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FM PARIS

TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY 101800Z FCO

TELNO 145

OF 101615Z FEBRUARY 86

INFO SAVING BRUSSELS, BONN, CG LILLE, CG BORDEAUX, CG LYON

INFO SAVING CG MARSEILLE

(COLLAR)

CFL CEREMONY AT CANTERBURY : PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S CURRENT  
PREOCCUPATIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE ELECTIONS INCREASINGLY DOMINATE MITTERRAND'S THINKING AS HE MOVES MORE DIRECTLY INTO THE FRAY. BUT POLLS STILL SHOW THE RPR/UDF LIKELY TO WIN A CLEAR MAJORITY. TERRORISM HAS BECOME AN ELECTION ISSUE IN THE LAST WEEK.

DETAIL

2. MITTERRAND'S PREOCCUPATIONS HAVE NOT CHANGED GREATLY SINCE THE LILLE CEREMONY (MY TELNO 55). THERE IS NOW LITTLE MORE THAN A MONTH TO GO UNTIL THE ELECTIONS, WHICH INCREASINGLY DOMINATE HIS ACTIONS. THE CAMPAIGN HAS NOT GONE WELL FOR THE OPPOSITION IN THE LAST FORTNIGHT (MY SAVING TELNO 11 OF 7 FEBRUARY), LARGELY BECAUSE OF BARRE'S DETERMINED REJECTION OF THE IDEA OF THE RPR/UDF GOVERNING WITH MITTERRAND AFTER THE ELECTIONS. BUT THE SOCIALIST SCORE IN THE OPINION POLLS HAS NOT IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY.

3. MITTERRAND HIMSELF HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY ACTIVE IN THE CAMPAIGN. HE FOLLOWED UP HIS MAJOR APPEARANCE AT GRAND-QUEVILLY (FABIUS' FIEF) JUST BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER LAST MET HIM (MY SAVING TELNO 7 OF 24 JANUARY), WITH ANOTHER POWERFUL PERFORMANCE ON 7 FEBRUARY IN LILLE (MAUROY'S STRONGHOLD). INEVITABLY, THE OPPOSITION ARGUE THAT HAVING RE-ENTERED THE FRAY AS LEADER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, HE CAN NO LONGER PRETEND TO BE ACTING AS PRESIDENT OF ALL THE FRENCH PEOPLE, AND THAT HIS POSITION AFTER THE ELECTION WILL BE CORRESPONDINGLY WEAKENED. MITTERRAND, MEANWHILE, HAS BEEN REDOUBLING HIS EFFORTS TO STAKE OUT THE GROUND IN THE AREAS WHERE HE INTENDS TO RETAIN THE MAXIMUM CONTROL. FOR EXAMPLE, HE PUBLISHED ON 30 JANUARY, A COLLECTION OF HIS FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPEECHES PREFACED BY 135 PAGES OF STYLISHLY WRITTEN COMMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY, VERY MUCH ALONG TRADITIONAL LINES (MY SAVING TELNO 9 OF 3 FEBRUARY). HE HAS ALSO OVER THE WEEKEND EMPHASISED HIS PRIMACY IN DEFENCE MATTERS BY

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REMINDING EVERYONE THAT IT IS HIS FINGER ON THE NUCLEAR BUTTON.

4. MITTERRAND HAS NOW REVISED HIS EARLIER PLEDGE TO DESIST FROM CAMPAIGNING THE LAST THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. NOT ONLY WILL HE EXPLOIT DOMESTIC EVENTS TO MAKE PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS (THE NEXT IN SIGHT IS AT NEVERS ON 14 FEBRUARY), BUT HE CONTINUES TO APPEAR AT MAJOR INTERNATIONAL OCCASIONS TIMED WITH THE ELECTIONS IN MIND. LAST WEEK, IT WAS THE FRENCH-INSPIRED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FORESTS, WHICH MR RAISON ATTENDED. NEXT WEEK, IT WILL BE THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE (ALSO IN PARIS) OF HEADS OF STATE OF FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES. THESE HELP KEEP MITTERRAND IN THE PUBLIC EYE THROUGHOUT THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN.

5. BUT SUCH ACTIVITY DOES NOT ALTER THE FACT THAT THE RPR/UDF ALLIANCE STILL LOOKS SET TO WIN A CLEAR VICTORY ON 16 MARCH. THE LATEST OPINION POLLS SHOW THE RELATIVE SCORES REMAINING STABLE. DESPITE THE CONTINUED RECOVERY IN MITTERRAND'S PERSONAL POPULARITY, THE RPR/UDF ALLIANCE AT PRESENT LOOKS SET TO WIN SOME 46% OF THE TOTAL VOTES (AGAINST ABOUT 29% FOR THE SOCIALISTS). THERE IS STILL SOME UNCERTAINTY, GIVEN THAT UP TO A QUARTER OF THOSE POLLED CLAIMED THEY HAD NOT DECIDED HOW TO VOTE OR MIGHT CHANGE THEIR MINDS. BUT AT THIS STAGE, THE SIGNS ARE THAT THE RPR/UDF ALLIANCE WILL HAVE A COMFORTABLE OVERALL MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

6. ONE PARTICULAR ISSUE WHICH HAS COME TO THE FORE IN THE LAST WEEK IS TERRORISM. AFTER THE 3 BOMB ATTACKS IN PARIS LAST WEEK, WHICH HAVE PROVOKED A SHARP POLITICAL DEBATE, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT HAS CONVENED A MEETING OF THE TWELVE ON 12 FEBRUARY TO DISCUSS EC COOPERATION AGAINST TERRORISM (MY TELNO 143). MITTERRAND MAY WELL ALLUDE TO THIS.

FRETWELL

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FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING BRUSSELS, BONN

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