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## FRANCE'S FAR-RIGHT LEADER MARINE LE PEN VISITS CHAD

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BBC (21 March 2017)

French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right Front National (FN) party, is making a rare visit to Africa, a party official said.

She is in Chad to meet French soldiers based there as part of the Barkhane anti-terrorism force.

Chadian opposition parties say she should have been banned from visiting describing her as a champion of "fascist" policies.

It is the first time Ms Le Pen is in Africa in an official capacity.

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The plane carrying Ms Le Pen to Chad departed only a few hours after she took part in a live presidential debate on French TV where she reasserted that fighting Islamist fundamentalist networks would be her priority as president.

The Barkhane force is made up of about 3,000 French soldiers along with troops from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad.

It has been set up in an effort to stifle jihadist groups in the Sahel region in West and North Africa.

Ms Le Pen's planned meeting with the French soldiers is seen as a move to mark her commitment to stopping Islamist fundamentalism at the root before it is exported to France.

France has been hit in recent years by deadly attacks, including the Charlie Hebdo killings and the Bataclan night club attack, all claimed by radical Islamist groups.

The FN leader proposes to curb immigration and increase military spending as a way of safeguarding France against future attacks.

She wants to hike defence spending to a minimum of 2% of France's GDP.

Neo-colonialist

Her visit to Chad has created a controversy with opposition parties in the country.

"[Marine Le Pen], who is xenophobic and even fascist, is undertaking the visit under the pretext of

meeting [soldiers] of Operation Barhkane, but the real reasons are elsewhere," the Patriotic Rally of Renewal (PRR) opposition said in a statement.

"Marine Le Pen is coming to Chad, just like the other French political elites, to seek funds for her campaign from the Chadian authorities, who are known for their generosity towards the latter," PRR added.

"Chad is no longer a French colony and the Chadian people must break ties with the neo-colonialist policy of France and take its destiny in its hand," PRR said in its statement.

Ms Le Pen has not commented on this criticism levelled against her.

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Kaynak/Source: