

Margaret Netanyahu

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Margaret Thatcher was an incredibly divisive British prime minister. Personally, I could never warm to her. She was, however, credited with standing up to the unions. Although she had the immense good fortune to come to power as North Sea Oil provided the UK with a financial bonanza, she certainly changed the mood of the country from depressed hopelessness to one of optimism. Under her, Britain regained its mojo. Another of her great jingoistic triumphs was the successful Falklands War in 1982. It was perhaps the last hurrah of the British Empire.

President Ronald Reagan loved her, and in general she was held in greater affection by the United States than she was by most Britons. So it came as a great surprise to me to learn that Reagan nearly scuppered the Falklands campaign.

Here is an extract from an article that appeared in the British Sunday Telegraph on December 28, 2012:

“The United States wanted to give Argentina advance warning that Britain was going to retake South Georgia in 1982 in a move that would have spelt disaster ahead of the Falklands campaign, according to newly released files. The proposal, by US secretary of state Alexander Haig, was intended to show the military junta in Buenos Aires that America was a neutral player and could be trusted to act impartially during negotiations to end the conflict.

Ronald Reagan, then US President, made repeated attempts to persuade Margaret Thatcher to negotiate a truce so the Argentinians could save face and avoid “complete humiliation”. He was told by the State Department that support for a European colonial power would undermine ties with Latin America and hamper Washington’s covert campaign against communism in the western hemisphere. Thatcher refused, telling Mr. Reagan in a late night phone call on May 31st, 1982 that she would “not contemplate” a ceasefire after the loss of “precious British lives”.

Separately, Mrs. Thatcher found herself subject to demands from the Pope John Paul II. In one telegram, he calls on God to help “secure an immediate ceasefire. Thatcher, however, stood her ground, replying that Argentine aggression “cannot be allowed to succeed”.

While US defense secretary Caspar Weinberger proved a staunch ally of Britain from the outbreak of war on 2 April 1982, authorizing secret shipments of weapons vital to the task force, the US state department was anything but sympathetic to British interests.”

You will notice that it was the US State Department that was the source of the anti-British sentiment, as indeed it has always been, and remains today, against anything pro-Israel. The same was true during the Yom Kipur War, when again the State Department wanted the USA to stay out of the conflict and Kissinger (uncharacteristically and surprisingly) overruled them. It has always been the same in Britain. The Foreign Office's civil servants have always been Arabists. It has always been the politicians, including Margaret Thatcher, who have tended to overrule them. Indeed, today the majority of the frontbench of the conservative British government is sympathetic towards Israel; the Foreign Office is not. Bureaucrats think with statistics, weighing up numbers and spheres of influence. They think with their minds rather than their hearts. Politicians are more likely to decide emotionally or as a result of personal pressure.

So it is with Israel. All logic goes against it. More Muslims in the world, Arab oil, greater Arab wealth, world opinion (or some would say prejudice), all militate against supporting Israel. Yet time and time again, when it really comes down to the crunch, against the odds, decisions go Israel's way. There may be two reasons for this.

The first is that Israel is still more like the West than the East. It is surrounded by a sea of hatred and yet manages to survive. It is hated because it is a military power and an occupying power. Give me any example of anyone who likes to be occupied? Rather a failed government of their own than a successful one imposed from without. Yet it remains very much the underdog in comparison to the numbers, wealth, and power of the Arab and Muslim world. And counter intuitively, it is still both admired and hated.

But secondly, it is led by men who will fight for it, be prepared to be unpopular, refuse to curry favor with the international community and its journalists if they perceive its best interests are not being served. I don't like Netanyahu any more than I like any politician. I dislike right-winger politics wherever it is. And I believe no stone should be unturned in the pursuit of peace, and making inflammatory statements or actions is dangerously infantile if not counterproductive. But I have to hand it to him. Netanyahu is prepared to fight and be unpopular in the process. So was Margaret Thatcher. That is why the majority of the Israeli public and I would rather have someone like that as a leader than a nominal Jew who cares little for our heritage, who would put Hollywood's values over Judaism's.

No one can deny the need to keep the USA sweet. Britain has known that since the First World War and Israel knows that now. But when push comes to shove, no one else cares as much about a Jewish state as it does. Every now and then the world needs to know that, warts and all, the Jews will fight to the bitter end no matter who refuses to support them. They might not have liked Thatcher but they admired her guts. Who knows one day history might be kind to Israel.