



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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2 February 1982

Sir Reginald Hibbert GCMG
PARIS*Dear Reg,*

PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S HEALTH

1. Thank you for your interesting letter of 18 December drawing attention to the latest developments in the saga of the President's health. I agree that it would be a major set-back for the Socialists in France if there were to be any serious doubt over Mitterrand lasting at least 5 years.
2. We here in the FCO have not really been close to the President for long enough to form a worthwhile judgement though I myself saw no reason to doubt his health at the last European Council. His performance then was at times unexpected but I would find it difficult to attribute this to health problems.
3. The Prime Minister has told us that she was struck by the way in which President Mitterrand declined to play a positive role at the Cancun meetings. Given French statements about their intention to adopt a more forthcoming policy towards third world problems, he could have been expected to play a leading role but did not do so. The Prime Minister has no particular reason for attributing this reticence to health reasons but nevertheless finds it difficult to explain.
4. In her two recent contacts with President Mitterrand (at Cancun and at the last meeting of the European Council) the Prime Minister was struck by the peculiar colour of Mitterrand's skin. She also recalls that when she commented to Mitterrand's interpreter at the European Council that Mitterrand had lost weight, the interpreter replied: 'He has to - his doctor has told him he must'.



5. But despite these tentative indications of ill health, the Prime Minister has not detected any evidence that Mitterrand's mental or intellectual faculties are deteriorating.

6. Robert Armstrong asked Jaques Attali politely after the President's health when he was in Paris for a meeting of Personal Representatives in December. Rather to his surprise Attali launched into a list of medical ailments including rheumatism, of a kind which (he suggested) were normally associated with advancing years. Robert Armstrong wondered whether Attali was seeking to reassure him (or even to put him off the scent) with this rather unexpected display of medical openness.

7. I do not think there is any more we can say at this stage, but I am sure^x you will keep us abreast of the subject.

Yours ever,

Michael

Michael Palliser

x - or at least the Embassy !