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1.4c, 3.5c

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
PER E. O. 13526

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FRANCE

Jacques CHIRAC
(Phonetic: sheRAHK)

President (since 1995)

Addressed as: Mr. President 3.5c

Jacques Chirac's image is suffering as turmoil within his neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR) party continues. 1.4c, 1.4d

Chirac's party placed third in France's European Parliament (EP) election in mid-June 1999, after a campaign that revealed continuing divisions in the center-right over European integration and the lack of a coherent policy agenda. The second-place finish—behind the Socialists—of the center-right Euroskeptical list led by RPR renegade Charles Pasqua rocked the party. Some conservatives blame Chirac for contributing to the fragmentation of the center-right by failing to develop a clear policy program and by preventing new leadership talent from emerging to preserve his chances for a second term; his probable opponent is Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, head of the Socialist-led coalition government. 3.5c

Managing Cohabitation 3.5c

In the traditional Bastille Day press interview in mid-July 1999, Chirac asked for RPR and broader center-right unity and urged a halt to internecine bickering, calling for center-right ranks to find common ground and to elaborate a vision that sets them apart from the left. Chirac rebuffed calls for a more combative approach in his "cohabitation" with Jospin, asserting that cohabitation reflects the desire of the French public. Critics charge that Chirac's policy of "constructive cohabitation" further demoralizes the center-right, according to press reports. 3.5c

Although Chirac may not be as aggressive as his critics would like, he is stepping up his criticism of the ruling coalition's program, and the tone of cohabitation is becoming more tense. Chirac is urging the government to cut the public debt

1.4c, 3.5c



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Consensus on Foreign Affairs 3.5c
Chirac successfully used his foreign affairs role—in which the Constitution gives him preeminence—to reassert himself on the domestic political scene after mid-1997, when he sacrificed the RPR's overwhelming majority in the National Assembly by calling an election 10 months early; that voting ushered in cohabitation with the leftist coalition government. Jospin's team has been satisfied to work within the broad foreign policy parameters set by the President. Both men avidly supported the Allied air campaign in the Balkans, a policy that met with widespread public approval. Chirac has emphasized constructive ties to Russia in the wake of tensions over Serbia, as has Jospin. Since the election of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in May 1999, both Chirac and Jospin have advocated a role for Paris in any renewed peace talks, press reports indicate. 3.5c

and taxes. He terms pension reform, which Jospin's team has been reluctant to tackle, "urgent" and is advocating a retirement system based on private savings. He opposes Jospin's proposal to amend the Constitution to pave the way for legislation allowing limited use of regional languages in France. Chirac also has disparaged plans to institute a 35-hour workweek, a highlight

1.4c, 3.5c

(continued)
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of the government's fall 1999 legislative agenda. The President and Prime Minister also exchanged barbs in early November 1999 when the Socialist Finance Minister resigned in an emerging graft scandal. Chirac is likely to tread carefully, however; polls indicate that the public strongly disapproves of blatant jockeying between the President and the Prime Minister. The President has largely avoided confrontations on the most sensitive issues where presidential and governmental authority overlap. 3.5c

Chirac faces continuing challenges within the center-right ranks, highlighted by the decision of some RPR politicians to ignore his edict not to accept the tacit support of the far-right National Front during regional elections in 1998 and 1999. Moreover, Chirac has long been out of favor with the RPR's right wing for implementing military and security reforms that broke cherished ideological barriers. For example, he unilaterally launched France's initiative for greater participation in NATO. 3.5c

Chirac, nonetheless, remains the default candidate of the center-right for the 2002 presidential contest. 1.4c, 1.4d
Chirac's close associate and RPR deputy Bernard Pons points out that Chirac appears to be the only figure capable of uniting the fractious center-right in a presidential campaign. Pons notes that the presidential and French parliamentary elections are three years away and that time is on Chirac's side.

3.5c

Advocating Greater EU Independence 3.5c

Referring to recent transatlantic trade frictions over the EU import ban on hormone-treated beef, Chirac said publicly in September 1999 that one single power, "albeit a respectable and friendly one," should not rule the planet's food markets. Looking to the WTO's Seattle Round of talks set for late November, Chirac has pleaded for new rules on food and environmental safety. He has asserted that the United States backs the sale of a product "if it has not been proven dangerous," whereas Europeans advocate "the principle of caution." The question, Chirac noted, is whether

countries can be forced to import products that their people see as risky in the name of international trade liberalization. 3.5c

Speaking before the Atlantic Treaty Association in October 1999, Chirac stressed that NATO would continue to be the primary organization for collective defense in Europe—but argued that it should be reinforced by a strong European defense pillar. Chirac called for a permanent EU security council and for improvements in European defense capabilities to allow the EU to act on its own when necessary. 3.5c

A Life in Politics 3.5c

Chirac was born on 29 November 1932. He studied at the Institute for Political Studies before fulfilling Army duty and later attended the National School of Administration (1959). Chirac was elected to the National Assembly in 1967 representing Correze, a seat he held for three decades (only stepping down to assume other government posts). In 1962, Chirac joined then Prime Minister (1962-68) Georges Pompidou's staff, receiving his first government post in 1967 in the Ministry of Social Affairs; Chirac later held several cabinet posts, including that of Minister of the Interior (1974). He served as Prime Minister from 1974 to 1976, when he resigned over economic and political differences with then President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. During 1977-95, Chirac was mayor of Paris. His first failed presidential bid was in 1981; his rivalry with Giscard split the conservative vote and contributed to the center-right's defeat by Socialist Francois Mitterrand. After a second tour as Prime Minister (1986-88), Chirac was defeated again in the 1988 presidential election. 3.5c

Chirac speaks English well; the media say that he also speaks some Russian. During the early 1950s, Chirac attended a summer term at Harvard and worked briefly at a Howard Johnson's restaurant and for Anheuser-Busch while he traveled throughout the United States. Chirac enjoys poetry and detective stories. He and his wife, Bernadette, have two biological daughters,