

CONFIDENTIAL

056061
MDHIAN 4906

CONFIDENTIAL AMENDED DISTRIBUTION 8/4
FM PARIS
TO DESKBY 081200Z FCO
TELNO 340
OF 080859Z APRIL 88
AND TO IMMEDIATE SINGAPORE
INFO ROUTINE EC POSTS, WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO
INFO SAVING CONSUATES GENERAL IN FRANCE

COLLAR

FOLLOWING FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE FOREIGN SECRETARY

MY TELNO 318 : FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

1. MITTERRAND REMAINS WELL AHEAD OF CHIRAC IN THE POLLS. BARRE HAS SLIPPED AGAIN.

2. MITTERRAND IS MAKING THE RUNNING. HE HAS PUBLISHED AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL FRENCH CITIZENS SETTING OUT THE CHOICES FACING FRANCE AND THE COURSE HE WOULD STEER IF RE-ELECTED. COUCHED IN MODERATE TERMS, IT REINFORCES HIS EFFORTS TO ISOLATE CHIRAC AND APPEAL TO THE CENTRE GROUND.

3. CHIRAC HAS BEEN REFUTING MITTERRAND'S CHARGE THAT HE WANTS TO CONSTRUCT AN RPR STATE, AND MULTIPLYING HIS OVERTURES TO THE CENTRE. LE PEN'S STRONG SHOWING IS AN INCREASING EMBARRASSMENT. THE CHIRAC CAMP HOPES THAT THE RELEASE OF THE THREE FRENCH HOSTAGES (IF IT HAPPENS) WILL GIVE THEM A BOOST. BARRE REMAINS DIGNIFIED AS HIS PROSPECTS DIMINISH FURTHER.

4. THE RIGHT LOOKS RAGGED AND IS ON THE DEFENSIVE. MITTERRAND CONTINUES TO SHOW HIS TACTICAL SKILL.

DETAIL

5. WHILE THE CANDIDATES EASED UP OVER THE EASTER WEEK-END, THE OPINION POLLS DID NOT. THERE HAS BEEN A SPATE OF FINDINGS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, ALL REACHING MUCH THE SAME CONCLUSION: MITTERRAND REMAINS COMFORTABLY IN FRONT ON 37-38 PERCENT, CHIRAC IS AT AROUND 24 PERCENT, NOW WELL CLEAR OF BARRE WHO HAS SLIPPED TO 15-16 PERCENT, WITH LE PEN CLOSING UP TO 11-12 PERCENT. ON THE EXTREME LEFT, THE UNINSPIRING COMMUNIST CANDIDATE, LAJOINIE, OSCILLATES AROUND 5-6 PERCENT WITH HIS DISSIDENT BUT MORE TELEGENIC COMMUNIST CHALLENGER

CONFIDENTIAL

056061
MDHIAN 4906

JUQUIN AT 3 PERCENT.

6. MITTERRAND IS MAKING THE RUNNING. HAVING ACCUSED HIM OF SHIRKING BATTLE, THE RIGHT WERE CAUGHT OFF BALANCE BY HIS COMBATIVE ANNOUNCEMENT ON 22 MARCH. HAVING ACCUSED HIM OF BEING AN ANAESTHETIST, DEVOID OF POLITICAL IDEAS, THEY ARE NOW TRYING TO COUNTER THE IMPACT OF AN "OPEN LETTER TO ALL FRENCH CITIZENS" WHICH HAS BECOME THE FOCUS OF DEBATE. THE TEMPO IS NOW BEING DICTATED BY MITTERRAND.

7. MITTERRAND'S LETTER, WHICH HE WROTE HIMSELF, WAS PUBLISHED IN A NUMBER OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PAPERS ON 7 APRIL. IT TAKES UP TWELVE PAGES OF ADVERTISING. IT IS STRIKING FOR ITS LENGTH, FOR THE ORIGINALITY OF ITS FORM IN AN AGE OF STEREO-TYPED ELECTION HANDOUTS, AND FOR ITS INTIMACY OF STYLE. MITTERRAND DELIBERATELY ADDRESSES THE VOTERS IN A MANNER WHICH HE LIKENS TO A FAMILY DISCUSSION AROUND THE DINING TABLE, CONSCIOUSLY PLAYING UP THE DIRECT LINK BETWEEN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND VOTER THAT IS AT THE HEART OF THE GAULLIST CONCEPTION OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC. HE MIXES PASSION AND RELECTION, ANALYSIS AND ANECDOTE. HE DOES NOT SET OUT A DETAILED PROGRAMME (WHICH HE ARGUES IS FOR GOVERNMENTS NOT PRESIDENTS) BUT HIS BROAD ASSESSMENT OF THE CHOICES FACING FRANCE AND THE COURSE HE WOULD STEER IF RE-ELECTED.

8. I SHALL BE FOLLOWING UP WITH A FULLER ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT (TOGETHER WITH A SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSITIONS PUT FORWARD BY CHIRAC AND BARRE). IN GENERAL TERMS THE LETTER DEFENDS MITTERRAND'S RECORD AS PRESIDENT SINCE 1981 AND SETS OUT A NUMBER OF PRIORITIES FOR A SECOND TERM, WHICH INCLUDE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AT HOME (EG THE REINTRODUCTION OF A WEALTH TAX TO HELP PAY FOR A MINIMUM MONTHLY BENEFIT FOR "THE NEW POOR"), AND AN ACTIVE ROLE FOR FRANCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE, PROMOTING DISARMAMENT AND THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENT. MITTERRAND MAKES EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION A TOP PRIORITY, AND STRESSES THE NEED TO PREPARE FRANCE FOR THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE SINGLE MARKET BY PUTTING INCREASED EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION, TRAINING, INVESTMENT AND RESEARCH.

9. THE CHIRAQUIENS' INITIAL REACTION HAS BEEN TO ATTACK THE LETTER AS BEING SHORT ON SPECIFICS AND LONG ON PIOUS GENERALITIES. BUT THIS IN ITSELF POINTS TO THE SKILL WITH WHICH MITTERRAND HAS DRAFTED. ONLY A MONTH AGO CHIRAC WAS WARNING THAT MITTERRAND WAS AN UNRECONSTRUCTED SOCIALIST OF THE 1981-84 VARIETY, WAITING TO UNLEASH HIS RED HORDES AGAIN AND RPR COMMENT HAS FOLLOWED THIS THEME. NOW MITTERRAND HAS PRODUCED A PERSONAL MANIFESTO COUCHED IN MODERATE

TERMS WHICH, FOR ALL ITS LENGTH, DOES NOT MENTION SOCIALISM ONCE. HIS ONLY SHARPNESS COMES IN REFERENCES TO CHIRAC AND THE RPR, IN WHOSE ADVENTURIST HANDS MITTERRAND IMPLIES FRANCE WOULD BE IN PERIL. MITTERRAND EMERGES AS THE HERO OF THE COHABITATION YEARS, PUTTING CHIRAC FIRMLY IN HIS PLACE IN CASES OF ALLEGED DEVIATION OVER E.G. SDI, CHAD, AND DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE. THE STRATEGY IS THE SAME AS IN THE 22 MARCH ANNOUNCEMENT: ISOLATE CHIRAC AND APPEAL TO THE CENTRE GROUND.

10. CHIRAC HAS BEEN TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM THE CORNER INTO WHICH MITTERRAND HAS BEEN PAINTING HIM. HE CONCENTRATES HIS ATTACK ON MITTERRAND'S HISTORICAL RECORD OF GETTING MAJOR DECISIONS WRONG, AND ON HIS PRESENT VAGUENESS AND IMMOBILISM: 'HE HAS NOTHING LEFT TO SAY'. HE AND HIS ENTOURAGE CONTINUE TO EXPRESS OUTRAGED INNOCENCE AT SUGGESTIONS THAT THEY ARE BENT ON ESTABLISHING AN 'RPR STATE' FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR FRIENDS. THEY HAVE ALSO MULTIPLIED THEIR OVERTURES TO THE CENTRISTS, MATCHING MITTERRAND'S BLANDISHMENTS. THEY HAVE BEEN HINTING THAT, IF ELECTED, CHIRAC MIGHT CHOOSE A UDF PRIME MINISTER, PERHAPS EVEN A CDS (IE CENTRIST) ONE, AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO KEEP BARRISTE VOTERS ON BOARD IN THE SECOND ROUND. ANXIETY ABOUT THE CENTRE IS MIRRORED BY CONCERN TO THEIR RIGHT WHERE LE PEN'S CHALLENGE THREATENS TO BECOME A SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT. ON THE ONE HAND THE CHIRAC CAMP DO NOT WANT LE PEN TO OVER-TAKE BARRE IN THE POLLS FOR FEAR THAT THIS WILL FRIGHTEN THE CENTRE TOWARDS MITTERRAND. ON THE OTHER THEY WANT TO ATTRACT AS MANY OF LE PEN'S VOTERS AS POSSIBLE IN THE SECOND ROUND. THEY THEREFORE HESITATE BETWEEN ATTACKING LE PEN HEAD ON, AND NEGOTIATING WITH HIM. (THERE ARE STRONG RUMOURS THAT THE RPR IS CONTEMPLATING A SECOND ROUND DEAL WITH LE PEN: IN RETURN FOR HIS ENDORSEMENT OF CHIRAC, THEY WOULD GUARANTEE THE FRONT NATIONAL 15-20 SEATS AT THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS.) AMID THESE DIFFICULTIES THEY CONTINUE TO HOPE THAT A HOSTAGE DEAL (MY TELNO 332 OF 6 APRIL) WOULD ALLOW CHIRAC TO RECAPTURE THE INITIATIVE AND GIVE HIM NEW MOMENTUM.

11. BARRE REMAINS DIGNIFIED AND SERENE IN THE FACE OF HIS FALLING POPULARITY. MINOR REORGANISATION OF HIS CAMPAIGN STAFF, AND SOLID BUT UNEXCITING TELEVISION PERFORMANCES, HAVE NOT BEEN ENOUGH TO ARREST THE DECLINE. ONLY A DRAMATIC CHANGE OF MOOD OR SOME MAJOR AND UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT NOW SEEMS LIKELY TO RESTORE HIS FORTUNES.

12. WITH TWO WEEKS UNTIL THE FIRST ROUND, THE BROAD RIGHT NOW SEEMS ON THE DEFENSIVE. ITS DIVISIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS ARE MAKING IT LOOK INCREASINGLY RAGGED. MITTERRAND IS LEADING A WILY AND SOPHISTICATED CAMPAIGN.

CONFIDENTIAL

056061
MDHIAN 4906

FERGUSSON

YYYY

DISTRIBUTION

249

MAIN 249

EUROPEAN POLITICAL

WED [-]

NNNN