
NIGERIA AND ECOWAS IN THE LIGHT OF CURRENT HAPPENINGS

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ABSTRACT

From its very inception as a sovereign nation economic integration as a basis of enhancing functional co-operation among the nations of West Africa has been a cardinal principle of Nigeria's ECOWAS policy hence the formation of economic unions with West African countries in the first Republic under Abubakar Tafawa Balewa administration. The rationale behind Nigeria's avowed stand on West Africa is based on its realization that its security interests are intertwined with its neighbours in the sub-region. Playing a leadership role in West Africa gives her an advantage in doing same at the continental as well as the global level. However, among other recent issues, the role of South Africa in trying to undermine Nigeria's role in the Ivorian crisis is an eye opener to Nigeria's leadership that there is the need to externalize domestic priorities. Therefore, President Goodluck Jonathan administration's new focus on Nigerian Foreign Policy which hinges on economic diplomacy is a welcome development.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times there exists an increasing concern among students of Nigerian Foreign Policy on the need to disengage from the problems of Africa generally and West Africa in particular. Their position is based on the argument that just as economic liberalization requires a minimalist less interventionist state domestically so too is a minimalist state required internationally. The argument went further to say that since the nation is facing enormous domestic economic difficulties; it should drawback into its shell and faces its own problems. (Kuna M.J., 2) In other words, it is their contention that, the nation should put its house in order before shouldering that of others. This has equally been echoed in government circles in recent times, as shown in the statements of the President and some of his aids, particularly from the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Trade and Development as well as the Presidential Advisory Council on foreign relations. What this implies is that there is a less emphasis on the central philosophy that Nigeria should champion the cause of Black and African people. Recent events and developments may have influenced the call for some modification of this policy. It need be pointed out that this was equally echoed during the time of Shagari and Buhari regimes respectively. Though it was changed to a more open and close relationship with West African Countries in accordance with the tenets of ECOWAS protocols under Babangida's regime. That this focus of Nigeria's foreign policy has reechoed with a lot of emphasis in Goodluck Jonathan's administration calls for its examination and analysis in the light of current events and developments at the domestic as well as sub-regional level.

The basic concern of this paper therefore is to examine the relevance of this new focus on the nation's national interest within the context of current events and developments. In so doing, we would try to provide answers to the nagging question as to whether there is anything specifically new about this new focus or it is a new wine in an old wine skin or a mere rhetoric. The paper is divided into six sections. The first is the introduction, which is

followed by a look at some conceptual issues, the third is on the historical antecedents of Nigeria's ECOWAS Policy, the fourth is on the challenges to Nigeria's role in West Africa, the fifth is on the current happenings and the sixth is the conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Nigeria's policy in West Africa right from its inception as a sovereign nation has been centred on the economic integrational of the sub-region with a view to ward of external influence of outside powers particularly France on the economic survival of these countries. Economic integration in West Africa has been generously supported by the organization of African Unity (OAU) now AU, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United Nation's agencies. Arguments for economic integration in West Africa and indeed in all developing regions are varied. A. Segel, has enumerated trade diversification, import saving, increased saving and monetary stability as the major arguments in favour of economic integration in developing regions. (Onwuka R.I, 14). Basically the trade between the developing countries of the World has been disappointingly low when compared with that between the developed countries or between the developed and the developing countries. In the early 1960s for example, trade among the countries of Latin America was less than a twelfth of their total trade to the outside World and only a sixth of the total trade of East African Countries was within the region. The figure for West Africa was much lower at 3.3 percent. In contrast, trade among respective countries of North America and those of the European Community was more than half of their total trade for the same period. Developing regions are therefore encouraged to increase trade within their regions because of the welfare gains arising from increased trade. (Onwuka, R.I. 14)

R. G. Lipsey and J. Viner for example have maintained that economic integration (custom union) is more likely to raise welfare, the higher is the proportion of trade with the Country's Union partner and the lower the proportion of trade with the outside; and such a union is also likely to raise welfare. (Onwuka R.I., 15) It is still in this same line of thinking that made Prebisch to advocate a change in the then prevailing economic and trade pattern in Latin- America. Basing his arguments on the unequal trade thesis, Prebisch felt that industrialization, through the adoption of an import – substitution strategy would challenge the center's domination which arose from its monopoly of manufacturing.

Industrialization of the periphery could begin to restore the equilibrium, it would reduce the dependence of Latin America on imports and would serve as a means not only of overcoming foreign exchange constraints on growth but also of achieving a self-sustaining pattern of development; and – would thus rectify the balance of payments crisis which confronted the Latin American Countries. (Asante S.K., 53) On the other hand, Adedeji and his ECA group approached the issue of deteriorating terms of trade quite differently. The solution to them does not lie in the strategy of import – substitution industrialization, which by the mid 1970s had proved to be ineffective not only in Latin America but also in Africa as noted in ECA preliminary perspective study. The solution lies rather in the adoption of the inward looking strategy of the LPA which pays somewhat scant attention to the importance of extra-continental trade while highlighting the significance of the domestic market as a major instrument in the development process. This is considered as

a logical follow-up of the ECAs rejection of foreign trade as the engine of growth(Asante, S.K.B., 54). The objective of this decade long programme is to lay a solid foundation for a self sustaining industrial sector strong and dynamic enough to exert its influence and play its role in the economy as one of the main forces of growth and development. The industrial sector unlike Prebisch's import substitution industrialization strategy should not only provide its own inputs but should also provide inputs for food, agriculture energy, transport and communication. (Asante, S.K.B., 54)

The Historical Antecedents of Nigeria's ECOWAS Policy

Nigeria's relations with its neighbours were characterized by what was referred to as the functional approach which in effect meant no political arm-twisting and saw instead the encouragement of the formation of bodies such as the Chad Basin Commission and the Niger River Commission. This is predicated on the fact that, the relationship with its neighbours is the pivot around which one could define and project Nigeria's national interest. The sub-region is vital for Nigeria's survival; plainly because Nigeria's vital interests are located within it. (Ate, B.E. 175). This is the more reason why the fact of Nigeria's predominance in the sub-region has combined with the country's own policies towards its neighbours to prevent what normally should be amicable relations between Nigeria and those States. Nigeria's policies towards its neighbours have always rested on five principles: sovereign equality of all African States, respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State; respect for the boundaries inherited at independence by every African State, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and commitment to functional cooperation as a means of promoting unity. (Akinrinade, O., 49) This could be located within the notion of the four concentric circles of national interest. At the core of these circles lies a concern with Nigeria's own security predicated on the cultivation of good neighbourly relations especially with our – immediate neighbours: Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. This is in recognition of the fact that our security is inextricably tied to the security of West Africa, and it is for this reason that the second circles expands to include the whole of West African sub-region. Continental Africa then constitutes the third circle. The major focus here is the promotion of peace, economic integration, development, and the fight against all forms of colonial domination. The fourth and the final circle focus on Nigeria's relation with bodies and countries outside of Africa. (Kuna, M.J., 6)

For a large country regarded as *primus inter pares*, one with leadership potentials in West Africa, this location naturally has geopolitical and strategic implications in shaping and guiding its political security interests in the sub-region. Nigeria becomes even sensitive to this factor because of the intimate connection between many of its immediate neighbours and France, a World power with ambitions in West Africa.(Ate B.E., 175) The experience of the civil war, probably more than any other incident confirmed to the Nigeria's policy makers the need for excellent relations with its neighbours. Had facilities been made available to the secessionist in Niamey, N'Djamena, Yaounde Cotonou or Lome on the same scale as in Libreville, Sao Tom or Abidjan, probably would have had a significant impact on the direction or duration of the war. (Akinrinade, O., 49). That was why after the end of the civil war the Gowon regime deemed it necessary to spearhead the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria's interest in ECOWAS derived from its desire to become the industrial heart of West Africa

with all the political power that this would bring not only within West Africa but also in the world at large. Closely related to this was the desire to undermine or erode French economic and political influence which had some time been inimical to Nigeria's interest in the sub-region. Besides, having declared Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy, Nigeria made ECOWAS an excellent vehicle for demonstrating to African states the seriousness of its proclamations and thereby establishing credibility as a Black African leader. (Asante, S.K.B., 92)

Nigeria has demonstrated her seriousness in so many ways. This has been practically demonstrated by successive regimes in Nigeria. This was possible – essentially due to the buoyancy of the economy at the time. Nigeria made its borders open for West African nations to enter freely to reside and work in accordance to the tenets of ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of nationals, as well as goods and services. However when the economy nosedived and nemesis caught up with the monoculture economy due to the squandermania and conspicuous consumption associated with successive regimes in the country an oil induced foreign policy died a natural death. This was why the direction of the Buhari's regime's foreign policy was not well received by her West African neighbours. From this time onwards, the extent to which the government was ready to promote good neighbourly relations was dependent on not compromising on any issue of vital national interest to us not hesitating in affirmative protecting such interests. The point of emphasis here is that in as much as the government would continue to render assistance to sister States within the sub-region it has to be compatible with our limited resources. As such, playing the role of a big brother for nothing is no longer necessary.

The government's continued emphasis of its awareness of its limited resources and our present economic situation was to become translated into an aggressive Foreign Policy in which altruism had little or no place and Nigeria calculated it's relations with its neighbours principally in terms of what it stood to benefit. (Akinrinade O., 51) This became all the more necessary in view of the infiltration of nationals of neighbouring countries that tend to undermine the political, economic and security interests of the country in different ways. Nationals of neighbouring West African Countries were involved in the illegal trafficking of the Nigerian currency. Besides, they were equally involved in smuggling of food items thereby causing artificial scarcity in the country. This is in addition to their involvement in drug trafficking, gun running and car theft. To an extent, the public perception of these foreign nationals contributed in no small measure in influencing government's policy towards her neighbours. (Akinrinade, O., 52). However this posture was changed to a more assertive fire fighting stand in all the trouble spots within the sub-region during Babangida's administration. This came at a time when there exists an economic recession. Though Nigeria was equally affected by this development it really affected other West African Countries most. They were severely depleted. Nigeria's economic earning had helped greatly to cushion the effects of the economic recession, and Nigeria has continued to assist these neighbouring States particularly through the sale of oil to them at concessionary prices. This is in addition to the provision of scholarships, training facilities, medical supplies as well as equipments. It was these forms of assistance that culminated in the Technical Aid Corps Scheme in 1989 wherein Nigerian professionals enlist to serve in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific countries that need their assistance. (Akinrinade, O., 73)

Babangida's administration policy on West Africa was a clear demonstration of the unflinching commitment to regional peace and security. It is on record that ECOMOG succeeded in putting an end to the Liberian War in 1997, monitored the process of transition to democratic rule and reinstalled the democratically elected president of Sierra Leone. The breakthrough that Africa through the platform of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring group ECOMOG under the Nigerian leadership has recorded in Liberia is unprecedented. As an observer once put it: "ECOMOG has achieved what the West cannot (could not) do in former Yugoslavia with all their appreciable resource profile. (Saliu H.A., 203) Nigeria is the only country that has been resolute in terms of finding lasting solutions to the numerous conflict areas. One can hardly discuss the Ivorian crises, Sudanese War, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Togo crisis and others without having to reckon with the impairing roles of the country. (Saliu H.A., 205) The Nigerian leadership was apparently still desirous of seeing the country play a visible role in international relations, but it could hardly afford this on a grand scale. Thus, the country's leadership aspirations became concerned in sub-regional terms. Concentrating on West Africa meant psychologically, appeasing the spirit of visible diplomacy; it was an almost natural response from a government intent on laying claims to some form of activism in Foreign Policy of economic diplomacy" as the new creed in Nigerian Foreign Policy. (Akinrinade O., 70) The Nigerian government saw the West African sub-region as a veritable area for the pursuit of the country's new economic diplomacy. The Economic focus of the regime led to greater interests in ECOWAS as well as trade and security links with Nigeria's neighbours. This resulted in the regime's restoration of the policy of good neighbourliness in West Africa.

On the other hand, Nigeria experience of a low ebb in her external relations and the West African sub-region under Abacha was an exception. Due to it is inability to take care of the domestic scene, she was equally unable to play the expected role in West Africa. Her alstracization by the international community gave rise to some level of coldness with which the regime was received by other West African countries. Even her role in the installation of President Tejan Icabah of Sierra Leone who was ousted by Founda Sako Cop was really not well received by other leaders within the sub-region. Nigeria became a pariah nation in the international community. However, the coming into power of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and the general reconciliatory policies adopted by the new government at home and abroad seem to reverse the bleak prospects for the country. When he came, he quickly initiated what the international community wanted to hear from Nigeria. He promised the investigation of previous Human rights abuses. (IJBSS, 255). President's inaugural address speaks volumes, he said,, "We shall pursue a foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations and will continue to play a constructive role in the United Nations, the OAU, and other international bodies. We shall also continue to honour existing agreements between Nigeria and other countries. It is our firm resolves to restore Nigeria fully to our previous prestigious position in the committee of nations." (Olugbemiga, E.O., 172)

The expectation was that the introduction of democratic governance in the country would go a long way in strengthening the nation's foreign policy as it pertains to West Africa. This is predicated on the fact of what West Africa meant to Nigeria. The democratic regime would therefore be more proactive towards issues pertaining to West Africa. R. A.

Akindele's view is worthy of note, "There is little doubt that the introduction of democratic governance will have ripple effects on the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Therefore, the transition from praetorianism to liberal democratic politics is bound to affect the perception, formulation and execution of foreign policy. In addition, a foreign policy that is rooted in support for democratic values, the principles of self-determination, human rights and fundamental freedoms is bound to have the demonstration effect of strengthening and institutionalizing the culture of democratic values and democratic governance at home and beyond. The president's speech at the NIIA's annual Patrons Dinner is quite instructive, he said, "We are committed to maintaining and nurturing mechanisms essential for consolidating democratic and human rights. We must return to the true spirit of federalism in which equity, fairness and justice must become sacred principles. In particular, we need to learn the right lessons to comfort the injured and to promote national reconciliation". (Agbu O., 244)

The president's speech is very much in tune with what is expected from the country both from within and outside – particularly in West Africa. In marching words with action, the government started the informal reconciliatory process with the setting up of the Justice Oputa panel on national reconciliation. Though nothing substantial came out of it in terms of reconciling the thorny issues of national question, it went a long way in assuaging the feelings of the people as so many issues which were kept under the carpet by military juntas were unearthed. Peoples from the six geopolitical zones were able to express their views on diverse issues affecting the unity of the country. The South South geopolitical zone of the Niger Delta was very vocal on issues of resource control, true federalism as well as fiscal federalism. They were vehemently opposed to the existing revenue sharing formula in the country and at a point worked out of the conference due to lack of understanding of their peculiar deltaic character by other geopolitical zones. The role the country played in the final reconciliation of the Liberia crisis and its efforts in the transition process that brought Sirleaf Johnson into power in a democratic elections demonstrates vividly the government's avowed stand of exporting as well as entrenching the values of democracy into the sub-region. Again its last minute diplomatic move to grant Charles Taylor political asylum in the country also shows her concern to ensure the prevalence of a peaceful atmosphere not just in Liberia but in West Africa as a whole.

In the same manner his successor Late President Musa Yar'dua made spirited moves to consolidate national unity with his advocacy of "due process of Law" and the need for electoral reforms. The president's acceptance that the electionary process that brought him to power was faulty and vowed to change the existing electoral system tend to endear him to the people. To him, his vision twenty-twenty agenda which envisaged an economic eldorado for Nigeria would be a mirage without consolidating national unity as well as having peaceful relations with our immediate neighbours in West Africa. This can be seen through the spirited efforts of the President in bringing to an end the Niger Delta crises through the reconciliation of the various warring factions of the Niger Delta through his Amnesty programme. The importance of the president's action and its ripple effect on the entire sub-region can hardly be overemphasized. Considering the geo-strategic importance of the Niger Delta as the maritime gateway of Nigeria, a crisis prone Niger Delta could certainly not augur well for the nation and the entire sub-region. As early stated, Nigeria's relationship with its immediate neighbours is the pivot around which to

define and protect its core national security interests in its essence. The sub-region is vital for Nigeria's survival plainly because Nigeria's vital assets are located within it. This is an elementary point. For example, such vital assets are currently being put at risk because of the protracted contest in the Lake Chad area, the rich agricultural lands in the Maunbila Plateau, Bakassi Peninsula, including the Calabar River estuary and the Bight of Biafra. Hence, there is substantial truth in saying that Nigeria's national security interest is intertwined with the systemic security of the sub-region. (Ate B.E., 175) It is in this context that one has to appreciate the late President's efforts in resolving the crisis in the Niger Delta due to the maritime domain issues emanating from this area that constitutes a security threat not just to the country but the entire sub-region as a whole. In other words, the success of the President's vision 2020 agenda hinges on the existence of peaceful atmosphere in the country and beyond. As Charles Dokubo puts it, "Geographical propinquity links in an inextricable manner, the security interests of contiguous States. In this regard several situations have arisen in recent past, in both Nigeria and in some of the neighbouring States which clearly constitutes a threat to the security of parts of the immediate sub-region".(Dokubo, C.Q., 96) Therefore late President Yardua's efforts in bringing relative peace on the Niger Delta through his domestic policy have far reaching impact on the nation's West African policy of good neighbourliness. The infiltrations emanating from some West Africa countries into Nigeria by the militants if not nibbed in the bud would have resulted to some conflicts between Nigeria and those countries. The already existing volatility of the sub-region due to wrong perceptions of Anglophone Francophone dichotomy would have helped to fan the embers of discord among the nations. This certainly would not augur well; Nigeria's interest in the sub-region due to the interest France a World power in the sub-region.

It may well seem that the sudden death of President Yardua brought to an abrupt end the usage of a consolidated national milieu for Foreign Policy in West Africa. However, it is interesting to note that his second in command Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who took over power with an overwhelming support from Nigerians in a peaceful election that is unprecedented in the history of Nigeria's political history is an indication that there is hope for the future. As it is often said "to whom much is given much is equally expected", in other words, Nigerians expect a lot from this demonstration. To the average Nigerian, their enthusiastic involvement and participation in the election process has a lot to do with bread and butter issues. That is to say how they could put food on their table on a daily basis. It is from this context that an examination of the linkage that exists between the new focus on the nation's Foreign Policy and it's transformation agenda became highly imperative. The speeches and pronouncements made by the President at this inauguration and in other public gatherings are clear indications of the administration's resolve and commitment towards the realization of this Foreign policy goal. This commitment is also reflected in the actions so far taken by the President. The setting up of the presidential advisory council on foreign relations chaired by a renounced diplomat Chief Anyaoku, the appointment of Ngozi Okonjo Iweala as the Minister of Finance and the coordinator of the President's Economic team is a clear indication of the President's seriousness in the new focus on Nigerian foreign policy which hinges on economic diplomacy.

How be it, the truth of the matter is that the task is daunting as there exists enormous challenges before the President in the achievement of this goal. These challenges are both internal and external. It is a discussion of some of these challenges and how to overcome them that would constitute our next line of discussion.

Challenges to Nigeria's Role in West Africa

Right from the time of the first Republic, Nigerian leadership appreciates and understands the geo-strategic importance of the West African sub-region in so many of aspects of the nation's national interest. That was why since then there had been efforts geared toward Economic integration of the nations of the sub-region which culminated to the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In all such efforts, Nigeria has always played a pivotal role. This is in spite of the existence of enormous challenges she face at the domestic level. The challenge at the domestic front is how to ensure unity and stability through building a renewed identity by coalescing and directing the country's multifarious ethnic and religious groups towards common national goals. Therefore, political survival should be the most important item of Nigeria's national interest. What this implies is that Nigeria's Foreign Policy should be able to facilitate unity, political stability, development and democratic consolidation. (Agbu O., 253)

There is also in existence at the domestic level the issue of economic weakness, and the question of survival of the country in the waves of tribal and religious violence. So also is the issue of France's continued interest in leading Francephone anti-Nigeria posture in the sub-region.(IJBSS, 258) The Lackluster performance of ECOMOG at the initial stage of its establishment on the Liberian crisis is a pointer to the fact that there was a lack of consensus among community leaders and therefore the absence of the necessary political will to enforce the mandate.(The view that JMAS, 579) As a result, Nigeria bore the brunt of the ECOMOG activities in Liberia. This again has its implications both at the domestic and at the sub-regional level. At the national level, resources that ought to have been used at the domestic level were squandered in the name of shouldering ECOMOG in the Liberian crisis. Although it could as well be an advantage if it were retain to the nation through its involvement in investments in that country. At the external level it sent wrong signals to member nations particularly the Francophone group who perceive Nigeria as attempting to impose a unilateral settlement of the Liberian crises. This found a favourable response not only within the NPFL circles, but at more disconcerting in the Francophone countries. (JMAS, 579)

The issue of corruption at the national level has a lost to do with the way the nation's economy is being managed. The global assumption of Nigeria as a corrupt nation is a serious dent on the country. This is a major factor militating against the nation's development. Where in lies the essence of a new focus on foreign policy that hinges on economic diplomacy when all these vices has not been taken care of. There are also problems of border demarcation between Nigeria and some of its neighbours. The most notorious have been the dispute with Cameroon which have on many occasions degenerated into shooting incidents, leading to the deaths of both military men and civilians particularly on the Nigerian side.(Akinrinade, O., 49)

Current Happenings

Recent developments in Nigeria and the outside World have contributed in no small measure in the redirection of the nation's foreign policy. There is the realization by the government that the enthusiasm with which Nigerian's participated in the just concluded April 2011 elections that brought Goodluck Jonathan to power are clear indications of the people's expectation from the government. The tremendous good will and overwhelming support given to the government shows that they are ready to make necessary sacrifices to ensure that the government succeeds in its efforts at providing the needs of the people and transforming the country to its expected place in the committee of nations. As such the minor irritants emanating from an Islamic fundamental group the Boko Haram is seen by people generally as an unnecessary distraction that would go in the same way of political Sharia during Obasanjo's administration.

The major concern of the people in a democratic setting is to enjoy the dividends of democracy. As such the vast majority of the citizens have voted for democracy because of their expectation that it would banish poverty. Put differently, democracy is being voted for and daily defended on the grounds that it is sufficient to improve their living conditions. One cannot blame them going by their experience under successive autocratic regimes. The poverty level was high, leading to underdevelopment. Democracy is therefore seen as a way of empowering themselves. It is assumed that their elected representatives cannot be as irresponsible as the military rulers of yester-years. (Saliu H.A., 4, 5) This perception explains why there was a high turn out during the last elections that overwhelming voted President Goodluck Jonathan to power in the April 2011 elections.

The importance the government attached to the realization of the people's expectations is clearly shown in the President's speech at the opening session of the seminar organized by the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held at the Auditorium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja August 1, 2011. He said, "Although the country had played a leading and facilitating role in the emancipation of the African continent from colonialism, racial discrimination and reintegration in time pasts, there is need to now focus on new priorities and challenges such as job creation, economic progress, poverty eradication and security. In the era of globalization, at a time of grave challenges to national and international security, such as we face from terrorism and transnational criminal networks; at a time of massive poverty and youth restiveness in our country, we have no choice but to adjust and adapt the way we conduct Foreign Policy as we respond to the forces of globalization, our diplomacy must be put at the service of one domestic priorities. Since foreign policy was the externalization of domestic priorities and the aspirations of citizens, Nigeria's diplomacy must therefore articulate and vigorously market the country as a conducive environment in which to do business stating that the dignity of humanity must be defended both at home and abroad. While we continue to pursue a robust multilateral diplomacy, it should not be at the expense of our bilateral relationships and thus called for the deepening of partnerships with other countries anchored on mutual respect and responsiveness". (<http://nigeriansabroadlive.com/economicdiplomacy8/23/2011>)

The President's seriousness with the issues raised in his speech is vividly shown in the calibre of people appointed into his cabinet. This is predicated on the fact that Nigeria's new foreign policy direction is now on investment and economic co-operation which thus ties Foreign Policy to the country's domestic agenda, a radical departure from the old one which has Africa as the centre piece. The new foreign policy lay more emphasis on investment rather than political drive as it is the only avenue to deliver the dividends of democracy to the electorate. The new posture of government is that – while we retain the leadership role in our sub-region, and while we play our leadership role on the continent by taking the lead in all major issues on the continent, the Foreign Policy direction will also be used to propel the economic and industrial development of our country. This is the more reason why the government equally gave new directive to the nations various diplomatic missions as the operators of the foreign policy in practical terms. They are therefore required to look for opportunities, ventures, programmes that they could bring to Nigeria to give the new focus a success. (<http://www.africanoutlookonline.com/index.ph>)

In the West African sub-region, there has always been the concern from Obasanjo's regime for Nigeria to adopt a two track approach toward integration in West Africa. A first track for those like us ready to move more rapidly on monetary and political issues, while others in the second track are encouraged to catch up with the pace setters. (Guardian, March 17, 15) This thinking is in line with the present administration's foreign policy of externalizing domestic priorities. The concern therefore is that even within the sub-region there should be a new thinking on sub-regional integration based on inputs from the people as against past efforts which was the exclusive handwork as well as aspiration of the past leaders. The view of Ken Ukaoha, President NANTS is quite instructive he said, "After 35 years since ECOWAS was created, integration is not working. It is not impacting on the lives of the people. But now we are taking a bottom-to top approach. It is the people who are taking charge. Along with State actors, we have been working with eleven networks of civil society organizations and other non-State actors in all the States across the whole region. And we came up with ten strategic axes which prioritise the needs of the peoples of the region." (Nkanga, P. Pritemail, 2)

The ten points which the CDP prioritized are integration of people, cooperation of States, common agriculture and thus – trial policies, interconnection of transport infrastructure, ICT Interconnection; Energy and water interconnection; financial and monetary integration: Human Development; Research Development and Innovation; and Common policies for environmental and natural resources. (Nkanga, P. Pritemail, 2) That more emphasis is being laid on the above factors is the aspect of externalizing the domestic priorities as stated by the President in his opening speech at the seminar organized by the Presidential advisory council in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These are more or less considered to be the engine house of development. The thinking therefore is that if the nation's transformation agenda is to be realized both at home and at the sub-regional level the sinews of growth and development should be our priority. The view of the British Prime Minister David Cameron in his discussions with President Goodluck Jonathan at the State Lagos is a clear indication of the importance of the above factors in the new development agenda. He said, "He spoke of the huge responsibility of Africans to make their government accountable. He dwelt on the need for Nigeria to provide the

required leadership that can bring about desired growth and development. They must insist on the effective Meritereocratic and transparent public institutions which enable people to flourish. (This Day, July 28). It is in pursuit of those goals that informed Nigeria's recent involvement in the conflicts in Ivory Coast and Guinea. On the Ivorian issue the intransigence of Lawren Gbagbo necessitated the ECOWAS Heads of states at its 39th summit in Abuja arrived at a cumquat in which they called on the United Nations Security Council to (UNSC) to adopt strict sanctions against Lawren Gbagbo and to strengthen the mandate of the UN operation in Cote d'Ivoire enabling the mission to use all necessary means to protect life and property and facilitate the immediate transfer of power to Alassane Ouattara. Some arguments that the ECOWAS demand for UN imposition of tougher sanctions against Gbagbo is a sign of its weakness is misplaced. Rather this ECOWAS move is highly commendable in the sense that ECOWAS may just be emphasizing the plight of Ivorians to the UN. (<http://newsdownblotspot.com/2011/03/ecowas>). Therefore the call from ECOWAS chairman and the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan comes amid disquiet over the perceived global indifference of the UN and World powers towards the plight of Ivorians and sub-Saharan Africans in general is commendable.

This became necessary in view of the undercurrents emanating from certain quarters within the continent that are geared toward undermining the efforts being made by ECOWAS in the Ivorian crises. For instance, the view expressed by the ECOWAS chief on this issue is worthy of note, he said; "We find that others are encouraging Gbagbo not to yield probably because they can give him certain supports which ECOWAS does not have. There is a South African War ship docked in Cote' D'vore such as that can only complicate the matter further. I am surprised that a distinguished country like South Africa would decide to send a frigate to Ivory Coast at this time".(POCSS Statement by ECOWAS Commission President). This South African move is aimed at undermining the efforts of ECOWAS to resolve the Ivorian crisis once and for all. It is due to this South African move that made Gbagbo not to yield to power. There is no doubt about the fact that South Africa has some geopolitical interest in this game play. They awarded a failure mark to ECOWAS at this stage so that they themselves would shine. Hence there insistence that the matter should be looked at again giving the impression that Gbagbo won the election and at such they should negotiate.

The truth of the matter is that this South African move is really geared to undermine the influence of Nigeria in the sub-region. Considering the geo-strategic importance of the sub-region for Nigeria's continental and extra continental ambition, this was more was a calculated attempt to create the impression that Nigeria does not have what it takes to resolve crisis in West Africa. The negative implication of this if it has really materialized is far reaching. That an outside power though within Africa has come to play a big brother role in a sub-region that is a natural geopolitical orbit of Nigeria is a serious indictment of Nigeria which has far reaching consequences for Nigeria's leadership ambitions in Africa and the World at large. That both Nigeria and South Africa are nursing the ambition of seeking UN Security Council permanent membership makes the issue a lot more serious. This is against the fact of the need for a consensus candidate for that seat in Africa. The implication here is that, how can a country that seeks to represent Africa in the UN Security Council not be in a position to resolve crises in her sub-region. On issues of this

nature therefore the tacit if not overt involvement of blacklegs in Africa such as Libya under Muammar Gaddafi cannot be ruled out. This is because South Africa has confirmed links with the Libyan leader who is always referred to as the big brother.

It is however, interesting to note that the crisis was brought to an end with visible inputs made by ECOWAS under Nigerian leadership. Even the recent 'thank you' visit by President Alassane Ouattara to Nigeria an indication of Nigeria's role in bringing peace and normalcy to Ivory Coast. It is against the backdrop of the above scenario that one needs to appreciate the present administration's focus on Economic diplomacy as the centre piece of the nation's foreign policy. That Nigeria's role and efforts in West Africa shown in Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as in South Africa is being easily forgotten and that it is South Africa that is stabbing Nigeria at the back can be taken as part of ratch politics. Therefore the externalization of domestic priorities is a welcome development. The importance of economics in Foreign Relations has drawn the attention of Adebayo Adede. He contended that, "While the pursuit of her national interests through conventional diplomatic means continue to receive emphasis, Nigeria has in recent years placed perhaps more emphasis on economic diplomacy" in the belief that her political objectives must be pursued from a position of enhanced economic strength and improved terms of trade and balance of trade".(Njemanze, P.O.M, 143)

It is interesting for one to note that it was in furtherance of this objective that Obasanjo created a ministerial level portfolio and a minister for Economic Cooperation and integration in Africa. In the same manner the present administration under President Goodluck Jonathan has reiterated the need for economic focus in the nation's foreign policy. South Africa was trying to create the impression that she is more capable of resolving the Ivorian Crisis in her own way with Libyan backing since she has a better and stronger economy when compared to Nigeria. It is also interesting for one to note that Nigeria also played an important role in resolving the Guinean crisis. Therefore, the decision to lift the earlier imposed sanctions on the country was in appreciation and acknowledgement of the return to constitutional order through the effective holding of free and fair and credible elections leading to the victory of Prof Alpha Conde as President on November 7, 2010. This again is a plus point to a Democratic Nigeria that sees to it that conflicts in the sub-region as well as in the continent are resolved through normal democratic processes. The South African method would certainly have sent wrong signals and can therefore be seen as a retrogressive move that would not augur well for the continent.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussion, we have been made to understand Nigeria's ECOWAS policy in the light of current happenings at the domestic sub-regional, regional as well as global levels. In other words, the happenings that informed this policy strand are from diverse sources. From its very inception as a sovereign nation, economic integration as a basis of enhancing functional co-operation among the nations of West Africa has been a cardinal principle of Nigeria's ECOWAS policy. Hence the formation of Economic Unions with West African countries in the first Republic under Abubakar Tafawa Bewawa administration. This culminated to the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States in May 1975. The rationale behind this Nigeria's avowed stand on West Africa is based on it

realization that its security interests are intertwined with its neighbours in the sub-region. Playing a leadership role in West Africa gives her an advantage in doing same at the continental as well as the global level. Besides, the ambitions and interest of a powerful Western power France In the control of Francophone West Africa makes it all the more necessary for Nigeria to establish a firmer footage and involvement in the affairs of the sub-region. Nigeria has shown her level of commitment through her efforts in restoring peace in the war torn Liberia, Sierra Leone and in recent times in Ivory Coast and Guinea. However, the irony of her situation is that her external involvement and commitments do not tally with domestic determinants. As such, some of her activities in West Africa are being seen as acts of a Father Christmas or big for nothing brother.

Among other recent issues, the role of South Africa in trying to undermine Nigeria's role in the Ivorian crisis is a eye opener to Nigeria's leadership that there is the need to externalize domestic priorities. In other words, a viral and strong economy is a concomitant factor in a country's foreign policy. As such, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration new focus on Nigeria's foreign policy which hinges on economic diplomacy is a welcomed development. South African's attitude was to spite Nigeria that she is better of economically as such, wanted to use Ivory Coast as a test case for her continental leadership ambition. This, as a matter of fact is a preparation of contest with Nigeria on the issue of a consensus candidate for Africa in the UN Security Council. What this implies is that Nigeria should try as much as she could to overcome the challenges that face the nation. Efforts should be made to ensure unity and stability through building a renewed identity by coalescing and directing the company's multifarious ethnic and religious groups towards common national goals. In other words, foreign policy should be able to facilitate unity, political stability, development and democratic consolidation. Above all, everything should be done to strengthen the nations' economic. It is by so doing that a policy of economic diplomacy could be a basis of enhancing the achievements of democratic dividends.

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