cabinet should have given her the ability to draw on greater support from her minister, most of whom have owned their careers because of her preferment (Evans, 2004). However, she thought wrong. In fact, it was the betrayal of her most trusted follower that caused the end of her legend.

4. Conclusion

Mrs Margaret Thatcher is one of the phenomenal figures of the 20th century. As the only women political leader in a major political and economic powerful country, she has shown her ability no inferior to any men. Her presidential

style and determination in social and economic reform has gained her three ministries in the cabinet. However, in the late years of her ministry, she had too many enemies. Even her closest and most trusted followers have betrayed her, which eventually lead to her stepping down from the position of the Prime Minister. The Iron Lady was melted by the assassins of politics. This essay attempts to introduce briefly the story of her life as a Prime Ministry, the series of incidents and reasons that lead to her resignation as the Prime Minister of Britain against her will in the early 1990.