

**ECOWAS STANDBY FORCE AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN GAMBIA
CLEANSING THE SIT TIGHT SYNDROME OF WEST AFRICAN LEADERS**

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ABSTRACT

Perilous political crisis tilting towards a full-blown conflict ravaged the Gambia very recently when President Yahya Jammeh decided to hold onto power after suffering defeat in the December 1, 2016 election. ECOWAS mobilised its Standby Force and waded into the crisis and their intervention pacified the conflict with high accolades. The research questions are: (1) What is the background of the sit-tight syndrome of Jammeh and other African leaders (2) What role did the ECOWAS Standby Force play in resolving the Gambian political crisis (3) How is the inauguration of Barrow a consolidation on democracy in West Africa. The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. The study is guided by the Democratic Peace theoretical framework. The study concludes that Yahya Jammeh relinquished power and went into exile because of the intervention by the ECOWAS Standby Force. The measures he took to annul the election may have plunged Gambia into a full-blown civil war apart from truncating democracy. A blend of carrot and stick diplomacy of ECOWAS which led to the successful swearing-in of Adama Barrow on 19th January 2017 is a recipe to cleanse sit-tight African leaders to concede defeat in the polls and consolidate democracy. The article recommends that sit-tight African leaders should learn from the examples of Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria whose former leaders willingly and graciously conceded defeat to opposition leaders.

INTRODUCTION

On the 19th of January 2017 Adama Barrow was sworn in as President of Gambia in Dakar, Senegal (Gambia's Embassy) instead of Banjul, Gambia. The reason was that the incumbent President Yahya Jammeh who lost the December 1, 2016 presidential election was still obsessed with the sit-tight syndrome that possessed most African leaders in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Jammeh seized power in July 1994 through a military coup against Sir Dawda Jawara and had ruled the country for 22 years but yearned to remain in power for "a billion years" to use his words. Unfortunately, the trend had changed for good in the political perception and democratic consolidation of West African states.

In West Africa the jinx of not conceding to opposition leaders was broken when Abdoulaye Wade won the Presidential election of 2000 and President Abdou Diouf conceded defeat. The tradition was quickly followed by Ghana but the incidence that projected the democratic credentials of West Africa the most was the conceding of defeat by President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 Presidential elections. Thereby making Nigeria the bastion of democracy indeed and not exporting what it doesn't have as was the case when the democratic government of Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone was consolidated by General Sani Abacha of Nigeria.

Presently, the heads of state of most West African countries were former opposition leaders and flag bearers of a registered political party who won Presidential elections they contested with the incumbent presidents and flag bearer of another political party. They include: Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Nano Akufo-Addo of Ghana, Adama Barrow of Gambia, Ernest Koroma of Sierra Leone, Macky Sall of Senegal, Patrice Talon of Benin and Alassane Ouattara of Cote d'Ivoire. Also since 1990, West Africa established a well organised peace keeping and peace enforcement mechanism for conflict prevention and control as well as promoting democracy. A blend of the carrot and stick diplomacy of ECOWAS have been consolidating democracy in West African.

Territorially, Gambia is the smallest country on the African continental mainland and has a population of 1.9 million which is also one of the smallest. Countries like Seychelles, Sao Tome and Principe, Mauritius, Comoros and Cape Verde are smaller than Gambia but are not in the mainland of Africa. They are tiny islands in the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean of Africa. But for the tiny corridor to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, Gambia is completely encompassed with Senegal. Invariably, Gambia is bordered to the north with Senegal, to south with Senegal, to the east with Senegal and to the west with the Atlantic Ocean. Gambia was a British colony but gained independence on February 18, 1965 with Banjul as its capital city. The unique landscape of Gambia with respect to the flow of River Gambia through the centre of Gambia into the Atlantic Ocean with fine beaches makes it a tourist attraction for Europeans and other states in the international system.

The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. It consists of content and documentary analysis whereby data was gathered mainly through secondary sources and reviewed. The research questions are: (1) What is the background of the sit-tight syndrome of Jammeh and other African leaders (2) What role did the ECOWAS Standby Force play in resolving the Gambian political crisis (3) How is the inauguration of Barrow a consolidation on democracy in West Africa.

The study is predicated on the Democratic Peace theoretical framework. The theory is of the opinion that wars between democracies are rare or non-existent because democracies are more likely to settle mutual conflicts of interest short of threats or use of any military force. Major proponents of the democratic peace theory are Immanuel Kant and Woodrow Wilson. Francis Fukuyama optimistically argued that democratic government would be 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final form of human government' (Fukuyama 1992).

The article is divided into five sections. We are already in the first section which is the introduction. The second section would discuss Jammeh and the sit tight syndrome of African leaders while the third section would discuss ECOWAS Standby Force as panacea for political crisis in Gambia. Section four deals with the Barrow of Gambia and democratic consolidation in West Africa and finally section five is the conclusion and recommendations.

JAMMEH AND THE SIT TIGHT SYNDROM OF AFRICAN LEADERS

Perilous political crisis tilting towards a full-blown conflict ravaged the Gambia very recently when President Yahya Jammeh decided to hold onto power after suffering defeat in the December 1, 2016 election. He was defeated by Adama Barrow, who won 45% of the votes. Jammeh initially conceded defeat in the presidential election but subsequently reneged by declaring outright rejection of the election results. He declared the elections illegitimate and on Wednesday, December 7, 2016 'the parliament extended his term for three months' (Kennedy 2017). Jammeh proceeded by declaring a state of emergency and resorted to filing an application with Gambia's Supreme Court after initially threatening to unilaterally annul the election to impede the swearing in of Adama Barrow (Jones 2017). These were glaringly acts of sabotage to truncate relinquishing of power to the opposition and tenaciously remaining in power in line with his dreams and aspirations.

Since seizing power in July 1994 through a military coup against Sir Dawda Jawara who was the first Head of State after Gambia's independence Yahya Jammeh has been a ruthless leader that was highly despotic and never tolerated any form of opposition or criticism. In his tenure thousands of Gambians went into self-exile because of his tyrannical leadership and for fear of persecution. A lot of people were sentenced to death through firing squad and press freedom was abrogated culminating in the brutal murder of Journalist Deyda Hydar of the Point Private Gambian Newspaper in December 2004.

Jammeh's penchant for absolutism was vividly portrayed in his declaration that he would rule the Gambia for a billion years if God wills and arrogating to himself unprecedented array of titles viz. His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Doctor Yahya AJJ Jammeh Babili Mansa which were also inscribed on all his official vehicles. Gambia became notorious under the repressive and tyrannical leadership of Jammeh who was originally an army lieutenant but transcended to a civilian President through controversial elections designed to regulate his brutish grip on power (Ejime 2017). He accordingly began 'a brutal and sometimes bizarre administration that jailed opponents and journalists, hunted people thought to be witches and

unleashed fear so intense that even Gambians who had fled to Senegal were afraid he was spying on them' (Searcey and Barry 2017).

As was the case in previous elections Jammeh had taken all drastic measures and enacted very harsh draconian policies to subdue every opposition and ensure landslide victory for himself in the December 1, 2016 polls. One opposition activist died in custody in April 2016 and he went further to demand the arrest and jailing of Ousainou Barboe (the main opposition leader) and 18 other members of the opposition on flimsy allegations of unauthorised demonstration sequel to the death in prison custody of one of their members. In most elections powerful political parties were utterly barred from taking part in elections.

Noticing that his actions were not in conformity with procedures and conventions amongst the comity of nations as portrayed by wide-spread international condemnations, Jammeh decided to withdraw from prominent international organisations. He pulled out of the Commonwealth in 2013 and pulled out of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in October 2017. For the elections Jammeh plainly secluded the international community from Gambia. This he did by obscuring internet services and also disallowing international observation of the polls from ECOWAS and the European Union (EU). Nevertheless, the African Union presence in the election exercise, manifestly represented international for authentication purposes. Jammeh deployed heavy security presence for coercion in his favour but this time the electorate were resilient and rebuffed being cowed or intimidated and voted out the tyrant. Meanwhile the main opposition leader remained under incarceration but was substituted with Adama Barrow whom Jammeh believed he would have a landslide victory over but he was defeated.

As earlier stated Jammeh attempted to annul the election and retain the mantle of leadership in Gambia but the timely intervention of ECOWAS Standby Force compelled him to exit after 22 years in power. ECOWAS intervention began with diplomacy but coercion was introduced when he became adamant. Responding to the blend of diplomacy and coercion, President Yahya Jammeh 'agreed to step aside and go into exile' (Crawford 2017). The mediation of President Alpha Conde of Guinea and President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz paved the way for the peaceful settlement of the crisis. Also, 'Mohamed Ibn Chambas, special representative of the UN secretary-general and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, was a key figure in talks by regional leaders to persuade Jammeh to leave' (Jones and Westcott 2017). The tensed negotiation which took place in the Gambian State house in Banjul on Friday, 20 January 2017 was fruitful as Yahya Jammeh agreed to leave Banjul the next day viz. Saturday, 21 January 2017 for exile in Guinea to forestall attack by the West African Standby Force and to maintain peace.

The negotiations gave Jammeh a soft landing by making provision for the new Gambian government to guarantee the safety, security and dignity of Jammeh and Jammeh's family, cabinet members and loyalists. He was also allowed to go on exile with most of his treasured property including his Rolls-Royce 'with its custom headrests stitched with the honorific: His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, was loaded onto a cargo plane accompanying the president' (Searcey and Barry 2017). These magnanimously lenient terms was fundamentally to maintain peace but some scholars are of the impression that the accusation by authorities that he looted \$11.4m (£9m) from the coffers of Gambia before his departure makes the concessions the height of leniency (Burke 2017).

Jammeh arrived in Conakry, Guinea's capital, and departed again for Equatorial Guinea. Marcel Alain de Souza (The incumbent President of ECOWAS) had told journalist that Jammeh will stay in exile there with a high latitude of immunity as no legislative measures would be taken to infringe on his freedom, safety, security and dignity as covenanted by the joint declaration of ECOWAS, AU and United Nations. This is a prototype peaceful mediation of political crisis that involves rescinding a declaration by an African head of state to remain in power because a great majority of African sit tight leaders would wait for the actual use of force, escalation of the crisis and evidently till death do-them-path the throne.

This was recently the case with Muammar Gadhafi who ruled Libya for 42 years and refused to soft peddle when it was clear that things are falling apart and the revolution of 2011 wanted him to peacefully bow out. The intervention by the coalition forces of US, UK and France paved the way for his brutal murder. Laurent Gbagbo of Cote d'Ivoire who lost the 2010 presidential election to Allasane Ouattara and attempted to scuttle the election with policies similar with that of Jammeh i.e. through annulment by hook or crook. His attempts plunged the country into a civil war and attracted the intervention of France and ECOWAS. He

was forced out of office and is now facing trial which should lead to his prosecution by the ICC (Jobarteh 2017).

The above two cases were majorly propped up by France and other advanced countries but the success story of ECOWAS in this regard is myriad, some of which are Sierra Leone – the attempt by Johnny Paul Koroma to take over power after overthrowing the legitimate democratic government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and how ECOMOG forces under the auspices of Nigeria restored the administration (Jobarteh 2017). Also, the democratic regime of Fredrique de Menezes of Sao Tome and Principe that was overthrown in a military coup was restored to power by ECOMOG under the leadership of Nigeria. The same was applicable to the democratic regime of Kumba Yala of Guinea-Bissau who was toppled in a military coup but the intervention of ECOMOG led by Nigeria restored normalcy.

ECOWAS STANDBY FORCE AS PANACEA FOR POLITICAL CRISIS IN GAMBIA

ECOWAS Standby Force was the panacea for the political crisis in Gambia which began on December 1, 2016 and lingered till January 21, 2017. The political crisis was sequel to the defeat of President Yahya Jammeh in the Presidential Election by Adama Barrow and the attempt by Barrow to use his powers of incumbency to scuttle the victory. For twenty- two years Jammeh used his presidential powers to achieve his desires in Gambia without external interference and should have accomplished his mission of scuttling the elections and tenaciously retaining the mantle of leadership but for the intervention of ECOWAS which also attracted international opposition. ECOWAS initially adopted diplomatic strategies of attempting to persuade him to concede defeat and willingly relinquish power as is the trend in civilized countries the world over but he was adamant. His unyielding utterance compelled ECOWAS to initiate forceful ousting through its Standby Force. The operation was code named ECOWAS Mission in Gambia (ECOMIG) and comprises assorted troops.

Speaking on the deployment of Nigerian troops for the mission, Group Captain Ayodele Famuyiwa (Director of Information and Public Relations, Nigerian Air Force), said: ‘NAF deployment to Senegal was part of Nigerian contingent of Economic Community of West African States Military Intervention in Gambia (ECOMIG) – a standby force tasked by ECOWAS Heads of State to enforce the December 1, 2016 election mandate in the the Gambia’ (Joe 2017). He noted that on January 19, 2017 that Nigerian Air Force (NAF) ‘moved a contingent of 200 men and air assets comprising fighter jets, transport aircraft, light utility helicopter as well as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft to Dakar from where it is expected to operate into Gambia’ (Joe 2017).

The Hercules C-130 military transport plane conveyed the troops comprising combat support group, special forces, medical officials, technicians etc. In his address to the contingents departing for the ECOMIG operation the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar, underscored the commitment of Nigeria to the promotion of democracy and reiterated the fact that the mandate of ECOMIG was the enforcement of the results of the December 1, 2016 presidential election in Gambia. He noted that the contingent was led by Air Commodore Tajudeen Yusuf and was designed to avert hostilities or breakdown of law and order that may be a product of the ongoing political standoff in Gambia. The Nigerian Navy is also greatly involved in the operation and had deployed its newest warship, NNS Unity to Gambia for action in case Jammeh decides to challenge the will of the people. The Nigerian Army is not left out and has mobilised its forces which were airlifted by the C-130 transport plane. Ghana and Senegal were greatly involved in ECOMIG and contributed troops as well as ammunition for the operation (Joe 2017). The South African government also advised Jammeh to respect the mandate of the people and step down peacefully.

The African Union took a resolution stating that its recognition of Jammeh as President of Gambia will cease by midnight of Wednesday January 18, 2017 because the newly elected President would be sworn in the next day and would be vested with all the powers and authority of head of state which the AU would recognise. In a similar vein, the United States of America through John Kirby – the spokesman of Department of States had expressed its total support for the military intervention by ECOWAS, the West African regional bloc. He noted that the United States support the intervention because they are aware that the purpose is to enforce the will of the people of Gambia and maintain peace and stability (Kennedy 2017).

The biggest of them all is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2337 unanimously adopted on January 19, 2017. Resolution 2337 which was adopted by a vote of 15 supporting,

none opposed and none abstained - expressed support to ECOWAS in the efforts aimed at peacefully resolving the Gambian political crisis. It condemned in strongest terms the attempts of Yahya Jammeh to usurp power and urged him to step down and pave way for peaceful transition and swearing in of Adama Barrow as President (Lederer 2017).

Before this very important resolution Yahya Jammeh was very obstinate and uncompromising to the various negotiations. Less than 24 hours to the official end of his tenure and deadline given by ECOWAS, Jammeh belligerently swore to remain in office and warned that anyone who violated the state of emergency that he earlier imposed on the country would be summarily dealt with. It was however doubtful that he could execute the threat because of the deterrent capability of the Standby Force of ECOWAS (Joe 2017).

The negotiations for peaceful political resolution of the crisis were in phases. The Wednesday January 11, 2017 delegation aimed at resolving the political impasse was led by President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. Other members of the mediation committee were the Chairperson of ECOWAS and Liberian president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Senegalese president, Macky Sall, and Ghanaian president John Dramani Mahama. The leaders appealed to Yahya Jammeh to concede defeat and made provision for an honourable exit or soft landing whereby Jammeh, Jammeh's family, cabinet members and loyalists would enjoy immunity from prosecution and that their safety, security and dignity would be guaranteed. Despite the powerful delegation and juicy offers, Jammeh remained defiant. The situation was becoming precarious because Wednesday's meeting, loaded with a lot of 'carrots' was the second major meeting. The president of Sierra Leone – Ernest Bai Koroma, was in the first meeting together with President Buhari of Nigeria and President Sirleaf of Liberia and President Mahama of Ghana. They eventually decided to keep an open channel for a diplomatic solution, but simultaneously proclaimed that it was arranging the West African Standby force to intervene when the need arises (Searcey 2017)

The diplomatic negotiations loaded with 'carrots' were at the verge of failing and it became imperative for the stick to be wielded to buffer the carrots. It was on this bases that threats and actual mobilization for the use of force against Jammeh was adopted. Jammeh's tenure legitimately expired on the midnight of Wednesday January 18, 2017 and Adama Barrow was sworn in as Gambian President on Thursday 19, 2017 at the Gambian Embassy in Senegal. Thereafter ECOMIG troops already strategically positioned around the borders of Gambia in Senegal crossed into the Gambia. The constituent of the ECOWAS Standby force comprised troops from Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Togo and Mali. The command structure was such that the Senegalese army General – Francis Ndiaye will be heading the team for the joint operation that would sustain the outcome of the December 1, 2016 presidential in Gambia in line with the popular will of its people. The presidential guard of Jammeh comprises about 1,000 troops which is not strong enough to defend Jammeh against a well-trained regional force with superior weapons and would easily subdue Jammeh if he refuses to leave honourably (Marenah 2017). The chances of surviving the invasion is compounded by the geographic make-up of Gambia which is almost completely-surrounded by Senegal and the fact that a number of Gambian Armed forces do not support Jammeh. Apart from the sophisticated stature of Nigeria and Senegal in terms of weapons, their longstanding experience and expertise in peace enforcement operations makes it abundantly clear that the Standby Force will operate with maximum impact and limited cost and can forcefully oust Jammeh's within hours (Jobarteh 2017).

The interesting thing is that Gambia armed forces are tacitly in support of the intervention by ECOWAS to forestall breakdown of law and order as portrayed by the utterances and attitude of the Gambian Army Chief – Ousman Badjie because he identified with the plight of the ordinary civilians in the streets and declared that he would not order his men to fight ECOMIG forces if they intervene. The Gambian Army Chief said that 'We are not going to involve ourselves militarily. This is a political dispute...I am not going to involve my soldiers in a stupid fight. I love my men' (Adeogun 2017).

The troops infiltrated Gambia after several unsuccessful attempts at diplomatically mediating the political impasse and couldn't broker an asylum deal with Jammeh (Jajne 2017). Eventually, Jammeh was given an ultimatum of deciding to step-down and proceed on exile before noon of Friday, January 20, 2017 or being forcibly removed. Invariably the ultimatum from ECOMIG was such that he accepts to concede defeat and leave Gambia or the ECOMIG troops intervene and forcefully remove him from office and bring in Adama Barrow the recognized president. Meanwhile at this period, 'Marcel A. de Souza, the commission's president, told Reuters that by land, sea and air, Gambia is surrounded. A total of 7,000 men will participate

in the mission to re-establish democracy in Gambia' (Jones and Westcott). The coercive diplomacy of ECOWAS eventually worked because Jammeh complied with the ultimatum of conceding defeat and accepting to leave Gambia. He left on Saturday January 22, 2017 after securing the deal that gave him a soft landing. Alex Vines, director of regional and security studies at the London-based think tank Chatham House earlier said that 'this is all about a soft landing compromise' (Okello 2016)

The exit of Yahya Jammeh paved the way for the commencement of the administration of President Adama Barrow who arrived the country from Senegal on Thursday January 26, 2017 exactly one week after taking the oath of office in the Gambia embassy, Senegal. He commended the efforts of ECOMIG and stated that ECOWAS troops will remain in the country indefinitely until they are not needed anymore (Akwei 2017).

BARROW OF GAMBIA AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN WEST AFRICA

Calls of congratulations from world leaders flooded in for Adama Barrow after he was sworn-in as President of Gambia on January 19, 2017 at the Gambian Embassy in Senegal. The United Nations Secretary General and the Prime Minister of Britain were one of the first callers. African Union authorities were also happy with the swearing-in ceremony as they expressed 'the willingness of the AU to cooperate with the new Gambian government to promote peace, stability, security, and reconciliation in Gambia. In his inaugural speech, President Adama Barrow proclaimed that Gambia's flag will fly high among those of the most democratic nations of the world noting that this is the first time since the independence in 1965 that Gambians have changed their government through the polls. He pledged to respect fundamental freedoms and the rule of law and promised significant democratic reform as well as uniting the people. He also called on the country's military to remain loyal (Jones and Westcott 2017).

Fifty-one years old Adama Barrow was chosen in September 2016 to be the presidential flag bearer of the United Democratic Party – a coalition of seven opposition parties. He is a British trained property developer and had worked for 10 years in his real estate agency. In his school days as a Real Estate undergraduate in the UK, Barrow had worked as a security guard at the Argos Catalogue store in north London. Adama Barrow declared that 'My right as a winner to be sworn in and assume the office of president is constitutionally guaranteed and irreversible... I therefore call on all civilians and military personnel of the state to support my presidency, since it is built on a constitutional foundation' (Kennedy 2017).

Yahya Jammeh eventually accepted the amnesty deal and departed Gambia paving way for the commencement of the administration of President Adama Barrow who arrived the country from Senegal on Thursday January 26, 2017 exactly one week after taking the oath of office in the Gambia embassy, Senegal. His arrival prompted shouts of exceeding joy, happiness and an array of excitement. The euphoria of brighter future filled the air and thousands of people lined the streets of Banjul the capital city of Gambia beginning from the Airport and all major streets, celebrating, dancing, whistling, singing and banging drums. On arrival he was greeted by members of his coalition government and high ranking military officials.

President Barrow did not move into the State House where Jammeh resided and ruled Gambia for 22 years for precautionary reasons but moved into his personal residence where he would operate until the State Houses is declared safe. A major task for Barrow is the maintenance of peace, security and economic recovery as well as steps to pacify the latent ethnic tensions in Gambia. The ethnic tension is mainly between the Jola ethnic group of Jammeh who are in the minority and the Mandinka ethnic group of Barrow who are at the minority. Meanwhile the Jola ethnic group control the military upper ranks (Burke 2017).

For purposes of maintaining peace, security and development at the formative stages President Barrow said that 'the ECOWAS troops will remain in the country indefinitely until they are not needed anymore. Barrow decided to retain the head of the army General Ousmane Badjie' (Akwei 2017) It is expected that Adama Barrow would restore the membership of Gambia to the Commonwealth and International Criminal Court and respect international law and world best practices.

West Africa is presently rigorously promoting political reforms in tandem with liberal democracy and is opposed to the sit tight tendencies of dictatorial leaders which was the trend in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. At this period, 'West Africa had become a region known for political instability and leaders who did not want to leave. The chances of a peaceful transfer of power were zero' (Ohene 2017). The rear exception was when General Olusegun Obasanjo (A Military Head of State) handed over power to a civilian government

in 1979 after four years in office. In terms of conceding to opposition victory in a democratic dispensation Senegal was a pace setter in West Africa but the tradition is apparently sustained the most by Ghana.

In West Africa the jinx of not conceding to opposition leaders was broken when Abdoulaye Wade won the Presidential election of 2000 and President Abdou Diouf conceded defeat. Eventually, President Abdoulaye Wade lost to Macky Sall the opposition candidate in the Presidential election of 2012 and conceded with reservations. The tradition was quickly followed by Ghana when John Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party defeated Jerry Rawlings (incumbent president) in the December 2000 presidential election and became president January 7, 2001 as President Jerry Rawlings conceded defeat. Also, John Atta Mills of National Democratic Party defeated John Kufuor (incumbent president) in the December 2008 presidential election and became President in January 7, 2009 as President John Kufuor conceded defeat. Again, Nana Akuffo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party defeated John Mahama (incumbent president) in the December 2016 Presidential Elections and became President in January 7, 2017 as President John Mahama conceding defeat.

The incidence that projected the democratic credentials of West Africa the most was the conceding of defeat by President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 Presidential elections. Despite all odds and assorted pressures to challenge the victory, President Jonathan called Muhammadu Buhari – the opposition leader to concede defeat and congratulated him. He eventually magnanimously arranged and presided over a hitch-free handover exercise devoid of litigations.

There are presently so many incumbent presidents that sprang up from opposition political parties. They include: Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, Adama Barrow of Gambia, Ernest Koroma of Sierra Leone, Macky Sall of Senegal, Patrice Talon of Benin, Alassane Ouattara of Cote d'Ivoire. Nigeria is Africa's biggest economy and most populous nation hence the mentor of democratic consolidation in West Africa in-particular and Africa in general.

The case of Jammeh is different because he left office more by coercion than consent. He succumbed to the threat of armed intervention by ECOWAS Standby Force. Nevertheless, to his credit is the fact that he did not allow the political impasse to degenerate to full-blown war thereby saving lives and properties associated with the use of force. He obviously was aware that he cannot defeat or confront the overwhelming powers of the ECOWAS Standby Force and that retreat through exile was the wise way out.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, Yahya Jammeh relinquished power and went into exile because of the intervention of ECOWAS Standby Force. He ruled the Gambia for 22 years but wanted to rule for ever from his words and deeds. The December 1, 2016 was designed to legitimise his grip on power and he put every machinery in motion to win. The rude shock was that he was defeated and that prompted him to take drastic measures to annul the election. These measures may have plunged Gambia into a civil war apart from truncating democracy. The action of ECOWAS Standby Force is a recipe to cleanse sit-tight African leaders and compel them to concede defeat in the polls to consolidate democracy. A blend of the carrot and stick or coercive diplomacy of ECOWAS eventually led to the successful swearing-in of Adama Barrow on 19th January 2017 and return to the seat of power in Banjul Gambia on the 26th of January 2017. ECOWAS Standby Force is still in Gambia to maintain peace, security and development as enjoined by President Adama Barrow.

The article recommends that sit-tight African leaders should learn from the examples of Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria whose former leaders willingly and graciously conceded defeat to opposition leaders because the sit tight syndrome have been cleansed from West African States. Those who have the symptom should suppress or conceal it to avoid public disgrace when it manifest because it would surely attract public outcry and ostracism. Sit tight leaders should be forced out of office when they lose election and don't concede. The Standby Force of ECOWAS should be strengthened and emulated by other regions in West Africa. The United Nations should consolidate on the gains of ECOWAS by way of ammunition, financial support and logistics.

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