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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY IMMEDIATE 1989
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 6814
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 1259

S E C R E T ALGIERS 001077

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2019
TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PBTS KPAL KWBG US IR IZ IS
AF, XA
SUBJECT: BOUTEFLIKA TO WARD: WE WANT A STRATEGIC
RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Jordan;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander General William Ward met Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika November 25, during Ward's first visit to Algeria since assuming command of AFRICOM. Ward said AFRICOM's strategy was to assist African nations in providing for their own security needs, not do the job for them. The U.S. recognized Algeria's leadership in the region, and AFRICOM was prepared to assist Algeria and its neighbors combat terrorism. Bouteflika said Algeria wanted to be a strategic partner, not an adversary. Our military relationship already included training and technical cooperation. End-use-monitoring requirements infringed on Algeria's national sovereignty and therefore imposed some limits on military engagement. But the U.S. and Algeria shared a common goal in combating terrorism. Terrorism in the region had taken a dangerous form, and Sahel countries were prepared to address the problem jointly. More needed to be done to ensure the participation and commitment of Mali's political leadership in the regional struggle. Bouteflika told Ward the Malian president needed to understand he could not be friends with both the thieves and their victims at the same time. Trans-Sahara heads of state still planned to convene a security and development summit in Bamako but had yet to set a firm date. Bouteflika also reviewed Egyptian-Algerian tensions in the aftermath of a World Cup qualifying match, Western Sahara, the negative repercussions of Israeli settlement activities, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. On the soccer issue, he made a point of telling Ward that the king of Morocco -- in contrast to the strain with Egypt -- had sent him a very warm congratulatory message after the game. At the end of the meeting, Bouteflika invited Ward to return to Algeria in the near future. End summary.

Addressing Common Challenges

2. (C) Visiting Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander General William Ward met with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika November 25 at the presidential residence. With Bouteflika were Chief of Staff of the Algerian National Popular Army (ANP) Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaid-Salah, Ministry of National Defense (MND) Director of External Relations and Cooperation General Nourredine Mekri, ANP Chief of Organization and Logistics Major General Abdelhamid Ghriess and a translator. The Ambassador, General Ward's foreign policy advisor, Dr. Raymond Brown, the DATT and Poloff (notetaker) accompanied General Ward to the meeting, which lasted two hours. Ward emphasized that his visit to Algiers was symbolic of our countries' growing bilateral relationship. Africa Command's mission was to assist African nations address their own security challenges, not to do it for them. The purpose of his visit, Ward said, was to listen to Algeria's perspective on enhancing our cooperation as we seek ways to work together to address common challenges in Africa. Ward recognized that these challenges were complex and required development and political solutions, not just military intervention. Going forward, we sought to cooperate in areas that Algeria determines are priorities. AFRICOM welcomed the regional counterterrorism efforts Algeria has engaged in with neighboring Sahel countries. Algeria is leading the effort; we will work with Algeria and its neighbors to assist in eliminating the terrorist threat in the region.

3. (C) President Bouteflika said that the United States and Algeria shared a common objective and the will to work cooperatively in the fight against terrorism. Bouteflika noted the U.S. and Algeria started to work more closely together during the Clinton administration when both sides came to realize they were fighting the same problem. Bouteflika underscored that after 9/11, Algeria was the first Arab and Muslim country to send a message of solidarity to President Bush. Subsequently, despite the unpopularity of some Bush policies, political and economic relations between our countries improved. Today, relations were excellent, he said, noting that Algeria was the United States' second largest trading partner in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia and our largest trading partner in Africa. President Obama's new approach to U.S. foreign policy was "a breath of fresh air" and well regarded by developing world countries. But this meant there were also high expectations for his administration. Bouteflika predicted that our bilateral relationship would continue in a positive direction. He commented that the U.S. and Algeria were moving forward with cooperation, recognizing the value of dialogue across all leadership levels. In this regard, Bouteflika declared he was ready to assist Ward and invited him to visit Algeria again.

Military Cooperation

4. (S) Bouteflika attached importance to Algeria's military-military cooperation with the United States but noted that U.S. end-use monitoring requirements contravened Algeria's national sovereignty. Nonetheless, we had made progress on training and technical cooperation. Bouteflika said the capabilities of U.S. and Algerian forces were well understood in the region. Bouteflika argued that frank, direct talks were the key to a successful military dialogue, as well as recognizing that, in some cases, there would be limits on the extent of cooperation. "Tell us what you want, and we will tell you what we can do." Algeria, he continued, wanted to be a strategic partner for the U.S. in the region, not an adversary.

5. (S) General Ward thanked Bouteflika for his candid assessment of our mil-mil relationship. He said the President, secretaries of State and Defense, and US Joint Chiefs of Staff, all recognized the value of the US-Algeria partnership. Bouteflika responded that he would help us to consolidate that partnership. Ward argued that to enhance our partnership, Algeria needed to tell us how we can contribute best to achieve mutual objectives. Despite the bad things sometimes said about AFRICOM, Ward said with a smile, his command had not been created to take over Africa. Without missing a beat, Bouteflika replied with an even bigger smile that he had been unsure about this himself until Ward came. Ward said that, as we continue our military dialogue, we want to do the things Algeria tells us are important. Ward affirmed Algeria had long recognized the challenge of extremism and demonstrated its ability to fight back. AFRICOM would do its part to support Algeria and its neighbors in this effort. Addressing Bouteflika's point on end-use-monitoring requirements, Ward suggested focusing our efforts in areas where cooperation was possible, i.e., training and equipping. He acknowledged that some U.S. laws and regulations may preclude for now Algeria's participation in other forms of engagement.

Civil-Military Relations

6. (S) Bouteflika underscored that Algeria's military "absolutely" respected the authority of civilian leadership. "This is not at all like Turkey," he said. Bouteflika asserted that the army was forced to take drastic measures during the violence of the 1990s in order to save the country. This was a difficult period, but constitutional rule had been restored. "The house is now in order," he stressed, "and I can tell you that the army obeys the civilians. There is one constitution and all obey it." Bouteflika acknowledged, however, that the problems of the past still haunted the country. He cited foreign press reports referring to Algeria as a dictatorship and argued that the term was sometimes used carelessly. The Algerian constitution had established the rule of law. In 2004 it was decided that there was no more historical "revolutionary legitimacy". The only legitimacy was the constitution. "Anyone can be a candidate for election, in accordance with the constitution, even a general." He paused, then grinned and said, "but the generals realize the difficulties and none has been a candidate yet."

Counterterrorism

7. (C) Bouteflika said terrorism in Africa had taken a dangerous form. The situation in Somalia was hopeless, he commented. Meanwhile, the Sahel region presented a complex set of issues. Fortunately, most Sahel countries were determined to cooperate and have the capability to fight the threat if they work together. Mauritania expressed a clear commitment as did Niger, although Bouteflika recognized U.S. concerns with President Tandja. Mali's full cooperation remained elusive, however. Mali's policies have failed to create stability in the north. The result is a lawless environment in which smuggling, along with arms and drug trafficking, enable terrorism. Bouteflika said the region was prepared to tackle this problem, and bilateral and regional efforts were already underway. In this regard, Algeria was closely monitoring U.S. military assistance to Mali and Niger.

8. (S) Ward told Bouteflika that he planned to visit Bamako after Algiers and would encourage Mali's leaders to cooperate in the region's counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. was providing military assistance to Mali, and we hoped it complemented the work Algeria was doing. Ward emphasized that, ultimately, defeating terrorism was the responsibility of the region. Bouteflika expressed his appreciation for U.S. assistance to Mali and said Algeria also provided aid,

including some equipment. Bouteflika urged the U.S. to tell Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure that "he cannot be a friend to the thieves and victims at the same time." Many in Mali's security services shared the same concern, Bouteflika asserted. In the past, he said, Algeria has waited for the chance to debrief terrorist suspects held in Mali, only to find out later that Malian officials were conducting negotiations for the terrorist's release back to the terrorist organizations at the same time. "It is difficult to cooperate in these conditions," he said. Despite difficulties, Bouteflika said regional leaders still planned to convene a security and development summit in Bamako. All agreed on the need for the summit, he said, but there was still no set date. Bouteflika said that Algeria would be open to sharing information with the U.S. regarding Algeria's cooperation with its neighbors. General Ward said AFRICOM would do the same for Algeria regarding U.S. initiatives in the region.

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16. (S) The Ward-Bouteflika meeting was significant in a number of respects. The Algerian president spoke repeatedly of his readiness to build a strategic relationship with the US. He transmitted clear readiness for closer coordination and contact on Sahel counter-terrorism issues. The simple fact of the meeting with the president was itself a green light to the military bureaucracy on stepped-up bilateral military cooperation. Not least, the warm and high-level official reception provided a powerful antidote to the persistent negative mythology about Africa Command since the command's rollout. It was also noteworthy that, in the presence of three generals, including the chief of staff, Bouteflika spoke assertively to Ward about civilian control of the military. He described the revolutionary origins of military influence in Algeria, said this so-called revolutionary legitimacy ended in 2004, and the military now obeys the civilians and they all obey the constitution. In the course of his regional political review, Bouteflika delivered Algeria's views on Western Sahara in familiar terms. But in doing so, he also struck an unusually positive note about Morocco and the king's message. Clearly, in the context of the high emotions stirred in Algeria over the controversial World Cup contest with Egypt, Mohammed VI's message of congratulations struck a chord with Bouteflika.

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