



# Nigeria and the United States' Security Strategies in West Africa and Their Impact on Iran

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## Abstract

The United States actively engages in various regional orders, here with a particular focus on West Africa. Its approach involves organizing and leveraging relations with regional powers to influence and regulate the regional order. West Africa has gained significance in the international order, attracting the attention of the United States. Nigeria, as a key player in the region, plays a substantial role in Africa and West Africa, establishing a strategic alliance with the United States over several decades. This article explores Nigeria's role in the U.S. security strategy within the West African region. Notably, this topic has received limited attention in international relations literature, particularly within U.S.-Nigeria relations. Scholars have not reached a consensus on the impact and implications of Nigeria's role in U.S. security strategy, specifically in addressing regional insecurities. The central argument posited is that to safeguard its geo-strategic, geo-political, and geo-economic interests, as well as manage strategic rivalries in the region, the United States strategically engages with Nigeria. Nigeria serves as a crucial partner for the U.S. in containing the expansion of other powers in the region. The intersection of two key factors in Nigerian geopolitics—its SEA geopolitics in the Atlantic and its geo-economic significance due to oil production and other strategic resources—establishes Nigeria as a crucial player in the American regional security strategy. In essence, the article contends that Nigeria's unique geopolitical and geoeconomic attributes contribute to its special position in the U.S. regional security strategy, allowing the United States to maintain influence and counterbalance the activities of other powers in West Africa.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, US, Security strategy, West Africa, Regional order.



## Introduction

The ruling of the hegemonic power on a global scale necessitates the regionalization of the international system, involving the tracing or organization of regional orders and governing the world through regional controls. Regional control is impossible without paying attention to prominent actors in regional factors. In this regard, one of the reasons that has contributed to the international system becoming regionalized lies in the politics of major powers. These politics have two pivotal foundations known as preparatory resources and reproductive power, which can be conceptualized. From this perspective, every part of the intentional system could be distinguished in one or both of the aforementioned pivots. Often, these two instances overlap in the politics of major powers. In this context, West Africa should be recognized as one of the regional orders in the aforementioned two pivots for many reasons. It plays a prominent role in shaping the management of the international order. The United States is one of the world powers, and its second leadership phase as a hegemonic power began objectively after the Second World War. In this manner, the US was labeled a superpower, like other hegemonic powers, and when power is concentrated, it inevitably dominates international regimes. The US is also considered the greatest and the only superpower that influences international institutions such as the UN and regional politics to achieve its national interests through geopolitical, geoeconomic, geocultural, and security means. Similar to the United States of America, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a population exceeding 200 million, the largest economy, and a leading oil producer. It plays a significant political and economic role in Africa and wields substantial influence in regional bodies such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)<sup>1</sup> (Blanchard and Husted, 2013).

Therefore, the intrusive power employs various methods to network its international order, including regional orders. The most prominent and primary method involves joining the international control system with the control system in regional orders, where the major regional power plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining control. West Africa hosts sixteen countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo. The total area of the 21

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1. Economic Community of West African States

political units in West Africa is approximately 6,200,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with 20% of it comprising the African continent. Most of the West African states have small populations. From this perspective, Nigeria is the most populous country in the whole of Africa and ranks as the tenth most populous state globally. This common regionalism is experienced in the form of ECOWAS.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. government's understanding of the importance of oil, particularly the increasing discoveries in most West African countries, marked the beginning of a shift in its policy toward West Africa. In the year 2001, the United States of America imported 16% of its oil from the regional states of the Southern Sahara of Africa. This volume of West African oil flowing to the U.S. exceeded the imports from Saudi Arabia. Over the last decade, West Africa, often referred to as "an American diplomatic adopted son," has become a centerpiece in the energy studies of the United States of America. Merchants and some political analysts have identified West Africa as an important strategic area that the United States must place significant emphasis on. Nigeria, the sixth-largest crude oil producer globally, is the main supplier of oil to the United States of America and Western Europe. The country possesses abundant crude oil resources of more than 3 billion barrels. Nigeria's access to the high seas from its southern regions, as one of the coastal regions in the Gulf of Guinea, and the location of a significant portion of its oil resources in this region, has granted it a geopolitical position.

Nigeria is considered a potentially rich country due to its vast deposits of resources and abundant natural minerals, including oil, natural gas, charcoal, gold, ironstone, limestone, lead, zinc, tin, cobalt, and fertile soil. Since gaining independence, Nigeria's economy has been heavily reliant on oil, contributing approximately two million barrels per day to the total world output, accounting for nearly 3% of the world's oil reserves. The high-quality and low-sulfur characteristics of Nigerian crude oil make it a preferred choice in the production of diesel, jet fuel, and gasoline, with a high level of efficiency. About 90% of Nigeria's export earnings and government revenues come from crude oil sales. In addition to oil, the production of agricultural products plays a significant role in Nigeria's economic structure. The country is reputedly one of the largest producers of groundnut, coconut oil, and cocoa. The tourism industry also contributes to the government's income. Nigeria boasts a well-developed system of legal, financial, transportation, communication, and stock exchange securities. The country's stock

exchange is the second largest in Africa. As of 2017, Nigeria's gold deposits and foreign exchange were around \$47.6 billion, with a trade balance of \$40.81 billion from imports and \$35.24 billion from exports. The gross domestic production in 2017 amounted to \$394 billion, ranking Nigeria thirtieth in the world. The country's foreign debts in 2017 were estimated at \$35.23 billion, with \$3.4 billion declared as the total direct foreign investment attracted in that year. Two well-recognized international institutions, Standard and Poor's and Fitch Ratings, deemed the economic position of the country as stable. Nigeria's major imports include oil, oil-fabricated products, vegetables, ready-made foods, beverages, sesame, vinegar, cashew nuts, groundnuts, ginger, sour tea, tobacco, cassava, cocoa, rubber, etc.<sup>1</sup>

The three outstanding factors that highlight American dynamic power in the world order and regional orders are the West African sphere's integration into global geopolitical and geo-economic factors and Nigeria's position in West Africa. The strategic importance of West Africa in the African system, the influence on regional order in geopolitical and geo-economic areas, and Nigeria's role as the largest West African country with significant geopolitical and geoeconomic positions have collectively drawn major powers, including the U.S., to this region. Ewoh (2008) supports this perspective, stating that in the twenty-first century, U.S. policy toward West Africa is primarily driven by "geopolitical and geoeconomic interests, principally interests of oil and other natural resources." Additionally, security has become a focal point of U.S. policy in the region, making it a topic of great prominence in future international power dynamics.

Numerous writings exist on the West African order, with some focusing on ECOWAS' role in West Africa's security (Iwilade and Agbo, 2012; Tejpar and de Albuquerque, 2015; Opanike & et al., 2015). Others delve into internal security dynamics in West Africa (Söderbaum, 2000; Charbonneau, 2017), while some emphasize Nigerian foreign policy and security challenges in West Africa (Adetula, 2015; Obi, 2006, 2008; Yoroms, 2010). Certain studies examine Nigeria's capability to manage the West African order (Ogunnubi and Uzodike Okeke, 2016). Additional literature explores American and African security (Buss, 2011; Francis, 2010; Friend and Fanger, 2018; Kalu and Kieh Jr., 2014; Piombo, 2015; Ploch, 2010).

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1. <https://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/2328671>

While numerous literatures have explored the broader topic of America and Africa, a less addressed aspect is the role of West Africa, particularly the contribution of major countries like Nigeria, in the United States of America's security strategy. The United States has employed various strategies to pursue its interests in the region. Firstly, the containment strategy recognizes that the presence and rivalry of major powers in regions like West Africa pose challenges for the U.S., especially with serious competition and rivalry involving the U.S., China, and Russia. The containment strategy aims to manage and control these powers to secure U.S. national interests. Secondly, the creation of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 is another strategy to advance national interests in the region. AFRICOM was established to facilitate aid, trade, U.S. investment in West African oil, and military aid to address insecurity in Africa, particularly in West Africa. Thirdly, the Gulf of Guinea has become a strategic focus to secure U.S. energy interests. The U.S. aims to enhance its strategic presence in the region, including deploying troops to the Gulf of Guinea, as securing access to West African oil becomes increasingly vital. The power dynamics in the international system, coupled with strategic competitions involving major powers like China and Russia, underscore the importance of West Africa and Nigeria as a gateway for such order. The essence of Nigeria's position in the United States of America's security strategies in West Africa becomes crucial, necessitating attention to key concepts such as regionalism in complex situations and the formulation of appropriate strategies. In complex international systems, external control is deemed impossible or highly problematic, with the likelihood of failure. Therefore, major powers, including the U.S., must prioritize strategic cohesiveness in the form of a networking system as the central element in managing regional orders, such as those in West Africa.

## **1. Theoretical and Analytical Framework**

The topic of major powers and world order is situated at the core of the theorization in international relations, particularly within the framework of realism. Regional orders are integral components of the analytical mechanisms that shape the international system. Various international relations theories focus on power cycles, leadership, and factors within the international system, including its stratification, organization, communication mechanisms, and control systems, which have undergone extensive analysis. The

combination of these elements can serve as a valuable tool for presenting analytical mechanisms for understanding regional orders and control through the lens of dynamic power and major powers. From the perspective of international compound and complex systems, examining dynamic power and its major powers becomes instrumental in elucidating the research's analytical mechanisms. Complex-Chaotic System theory characterizes the pattern of international relations as a complex, adaptive, and evolutionary system. It is an interconnected, constantly self-organizing system with the capacity to adapt to new situations. Such conceptualization holds significant implications for understanding the foreign policy of rising regional powers. Applying complexity theory to the study of these powers' foreign policy provides a new perspective on how they navigate an environment shaped by systemic pressures and transitions.

A complex system is defined as a network of agents operating far from equilibrium, interacting through both positive and negative feedback loops, which results in an interdependent, dynamic, and evolving structure. These systems display universal characteristics, sharing fundamental traits common to all complex systems. Complexity and chaos are often used to describe self-organizing systems that consist of multiple components, exhibit distinctive features, display varied structures across different scales, involve diverse processes occurring at different speeds, and possess the ability to adapt rapidly to changing external conditions. The inadequacy of traditional theories has led to a call for a reevaluation of analytical approaches based on complexity and chaos theory. Understanding the interplay between complexity, chaos, and the survival of states is crucial for devising regional foreign policies (Ghasemi, 2011). The chaotic and complex nature of international attributes, characterized by non-linear, bifurcating order, functioning at the complex edge and distance from equilibrium, and self-organizing control, defines the strategies of major powers in regional orders (Ghasemi, 2022). External control in regional networking often proves inefficient, leading major powers to focus on controlling internal rates within the regional system and its order. This perspective underscores the importance of strategic cohesiveness in defining regional strategies for major powers. The internal atmosphere of regional orders holds a prominent status, and control strategies should concentrate on the rates of regional orders and their adulteration. Hence, control strategies must focus on both the elements and processes within regional orders. An essential

point regarding regionalism and major powers is related to integration and its strategies. The extent of integration in regional orders varies, with some orders marked by fragmentation and internal contradictions, hindering networking integrations. In well-organized regional orders, integrations tend to follow an institutional pattern.

In summary, the strategies of major powers in regional orders are shaped by several key factors:

- 1- The international system is characterized by being reticulated or networked. As a result of obtaining value from points and clusters in the network and its functions, a decrease in the efficiency of any point within the network will lead to an inefficient network. This aspect enhances the value of regions in the international system.
- 2- The pattern of bifurcating orders within a diffuse and complex international system positions regions as key centers for transmitting pressure and, likewise, for the reproduction of resources and power. In this context, major powers are driven to control and manage regional order.
- 3- To shift from centrality to polarity within international complex systems, major powers are compelled to regionalize networked communication and establish regional centralization.
- 4- In a complex situation, power dynamics are nonlinear, increasing major powers' sensitivity toward regions and their localities. Failure in regional orders will entail a cascading aftermath.
- 5- Geopolitical and geoeconomic areas exhibit complexity.
- 6- The power dynamic will function like networking, and its consequences will impose network rules on the strategies of major powers.
- 7- Control should operate in a self-organized manner, increasing the strategic cohesiveness of major powers in regional orders. In other words, by modifying internal variables, major powers can change their regional order (Ghasemi, 2008, 2013, 2022).
- 8- The significance of understanding the nodes in the international network lies in their sensitive relationships, heightening the importance of central countries in regional orders. Consequently, major powers in regional orders will adjust aspects of their strategies based on these countries.

## 2. West Africa and Regional Dynamics

West Africa is part of regional orders, a subject generally discussed

in international relations literature but often specifically neglected. This region can be considered part of the cultural regional order of the Islamic world, yet it has not received proper attention in international relations literature. West Africa can be likened to the West Asian region, where geopolitical points like the Gulf of Guinea, geo-economic factors such as oil and gas, and geocultural elements like Islam are considered significant apparatuses. The spatial dimension of West Africa is the most complicated in Africa, mainly due to the indefinite geographical location of the region. For convenience, the sub-region of West Africa is situated in the middle of Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahara Desert in North Africa. This definition aligns with the unanimous understanding of West Africa by scholars and the UN (Alli, 2012). The region constitutes one-fifth of the African continent territorially and hosts sixteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo. All West African countries, except Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger (since 01/28/2024), are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The management of regional order is handled by West African countries, intrusive powers, and non-state actors. Prominent among these actors are Nigeria, France, Britain, the U.S., and lately, China. Nonstate actors include ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN). There exists an alliance between these external powers and regional member states and institutions like ECOWAS in West Africa. Although the idea behind establishing ECOWAS serves to underpin the reality of forming regional cooperation to address challenges with a common agenda, the lack of cooperation between francophone and anglophone countries contributed to prolonged insecurity, terrorism, and crisis in the region. ECOWAS regional policies also differ in the political, economic, and security sectors, shaping how and why regional actors securitize (Akinwande, 2014). In the past, external strategic interests focused on controlling naval bases along sea routes to India via the Cape of Good Hope, protecting trade routes into central Africa, and extending territorial influence. Today, the United States seeks control over land, sea, space, and information in its global fight against terrorism (Pabst, 2007). The significance of the West African region for major powers is based on its geopolitical and geo-economic importance. West Africa hosts some of the largest deposits of natural resources in Africa and the world at large. Alden and Alves (2008) argue that

great powers, such as the United States, exemplify a narrow approach to resource diplomacy, seeking access to energy and strategic minerals with minimal investments in development assistance. Ewoh (2008) concurs, stating that U.S. policy toward West Africa in the twenty-first century is primarily driven by geopolitical and economic interests, particularly those related to oil and other natural resources. Consequently, the West African regional order is shaped and influenced by a variety of regional and external interests. This reliance on outside powers is reflected through multiple channels, including economic, political, and security mechanisms.

The parameters shaping the physical structure of the West African regional system involve both state and non-state actors. According to George and Bennett (2005), "States and non-state actors represent the real players in the West African region. These players have an extensive impact on the region and depend on the regional hegemon Nigeria and external actors, particularly the former colonial powers, the US, and the UN," which also includes ECOWAS.

From a SEA geopolitical perspective, West Africa is part of a SEA belt situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean, between the Southern and Northern Atlantic.

Ocean. It plays a crucial role in providing SEA access to Africa. Additionally, it is considered one of the most populous regions in Africa and holds a strategic position with the most valuable marine route. These characteristics, coupled with its importance and geo-economic prominence, have positioned the region as a strategic area that major and regional powers are attentive to.

In general, it is crucial to focus on the following key aspects of the West African region:

- 1- In the context of internal factors, the West African region has undergone a significant partition and continues to do so. This division is characterized by widespread and similar crises. The structures of various indigenous nations, amalgamated by former colonial masters, along with colonialism and external interventions, have transformed the region into a disconnected entity. The sociological characteristics specific to the region, coupled with the impact of external colonialism, contribute to the creation of a disconnected order in this area.
- 2- The prominent role of internal conflicts within the states stands out as one of the fundamental security problems in the West African region.

- 3- From the perspective of geopolitical factors, the mentioned region boasts a fundamental SEA foundation. Considering the strategic importance of seas in the strategies of major powers, this region has become crucial in the security strategies of these major powers.
- 4- From the standpoint of geoeconomic factors, the aforementioned region exhibits a characteristic of abundant resources, particularly those essential to the industrial world. This characteristic has historically been a driving force for the colonization of the region.
- 5- From a cultural perspective, it is considered part of the Islamic world.
- 6- In times of power transition, the region, due to geopolitical factors, is at the center of security strategies for major and regional powers.
- 7- West Africa is considered part of the regional super network of Africa, which is an extensive and immeasurable network.
- 8- In a situation of delicate relationships, the West African region is engaging unilaterally with external major powers.

Before European colonization and the balkanization of Africa, various African tribes thrived in well-organized empires. Some of the most renowned were the Oyo, Mali, Old Ghana, and Songhai empires. These empires comprised different kingdoms that existed within their territories. Notably, an early Dutch merchant, upon visiting the Benin Kingdom in Nigeria during the Middle Ages, was so impressed by its orderliness that he compared it favorably with the Amsterdam of his time. This sentiment was echoed by other Arabic and French writers who attested to the remarkable organization of these African societies (Deji, 2013). The Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa ethnic groups in Nigeria, in particular, were recognized for their ability to form orderly social, cultural, and political structures. Much of present-day Nigeria was divided into states, and these divisions can still be traced to the modern ethnic groups that have roots in the origins of these states. Among the early states were the Yoruba kingdoms, the Edo Kingdom of Benin, the Hausa cities, and Nupe.

The present Nigeria is located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon. It has an area of 923,768 km<sup>2</sup>, including about 13,000 km<sup>2</sup> of water. About Nigeria's land boundaries, Nigeria shares borders with Cameroon in the east, Chad in the northeast, Niger in the north, and Benin in the west, and it has sea boundaries with the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria's approach to sub-

regional security has been significantly shaped by the national role envisioned for it in international relations by its leaders. This role conception has become the defining paradigm for foreign policy engagement. According to this paradigm, Nigeria sees itself as the natural leader of Africa, with a manifest destiny and a responsibility to promote and protect the interests of Africa and Black people worldwide. The belief is that the country's security is interconnected with that of other African states due to cultural and historical experiences, as well as transnational security issues arising from the impact of events in neighboring countries. Alli (2012) argues that Nigeria must consider this sub-region as a natural base from which to project its national interests and regional influence. This perspective has elevated Nigeria to the forefront of African affairs in general and West African security matters in particular. The concept of *Pax Nigeriana*, the ambition to lead Africa, was first proposed in 1970 by Akinyemi, a realist scholar, and is most prominently manifested in West Africa (Alli, 2012). In extensive international relations literature, Nigeria is sometimes viewed as a regional hegemon in West Africa (Ojakorotu and Adeleke, 2018). However, some scholars identify domestic problems as a major obstacle to its regional hegemony. Ojakorotu and Adeleke (2018) suggest that Nigeria's weak performance as a potential regional hegemon persists due to internal problems that have persisted since its independence. The country's struggle to establish hegemonic power in the region is hampered by internal instability, weak institutions, and an overreliance on a single economic product—crude oil, subject to the volatile influence of the international oil market. Nigeria's infrastructure is in poor condition, corruption remains an indigenous problem, and functional inequities and tribal fanaticism threaten development (Ojakorotu and Adeleke, 2018). Nigeria's economy must be integrated into a continuous growth and development trajectory to achieve its aspirations of becoming a regional hegemon (Ojakorotu and Adeleke, 2018; Souaré, 2005), a goal that remains ambiguously defined in discussions of Nigerian hegemony in West Africa.

Therefore, Nigeria, as an active participant, alongside external factors such as the US and institutions like ECOWAS, is primarily responsible for maintaining order in West Africa. Several factors contribute to Nigeria's role in maintaining order in the region. Nigeria's status as a regional leader is grounded in the material gap—encompassing economic, demographic, cultural, and military aspects—between the country and the majority of other African

states. This is especially pronounced within West Africa, where Nigeria stands out as the most powerful state based on these indicators. Furthermore, this gap conceals the material fragilities of Nigeria. Its power in Africa not only stems from material sources but also from political influence gained through actions at the sub-regional and regional levels. While a state is typically eligible for polar status if it excels in all components of power—economic, military, populace, and territorial—Nigeria stands out as the West African hegemon that comprehensively meets these prerequisites. No other state in West Africa matches the completeness of Nigeria's might in all major components of power, encompassing both hard and soft power. The global preeminence of Nigeria has been largely maintained over the years through its economic and military capabilities, with no regional country ranking higher than Nigeria in terms of a display of hard power. For instance, within the West African sub-region, Nigeria has played an enviable role in resolving conflicts through intervention and contributing military, humanitarian, diplomatic, financial, and material resources in war zones such as Chad, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and the Central African Republic. Its involvement in these sub-regional conflicts has contributed to shaping its international reputation as a benevolent regional power, gaining respectable international acceptance among its contemporaries (Ogunnubi and Isike, 2018). In a period where Nigeria faces numerous internal contradictions that weaken its leadership role in Africa, especially in the West.

According to the National Power Index (index weighting factors of GDP, defense spending, population, and technology), Nigeria is the first state in Africa in percentage of the total global power share. As of 2012, it was 0.83%, followed by Egypt (0.61%), then South Africa (0.55%), and Algeria (0.38%). The forecast until 1960 indicates that Nigeria would keep the first place.

Africa, the traditional approach of Nigerian foreign policy, typically relies on its economic, military, and political powers to assert its leadership and hegemonic role in the region. However, Elizabeth L. notes, "Nigeria's ability to play a leadership role in Africa declined under the weight of its economic and political problems" (Normandy, 1997). Nigeria has, to some extent, remained primarily a market for major powers, especially the US and China, to purchase its crude oil and sell its manufactured goods. Events at international and regional levels are not traditional and linear but complex and non-linear. Therefore, a country like

Nigeria, with all these enormous potentials, needs to revise its views and policies toward global and regional occurrences. In essence, Nigeria wields the financial power to assert influence on an international scale. This substantial economic prowess gives Nigeria the wherewithal not only to intervene in regional conflicts to maintain political stability and foster development but also to support a dynamic foreign policy that has ultimately contributed immensely to the growth and development of the continent (Ogunnubi and OkekeUzodike, 2016). Nigeria has been able to play a leading role on behalf of Africa in multilateral institutional arrangements such as the UN, the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now the AU), and ECOWAS. However, Nigeria has often resorted to providing pragmatic leadership. Despite being the brain behind the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the largest contributor to the ECOWAS fund, as well as the largest economy in the sub-region (Madeira, 2015). Presently, the most pressing security challenge, according to Nigerian officials and as presented in official documents, is terrorism and the calls for self-determination of Biafrans and the Yoruba nation. They refer to the national dimension of terrorism, citing the activities of the Islamist sect Boko Haram and ISWAP in the northern part of the country. The local-transnational dimension is especially evident here. Whereas Boko Haram is best understood in the local and historical context of (Northern) Nigeria, there is also evidence of close connections with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operating in the Sahel, and ISWAP also has a direct link to ISIS in Iraq and Syria, internationally recognized terrorist groups. Nigerian officials, in particular, emphasize this transnational dimension to underscore the relevance of regional cooperation and the integration of security apparatuses, particularly in West Africa. However, Nigeria's characteristics in West Africa position it as one of the fundamental joining points between the West African regional order and the world order, transformed with the leadership of major powers. Regional orders relate world order to various forms. One of the most distinguished relationships related to events and power dynamics is the routine relationship between the sources of the production of power necessitating in the region and world. From here, the relationship between the US and major powers with the regional power Nigeria will emerge. Nigeria should be known as a point of connecting world power dynamics and regional power dynamics. In other ways, the sea serves as another connector from the international and regional orders; in this

direction, the Gulf of Guinea and Nigeria enjoy a prominent position as direct powers of it. The third relationship is a kind of geoconomics that, in this region, considers Nigeria as the most significant economic power and exhibitor of resources such as oil and gas to the international system. This subject of feedback relationships and events will cause a connection between Nigeria and world power dynamics.

Generally, it is principally important to pay attention to the following keys about Nigeria and its role in West Africa:

- 1- The power dynamics of Nigeria in West Africa are notably outstanding, and the country holds a significant influence over the regional order.
- 2- Nigeria's internal power dynamics are interconnected with institutional power dynamics.
- 3- Nigeria's power dynamic is related to the control dynamics of regional order.
- 4- Nigeria's internal power dynamic is outstandingly connected to the world economic power dynamic due to its capability to exhibit economic resources such as oil and other raw materials.
- 5- Nigeria's domestic power dynamics are related to marine geopolitical power dynamics, and this relationship is significant for world powers like the US.
- 6- Nigeria plays a crucial role in shaping and strengthening the SEA belt in the international geopolitical sphere. This role is vital in connecting the Oman Sea-Indian Ocean with West Asia.
- 7- Nigeria's power dynamic has a fundamental relationship with geo-cultural power dynamics. This role is particularly noteworthy in connecting West Africa with the Islamic world network.

### **3. U.S. Strategy and Nigeria's Role**

The connection between external powers and regional orders in the context of power and the reproduction of power can be conceptualized by addressing the fundamental question major powers face: the production and reproduction of power to safeguard their position in the international hierarchy and maintain centrality in the network of international power. This involves the concentration of power and its fixation within these major powers. Three key relationships can be identified: geopolitics, geoconomics, and geo-culture. Geopolitics, an age-old term shaped by academic and popular usage, traces back to imperial concerns about the links between geography, state territoriality, and global power politics.

On the other hand, geoconomics, a relatively new term, is less commonly adopted in academic discourse but appears frequently in popular writings, where it encompasses ideas ranging from competitive economic positioning to the strategic view that economic competition has overtaken military confrontation in interstate relations. Geoconomics provides the logic behind resource extraction and use, with resources aimed at boosting global production and trade. This understanding of geopolitical and geo-economic concepts is supported by the position of the U.S. (Ewoh, 2008). policy toward West Africa, suggesting that the U.S. is driven by geopolitical and economic interests, especially those related to oil and other natural resources in the twenty-first century. Moreover, authors like Klare and Volman (2006) argue that the establishment of U.S. military bases in strategic African regions, including West Africa, aims to ensure access to natural resources and counter indigenous forces that might threaten the free flow of oil exports and other minerals. This political enhancement is seen by some as the beginning of a more extended U.S. military presence in Africa to indirectly ensure free access to strategic resources, monitor China's rise on the continent, and create a secure environment for oil companies (Da Cruz and Stephens, 2010). In the pursuit of safeguarding its geopolitical interests in the region, the U.S. established AFRICOM as a multipurpose organization. AFRICOM's security sector strategy aimed to protect U.S. national interests from potential threats on the African continent while contributing to the stability and security of the African people (Ploch, 2010). The goals were centered around waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security. The creation of AFRICOM in West Africa was deemed imperative to address regional instability caused by violent extremism from transnational terrorist organizations.

The relations between Africa and Europe, spanning from the colonial era to the post-independence wave, are often characterized as having no significant quantitative results for West Africa. Instead, these relations are described as a form of failed partnership. Dissatisfaction with Europe's inability to meet expectations has led Africa to seek development partnerships elsewhere, particularly with China. This shift is evident in the expanding partnership between Africa and China, exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has signed memoranda of understanding with several African countries for future development projects, and though specific agreements are often undisclosed, China's

investments, especially from the early 2000s, have seen rapid growth, largely attributed to the execution of the BRI. The West's persistent suspicion of China's motives in its engagement with Africa underscores the need for close monitoring (Dzekashu and Anyu, 2020).

In the case of the United States of America, there are several dimensions influencing the design and management of its regional order, particularly in alignment with the West African regional order. The first dimension is linked to SEA geopolitics and its role in the global power dynamic. The sea serves as a physical unifier across different geographical levels and plays a crucial role in shaping the world order. West Africa holds a strategic position as the connecting link between three vital SEA regions: the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic. This SEA unification provides a favorable operational ground for major powers like the United States of America. The second dimension revolves around the importance of West Africa in enabling economic dynamics. This involves the feasible exhibition of economic and mineral resources such as oil and gas, among other sources. Over time, the relationship between the United States of America and West Africa is anticipated to become more sensitive, influenced by power transitions and strategic competitions with major powers like China. The combination of factors shaping the relationship and integration between the United States of America and West Africa has transformed into a strategic focus in American regional policy, and it is expected to intensify in the future.

The historical relationship between the United States and Nigeria has experienced fluctuations, alternating between periods of close or special relations and times of indifference, neglect, and even hostility. Noteworthy developments in this relationship include a cordial period from the 1960s to the 1920s. The initiation of diplomatic ties between the US and Nigeria occurred on a positive note, especially after Nigeria gained sovereign status from Britain in 1960. The Kennedy Administration, in recognition of Nigeria's newly independent status, offered a substantial long-term development aid of \$25 million (Sanderson, 2012). However, the end of the Cold War marked a significant shift in the dynamics of Nigeria-U.S. relations. The evolving nature of the relationship has been influenced by factors such as the push for democratization in Nigeria, trade, combating the sale of illegal drugs, and participating in peacekeeping efforts within Africa. In the realm of peacekeeping, the United States has become increasingly hesitant to deploy its

military forces in Africa, particularly following the challenges faced in Somalia. This reluctance has created opportunities for Nigerian peacekeeping forces to take on roles in resolving conflicts within the West African subregion, as exemplified by their involvement in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Additionally, there seems to be a current policy of self-restraint by Nigeria, evident in its approach to the crisis in Niger. Garuba et al. (2022) have categorized the relations between these two countries into distinct periods, reflecting the evolving nature of this diplomatic relationship.

- 1- In the inception of the relationship from 1960 to 1967, the U.S. promptly recognized Nigeria as an independent state. During this period, U.S. foreign relations with Nigeria and the world were primarily influenced by the foreign policy of containment, aiming to curb the spread of communism.
- 2- The period of 1966-1975 coincided with the crisis and Biafra civil war era. The U.S. chose not to intervene, declaring it a British affair.
- 3- From 1975 to 1979, during Obasanjo's leadership, the practical interactions with the U.S. reflected an apologetic stance. Obasanjo praised the United States of America's multinational corporations for their contributions to Nigeria's technological and industrial development, assuring them of protection.
- 4- The period of 1979-1983 saw the U.S. and Nigeria enter a contract for the Nigerian Nitrogenous fertilizer complex in 1981. Additionally, joint equity participation and management agreements were signed for the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria, with the U.S. granting \$247 million export credit to Nigeria. At the regional level, the U.S. collaborated with Nigeria on policy coordination regarding the Chadian conflict and managing Gaddafi's influence on the African continent.
- 5- From 1984 to 1993, the nature of military rule in Nigeria and governance problems led to a negative image internationally. The U.S. imposed several sanctions on Nigeria during this period.
- 6- The period of 1993-1998 witnessed strained relations between Nigeria and the U.S., marked by the U.S. government withholding support and temporarily pulling out from diplomatic relations. Abacha's association with Ghaddafi further fueled tensions, and the U.S. openly condemned the actions of the Abacha government, imposing sanctions and restrictions.
- 7- From 1998 to 1999, there was an improvement in bilateral relations, marked by the removal of sanctions and travel

restrictions on some Nigerian public officials. Discussions on future assistance to Nigeria contributed to strengthening relations.

8- The period from 1999 to 2020 saw the establishment of the U.S. Bi-National Commission (BNC) in 2000, which became effective in 2010, further solidifying the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and the U.S..

A significant point regarding Nigeria-U.S. relations is the resilience of economic ties even during periods of strained political and diplomatic relations. Shepard noted that economic relations between the two countries continued to flourish even when political relations were acrimonious, as observed during the conflict over the independence of Angola in 1975. The imposition of sanctions by the United States during the June 12, 1993, presidential elections did not extend to critical aspects of

the economy, such as trade in crude oil. Both countries have been cautious in implementing policies that could jeopardize their economic self-interests despite diplomatic and political disagreements (Faseke, 2021; Ahmed, 2020; Garba et al., 2022).

The strategic importance of Nigeria in the eyes of the United States is a major factor influencing its security strategy in the region. Nigeria's large population, territorial size, and abundant human and material resources make it essential for U.S. administrations to seek the support and cooperation of the Nigerian government on various regional and international issues. From the U.S. perspective, Nigeria's economic, political, and military power serves as an anchor of stability for the region. The fear of chaos or instability in Nigeria spreading through the West African region, particularly affecting Nigeria's neighbors, has been a dominant factor in Nigeria-U.S. relations since 1999. This concern has shaped their approach to the region and regionalism in West Africa.

The establishment of the Bi-National Commission in April 2010 further highlights the commitment of both sides to address surrounding issues at a high level. Economically, the United States is the largest foreign investor in Nigeria, with significant investments in the petroleum/mining and wholesale trade sectors. The two-way trade in goods between the United States and Nigeria exceeded \$10 billion in 2019, with the United States exporting wheat, vehicles, machinery, aircraft, and plastics to Nigeria, while Nigeria's exports to the United States included crude oil, cocoa, cashew nuts, and animal feed (Ogbodo, 2016).

Militarily, Nigeria is an important U.S. security partner in

Africa. Nigeria is engaged in intensive efforts to defeat terrorist organizations within its borders, including Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA). Nigeria is a vital member of the Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS) coalition, and in October 2020, Nigeria co-hosted a virtual D-ISIS conference with the United States (CIA World Fact Sheet, 2021).

Some scholars argue that Nigeria is merely a player in the American security strategy for the region, drawing on dependency and containment theories. These theories suggest that powerful states control weaker ones to serve their national interests. The policy of "containment" in international relations, particularly during the Cold War, involved the United States providing political, economic, and military support to strategically important and friendly less developed nations, marking a shift in emphasis toward the Third World, especially geographically strategic nations (Ogbodo, 2016).

From this perspective, the U.S. exerts a form of power control and dominance over its ally, Nigeria. This viewpoint suggests that Nigeria depends on the United States in various aspects, and the region is directly influenced by the asymmetrical power relations between the U.S. and Nigeria. From a geo-economic standpoint, Nigeria holds significant importance in U.S. security strategy in West Africa due to its abundant resources and large market. The oil resources in Nigeria are vital to American economic interests, and its population size and strategic location make it one of the most profitable markets and investment opportunities on the continent, particularly in West Africa (Idahosa, 2012; Boge, 2017; Wohar et al., 2020; Nwobodo, 2020). In this context, Nigeria has become a major economic hub for the United States. The abundant resources in Nigeria are crucial for the U.S. to execute its policies in West Africa, requiring significant resources. For example, in 2019, Nigeria was the second-largest U.S. export destination in sub-Saharan Africa, totaling \$3.2 billion (US Fact Sheet, 2021). This underscores the significant role Nigeria plays in U.S. security strategy in West Africa (Ola, 2018).

Apart from the economic roles that Nigeria plays in US security strategies, it also plays other roles, such as political roles that might earn it a permanent seat in the United Nations. This can come true through Nigeria's participation in US security strategies both at regional and international levels. Therefore, the leadership role of Nigeria makes it a strategic player in US security strategy in West Africa. In addition to that, Nigeria's leading role has paved the way

for the U.S. to easily achieve both its geo-economic and geopolitical interests and many others in West Africa.

In conclusion, one of the prominent topics in international politics is the volatility and change of power structures and, generally, power dynamics after the end of the Cold War. Rapid changes have occurred in the chain of present international degrees, resulting in a new phenomenon of systemic structures and the emergence of new powers. The disregard of emerging powers such as Russia, China, India, Brazil, or South Africa is inconceivable in the process of decision-making in today's international order..

Moreover, a group of smaller countries, while recognizing their limited ability to alter international rules, is eager to shift power dynamics and enhance their influence. The emerging international system follows a bifurcated networking order, which may ultimately lead to a withdrawal of both heterarchy and panarchy. In this model, competition is primarily driven by networks and the rules governing them, with the most notable competition occurring within the bifurcating structure. Within this framework, network centers will be positioned at the heart of competition among major powers. Nigeria, as one of the central network hubs in Africa, plays a pivotal role in the West African region. This study underscores Nigeria's crucial position in the United States' security strategy within the current international order.

#### **4. Iran, West Africa, Nigeria, and the United States: Strategic Geopolitical, Economic, and Cultural Dynamics**

Nigeria, as a key focus of U.S. security and economic strategies in today's complex and chaotic world order, plays a significant role in shaping Iran's regional policies. Unlike the past, the modern regional order is defined by a modular network, or panarchy-heterarchy. Currently, Iran's regional order is deeply influenced by the shifts in the global landscape. Strengthening existing clusters and forming new ones has become essential to Iran's foreign policy and will continue to grow in importance. West Asia holds three key strategic values for Iran: geopolitical significance through maritime routes, geoeconomic value in trade and economy, and geocultural influence in culture and religion. West Asia represents the extension of Iran's maritime geopolitics. The United States' presence and security strategies in West Africa and surrounding seas are crucial factors in this region. Iran's maritime geopolitical strategy begins in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, extending across several critical maritime routes. Without these routes forming coherent clusters,

Iran's maritime geopolitical system would be severely weakened, leaving it vulnerable to potential threats, particularly from the United States.

The Red Sea route is the first strategic maritime corridor in Iran's geopolitical framework, and it has been the site of intense conflicts. The United States seeks to exert control over this maritime domain; conversely, within Iran's deterrence strategy, the establishment of military bases in the Red Sea is deemed critical for developing an effective deterrence system. The second key region in Iran's maritime geopolitics encompasses the Oman Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, and the South China Sea. The third area involves the Oman Sea, the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, and East Timor, linking Iran to the Australian region. Additional maritime areas under Iran's geopolitical interest include Madagascar, South Africa, and the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria stands as a central power within this strategic sphere. The clustering of interests in this region connects Iran's maritime geopolitical network with both West Africa and Latin America, enhancing Iran's presence as a significant actor in the Atlantic Ocean. Focusing on West Africa has proven strategically vital for gaining access to a region that holds both geopolitical and economic significance. Africa represents a substantial market for Iranian exports, and Iran's presence in the region serves not only as a means of competing with traditional regional adversaries but also as a deterrent against strategic threats, particularly from the United States.

The aforementioned maritime routes connect Iran's strategic sea areas, which are under the control of the United States. A significant component of the strategic threats posed by the U.S. to Iran arises from the fourth route, where Nigeria serves as a focal point within Iran's regional network. The U.S. control over this area disrupts Iran's strategic links with two major branches of its regional network, namely West Africa and Latin America. This issue becomes increasingly pertinent in the context of conflicts that are networked, multimodal, or multivariable, rather than simple.

One of the key security strategies of the United States regarding Nigeria is its effort to control the global geopolitical order, as well as regional and global competitors, by dominating this area, which serves as a gateway to West Africa. This strategy includes controlling sea routes and preventing the formation of networks of global and regional challengers such as Iran. Nigeria holds three strategic values for Iran's regional network, namely geocultural, geoeconomic, and geopolitical significance, and functions as a critical connecting node between various clusters in West Africa

and Iran.

Moreover, Nigeria is a major actor in OPEC and the global oil industry, which positions it as an integral part of Iran's geoeconomic network. As the most populous country in Africa (Sule, M., & Abdullahi, M. M., 2019) and the third-largest Muslim-majority nation, Nigeria plays a pivotal role in Iran's geocultural sphere. With the expansion of Shiite Islam in Nigeria, the country has become one of the most prominent centers of culture in Africa.

In the past decade, Iran has consistently emphasized deterrence and maritime presence as the foundation of its deterrence system. Iran's strategy toward West Africa serves to further these deterrence objectives by preventing adversaries from altering the established order within its regional network. Within this context, Nigeria is one of the most significant layers in Iran's regional network at sea. In essence, the Iranian regional network operates within a multi-layered and adaptive framework, characterized by a "network of networks" model. These networks form the layers that constitute the entire regional network.

To maintain coherence, it is crucial to define the connections between pairs of node-layers. Each layer, while part of the larger network, serves two primary functions: first, it contributes to the overall responsibilities of the regional network, and second, it supports the underlying layers. West Africa represents one of the most prominent layers within Iran's regional network, fulfilling geopolitical, geoeconomic, geocultural, and maritime communication functions. Additionally, it serves as a gateway for managing maritime threats to Iran, particularly those posed by the United States. U.S. strategies in this region will influence both the structural integrity and the adaptive capabilities of Iran's regional network, posing a critical challenge to the efficacy of Iran's deterrence system.

## Conclusion

Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, the country and the United States have maintained a longstanding alliance. This article focuses on the period from 1999 to the present, examining the political history and alliance between Nigeria and the U.S. It explores Nigeria's role as a key partner in ensuring security in West Africa, particularly in light of the potential regional crises arising from Nigeria's political instability. U.S. policy has been shaped to address the security dynamics of West Africa, with Nigeria being identified as strategically crucial to American interests. Scholars

argue that U.S. policies have consistently been designed to respond to immediate security challenges in the region. In the post-Cold War era, securing West Africa became a priority for the U.S., especially as several states in the region were on the brink of collapse. The post-9/11 period further heightened U.S. engagement with regional actors in West African security, culminating in the establishment of AFRICOM. The U.S. sees its partnership with Nigeria as vital to mitigating the impact of instability on its own security and to countering terrorism originating from West Africa. Nigeria is viewed as a strategic partner in establishing regional order, maintaining international stability, and containing the influence of competing powers.

In conclusion, several key points underscore Nigeria's significance in U.S. foreign policy and security strategies, particularly within the framework of international complex systems. These points are articulated as follows, with a focus on Iran's foreign policy:

- 1- The design of a networked international order, characterized by bifurcating order patterns, where Africa acts as a critical juncture in safeguarding U.S. interests and managing systemic pressures.
- 2- The necessity of developing geopolitical networks, particularly maritime-based geopolitics, with Nigeria as the central hub in West Africa's geopolitical landscape.
- 3- Conceptualizing Africa as a regional super-network within the international system, emphasizing the need for balance according to network principles, and recognizing Nigeria as a key node in this network.
- 4- Activating dynamic networking power structures in the international order, highlighting West Africa as a crucial bifurcation point within Africa's regional super-network, and emphasizing Nigeria's role in this interregional network.
- 5- The importance of establishing power rotations during transitional periods, with West Africa playing a pivotal role due to its geopolitical and geoeconomic attributes, with Nigeria serving as the central axis of this rotation.
- 6- Recognizing Nigeria as a key element in the internal control systems of West Africa.
- 7- Understanding Nigeria and West Africa as vital connectors between various global regions, particularly in unifying the maritime geopolitical network.
- 8- Acknowledging Nigeria's role within Africa and West Africa in facilitating the operational environment of U.S. naval forces, especially in competition with emerging global powers.

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