



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

# The American Military Capital in Africa? Morocco, AFRICOM, and Washington's Strategic Pivot



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## Introduction

A potential return of Donald Trump to the White House signals a strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy, with significant implications for the African continent. During his first term, bilateral relations between the United States and Morocco, its most important non-NATO strategic ally, gained new momentum. This progress included U.S. recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Rabat normalizing relations with Israel, alongside expanded economic and military cooperation. While the Biden administration paused the construction of a planned U.S. consulate in Dakhla, a potential Trump presidency could reinvigorate this partnership. This has renewed speculation about a long-discussed plan: relocat-

ing the headquarters of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) from Stuttgart, Germany, to Morocco. For the United States, such a move would represent a major strategic repositioning, guaranteeing direct access to the heart of the Sahel via a stable partner without relying on distant European bases.

This prospect raises critical questions about security governance in Africa. This paper will analyze the potential relocation by examining: the nature and role of AFRICOM; Morocco's strategy to position itself as a regional power; the trajectory of U.S.-Moroccan military relations; the geopolitical competition between the United States and China; and the complexities of Morocco's normalization with Israel.

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1 Abraham Accords 2.0: Will Donald Trump's 'golden age' reshape US ties with the Maghreb?, THE NEW ARAB, 23 January, 2025, available at: <https://2u.pw/qbK1q>

2 أنباء عن إمكانية نقل مقر قيادة أفريكوم من ألمانيا إلى المغرب، الدفاع العربي، متاح على: <https://linkshortcut.com/BleKW>

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3 Le siège d'AFRICOM: Le Maroc bientôt capitale militaire américaine en Afrique?, La Relève, 14 June 2025, available at: <https://lareleve.ma/156753/>

# 1. Understanding AFRICOM : Origins, Mission, and Geopolitical Interests

The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) is one of the Pentagon's primary unified combatant commands, responsible for military relations and operations in 53 African nations. Its establishment in 2007 was a direct consequence of the September 11 attacks, which reshaped U.S. national security doctrine toward proactive and preventative strategies.

This command was established in the wake of the devastating social, economic, political, and psychological consequences of the September 11 attacks on American power, and their impact on redefining imminent threats and the nature of the response to them, which primarily revolves around adopting preventive and proactive strategies.

Officially, AFRICOM's mission is to help African nations respond to humanitarian crises, counter transnational terrorism, and strengthen regional stability. However, beyond these stated goals lie more pragmatic geopolitical calculations. A primary, though often unstated, objective is securing the continent's vast natural resources.

This was confirmed by Deputy Admiral Robert Moeller at an AFRICOM conference in 2008, where he identified "oil supply disruptions, terrorism, and China's growing influence" as major challenges to U.S. interests. He explicitly stated that protecting "the free flow of natural resources from Africa to the global market" was a fundamental guiding principle for the new command.

The strategic importance of African energy resources grew after the 2003 Iraq War destabilized Middle Eastern oil supplies. The Gulf of Guinea, with major producers like Nigeria and Angola, emerged as a crucial alternative. Consequently, the expanding interests of competitors like China and India in African oil became a key factor driving AFRICOM's formation.

In this context, Morocco's strategic importance becomes clear. It is viewed as a stable partner capable of helping Washington achieve both its stated and unstated goals in Africa: ensuring the security of energy supplies and Israel, confronting Islamic extremism, protecting economic interests, and preventing the rise of a regional power that could challenge Western influence.

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4 القيادة العسكرية الأمريكية لإفريقيا "الأفريكوم" ودورها في أمنة القارة السمراء، قراءات إفريقية، 30 أغسطس 2018، متاح على

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5 AFRICOM and the Burdens of Securitisation in Africa. Kiale Nyiayaana, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
,Doi:10.19044/esj.2022.v18n20p190 , 06 April 2022

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## 2. Morocco's Rise: A Strategic Partner and Regional Power

Morocco has actively positioned itself as a reliable regional power and indispensable strategic ally for Washington and its European partners. Through deep economic, political, and security engagement, particularly in West and Central Africa, Rabat aims to consolidate international support for its position on the Western Sahara and bolster its diplomatic standing amid regional tensions with Algeria.

Several factors enhance Morocco's value to the United States. The 2023 military coup in Niger and the subsequent loss of the U.S. airbase there—a critical hub for counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel—have elevated Morocco's importance. As a long-standing security partner, demonstrated by the annual "African Lion" military exercises, Morocco is seen as a dependable alternative.

Amid intensifying international competition, a

Trump administration could rely on Morocco to help curb Chinese and Russian influence on the continent. Morocco's geographic location and strong diplomatic ties across Africa enable it to play a pivotal role. Its "soft power" strategy, balancing relations with the U.S., EU, and Gulf countries, allows it to mobilize diverse resources to promote regional stability.

Furthermore, Morocco has proven its effectiveness in crisis diplomacy, mediating conflicts in Libya and Mali. These efforts align with a potential Trump doctrine of avoiding "endless wars," allowing the U.S. to claim diplomatic victories without direct intervention. Rabat's leadership in regional security coordination against terrorist groups further solidifies its position as an experienced and vital partner in the fight against extremism.

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7 Morocco looks forward to Donald Trump's return to the White House, 28 January 2025, available at: <https://linksshortcut.com/lckKi>

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8 Morocco Through Donald Trump's First 100 Days in the White House: Navigating the Trump Administration's Second Term, Global Governance & Sovereignty Foundation, available at: <https://linksshortcut.com/bEydN>

### 3. The Bedrock of the Alliance: Deepening U.S.-Moroccan Military Ties

Military cooperation forms the core of the U.S.-Moroccan strategic partnership. This is most visible in the annual "African Lion" maneuvers, the largest U.S. military exercise in Africa. This partnership has been reinforced by a series of high-profile arms sales approved since the first Trump administration. In March 2025, Morocco finalized a deal to purchase Stinger surface-to-air missiles, enhancing its air defense capabilities against regional threats. This follows acquisitions of F-16 fighters, Reaper drones, and Apache helicopters, which collectively bolster Morocco's role as a key security hub in North Africa. Under a potential second Trump administration, known for favoring arms sales as a diplomatic tool, Rabat could gain even wider access to the latest military technologies. This aligns with Morocco's ongoing efforts to modernize its

Royal Armed Forces and expand its strategic military capabilities.

The partnership is also forward-looking. In November 2023, King Mohammed VI announced an initiative to grant Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso) access to the Atlantic Ocean through large-scale infrastructure projects. This ambitious plan will require coordination with the United States, likely through frameworks like the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, launched in 2023. This creates new avenues for cooperation on shared challenges, such as combating drug trafficking and its links to terrorist financing in the Sahel and Russia's increasing influence through Wagner Group mercenaries.

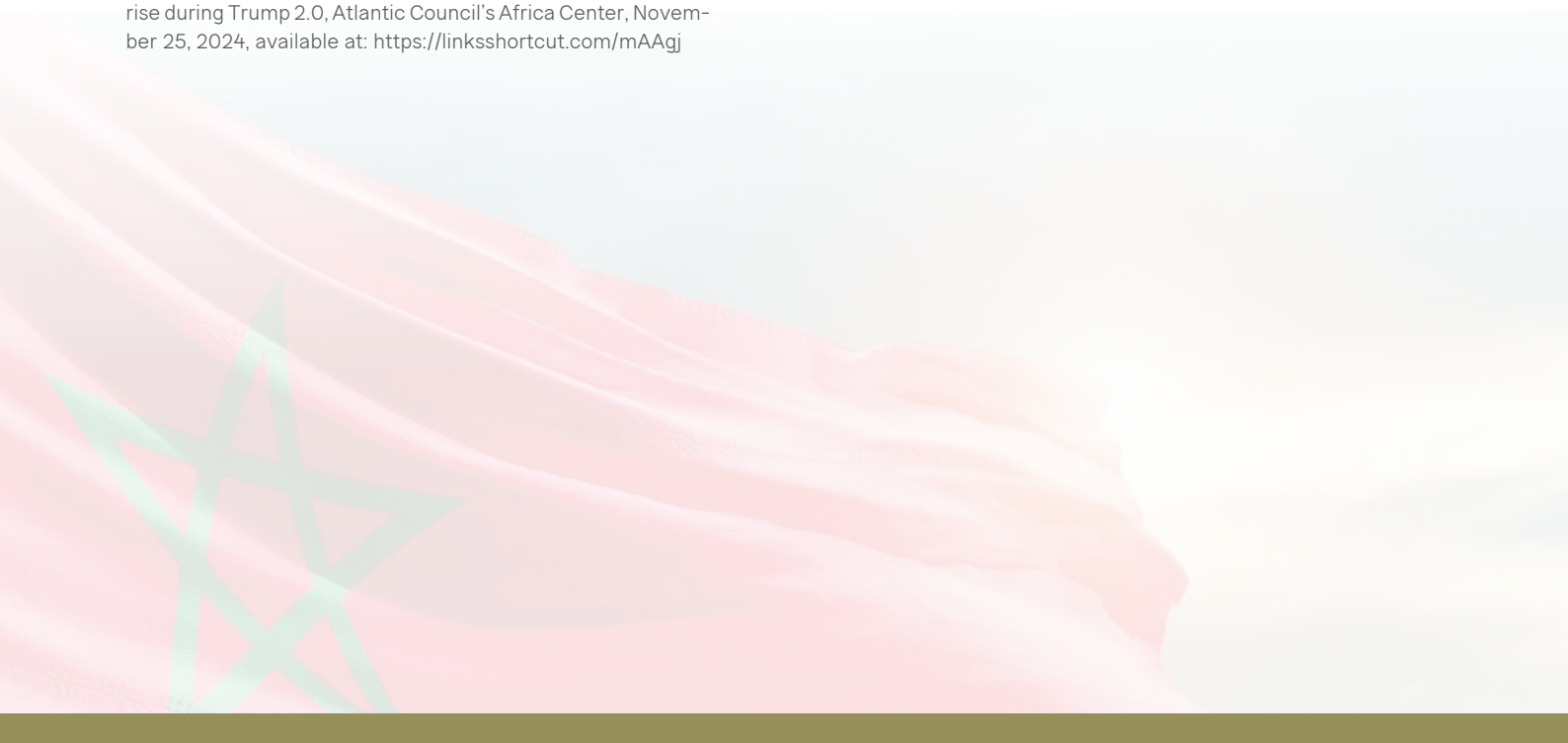
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10 Why Morocco could see its importance to Washington rise during Trump 2.0, Atlantic Council's Africa Center, November 25, 2024, available at: <https://linkshortcut.com/mAAgj>

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11 AFRICOM Commander Highlights Morocco's Key Role in Ensuring Security in Africa, I'am Arabic, 6 April, available at: <https://linkshortcut.com/ILwyT>







## 4. The Great Power Chessboard: AFRICOM and the U.S.-China Rivalry

The post-9/11 strategic landscape saw the U.S. increasingly view Africa through the lens of great power competition. The rise of China as a global force has made containing its influence a central, if not primary, mission for AFRICOM.

Washington perceives China's expanding economic dominance and growing military footprint in Africa as a direct challenge to its vital interests and the neoliberal world order.

A 2020 report from the commander of AFRICOM to the U.S. Congress highlighted the nature of these perceived threats:

- China is transforming its first overseas military base in Djibouti into a power projection platform.
- Its investments in seaports across East and Southern Africa are not purely commercial but

geo-economic tools to increase geopolitical influence.

- China has 52 embassies in Africa—three more than the United States—and continues to invest heavily in infrastructure.

- Beijing is engaged in a "slow but steady trend towards the militarization and securitization of Africa" through military aid, cooperation with all 55 African Union member states, and significant troop contributions to UN peacekeeping missions.

This strategic struggle for influence, particularly over key locations like Djibouti, underscores why the U.S. National Security Strategy frames Africa as a continent that must be secured to counter strategic competitors like China and Russia."

## 5. The Abraham Accords Dilemma: Navigating Diplomacy and Domestic Pressure

On December 10, 2020, the U.S. brokered the normalization agreement between Morocco and Israel, which coincided with Washington's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. While the Abraham Accords did not impose costly concessions on Morocco's historical positions regarding the Palestinian issue, a potential Trump return may once again place the Kingdom before a dilemma: balancing its strategic partnership with the U.S. and Israel against its defense of the Palestinian cause.

It is likely that a Trump administration would pressure Morocco to take additional steps, such as upgrading its liaison office in Tel Aviv to a full embassy. While these measures would be part of

a U.S. strategy to strengthen the Arab-Israeli alliance against Iran, Rabat could leverage this pressure to gain additional American support on other regional issues.

Morocco's handling of the Israel-Hamas war illustrates this delicate balancing act. Following the October 7, 2023 attacks, massive demonstrations erupted in Morocco in support of Palestinians. The government sent aid to Gaza and affirmed Palestinian rights at the United Nations, yet it did not sever diplomatic ties with Israel. This pragmatic approach demonstrates Morocco's ability to navigate complex international and domestic pressures.

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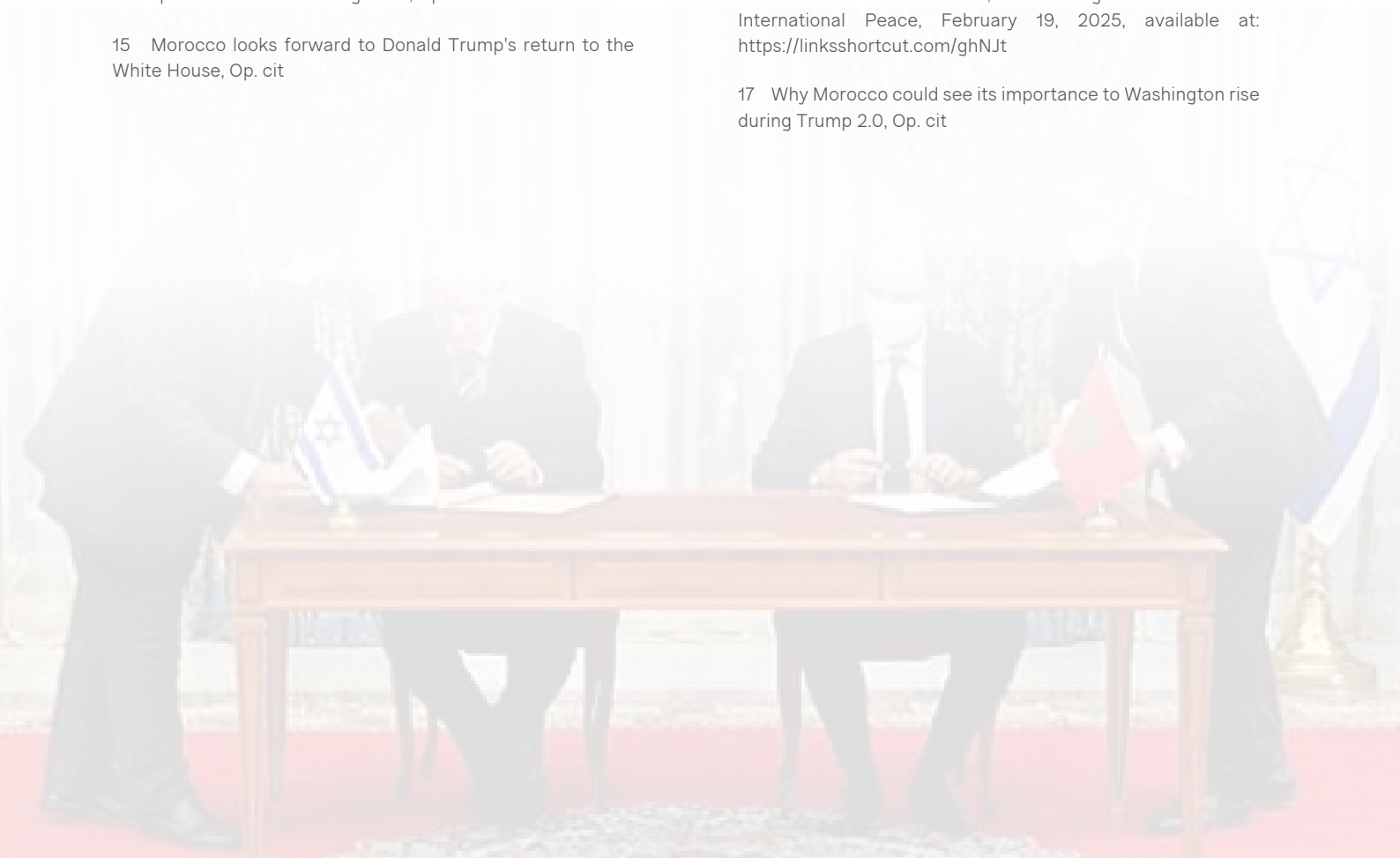
14 Abraham Accords 2.0: Will Donald Trump's 'golden age' reshape US ties with the Maghreb?, Op. cit

15 Morocco looks forward to Donald Trump's return to the White House, Op. cit

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16 Trump's Lesser-Known Deal of the Century? Resolving the Western Sahara Conflict, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 19, 2025, available at: <https://linkshortcut.com/ghNJt>

17 Why Morocco could see its importance to Washington rise during Trump 2.0, Op. cit



## 6. A Continent's Hesitation : Why Africa Resists Hosting AFRICOM

The proposal to move AFRICOM headquarters to Africa is not new, and it has consistently faced resistance from African nations. In 2007, Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua rejected the idea, stating that African nations had their own plans for regional military commands. Although his successor, Muhammadu Buhari, called for the move in 2021 to bring the command closer to active threats, the proposal was once again rejected by most African countries.

The fact that no African country has accepted the offer to host AFRICOM reveals a deep-seated sensitivity to the issue. Concerns over the erosion of national sovereignty, the security risks of hosting a major foreign military presence, and historical factors related to colonialism combine to create powerful opposition. Regardless of the incentives offered by the U.S., any African leader would face significant domestic and continental pressure to refuse.

## 7. Future Scenarios: Will AFRICOM Relocate to Morocco?

Despite official statements from the Pentagon downplaying the urgency, the location of AFRICOM's headquarters remains a critical issue for U.S. strategic planners. Its current base in Germany is seen as a barrier to the complete success of American penetration and influence on the continent. Two primary scenarios exist regarding a potential move to Morocco.

### Scenario 1: Morocco Declines to Host Foreign Bases.

Morocco's foreign policy is built on the principle of achieving stability through development and "soft power." The Kingdom has cultivated its position as a "pole of peace and security" through investment and economic cooperation, such as its Sahel initiatives. Hosting a base for offensive operations could undermine this diplomatic

ability and be perceived as a violation of its sovereignty, making refusal a likely outcome.

### Scenario 2: The AFRICOM Relocation is Confirmed.

If the transfer is confirmed, it would cement the Trump administration's commitment to Rabat. This would likely involve projects aimed at restoring Morocco's leadership role in the Sahel—a region where it has lost ground militarily to Russia and economically to China. However, such a move would require significant investment in military infrastructure and complex logistical support to transfer operations from Stuttgart. The Africa that awaits a potential second Trump administration is profoundly different from the one he left, shaped by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, a series of coups, and the rise of BRICS. On each of these issues, Morocco offers an influential voice in Washington.

18 AFRICOM and the Burdens of Securitisation in Africa, Op. cit

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<https://democraticac.de/?p=89156>

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21 Why Morocco could see its importance to Washington rise during Trump 2.0, Op. cit





## Conclusion

**M**orocco presents itself as a stable, strategic partner with the infrastructure and political will to deepen its military partnership with the United States. However, the prospect of relocating AFRICOM headquarters remains speculative and faces significant internal and continental resistance. Nevertheless, evolving regional dynamics and Washington's shifting priorities under a potential Trump return could reinvigorate the debate—placing Morocco at the heart of future U.S. defense strategy in Africa.