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FM PARIS

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TELNO 382

OF 220849Z APRIL 88

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO, EC POSTS

INFO SAVING HMCBS IN FRANCE

MY TELNO 372: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

1. AT THE FIRST ROUND ON SUNDAY, 24 APRIL, MITTERRAND WILL COME IN WELL AHEAD. CHIRAC'S IMPRESSIVE CAMPAIGN WILL BRING HIM AHEAD OF BARRE TO CONFRONT MITTERRAND IN THE SECOND ROUND. LE PEN WILL DO WELL, MUCH BETTER THAN LAJOINIE ON THE OTHER EXTREME. THE MITTERRAND AND CHIRAC CAMPS ARE ALREADY PREPARING FOR THE SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF. MITTERRAND WILL START FAVOURITE BUT CHIRAC WILL BE MAKING AN ENEGETIC FINAL SPRINT.

DETAIL

2. THE CANDIDATES ARE MAKING THEIR FINAL EFFORTS BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND. BARRE HAD A LARGE RALLY IN LILLE YESTERDAY AND MITTERRAND HAS ONE IN PARIS TONIGHT. CHIRAC PREFERS TO CONCENTRATE ON THE MEDIA, TO WHICH HE IS GIVING NUMEROUS INTERVIEWS. VOTING TAKES PLACE ON SUNDAY. THE FINAL OUTCOME IS LIKELY TO BE CLEAR NOT LONG AFTER 2000 HOURS LOCAL TIME. [7 p.m. Lve]

MITTERRAND

3. MITTERRAND'S CAMP ARE CONFIDENT THAT HIS DECISION TO FIGHT A SHORT CAMPAIGN HAS PAID OFF. HE HAS PLAYED DOWN HIS SOCIALIST PAST, PRESENTING HIMSELF AS A MODERATE AND SEASONED PRESIDENT IN WHOM THE NATION CAN PUT ITS TRUST. HE HAS EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN A FRANCE COMMITTED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE. HIS ATTACKS HAVE FOCUSED ON CHIRAC, AND SPARED BARRE, SOME OF WHOSE CONTRIST SUPPORT HE NEEDS TO ATTRACT IN THE SECOND ROUND. IT HAS BEEN A NICELY JUDGED PERFORMANCE AND EVEN IF HIS OPINION POLL RATINGS HAVE SLIPPED A LITTLE FROM THEIR EXCEPTIONAL LEVELS OF A MONTH AGO, HE REMAINS COMFORTABLY AHEAD OF THE FIELD. I EXPECT HIM TO SECURE BETWEEN 34 PERCENT AND 35 PERCENT ON SUNDAY.

CHIRAC

4. CHIRAC'S CAMP ARE EQUALLY CONFIDENT THAT HIS DECISION TO DECLEAR HIS CANDIDACY EARLY WAS THE RIGHT ONE. HE HAS CRISS-CROSSED FRANCE

CONFIDENTIAL

123201
MDHIAN 6758

SINCE JANUARY, PRESENTING HIMSELF AS THE NATURAL LEADER OF THE RIGHT WHO HAS BEGUN TO RESTORE FRENCH FORTUNES SINCE HE BECAME PRIME MINISTER DESPITE MITTERRAND'S OBSTRUCTIONISM. HE PROMISES THAT UNDER HIS DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP FRANCE WOULD BE PRE-EMINENT IN EUROPE BY THE END OF THE CENTURY. HIS ENERGETIC PERFORMANCE, SUPPORTED BY THE FORMIDABLE WELL OILED MACHINE, HAS ENABLED HIM TO CRUISE PAST BARRE BUT NOT TO NEUTRALISE THE CHALLENGE FROM LE PEN. THE LATTER WILL REMAIN AN EMBARRASSMENT AND COMPLICATION BEYOND SUNDAY'S FIRST ROUND WHEN I EXPECT CHIRAC TO OBTAIN 23 PERCENT TO 24 PERCENT AND BECOME MITTERRAND'S CHALLENGER IN THE SECOND.

BARRE

5. THOUGH HE STILL COMMANDS WIDE RESPECT PERSONALLY BARRE'S CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LITTLE SHORT OF DISASTROUS. IT HAS SUFFERED FROM BAD ORGANISATION, FROM UNDERESTIMATING CHIRAC, AND FROM AN INITIAL OVER-CONFIDENCE THAT BARRE WOULD HAVE THE CENTRE GROUND TO HIMSELF. INSTEAD MITTERRAND AND CHIRAC HAVE BEEN CHOPPING IT FROM UNDER HIM. BARRE'S CLAIM TO BE ABOVE POLITICAL PARTIES HAS ALSO BACKFIRED AS HE HAS DISCOVERED THAT POLITICAL PARTIES WIN ELECTIONS. HE HAS CHANGED DIRECTION, PACE AND HIS CAMPAIGN STAFF IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS BUT IT IS ALMOST CERTAINLY TOO LITTLE TOO LATE. UNLESS THERE IS AN EXTRAORDINARY LAST MINUTE SURGE IN HIS FAVOUR, I EXPECT HIM TO SCORE ABOUT 17 PERCENT ON SUNDAY AND THUS TO BE ELIMINATED FROM THE SECOND ROUND (HIS SURVIVAL IN POLITICAL LIFE REQUIRES HIM NOT TO DROP BELOW THIS FIGURE)

LE PEN

6. LE PEN HAS AGAIN DEFIED THOSE WHO PREDICTED THAT HIS CHALLENGE WOULD FADE AS THE ELECTIONS APPROACHED. PLAYING ON FEARS ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND LAW AND ORDER, AND PRESENTING HIMSELF AS THE CHAMPION OF THOSE WHO FEEL ALIENATED FROM OR EXPLOITED BY THE SYSTEM, HE HAS GAINED GROUND AS THE CAMPAIGN HAS PROGRESSED. HE IS A MAN OF MUCH GREATER FLAIR AND ENERGY THAN MOST PEOPLE IN THE FRENCH ESTABLISHMENT ARE HAPPY TO ADMIT AND HE ASKS THE QUESTIONS WHICH THE MAIN LINE PARTIES SHRINK FROM ASKING. HIS STRIDENCY HAS AN APPEAL (UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED BY REGION) TO THOSE WITH STRONG STOMACHS, BORED BY AN ELECTION PITCHED AT THE MODERATE CENTRE. HIS SCORE COULD BE A SURPRISE ON SUNDAY. I EXPECT IT TO BE ABOUT 13 PERCENT: IT MIGHT BE MORE.

LAJOINIE, JUQUIN AND THE ALSO RANS

7. ON THE OTHER EXTREME, THE COMMUNIST CANDIDATE LAJOINIE HAS PLOUGHED RESOLUTELY ON, HAMPERED BY A DULL PERSONALITY AND HAUNTED BY MARCHAIS, WHO HAS SCARCELY LEFT HIS SIDE. HE HAS SET HIMSELF A

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TARGET OF 9-10 PERCENT AND, ALTHOUGH I EXPECT HIM TO FALL SHORT AND GET ABOUT 7 PERCENT, THIS IS BETTER THAN THE POLLS WERE SUGGESTING TWO OR THREE MONTHS AGO. NEVERTHELESS IT WILL MARK A FURTHER STAGE IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S DECLINE. JUQUIN, HIS DISSIDENT CHALLENGER, MAY GET ANOTHER 2 PERCENT, ABOUT THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT I EXPECT FOR TWO OTHER MINOR CANDIDATES, THE GREEN, WAECHTER, AND THE TROTSKYIST, LAGUILLER.

CONCLUSION

8. THE MITTERRAND AND CHIRAC CAMPS ARE CONFIDENT OF SUNDAY'S OUTCOME AND ARE ALREADY TURNING THEIR ATTENTIONS TO THE FINAL ROUND. MITTERRAND WILL THEN HAVE TO SAY AND DO ENOUGH TO RALLY ALL THE LEFT WING VOTE, AND SOME OF THE CENTRE. CHIRAC, IF HE HAS INDEED DEFEATED BARRE, WILL HAVE TO DENY MITTERRAND THE CENTRE, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY RALLYING LE PEN'S VOTE. MITTERRAND'S LOOKS THE EASIER TASK: PRIVATE POLLS TO WHICH WE HAVE ACCESS SUGGEST THAT HE WOULD BEAT CHIRAC BY 4-5 PERCENT. THIS IS A CONVINCING MARGIN BUT NOT UNASSAILABLE. MITTERRAND WILL START THE FINAL LAP AS FAVOURITE BUT HE WILL HAVE TO BEWARE OF CHIRAC SPRINTING ALL THE WAY.

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249

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248

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