

**May 13, 1959**

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'Disarmament Negotiations: The Fourth Power  
Problem: France'**

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<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/134044>

**Summary:**

According to intelligence reports, the French were trying to acquire from US firms the diagnostic technology needed to measure a nuclear explosion. INR did not believe that France had identified a specific test site and noted that France was under pressure to hold a test somewhere other than North Africa; nevertheless it went ahead with one in Algeria in early 1960.

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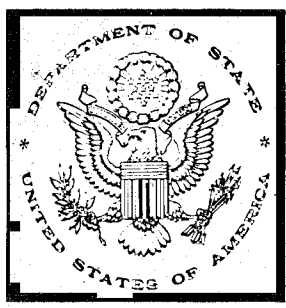
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# Intelligence Information Brief

No. 139

May 13, 1959

This brief contains research information designed to meet the needs of a specific requester. It is not intended to provide a definitive analysis of the topic.

## DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS: THE FOURTH POWER PROBLEM: FRANCE

In April 1959, French Premier Debre and Foreign Minister Couve de Murville visited London to exchange views with British officials incident to negotiations on Berlin, Germany, and Africa. At that time, Prime Minister Macmillan brought to the attention of the French a resolution by the Nigerian legislature against French testing of nuclear weapons in the Sahara. Mr. Macmillan said that the explosion of nuclear weapons in the Sahara would be likely to cause many difficulties. The French merely took note of this statement.

An unevaluated report of January 1959, concerning statements by certain production and research personnel of an American electronics firm which makes equipment for nuclear weapons tests, suggested that prior to the election of General de Gaulle as President, French sources had indicated a definite plan to fire a 60 kiloton tower shot in the Sahara, but that this plan was probably changed after July 1958 in favor of a much larger shot, possibly up to a megaton. According to speculation among US sources in the electronics field, testing by the French may take place at the Kerguelen Islands (latitude 49S, longitude 70E - southeast of Madagascar) instead of in the Sahara because of pressures from North African countries, though some sources are doubtful of this possibility.

This report also suggested that the French have requested that a team of engineers and technicians be allowed to visit a US plant reportedly manufacturing test equipment for them, and to observe the final assembly of the equipment. This visit was said to be scheduled for April 1959. In addition, the French have requested the American firm to send an engineer to Paris to check the equipment after its arrival there.

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According to this report, the French have ordered enough equipment to make complete diagnostic measurements in approximately a five shot series. The equipment is probably capable, with circuitry adjustments, of making measurements on shots with yields ranging from 100 tons into the megaton range. The order, placed in December 1958, reportedly calls for delivery to be completed by May 26, 1959.

France has two atomic reactors in use at present and is expected to have sufficient plutonium to manufacture devices for two tests by July 1959.

President de Gaulle and Foreign Minister Couve de Murville have stated that France will not be bound by any agreement that may be reached between the US, UK, and USSR in current negotiations on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests.

This report was prepared from information available through May 12, 1959.

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