

On the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the United States Air Force

by Lady Margaret Thatcher
Former Prime Minister of Great Britain
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Warm greetings and grateful thanks to you all as you gather to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the United States Air Force. Alas, I can't be with you myself because I have commitments in Hong Kong.

The USAF is a young Service when compared with the Army and Navy, but it has already established a great tradition. My generation will never forget the courage and selflessness of those young Americans who in World War II risked, and in many cases gave, their lives that liberty might prevail. Today, you are a vital part of our security, and your effectiveness wields enormous influence on world events.

Over the fifty years since your founding we have witnessed astonishing advances in science and technology - indeed they have revolutionized our lives. I recall my visit to see the Stealth aircraft: and later I remember viewing an extensive exhibition of work on the Strategic Defense Initiative - which is still vital to our future. Both were exciting beyond measure. Some of our finest young scientists were achieving remarkable results and receiving all too little recognition and praise. These great technological advances of the past half century have transformed the scope of military operations. No part of the globe is now beyond the reach of the power and precision of the United States Air Force.

I cherish the personal links which developed between the USAF and Britain during the long years of the Cold War. As Prime Minister I was privileged to work closely with President Reagan and President Bush in the struggle against Communist tyranny. You represented Freedom's forward presence in Europe. Your strength and foresight not only deterred aggression, it helped to bring about the collapse of that heartless ideology.

Now your role extends beyond the bounds of the Cold War world. The Gulf War was a vivid reminder that evil will always be with us and that dictators will not suddenly become an extinct species.

There, your speedy and courageous action ensured that the enemy was defeated.

Today, we face new threats and instabilities. Weapons of mass destruction are now available to regimes who have little respect for human life.

My friends, we in Britain are proud to be part of the great Anglo American Alliance
- the greatest force for liberty in the world has ever known.

On this your 50th anniversary, let us learn the lessons from the past so that we may
never fail the generations of the future.

In the words of Goethe:

*That which thy fathers bequeathed thee, earn it anew if thou wouldst
possess it.*