

U.S. Christmas bombing of Nigeria to reassert control in West Africa

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Map of Nigeria highlighting Sokoto State, site of U.S. Christmas

airstrikes, and Zamfara State, a neighboring region affected by ongoing violence in northwest Nigeria.

On Christmas Day 2025, while much of the world marked a religious holiday, U.S. warplanes carried out airstrikes in Nigeria's Sokoto State. Washington described the operation as a precise counter-terrorism mission against ISIS-linked fighters, framed as an urgent response to attacks on Christian communities.

That explanation conceals the real political meaning of the strikes. Far from a limited security action, the bombing represents a renewed intervention by U.S. imperialism aimed at reasserting control over West Africa — using military force to discipline states, secure access to resources, and contain the spread of anti-imperialist independence movements in the Sahel.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest economy, is central to this effort.

Counter-terrorism as a weapon of imperialism

U.S. military operations in Africa are routinely justified as counter-terrorism. In practice, they function as tools of imperialist domination.

Nigeria's armed forces have struggled for years to suppress armed groups in the northwest and northeast. By intervening directly with airpower, Washington presents itself as indispensable to Nigeria's internal security. That dependence is then converted into political influence. Military assistance becomes a means of shaping state policy in ways favorable to U.S. power and Western capital.

Security cooperation under imperialism is never neutral. It binds the recipient state more tightly to U.S. military command structures, intelligence networks, and strategic priorities, limiting its ability to act independently.

Why Sokoto matters

The location of the strikes is not incidental. Sokoto State lies near Nigeria's border with Niger, one of three Sahel countries — along with Mali and Burkina Faso — whose governments have moved to break from decades of U.S. and French military control.

These states expelled Western troops, rejected foreign-directed counter-insurgency programs, and asserted greater control over their own security and economic decisions. This process is often misdescribed as a “geopolitical realignment.” In reality, it is a struggle for national independence against imperialist neocolonial domination.

From the standpoint of U.S. imperialism, such independence poses a threat not because of who these governments cooperate with, but because they have challenged the assumed right of Western powers to dictate military and economic policy across the region.

Preventing Nigeria from breaking ranks

The U.S. airstrikes signal an effort to ensure Nigeria does not follow the same path.

Nigeria has expanded economic cooperation with China and sought development arrangements that reduce reliance on Western lenders and corporations. More importantly, Nigeria's size and regional weight mean that any decisive move toward greater independence would weaken imperialist control across West Africa.

By embedding itself more deeply in Nigeria's security apparatus, the United States aims to lock Nigeria more firmly into an imperialist alignment. Security assistance becomes conditional: Continued U.S. support depends on political obedience and continued openness to Western capital.

This is not a partnership between equals. It is the use of military power to enforce hierarchy.

Oil, minerals, and the economics of domination

Nigeria remains central to imperialist interests because of its resources. In 2023, oil and gas exports generated more than \$45 billion in revenue. The United States is Nigeria's largest export market, absorbing over \$6 billion in goods annually.

Under imperialism, “stability” means uninterrupted extraction of oil and minerals, secure transport routes, and a political order that protects foreign corporate profits. Military intervention is justified as preventing chaos, but in reality it preserves the conditions under which wealth produced in Nigeria is transferred outward to imperialist corporations and financial institutions.

This pattern is familiar. Across the Global South, U.S. military force has repeatedly been used to secure favorable conditions for energy companies, mining firms, and banks — while local populations remain impoverished and politically constrained.

African critics have drawn direct parallels to U.S. policy toward Venezuela, where sanctions and threats of force were justified as humanitarian measures while targeting control over oil revenues.

Sovereignty reduced to formality

Inside Nigeria, the strikes provoked sharp criticism.

Human rights lawyer Dele Farotimi described the operation as a violation of sovereignty, accusing Nigeria's ruling elite of complicity. U.S. officials initially claimed the strikes were carried out “at the request of” Nigerian authorities, a phrase later revised to “in coordination with.”

The distinction is revealing. When foreign warplanes strike targets on Nigerian soil and the terms of consent remain deliberately vague, sovereignty exists largely as a legal form rather than a material reality.

Religion as pretext, not cause

The Trump administration framed the strikes as a defense of Christians against ISIS militants. Conditions on the ground tell a different story.

Armed groups in northern Nigeria have targeted Muslims and Christians alike. Communities of all faiths have suffered. The violence is driven by poverty, displacement, land conflict, criminal networks, and decades of state failure — conditions rooted in underdevelopment shaped by imperialist extraction and political interference.

Reducing this crisis to a religious narrative serves U.S. domestic politics and obscures the social causes of violence. It also provides moral cover for expanding U.S. military operations without addressing the material conditions that fuel instability.

Nigeria as an imperialist proxy

Beyond Nigeria itself lies a wider imperialist calculation.

U.S. imperialism has long relied on regional proxies — states strong enough to project force locally but dependent enough to remain subordinate. The Sokoto airstrikes suggest renewed efforts to cast Nigeria in this role: a regional enforcer tasked with containing the spread of anti-imperialist independence in the Sahel.

Under this arrangement, Nigeria need not formally wage war. Its role is to host U.S. forces, coordinate operations, and provide African political cover for interventions designed elsewhere.

Imperialism versus independence

The Christmas Day airstrikes are not an isolated incident. They are part of a broader effort by U.S. imperialism to halt the erosion of its control over Africa.

As more states seek to reclaim sovereignty after decades of neocolonial domination, imperialism responds not with development or democracy, but with coercion. Counter-terrorism becomes the justification. Security cooperation becomes the mechanism. Independence becomes the threat.

What is unfolding in Nigeria is not a contest between abstract “global powers.” It is a struggle between imperialism and the right of oppressed nations to determine their own future.

That is the real meaning of the U.S. airstrikes — and the stakes for West Africa.

