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FRANCE MAY REASSESS NUCLEAR FORCE

Technical difficulties and rising costs, particularly the development of a second-generation nuclear weapons system, may be causing France to take a harder look at its capability to develop an independent deterrent force. Paris, of course, remains firmly committed to having its own force. There are some indications that it now may be looking for ways to ameliorate differences within the Western Alliance in the hope that improved relations would bring technological aid.

Retired Air Force General Pierre Gallois, one of the most ardent advocates of an independent force, told [redacted]

[redacted] on 2 April that the first-generation nuclear force, based on the Mirage IV bomber, is already obsolete, but would have to be maintained until 1973 or 1975. He expects delays of several years beyond the planned operational dates for a missile-firing nuclear submarine, an air-to-surface missile compatible with an advanced aircraft, and thermonuclear bombs or nuclear warheads.

There also are indications of technical difficulties at France's Pierrelatte gaseous diffusion plant, a key instal-

lation in the production of thermonuclear weapons.

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(b)(3)

Heretofore, [redacted]

[redacted] France was about on schedule in the development of missiles, the Polaris-type submarines, and other second-generation delivery systems. These programs are in the early development stages, however, and most of the major technical hurdles still lie ahead. Despite the new spate of claims by the French that their nuclear force is moving ahead as planned, technical manpower and funds have been spread thinly among a number of programs, and the difficulties of holding to original development timetables may now be as apparent to the government as they have been to the technicians involved.

As for the Mirage IV, minor delays have been noted, but delivery of the aircraft to operating units is still expected to begin this year and be completed by 1965. France probably has the capability, and may already have begun, to manufacture fission weapons compatible with this aircraft.

The findings of the extensive reappraisal of the strike-

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force program which De Gaulle had ordered in late December may have made him realize the barriers ahead. This would help explain the more conciliatory stance he is reportedly adopting on Western Alliance differences. In a recent conversation with Archduke Otto of Hapsburg, he said he thought it was time to improve relations with his allies. De Gaulle admitted that the positions he had taken in January and February had caused disarray in the alliance, but said he had felt compelled to move in a dramatic manner because of his concern over political and nuclear developments

which did not fit his design for Europe.

Gallois, who has high-level connections in the French Government, has intimated that a thaw in Paris' attitude on nuclear policies may be in the offing. On this score, he recently told [redacted] that a new nuclear formula must be worked out among the Western allies. He also predicted a reconciliation with the British and said France wants more than anything else to have the nuclear discrimination of the MacMahon Act ended. [redacted]

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