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FROM PARIS
TO FCO TELNO 54 SAVING OF 2 JUNE 1982

FALKLANDS : FRENCH REACTIONS

1. French press coverage has continued to be reasonably good. Although the tone of reporting reflects a growing recognition of the valour of the Argentine troops, there are few calls for Britain to stop fighting. Comment has tended to focus more on what will happen after the fighting is over, and the wider international implications of the conflict. Apprehensions about the effects on French relations with Latin America and the Third World are re-emerging.

2. One consequence of the general assumption that Britain will win a military victory has been some soul-searching debate on the basic issues at stake. Some interesting examples have been provided in a series of articles by left-wing writers in Le Matin. These set out clearly the French dilemma over the Falklands, particularly on the Left. Guy Claisse, a recent biographer of Mitterrand, while agreeing that Britain was right to defend the principle that aggression should not pay, complained that support for Britain had now become an intellectual orthodoxy and was obscuring the need to oppose colonialism and the importance of Europe's links with Latin America. These reservations reflect traditionally strong underlying trends in the French Socialist Party. Other writers in countering these points have recalled that in the Thirties and Forties there were occasions when failure to line up with Britain in resisting aggression led to disaster, and have drawn attention to the trends of anglophilia and anglophobia with which French political life is riven. The debate has touched some deep chords in French politics. In its editorial on 2 June, however, Le Matin comes to the positive conclusion that the conflict had put Western solidarity to the test, with the result that UK-US relations had been strengthened and relations between France and the UK, or at least between the two Heads of Government, had never been better.

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