

**STATEMENT OF JOAN POLASCHIK
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO
THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
JUNE 17, 2014**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Rubio, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored that President Obama has nominated me to be the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, and I deeply appreciate the confidence he and Secretary Kerry have shown by making this nomination.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take a moment to thank my family, which has been a tremendous support throughout my career. My mother, Marion Polaschik, and my sister Anne, and her husband and son Keith and Grant Barcal, have provided love, support and a place to stay no matter where I was in the world and no matter how much worry I caused them by pursuing challenging assignments. I'm very grateful to them.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has a robust and multifaceted partnership with the people and government of Algeria. I am fortunate to be nominated at a time when the potential for expanding that bilateral relationship has never been stronger. In April 2014 we completed the latest round of our Strategic Dialogue, and just two weeks ago the Secretary of Energy visited Algeria to lead the U.S. delegation to the Algeria International Trade Fair – where the United States was the guest of honor for the first time. If confirmed by the Senate, I will continue to advance our key U.S. foreign policy interests in Algeria. They are: (1) working with the government of Algeria to counter the threat of terrorism and strengthen the stability of the Maghreb and Sahel regions, (2) increasing commercial ties between the United States and Algeria, (3) boosting civil society and democratic institutions, and (4) working with the Algerian government to support the political and economic reforms necessary to ensure Algeria's long-term stability. And as Ambassador, I will make my priority the protection of the people who serve in U.S. Embassy Algiers, and all Americans who live and work in Algeria.

We know that we work in a dangerous part of the world, and I am pleased to report that the Algerian government is deeply committed to the safety and security of our personnel and facilities, and has been extremely responsive to our requests for security support.

Mr. Chairman, the relationship between the United States and Algeria continues to grow stronger. Since 9/11, our nations have joined together in the struggle against violent extremism. Algeria is on the front lines of the battle against violent extremism, having suffered the scourge of terrorism since the 1990s, and most recently in the attack on the gas-production facility near In Amenas in January 2013. The government of Algeria understands the need to remain vigilant against those who wish to do us harm and is a steadfast partner in our counterterrorism efforts including as an active participant in the Global Counter-terrorism Forum and the Trans-Sahel Counter-terrorism Partnership. While terrorist activity in Algeria has decreased since the dark decade of the 1990s, the Algerian government knows as well as the United States that violent extremism remains a threat. President Bouteflika was the first Arab leader to call President Bush following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, reflecting our shared view of the dangers posed by terrorism. This call was an expression of support that led to even greater cooperation.

Today, Algeria is working with its neighbors to stabilize the broader Maghreb and Sahel region. Algeria has taken positive steps to help train security forces in countries like Mali and Niger in the Sahel. Algeria has also provided airlift support to African peacekeeping troops. The Algerian military has taken action to secure its eastern border to combat smuggling and weapons proliferation. Tunisia and Algeria have formed a close security relationship to aggressively confront violent extremists. We continue to engage with Algeria about the security situation in Libya and the challenge of foreign fighters in Syria as well. If confirmed, I will work to support these efforts.

While counterterrorism and security remain the cornerstone of our relationship, in recent years we have expanded beyond CT to form a robust diplomatic, political, and economic partnership as well. In recent years, we have held two bilateral Strategic Dialogues, former Secretary Clinton visited Algeria twice, Secretary Kerry just visited in April 2014, and Energy Secretary Moniz opened the U.S. pavilion of the Algerian International Trade Fair – where 80 companies and organizations represented our commercial and economic interests in Algeria. These visits and dialogues are indicative of our rapidly expanding commercial and social ties.

As one of the largest oil and gas producers in the Middle East and Africa, Algeria is a critical supplier of energy to Europe and global markets. Algeria has significant remaining energy resources and potentially vast untapped unconventional hydrocarbon resources, and its government is eager to partner with

U.S. firms, whose expertise in this sector is unparalleled in the world. If confirmed, I will advocate for U.S. companies who can partner with Algeria to safely develop shale gas and other resources to ensure stability in global energy markets and bring further development and prosperity to the people of Algeria.

Beyond oil and gas, Algeria is interested in diversifying its economy, and there is significant potential in the Algerian market for U.S. companies. Last year General Electric won a contract worth several billion dollars to develop Algeria's electricity sector. U.S. companies in the fields of pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and machinery are investing in Algeria and have won multi-million dollar deals in recent years.

Algeria has long had a significant political and diplomatic role in Middle Eastern and African affairs – it is literally at the confluence of Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Arab world. Algeria is a key player in the Arab League, the African Union, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It is a longstanding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and a founding member of the New Economic Partnership for African Development. Algeria is also active in the Arab Maghreb Union, which has the potential to bring the Maghreb states closer together.

Algeria has an important role to play in strengthening relations between North and sub-Saharan Africa, and its mediating role in conflicts around the continent will remain vital to finding peaceful solutions there. Algeria has forgiven the debt of multiple African countries, and is looking for ways to boost economic development of its neighbors to the south. Algeria would gain from increasing trade within the region, and its willingness to lead in this area will be critical to realizing long-held dreams of regional integration, including with Morocco. To that end, we appreciate Algeria's support for the UN-led negotiations over the disputed territory of the Western Sahara. We also welcome Algeria's participation in the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit later this summer. I know the President looks forward to genuine dialogue with leaders of African nations, and we look forward to hearing from Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal – who will represent Algeria – about the many ways that Algeria stands ready to partner with and support its neighbors on the continent.

Unlike other countries in the region, Algeria did not experience the upheaval of the Arab Spring. President Bouteflika introduced political reforms in 2011, and recently announced a series of Constitutional amendments to further develop Algeria's political system. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to work with the Algerian government and people as they take the next steps in negotiating, adopting, and implementing reforms that will strengthen Algeria's long-term stability.

The potential of the Algerian people is limitless. As Secretary Kerry saw firsthand during his recent trip, the people of Algeria are eager to partner with the United States to develop people-to-people ties. We have expanded our cultural connections with Algeria, including boosting English Language Education, increasing opportunities for Algerians to study in the United States, and develop other educational exchange opportunities. Additionally, programs like those promoted by the Middle East Partnership Initiative help build civil society and will help bring our countries even closer together. If confirmed, I will work with the Algerian government and people to continue and expand these programs.

Mr. Chairman, I have had the great honor of serving as a Foreign Service Officer for the last 20 years. I have worked in and on the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, focusing on countries that present some of the same challenges and rich opportunities that exist in Algeria. My previous assignments in Azerbaijan and Libya provided an extensive background in the counter-terrorism and energy issues that are critical to our partnership with Algeria, while multiple tours in transitional and post-conflict countries have instilled a profound appreciation for the importance of political and economic reform to long-term stability, and for the power of people-to-people diplomacy to build lasting partnerships.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, ranking member Rubio, and members of the committee, for this opportunity to address you. I'm deeply honored to have been selected to lead the team in U.S. Embassy Algiers, a dynamic, hard-working, and dedicated group working on the front lines of U.S. policy. If confirmed, I hope I will have many occasions to host you and your colleagues in Congress in Algiers. I would be pleased to address any questions that you may have.