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To:
From: Amanda Tanfield
Subject: FW: LEAD: OO PARIS/FCOLN 124: IRAQ: CHIRAC'S TV
INTERVIEW - FRANCE'S VETO
Sent: 11 March 2003 16:44:16 GMT

Please register on 13/1

-----Original Message-----

From: MENAD
Sent: 11 March 2003 16:13
To: MENAD - All Staff
Subject: FW: LEAD: OO PARIS/FCOLN 124: IRAQ: CHIRAC'S TV INTERVIEW - FRANCE'S VETO

From: Swift Incoming Telegrams (Machine 1)
Sent: Tuesday, March 11, 2003 4:12:48 PM
To: MENAD
Subject: LEAD: OO PARIS/FCOLN 124: IRAQ: CHIRAC'S TV INTERVIEW - FRANCE'S
VETO

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CABINET OFFICE FOR MANNING AND RYCROFT, NO 10

SUBJECT: IRAQ: CHIRAC'S TV INTERVIEW - FRANCE'S VETO

SUMMARY

1. Chirac leaves himself minimum to non-existent wriggle room over use of the veto, presumably in order to exert maximum influence on the Russians/Chinese and the swing six. But has he played this card too soon? The French remain confident we will not get a majority, even if Villepin seems to have got relatively little out of his African tour, and that the consequences for them of a veto will be limited.

DETAIL

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2. Chirac went on prime time TV on 10 March. Asked how France would vote if there were 9 votes in favour of a second resolution, his exact words were: "My position is that, whatever the circumstances, France will vote "no" because she considers tonight that there is no need to make war to attain the objective we have fixed of disarming Iraq." He added that the kind of amendments to the draft resolution that had been talked about, eg letting the 17 March slip further, would make no difference to this French position.

3. He made a number of other, less headline-grabbing points:

- there are still arms in Iraq; the inspectors say Iraqi co-operation has improved. But it is still not sufficient;
- he had proposed a Heads of State meeting in New York for two reasons: (a) a decision on war and peace should be taken at this level, and (b) there are other crises, including the MEPP and North Korea, which world leaders need to discuss. But he wouldn't go alone. He would see if a majority wanted to go;
- his conviction is that there currently are not nine votes. In this scenario, the veto question does not arise. His impression is that Russia and China have the same attitude as France towards a resolution authorising war;
- France has used her veto 18 times, the last time being in 1989 during the Panama crisis. It is not an exceptional phenomenon, though the US has used her veto 77 times and the UK 32;
- there is no risk of a US/France dispute. Talk of economic embargoes is not serious. If the US wanted to take action against France they would need to do so against the whole of Europe, including the UK. Bush has said that the French and Germans are friends and will remain so;
- it is highly probable that if the US and the UK had not deployed 200,000 troops Iraq would not have provided the more active cooperation that the inspectors demanded. In reality, the US have achieved their objective in their strategy of disarming Iraq. And dictatorships do not survive transparency for long;
- without a UN mandate France will not associate herself with war. She will make no military contribution, but will allow overflights;
- France will be required to take part in Iraqi reconstruction. This can only take place through the UN;
- Chirac does not believe Europe will be a victim of war in Iraq. CFSP and ESDP will survive. For example, despite differences of position on Iraq, the UK and France made progress on European defence at Le Touquet. Europe will not be divided after a war. The history of Europe is paved with crises. In a multipolar world Europe will always count;
- those who will gain from a war will be the terrorists, who want a clash of civilisations and religions. War will lead to an upsurge in terrorism and a splintering of the anti-terrorism

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coalition. France has her own bitter experience of terrorism. She will not be alone in opposing war. The large majority of peoples and countries are with her.

4. The press is virtually unanimous in its support for Chirac. Liberation devotes its whole front page to the word "NO" (on a red background) and says in its editorial that we must save the US from its fatal unilateralism. Figaro's editorial backs France's idea of a summit where Bush might learn why France, Germany and Russia have taken the positions they have. Le Monde accepts that using a veto against an ally is a very serious step, but argues that it is justified to help bring about a better world order. Only La Tribune uses its editorial to say that the threat of the veto is a trap: it may play well with the public but in terms of preserving the longer term US-French relationship abstention would be the better and braver option.

COMMENT

5. Even if only in response to a question, Chirac went out of his way to make his position categorical. The French calculation is presumably that this makes it as hard as possible for the Russians and Chinese not to follow, and as easy as possible for the swing six to abstain, as an obvious middle course between the two opposing blocs. The only glimmer of encouragement I can see for us is that he may have played this card too soon, apparently ruling out any flexibility even if the text of a resolution is amended. We might be able to use this against the French in arguing with others. I suppose it is possible in theory that, faced with a significantly amended resolution, a Security Council majority in favour, and no Russian/Chinese company, Chirac could change to an abstention. But this is clutching at straws, such is the limb he has deliberately put himself out on.

Contact:

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