

The Rt Hon William Hague

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Remarks at Unveiling of the Statue of Ronald Reagan

Grosvenor Square, London

4th July 2011

On behalf of the British Government on this moving occasion, as a Briton, as a Conservative and as a passionate admirer of America, I am proud that we have made a home here in the centre of our city for President Ronald Reagan.

It is a great honour for me personally to take part in a ceremony for a man who changed the political landscape at the time I first became involved in it.

He joins the ranks of great men and women whose statues adorn our London streets; Nelson, Wellington, Lincoln, Churchill, Roosevelt, Edith Cavell and Nelson Mandela.

Statues bring us to face to face with our heroes long after they are gone. Ronald Reagan is without question a great American hero; one of America's finest sons, and a giant of 20th Century history. You may be sure that the people of London will take his statue to their hearts.

For years to come, thousands of people will pass by this place as they visit London or go about their daily lives.

Those who stop and look will be reminded of President Reagan's extraordinary achievements, and all that he stood for as a man and a leader of men:

The President, who restored American confidence with inspirational leadership and commitment to strength abroad and economic revival at home. His shining optimism that America's best days were still ahead was vindicated not only during his Presidency, but by all that the nation he so dearly loved has accomplished since then.

The man of conviction, who knew it was right to go to Berlin and say "Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall", at a time when such a thing seemed utterly impossible and many advised him against it, and who simply would not forget or give up on those he saw enslaved by communism.

The statesman, who in the words of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, won the Cold War "by inviting enemies out of their fortress and turning them into friends".

The peacemaker, who was prepared to seek reconciliation with the Soviet Union, but who never wavered in exposing its flaws and so hastened its demise.

The negotiator, architect of the first treaty that made progress on nuclear disarmament and began to turn the tide of fears of nuclear holocaust.

The great idealist, who were he alive today might well be saying now “it is morning again in the Middle East”, spurring us on to help those in the region seeking freedom.

And on top of his achievements as President, we remember Ronald Reagan for his extraordinary human touch.

When the space shuttle Challenger exploded before the eyes of a shocked nation and seven brave men and women died, he offered comfort to the American people with a grace and compassion that has been seldom rivalled, saying:

“We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God.””

He said that those seven astronauts “had that special grace, that special spirit that says, give me a challenge and I will meet it with joy”.

Well of all people Ronald Reagan had that spirit himself.

When confronted by difficulty he drew on his own unending reserves of humour and charm. When pierced by an assassin’s bullet and bleeding on a hospital bed he could still joke to his wife, “honey, I forgot to duck”, and reassure a nation with his courage and resolve.

Such outstanding leadership qualities meant that even those who disagreed with his politics recognised his greatness.

Here in Britain we admire him for the way he brought to the Special Relationship between our countries such intense personal warmth and mutual loyalty.

His belief in our country as a staunch friend and ally showed itself in the support he gave us after the invasion of the Falkland Islands, which we will always remember.

And it was reflected in his deep and abiding friendship and partnership with the Prime Minister.

He recognised in her a fellow leader and “a tower of strength”, as he described her,

He understood then as we do now that “the strength of America’s allies is vital to the United States”, and that America has no stronger ally than Britain in standing up for peace and security in the world.

The resolve shown by President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher, allied with the courage of the people of Eastern Europe, brought down the Berlin Wall, saw communism collapse and the Soviet Union dissolve, and helped usher in democracy for tens of millions of people.

Lady Thatcher could not be with us today and is much missed at this ceremony by all of us. But she has asked me to say these words to you:

“Ronald Reagan was a great President and a great man - a true leader for our times. He held clear principles and acted upon them with purpose. Through his strength and his conviction he brought millions of people to freedom as the Iron Curtain finally came down. It was a pleasure to be his colleague and his friend and I hope that this statue will be a reminder to future generations of the debt we owe him.”

As President Reagan once said: “Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue”.

Today, wherever in the world there is conflict, oppression or danger you will find Britain and America working side by side.

Our two countries still make an indispensable contribution to each other’s security and to global security, and still play a vital role in standing up for the values that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan espoused.

It was a French writer who once said that a nation could be judged by the statues it erects. I for one am proud about what this statue says about Britain and America.

It reminds us of a period of extraordinary achievement and hope in world affairs after a time of darkness and great danger.

It celebrates the life of an exceptional and gifted American President.

It is a fitting tribute to one of the truest friends that Britain has ever had.

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And it will be a source of inspiration and encouragement to all of us who live in a more peaceful and prosperous world today because President Reagan, Britain and our allies stood firm.

This generation knows that to be true. This statue will help future generations never to forget it.