



An Exploration of the Interests of the United States in Western Africa Using Huntington's Thesis on the Clash of Civilizations as a Framework

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ABSTRACT

The geopolitical and strategic interests of the United States in Western Africa are often analysed through economic, security, and political lenses. However, applying Samuel P. Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis to U.S. engagement in the region provides a unique perspective, suggesting that cultural and civilizational dynamics may also shape these interests. This article explores the U.S.' involvement in Western Africa, focusing on how Huntington's hypothesis that cultural and religious differences will increasingly drive global conflicts can be applied to understanding U.S. foreign policy in this area. The analysis argues that while traditional geopolitical motivations such as counterterrorism and resource control are evident, underlying cultural interactions and the U.S.' perception of Western Africa as part of a broader "Islamic civilization" significantly inform policy decisions. Huntington's theory emphasizes that future conflicts will primarily arise between civilizations, with cultural and religious identities as key drivers.

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INTRODUCTION

Western Africa has long been a significant region of interest for U.S foreign policy, largely due to its abundant strategic resources, pivotal geographic location, and the rise of Islamic extremism. Historically, U.S engagement in the region has focused on economic opportunities and military interventions aimed at countering terrorism and securing energy supplies. However, limiting the analysis of U.S interests to these dimensions risks overlooking the broader cultural and civilizational factors that may also shape U.S policy.

Samuel Huntington's 1996 *Clash of Civilizations* theory provides a framework for examining these broader dynamics. Huntington argues that future conflicts will not be driven primarily by ideological or political differences but by clashes between civilizations, defined largely by religious and cultural identities. In this context, Western civilization, led by the U.S and its allies, may find itself increasingly in conflict with Islamic civilization one of the eight major global civilizations Huntington identifies.

In Western Africa, this theory becomes particularly relevant given the region's complex civilizational makeup. Western Africa sits at the crossroads of Islamic civilization, with significant Muslim populations in countries such as Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, and sub-Saharan African civilizations. As Islamic extremism rises in the region manifested by groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) Western Africa may be a flashpoint for the civilizational clash Huntington predicted.

The U.S response to this extremism has been heavily militarized, with programs such as the U.S Africa Command (AFRICOM) focusing on counterterrorism efforts in the region. However, a deeper exploration of U.S involvement reveals that this military engagement may not only be a reaction to security threats but also part of a larger civilizational struggle. From Huntington's perspective, U.S actions in Western Africa may be viewed as an effort to preserve Western civilization's values democracy, secularism, and individual freedoms against the spread of radical Islam.

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Thus, the problem lies in the potential for conflict between civilizations in Western Africa, which has implications for U.S foreign policy. While traditional analyses emphasize security and economic interests, Huntington's civilizational framework suggests that cultural and religious factors must also be considered to fully understand U.S engagement in the region. Understanding the civilizational dimensions of this conflict is critical for crafting policies that address both the immediate security concerns and the underlying cultural tensions.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The Clash of Civilizations Thesis

Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* theory, developed in the post-Cold War era, postulates that ideological and political conflicts will be eclipsed by struggles between civilizations, defined by broad cultural characteristics such as religion, history, language, and values. Huntington identifies eight major civilizations: Western, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Latin American, African, and Japanese. Among these, he highlights the potential for conflict between the Western and Islamic civilizations due to historical tensions, incompatible governance structures, and divergent religious values.

The U.S, as the principal representative of Western civilization, faces what Huntington describes as an increasing civilizational challenge from the Islamic world. This framework provides a lens for examining the geopolitical and military interactions between the U.S and Muslim-majority regions, particularly where extremism emerges as a threat to global stability.

Application to U.S Interests in Western Africa

In applying the Clash of Civilizations thesis to U.S interests in Western Africa, it is essential to understand the geopolitical and ideological dynamics at play. Western Africa, particularly countries like Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, faces a profound intersection of civilizational and security challenges. Groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have been central actors in destabilizing efforts across the region, promoting an extremist form of Islam that not only challenges local governance structures but

also clashes with Western values of democracy, secularism, and human rights (Pham, 2016).

Nigeria, for instance, has long been a focal point for U.S counterterrorism strategies due to Boko Haram's presence in the northeastern region. This group's actions have led to the displacement of millions and a humanitarian crisis that draws international attention (Campbell, 2021). Boko Haram's insurgency is rooted in its opposition to secular governance and Western-style education, which the group considers an imposition on Islamic values. U.S involvement in Nigeria, through programs like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), illustrates how counterterrorism is framed as a means of not only addressing immediate security threats but also reinforcing the U.S' broader goal of preserving Western civilization's influence in a region facing ideological fragmentation (Cook, 2011).

In Mali, the rise of jihadist groups, particularly after the 2012 Tuareg rebellion, presents another layer of complexity. AQIM and its affiliates, including the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), have capitalized on weak governance structures and ethnic tensions to expand their influence (Thurston, 2020). The U.S, through AFRICOM and support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, has been involved in military operations aimed at curbing the spread of extremism in the region. This engagement aligns with the Clash of Civilizations thesis, as it can be viewed as a concerted effort by the U.S to safeguard Western values and strategic interests by preventing the region from becoming a stronghold for radical ideologies that challenge Western ideals of governance and human rights (U.S AFRICOM, 2020).

The U.S also engages with Senegal, a relatively stable country but one that still faces external pressures from extremist groups. U.S involvement here tends to focus more on diplomatic efforts and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that Senegal remains a bulwark of stability in the region (Yabi, 2013). These actions demonstrate how the U.S seeks to balance its security interests with a broader strategy to ensure that Western-aligned governments in the region continue to serve as counterweights to the spread of radical Islam.

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The Clash of Civilizations theory, proposed by Samuel Huntington, posits that future conflicts will primarily be driven by cultural and civilizational differences, rather than ideological or economic disputes (Huntington, 1996). This framework offers a lens through which U.S engagement in Western Africa can be viewed—not merely as a series of counterterrorism efforts but as part of a larger project to maintain the global dominance of Western civilization in the face of challenges from other cultural blocs, particularly the Islamic world. By aligning itself with local governments and providing military, economic, and diplomatic support, the U.S is actively working to ensure that Western ideals, such as secular governance, liberal democracy, and human rights, remain influential in the region.

Broader Implications of Huntington's Framework

Huntington's framework broadens the scope of analysis beyond immediate military or economic concerns, pushing scholars and policymakers to consider how cultural dynamics influence foreign policy. In the case of Western Africa, U.S involvement can be understood as part of a larger civilizational strategy aimed at maintaining Western influence and preventing the rise of hostile ideological movements that could reshape global order.

This conceptual analysis underscores the importance of recognizing that U.S interests in Western Africa are not only about protecting economic and strategic assets but also about safeguarding civilizational ideals. The U.S is effectively positioning itself as a protector of Western civilization in a region where Islamic civilization shaped by both moderate and extremist interpretations is vying for influence. The interplay between these civilizational forces creates a complex environment where cultural and religious factors must be integrated into any comprehensive analysis of U.S foreign policy.

Economic Interests and the Civilizational Framework

U.S interests in Western Africa are not limited to security; economic opportunities, particularly in energy and natural resources, play a significant role in American engagement in the region. Western Africa is rich in oil, gas, and minerals, making it an attractive investment

destination for American companies. Nigeria, in particular, has been a major focus for U.S economic engagement due to its vast oil reserves (Campbell, 2013).

However, from a Huntingtonian perspective, even economic interactions in Western Africa can be interpreted as part of the broader clash between civilizations. The competition for resources is not just about economic gain; it is also about the extension of Western influence and control over key geopolitical regions. The U.S, as the leading representative of Western civilization, seeks to maintain its global dominance, and securing resource-rich regions like Western Africa is a critical part of that strategy. The involvement of other global actors, such as China, in the economic landscape of Western Africa adds another layer to this civilizational competition, as different civilizations vie for influence and control over the region's resources (Fessy, 2017).

Cultural and Religious Dimensions of U.S Engagement

Huntington's thesis also highlights the importance of cultural and religious factors in shaping international relations. In Western Africa, the U.S has increasingly engaged in efforts to promote democratic governance, human rights, and religious tolerance values that Huntington identifies as central to Western civilization. These efforts often bring the U.S into conflict with traditional and Islamic values that are prevalent in the region (Korieh, 2020).

For instance, U.S-backed programs promoting gender equality and secular education have sometimes been met with resistance in Muslim-majority areas, where conservative interpretations of Islam may oppose such reforms. This cultural clash, though less overt than military or economic conflicts, underscores the deeper civilizational divide between Western and Islamic worldviews that Huntington predicted (Huntington, 1996).

Moreover, U.S diplomatic efforts in Western Africa, particularly in countries facing religious or ethnic conflicts, often emphasize the importance of maintaining peace between Muslim and Christian communities. This reflects a broader Western effort to mitigate the effects of civilizational conflict by promoting interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution. However, as

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Huntington suggests, these efforts may be seen as Western impositions on the cultural fabric of these societies, leading to further tensions (Huntington, 1996).

Theoretical Framework: An Exploration of U.S Interests in Western Africa Using Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Thesis

This theoretical framework is built around Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, providing a lens to analyze the cultural and civilizational dynamics shaping U.S foreign policy in Western Africa. It examines how civilizational clashes, particularly between Western and Islamic civilizations, influence U.S engagement in the region, focusing on military, security, and cultural interests, (Huntington, 1996).

Understanding Huntington's Concept of Civilization

Huntington defined clearly his idea of civilization. According to him, "a civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity" (Huntington, 1993). In a study such as this, it is necessary to make direct quotations as this has been the source of many arguments and criticism (as can be seen in sections below). He further explained that

A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people (Huntington, 1993).

This implies that civilizations are the biggest, most encompassing groups of people who share a civilizational identity and commonalities. To Huntington, these groups appear to be mutually exclusive, such that one cannot be a Muslim and belong to the Western civilization at the same time and encompass the whole population of the world. This would imply that group or cultural membership is a given, ignoring the cognitive aspect of group construction. He argued that civilizations are the ultimate source of identity and conflict in the post-Cold War world. According to Huntington civilizations are characterized by common

cultural traits such as language history religion customs institutions and values.

One of the key concepts in Huntington's thesis is the idea of a clash of civilizations. He posited that future conflicts would not be primarily ideological or economic but cultural and civilizational. Huntington identified major civilizations including Western Confucian Japanese Islamic Hindu Slavic-Orthodox Latin American and African civilizations. He argued that the fault lines between these civilizations would be the primary sources of conflict in the post-Cold War world.

This contradicts Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1981, *apud* Demmers, 2012). However, sociological approaches differ in that they:

...place the origins of social identities in the social and the political, not the individual. Social identities are seen as socially constructed, as largely externally ascribed and as serving social and political functions. It is about categories and relationships. The social identity concept tells us about the categorical characteristics such as nationality, gender, religion, ethnicity – that locate people in social space. A person has a certain social identity if (s) he shares certain characteristics with others (Demmers, 2012).

Huntington's concept of civilization has sparked a significant debate among scholars. Some have criticized his thesis for oversimplifying complex global dynamics and essentialising cultures. Others have contended that Huntington's focus on cultural differences overlooks the role of power politics and economics in shaping international relations. Despite the criticisms Huntington's concept of civilization remains relevant in understanding global politics today. The rise of identity politics the resurgence of nationalist movements and the clash of values in the international arena all point to the enduring significance of cultural identities in shaping world affairs. This study further explores the criticism and praises of Huntington's Clash of Civilization.

Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Theory

At the core of this framework is Samuel Huntington's theory, which argues that the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world will be cultural and civilizational rather than ideological or political. Huntington defines civilizations as the broadest cultural

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entities, grouped by common language, history, religion, values, and customs. He identifies eight major civilizations: Western, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Latin American, African, and Japanese, (Huntington, 1996)

Huntington suggests that future conflicts will arise primarily between civilizations, with the West (led by the U.S) in increasing conflict with the Islamic world due to religious and governance differences. Western civilization, characterized by values such as democracy, secularism, and individual rights, is seen as clashing with Islamic civilization, which operates under different political and religious structures, some of which promote authoritarianism and theocratic governance, (Huntington, 1996).

Application to U.S Foreign Policy in Western Africa

Western Africa represents a key geographic intersection of two major civilizations: Western and Islamic. This region is home to several Muslim-majority nations, including Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, and has seen the rise of radical Islamic extremist groups like Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Huntington's thesis provides a framework for understanding U.S interests in this region, which are driven not only by security concerns but also by a broader civilizational struggle.

U.S involvement in Western Africa, particularly through counterterrorism initiatives such as AFRICOM, can be viewed through this civilizational lens. Huntington's theory suggests that the U.S is not only responding to immediate security threats posed by extremist groups but also working to protect and extend Western civilization's values in a region threatened by the spread of radical Islamic ideologies.

Civilizational Conflict as a Driver of U.S Policy

The framework posits that U.S actions in Western Africa are motivated by both security concerns and the need to safeguard Western values from the civilizational challenge posed by radical Islamic movements. This includes promoting democracy, human rights, and secular governance, which are often in direct conflict with the theocratic and authoritarian ideologies promoted by extremist groups.

U.S military and diplomatic engagements in the region can be seen as part of a broader civilizational strategy. This strategy aims to counter Islamic extremism not just by eliminating terrorist threats, but by stabilizing the region and fostering governments aligned with Western ideals. In this sense, U.S policy in Western Africa is part of the larger struggle Huntington identified between Western and Islamic civilizations.

Cultural and Religious Dimensions of Conflict

A core aspect of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations framework is the understanding that culture and religion are central to civilizational identity. In Western Africa, Islam plays a significant role in shaping the political, social, and cultural environment. Historically, Islam has been deeply embedded in the region, influencing not only personal and communal identities but also governance structures and social norms (Thurston, 2020). While many Islamic communities in the region adhere to moderate interpretations of the faith, extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) exploit religious sentiment to challenge the secular, democratic values that Western civilization promotes. From Huntington's perspective, these groups are not just a security concern but represent a cultural and religious confrontation against the global dominance of Western civilization (Huntington, 1996).

Boko Haram, for instance, explicitly opposes Western-style education, which it views as incompatible with Islamic teachings, and aims to impose a radical form of Sharia law throughout Nigeria. This is not merely a rejection of local governance but an ideological and civilizational clash with the Western ideals of secularism, individual liberty, and democracy. Similarly, AQIM has extended its reach throughout the Sahel, advocating for a global Islamic state and rejecting Western influence in the region. These movements frame their struggles as part of a larger, existential battle between Islamic and Western civilizations, with religion serving as the primary dividing line (Pham, 2016).

The U.S response to these challenges, particularly through programs like AFRICOM and counterterrorism partnerships,

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underscores the significance of maintaining Western influence in the region. While the immediate objective is to combat terrorism and promote political stability, Huntington's theory suggests that U.S actions are also motivated by a desire to protect Western civilization's broader influence in the face of rising Islamic assertiveness. Military operations, such as drone strikes against extremist leaders and joint military exercises with local forces, are complemented by diplomatic efforts that promote governance reforms, economic development, and civil society initiatives aimed at reinforcing secular governance and democratic values (Campbell, 2021).

However, Huntington's framework also posits that U.S foreign policy in the region cannot be fully understood without recognizing the deeper civilizational struggle at play. Islamic civilization in Western Africa is not monolithic; it comprises both moderate elements, which often align with Western values on certain issues, and extremist factions that reject those values entirely. The U.S, therefore, finds itself navigating a complex cultural landscape where it must balance security needs with efforts to support moderate Islamic governments and communities. This delicate balance is necessary to prevent extremist ideologies from gaining further traction, while simultaneously ensuring that Western civilizational values such as secularism and human rights continue to influence the region's political and social structures (Cook, 2011).

Furthermore, Huntington's thesis highlights the cultural and religious dimensions of U.S involvement in the region, suggesting that the conflict is not merely about territorial control or economic dominance but about the protection of Western civilization in the face of an Islamic resurgence. Extremist groups challenge not only the political order but also the cultural and religious hegemony that Western powers have historically sought to maintain in regions like Western Africa. As Islamic civilization, driven by both moderate and extremist forces, asserts its influence, the U.S must contend with the reality that the region is becoming an increasingly contested civilizational battleground (Thurston, 2020).

Conceptual Model

Theoretical framework can be illustrated as follows:

1. Western Civilization (U.S and allies): Promotes democracy, secular governance, human rights, and individual freedoms.
 - a) Key U.S Interests: Security (counterterrorism), economic partnerships, promotion of Western values.
2. Islamic Civilization (Western Africa): Comprised of both moderate and radical elements. Radical movements (e.g., Boko Haram, AQIM) seek to impose a theocratic, authoritarian vision of governance, which conflicts with Western values.
 - a) Key Factors in Conflict: Religious values, governance structures, cultural identity.
3. Civilizational Clash: U.S involvement in Western Africa, driven by the need to counter Islamic extremism, protect Western interests, and promote stability, aligns with Huntington's prediction of civilizational conflict between the West and the Islamic world.
 - a) Outcomes: Military engagement (AFRICOM), support for local governance, attempts to promote democracy and human rights.

Implications for U.S Foreign Policy

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis offers valuable insights into how U.S foreign policy can be shaped by civilizational and cultural factors, particularly in regions like Western Africa, where ideological conflicts between Western and Islamic values are prominent. This theoretical framework stresses that beyond security and economic interests, the U.S must consider the underlying civilizational dynamics that inform not only local conflicts but also the broader global contest between the West and Islamic extremism (Huntington, 1996). As U.S foreign policy seeks to maintain Western hegemony and counter the

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spread of radical Islam, integrating cultural and civilizational factors becomes crucial for effective policy design and implementation.

In the case of Western Africa, U.S foreign policy has traditionally been driven by counterterrorism objectives, particularly in nations like Nigeria and Mali where groups like Boko Haram and AQIM operate. However, by applying Huntington's theory, it becomes clear that these security engagements are part of a larger civilizational contest. This viewpoint helps policymakers understand that the ideological battle between Western values such as secularism, liberal democracy, and individual rights and the extremist Islamic ideologies promoted by terrorist groups is as critical as the military operations themselves (Pham, 2016). As a result, U.S policy must go beyond immediate security needs to address the underlying civilizational struggles that fuel instability and extremism in the region.

This perspective also implies that U.S foreign policy should prioritize cultural diplomacy and soft power strategies alongside traditional military aid and economic support. For example, in countries like Senegal, where Islamic influences coexist with relatively stable democratic institutions, the U.S can leverage its civilizational appeal by promoting education, governance reforms, and human rights initiatives that align with Western values. By focusing on reinforcing cultural and civilizational ties, the U.S may enhance its long-term influence and mitigate the risk of ideological shifts that could lead to the rise of extremism (Yabi, 2013).

Moreover, this framework provides a lens through which to view the long-term objectives of U.S involvement in the region. While counterterrorism efforts in places like Mali and Nigeria are crucial in the short term, the deeper objective is to ensure that Western ideals maintain their dominance in a region where Islamic extremism seeks to take hold. Huntington's theory, in this sense, suggests that the U.S must not only win the battles against terrorist groups but also the broader ideological and civilizational struggle for the hearts and minds of the region's population (Campbell, 2021). This calls for a more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, poor governance, and lack of education, which are often exploited

by radical groups to gain support (Thurston, 2020).

Additionally, by framing U.S involvement in Western Africa as part of a global civilizational contest, Huntington's thesis highlights the long-term challenges for U.S foreign policy. As Islamic extremism continues to evolve and adapt, U.S policymakers will need to stay vigilant in addressing the cultural and civilizational dimensions of the struggle. This includes not only countering extremism but also promoting Western values in ways that resonate with the local populations. The challenge for U.S foreign policy, therefore, is to strike a balance between immediate security concerns and the broader, more enduring task of ensuring that the Western civilizational model remains influential in the face of rising Islamic extremism (Cook, 2011).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivism theory

The Constructivist theory was first introduced to international relations through Nicholas G. Onuf's 1989 book 'World of Our Making'. Onuf and other early scholars who built the theoretical foundations of constructivism in international relations first established that norms matter in this context. Shared ideas form the bedrock of motivations, not raw nature, or the arbitrary state. Social interactions lead to structures. States pretend that society is anarchic, and so respond or behave anarchically. What makes the United States the United States, or what makes Nigeria, Nigeria? Structures, systems? No. It is shared identity, values, norms and beliefs. This theory will be the main theory upon which our work will be based since it is relationally most linked to Huntington's thesis on the basis for conflict which are identity-based. Even if the state dies, the identity remains. The USSR failed, not because it was disbanded, but because people stopped believing in it. Fragmented beliefs and identity systems in the USSR ultimately broke it, not anarchy. Reality reflects our beliefs and vice versa. Through this, Realism and Liberalism are rejected. If the US and Russia (USSR) decided they were no longer enemies, then they cease to be enemies. In Nigeria for instance, we conglomerate around a common value: sports, many other factors divide us.

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Sarina (2018) stated that Constructivism sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed and ordered. This perspective refers to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge that are also called ontology and epistemology in research language. Ademola, (2006) offers an excellent example that illustrates the social construction of reality when he explains that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons. These identifications are not caused by the nuclear weapons (the *material structure*) but rather by the meaning given to the material structure (the *ideational structure*). It is important to understand that the social relationship between the United States and Britain and the United States and North Korea is perceived in a similar way by these states, as this shared understanding (or inter-subjectivity) forms the basis of their interactions. The example also shows that nuclear weapons by themselves do not have any meaning unless we understand the social context. It further demonstrates that constructivists go beyond the material reality by including the effect of ideas and beliefs on world politics. This also entails that reality is always under construction, which opens the prospect for change. In other words, meanings are not fixed but can change over time depending on the ideas and beliefs that actors hold.

Sarina (2018), following Wendt's (1992) trend of postulation, posits that Constructivists agree that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure refers to the international system that consists of material and ideational elements. Returning to Wendt's example discussed above, this means that the social relation of enmity between the United States and North Korea represents the inter subjective structure (that is, the shared ideas and beliefs among both states), whereas the United States and North Korea are the actors who have the capacity (that is, agency) to change or reinforce the existing structure or social relationship of enmity. This change or reinforcement ultimately depends on the beliefs and ideas held by both states. If these beliefs and ideas change, the

social relationship can change to one of friendship. This stance differs considerably from that of realists, who argue that the anarchic structure of the international system determines the behaviour of states. Constructivists, on the other hand, argue that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992). This means that anarchy can be interpreted in different ways depending on the meaning that actors assign to it.

Constructivists argue that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identities are representations of an actor's understanding of who they are, which in turn signals their interests. They are important to constructivists as they argue that identities constitute interests and actions. For example, the identity of a small state implies a set of interests that are different from those implied by the identity of a large state. The small state is arguably more focused on its survival, whereas the large state is concerned with dominating global political, economic and military affairs. It should be noted, though, that the actions of a state should be aligned with its identity. A state can thus not act contrary to its identity because this will call into question the validity of the identity, including its preferences. This issue might explain why Germany, despite being a great power with a leading global economy, did not become a military power in the second half of the twentieth century. Following the atrocities of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime during the Second World War, German political identity shifted from one of militarism to pacifism due to unique historical circumstances.

Although all constructivists share the above-mentioned views and concepts, there is considerable variety within constructivism. Conventional constructivists ask 'what'-type questions – such as *what causes an actor to act*. They believe that it is possible to explain the world in causal terms and are interested in discovering the relationships between actors, social norms, interests and identities. Conventional constructivists assume, for instance, that actors act according to their identity and that it is possible to predict when this identity becomes visible or not. When an identity is seen to be under-going changes, conventional constructivists investigate what factors caused which aspects of a state's

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identity to change. Critical constructivists, on the other hand, ask 'how'-type questions such as *how do actors come to believe in a certain identity*. Contrary to conventional constructivists, they are not interested in the effect that this identity has. Instead, critical constructivists want to reconstruct an identity – that is, find out what are its component parts – which they believe are created through written or spoken communication among and between peoples. Language plays a key role for critical constructivists because it constructs, and has the ability to change, social reality. Most constructivists, however, position themselves between these two more extreme ends of the spectrum (Sarina, 2018). As stated earlier, Constructivism best fits our research for the reason that the theory and the CoC thesis rendezvous on the importance of identity, values, norms or interests as the main reason nations or individuals cohere or conflict.

CONCLUSION

In exploring U.S interests in Western Africa through the lens of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, it becomes clear that U.S involvement in the region is shaped not only by immediate economic and security concerns but also by broader civilizational dynamics. Huntington's theory emphasizes that future conflicts will primarily arise between civilizations, with cultural and religious identities acting as key drivers. In Western Africa, the intersection of Western and Islamic civilizations creates a unique arena where the U.S seeks to protect its values democracy, secularism, and human rights against the rise of radical Islamic movements.

The analysis demonstrates that U.S military engagement, particularly through programs like AFRICOM, is not merely a response to security threats but part of a larger civilizational struggle. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram and AQIM represent both a tangible security threat and a cultural challenge to Western civilization's ideals. In this context, U.S foreign policy aims not only to counter terrorism but also to stabilize the region by promoting governance systems aligned with Western values.

The civilizational framework broadens the scope of analysis, revealing that U.S interests in Western Africa are deeply

intertwined with the need to maintain Western civilization's influence in a region increasingly affected by the rise of Islamic extremism. By recognizing the importance of cultural and religious factors, policymakers can craft strategies that address both the immediate and underlying causes of conflict in the region. Huntington's theory, therefore, provides a valuable tool for understanding the complex motivations behind U.S engagement in Western Africa, suggesting that the region will continue to be a focal point for civilizational contestation in the coming years.

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