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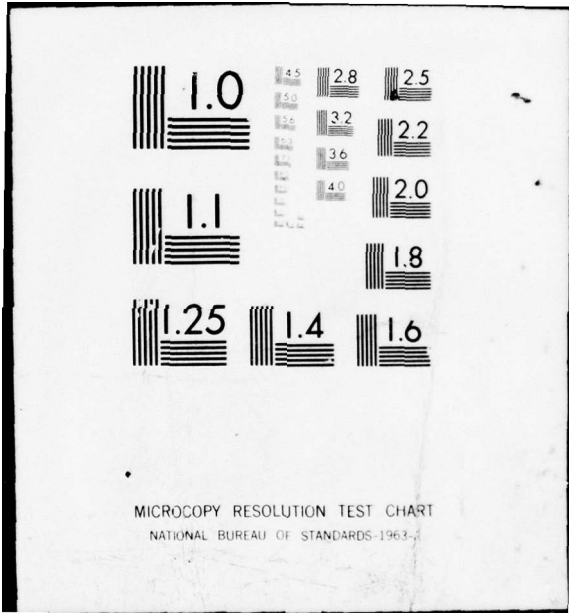
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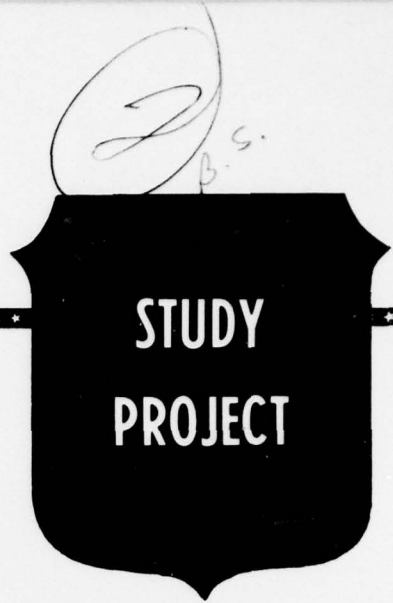
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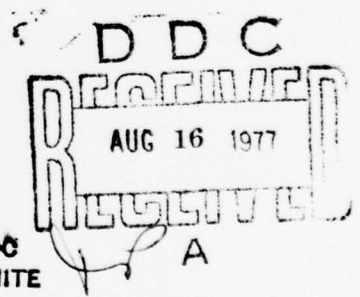
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29 APRIL 1977

UNITED STATES NAVAL BASES IN TUNISIA IN THE 1980'S?

By

COLONEL JAMES P. BERGEN  
ARMOR



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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

UNITED STATES NAVAL BASES IN TUNISIA IN THE 1980'S?

INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel James P. Bergen  
Armor

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US Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
29 April 1977

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ABSTRACT

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The basic issues are the availability of suitable naval base sites in Tunisia and the military, economic and political ramifications of U.S. bases there in the 1980's. The continued importance of the Mediterranean region for the United States is a virtual certainty. The U.S. can anticipate greater future constraints imposed on her use of various Mediterranean facilities. Bizerte, Tunisia has the potential to be a contingency base. Other ports in Tunisia are inadequate. Bizerte is a good harbor bounded by an area with expansion possibilities. The construction of a U.S. base there would be expensive and difficult to justify. The need for overseas U.S. naval bases is coming under increased scrutiny and their cost effectiveness will need more justification in the future. The political aspects of a U.S. naval base in Tunisia are the key considerations. U.S. interests are served by an independent, unaligned, moderate and pro-Western Tunisia. Internal dissension, external animosity (e.g. Libya and/or Algeria), and loss of status among Third World countries would probably result if Tunisia became openly aligned with the U.S. A U.S. base in Tunisia would not be in consonance with U.S. interests toward major Arab nations or in our effort to counter Soviet expansionism in the Mediterranean. The U.S. should not establish a base in Tunisia nor engage in activity that would have that connotation.

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"The Middle East is an area of paramount importance to the United States. . . .Our objectives, therefore, are . . .to enhance U.S. relations with the key nations of the area and to limit Soviet influence in the area."<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Sea has been an "American Lake" since World War II. The United States Sixth Fleet, located in the Mediterranean, has provided a strategic as well as a tactical umbrella for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and for nations of the Mediterranean littoral friendly to the United States. The continued availability of naval bases in the Mediterranean for the Sixth Fleet is a subject of concern. This research effort will address possible alternate sites in Tunisia for U.S. Naval bases. See Figure 1, Annex 1, for a map of the Mediterranean Basin.

### BACKGROUND

Daniel J. Carrison in The United States Navy cites:

"A display of armed ships often calms unsettled situations, and, in many areas of the world where the forms of military power seem remote, naval power can be the most effective means of preserving peace and order."<sup>2</sup>

The precise impact of the Sixth Fleet, per se, in maintaining a high assurance of avoidance of global war over the last three decades, in spite of extended periods of regional conflict, is difficult to pinpoint; however, it is certain that the influence of the fleet has been significant.

The Mediterranean, more than any single body of water, has, since the dawn of recorded history, been of great strategic value. This trend has continued to the present day. The current "Superpowers," the United States and the Soviet Union, are vying for control of the sea lines of communication and influence in the adjoining lands of that historic waterway. Unrestricted access through the Mediterranean and the ability to influence activities in the countries bordering that Sea are increasingly important to both countries.

The potential for a superpower confrontation is ever present. This condition would be aggravated in the event of renewed hostilities between Arab nations and Israel. There is an absolute necessity for the continued flow of oil to the United States, Western Europe and Japan. The USSR has increased her naval presence and political initiatives in the Middle East area. These conditions clearly underscore the need for continued United States interest in and the projection of naval power throughout the Mediterranean.

Of great significance, over the past decade, is the Soviet Navy's improved naval warfare capabilities and the movement of sizable Soviet fleets into the Mediterranean and other seas. Between 1965 and 1975, the number of Soviet ship-days in the Mediterranean increased from 2,800 to 20,000. (At the same time, those in the Atlantic rose from 1,400 to 14,500.)<sup>3</sup> These statistics give face validity to any hypothesis related to the necessity for the continued presence of the Sixth Fleet and its associated support in the Mediterranean.

## THE SIXTH FLEET

The principal missions of the Sixth Fleet are:

- " . Sea defense on NATO's southern flank
- . Tactical support for NATO ground operations
- . Support for American nuclear deterrence
- . Shows of force in Balkan and Mid-East crises
- . Symbolic support to NATO southern flank nations of the American commitment to Europe."<sup>4</sup>

The Sixth Fleet prides itself as the prime example of a "fleet afloat." The fleet is considered self-sustainable; however, to operate without bases outside the CONUS greatly taxes routine supply functions, increases wear-out rates, requires a greater number of deployed ships for equal time on station, delays certain repairs and increases overall maintenance costs. The missions of the Sixth Fleet have been performed efficiently and effectively over the past decades because there have been bases in the Mediterranean, or just outside Gibraltar, which have provided support and repair facilities for fleet vessels. Though it uses shore based facilities, the Sixth Fleet can operate for prolonged periods independent of these Mediterranean bases. The period of time can be of sufficient length to restore any military or political imbalance which may have caused the denial of access to these bases.<sup>5</sup> Mediterranean bases are key, but not critical, ingredients of the sustained operability and efficacy of the Sixth Fleet.

Currently, the U.S. has naval bases of various categories and classifications in the Mediterranean region. To highlight a few, there is a major servicing and supply base at Rota, Spain; a naval ammunition center at El Terral, Spain; a fuel storage center at

Cartogena, Spain; the Sixth Fleet flagship in Gaeta, Italy; and the "hub of US activity in Italy at Naples" where there is a major headquarters and a supply complex.<sup>6</sup>

#### FUTURE ACCESS TO BASES

Some of our Mediterranean naval bases and their continued occupancy by U.S. forces are currently being negotiated between the United States and the host governments. The terms for U.S. retention of rights on these bases are becoming increasingly restrictive. This is with respect to limiting U.S. jurisdiction and access in various contingencies. The dollar costs of continued and even reduced rights are also becoming increasingly more expensive. It can also be hypothesized that as time goes on political pressures (domestic and external) in host countries to terminate American base arrangements may be accentuated. This situation could be particularly acute if local Communist party representatives become more prevalent in elected assemblies and/or appointed cabinet positions. The expulsion of U.S. forces from these host countries could become a heightened public issue.

Alternate bases for the Sixth Fleet is a viable contingency to be analyzed. Notwithstanding that the main thrust of our policies concerning bases in the Mediterranean is to hold what we have, there are countries and alternate locations that can be appraised as possible fall-back positions should new bases be needed. Although several countries in the Mediterranean offer possibilities, this research effort will focus on Tunisia.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to investigate the feasibility of establishing a U.S. naval base in Tunisia during some period in the 1980's.

Tunisia will be appraised from the standpoint of the availability of potential bases, the practicability of an effort on the part of the United States to enter into negotiations with the Government of Tunisia for a base, the political implications of such an initiative and subsequent arrangement for the United States and Tunisia, and an analysis of other major factors to be considered prior to establishing a U.S. base in Tunisia.

## METHODOLOGY

Conduct of a detailed appraisal of the feasibility of U.S. bases in Tunisia over the next decade requires exploration of several key factors pertaining to that issue. These are military, political and economic considerations. All of these must be investigated in sufficient depth. The emphasis of this analysis should focus on United States and Tunisian interests, our continued relations with Tunisia and Tunisia's role in the world community and this impact on U.S. goals and objectives.

Tunisia is a small country. It has been fundamentally unaligned since its independence from France in 1956. The tilt of Tunisian orientation has been pro-Western. Publicly and privately, this small nation has been a supporter of many aspects of United States foreign

policy, e.g. Southeast Asia and moderation in the Middle East. Although the recipient of substantial amounts of U.S. economic assistance and a modest program of military support, the attention focused on Tunisia by military planners over the last two decades has been minimal.

The availability of current information on Tunisia is quite limited. Specific information on the study subject, U.S. bases in Tunisia, is nil in written form. Liaison with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of the Navy, and research of classified and unclassified libraries indicate that consideration of the ports and harbors of Tunisia as potential U.S. naval bases has not been seriously considered within memory or record.

This, then, creates a fertile field for research. The approach taken has been to gather the pertinent available sparse information pertaining to the subject, determine current thinking on naval bases in the Mediterranean, investigate the characteristics of ports and harbors used for naval bases, compare these characteristics with those found at potential sites in Tunisia, analyze, in macro terms, the cost effectiveness of establishing bases in Tunisia and consider the myriad of political and other ramifications and implications on the United States and Tunisia of initiating such a program.

Because of the paucity of written information relating directly to this issue, much of the information for this study has been obtained through the interview or discussion method. Officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (ISA), Department of the Navy, Department

of State, Headquarters, US European Command, American Embassy, Tunis, Strategic Studies Institute, USAWC, and a number of knowledgeable individuals provided various subjective opinions and forecasts relating to the issue. The data obtained was synthesized, then analyzed, conclusions drawn and recommendations made for follow-on action.

#### RELIABILITY OF THE INVESTIGATIVE METHODS

The methodology employed is appropriate for this research project. The study's objective is to determine, in a macro fashion, the feasibility of considering establishing a U.S. naval base in Tunisia. The background data, obtained through a review of the literature is valid. The limitation of the study to Tunisia narrows the subject. Personal reconnaissance of the major ports and discussions with officials fully conversant with specific aspects of the issue provide an objective but generalized appraisal of many facets of the subject. Interviewees are officials in positions which require knowledge of past and current policies and trends concerning Tunisia even though they may reflect their own perceptions of a given situation. Some interviewees were of differing opinions concerning various factors. These views were considered and either included or excluded depending on their pertinence. Since a major portion of the appraisal and conclusions are conjecture or prophesizing the future, the assumed validity of the subjective data may prove to be contradictory to what might actually transpire in the future.

## PLAN FOR ANALYZING DATA

Pertinent data from all accessible and unclassified sources will be considered. The overall issue will be analyzed by drawing conclusions on the major factors previously discussed and a synthesis of all factors will then be made.

The key questions to be answered are:

1. Will the United States need new naval bases in the Mediterranean during the next decade?
2. Does Tunisia provide a potential site for alternative bases?
3. Are the political implications supportive of U.S. bases in Tunisia?
4. Are the risks/costs of bases in Tunisia offset by the military advantages of these bases?
5. What recommendations pertaining to future U.S. bases in Tunisia are suggested by this study?

## ASSUMPTIONS

The nature of this research requires no stated assumptions. Its purpose is not to respond to a scenario of events indicating a pressing need for alternative naval bases, but to investigate the potential future use of ports and/or harbors in Tunisia on a permanent basis.

The projected scenario in this study that would prompt the United States to consider seriously the use of bases in Tunisia is open-ended. Rather than a series of political and military necessity assumptions

which could tip the balance toward an affirmative conclusion regarding Tunisian bases, this study will not postulate any radical or desperate conditions for the United States denying accessibility to current bases.

Future events which may necessitate the United States development of new bases in the Mediterranean would add a different dimension to this study and tend to modify or influence the conclusions drawn. As such, this appraisal can be viewed as the first phase in a long range analysis. A different scenario or revised political climate would weight the key factors accordingly and different conclusions could then be drawn.

## CHAPTER II

### FUTURE ROLE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Soviet Union has long espoused a dual pronged foreign policy. On the one hand, she appears to favor detente with major Western powers, principally the United States. At the same time, she supports openly any "progressive" nation that is anti-Western in its foreign policy or relies on other than Western powers for arms supplies and other assistance.<sup>7</sup>

The Middle East, for over three decades, has been characterized by open hostilities and political instabilities. These trends allow for even the least clairvoyant of prognosticators to predict with a reasonable degree of assurance that the next decade will not result in a lessening of tensions in that area. There will be an aggravation of past hostile attitudes, a potential for more destructive conflagrations and economies and living standards worldwide which will pivot on the availability and cost of oil from the Arab nations of the Middle East. These conditions appear to play directly into the types of situations on which the Soviet Union thrives. They also encourage the USSR to exert her influence and become aggressive in her modus operandi.

The United States must counter Soviet moves and have forces locally available to deter Soviet aggressive initiatives in the Mediterranean. However, the United States is not the only nation that has a vital interest in dampening Soviet initiatives in the region. The major powers along the northern littoral, even though they may have Communists in their governments by the 1980's, will be reluctant to

accept the Mediterranean as a "Soviet Lake." The lesser developed countries along the southern littoral and the Middle East value their recently acquired independence and freedom of action. They would be loathe to forsake these liberties to the specter of Soviet imperialism. Therefore, all countries concerned are dependent on the presence of the United States Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean to a greater or lesser degree. It is irreconcilable to speculate how this reliance could completely degenerate as the Soviet Union becomes more powerful and the developing countries in the Mediterranean strive to become more modernized and simultaneously solidify their consciousness of independence.

#### U.S. BASES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The above discussion has its basis in pragmatism. This is reflective of the U.S. policy pertaining to negotiations with host countries of our current naval bases. Our current approach is to retain the bases that we have.<sup>8</sup> We count on the realization by host nations that a U.S. base on their soil serves their own as well as our national interests. Host nations are becoming more demanding negotiators and there are increasingly more restrictive terms forecast for the future. Irrespective of these constraints and more vocal expressions of nationalism and maritime sovereignty, alternate U.S. naval bases are not official subjects of study at this time.<sup>9</sup>

The real question of the utility of bases revolves around the missions they support. Our current bases, particularly in Spain, are cost effective. It would be more expensive to perform required

missions at the same level of effectiveness in another way.<sup>10</sup> From the standpoint of strategic weapons delivery, the Sixth Fleet, its support bases, and the Mediterranean Sea are becoming less important. This trend will continue as more sophisticated weaponry is added to our arsenal. The conventional war and Middle East crises missions are supported by current bases. However, except for the Azores, which are outside the Mediterranean, their criticality to these operations is marginal.

There is high degree of reliance on the use of commercial utilities at current bases vis-a-vis the self-contained power plants of navy tenders and other repair ships. This greatly extends the life of those components on the vessels. The U.S. repair facilities on our leased bases in the Mediterranean are predominately U.S. surface ships.<sup>11</sup> Most major repairs, other than those that can be performed by these tenders, are done by commercial shipyard firms in the host country on a contract basis.<sup>12</sup> This invariably increases our ship-days available in the Mediterranean and reduces the number of ships that must be available for a given size force; however, the use of tenders supports the thesis that reliance on our current bases and their commercial facilities are economical "nice to have" but not a "need to have" arrangements. Although few would unequivocally advocate a withdrawal from all bases in the Mediterranean or movement of the bases to sites with more accommodating arrangements (unknown, undeveloped and unlikely at this time), there are periodic studies conducted by the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Library of Congress on the former alternative. The real "need" for bases, under current world conditions, is a debatable topic.

There is some degree of optimism that the U.S. will retain its current base rights under mutually acceptable terms for both the host nation and the United States.<sup>13</sup> It is generally anticipated that the conditions imposed will carry through for the next decade. There is minimal concern by the Navy that an unforeseen turn of events over the next 10 years will cause a preemptive expulsion of U.S. forces from current facilities and/or a denial of access to commercial shipyards co-located with or in proximity to the current bases.<sup>14</sup>

There is another factor which reinforces what appears to be official complacency regarding investigating contingency bases elsewhere in the Mediterranean. This is oriented on the premise that should the United States lose full access to current bases because the terms are not cost-effective or that nationalism or the overall international situation brings about our ouster, then any potential alternative site would undoubtedly present the same conditional complexities. This tends to preclude any confidence in or need for embarking on a venture of new negotiations with new host governments.

#### SHIP VISITS AT PORTS OF CALL

Currently the Sixth Fleet enjoys "ship visit" rights to an adequate number of ports in the Mediterranean.<sup>15</sup> These visits contribute to the mission of "showing the flag," foster better "people to people" programs, provide crews with the opportunity for shore leave and enable the vessels to accomplish minor repairs and replenishments. Denial of "ship visits" would seriously aggravate morale conditions in

the Sixth Fleet. (This condition is being experienced by the Soviet Mediterranean Force because the ports to which they have access are limited.<sup>16)</sup>)

Worsening world conditions vis-a-vis the United States would greatly impair the flexibilities and operational methods currently employed by the Sixth Fleet. These type conditions have occurred in the past but, relatively speaking, were short-lived and were adjusted to with minimum adverse repercussions.

In summary, the Sixth Fleet is not entirely dependent on current bases. Adjustments have had to be made over the last decade on the freedom of action we previously enjoyed. These flexibilities will be even more restricted in the future. We will have to adjust our plans for reaction to contingencies in the Middle East or reinforcement for a NATO/Warsaw Pact conventional conflict when the host nations of the various bases do not desire to become directly involved.

Alternative bases in the Mediterranean are not being seriously considered at the present time for the reasons cited above. This does not preclude, however, a detailed appraisal of possible sites for future U.S. naval bases in Tunisia.

## CHAPTER III

### TUNISIA AS A POTENTIAL SITE FOR BASES

#### STRATEGIC POSITION

North Africa has long held a position of strategic importance. It serves as a land bridge between the Atlantic Ocean and Europe to the Middle East. North Africa also could be a second line of defense against an attack by the Soviet Union on NATO Powers in Europe, just as it functioned as an initial objective area for the subsequent movement of Allied forces onto the European continent in World War II. Any unfriendly power operating from sea and/or air bases in North Africa could easily threaten east-west shipping lanes in the Mediterranean, launch air and naval attacks against NATO countries and confront NATO with an unwanted second front.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, North Africa in the hands of friendly powers would seriously disadvantage the Soviet Union in any case of hostilities, in Europe or the Middle East.

Tunisia is located at a critical juncture of the Mediterranean. This was as true in the ancient days of Carthage, located in Tunisia, as it is today. The Sicilian straits, one of the key choke points of the Mediterranean, is the confluence of sea lines of communication. These straits can be controlled from Tunisia and they split the Mediterranean into its eastern and western natural basins. Merely a cursory examination of the area (see figure 2, Annex 1) reveals that Tunisia is as strategically located as Malta, one of the currently recognized keys to Mediterranean control.

The coastline of Tunisia and an excellent internal road network system enhance the strategic value of the country. A standard-gauge railroad links Tunisia with Algeria and over 1,000 kilometers of narrow gauge rails provide transportation service to all but desert regions in the extreme south. The expanding tourist industry in Tunisia has also resulted in international airfields at Tunis-Carthage, and at Monastir (near Sousse).

A free, independent, unaligned, and pro-Western Tunisia has been a buffer between the more radical and Soviet-bloc inclined Algeria and Libya.

#### U.S. RELATIONS WITH TUNISIA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Tunisia that is friendly to the West and supportive of interests of the United States represents an asset as well as a potential for opportunity to enhance the interests of the Free World. The United States has consistently been conscious of the desires of the Tunisian people for independence and their rights to establish their own destinies. The United States has had warm relations with Tunisia since 1956. The degree of United States involvement has been within the limits desired by the Government of Tunisia and this relationship has been acceptable to the United States.

Since the early 1960's, significant economic aid, advice and financial assistance have been given to Tunisia by the United States. Records indicate that over the last two decades Tunisia has received more American aid per capita than most African countries.<sup>18</sup> Throughout this period, Tunisia has maintained a moderate and rational

approach to world affairs and to the political complexities associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict. From time to time, President Bourguiba of Tunisia has been instrumental in tempering the extremism so common to emerging African nationalism and the North African and Middle Eastern Arab States.

In May 1968, President Johnson reaffirmed the United States interest in Tunisia by stating:

"America's friendship with Tunisia demonstrates that a nation of great size and power can play a role in the development of a smaller nation without in any way detracting from its liberty or its independence of action."<sup>19</sup>

#### U.S./TUNISIAN RELATIONS TODAY

The above relationship between the United States and Tunisia has continued unabated for the decade following President Johnson's statement. That decade has seen Tunisia develop and even prosper when compared to many other countries of comparable size and with limited resources.<sup>20</sup> Because of our own diminished foreign assistance resources and a Tunisian per capita annual income of approximately \$800.00, American aid has been consistently reduced over the last few years. The focus of our assistance is now on projects that will solidify the current industrial base (e.g. agribusiness) and stimulate the development of exportable commodities.<sup>21</sup> These efforts will assist in reducing the Tunisian foreign debt which has also been an area of significant Tunisian improvement over the last decade.<sup>22</sup> Tunisia still remains, however, dependent on a sustained flow of foreign assistance to underwrite new investments and on good weather for its agricultural products.

More radical Arab neighbors have continually been a cause for concern for Tunisia. A small country between Algeria and Libya faces the constant danger of threatened annexation by one or the other on various kinds of provocation, real or imagined. With a history of emphasis on economic development and nation building, Tunisia has not devoted more than a modest percentage of its GNP to defense. Military assistance has been received primarily from the United States and France. Over the past decade, Tunisia has built up a small and modest armed force. Defense is now getting a larger share of the national budget than at any time since independence.<sup>23</sup>

To a degree, it has appeared for years that Bourguiba has placed Tunisia's major reliance for security on the United States and its Sixth Fleet. Bourguiba's support of U.S. policies, frequently in opposition to that expressed by other Arab nations, and his moderation on many volatile issues tend to indicate an assumed "special relationship" that he would like to enjoy with the United States. In the summer of 1976, Sixth Fleet vessels, presumably at Tunisia's request, moved into the area in proximity of disputed off-shore oil fields between Tunisia and Libya. This action may have been instrumental in preventing an outbreak of hostilities between Tunisia and Libya.

The United States has shown an interest in maintaining the security of Tunisia. This attitude, from a micro view, benefits the United States by having a friendly Tunisia located along the narrow Sicilian straits. From the macro perspective, Tunisia is a small, independent, moderate, unaligned nation with a pro-Western orientation; therefore, it has earned U.S. concern for its security. A current challenge for

the United States is to convince Tunisia of our continuing interest in her security particularly as our outward manifestations of this concern, economic and military aid, are decreasing.

This history of cordial relations with Tunisia indicates a first level degree of viability for considering the establishment of U.S. naval bases in Tunisia. The current and projected political overtones of such an initiative will be considered subsequent to an appraisal of the technical aspects of establishing a U.S. naval base or bases in Tunisia.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL BASES IN TUNISIA

#### GENERAL

The ports of Tunisia can be grouped into principal, secondary and minor ports. This is on the basis of their estimated military port capacities, alongside berthing accommodations and naval and commercial importance.

Bizerte and Tunis-La Goulette are principal ports.

Sfax, Sousse and Gabes are secondary ports.

There are 13 fairly well spaced minor ports. Four of these are on the north coast and 9 on the east coast. Except for Cehkira, between Sfax and Gabes, which is a petroleum shipping port, these minor ports accommodate only small craft.

The majority of minor ports can be quickly eliminated from further consideration as a U.S. naval base because they are completely undeveloped and for small craft only. This would retain Bizerte, Tunis-La Goulette, Sousse, Sfax and Gabes for more detailed analysis. These ports are shown at Figure 3, Annex 1.

#### CRITERIA

There are many technical factors that can be considered in determining the adequacy of a port for U.S. naval forces use. These criteria can be reduced to fundamental characteristics when considering potential ports in Tunisia. The port facilities in that country are limited and

a wide range of technical data analysis factors will not be necessary in isolating the lesser ports from further consideration.

The key criteria to be applied are:

- a. Characteristics of U.S. naval ships common to the Sixth Fleet.
- b. General size and description of each port.
- c. Channel access to the port area.
- d. Depth and width of channel and basins.
- e. Pier facilities.
- f. Competition of port with commercial shipping.
- g. Repair facilities locally available on a commercial basis.
- h. Expansion possibilities in the port area.
- i. Infrastructure to handle base activities.
- j. Existing facilities in or near the port area.

These criteria will be applied to each of the above ports to the degree necessary to establish the feasibility of pursuing further the possibility of a U.S. naval base at each location.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF U.S. NAVAL VESSELS

The data that follow are the specifications of various classes of representative ships which could be required from time to time to use U.S. naval base facilities in the Mediterranean. Accommodation of these ships on a routine basis, with or without consideration of tide data, would indicate that a prospective port had a potential for use.

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Dis- place- ment (Tons)</u>	<u>Length (Ft)</u>	<u>Beam (Ft)</u>	<u>Draft (Ft)</u>
Carrier	Nimitz	91,400	1092	252	37.7
Carrier	Forrestal	78,000	1040	252	35.5
Cruiser (Hv)	Albany	18,950	674	71	33.5
Cruiser (Hv)	Long Beach	16,247	721	73	29.7
Cruiser (Lt)	Truxton	9,000	564	58	31
Cruiser (Lt)	Belknap	7,940	547	55	29
Destroyer	Mitscher	5,155	494	50	26
Destroyer	Forrest Sherman	4,050	418	45	22
Frigate	Knox	4,100	438	47	25
Frigate	Brooke	3,400	415	44	24

#### EXAMINATION OF PORT CHARACTERISTICS

##### Gabes (Qabis)

Gabes is the newest of Tunisian ports and opened for trade in January 1975. This port was developed for the export of phosphates and is almost exclusively used for that purpose. The quai will be 1210 meters by 1980. The basin has a depth of 31 to 39 feet.<sup>25</sup> Port traffic is very specialized and the entire geographical area supports this important mining/mineral center. There is minimal infrastructure in the region and the only major pieces of equipment at the port are a traveling crane for unloading sulfur and 4 cranes for cargo up to 30 tons. The Gulf of Gabes has a sandy and shallow bottom.<sup>26</sup>

The characteristics and potential for naval usage of this port are extremely limited; hence, it is easily rejected on technical grounds from further consideration as a potential U.S. naval base.

##### Sfax (Safaqis)

This is a key commercial port for three of Tunisia's exportable

products. Nearly two and a half million tons of phosphate, a quarter million tons of salt and sixty thousand tons of olive oil are exported annually from Sfax.<sup>27</sup> There are also significant imports through Sfax for consumption in the southern regions of Tunisia. Sfax served as an important Axis base in World War II from November 1942 until captured by the British in April 1943.<sup>28</sup>

The port consists of three basins. The largest covers 42 hectares; another is for oil tankers and the third handles light craft. There are 2,017 meters of docks and 600 meters under construction. A program of \$47 million in total port investment is programmed through 1984.<sup>29</sup>

The inner harbor is sufficiently large to provide pierside docking for several large merchant ships. The turning basin allows sufficient room for all but the largest ships. Depths vary from 19 to 42 feet in the roadstead and the channel has been dredged to 34 feet.<sup>30</sup> As with other dredged ports on Tunisia's eastern coast, Sfax silts rapidly.

The port of Sfax is small by any standards, except in tonnage handled, and offers little, if any potential, for use as a permanent U.S. naval base. Infrastructure, extensive utilities availability and other support requirements are virtually non-existent. In addition, the port is critical to the economic well-being of the local region. A U.S. base in the area would undoubtedly require diversion of current imported and exported commercial tonnage to an alternate port and there are none in Tunisia to accommodate this increase in an economical fashion. These factors result in the conclusion that Sfax is

unacceptable as a potential base.

#### Sousse (Susah)

The total area of the port of Sousse is 28 hectares and the docks are 830 meters long. The inner basin is to be dredged from 22 to 28 feet.<sup>31</sup> Sixth Fleet vessels currently making ship visits to Sousse anchor outside the breakwater.<sup>32</sup> In addition to limited room for maneuvers, the bottom of the basin is composed of a mixture of mud and alpha grass.<sup>33</sup> Disturbance of the bottom causes large quantities of alpha grass and mud to float to the surface and may result in a complete loss of a ship's power by fouling of the main condensers.<sup>34</sup>

The port area is located in the heart of the commercial district of the city (83,000) of Sousse. Expansion of the port to any significant size would be restricted. The Sousse complex is also in the midst of Tunisia's expanding resort and tourist belt and the city and surrounding areas project that type of atmosphere.

As with ports previously mentioned, the heavy equipment available at Sousse is minimal, repair facilities are virtually non-existent and the port area is small and primitive. Notwithstanding the above, Sousse is important economically for Tunisia. It serves the third largest urban area in the country and will play an increasingly important role in the development of the center of the country and the heavily populated and economically productive Sahel extending around the Sousse region. A \$20 million expansion program for the Sousse port is programmed through 1981.<sup>35</sup>

Location, size, importance to the local economy, and port basin

conditions militate against further serious consideration of Sousse as a potential U.S. naval base.

#### Tunis-La Goulette

This port complex is located in the vicinity of Tunis, the capital and largest city in Tunisia. The La Goulette port is 10 kilometers north of Tunis. It consists of two basins with access through a channel 4,030 meters long and 26 feet deep. The La Goulette Port is supplemented by the Tunis port for smaller ships. The Tunis port is joined to La Goulette by a 9.7 kilometer channel and port basin which are both 20 feet deep.<sup>36</sup>

The ports handle most cargos and are equipped with cranes, lighters and tugs. Extensive warehousing facilities are available and new construction is planned.<sup>37</sup> However, the delays associated with customs clearance impede the rapid transshipment of off-loaded cargo and storage facilities are frequently overtaxed.<sup>38</sup> There are limited facilities for moderate repairs of vessels in Tunis.<sup>39</sup>

The channels are narrow and can only be safely navigated by one vessel at a time.<sup>40</sup> The port areas are congested and have been expanded over the centuries in a seeming unprogrammed manner which is typical of ports in small underdeveloped countries with an ancient heritage. Although there is some latitude for expansion and modernization, the port area is in close proximity to an expanding metropolitan area. The commercial development of the Tunis area and the importance of the port to Tunisia's continued economic progress are key factors for that nation's future. Over the next few years, \$87.5

million of investment will be devoted to expansion of the port.<sup>41</sup> U.S. naval base development in the Tunis area would impair this program. In addition, the technical shortcomings of location, basin, channel and port facilities make the Tunis-La Goulette site uninviting and even undesirable.

#### Bizerte

This former French naval base is located 63 kilometers north of Tunis. It is a natural port which does not require extensive dredging for maintenance. The quay and channel depths are 32 and 37 feet respectively. Bizerte is the largest port in Tunisia in tons imported and second in tonnage exported.<sup>42</sup> The capacity of the port is far greater than its current usage primarily because of the preference of local importers and exporters to use the Tunis-La Goulette port.<sup>43</sup>

Bizerte is a former NATO naval base built by the French with Marshall Plan funds. The channel leads to the large Lake of Bizerte. The lake is bordered by an abandoned ship repair yard, a steel mill, cement plant, diesel engine manufacturing plant and Tunisia's only oil refinery. The refinery refines 1,000,000 tons of crude oil annually.<sup>44</sup> There are abandoned dry dock facilities, storage areas and ammunition bunkers. All are of pre-1960 vintage. In addition, a former French Naval Air Base is located at Sidi Ahmed adjacent to Bizerte. The airfield has two runways of 6500 feet which will accommodate any U.S. Navy aircraft.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to the other ports in Tunisia, Bizerte is relatively isolated from metropolitan congestion and projected urban development.

It is a large port possessing good shelter and a coastal breakwater harbor.<sup>46</sup> The limitations on the size of vessels (other than Nimitz class carriers) are imposed by the berthing dimensions rather than by the fairways leading to them. Sixth Fleet heavy cruisers have docked in Bizerte on several occasions over the last decade.<sup>47</sup> Real estate for expansion and a foundation for equipping Bizerte as a U.S. naval base are present in the area.

The fact that Bizerte was an operable naval base until 1963 does not mean prima facie that it can be quickly or economically converted to a U.S. naval base. The skeletal framework of facilities may be present, but the equipment needed by those facilities has either been removed or is long since inoperable. A base built under French specifications prior to 1960 and left unutilized for 15-25 years would only minimally satisfy the requirements of the 1980's. In actuality, reopening Bizerte for modern navy use would be little less than building an entirely new complex. Moreover, it could even be more expensive because the obsolete facilities, piers and other delapidated construction would be more expensive to reconstruct than if a virgin harbor complex were present.<sup>48</sup>

The extensiveness of construction insinuated above, financed by the United States, would be costly. It would be analogous to building in Tunisia repair facilities on the order of those found in commercial shipyards in the United States, Italy and Spain. This is counter to the type of foreign assistance the United States is rendering today. Therefore, it is impractical to assume that shipyard construction efforts of any magnitude would be undertaken by the United States to

refurbish Bizerte.

There are few host country technicians in Tunisia with any usable expertise for employment at a naval base or for construction. This would necessitate that the new facilities, in large part, be constructed and eventually manned by U.S. or third country personnel at the technician and managerial levels. However, employment would be provided for Tunisians at the laborer level and in ancillary functions. This would help the Tunisian economy and foster a program of managerial and technician development.

The above does not preclude, however, the limited use of the Bizerte complex for repairs that can be conducted by U.S. Navy tenders and other repair ships positioned semi-permanently in the harbors and lake. This limited capability may be advantageous and the industrial and facilities for storage potential of the area could also be used on a selective basis.

It appears that Bizerte may be isolated from the mainstream of the Tunisian economy in the future just as it is today. The center of gravity of Tunisian commercial and industrial development and population concentrations are from Tunis to the South. Mineral deposits, industry and agriculture are in that direction. Unless an expanded trade relationship develops between Tunisia and Algeria, the northern tier, which includes Bizerte, may not be subject to much expansion over the next decade. These conditions have the advantage of creating a minimum of interference with host country programmed and evolving economic development and the added benefit of a U.S. base supporting an economically relatively depressed area of the country.

Bizerte's geographical position - nearest to Europe and the Mediterranean sealandes - and its deep port and potential for development are factors which indicate that there is a technical feasibility for a U.S. base, of some type, in Tunisia. The precise utilization of the facility and to what degree the Navy would employ a base at Bizerte are beyond the scope of this research. Needless to say, there are other bases in the Mediterranean which are more desirable and advantageous for the United States, but there are no others in Tunisia which offer the potential that Bizerte presents.

Having concluded from this cursory examination of the data that only Bizerte offers any possibilities for a naval base from a technical standpoint, other implications of the issue will be examined.

## CHAPTER V

### POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BASE RIGHTS

#### GENERAL

Tunisia has been characterized as a stable, unaligned but pro-Western oriented country. It is a member of the Arab League and supports the Arab cause in the Middle East. President Bourguiba has dominated the country since its independence, but his health has been failing for several years. The question of his successor may still remain to be resolved even though Bourguiba has named the current Premier Hedi Nouira as his heir-apparent. The United States has been a "good friend" of Tunisia. There are no indications that the U.S. has ever taken any initiatives which would appear to interfere with Tunisia's independence or right of self determination.

Over the last two decades, Tunisia has carefully maintained an unaligned posture while being openly moderate and pro-Western. Relations with Soviet bloc countries have been cordial and diplomatically correct. The lesser developed nations and other Third World countries understand Tunisia's role in world affairs. Bourguiba and his record of Tunisian progress have been held in high esteem by newly emerging nations. Tunisia has been careful not to overly antagonize her radical Arab neighbors and places high value in making contributions to the Arab cause in the amelioration of the Middle East conflict. Tunisia's modus operandi, from the international as well as the domestic scenes, has been to seek to preserve her independence through

flexibility. The United States appears to fully support Tunisia in her approaches.

Although succession to Bourguiba's rule may not be clear-cut and a power struggle ensue following his death, there is high confidence that the follow-on Tunisian government will continue established policies and maintain a pro-Western orientation.<sup>49</sup> A closer relationship will probably develop with the rest of the Arab World, but Bourguiba's successors will not be able to speak with the personal authority and aplomb that has characterized Bourguiba.

The Tunisian government is not as strong as it once was and is likely to get weaker as Bourguiba ages.<sup>50</sup> In essence this could mean that the United States' relationship with Tunisia may be more restrained in the future, but the basic understanding between the two countries should remain unchanged.

#### BASE RIGHTS FROM THE TUNISIAN POINT OF VIEW

Assuming a scenario where the independence of Tunisia was seriously threatened and Tunisia felt that a full commitment from the United States to preserve her independence was necessary, then there would be a plausible possibility that naval base rights would be offered by Tunisia to the United States. Any situation short of the above would present an entirely different case. Tunisia has been very diligent in downplaying any American military assistance or presence. Sixth Fleet ship visits, for example, receive minimal public attention or press coverage.<sup>51</sup> Dissident elements in the country already allege that Tunisia is a "lackey" of the United States and even charge that there

are U.S. bases in Tunisia now.<sup>52</sup> The government counters these assertions by remaining staunchly unaligned and allowing Soviet Union naval vessels, from time to time, also to visit Tunisia. Recently the Chief of Naval Operations of the United States Navy, Admiral James. L. Holloway III, was in Tunisia for three days, toured the country, met some of the key officials and received a decoration from President Bourguiba. The day after the American CNO departed, his counterpart in the Russian Navy, Admiral of the Fleet Sergey G. Gorshkov, arrived for a similar visit and prior to departure received the identical decoration from Bourguiba.

Any foreign base in another's country deprives the host nation of some degree of sovereignty. This condition is particularly sensitive to North African countries because of their recent heritage. In addition, it is even more of an issue for Arab countries while the Middle East crises with Israel remains unresolved. American use or even suspected use of a base on Tunisian soil to resupply or assist Israel would surely ostracize Tunisia from the rest of the Arab World. Both bases and the use of bases by the United States would impact adversely on the respectability of Tunisia among the lesser developed countries.<sup>53</sup>

Tunisia, today, has been unable to come to terms with young people, particularly university students.<sup>54</sup> An American base in Tunisia couldn't help but ferment discontent and provide a platform for young vocal dissidents. Liberals in Tunisia are increasingly active. The current United States emphasis on human rights may result in the Tunisian government relaxing some of its controls.<sup>55</sup> This condition may be more likely after Bourguiba passes from the scene. Perhaps

it will occur when the successor government is establishing its position and attempting to acquire popular support. Too much orientation toward the West, such as U.S. naval presence, could intensify liberal domestic attacks against the government.

An American base would have economic and security advantages for Tunisia, but this does not outweigh the outcry, internally and externally, that would result from such an initiative. The existence of a U.S. naval base in Tunisia might, except for the extreme case, politically destroy the very Tunisia that the U.S. set out to save or to assist. This condition appears as if it will be as likely a decade from now as it is today.

#### BASE RIGHTS FROM THE U.S. PERSPECTIVE

The United States has historically been super-sensitive to the Tunisian image. Many of our actions taken over the years and our acquiescence to Tunisian requests have been prompted by our desires to insure that Tunisia is presented in a light that does not complicate her tenuous position in the Arab World and gives her stature in the world community. A Tunisia that does not have the appearance of close dependence on the U.S. and which is independent in its policies and positions is a nation which can be invaluable to the United States. It is in the U.S. interests not to jeopardize that relationship. Any significant overt action, such as the establishment of a permanent or semi-permanent U.S. base in Tunisia, would have to be weighed carefully prior to implementation for the political impacts that would result.

The factors covered in the previous section of this chapter are perhaps more important to the United States than they are to Tunisia. Although it might be conjectured that 10 years from now U.S. bases in small countries would not impact on nationalism or raise the ire of other small nations, that possibility seems remote. If anything, the situation may be even more aggravated by 1990 if rich nations continue to become relatively richer and poor nations poorer while the USSR/US power struggle continues unabated.

From the standpoint of domestic politics in the United States, the issue of establishing an American base in Tunisia is also inhibiting. The trend in congressional thinking is in reducing the bases and overseas' deployments that we currently have, not building new facilities. Any base that would require a significant outlay of funds, as any type of base in Tunisia would undoubtedly do, is sure to come under congressional scrutiny and require convincing justification. Ten years from now this condition will probably be accentuated from what is being experienced today.

The above is not meant to imply that Congress would not appropriate required funds for the construction of a needed U.S. naval base in an overseas area. The emphasis is on need; therefore, the justification would have to be complete and considerate of all the implications and alternatives. Military necessity would have to be the driving issue.

The tendency on the part of Arab nations, over the last few decades, to expropriate or nationalize foreign bases and investments on their soil is also a constraining factor of a significant degree when

considering U.S. bases in Tunisia.

An American base located in Bizerte, the only practical site, is only 110 kilometers from Algeria and 600 kilometers from the Libyan border. Placing an American military installation between two Arab regimes that are wealthy, belligerent, supplied by the USSR and messianic for Pan-Arabism could provoke repercussions that could lead one of these nations to attack Tunisia. American bases there could come under attack. There could be rapid involvement to a degree that escalation into hostilities with the USSR could result, or, at the least, there could be unacceptable embarrassment to the United States.

This is a condition the U.S. should seek to avoid. Direct U.S. involvement to preserve Tunisia should be only as a last resort. It is conceivable that other nations would come to Tunisia's defense if she is unjustly invaded. The U.S. is able to assist in Tunisia's defense by other means. A base in Tunisia may result in a commitment that is not advantageous to U.S. global interests.

In the American approach to North Africa regional diplomacy, we should recognize Algeria as one of the potential future centers of power in Africa. It is essential that our policies pertaining to North African countries do not overly antagonize Algeria.<sup>56</sup> Most assuredly, establishment of a U.S. naval base in Tunisia would excite Algerian radicals, drive Algeria further away from the U.S. (if this is possible) and could even improve relations between the USSR and the Algerians. In the broad context of long range political strategy, it would appear that Algeria will become increasingly important and U.S. relations with Algeria should be cultivated so as to capitalize on that eventuality.

#### SUMMARY

The above is but a partial listing of the political risks associated with a U.S. base in Tunisia. These could be offset by only the gravest of circumstances that would create a situation establishing a clear and irrevocable need for the U.S. to have a base in Tunisia. Even then, it would be prudent for the United States to vacate whatever base she established as soon as the crisis terminated. The political and military equilibrium of the world would not be upset by a U.S. base in Tunisia; however, it does not appear that the political interests of either nation would be best served by such an action.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYSIS OF CONSIDERATIONS

The issue of U.S. bases in Tunisia as a contingency option for the future is influenced by a myriad of factors. In the first instance, the overall question of the need for new naval bases, per se, is inherently complicated. The world of today, and assuredly that of the future, project an erosion of U.S. basing posture and prospects. There is growing domestic opposition by host countries to bases. There is opposition in the U.S. to overseas bases. There will be excessive costs and restrictions imposed on our use of bases by host countries. There are schools of thought indicating that overseas naval bases are not as vital to U.S. security as they were once thought to be for interdiction missions and control of sea lanes.

Secondly, from a technical standpoint, the options for bases in Tunisia are limited to the Port of Bizerte on the northern tier. With the exception of Tunis-La Goulette, the other ports in Tunisia are too small and too critical to the economies of the regions in which they are located. Tunis-La Goulette is of reasonable size, but the location near the metropolitan area of Tunis, small basin and relatively shallow channels also preclude it from serious consideration. Bizerte has a good harbor, protected lake, skeletal port facilities, commanding location, and a lack of congestion for expansion and storage facilities. Any use of Bizerte as a base, however, presupposes that the United States would finance the construction of facilities from the ground up. There are few, if any, usable facilities at Bizerte for U.S. naval purposes.

Thirdly, the realities of international politics bear heavily on the issue. Tunisia, although friendly to the U.S. and with a long history of mutual cooperation would place itself in an untenable position if base rights were granted to the U.S. It is difficult to conceive acceptance of this arrangement by the Arab World, lesser developed countries or even the populace of Tunisia. In addition, the United States would be losing a friend and gaining a client whose voice in international forums could go unheard. This latter factor may seem extreme, and by some, thought to be immaterial, but if the past portends the future, the U.S. should insure that it has friendly voices speaking who are heard even if not heeded. Tunisia has been effective over the years, at least as a moderating influence. Any action on the part of the U.S. which would reduce Tunisia's political credibility could impact adversely on U.S. interests in international forums.

Key to the U.S. political strategy in the Mediterranean is the denial of bases to the USSR. The reaction of Algeria and/or Libya to a U.S. base in Tunisia might well be the granting of similar concessions to the USSR by either or both countries. Any approach taken by the U.S. to worsen relations with Algeria and Libya while accruing a direct and desirable benefit to the Soviet Union is counter to U.S. interests. Actions on the part of the U.S. which stimulate similar Soviet reactions are counterproductive.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### CONCLUSION

A U.S. naval base in Tunisia is not feasible from an economic or political standpoint for the foreseeable future. Any agreement between the two countries for a U.S. naval base in Tunisia would be warranted only under the unlikely condition that the security of both countries would be dependent on such an action.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN


The United States should not initiate any proposal to establish a permanent naval base in Tunisia over the next decade. Similarly, there should be no more than modest increases, if any, in U.S. military presence in that country.

In the event that Tunisia should offer or encourage the United States to seek a naval facility in Tunisia, that offer should be diplomatically declined. This includes even limited U.S. use of port areas for major repairs or extended port visits. In addition, any proposal that would invoke U.S. assistance in refurbishing the port of Bizerte for commercial ship repair capabilities should be examined carefully before commencement of construction. This is particularly true if the port of Bizerte does not appreciably increase its port usage. If the latter condition is preceded by a period of obvious over-taxing of the port's commercial facilities and the Mediterranean

maritime industry shows a clear need for commercial repair facilities in a free zone of international transit, then the inapplicability of this restriction is obviated, but the degree of involvement and identification of the project with the U.S. would remain a key issue.

The current political relationship between the United States and Tunisia should be maintained. The United States should continue to exercise a high degree of ambivalence in any commitment to act directly to guarantee Tunisia's security via the Sixth Fleet. This approach, at the present time and for the foreseeable future, is best for the United States and for Tunisia. Security guarantees for Tunisia would not be in the best interests of the United States nor is the current American political climate conducive to such treaties.

United States efforts should continue to be directed toward fostering an independent, stable, friendly, unaligned but pro-Western oriented Tunisia. No overt action, such as constructing a U.S. naval base in Tunisia, should jeopardize that broad objective.

  
JAMES P. BERGEN  
Colonel, Armor

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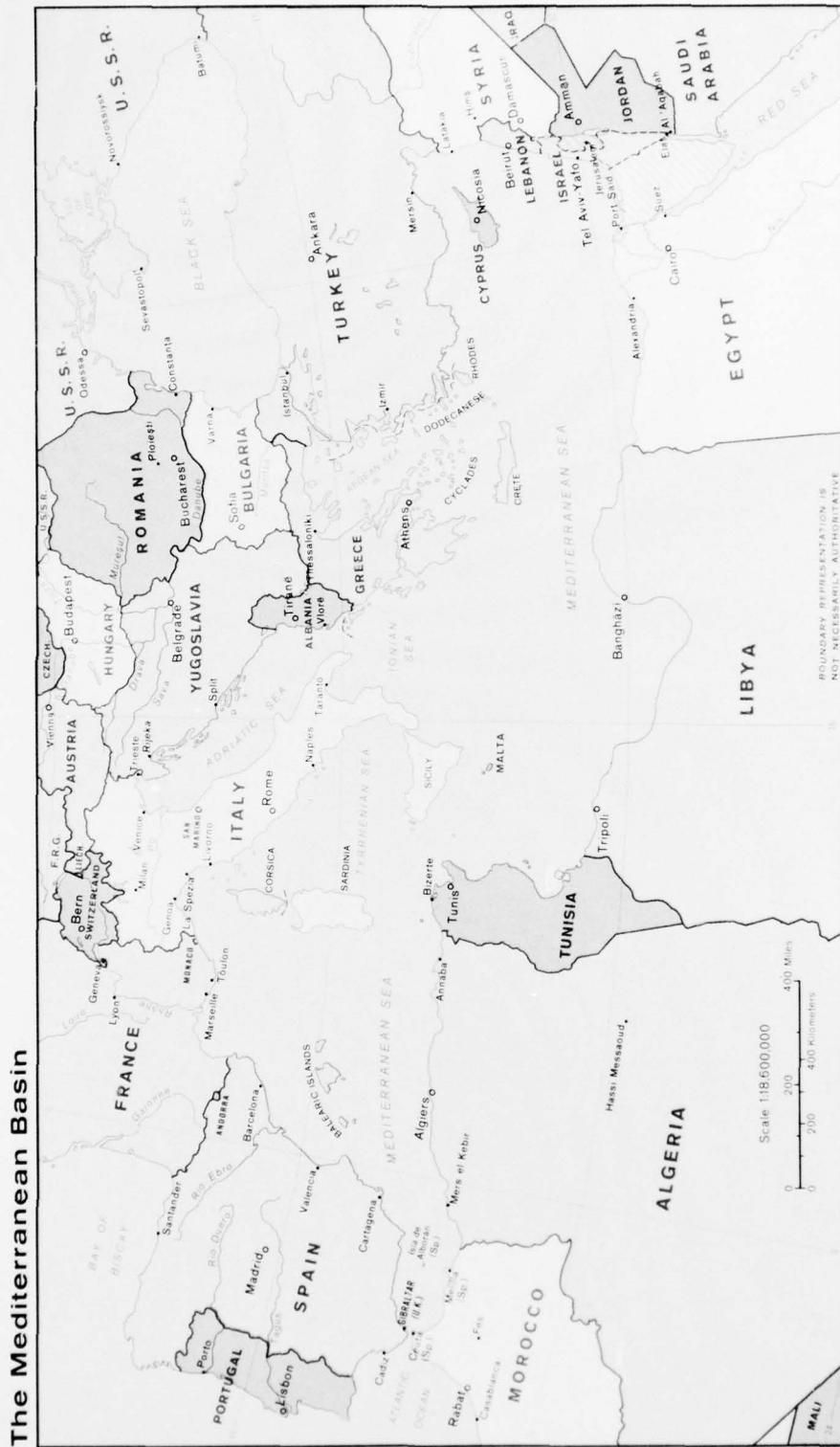
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ANNEX 1

FIGURES

Figure 1



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Figure 2  
Sicilian Straits  
depicting  
The Strategic Position of  
Tunisia

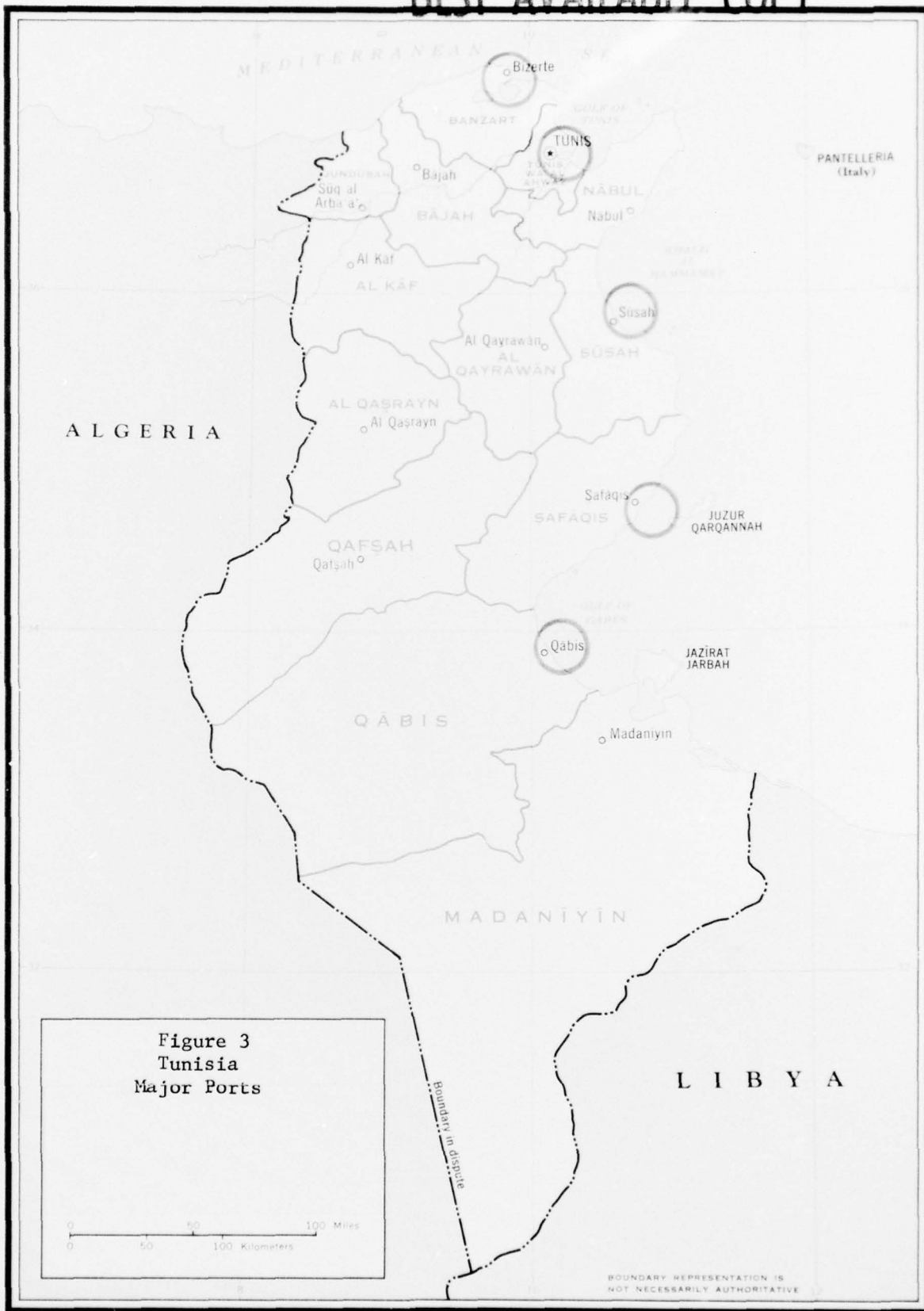


Figure 3  
Tunisia  
Major Ports

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