

**Air University Advanced Research: ISR Considerations for US National Security**  
**The Case for Nigeria**

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## Abstract

Nigeria is the largest, wealthiest, and most influential country within the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) in Africa's west coast. The GoG is strategically important due to its proximity to the Atlantic trading routes, its access to the Americas, hydrocarbon-rich region, and a trading hub for Central African Nations through Nigeria. Nigeria's influence in the GoG region for swinging votes to China's favor in the UN makes Nigeria incredibly important to China. Nigeria was the top recipient of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) directed investment at \$7.5 billion since 2018, dedicated to infrastructure projects (Crowley 2021). Nigeria's location relative to Niger makes Nigeria an important logistical location for the US Military. US-Nigeria relations date back to 1960; the long history, shared values and democratic values enables the US to drive Abuja (Nigeria's capital) away from China's sphere of influence.

To strengthen US-Nigeria bilateral relations, the US needs to increase its security cooperation via intelligence-sharing, geospatial imagery, financial intelligence, maritime tracking, and others, if it seeks to drive Nigeria out of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) sphere of influence (Page 2018). Nigeria relies on oil exports which are threatened due to lowered global demand and consumption, creating a need to diversify its economy to sustain its economic growth. The focus of the US for Nigeria should center on building economic diversity, expanding professional training and employment, and expanding equitable trade deals: areas where the PRC lacks focus or intent.

Nigeria is strategically important to both the US and China. For the US, it allows logistical support for US military operations against terrorism organizations in Niger; for China, it opens strategic ports to limit US hegemony in the Atlantic Ocean. A strong US-Nigeria relationship limits the CCP's ability to expand its sphere of influence to the US backyard: Central and South America.

## Introduction

Nigeria is the largest, wealthiest, and most influential country along the west coast of Africa, in the region known as the Gulf of Guinea (GoG). The GoG is an important strategic location of Africa, easily accessible to the Americas and a convergence of multiple trade routes through the Atlantic Ocean. The Gulf, and in particular, Nigeria, has also been a primary focus of China for its rich hydrocarbon resources, minerals, and strategic ports to access the Atlantic Ocean trade routes. Nigeria was the top recipient of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) directed investment at \$7.5 billion since 2018, mostly on infrastructure projects (Crowley 2021). Nigeria shares a long border with Niger, a landlocked country in West Africa, where the US currently supports the French military as part of a security coalition with military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) resources. Nigeria's location relative to Niger makes Nigeria an important logistical location for the US military. US-Nigeria relations date back to 1960; the long history and shared democratic values enables the US to drive Abuja (Nigeria's capital) away from China's sphere of influence.

Nigeria is rich in natural resources, most notably oil reserves, which compose 95% of Nigeria's GDP (U.S. Relations With Nigeria 2021). The US is the top recipient of crude oil sales for Nigeria. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups and over 500 languages, with English being the official language (CIA World Factbook 2022). Nigeria is known regionally and internationally as the giant of Africa. They have the largest population and a vibrant culture that is exported in the form of Afrobeat music and "Nollywood" produced films. As an internationally influential nation, Nigeria seeks an equal partner status in trade and across the world stage.

Nigeria's challenges include terrorism (Boko Haram), corruption of government officials, and widespread poverty. Approximately 60% of Nigeria's population is in poverty (U.S. Relations

With Nigeria 2021) which continues to be a root cause for terrorism, social unrest, and crime. To improve living conditions, the US and Nigeria should focus on diversifying the economy to build a larger “middle class” population. A larger middle class will increase wages overall, reducing the need for child labor to supplement incomes. A larger, more diversified economy provides more opportunities for youth employment which will deter participation in terrorist organizations like Boko Haram (CIA World Factbook 2022).

### **China and Nigeria**

China invests heavily in many African countries, the top recent recipient being Nigeria, primarily in infrastructure, whose relations date back to 1971. Chinese firms and banks play a significant role in the construction of rail lines and re-construction of roads throughout Nigeria. As part of the CCP’s focus on establishing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the CCP invested \$7.5 billion in Nigeria’s infrastructure projects beginning in 2018 (Crowley 2021). These infrastructure projects are designed, built, and maintained by Chinese companies to which the host nation owes of debt of higher interest rates. In most cases, the Chinese operate the new projects so that the Nigerian people are not offered employment thus not benefiting from work. There are multiple documented instances of overt bribery for billion-dollar contracts by Chinese owned companies with Nigerian authorities (Egbunike 2021). Concerning trade, from September 2016 to December 2021, Nigeria exported a paltry \$5.1M USD worth of commodities to China, putting the trade deficit at \$41.7M USD (Iyatse 2021). This mirrors the trade deficit that the US also experiences with China.

Nigeria is a primary focus of China for its rich hydrocarbon resources, minerals, and strategic ports to access the Atlantic Ocean trade routes. Nigeria is a valuable political friend to China in regional and international forums. Nigeria typically votes in tandem with other African

countries—and this bloc vote correlates strongly with China’s votes in international bodies. A steadfast supporter of Beijing’s One China policy, Nigeria has served on the UN Security Council more times than any other African nation (Page 2018).

### **The US and Nigeria**

Diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the United States (US) date back to 1960; the long history, shared values and democratic values enable the US to drive Abuja (Nigeria’s capital) away from China’s sphere of influence. Nigeria’s federal republic government is very similar to the US’s and is a stark contrast to China's authoritarian regime who lacks democratic elections. The US continues to support Nigerian institutions and people in their efforts to conduct free, fair, transparent, and peaceful elections, the results of which reflect the will of the Nigerian people.

The US has historically sought to mentor Nigeria as it gained social and political stability. Humanitarian investments have been the traditional focus of the US in Nigeria. For instance, the US has long invested in Nigeria's healthcare education and resources. In the past, the US provided resources, training, and equipment to combat malaria and AIDS/HIV for children, pregnant women, and other vulnerable populations. The US has also invested heavily in providing the polio vaccine for children and Nigeria has declared itself polio-free in 2020 after a prolonged immunization campaign. (Husted and Blanchard 2020)

The US has also provided weapons systems to Nigeria such as the A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft. Human rights concerns caused the US to pause the sale of the aircraft, but it was eventually allowed to proceed in 2021 (Husted and Blanchard 2020). The US Navy directly supports Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the Nigerian Navy’s Deep Blue Project anti-piracy efforts in the GoG. Piracy dropped sharply in 2021 as a result (Ukpe 2022). US-Nigerian anti-piracy efforts have a direct impact on the US military anti-

terrorism operations in Niger concerning freedom of access to ports in the GoG. Nigeria's location relative to Niger makes it an important logistical location for the US military, particularly in Lagos, a major port in Nigeria.

### **Solution**

The solutions below follow the US instruments of power: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME). Military options are viewed as unhelpful for building a stronger relationship with Nigeria and thus omitted for the US seeking to develop a stronger relationship with Nigeria. To develop transcendental solutions the focus rest in the instruments of diplomacy, information foundation and economic.

#### **Diplomatic/Informational**

To strengthen the existing US-Nigeria bilateral agreement, a US-GoG coalition should be formed, or the US should directly engage with the existing ECOWAC (Economic Community of West African Countries) of which Nigeria is a critical member and leader. The bilateral agreement can be strengthened by regular diplomatic visits, in both directions, on a regular annual or biannual basis. Visits demonstrate importance and Nigeria is a superpower in Africa. Recognizing that prominence is a strong step to creating an equal partnership with Nigeria. Nigeria craves respect and trust to make its own decisions. As Secretary of State Blinken states, "it's time to stop treating Africa as a subject of geopolitics — and start treating it as the major geopolitical player it has become" (Crowley 2021) which by extension means the giant of Africa: Nigeria. This is an attitude adjustment on the part of the US and will require softening the rhetoric about China in Nigeria. Nigeria does not want to be in the middle of a new cold war between the US and China.

The US could improve information sharing by widening intelligence-sharing limits to allow sharing of geospatial imagery, financial intelligence, and maritime tracking to help Nigeria

combat corruption, trafficking and terrorism (Page 2018). Information sharing gives the US an edge that fosters a collaborative partnership with Nigeria and not currently matched by China due to the CCP's non-interference policy of host nation affairs.

### **Economic**

Nigeria struggles with widespread poverty despite enormous oil wealth. This is partly due to mismanagement of revenue, uneven distribution of oil revenue throughout the country, and corruption. With oil declining in value, Nigeria needs to diversify its economy. Diversifying the economy to other sources of revenue will help generate wealth, expand the middle class, and create a resilient economy (Folarin 2020). The US should invest in the needs of Nigeria in equitable terms, e.g., Nigeria must open trade to the US, but the US must offer training and employment to Nigerians (something China does not do). The US should help Nigeria identify ways to modernize existing industrial and business practices using high-efficiency American models, reduce artificial trade barriers, and instill a sense of hope and self-reliance for Nigeria in the spirit of the Marshall Plan of WWII.

One of the greatest needs for Nigeria is a reliable power grid. Nigeria has potential for hydropower plants with two major rivers flowing through the country, solar farms, and other environmentally friendly options for energy as well as traditional fossil fuel power plants. US investment in these areas will propel development in Nigeria, provide jobs for Nigerians and diversify the economy. Powerplant work is skilled labor, and it will also deepen the Nigerian workforce skillset. China has only invested in incomplete rail lines which are transparently self-serving for the CCP BRI. Three existing and successful tools are available for US infrastructure investment: African Growth and Opportunities Act, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and Prosper Africa Initiative.

## Conclusion

A focus on Nigeria is critical in furthering US interests in Africa and limiting China's sphere of influence worldwide. Nigeria's critical location in the GoG and its port's direct access to the Americas provides an opportunity for China to expand their efforts from Africa to Central and South America. Increasing the US hegemony in the GoG via Nigeria will severely limit CCP's ability to expand their sphere of influence to the US's backyard.

Nigeria is critical to the US also because Nigeria aligns closely with the CCP's One China policy and often votes in agreement with China on UN votes. Where US and China disagree, losing the support of the African bloc (led by Nigeria) is crippling to the US national security strategy. It should be noted that China's One China policy also does not align with the US's resolute support of Taiwan. Tensions have recently escalated between US and China about Taiwan, and it is important to have Nigeria supporting the US position since they influence a large voting bloc in the UN.

The US can improve its position with Nigeria and within Africa using diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power. The solutions presented above are ways that the US can project influence with Nigeria and in the GoG. China has made significant investments in Nigeria's infrastructure, but the relationship is uneven with China benefitting more than Nigeria. Nigeria appreciates the CCP's willingness to treat them as equal partners but is heavily indebted to the CCP. Other African nations have fallen prey to CCP's debt trap and have traded port access/control in return for defaulting on CCP loans. These nations are in a tough position to oppose China and Nigeria is poised to fall victim to the same debt trap. US led investment and initiatives in Nigeria will prevent the CCP from gaining political and economic leverage in Nigeria, the GoG, and across the Atlantic Ocean and will ultimately protect US national security interests.



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