

French defence minister whips up hysteria over Russian hacking of elections

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This week, as US intelligence circles accuse Moscow of having influenced the US presidential elections through cyberattacks, French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian accused Moscow of preparing cyberattacks to influence the outcome of the French presidential election.

In an interview with the *Journal du Dimanche*, asked whether “French political parties are protected from an attack like what the Democratic Party faced in the United States,” Le Drian said: “Analyses carried out by the ANSSI [National Agency for Security of Information Systems] have not allowed us up until now to identify any traces of destabilisation operations targeting the elections in France. It cannot be excluded, however, that operations such as those that were observed in the United States could be carried out to undermine the French electoral process. I therefore call on everyone to exercise the greatest vigilance. It is for this reason that the ANSSI organized meetings in October with the leaders of the main political movements in France.”

The anti-Russian hysteria in the international media notwithstanding, US intelligence reports have not furnished any concrete evidence proving Russian intervention in the US presidential election. The *Washington Post* was even forced to admit that there were no “bombshell” revelations even in the classified report on Russian hacking prepared by the US intelligence community—and even less in the unclassified report published last Friday.

Nevertheless, Le Drian went on to speculate on Russia’s possible involvement in cyberattacks on the US elections in line with CIA and US media claims, declaring: “If there was an intervention to influence or manipulate the US presidential elections, it is a serious matter. If it was carried out by a state, this is an

intolerable intervention. Because targeting the electoral process of a country means targeting its democratic foundations.”

To underline the supposed danger of hacking during the presidential elections, Le Drian stated that France is already targeted by such attacks: “Since I have been in this position, and particularly over the last three years, the cyber threat has become intense, including against our own military equipment. The number of instances of aggressive electronic targeting of my ministry doubles each year. In 2016 our security systems blocked 24,000 external attacks. Among these, a few hundred more elaborate attacks were clearly designed with hostile intent.”

Such comments, by suggesting without any concrete evidence that the US presidential elections were hacked and that Russia was the power behind this, underscore the close alignment of France’s Socialist Party (PS) government on the anti-Russian campaign in the United States.

From the first accusations at least five months ago that Russia was organising hacking against Hillary Clinton’s campaign, the goal was to stir up public anger and justify a more aggressive posture against Russia, notably over the war in Syria. At the same time, Russian influence was used to explain away Trump’s surprise victory and the humiliating defeat of Clinton and the Democrats amid a collapse in their electoral support.

A hysterical campaign by the Democrats, the CIA and the media is blaming alleged Russian intervention in the presidential elections for having aided Trump. It claims that Russia provided WikiLeaks with internal Clinton campaign emails, as well as proof of Clinton’s moves to undermine Bernie Sanders’ campaign, in order to discredit the Democrats. They also allege that

Russia could have hacked electronic voting machines in the United States to hand the election to Trump.

This underscores that the anti-Russian campaign in the United States is denouncing the publication of true information that exposes the Democrats' right-wing policies and their close ties to Wall Street, and therefore appeals to mass opposition from the left to the policies of Clinton and Obama.

At the same time, there are explosive battles inside the American ruling class over the foreign policy to be pursued by Trump, whose initial statements suggest that he would orient to a more aggressive commercial and military policy against China than against Russia.

Le Drian's interview with the JDD underscores that similar conflicts, in various forms, are erupting inside the European bourgeoisie, including the various parties running in the French presidential elections. Significant sections of the French political establishment are trying to exploit Trump's foreign policy to adopt a more pro-Russian orientation.

Several leading candidates, including the conservative François Fillon, neo-fascist Marine Le Pen, and Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, are pro-Russian, and have to varying degrees expressed dissatisfaction with German hegemony in the EU. They are adopting the traditional "alliance from behind" orientation in French foreign policy. This entailed seeking alliances to the east, typically with Russia or Turkey, in order to counterbalance more powerful neighbours in Central Europe, such as Germany or Austria.

This points to the likelihood of increasingly bitter conflicts not only with the unstable and deeply divided regime in Washington, but also with Berlin.

The more anti-Russian sections of the American bourgeoisie have intervened aggressively in the French presidential election, as the *Canard Enchaîné* has reported, to ensure that Paris stays aligned with the CIA's anti-Russian policy. They moved to cut campaign financing from Russian banks to Le Pen's National Front (FN) and to criticise Le Pen's political and financial ties to Moscow.

Through Le Drian's JDD interview, sections of the PS and of the French army are joining in efforts to incite an anti-Russian atmosphere and to discredit criticisms of the deeply unpopular policies of the PS as reflecting a foreign, illegitimate, or even illegal

intervention in the French electoral process.

Le Drian's claims notwithstanding, it is impossible for Moscow to subvert the French presidential elections with cyberattacks. The vote is recorded on paper ballots cast in voting booths. An intervention by computer hackers would therefore be insufficient by itself to modify the results of the election.

The goal of the anti-Russian campaign is thus not to protect the elections, but to stoke international tensions and delegitimise all criticisms of the close collaboration between the PS government, NATO, and Washington in war and austerity in the service of the banks.



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