Beat: Politics

MACRON GATHERS FRANCE'S PARTY LEADERS AS ENERGY SHOCKS & RUSSIAN HYBRID THREAT

THREATS TEST A PRE-ELECTION NATION

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USPA NEWS - FROM THE ELYSEE TO THE PETROL PUMP: MACRON'S CRISIS MEETING PUTS SECURITY, ENERGY AND DEMOCRACY ON THE SAME TABLE
On 18 September, Emmanuel Macron gathered the leaders of parliamentary parties and representatives of presidential candidates in the secure Vega room at the Elysee.
The President of the National Assembly, Yael Braun-Pivet, and Senate President Gerard Larcher were also present. It was a rare format (called Saint Denis format), reminiscent of the Saint-Denis meetings Macron has used during previous national crises: less a negotiation than a classified briefing intended to place political rivals before the same map of danger.
The meeting came as France confronts two pressures that are increasingly impossible to separate. The first is security: Russia's war against Ukraine, the escalation of hybrid threats in Europe and fears of cyberattacks, drone incursions and foreign interference. The second is energy: the conflict in the Middle East, blockages affecting the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea routes, and fuel prices that have become painfully visible in the daily lives of French households. (Source French Presidency Elysee)

This is not an on-the-ground report from inside the Elysee Palace. It is an independent political analysis based on the official presidential communiqué, Emmanuel Macron's full press conference, public energy data and more than 25 years of experience covering French political life from Paris including the uneasy boundary where executive authority, national security and electoral politics begin to overlap.

EMMANUEL MACRON IS A PRESIDENT RETURNING TO HIS ROLE AS ARBITER
Macron cannot seek a third consecutive term in the 2027 presidential election. But he remains President of the French Republic, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and guarantor of national institutions. With less than seven months before the first round, he has chosen to exercise that role through crisis management rather than campaign commentary.
"I believe that this is the role of guarantor entrusted to the President of the Republic," President Macron said after the meeting. He promised to convene political forces whenever transparency and the national interest required it, while insisting that he would not become a commentator on the presidential contest.

That positioning is politically delicate. Any President who convenes party leaders and presidential candidates during a pre-election season risks being accused of setting the agenda or using the institutional gravity of office to dominate the debate. Yet refusing to brief political leaders on threats affecting the country would create its own democratic problem.
The meeting was therefore an exercise in executive power, but also in institutional responsibility. Prediddent Macron's message was that security intelligence cannot wait until the campaign becomes comfortable, and that the campaign itself must not become blind to the dangers already reshaping French life.

THE EMPTY CHAIRS AND THE POLITICS OF ABSENCE
Although all the party's leaders were invited by the French President, not every political leader attended in person. As for the Presidential Elections 2027 candidates, Jean-Luc Melenchon (favorite leader of La France Insoumise Far Left) was represented by Manuel Bompard, while Marine Le Pen, super favorite, far right's boss, was represented by Jordan Bardella. In a period of permanent political theatre, even an empty chair becomes a message: distance from the President, reluctance to validate his framing of the crisis, or a strategic decision to let a party's next generation occupy the room.
But the official format was broader than the two leading figures who stayed away. The meeting included the principal forces represented in the National Assembly and Senate, along with senior officials from the DGSI domestic intelligence service, the DGSE external intelligence service, military intelligence, the General Secretariat for Defence and National Security, and the Directorate-General for Energy and Climate.

This was not a gathering designed to produce a coalition government. It was a briefing designed to impose a shared baseline of information. In theory, that matters. Candidates can disagree about sanctions, military aid, energy policy or public spending. They should not disagree about whether the country faces serious risks to critical infrastructure, democratic integrity and energy security. (Source French Presidency Elysee)

RUSSIA'S HYBRID THREAT MOVES CLOSER

The most serious part of Macron's message concerned Russia. He said the character of Russian aggression and threats towards Europe had changed, citing attacks, attempted attacks, drone incidents and other hostile acts in several European countries.

Macron referred to a drone attack on a passenger train leaving Kyiv, an attempted attack at Leipzig Airport attributed by German services to the GRU, a flare fired near a Danish frigate, airspace incursions and a growing pattern of hostile activity. "No one is safe," he warned, arguing that an attempted attack in Leipzig could have occurred in another European city had the operation succeeded.

France has already been the target of documented information and cyber operations, Macron said. He announced reinforced vigilance around strategic sites, critical infrastructure and the country's defence industrial base, including protection against drones and cyberattacks. He also pointed to Viginum, France's service for detecting foreign digital interference, as part of a wider national response.

Emmanuel Macron's warning is not that war is arriving at every French street corner tomorrow. It is more precise and, perhaps, more unsettling: hybrid threats are designed to remain below the threshold of open war while weakening public confidence, disrupting infrastructure, intimidating societies and creating political division.

That raises an uncomfortable question for the 2027 campaign. Can France conduct a serious democratic election while managing the risk that foreign actors may seek to manipulate information, influence public debate or test the country's resilience? The answer cannot be to suspend democracy in the name of security. It must be to make democracy harder to destabilise.

THE PRICE OF WAR AT THE PETROL PUMP

For many French families, the geopolitics of Hormuz, Yanbu or the Red Sea becomes real only when the fuel display turns red at the petrol station. Diesel prices reached around €2.39 per litre on 18 September, while supply tensions affected stations across the country.

Macron insisted that the rise was not the result of a French domestic decision. He linked it to the war in Iran, the partial blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, attacks affecting alternative routes and wider pressure on energy infrastructure. France, he said, did not choose the conflict, but it is living with its consequences.

The President's answer has three layers. First, diplomacy: facilitate a peaceful reopening of Hormuz, including possible defensive escort arrangements if an agreement allows it. Second, supply security: diversify crude oil, refined products, diesel, jet fuel and liquefied natural-gas sources through partnerships with Gulf states, Iraq, Nigeria, Canada and others. Third, European coordination: a future G7 meeting on strategic stocks, production, exports and the possible release of reserves.

This is the language of long supply chains and high diplomacy. It is also the language of a government explaining why it cannot simply make a global energy shock disappear by decree.

THE GILETS JAUNES (YELLOW JACKETS) SHADOW MOVEMENT THREAT

Presidnet Macron acknowledged that fuel prices are causing "a lot of suffering" and warned against the reflex of spending public money France does not have. The comment carries the memory of 2018, when a fuel-tax dispute ignited the Gilets Jaunes movement and exposed the distance between Parisian policy and the daily economics of driving to work.

Today, the risk is different but recognisable. A strike is planned for 29 September. Calls for renewed mobilisation are circulating, while a possible return of a Gilets Jaunes-style movement is being discussed for October. The public mood is already sharpened by inflation, debt, mistrust and an early presidential contest that produces more candidates than confidence.

The Government's targeted support for "heavy drivers" is intended to reach roughly three million people. But targeted help is never as simple as a television announcement. People must know they qualify, be able to apply, navigate the paperwork and receive assistance quickly enough for it to matter. A fuel measure that exists only in an online form can become another example of the State speaking the language of empathy while households speak the language of the bank balance.

Emmanuel Macron's warning was politically accurate: price caps or broad rebates would have budgetary consequences, either through larger deficits or future taxation. But the opposite danger is equally real. If French citizens conclude that the State can explain their hardship but cannot relieve it, anger may find its own routes.

UNITY, BUT NOT SILENCE

The President Macron called on the country to remain united. "Division will make us weaker in facing these crises," he said. That is true. Russia benefits from democratic societies that lose trust in their institutions; energy shocks are easier to manage when governments, businesses and citizens share credible information.

Yet, unity cannot mean silence, nor can national security become an excuse for avoiding debate. Opposition parties have a democratic duty to challenge the Government's assumptions, ask whether protection measures are sufficient, test the fairness of energy support and scrutinise the balance between civil liberties and security.

Emmanuel Macron's meeting was useful precisely if it gives political leaders more information with which to disagree responsibly. Unity should mean a shared attachment to France's security and democratic institutions, not an obligation to approve every presidential diagnosis or policy.

A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN UNDER THE PRESSURE OF HISTORY

The meeting at the Elysee may be remembered as a warning about more than fuel. It placed the coming presidential campaign inside a much wider landscape: an aggressive Russia, a fragile European security order, an energy shock, stressed public finances and a society that remembers how quickly anger can turn into revolt.

Macron will not be a candidate in 2027, but he is not disappearing from public life. His role is evolving from presidential competitor to institutional guardian a position that gives him both responsibility and influence. The question is whether candidates will rise to the level of the threats described, or continue treating the campaign as a contest of television moments, personal rivalries and polling theatrics.

France is entering an election year while facing the kind of pressures that make politics both more difficult and more necessary. A country can debate fiercely. It must. But it also has to protect its critical infrastructure, secure its energy, defend its democratic space and ensure that no external power writes the next chapter of its political life for it.

SOURCES

• Elysee Palace, official communiqué and President Macron's 18 September 2026 press conference following the meeting with party leaders.
• Euronews TV, reporting on Macron's protection plan against Russian hybrid attacks, energy diplomacy and the planned G7 energy meeting.
• Public reporting on attendance at the meeting, intelligence briefings and fuel-price context.todoalicante
• Fuel-supply reporting diesel price levels, station availability and the impact of pressure on Hormuz and Middle East energy routes.

DISCLAIMER

This independent political analysis was written by Rahma Rachdi, a Paris-based political correspondent with more than 25 years of experience covering French political life. It is based on the official Elysee communiqué and full presidential press conference, together with reliable public reporting on energy prices, security risks and institutional developments. It does not constitute support for or opposition to any candidate, political party or government policy. Our Agency, USPA supports disability inclusion, accessibility and equal representation in public-interest journalism. In any national crisis, whether energy, security, cyber or social public information, emergency support and security arrangements must be accessible to people with disabilities, including accessible digital services, clear communications, adapted transport and the practical ability to participate in democratic life.

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