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FROM WASHINGTON 230445Z OCT 84.

TO PRIORITY F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 3159 OF 22 OCTOBER

INFO SAVING NATO POSTS, USCG'S, BIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW, TOKYO,  
DUBLIN, UKREP BRUSSELS.

MY TELNO 3096: THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.

SUMMARY

1. NO KNOCK-OUT BLOW IN THE FINAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE. THE PRESIDENT DID WELL ENOUGH TO REMAIN ON COURSE FOR THE FINAL TWO WEEKS.

DETAIL

2. THE SECOND AND FINAL TELEVISED PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE, DEALING WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TOOK PLACE IN KANSAS CITY ON 21 OCTOBER. IT PRODUCED NO GREAT SURPRISES OR UPSETS. THE PRESIDENT WAS IN BETTER FORM THAN IN THE FIRST DEBATE. DESPITE A GAFFE (WHICH HE LATER CORRECTED) ABOUT THE CIA IN NICARAUGUA, AND A SOMEWHAT RAMBLING CLOSING STATEMENT, HE SCORED EFFECTIVELY AGAINST MONDALE OVER THE LATTER'S RECORD ON DEFENCE. HE ALSO NEATLY FINESSED THE AGE ISSUE WITH A CRACK ABOUT MONDALE'S YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE.

3. MONDALE, FOR HIS PART, ACCUSED THE PRESIDENT OF LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND FAILURE TO MASTER DETAIL, EG OVER CIA ACTIVITIES IN NICARAGUA, OVER THE LEBANON BOMBINGS, AND OVER ARMS CONTROL ISSUES. HIS THEME WAS THAT THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF MUST BE IN COMMAND - OF THE FACTS, AND OF HIS SUBORDINATES. BUT ALTHOUGH MONDALE SCORED SOME GOOD POINTS, THE PRESIDENT DID IN FACT LOOK CONFIDENT AND REASONABLY WELL IN COMMAND.

4. LITTLE NEW WAS SAID BY EITHER CANDIDATE ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ISSUES. UNDER THE PRESSURE OF DEBATE, BOTH WERE SOMETIMES FORCED INTO UNCOMFORTABLE POSITIONS. CRITICISED BY MONDALE FOR FAILING TO RETALIATE AFTER THE LEBANON BOMBINGS, THE PRESIDENT SAID "WE ARE BUSY TRYING TO FIND THE CENTRES WHERE THESE OPERATIONS STEM FROM, AND RETALIATION WILL BE TAKEN". ON THE STRATEGIC DEFENCE INITIATIVE, MONDALE AGAIN ATTEMPTED TO OUTFLANK THE PRESIDENT FROM THE RIGHT AND WAS SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S ORIGINAL IDEA, REPEATED LAST NIGHT, OF SHARING NEW SDI TECHNOLOGY WITH THE RUSSIANS. ASKED ABOUT HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRO-WESTERN DICTATORS, THE PRESIDENT DEFENDED THE SHAH, WHO HAD LOYALLY "DONE OUR BIDDING", AND SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABANDONED IN FAVOUR OF A "MANIACAL FANATIC, SLAUGHTERING THOUSANDS": AND THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE US SHOULD STICK BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES, BECAUSE THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE WAS A COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER.

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5. BOTH CAMPS CLAIM A VICTORY, AND IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW THE POLLSTERS WILL SCORE THE CONTEST. BUT IT SEEMS A SAFE BET THAT IT DID LITTLE TO INCREASE THE WORRIES ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S AGE AND COMPETENCE WHICH HIS PERFORMANCE IN THE FIRST DEBATE BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE. MONDALE NEEDED A CLEAR WIN LAST NIGHT, AND DID NOT GET IT. THE GAP MAY CONTINUE TO CLOSE A LITTLE OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. BUT, GIVEN HIS PERSONAL POPULARITY, REAGAN'S PERFORMANCE SHOULD PROVE SUFFICIENT TO STOP THE TRICKLE FROM TURNING INTO A TIDE.

FCO PASS SAVING:-

ANKARA, ATHENS, BRUSSELS, BONN, COPENHAGEN, LISBON, LUXEMBOURG  
MADRID, UKDEL STOCKHOLM, DUBLIN, UKREP BRUSSELS, OTTAWA, OSLO,  
PARIS, ROME, REYKJAVIK, THE HAGUE, UKDEL NATO, UKDEL VIENNA,  
MOSCOW, TOKYO.

WRIGHT

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

FCO (PALACE) WHITEHALL

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