

18 September 1958

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FRENCH NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM

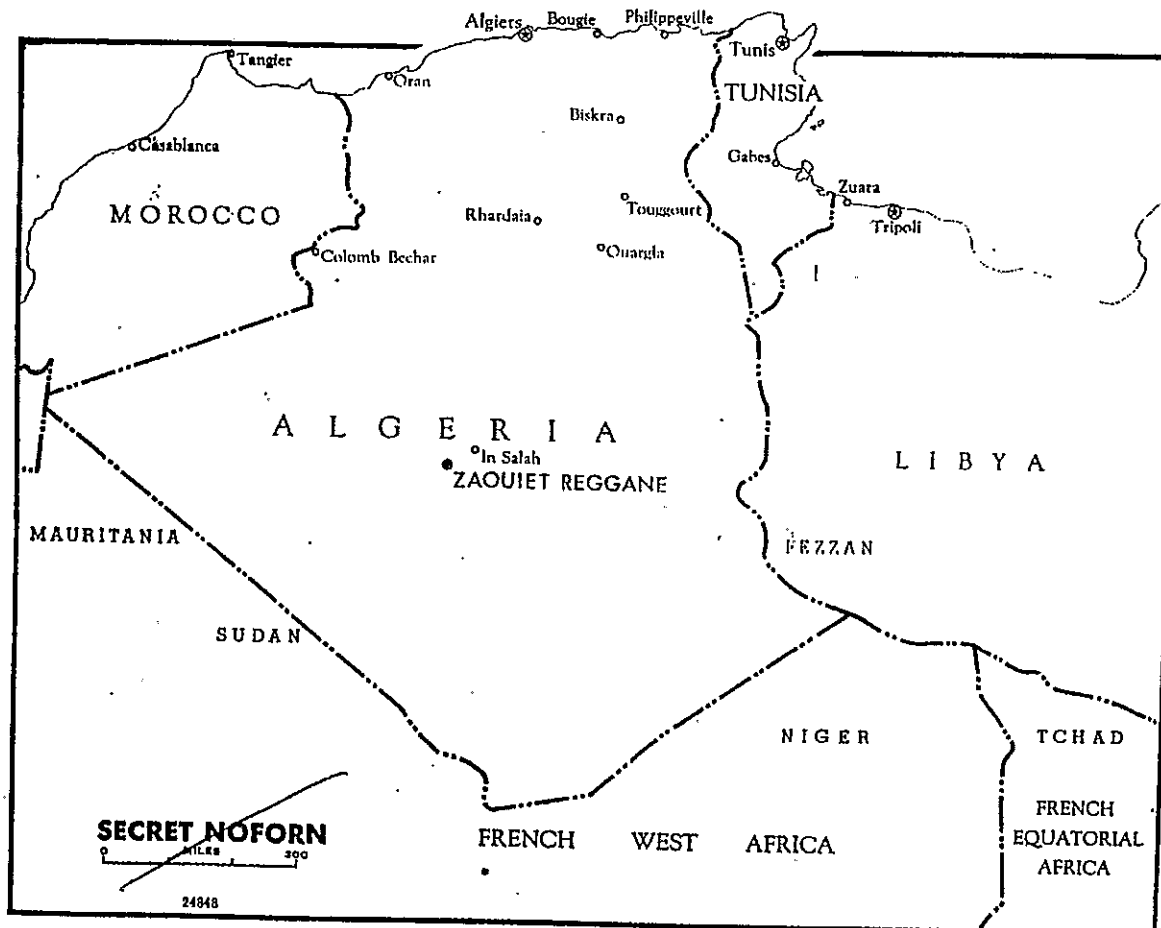
France now may have the capability of exploding a nuclear device of nominal yield at any time, and intensive preparations for a test have been reported recently. Various political and prestige considerations impel the De Gaulle government to attempt such a test before the 31 October deadline announced by the United States and Britain for the suspension of nuclear weapons testing.

A French nuclear test had previously not been expected much before 1959, although France has enough plutonium to explode a nominal-yield device prior to 31 October. Until recently, technical reasons delayed completion of chemical separation plant facilities,

and instruments for deriving useful scientific data from a test were not expected to be available before 1959.

The German scientist who heads research at the joint French-German Research Institute in Alsace is [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] working feverishly in midsummer on instrumentation for an impending French nuclear test, and [REDACTED] made [REDACTED] trips to the French nuclear test site [REDACTED] at Zaouiet Reggane (oasis) in the Sahara. The institute's research is ostensibly confined to conventional ballistics and explosives, but the results are applicable to nuclear weapons.



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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

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French officials have complained that France is "the only country in the world" which, because its nuclear weapons program is on the verge of testing, cannot afford to renounce testing along with the US, the UK, and the USSR. Foreign Minister Couve de Murville has reiterated Paris' interest in discussions on disarmament as a whole rather than on a nuclear test ban.

French officials also probably consider that an early test would favorably affect the prospects for French-German cooperation. Although West German spokesmen have denied that nuclear matters were discussed by De Gaulle and Adenauer in their 14 September meeting, it is nevertheless evident that the enormous cost of a national nuclear weapons program is a strong incentive

for closer cooperation. [REDACTED]

On the domestic political scene, an early test would be important for the government's prestige not only in connection with the constitutional referendum scheduled for 28 September, but also for the November parliamentary elections. In addition, a test would strengthen De Gaulle's hand vis-a-vis army elements in Algeria which are still not unconditionally obedient to him. [REDACTED]