

Abdelhak Bouifer: Welcome to this interview, the first one that is given to a national media organization by her Excellency Madame Joan Polaschik, the United States Ambassador to Algeria. Your excellency, welcome to the APS headquarters.

Ambassador Polaschik: Thank you, it's really a great honor to be with you today.

Abdelhak Bouifer: And my colleague Djamel Bessou joins me to conduct this interview. Djamel, welcome.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Welcome

Abdelhak Bouifer: Your Excellency, you have a huge diplomatic career behind you, you served as a senior member of service at U.S. Department of State, and more important for us you served in different Arab countries, notably, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Jordan as well. And since last August you have been in Algeria for new diplomatic mission if may I say. Ambassador Polaschik, do you have a clear road map to boost relations between Washington and Algiers?

Ambassador Polaschik: Well first, again, let me thank you for the opportunity to come and talk with APS today. I've been in Algeria for about two and a half months now, and I am really so honored to be the Ambassador of the United States of America to your country. When I look back on Algerian history, it's very clear that Algeria has been through so much in the sixty years since it first launched its struggle for independence, and I deeply, deeply admire everything that the Algerian people have achieved in that time. Looking, at the current picture, I would say that U.S.- Algerian relations are the best that they have ever been. We have broad cooperation in a number of areas, and I intend to work with the Algerian Government to strengthen, and deepen, and expand that already very good cooperation. I intend to focus on three areas. First is security cooperation and promoting regional stability. And that is not only the fight against transnational terrorism, but it also means working with the Algerian government to promote peaceful solutions to the conflicts that are roiling the region, particularly in Mali and Libya. My second area of focus is strengthening our very good economic and commercial ties. American companies here are already very present in the energy sector, but as the Algerian government seeks to diversify its economy, I think that there is a lot more that my government and American companies could do to support those goals. And my third area of focus is on strengthening the bonds between our two peoples, particularly through the promotion of more English language education and through support for civil society here in Algeria.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Ambassador what are the key areas of cooperation mainly in economy and technology which you are going to develop in during your mandate here in Algiers?

Ambassador Polaschik: Well as I said earlier, we already have-

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Can you please be more explicit.

Ambassador Polaschik: More explicit, absolutely. We already have a very good track of record of cooperation in the energy and power generation sector and I think that cooperation will be a very important basis for us to build on as the Algerian government seeks to develop its non-conventional energy resources. The United States of America has a very important experience in that area and I think we have, our American companies have, some of the best technology in the world. But as I said

earlier, it's also important that we support the Algerian government's effort to diversify its economy. Algeria's long term prosperity will depend on the development of the non-energy sectors and I think that here too, American companies can bring a very important qualitative edge and that is our commitment to training and capacity building. This is exactly the sort of win-win approach that the Algerian government seeks and American companies are very interested in working here in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. They are also interested in information and communication technology which is the driving force of the global commerce these days and also the services sector.

Abdelhak Bouifer: At the end of October, an Algerian business delegation had been to the United States to present the business investment opportunities in Algeria to the American potential investors. Do you believe Ambassador, honestly speaking, that the moment has come, as you said, to find out cooperation, to build up cooperation, but out of gas and oil industry?

Ambassador Polaschik: Absolutely, and I think that there has been some very interesting progress in this regard just in the last few months. First of all, Prime Minister Sellal, when he was in Washington in August for the U.S. Africa summit, brought with him several key ministers here from Algeria, and they had excellent meetings with major U.S. corporations in Washington and that, I think, set the stage for the very successful "Doing Business in Algeria" roadshow that Minister Bouchouareb just led to Washington and Chicago in October. The trip was very well received, both by the U.S. government and the U.S. private sector. I understand that more than 30 Algerian companies were part of that mission, and also very importantly I think Minister Bouchouareb made some interesting comments about the Algerian government's desire to further open up its economy. When you look at the situation here, it's clear that this is a challenging business environment, and Algeria needs to compete on the global scale right now. It's a very interlocked world. The most recent World Bank "Doing Business" report here in Algeria indicated that there are some challenges. But at the same time there are very positive indications that the Algerian government is prepared to address those challenges, and I look forward to supporting the Algerian government's efforts to improve the business climate here. I would say I can't address the expectations on the Algerian side. I can address the expectations on the American side. And when I look back over the last year, we've had a number of very important exchanges and certainly on the diplomatic front, which always supports the economic front, we had the Secretary of State John Kerry here in April. We had Secretary of Energy Moniz here in June leading a delegation of more than 80 American companies for the Algiers International Trade Fair. And then of course, as I mentioned earlier, we had Prime Minister Sellal in the United States, followed by the October "Doing Business" roadshow with Minister Bouchouareb. All of these diplomatic exchanges have helped promote further economic cooperation. Again, looking back over the last year, we have had some major milestones. First, General Electric signed a multi-billion dollar deal to build a gas turbine factory here in Algeria, and this is just one of seven factories like this anywhere in the world. This is hugely important because it will allow Algeria to meet its own energy production needs, to become totally self-

sufficient, and then also to become a base to export to the rest of Africa, which is huge. GE has also been very present in the healthcare sector. It's working with five Algerian hospitals to upgrade their administrative and technological systems, which is part of the ongoing reform efforts with the Ministry of Health. Also in the healthcare sector, Varian Medical Systems is working on providing cancer treatment and detection equipment. And finally, Boeing just signed a deal to sell 10 aircraft to Air Algerie, which will support economic development not just here in Algeria but increase the Algerian government's ability to serve as an economic hub and a force for integration in the region, which is also very important.

Abdelhak Bouifer: Let's move on to security issues. As you mentioned at the beginning of the interview it has been one of the topics of your agenda here in Algeria. Many senior American officials have welcomed the role of Algeria in fighting terrorists. How do you think, your Excellency, that this cooperation could be forged in light of the new threats and the current security situation in the region, notably following the consequence of what is called the Arab Spring?

Ambassador Polaschik: Well first, I hope you'll add me to the long list of U.S. officials who have commended Algeria's strong support for the fight against transnational terrorism. Algeria has really been a steadfast, excellent partner in all of our efforts to combat terrorism and to promote regional stability. It's no doubt that this is an incredibly challenging time for the region, and the United States government very much shares the Algerian government's views that there can be no military solution to the conflicts here in this area, particularly in Mali and Libya —

Abdelhak Bouifer: Sorry to interrupt you Ambassador but here this is the point, this is the bottom line. How could we, how could we, between Algeria and the United States, work on together in favor of political solutions, not just military ones.

Ambassador Polaschik: Well we are already working very closely — our two governments, the Algerian and the U.S. governments — in these areas. First, the United States government very much appreciates the efforts of the Algerian government to launch and facilitate the ongoing Inter-Malian dialogue. We very much appreciate their efforts and in fact I have a senior colleague here from Washington this week who is here and will be meeting with Algerian officials later today to discuss that and express our very strong support for the Mali efforts. On Libya we continue to consult very closely with the Algerian government on that issue, and we very much appreciate the efforts of the Algerian government to work closely with the United Nations. The U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya Bernardino Leon knows Algeria very well, consults regularly, and we're very pleased to see that there is close coordination underway between Algeria and the United Nations to support Mr. Bernardino Leon's efforts.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Ambassador, the United States and the international community were respectively late in getting aware of the terrorist threat, whereas Algeria has not stopped during the 20 years' war warning from this phenomenon. Some observers say that this international campaign against terrorism has not set borders between Islam and terrorism and between terrorism and struggling for independence. Do you agree with this statement?

Ambassador Polaschik: I don't agree with that statement. Terrorists are despicable criminals who have no respect for human life or basic human values and it's wrong, completely wrong to associate terrorism with one issue or one religion. And let me be very clear that the United States government views Islam as a religion of peace and in fact when you look back at our very early diplomatic history, one of the first international treaties that we signed here in North Africa in 1796 said very clearly the U.S. has quote "no enmity towards Muslims." And then the treaty goes on to say that religion should never be the pretext or the reason for disturbing the peace between two countries. This was a founding principle of the United States of America's foreign policy. It remains one of our core principles to this day.

Abdelhak Bouifer: What can the United States do to show this on a practical side?

Ambassador Polaschik: First of all I want to make it very clear that violence is never the answer and I think that the United States government and the Algerian government are in one hundred percent agreement on that front. We always encourage people on any side of a conflict to sit down peacefully and work out their differences without resorting to violence. I would never ever condone the use of violence in any situation.

Abdelhak Bouifer: Let's go back to the diplomatic effort made by Algeria to find a political solution for the crisis in Mali and Libya. What kind of support can United States provide to the Algerian effort to promote, let me quote from your words, peace and stability in the region.

Ambassador Polaschik: When I take a very careful look at U.S.-Algerian history and bilateral relations, you know, Algeria is a country of very skilled diplomats and it's important to remember that in my country's own history Algeria played a very important role in helping us solve one of our most difficult problems and that was the Iran hostage crisis and the American people and government are eternally grateful to the terrific work done by the Algerian government in securing the release of our hostages in 1981. So when I think about the current situation, I think about the wonderful skills of Algerian diplomats and I am really excited and honored to have the opportunity to work with them as we try to tackle together these very difficult problems. So as I said earlier we continue to support the efforts of the Algerian government with the Inter-Malian dialogue and as we look at Libya, again I have to reiterate my government's commitment to a peaceful political solution there. It's very clear that there can be no military solution there. We're consulting very closely with the Algerian government and we're very pleased that the Algerian government is working very closely with the United Nations as it tries to identify and implement a political solution there.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Ambassador, excuse me to want to be more precise on that point. Which kind of effort can the United States provide to Algeria to promote the Inter-Malian dialogue concretely by acts?

Ambassador Polaschik: Well, we've been offering our political support for quite some time in the months since Algeria launched this initiative and as I mentioned earlier I have a colleague here from Washington today; she's been here this week meeting with the parties who are involved with the talks, and she'll be meeting later today with the Algerian Foreign Ministry. So I don't want to steal her thunder or in any way say

something that is really not within my bailiwick. She is the one leading our efforts on this, but I can affirm with 100% certainty that we fully support the Algerian efforts and we are very grateful for everything they are doing.

Abdelhak Bouifer: What about Libya? How could the United States government back up the Algerian effort to gather the Libyan rivals on the same table? We know that the security situation there is warring and the United States lost one of their Ambassadors there.

Ambassador Polaschik: Well first I should clarify not only did we lose an Ambassador but three of our other colleagues. So the events in Benghazi were a horrible tragedy on many, many different levels. As I said earlier, we continue to consult very closely with the Algerian government. We recognize that Libya's neighbors have the most at stake as the situation in Libya continues to deteriorate. It's very clear that as transnational terrorist groups establish a foothold there, they pose the greatest risk to all of the neighbors including Algeria. So for this reason, we have been consulting very closely with Algeria for quite some time and when you look back to the September 22nd ministerial meeting that Secretary Kerry hosted in New York we of course invited the Algerian Foreign Minister Lamamra to participate and that has set the tone for the sort of coordination that continues to exist to this day. U.S. policy is that we are counting on the United Nations to find a political solution there and we really welcome the Algerian government's efforts to coordinate its work directly with the United Nations.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Ambassador, let's move to another issue, Western Sahara issue. As you know in occupied Western Sahara the situation of human rights has become worrying for the international community. How does or how do United States monitor the situation?

Ambassador Polaschik: Human rights is a concern, a major policy concern for the United States all over the world and we are committed to sustained international engagement and independent and impartial monitoring of the human rights situation all over the world, including, of course in Western Sahara and the refugee camps near Tindouf and we very much appreciated the efforts of the Algerian government over the last year to facilitate human rights monitoring in the camps near Tindouf.

Abdelhak Bouifer: As you mentioned just now is committed to solving this issue within the UN framework. But United States hasn't showed in several years they are in favor of implementing the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. In a sense it does appear that United States for the maintenance of the status quo between Morocco and Polisario Front doesn't it?

Ambassador Polaschik: I fundamentally disagree with your analysis of United States policy. United States policy towards Western Sahara has remained consistent for many years. We fully support the UN-led process, which is led by Ambassador Christopher Ross, the Secretary-General's personal envoy for Western Sahara and its efforts to implement a peaceful, mutually agreed solution to this conflict that respects the human rights of all people who have been involved in the dispute and we continue to urge all parties to work towards a solution.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Ambassador, always in the same context, the international community welcomed the U.S. initiative for the expansion of the MINURSO Mandate to human rights monitoring in Western Sahara. Was the U.S. initiative sincere or just a mere test, especially because the draft resolution was redrawn without explanation?

Ambassador Polaschik: As I said earlier, the United States considers human rights issues to be among our most important priorities all over the world and we are committed to international engagement and sustained, independent monitoring of human rights issues all over the world including in Western Sahara and in the refugee camps near Tindouf.

Djamel-Eddine Bessou: Excuse me Ambassador on that point; there is a change in the position of the United States. There was an initiative for an enlargement of the mandate and then the project was withdrawn without any explanation.

Ambassador Polaschik: I can't comment on the diplomatic discussions that took place behind closed doors when that project was under consideration. But what I can do is affirm that the United States is committed to human rights issues all over the world including in Western Sahara and in the refugee camps near Tindouf.

Abdelhak Bouifer: Can we see another U.S. initiative to monitor the human rights situation in Western Sahara?

Ambassador Polaschik: I can't comment on what our plans might or might not be for the United Nations. I am the U.S. Ambassador here to Algeria but what I can do is affirm, again, our commitment to support for human rights all over the world including in Western Sahara and in the camps near Tindouf.

Abdelhak Bouifer: By the way the American foundation, Robert Kennedy for Justice and Human Rights, denounced in its latest report, let me quote, what they call the continuing violation of human rights in occupied Western Sahara. Is the U.S. administration aware of what happening as human rights violation in occupied Western Sahara?

Ambassador Polaschik: As I said earlier we monitor the human rights situation in many countries and many areas all over the world. As I am sure you know we publish an enormous annual report on human rights practices. So human rights continues to be at the top of our priority list. We continue to be engaged. We continue to push for international engagement and independent sustained monitoring of the situation in Western Sahara and in the camps here near Tindouf.

Abdelhak Bouifer: But you take into account, into consideration, such a report, coming from a U.S. foundation?

Ambassador Polaschik: When we look at human rights issues, we study the whole range of literature that exists on these topics. You know when I was a junior diplomat in Tunisia it was my job to draft the human rights report and I can tell you that I consulted with human rights activists in country, with human rights activists all over the world. I searched, there was no internet at that time, but I searched all of the periodicals and reports that I could find. So of course, as part of our commitment to promoting human rights all over the world, the U.S. relies on a wide variety of sources.

Abdelhak Bouifer: So your Excellency, certainly you have a few words in Arabic to say to Algerians.

Ambassador Polaschik: *(delivers message in Arabic and French)* ...plusiers mots en francais. Vraiment, pour nous, aux Etats-Unis, nous voudrions travailler avec le gouvernement et les peuples algériens dans trois domaines. D'abord, c'est d'approfondir notre coopération pour promouvoir la sécurité regionale. Deuxièmement, c'est d'établir les liens plus proches sur le plan économique et commerciaux. Et troisièmement, c'est de rapprocher les deux peuples avec la promotion de la langue anglaise ici, en Algerie. (more words in Arabic)

Abdelhak Bouifer: Your Excellency, Joan Polaschik, United States Ambassador to Algeria, thank you very much indeed for your time and my thanks is also due to my colleague Djamel Bessou who has taken part in this interview. And for you, thanks for watching and goodbye.