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WELLINGTON FOR LORD GLENARTHUR.

FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICS: ROCARD APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER.

SUMMARY

1. CHIRAC HAS RESIGNED. MITTERRAND HAS APPOINTED ROCARD TO REPLACE HIM. HE WILL BE A POPULAR CHOICE, WELL RECEIVED BY THE CENTRE. HE IS WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS TO UK.

DETAIL

2. CHIRAC PRESENTED HIS RESIGNATION TO THE PRESIDENT THIS AFTERNOON. THE ELYSEE AGREED TO HIS REQUEST NOT TO AWAIT THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL'S FORMAL DECLARATION OF THE ELECTION RESULT (MY TELNO 414 OF 28 APRIL).

3. MITTERRAND HAS APPOINTED ROCARD TO SUCCEED HIM, THEREBY DRAWING A LINE UNDER THE DIFFICULTIES THAT BEDEVILLED THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONS, AND EFFECTIVELY MARGINALISED ROCARD, DURING MITTERRAND'S FIRST TERM. ROCARD'S DIGNIFIED WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE THIS TIME, AND HIS IRREPROACHABLE LOYALTY TO MITTERRAND DURING THE RECENT CAMPAIGN, HAVE BEEN REWARDED.

4. HIS APPOINTMENT HAS A NUMBER OF ADVANTAGES FROM MITTERRAND'S POINT OF VIEW. ROCARD REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR POLITICIANS IN FRANCE, WHICH SHOULD HELP THE NEW GOVERNMENT GET OFF TO A GOOD START. HE SHOULD ALSO BE A CONSIDERABLE ELECTORAL ASSET IF MITTERRAND DISSOLVES THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS OR MONTHS AND CALLS NEW ELECTIONS. IN ADDITION, ROCARD IS IDENTIFIED WITH THE PRAGMATIC, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC WING OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) AND COMMANDS THE RESPECT OF THE CENTRE. HIS POLITICAL PROFILE IS THEREFORE NICELY CALCULATED TO APPEAL TO THE CENTRE AND CENTRE-RIGHT WHOM MITTERRAND HOPES IN DUE COURSE TO ATTRACT INTO A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE SOCIALISTS. (IT IS PROBABLY THIS THAT FINALLY DECIDED MITTERRAND TO CHOOSE HIM IN PREFERENCE TO BEREGOVY).

CONFIDENTIAL

000235
MDADAN 57

5. MITTERRAND HINTED DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT, IF RE-ELECTED, HE WOULD LEAVE THE DETAILS OF DAY-TO-DAY DOMESTIC POLICY TO HIS PRIME MINISTER WHILE CONCENTRATING HIMSELF ON DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY (NOTABLY EUROPE). ROCARD IS THEREFORE LIKELY TO CONCENTRATE MORE ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES THAN ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. ALTHOUGH HE PROVED A COMPETENT DEPARTMENTAL MINISTER DURING MITTERRAND'S FIRST TERM, THERE ARE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT HOW EFFECTIVE HE WILL BE IN CO-ORDINATING POLICY AND MANAGING THE GOVERNMENT. (THE EDITOR OF LE MONDE TOLD ME TODAY THAT HE THOUGHT ROCARD WAS TEMPERAMENTALLY UNSUITED FOR THE JOB AND MIGHT EASILY GET BOGGED DOWN IN DETAIL.)

6. ROCARD'S APPOINTMENT SHOULD BE GOOD FOR OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE IS WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS US, AND HAS BEEN A KEEN ADVOCATE WITHIN THE PS OF PROMOTING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARIS AND LONDON THAT IS AS CLOSE AS THAT OF PARIS AND BONN. HE HAS ALSO BEEN FAIRLY FREQUENTLY TO BRITAIN AND WAS LAST THERE IN JANUARY AS A CATEGORY I SPONSORED VISITOR WHEN HE MET THE PRIME MINISTER, YOU, THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE. WE KNOW THAT HE WAS DELIGHTED BY HIS RECEPTION.

7. THE NAMES OF AT LEAST SOME OF ROCARD'S MINISTERS MAY BE ANNOUNCED TOMORROW (11 MAY). MEANWHILE I RECOMMEND THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD SEND A MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATION.

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PAGE 2
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