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FM PARIS

((CORRECTED VERSION REQUESTED))

TO DESKBY 291400Z FCO

TELNO 418

OF 291441Z APRIL 88

AND TO PRIORITY EC POSTS, WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO  
INFO SAVINGS CONSULS GENERAL IN FRANCE

MY TELNO 395: THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: SECOND ROUND

SUMMARY

1. MY TELNO 413-141 OF 28 APRIL LOOKED AHEAD TO PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 8 MAY. THIS TELEGRAM COVERS THE FIRST WEEK OF THE SECOND-ROUND CAMPAIGN.

2. CHIRAC IS RUNNING FLAT OUT TO TRY TO CLOSE THE GAP WITH MITTERRAND, BUT YESTERDAY'S TELEVISION DEBATE IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE MADE MUCH DIFFERENCE. NOR IS THE RITUAL ENDORSEMENT OF UDF LEADERS WHO PRIVATELY EXPECT HIS DEFEAT. MITTERRAND IS PROJECTING HIMSELF AS THE BULWARK OF A DEMOCRATIC FRANCE THREATENED BY AUTHORITARIANISM AND INTOLERANCE. HIS CAMP ARE CONFIDENT OF VICTORY AND ARE SPECULATING ABOUT A DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. CHIRAC'S HOPES OF SPRINGING A SURPRISE LOOK SLIM: HE IS CONCERNED NOW TO MINIMISE THE SCALE OF PROBABLE DEFEAT. THE OPINION POLLS MAKE GRIM READING FOR HIM.

DETIAL

3. SINCE 24 APRIL CHIRAC HAS BEEN STUGGLING TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN WHO STILL BELIEVES HE WILL WIN ON 8 MAY. HIS RESPONSE TO THE SHOCK OF HIS POOR FIRST ROUND SCORE HAS, TYPICALLY, BEEN TO ENGAGE IN A FRENETIC PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND MEDIA APPEARANCES AT WHICH HE HAS INSISTED THAT VICTORY IS IMMINENT.

4. HE AND HIS ENTOURAGE HAD HIGH HOPES OF THE TELEVISED DUEL IN WHICH HE AND MITTERRAND SLUGGED IT OUT FOR TWO HOURS LAST NIGHT (28 APRIL). CHIRAC ATTACKED MITTERRAND'S RECORD, PARTICULARLY ON ECOR

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^ -))3&3^ 5#-5 #8' 09)8:83' %94 5#3 %75743 2343

=-873 94 .7^^)3^ BUT MITTERRAND SOAKED UP THE PUNCHES AND THREW SOME TELLING ONES OF HIS OWN, NOTABLY ON CHIRAC'S HANDLING OF TERRORISM AND NEW CALEDONIA. THE MORNING-AFTER CONSENSUS IS THAT IT WAS A DRAW OR PERHAPS A NARROW WIN FOR MITTEERRAND ON POINTS. CHIRAC



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NEEDED A KNOWCK-OUT.

5. CHIRAC REMAINS COUGHT BY THE NEED TO ATTRACT LE PEN'S VOTERS WITHOUT ALIENTATING BARRE'S. HIS STRATEGY HAS BEEN TO INSIST THAT HE WILL DO NO DEALS WITH LE PEN, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY SHARPENING HIS LANGUAGE ON IMMIGRATION IN THE HOPE OF APPEALING TO FRONT NATIONAL ELECTORS. AT THIS HALF-WAY POINT OF THE SECOND ROUND CAMPAIGN, HE APPEARS TO BE MAKING LITTLE IMPRESSION EITHER TO THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT. THE LATTER ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY LE PEN'S SCATHING COMMENTS ON THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT EMBARRASMENTS IN NEW CALEDONIA (MY TELNO 405 - NOT TO ALL), WHICH INCLUDE THE KIDNAPPING OF THE COMMANDER OF AN ELITE GENDARME FORCE BY THE KANAK REBELS HE WAS SENT TO QUELL.

6. CHIRAC HAS ALSO BEEN INSISTING ON THE UNITY OF THE TRDITIONAL RIGHT, SECURING ENDORSEMENTS FROM UDF LEADERS (INCLUDING GISCARD) TO PILE ON TOP OF BARRE'S (MTUR). BUT THERE HAS BEEN A RITUAL QUALITY ABOUT THESE, AND BARRE HAS SAID SOME HARD THINGS ABOUT THE RPR'S BEHAVIOUR BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND WHILE REFERRING QUITE FAVOURABLY TO MITTERRAND.

7. PRIVATELY, MANY WITHIN THE UDF ARE CONVINCED TMWAU/EJWJOWV ((SIC)) A POLITICAL MIRACLE FOR CHIRAC TO WIN. DEFEATISM IS DETECTABLE TOO AMONG SOME CHIRAC SUPPORTERS WHO DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE CAN ATTRACT AN EXTRA 30 PERCENT OF THE VOTE BY 8 MAY. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT EVEN SOME WITHIN THE RPR MIGHT BE WILLING TO SERVE EVENTUALLY IN A MITTERRAND COALITION GOVERNMENT.

8. MITTERRAND'S STRATEGY IS TO PRESENT HIMSELF AS THE RALLYING POINT FOR ALL WHO ARE UNEASY AT THE PROSPECT OF A CHIRAC PRESIDENCY THAT RESTS, IN PART AT LEAST, ON LE PEN'S VOTES. THE SOCIALISTS (PS) ARE CONFIDENT THAT IT IS WORKING. TALK IS NO LONGER ABOUT WHETHER MITTERRAND WILL WIN BUT BY HOW MUCH, AND ABOUT WHAT HE WILL DO WITH VICTORY. PRESSURE HAS BEEN BUILDING UP IN THHRYPPUZAA GR KUFNYWPDISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IF THE WINNING MARGI GY

BIHADBVGGQHSXM THE PS HOPE THEY COULD CAPITALISE ON MITTERRAND'S SUCESS

TO MAKE GAINS IN JUNE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WHICH, EVEN IF NOT ON THE 1981 SCALE, MIGLNSPQ

ZUORKV VLD CONSIDERABLE. IN LAST NIGHT'S

DEBATE MITTERRAND REAFFIRMED HIS INTENTION NOT TO DISSOLVE AT ONCE, BUT HE MIGHT BE SWAYED BY THE ARGUMENT THAT AN ENLARGED SOCIALIST BLOC IN THE ASSEMBLY WOULD BE A USEFUL INVESTMENT.

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CONCLUSION

9. CHIRAC WILL RUN FLAT OUT IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, NOT SIMPLY IN THE HOPE OF PULLING OFF A SURPRISE VICTORY, BUT ALSO TO MINIMISE THE SCALE OF ANY DEFEAT. IF HE LOSES NARROWLY HE WILL EMERGE WITH MUCH OF HIS POLITICAL CAPITAL INTACT. IF HE LOSES BADLY HIS POLITICAL PROSPECTS AND THOSE OF THE RPR WILL BE COMPROMISED. AT PRESENT THE OPINION POLLS MAKE OMINOUS READING FOR HIM. THE MOST FAVOURABLE SUGGESTS HE WILL LOSE BY 47-53, THE LEAST FAVOURABLE BY 43-57.

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