Why Are Washington's Eyes Turning Toward Bizerte and Gibraltar?

(Translated)

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In an analytical paper published by the American Stimson Center in April 2026, titled "Reassessing Tunisia's Strategic Importance for the United States," former U.S. Ambassador Joey R. Hood presents a reading that reflects America's strategic perspective. He argues that its adversaries—Iran and extremist organizations—seek to expand their influence in any arena available to them, particularly in countries with high levels of education located near strategic geographic chokepoints.

In this context, he invokes Hitler's insistence on Tunisia as the cornerstone of Rommel's African campaign and Roosevelt's selection of it as the site for the U.S. Army's first confrontation with Nazism in Africa, concluding that Tunisia has historically been a focal point of intense interest for empires seeking to establish it as an African bridgehead.

This reading is not merely a summoning of history from a center funded by major Pentagon contractors, but rather an entry point for understanding the ongoing transformations in North Africa, where American military calculations intersect with European energy and navigation security, and the international competition over ports, infrastructure, and supply chains.

Bizerte in America's Military Calculations

Bizerte, which was one of France's most important naval bases in the Mediterranean before its forces withdrew in 1963, has not lost its strategic value. The American attention it is witnessing today reflects the return of its geographical location to the forefront of naval calculations, but with new tools and challenges, the most important of which are the repercussions of the international Strait of Hormuz crisis.

In June 2026, Admiral George Wikoff, commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Africa, visited the naval base in Bizerte. He observed training exercises conducted by the Tunisian Navy and special forces, and also visited the Center of Excellence for Maritime Affairs currently under construction through contracts awarded by the U.S. Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command. This center is dedicated to training naval commandos and special operations forces and is a candidate to become a regional platform for multinational joint training.

In September, Tunisia hosted the Phoenix Express 2026 maneuvers, sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the U.S. Sixth Fleet, with the participation of American, European, and African forces. The maneuvers utilized regional maritime operations centers for real-time data exchange and building a shared operational picture of the maritime domain, alongside training in vessel inspection and interdiction. They also featured the use of unmanned maritime systems, indicating a shift in cooperation toward advanced surveillance, reconnaissance, and maritime domain awareness technologies. These developments gain significance from their connection to the Sixth Fleet, which is responsible for U.S. naval operations in the European, Mediterranean, and African theaters, reflecting an attempt to integrate local capabilities related to navigation monitoring and the protection of sea lanes into the American system.

Gibraltar: The Atlantic Gateway and the Calculus of Influence

If Bizerte overlooks a critical juncture between the eastern and western Mediterranean, then Gibraltar represents its natural western gateway to the Atlantic. The United States bases its presence in this area on a significant military network in Spain, most notably the Rota Naval Base, which hosts U.S. destroyers equipped with the Aegis system, and the Morón Air Base used for military support and deployment. This integrates with the headquarters of the Sixth Fleet in Naples, within the U.S. deployment network spanning the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

In contrast, Britain clings to Gibraltar as one of its most significant pressure cards and maintains its military and naval presence there. The detention of an Iranian tanker in July 2019, involving the Royal Marines on suspicion of violating European sanctions against Syria, highlighted the strategic importance of the location and the reality of the international struggle for influence.

Tunisia and Morocco: Partnerships That Go Beyond Traditional Military Cooperation

In this context, Morocco and Tunisia emerge as major non-NATO allies of the United States, with Morocco obtaining this status in 2004 and Tunisia in 2015. This designation grants conditional privileges in military cooperation, without including the collective defense guarantee stipulated in Article 5 of the Alliance's treaty.

Thus, America, no longer able to bear the burdens of world leadership, seeks to build advanced partnerships with two countries overseeing two critically important geographical junctions: Morocco at the Atlantic entrance to the Mediterranean and the Strait of Gibraltar, and Tunisia at the Strait of Sicily, which separates the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean. These two locations complement each other within a network of partnerships that enhances maritime presence, information exchange, and the security of communication and supply lines. This reflects a shift in the American approach toward expanding its network of regional partners and distributing roles of security and stability among them, rather than bearing the burdens of direct deployment alone.

The article of Joey R. Hood reveals an additional dimension to this vision, proposing the utilization of Tunisian facilities—foremost among them the Bin Ghilouf Center—to train forces from Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, and to integrate them more broadly into the African Lion exercises, while leveraging Tunisian airlift capabilities. Tunisia is thus presented as an alternative platform to Niger for training, support, and knowledge transfer, enabling America to compete with Russian influence without the need for extensive military deployment. The statement from the U.S. Embassy on the occasion of Major General Matthew Brown's visit to Bin Ghilouf in November 2026 reinforced this direction, speaking explicitly about enhancing Tunisia's capacity to become "a security exporter for the wider region."

As for Morocco, cooperation with it reveals another function within this network. In statements by Major General Brown during the U.S. Army conference in October 2026, he announced the selection of the city of Tan-Tan to host a U.S. event for testing counter-drone technologies and protecting forces and military installations in the spring of 2027. This complements the project for the Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Center, making Morocco a space for testing and developing military technologies under realistic operational conditions.

Simultaneously with attempts to strategically encircle Algeria, this direction is reinforced by two roadmaps for U.S. defense cooperation with Tunisia (2020–2030) and Morocco (2026–2036), thereby establishing a long-term military partnership. Thus, roles are distributed between training and support in Tunisia, technical experimentation in Morocco, and expansion toward the Sahel states. This places Algeria before increasing security challenges in its African depth, which has pushed it to expand its army's role beyond its traditional duties, culminating in assigning it missions in Niger—this being the first step toward attrition.

From a Trade Corridor to Energy Arteries

The strategic importance of these locations extends beyond the movement of ships and fleets; the Mediterranean has also become a vital artery for transporting African energy to Europe. Following the Russian-Ukrainian war, Europe's reliance on Algerian gas via pipelines through Spain and Italy has intensified, including the Transmed pipeline that crosses Tunisia.

In this context, two routes for transporting Nigerian gas to Europe stand out: the Trans-Saharan Pipeline project through Niger and Algeria, and the Nigeria-Morocco Atlantic Gas Pipeline project through West African countries to Morocco. These are complemented by the Elmed electrical interconnector between Tunisia and Italy, and green hydrogen projects.

Thus, two strategic spheres are integrated: a trade and maritime corridor extending from the Suez Canal through Bizerte and Gibraltar to the Atlantic, and energy corridors linking Africa to Europe via pipelines, submarine cables, and export terminals. This interconnection was reflected in the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, which linked energy security to cyber and hybrid threats and the protection of critical infrastructure.

Conclusion: The Islamic Maghreb Is Not a Periphery in the International Conflict

Bizerte and Gibraltar are like two eyes in the strategic geography of the Islamic Maghreb; one eye overlooking the heart of the Mediterranean, and the other its Atlantic gateway. And they are, in a historical paradox, two sites that were linked early on to the Islamic conquest of Africa: Bizerte was opened by Muawiyah ibn Hudayj in 45 AH, and Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed from Gibraltar into Andalusia in 92 AH. The region formed a naval support point in the greatest historical phases of the Islamic State, most notably during the era of the leader Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi.

And between these two eyes, the movement of trade, energy, and fleets is exposed, and the balances of influence are determined in a region of civilizational weight, which lacks not location, wealth, or demography, but rather a strategic intellect enlightened by the rulings of Islam, capable of transforming these components into tools of strength that embody the sovereignty of the Shariah and the authority of the Ummah.

The peoples of North Africa, despite their political fragmentation, are united by Islam as an ideology from which a system emanates, necessitating a state that adopts and implements it, protects the interests of its subjects, safeguards its sovereignty and security, and achieves strategic integration between the regions that the disbelieving colonialist has worked to divide. And we all hope for the establishment of the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly-guided Caliphate) soon, by the Permission of Allah (swt): ﴿وَعْدَ اللَّهِ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ﴾ **"It is the promise of Allah. Allah does not fail in His promise."** [TMQ Surah Ar-Rum: 6].