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To: Emergency Unit - All Staff  
From: EMERGENCY UNIT  
Subject: FW: INFO: OO PARIS/FCOLN 148: NOSEC: FRANCE/IRAQ: HOW DID CHIRAC FINISH UP WHERE HE DID  
Sent: 24 March 2003 19:05:38 GMT

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To: EMERGENCY UNIT  
Subject: INFO: OO PARIS/FCOLN 148: NOSEC: FRANCE/IRAQ: HOW DID CHIRAC FINISH UP WHERE HE DID  
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CABINET OFFICE FOR POWELL, WALL, MANNING AND RYCROFT

SUBJECT: NOSEC: FRANCE/IRAQ: HOW DID CHIRAC FINISH UP WHERE HE DID AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

PART 2 of 2

8. Two final, important, angles: first, domestic politics. Chirac is floating on a cloud of popularity beyond his wildest dreams. And it has been particularly valuable for him to show that he does have strong convictions on something, and is capable of sticking to them (the almost universal assumption here until recently being that he was bluffing as usual). Second, the emphasis that both he and Villepin place on the Arab and African worlds, where the French stance has been particularly popular.

When?

9. It is hard to be sure of the exact moment when French insistence on their own view hardened into resolve to take on some of their closest allies and veto if necessary. It was clear from late December/early January that France would not rally to the

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coalition and take part in military action, but still widely assumed (not by us, I may add) that Chirac was bound to stand aside rather than stick to his (non) guns. The present hard line was inherent in the Franco-German position in late January, but few here took it quite so seriously then, and even the French moved quickly to distinguish their position from German pacifism and suggested they wanted a position somewhere between the Germans and us. There is plenty of evidence of dispute and worry about the consequences of a hard line in the French camp well into late February, perhaps even from Villepin, more recently an enthusiastic convert to it.

10. Errera, the French Ambassador in London, and himself a keen advocate of the hard line, claims the veto die was cast as early as the first week of February. I doubt this: the French objective throughout February seems to have been to prevent us from putting the resolution to a vote and to keep their own options open. My own view is that while Chirac, excited by his popularity at home and abroad, was gradually coming to see the attractions of a veto during February, the key determining moments were his rapturous reception by the crowds during his visit to Algeria at the beginning of March, increasing confidence in a Russian veto after Ivanov's visit to Paris on 5 March, and, crucially, his realisation shortly afterwards, under pressure from the Chileans and Mexicans, that there was little chance of persuading the swing six to abstain unless France was herself ready to say she would veto.

## Implications

11. What does this mean for us? The dynamics of the final French decision may have been partly opportunist, even accidental, in typical Chirac style; and there may still be many in the Quai and French MOD, and outside, who doubt its wisdom. But the die really is now cast, and Chirac is set on a collision course with the Bush view of the world, while simultaneously professing affection for America and a conviction that France will suffer no bilateral blowback. How this plays out will depend largely on the course of military action in Iraq and its immediate consequences. If all goes as well as we hope, including significant WMD finds, he could face a very difficult time, including in France, where opinion could turn quickly. There are many journalists already sharpening their knives for both him and, particularly, Villepin, who threatened too many senior journalists during his Elysee days to have many friends in their ranks.

12. But those around both men say they are ready for this short-term dip in their fortunes and are convinced that in the slightly longer term they will be proved right as the dire consequences they have predicted begin to come true: not only the fragmentation of Iraq, radicalisation of the Arab world, clash of civilisations, aggravation of terrorism etc, but also the temptation of the Washington hawks to repeat the medicine somewhere else, probably starting with Iran. Their plan is to capitalise on the international goodwill they have accumulated, including Russian and Chinese support, to lead the opposition to what they see as Bush's Manichean approach to global problems. They aim to show there is a better, more peaceful way, relying on the UN and techniques like a permanent weapons inspectors' corps, and to build an alliance capable of resisting US hegemony.

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13. Adherence to this folie de grandeur will not in my view stand the test of time and adversity/unpopularity. But in the short term we should not underestimate the tenacity with which Chirac and Villepin may cling to it. This will make them continuing very uncomfortable partners in the Security Council over Iraq-related business, particularly the so-called fourth UNSCR. It will lead them to an even greater proliferation of French-style initiatives than usual, not least to keep themselves visible on the domestic and international stages. But above all it will condition their approach to the EU. We may face an all-out effort to convince the rest of the 15 that they have to conform to the French view of the world or become mere US vassals, and to frighten the candidates that failure to conform risks real French opposition to their admission. The spectre of the hard core will be brandished. They will argue as hard as they can that there is a deliberate Bush policy to divide Europe, and that we face a choice between a strong Europe (Europe puissance) and an Atlanticist Europe. Relentless pressure will be exercised on the Germans not to break ranks with this French vision (because without German support it will collapse at the first touch). Keeping us down and belittling us as US poodles is part and parcel of this approach.

14. Separate telegrams will contain more detailed reflections on likely French attitudes to the UN, EU and US flowing from this. I am also writing separately to Ricketts (not to all) with more detailed thoughts on how we should respond. But in sum I believe we have to take on this French vision of the EU directly and robustly and pull the Germans away from the French. Nevertheless our longer-term strategic interest continues to lie in working with the French to build the kind of strong but nation-state based Europe we both want and to tackle the main global challenge, including proliferation. So we should avoid an open breach with them, as we have so far managed to do. Finding a more durable modus vivendi may of course be more difficult, particularly as long as Chirac is around.

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