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# France to invest 1 billion euros to update cyber defences

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By Marine Pennerier

PARIS, Feb 7 (Reuters) - France unveiled plans on Friday to bolster long-neglected defences against cyber attacks, with 1 billion euros (\$1.36 billion) of investment foreseen to bring the country's technology up to speed with NATO partners.

Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian presented measures including roll-outs of secure telephones, encryption technology and network surveillance to harden sensitive computer systems now exposed to hacking and espionage.

The spending aims to build up France's ability to fend off mounting cyber attacks and bolster surveillance after years of neglect. The issue has taken on more urgency in the wake of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden's disclosures about US cyber surveillance practices.

"This is a priority for the defence ministry because our operational capacity, our ability to conduct operations, can be gravely threatened by cyber threats," Le Drian said. "I'm referring to weapons systems, command and control, information and the systems that link them together."

Most of the money will go toward shoring up security at the defence ministry and its strategic partners, which were targeted by some 800 cyber attacks in 2013 amid unprecedented belt-tightening for the military, according to a presentation the defence ministry posted online.

## 'STRATEGIC HEART'

But funds will also go to building up web monitoring and personal data collection. Parliament passed a law in December empowering the state to request data from telecoms operators and web providers, in some cases without asking a judge, drawing criticism from web and privacy activists.

"France has only woken up to these risks very recently," said Jean-Francois Bezel, president of the IT consultancy Safaris and a specialist in cyber security. "The main thing today is to protect companies that are crucial to the state's functioning, as well as government and banks, and to promote best practices in security."

France, which spends more money on its military than any other European nation except Britain, has given itself two years to catch up with its allies on cyber defences.

Some 400 million euros of the total 1 billion will be used to equip strategic firms with means to protect and encrypt data, detect hacking and monitor internal networks. The ministry document did not specify if it had certain firms in mind.

The military will set up a centre to train personnel in cyber defence near the northwestern

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Staff at the military's CALID cyber defence unit will be increased six-fold, while specialised lawyers will be trained to usher legal complaints through the judicial system, which rarely produces convictions for cyber security-related crimes.

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"We are able to identify the source of the attack but bringing proof in judicial terms is very difficult because conscientious hackers will cover their tracks by bouncing their attacks on servers located around the world," said Guillaume Poupard, head of information systems security at the defences ministry's procurement agency.

Thomson Reuters is the world's leading source of intelligent information for businesses and professionals. Of the 800 attacks targeting French interests in 2013, Poupard said most had been attempts to infiltrate defence systems, with none aiming to incapacitate battle-ready units like ships.

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launched the first reaction force to deflect cyber attacks targeting the alliance's computer systems

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