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CONFIDENTIAL



Prime Minister  
Can you say how he stood  
you at Council and/or the  
European Council?

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

A.F.C.

11 January 1982

*h.a. M 25*

Dear John.

There has been considerable speculation in France about the state of President Mitterrand's health. Although he has recently had a medical check-up and been given a clean bill of health, most Frenchmen remember all too well the denials of ill-health that preceded President Pompidou's death in office.

HM Ambassador in Paris is inclined to give slightly greater credence than hitherto to suggestions that President Mitterrand might be suffering from some long term - but at present stabilised - illness, possibly a form of Leukaemia. I attach a letter from Sir R Hibbert setting out the reports he has heard.

Sir R Hibbert is anxious to have any first hand impressions of M Mitterrand and I should be grateful if you would consider asking the Prime Minister to comment on President Mitterrand's appearance and performance at her recent meetings with him at, for example, the Cancun Summit and the European Council. Those in the FCO who have encountered him recently have done so too briefly to make a proper assessment.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretary to the Secretary to the Cabinet as Sir Robert Armstrong may also wish to comment.

*Yours ever,*

(F N Richards)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing St

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Hd/W(EI)

3/10/81

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Showered in the  
no 20?

BRITISH EMBASSY,  
PARIS.

18 December 1981

MICHAEL PALLISER

Sir Michael Palliser GCMG  
PUS  
FCO

Hd/W(EI) for suitable diff reply pse  
cc Mr Bullard. Switzerland  
PS  
P>PUB

THIS COPY FOR  
30.21/12

Dear Michael,

1. I sent a savingram a little while ago (no 181 of 23 November) about M. Mitterrand's health. His latest six monthly health certificate was issued on 15 December. I enclose the text. It is full of medical mumbo-jumbo and this is skilfully used to give a thoroughly reassuring impression - although you will note that the statement in the last sentence that his health "is perfectly satisfactory in all the fields that have been examined" leaves a residual doubt that there may be some areas where his health is unsatisfactory.

2. Last week, however, I heard for the first time some talk about the President's health which seemed to me to carry a certain amount of conviction. It came from M. Ambroise Roux, the Président-Directeur Général of the Compagnie Générale d'Electricité, who has had good inside knowledge about the Elysée and its occupants for several reigns. He told me that he had had good detailed knowledge of President Pompidou's medical condition long before that became common knowledge, and he said that he had had very reliable reports on M. Mitterrand's health well before M. Mitterrand arrived at the Elysée. According to these, M. Mitterrand was suffering from a form of leukaemia which was controllable within limits by medical treatment and whose effects would be slow to develop. M. Mitterrand, as we all knew, had not expected to win the presidential election and had not regarded his health condition as being a serious obstacle to his conduct of the contest for power within the Socialist Party. When the election suddenly turned in his favour he was caught and was now bound to put the best possible face on the state of his health. According to M. Roux, the burdens of office had put some strain on M. Mitterrand, and in recent weeks he had suffered from some instability in his condition. This was now under control again and there was no reason to suppose that there would be any early health crisis for the President.

/3. M. Roux



3. M. Roux said that he had watched with care the President's recent appearance on television (my telno 1102). He had been surprised by the apparent frankness with which the President approached the health question. He had spoken of having his check-up and M. Roux had thought for a brief moment that all the rumour-mongers, including himself, were going to be confounded by the President producing the written results of his check-up, holding them up to the television camera and saying "There you are you see, I am clear". He had not done this and, after talking about his analyses, had simply concluded by saying that he was now feeling better - not that he was better and not an admission that there had ever been anything wrong, but simply the subjective comment that he was feeling better. M. Roux's conclusion was that to all intents and purposes M. Mitterrand was lying to the French people.

4. M. Roux and other distinguished non-Socialist Frenchmen who have been received by the President recently all tend to be unanimous in declaring privately afterwards that they had the feeling of dealing with a man who was not really fit. I am increasingly impressed by the unanimity of this verdict among responsible men who have close dealings with the President. I myself have had the opportunity to watch the President at close hand on several occasions recently and I have been struck by a certain oddness in his demeanour. His skin tends to be remarkably pallid and there is a certain passivity in the way in which he goes through public ceremonial. He is amiable to everyone whom he meets, but only in the most cursory, impersonal way. He makes virtually no effort to establish a direct human relationship with people who are introduced to him unless the television cameras happen to be trained on him at the particular moment, in which case he goes through the motions of being warm. He tends to blink continually and his eyes dart about in an uncertain sort of way as if he was unsure what was coming next and what was expected of him; but this is accompanied by an apparent imperturbability or perhaps immobility of manner which contradicts the evidence of internal tension supplied by his eyes. When he speaks he does so very quietly; but if he is making a speech he becomes animated in the course of it and rises to something of a crescendo in the middle, relapsing again to a quiet fireside manner as he comes to his conclusion. The crescendo tends to be accompanied by minor signs of shortage of breath. I have noticed no physical weakness in him even when being pushed around by enthusiastic crowds and the usual horde of photographers and press men. It is noticeable however that his military aide takes great care to have glasses of water on hand at any moment when there is a pause in the proceedings. In a relatively private circle he is pleasant and fairly relaxed but still not noticeably forthcoming.

/5. Observed



5. Observed symptoms, even at closer range and over a longer period than is possible in such a case, are notoriously difficult for laymen to evaluate; and doctors seem no more able than economists to agree with one another or to express themselves in clear terms. One turns inevitably to the surrounding political circumstances and judgments. Was Mitterrand's attempt to make a clandestine visit to the Val de Grâce hospital a simple misjudgment? Is the laconic (and sibylline) language of the medical communiqué standard medical caution? In which case how did the President's advisers fail to see that the combination of these things would give rise to rumour and speculation? They are well aware that the strongest asset which President Mitterrand's administration possesses is its prospect of lasting for at least another five years (until the next Legislative elections). The President's advisers should in theory be doing their utmost to preserve the integrity of that card. Equally of course the President's opponents, among whom M. Ambroise Roux must undoubtedly be counted, will be doing their best to undermine it. But even they, in turn, will know that they cannot for long make smoke without fire.

6. As you will see from the above I am somewhat more inclined now than I was a few weeks ago to think that there may be something wrong with M. Mitterrand - not something acute, but something which makes his health preoccupying in the long term. It would be very helpful to know what sort of impression M. Mitterrand gives when involved in protracted sessions at, for example, European Council meetings. I have been told that at Cancun M. Mitterrand's interventions were much less vigorous than everyone had been led to expect. Is this becoming a common experience at meetings with M. Mitterrand?

7. Paradoxically, I think that the more M. Mitterrand parades his allegedly clean bill of health, the more one becomes suspicious that there is something wrong with him.

*Yours ever,*

*Reg.*

Reginald Hibbert

THE SECOND SIX-MONTHLY REPORT ON PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S  
STATE OF HEALTH, PUBLISHED ON 15 DECEMBER 1981

During this period, the President of the Republic experienced considerable pain in his right thigh, involving disturbance to the functioning of the right leg.

This condition made necessary a series of precise examinations, which revealed the presence of an uncarthrosis of the spine\*, associated with a localised arthrosis\*\* of the disc in the lumbar region.

In parallel with these specific tests, other investigations were carried out, both clinically and paraclinically, and ranging over the cardio-vascular, pulmonary, gastro-hepato-enterological, renal, neurological and haematological fields.

The conclusion of these examinations led to the adoption of medical therapy with the object of curing the osteo-articular disorders.

The effectiveness of the treatment has resulted in the disappearance of the functional disturbance and the pain.

At the end of this initial six-month period, the President of the Republic has a state of health that is perfectly satisfactory in all the fields that have been examined.

Signed: Dr Claude Gubler

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\* uncarthrosis: a type of cervical spondylitis (inflammation around the vertebrae in the neck)

\*\* arthrosis: inflammation associated with a joint - in this case the inter-vertebral disc in the lower back