

US politicians, intelligence move to cut French neo-fascists' ties to Russia

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Amid bitter political infighting in Washington over the foreign policy of the incoming Trump administration, sections of the US intelligence community have moved aggressively to cut across French neo-fascist presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's ties to Russia.

The American media and the intelligence apparatus are whipping up a hysterical campaign accusing Moscow of intervening in the US presidential elections to secure a Donald Trump victory. As these same forces intervene in an effort to cut off financing to Le Pen's National Front (FN) party and denounce Le Pen's ties to Russia, the explosive geo-strategic rivalries underlying the campaign against Russia in the United States and Europe are emerging into view.

On December 18, the satirical *Canard Enchaîné* weekly revealed that Ohio Republican Rep. Mike Turner of the House Intelligence Committee had written a November 28 letter to US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, warning of the FN's ties to Russia.

Turner noted that the FN "publicly acknowledged that it had received a \$9.8 million loan from a Russian bank with links to the Kremlin, allegedly brokered by a sanctioned Russian Duma deputy, according to French press reporting. ... In February 2016, the FN asked Russia for a \$30 million loan to fund the FN leader Marine Le Pen's 2017 campaign." Turner also noted Marine Le Pen's support for Russian control of Crimea—after which the Washington-backed regime in Ukraine declared Le Pen *persona non grata*, banned from travel to Ukraine.

Finally, Turner urged Clapper to find "more details" on "this vast campaign" of "information war against the United States and other countries whose interests go against those of Russia."

Le Pen—who hailed Trump's election and his protectionist policies as a "victory of liberty," and also praised Trump's selection of white supremacist Stephen Bannon as a top advisor—initially responded aggressively

to Turner's letter.

Without referring to US intelligence's moves against her or to Russia, Le Pen sharply attacked the NATO military alliance and the European Union (EU). This was in line with the FN's long-standing criticisms of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and FN calls for a referendum on a French exit from the EU and the euro currency.

Speaking to the Greek daily *Dimokratia*, she echoed Trump's hostility to NATO. "NATO was created when the Warsaw Pact threatened the expansion of communism from the Soviet Union," she added. "But the USSR no longer exists, nor does the Warsaw Pact: Washington only maintains NATO's presence to serve its interests in Europe."

For good measure, she again denounced the EU in her *Dimokratia* interview, declaring: "Frexit [France's exit from the EU] is in my program. The people must have the opportunity to vote for the liberation from the slavery and blackmail imposed by Brussels technocrats, in order to regain the country's sovereignty."

Le Pen also stated that the FN is not currently linked to Golden Dawn, the pro-Nazi party infamous for its often murderous street attacks on immigrants, homosexuals and left-wing figures in Greece.

After Le Pen's interview, however, it emerged that the Russian bank that loaned the FN its campaign money, the First Czech Russian Bank (FCRB), had gone bankrupt, and that Russian financial authorities had suspended the loan to the FN. On December 31, a sudden announcement revealed that Le Pen had been forced to turn to a \$6 million loan from Cotelec, a company tied to her father, former FN boss Jean-Marie Le Pen.

When on January 3, Marine Le Pen appeared on BFM-TV for an interview with Jean-Jacques Bourdin, she had clearly shifted her line. She proclaimed herself "not anti-European" and called for a renegotiation of, rather than an exit from the EU. Apparently stepping back from FN calls

for a return to the French franc and a break with the German-led European Central Bank, she suggested that a French national currency could be compatible with the 19-country euro currency. This portion of the interview proceeded as follows:

Q: Do you want France to leave the European Union? I want things to be clear, I am asking you the question directly. Yes or no?

MLP: I would like, uh, no, I think we have to renegotiate with the European Union, because I want sovereignty to come back to France ...

Q: Renegotiate?

MLP: I definitely want borders to come back, monetary, economic, and budgetary sovereignty ...

Q: So, no more euro?

MLP: A national currency [together] with a euro, common currency ... it doesn't cause problems. I want a national currency. I am not anti-European, I am against the European Union.

Q: How will you reinforce Europe?

MLP: I will reinforce it with bilateral relations with a certain number of countries.

After having distanced herself from the FN's most strident anti-EU positions, however, Marine Le Pen again defended Trump and downplayed US accusations of Russian hacking in a meeting Thursday with the Anglo-American Press Association.

"I don't think there is any serious proof behind these allegations of cyber-attacks. We should only consider real revelations. In any case, we can't say that it was [Moscow] that was behind this cyber-attack," she said, adding: "I supported Donald Trump's presidential candidacy because it seems to me that his international policies are good for France. The only question that interests me is will Donald Trump's international policies hurt France? So far that is not the case, quite the contrary."

The intervention by US intelligence to whip the FN into line points to the explosive conflicts underlying the unsubstantiated campaign of denunciations of Russian hacking of the US elections. These are driven not by any meaningful evidence of hacking, of which none has been produced, but by economic and geo-strategic tensions inside the NATO alliance.

The conflict between Trump and the Democratic Party, the CIA and sections of the US media over Russia has inevitably become linked with conflicts inside the EU. Trump has indicated that he may consider pivoting away from a highly aggressive strategy against Russia, and

instead focus on a confrontation with China, based on repudiating Washington's traditional "One China" policy. This has become not only a subject of commentary by geopolitical strategists, but of calculations by leading bourgeois politicians in Europe.

Last month, European Council on Foreign Relations Asia specialist François Godement noted that a more aggressive US "pivot to Asia" could have drastic consequences in Europe. Europe, he noted, "lacks a coherent foreign and security policy, and has terrible relations with the two regional powers of Russia and Turkey. In this context, engineering an alliance with the likes of Russia, India and Japan in order to cap China's ambitions could well be more valuable to Trump's United States than imposing sanctions for eternity on Russia as a favour to Europe."

In this context, a certain alignment is emerging between those sections of the US foreign policy establishment calling for a "pivot" away from Russia towards China, and most of the leading candidates in this year's French presidential election.

The latter are adopting a pro-Russian, nationalist, and protectionist orientation, often harshly critical of Germany, the EU's leading economic power. These include Le Pen; conservative candidate François Fillon, a pro-Russian and personal friend of Vladimir Putin, and who voted against the Maastricht Treaty that founded the EU; and former Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Yesterday, asked about her relations with Putin by the daily *Paris-Normandie*, Le Pen noted that she shared "an international geopolitical vision" with Fillon, adding: "I would never have allowed France to return to NATO's integrated command structure. Beyond that, I am not bound by any foreign power, I think only of the interests of France."



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