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SAVING TO (FOR INFO) BONN, WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO, MOSCOW,
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MITTERRAND'S PRESS CONFERENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY: 10 MARCH

SUMMARY

1. Mitterrand reaffirms and explains his welcome for progress towards an INF agreement. He takes a tough line on Middle East terrorism and Chad. Other subjects covered include EC financing, President of Europe and Third World debt. In domestic terms, this was an occasion to present himself as fully in control of French foreign policy.

DETAIL

2. Mitterrand was guest of honour at lunch on 10 March with the French diplomatic press. His remarks broke little really new ground, although there were some new nuances. Over half the time was devoted to East-West relations.

3. On INF, Mitterrand recalled that the zero option was a Western proposal which the USSR seemed belatedly to have accepted. At the time of the deployment debate, France had fully supported this Western position. The zero option on its own did not require a link to conventional disarmament, although some other proposals from Reykjavik would pose the question of conventional arms. Nor would the zero option necessarily lead to US decoupling: that was a much more complex political issue. In any case, France had her own nuclear deterrent and did not participate in the negotiation. Her forces were not intermediate. He had told Vorontsov that if the Russians again tried to include French strategic forces in an INF negotiation, he would insist that all Soviet nuclear forces be included, since they were all in Europe and all Euro-missiles.

4. Asked about Gorbachev's motives in delinking INF, Mitterrand spoke first of the rapidity with which Pershing IIs in the FRG could strike targets in the USSR, then added that the USSR, and especially Gorbachev, wanted «to pursue a certain disarmament, a disarmament sufficient in any case to enable it to devote a part of the resources of the Soviet Union to its economic recovery, to increasing the standard of living of the Soviet citizen».

5. Mitterrand was also asked about possible Soviet pressure to include French short-range missiles, Hades and Pluton, in a follow-on negotiation. He said that the terms of such a negotiation were not yet known: and Soviet superiority in

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short-range systems was so great that they should be required to make the first move. He added, obscurely, that when the problem was posed, the journalist's question was completely reasonable and could be examined: indeed it already figured in Western statements. He later stressed that France's strategic forces were not up for negotiation and that they were intimately linked to the tactical nuclear forces.

6. Mitterrand reiterated his support for European defence with specific references to the FRG and UK.

7. On EC questions, Mitterrand saw great difficulties in achieving the completion of the internal market in 5 years, but they must be overcome. Progress had been achieved on agriculture. He welcomed Chirac's decision to agree to a larger R and D programme (without mentioning figures). On the budget, the Fontainebleau European Council had envisaged raising the VAT ceiling to 1.6% next year. This was now an indispensable minimum and should be attainable despite the obstacles, notably the British view. Delors' ideas for changing the basis to a percentage of GDP were too ambitious for the moment but showed the direction for the future.

8. Mitterrand said that it was desirable to have a President of Europe. Six months was too short. The Troika was not a satisfactory solution. It would be good for the European Council to designate one of their number as President for a reasonable length of time. Eventually the President might be chosen by the EP or even direct election.

9. We are reporting separately in detail Mitterrand's comments on terrorism and the Middle East. He said that one could not negotiate with terrorism or its agents. He had refused to exchange the hostages for convicted terrorists in France. What he had agreed was to set free one criminal (Naqqash) if and when all the French hostages had been released, but he had refused to go further.

10. On Chad, he described Hissein Habré as a man who was intelligently conducting military operations to recover the integrity of Chadian territory. The Africans and OAU seemed better to understand the nature of the problem, but the solution, unfortunately, was first a military one. French aid to Chad was increasing every month.

11. On Third World debt, Mitterrand said that it was inconceivable that there would not be cancellation of debts by the rich nations for the poorest, and special treatment for the others.

12. Finally, Mitterrand underlined the continuity of French foreign policy since the legislative elections and his own direction of it.