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FM WASHINGTON 112330Z SEPTEMBER 80

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 3979 OF 11 SEPTEMBER

INFO SAVING ALL NATO AND EC POSTS, MOSCOW, TOKYO AND C GS IN USA.

**US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.**

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1. ON 9 SEPTEMBER THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS INVITED THE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE, CONGRESSMAN JOHN ANDERSON, TO TAKE PART ALONG WITH CARTER AND REAGAN IN THE TELEVISED DEBATES BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES SPONSORED BY THE LEAGUE. WITHIN HOURS, CARTER'S CAMPAIGN MANAGER ANNOUNCED THAT THE PRESIDENT QUOTE RESPECTFULLY DECLINED UNQUOTE TO PARTICIPATE IN A THREE-WAY DEBATE BECAUSE HE WISHED FIRST TO DEBATE THE ISSUES FACE TO FACE WITH REAGAN ALONE. REAGAN AND ANDERSON QUICKLY ACCEPTED THE LEAGUE'S INVITATION. SUBSEQUENT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE LEAGUE AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE CANDIDATES HAVE SO FAR FAILED TO ARRIVE AT ANY MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE. THE FIRST DEBATE, WITH OR (MORE LIKELY) WITHOUT CARTER, IS SCHEDULED FOR 21 SEPTEMBER.

2. IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE MEDIA HAVE ELEVATED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT ANDERSON SHOULD TAKE PART IN THE DEBATES TO A MAJOR TACTICAL ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN. CARTER AND HIS SPOKESMEN HAVE INSISTED THAT, WHILE HE WOULD BE WILLING TO TAKE PART IN DEBATES INCLUDING ANDERSON OR ANY OTHER SERIOUS CANDIDATE AT SOME LATER STAGE, THE FIRST NATIONALLY TELEVISED DEBATE (WHICH IS RECKONED TO HAVE THE MOST IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION) SHOULD BE RESTRICTED TO THE TWO MAJOR CANDIDATES. CARTER'S POSITION DERIVES FROM HIS MANAGERS' ASSESSMENT (BORNE OUT BY SOME, BUT NOT ALL, CURRENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS) THAT IF ANDERSON REMAINS A VIABLE CANDIDATE HE WILL TAKE MORE VOTES FROM CARTER THAN FROM REAGAN IN NOVEMBER: AND THAT CARTER'S STRATEGY SHOULD THEREFORE BE TO MAKE REAGAN THE ISSUE AND TO FOSTER THE IMAGE OF ANDERSON AS NO MORE THAN AN IRRELEVANT SPOILER BUT IF ANDERSON WERE INCLUDED IN THE OPENING DEBATE, THIS WOULD BOTH ENHANCE HIS CREDIBILITY AND DETRACT FROM CARTER'S OWN ASSAULT ON REAGAN.

3 THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF CARTER'S ACTION HAS BEEN TO MAKE HIM LOOK WEAK AND ARROGANT AND TO INCREASE PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR ANDERSON. BUT CARTER IS GAMBLING THAT THE INEVITABLE CRITICISM OF HIS OPEN ATTEMPT TO FREEZE ANDERSON OUT WILL FADE: AND THAT THE PUBLIC WILL PAY LITTLE ATTENTION TO ANY DEBATES WHICH TAKE PLACE WITHOUT HIM. HE MAY BE RIGHT. BUT HE IS TAKING THE OBVIOUS RISK THAT HIS ATTITUDE COULD ITSELF BECOME A DAMAGING ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN. REAGAN AND ANDERSON ARE ALREADY DRAWING UNFLATTERING PARALLELS WITH CARTER'S BEHAVIOUR VIS-A-VIS KENNEDY IN THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION CAMPAIGN: AND OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED THAT REAGAN (IN IOWA) AND BUSH (IN NEW HAMPSHIRE) EACH IN TURN SUFFERED IN THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES FROM REFUSING TO TAKE PART IN DEBATES WITH ALL THEIR OPPONENTS.

RESTRICTED

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4. AS THINGS STAND, REAGAN IS IN THE TACTICALLY VIRTUOUS POSITION OF APPEARING READY TO DEBATE ALL COMERS AND OF DEFENDING ANDERSON'S RIGHT TO BE HEARD. HE CALCULATES THAT HIS INTEREST IS BEST SERVED IF ANDERSON MAINTAINS SOMETHING LIKE HIS EXISTING LEVEL OF POPULAR SUPPORT. THE REAGAN CAMP FEAR THAT LIBERAL REPUBLICANS WILL BE THE LAST OF ANDERSON'S CURRENT SUPPORTERS TO ABANDON HIM, SO THAT THE LOWER HE SINKS IN THE POLLS THE GREATER THE RISK THAT HE WILL END UP DRAWING MORE VOTES AWAY FROM REAGAN THAN CARTER IN KEY STATES.

5. ANDERSON HAS BEEN PINNING HIS HOPES ON THE DEBATES AS A MEANS OF REINVIGORATING HIS FALTERING CAMPAIGN THROUGH NATIONWIDE TV EXPOSURE ON EQUAL TERMS WITH CARTER AND REAGAN. BUT THE LEAGUE'S INVITATION WILL PROBABLY BENEFIT HIM LESS THAN HE HOPED, SINCE CARTER'S ABSENCE FROM THE FIRST DEBATE WOULD LESSEN ITS IMPACT: AND IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER REAGAN, HAVING MADE HIS POINT, WOULD SEE ADVANTAGE IN MORE THAN ONE DEBATE WITH ANDERSON ALONE. NEVERTHELESS, THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS HAVE GIVEN ANDERSON'S CANDIDACY A SEAL OF RESPECTABILITY AND, IN EFFECT, CERTIFIED THAT HIS RECENT SLIDE IN THE POLLS HAS BEEN ARRESTED, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. THE FOUR MOST RECENT MAJOR POLLS SHOW ANDERSON'S SUPPORT VARYING BETWEEN 13 PER CENT AND 18 PER CENT, WITH THREE OF THEM PUTTING ANDERSON AT OR ABOVE THE 15 PER CENT QUALIFYING MARK SET BY THE LEAGUE FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE DEBATES. AND SO LONG AS THE ARGUMENT ABOUT THE DEBATES PERSISTS, ANDERSON IS ASSURED OF EXTENSIVE AND GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC MEDIA COVERAGE.

6. ANDERSON HAS ALSO BEEN HELPED RECENTLY BY THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION'S DECISION THAT, PROVIDED HE OBTAINS AT LEAST 5 PER CENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE IN NOVEMBER, HE WILL QUALIFY RETROACTIVELY FOR SOME FEDERAL FUNDING OF HIS CAMPAIGN EXPENSES (THEREBY MAKING IT EASIER FOR HIS FINANCIALLY STRAPPED CAMPAIGN TO BORROW MONEY NOW): AND BY THE DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NEW YORK LIBERAL PARTY TO ENDORSE HIM, THEREBY ENSURING THAT ANDERSON WILL BE ON THE NEW YORK BALLOT IN NOVEMBER, NEW YORK, WITH ITS 41 ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES, IS CRUCIAL TO CARTER: HE WON NARROWLY THERE IN 1976 AND MUST CARRY THE STATE THIS YEAR IF HE IS TO BEAT REAGAN. CURRENT NEW YORK POLLS SHOW CARTER MARGINALLY AHEAD OF REAGAN BUT HIGHLY VULNERABLE TO A STRONG SHOWING BY ANDERSON. THE LATTER'S LIBERAL PARTY ENDORSEMENT COULD STRENGTHEN HIS CHANCES OF ATTRACTING A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE IMPORTANT AND TRADITIONALLY DEMOCRATIC JEWISH VOTE, WHO MAY SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR DISENCHANTMENT WITH CARTER WITHOUT HAVING TO GO OVER TO REAGAN. THE NEW YORK OUTLOOK HAS BEEN FURTHER COMPLICATED BY THE UNEXPECTED DEFEAT OF SENATOR JAVITS IN THE REPUBLICAN SENATORIAL PRIMARY ON 9 SEPTEMBER. BUT JAVITS WILL STILL BE ON THE BALLOT FOR THE SENATE SEAT IN NOVEMBER SINCE HE, TOO, HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY THE LIBERAL PARTY, AND THIS COULD ALSO WORK TO ANDERSON'S ADVANTAGE.

RESTRICTED 2

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7. MEANWHILE CARTER HAS MAINTAINED HIS RECOVERY IN THE PUBLIC OPINION RATINGS. NATIONWIDE SURVEYS GENERALLY SHOW HIM CLOSE BEHIND OR EQUAL WITH REAGAN. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, A RECENT INDEPENDENT STATE-BY-STATE SURVEY SHOWED REAGAN COMFORTABLY AHEAD IN 20 STATES WITH A TOTAL OF 137 ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES (MAINLY IN THE WEST AND MIDWEST, BUT INCLUDING LOUISIANA, MISSISSIPPI AND TEXAS, WHICH CARTER CARRIED IN 1976): CARTER LEADING, BUT GENERALLY MORE NARROWLY, IN 14 STATES WITH 159 ELECTORAL VOTES, MAINLY IN THE SOUTH: AND 15 STATES WITH 228 ELECTORAL VOTES WHERE, ON PRESENT FORM, THE RESULT COULD GO EITHER WAY. BESIDES NEW YORK, THESE INCLUDE CALIFORNIA (45), ILLINOIS (26), MICHIGAN (21), FLORIDA (17) AND NEW JERSEY (17). ANDERSON IS STRONGEST IN MASSACHUSETTS, THE STATE WHERE HE CAME CLOSEST TO WINNING A REPUBLICAN PRIMARY. THE RACE IS THUS STILL VERY OPEN.

8. WE ARE REPORTING SEPARATELY (NOT TO ALL) ON THE CANDIDATES' CURRENT POSITIONS ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES.

FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING TO ANKARA ATHENS BONN BRUSSELS COPENHAGEN DUBLIN LISBON LUXEMBOURG OSLO PARIS ROME THE HAGUE UKREP BRUSSELS OTTAWA REYKJAVIK AND UKDEL NATO MOSCOW TOKYO

HENDERSON

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WAS NOT  
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