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TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 3048 OF 11 OCTOBER

INFO SAVING NATO AND EC POSTS, US CGS, BIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW, TOKYO

MY TELNO 3006: THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY

1. THE COMMENTATORS AGREE THAT THE TELEVISED DEBATE ON 7 OCTOBER HAS PUT MONDALE BACK IN THE RACE. THE AGE FACTOR IS NOW AN OPENLY DISCUSSED ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN. THE PRESIDENT STILL HAS A SUBSTANTIAL LEAD, BUT SMALLER THAN BEFORE. THIS HAS RAISED THE STAKES FOR THE BUSH/FERRARO DEBATE TONIGHT. BUT THE BASICS - THE STRENGTH OF THE ECONOMY AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT TO THE SUNBELT - REMAIN THE SAME AND BOTH BENEFIT THE PRESIDENT.

DETAIL

2. 90 MILLION AMERICANS ARE SAID TO HAVE WATCHED THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE LAST SUNDAY. THEY SAW THE PRESIDENT LOOKING UNCHARACTERISTICALLY NERVOUS AND HESITANT WHILE HIS CHALLENGER, BY CONTRAST, LOOKED RELAXED AND CONFIDENT AND DEALT CONVINCINGLY WITH THE ISSUES. THE PRESIDENT APPEARED VISIBLY TO FLAG TOWARDS THE END OF THE 100 MINUTES ON STAGE.

3. THE MEDIA HAVE UNANIMOUSLY DECLARED MONDALE THE WINNER. LEADING COLUMNISTS HAVE DESCRIBED THE DEBATE AS A DEBACLE FOR REAGAN AND THE MOST ONE-SIDED PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE SINCE THESE CONTESTS BEGAN. AS THE DAYS HAVE GONE BY THE JUDGEMENT HAS BECOME MORE EMPHATIC. INEVITABLY, THE COMMENTATORS ARE OFF ON A FRESH SCENT, LIKE FOX TERRIERS OUT ON A WALK. A CONSISTENT THEME OF PRESS COMMENT OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS, EVEN IN NEWSPAPERS NOT NORMALLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESIDENT (EG THE WALL STREET JOURNAL), HAS BEEN THAT HIS PERFORMANCE RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS AGE AND ABILITY TO SERVE FOUR MORE YEARS. THE WHITE HOUSE ARE NATURALLY PLAYING THIS DOWN AND HAVE ISSUED A STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT'S DOCTOR TO THE EFFECT THAT HE IS QUOTE A MENTALLY ALERT, ROBUST MAN UNQUOTE. BUT THE ISSUE IS AN AWKWARD ONE WHICH WILL NOT EASILY GO AWAY, PARTICULARLY IF THERE ARE FURTHER SLIPS OR STUMBLES- OR WORSE STILL ANY HINT OF ILLNESS- BETWEEN NOW AND THE ELECTION.

4. WHAT EFFECT ALL THIS WILL HAVE ON THE ELECTORATE IS NOT EASY TO SAY. THE BASICS HAVE NOT CHANGED. THE ECONOMY CONTINUES TO GROW, ALTHOUGH AT A SLOWER PACE. THE DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT TO THE SUNBELT IS STILL THERE AND THE ETHOS OF THE SUNBELT IS NOT ABOUT TO CHANGE. THESE FACTORS CONTINUE TO BENEFIT THE PRESIDENT. POLLS TAKEN SINCE THE DEBATE SHOW REAGAN STILL COMFORTABLY AHEAD, THOUGH WITH HIS LEAD REDUCED BY ABOUT 3 POINTS (FROM 18 TO 15 POINTS). PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANT IS THE FACT THAT MONDALE'S APPROVAL RATING (IE THE PROPORTION OF VOTERS EXPRESSING A

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FAVOURABLE OPINION OF HIM) HAS RISEN, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST ABC POLL, FROM 41 PERCENT TO 54 PERCENT IN THE LAST WEEK.

THE PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATING HOWEVER HAS STAYED ABOUT LEVEL AT 60-61 PERCENT. THIS SUGGESTS THAT MONDALE DID HIS IMAGE A LOT OF GOOD, BUT HAS NOT YET MANAGED TO TRANSLATE THIS INTO POTENTIAL VOTES. CONVERSELY THE PRESIDENT'S OVERALL LEVEL OF SUPPORT APPEARS TO BE HOLDING UP PRETTY WELL.

5. THE GAP WAS EXPECTED TO CLOSE AND HAS NOW BEGUN TO DO SO. THE FIRST DEBATE HAS SHARPENED EXPECTATIONS/APPREHENSIONS ON EACH SIDE FOR THE BUSH/FERRARO ENCOUNTER TONIGHT AND THE REAGAN/MONDALE REPLAY ON 21 OCTOBER. MONDALE STILL HAS A GREAT DEAL OF LEEWAY TO MAKE UP IF HE IS TO GET WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE. BUT HE IS BACK IN THE RACE, AND BOTH HE, HIS RUNNING MATE AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAVE SHAKEN OFF THE AIR OF INEVITABLY IMPENDING DEFEAT WHICH DOGGED HIM BEFORE THE DEBATE. HIS CAMPAIGN CROWDS HAVE BEEN BIGGER, AND SPEECHES SHARPER, THIS WEEK: AND THE PRESIDENTS' CAMPAIGN STAFF SEEM CORRESPONDINGLY MORE ON EDGE, THOUGH STILL CONFIDENT. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE RACE HAS COME ALIVE, BUT THE ODDS ARE STILL ON REAGAN TO WIN.

FCO PASS SAVING TO

ANKARA ATHENS BRUSSELS BONN COPENHAGEN LISBON LUXEMBOURG MADRID  
UKDEL STOCKHOLM DUBLIN MOSCOW TOKYO OTTAWA OSLO PARIS ROME REYKJAVIK  
THE HAGUE UKDEL NATOUKDEL VIENNA UKREP BRUSSELS

WRIGHT

FCO(PALACE)/WHITEHALL  
NAD

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)