

Interview of Under Secretary for Political Affairs Thomas A. Shannon, Jr. with Algeria Press Service (APS)

APS – Libya. U.S. military officials say they don't have a clear picture about the situation in Libya, including which militias should participate in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). How do you overcome this problem when USG has decided to arm the Government of National Accord (GNA)?

Under Secretary Shannon: Libya. Our interest is working with the GNA and Prime Minister al-Sarraj. We believe that it's up to Libyan government to determine how it organizes itself and what kind of weaponry it needs in order to confront terrorist organizations like ISIL inside of Libya. Our purpose is to support GNA and underscore its legitimacy as the sole government of Libya and the protector of Libyan sovereignty. And then to work through the UN and our other partners to help arm and train Libyan security forces in order to fight ISIL.

APS: But which militias?

Under Secretary Shannon: This is really going to be a decision for the Libyan government to make. The decision is not ours. We will work with the government of Libya to determine how and whom to arm.

APS: Lately, the President of the United States (POTUS) says the intervention in Libya was the worst mistake of his presidency. We've seen you've left to Italy to lead the future coordination with Libya. What will be the role and participations of nations states in case of another military offensive inside Libya?

Under Secretary Shannon: U.S. role will be that of Libya's partners, which is to support GNA and help it find a way to fashion the institutions necessary to fight ISIL inside of Libya and to protect Libya's borders. We see our role, now and in the future, as being consistent with Libyan sovereignty and Libyan purpose. It's not our goal to fight a war inside of Libya. Our goal is to create a Libyan state and Libyan government that's capable of defending itself with the help of its allies and partners.

APS: I want to talk about the vision of Algeria. The Libyan crisis should be solved with dialogue and diplomacy. It's a country now plagued by violence after the intervention. We've seen that a northern military coalition/offensive could resolve a problem there.

Under Secretary Shannon: I think the Algerian government is right; this is a problem that has to be resolved with dialogue.

APS: Does the U.S. government (USG) think a northern military offensive could resolve

the problems there?

Under Secretary Shannon: No. Against ISIL, yes, but not internally among Libyans. In other words, in order to build support for the GNA, it must be done through dialogue. And it has been done through dialogue, led by the UN and assisted by the Libya's partners, including the United States. So, from our point of view, now is the time for all of the different factions within Libya that have been fighting each other to support the GNA and begin to build the security forces necessary to protect Libya and fight ISIL inside of Libya.

APS: Tunisia. USG wants to make Tunisia a major ally against terrorism. We also heard that AFRICOM wants to expand its military bases in this country. What about this?

Under Secretary Shannon: Our purpose in Tunisia is to help Tunisia defend itself and, as a democracy that has emerged from the Arab Spring, to be an example of what other countries in the region, such as Libya, are struggling towards. And, in that regard, we're going to provide Libya with the assistance that it needs. But, we're not going to be installing military bases throughout the region.

APS: Algeria. We've accumulated a lot of experience in countering terrorism. How do you assess security cooperation with Algeria in the context of proliferation of actors in the region?

Under Secretary Shannon: Algeria is a great partner. Secondly, it has a history that's very relevant to what the rest of the Middle East, Maghreb, Levant, and great Middle East is working through now – facing jihadists who are attacking the government and attacking the people. Algeria and Algerians have shown great courage and purpose in fighting these jihadists in securing their space and securing their people. We believe we have a lot to learn from Algeria.

APS: We just need the transfer of military technology. I repeat the words of our president during his last visit to Washington. He said we need your technology, including military monitoring technology. Do you think you can have a partnership with us?

Under Secretary Shannon: I do. Our partnership with Algeria is evolving and growing over time. This kind of vision of purpose is a good vision, it's a positive vision, and it's one we'd like to work towards.

APS: We're facing a drastic drop in oil prices in the last few years. Our security spending is increasing because of ISIL. We monitor thousands of kilometers of borders. We need a helping hand from the United States to diversify our economy and maintain military spending. How can the U.S. help us in this direction?

Under Secretary Shannon: First and foremost through U.S. investment and trade with Algeria. We have very active discussions with Algeria about how best to create an environment to promote U.S. investment and trade. Algeria is a great country with enormous economic potential with a long coastline and faces Europe. It has important commodities like oil and gas. It has the potential to be a large center for tourism. And I know that its manufacturing sector, because of its proximity to Europe, can be a very attractive platform for the production and assembly for items sent to Europe. The potential is there, and we just have to work on the investment environment and ensure there's the right kind of flow of trade in order to take advantage of it.

APS: But we need a transfer of technology to develop our industry hydrocarbon sector. That's what we want.

Under Secretary Shannon: Transfers of technology come with investment. Extent to which Algeria can open its economy to foreign investors and allow them to become partners with Algeria and Algerians, technology transfer will happen.