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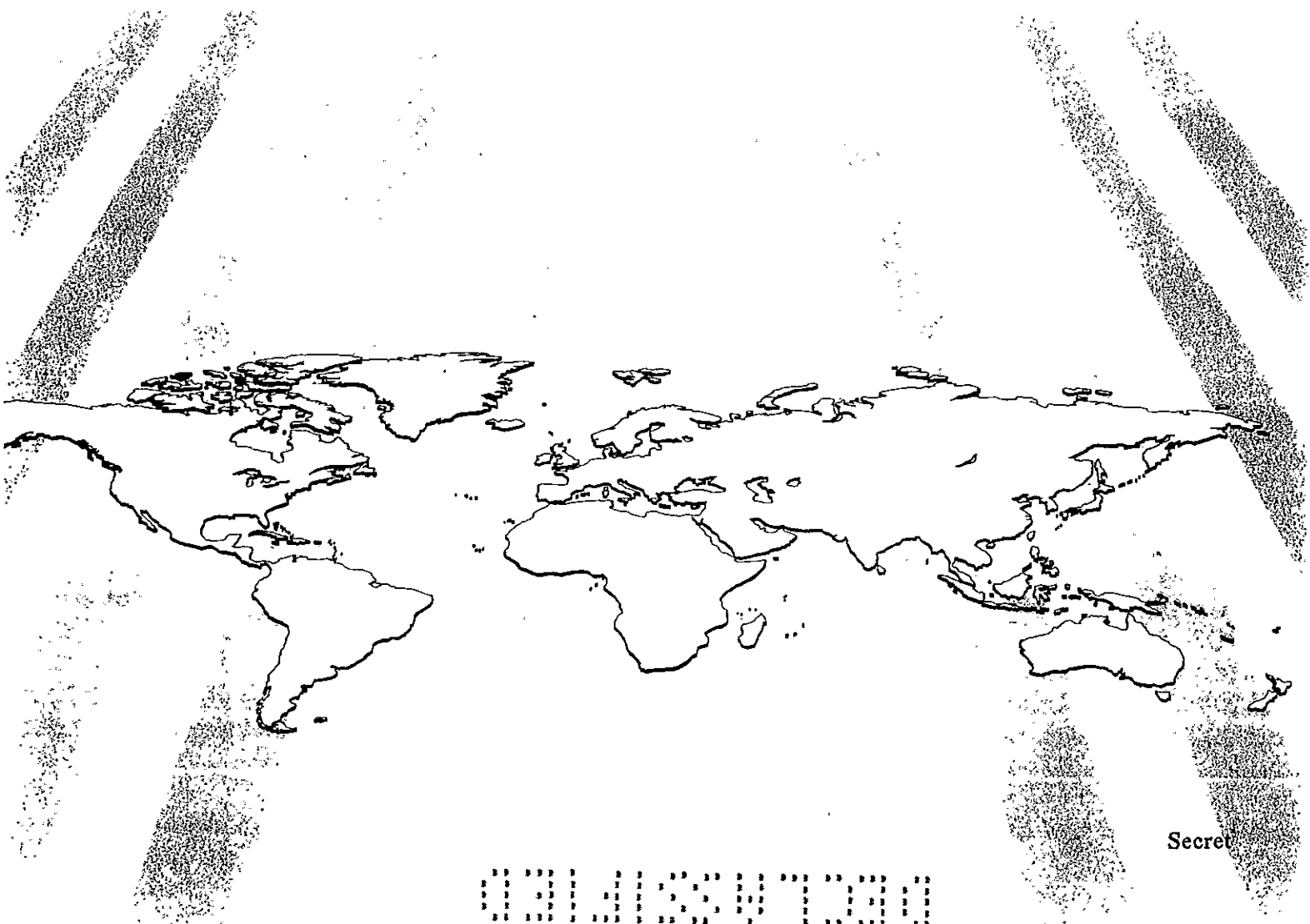
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# French Nuclear Strategy and Nuclear Forces: An Update

IRR No. 101 - June 30, 1987



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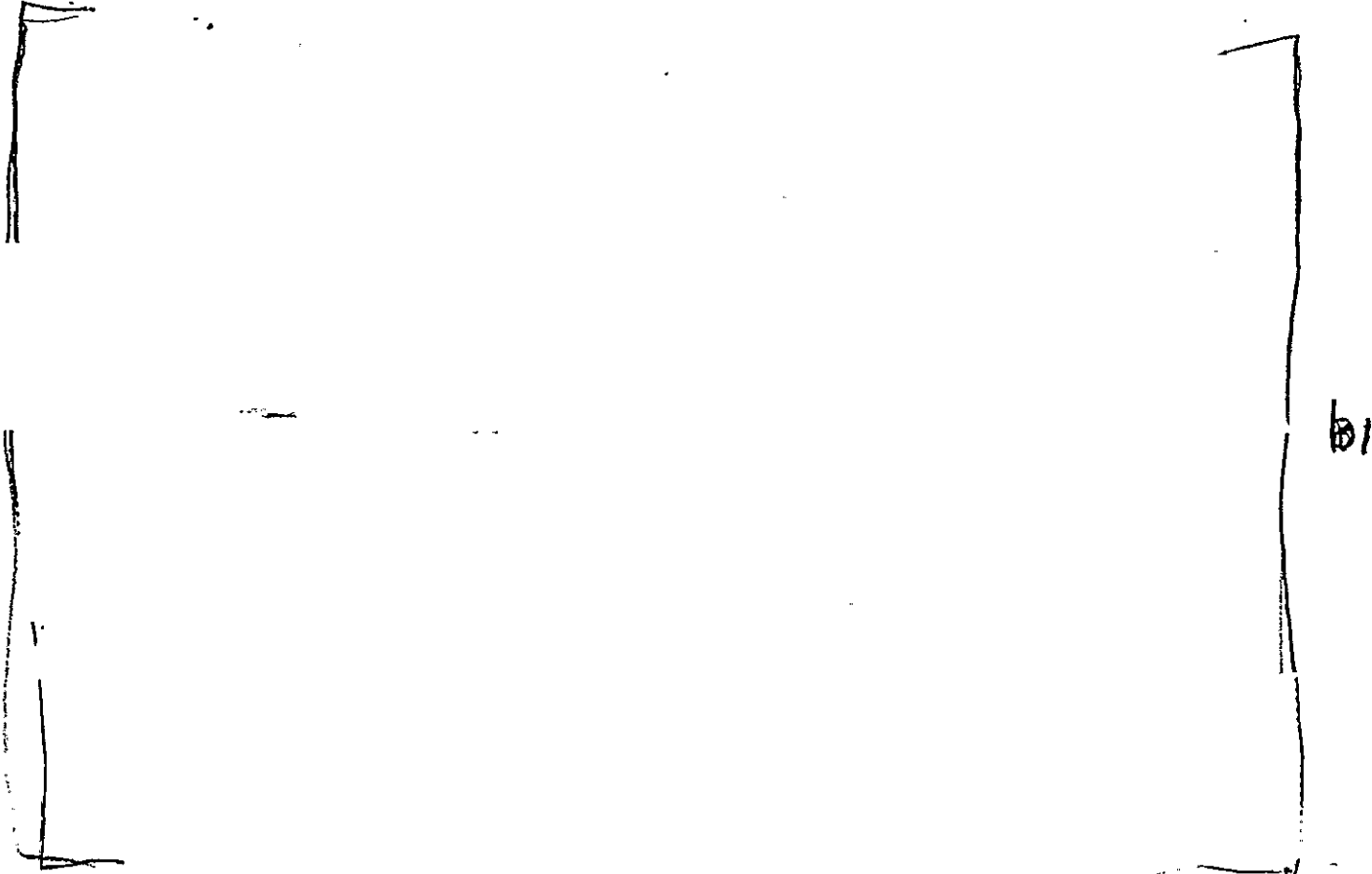
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The Evolution of French Nuclear Doctrine

(U) A. The Problem

The underlying rationale for the development of an independent French nuclear force, in addition to national pride and politics, has been France's lack of confidence in the US nuclear guarantee and its belief in the theory of proportional deterrence. This theory states that the superiority of the enemy's nuclear forces is irrelevant as long as the forces of the small nuclear power are strong enough to inflict a level of damage on the enemy that is out of all proportion to any benefit the enemy could derive by destruction of the smaller power.

Once the decision to create an independent nuclear force was made, however, every French Government since the 1960s has faced the need to make this force credible to deter a changing Soviet threat.

In the early years, the strategic force de frappe of SLBMs and IRBMs served as a deterrent against any massive Soviet nuclear attack on France by threatening to reply in kind. As Soviet conventional forces have improved, however, the threat of a Soviet ICBM/SLBM attack against France has not been the central focus of French concern. The French have changed the emphasis of their strategic and tactical nuclear doctrine several times in order to respond to perceived changes in the Soviet threat to France.

Since the mid-1970s, the French have faced the continuing dilemma of finding a role for French tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in deterring a sophisticated Soviet conventional attack. The French also fear the possibility that a conventional attack could be preceded by or coupled with precision nuclear strikes against limited, selected French military targets. This latter possibility could leave the French President with the options of no nuclear response, a tactical nuclear response that was incapable of stopping a Soviet conventional advance into France, or massive retaliation that would ultimately result in the complete destruction of France.

B. Tactical Nuclear Policy

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(U) Instead of following the Giscard approach toward increased conventional spending and tactical nuclear weapon deployments, French military budgets in the 1980s have made cuts in the size of conventional forces and increased the percentage spent on strategic nuclear forces. (Economic constraints have forced a slowdown in real spending, resulting in stretching out the modernization of some weapons.) A major reason behind the shift in percentage of spending toward strategic vs. conventional weapons was a reappraisal of the Soviet threat.

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