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RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI IMMEDIATE 0001
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA IMMEDIATE 0073
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0008
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 1463
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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 0002
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL IMMEDIATE 0001
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR IMMEDIATE 0003
RHEFHL/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMCSUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/TSA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA IMMEDIATE 0012
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ALGIERS 000039

SIPDIS
NOFORN

EO 12958 DECL: 01/11/2020
TAGS PREL, PTER, PGOV, PINR, MOPS, AG, US
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN FM: TSA LISTING "INTOLERABLE,
INAPPROPRIATE, INOPPORTUNE"

REF: A. ALGIERS 20 (NOTAL) B. STATE 001187
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Classified By: Ambassador David D Pearce; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (S/NF) Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci January 11 summoned the Ambassador and forcefully objected to Algeria's placement on the TSA enhanced screening list. He termed the decision intolerable, inappropriate, and inopportune. It reflected neither the reality of Algeria's security situation, its counterterrorism efforts nor our close bilateral cooperation. Further, the U.S. had not communicated the TSA decision to Algeria prior to releasing it to the press, which was how the GOA had learned of the measure. The GOA now had to contend with not only the collective humiliation felt by domestic opinion but also incomplete and inaccurate information regarding Algeria's CT efforts circulating in the international press as a result of the story. Medelci reinforced the earlier MFA demarche (ref A) formally requesting removal from the list and a high-level U.S. statement to help correct the record regarding Algerian cooperation on counterterrorism. He pointedly asked the Ambassador to communicate this message to the Secretary and said the GOA would be monitoring the U.S. reaction closely. End Summary.

TSA Decision Ignores Reality of CT Cooperation

2. (S/NF) Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mourad Medelci summoned the Ambassador to the MFA January 11 to underscore Algeria's dissatisfaction with its placement on TSA's enhanced screening list. Medelci began by noting he had had a productive visit to Washington in early December. He had been favorably impressed with both the quality and level of his meetings and had appreciated their focus on bilateral security and counterterrorism cooperation. The visit had underscored the strategic importance of our countries' counterterrorism partnership on this sensitive issue. "We are confident in the direction this cooperation is leading," he remarked. "After my visit, I was eager to report my discussions in Washington to President Bouteflika, meetings which demonstrated that our relations have reached a new level."

3. (S/NF) The discussions in Washington, he asserted, reflected the reality of the relationship. Algeria's own struggle against terrorism and its contribution to defeat terrorists were well understood. It remained determined to continue that cooperation and reinforce the relationship with the U.S. "We are aware of the risks this threat poses. We must remain vigilant and preserve the progress that has been made," Medelci said. The progress that both sides have made on the ground underscores the confidence and openness of the strategic partnership.

4. (S/NF) Therefore, the minister said, the GOA had been extremely disappointed with Algeria's inclusion in the TSA list, as well as the press coverage the decision had generated. The decision was intolerable, inappropriate, and inopportune. It was a contradiction not only to Algeria's own progress on security and efforts to fight terrorism, but also to our countries' counterterrorism cooperation. No attacks against the U.S. had been "signed" by an Algerian. Algeria had made major progress in recent years on its internal security. The domestic security environment had been stabilized, airports were secure, and Algeria was now an international partner in the fight against terrorism. TSA's announcement had made no mention of any of this.

Measures Viewed as Discriminatory

5. (S/NF) This was not just a matter of Algeria's inclusion on the list, Medelci said. The GOA protested the discriminatory nature of the whole list. Thirteen of the 14 countries listed were Muslim. This sent a message that was inconsistent with President Obama's Cairo speech, and

the administration's stated policy of outreach to Muslim communities. The decision will likely give further impetus to those who already question the sincerity of the administration's approach.

¶16. (S/NF) The GOA was also disappointed, Medelci continued, that the decision had not been communicated prior to its release and that the Algerian leadership had to learn of it via the media. The minister said the GOA had initially refrained from making a public statement out of concern for U.S. relations, but now, due to the extensive press play and sense of collective humiliation among the public, it felt it needed to respond.

U.S. Focus on Air Travel Safety

¶17. (S/NF) The Ambassador said the intention behind the TSA measures was not to harm or discriminate against any group or country, least of all our friends and partners. The intention was to make air travel as safe as possible for all. The problem was that, on Christmas day, a terrorist had gotten through the system. President Obama had reacted immediately, ordering reviews of both our watch list system and our air passenger screening measures. He had also made clear that our approach would not be static but would evolve as our evaluation of the risk evolved. Algeria's concerns would be reported in full; Washington had already heard the message from Ambassador Baali. The Ambassador added that the U.S. understood well Algeria's difficult history with terrorism and appreciated its leadership in the international fight against extremist violence. The U.S. wanted to continue, and build on, our very important counterterrorism cooperation as well as our new partnerships in other areas, including military relations, law enforcement, and economic and trade cooperation.

Going Forward

8. (S/NF) Medelci said the GOA shared the desire to continue building our bilateral relationship. He reconfirmed GOA approval for a recent U.S. request to allow overflights of EP-3E surveillance aircraft. He also welcomed the visit of U.S. Attorney General Holder to conclude work on a mutual legal assistance treaty. The minister underscored as well the GOA's readiness to assist with the upcoming Department of Commerce trade mission to Algeria in February and offered to meet with the head of the U.S. delegation, schedule permitting. At the same time, he asked that the Ambassador convey his message on Algeria's concerns about the TSA measures to Secretary Clinton. The GOA shared the U.S. desire to continue building the bilateral relationship. But it would also be watching closely to see how the U.S. responds to its stated concerns and looking forward to an "equitable solution".

GOA Statement

10. (U) Below is Embassy's informal translation of the statement issued January 11 by the Algerian MFA:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mourad Medelci, summoned Monday the Ambassador of the United States of America in Algiers to express the Algerian government's strong protest over the decision taken by U.S. authorities to include Algerian nationals on a list of countries whose nationals are subjected to specific control measures when arriving and departing U.S. airports:

"In the wake of the decision taken by the U.S. authorities to include Algerian nationals on a list of countries whose nationals will be subjected to specific control measures when arriving and departing U.S. airports, Foreign Affairs Minister Mourad Medelci summoned the Ambassador of the United States of America in Algiers to express the Algerian government's strong protests over the unfortunate, unjustified, and discriminatory measure.

"This comes after several previous efforts that were deployed, once the TSA measures were known, by the central government and by our Ambassador in Washington with the relevant U.S. authorities." END INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF GOA STATEMENT.

COMMENT

11. (S/NF) The past year has seen developments in important new areas of government-to-government cooperation. These include:

-- Approval for visits by senior Department of Defense visitors, including Deputy Assistant Secretary Huddleston and the first by AFRICOM Commander General Ward. These have significantly improved the substance of our mil-mil engagement.

-- Prompt agreement to allow U.S. military overflights for surveillance aircraft against AQIM targets in the Sahel.

-- Repatriation of eight Algerian Guantanamo detainees since 2008 and agreement to cooperate on the return of the remaining Algerian detainees.

-- Bilateral cooperation on judicial matters; a mutual legal assistance treaty and a customs agreement are both ready for signature.

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-- Cooperation with our new legatt office, including on a cybercrime investigation that will protect American citizens from hackers and identity thieves.

-- Improved police contacts and access for RSO, which plans to launch an anti-terrorism assistance program this year.

12. (S/NF) On the commercial side, the U.S. exported about USD 400 million in oil field equipment and services to Algeria in 2008 and imported USD 19 billion worth of Algerian oil and natural gas. And our commercial interests are rapidly expanding beyond the hydrocarbons sector. Algeria signed two contracts, totaling USD 847 million, in December 2009, to purchase 11 Boeing aircraft. These were presidential decisions, made in the face of heavy French pressure for Airbus. A U.S. firm, Solar Turbines, concluded a USD 320-million contract in October 2009 with Algeria's state electricity company to supply gas-fired turbines. U.S. companies are also competing for politically sensitive security contracts. Cogent, a U.S. biometrics company, is close to signing a USD 45-million deal to supply the Ministry of Interior with an automated fingerprint identification system but faces heavy competition from France. Harris Radio is bidding on a contract with a potential value of USD 500 million to manufacture and supply radios for Algeria's defense ministry and signals corps. The Harris and Cogent contracts have significant implications for U.S. commercial and security interests.

13. (S/NF) It is noteworthy that Medelci began and ended this conversation by stressing the importance the Algerian leadership attaches to continuing bilateral cooperation, especially on counterterrorism. But in-between, however, he delivered an unmistakable message that the GOA feels the TSA moves are inconsistent with that relationship and that they will be watching closely to see how we respond to this demarche. Over the past year, we have had a green light to develop important new ties across the board, from military to law enforcement. That light has now turned yellow. PEARCE