

The Press and Foreign Policy: An Examination of the Role of the Nigerian Press in the Government Decision to Intervene in the Liberian Civil War in 1990¹

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Abstract

This work examines the role of the Nigerian press in the government's decision in 1990 to intervene in the Liberian civil war which consumed 160,000 lives and displaced 1.8 million people (Paasawe, 2006). Nigeria was the biggest contributor to the ECOMOG operation in Liberia (West Africa, 1992, 1996 & Defence Studies, 8:1998, p65). It committed 10,000 troops to the operation and spent \$4 billion to bring peace to the African country. Together with its intervention in Sierra Leone it sustained 1,000 casualties (IPA, 2003). Except for the first Commander provided by Ghana, all the nine Field-Commanders of the ECOMOG were Nigerians. President Babangida in fact initiated the mediation efforts and later the ECOMOG operation (Bundu, New Nigerian, 1990). The government policy was some good grist in the Nigerian press mill. Ten newspapers were selected because, first, they belonged to the serious and prestigious press in the country. All of them enjoyed a wide readership and could claim national outlook either because of their wide circulation or because of their worldview despite the degree of provincial concentration of readers. Secondly, they were a good representative sample of government and private newspapers. In addition, under military rule in Nigeria, there appeared to be greater freedom of expression on foreign policy matters, than on domestic issues. The New Nigerian newspapers and the Times group represented government newspapers. The Guardian, the Concord and the Democrat groups represented private newspapers. The papers also represented liberal and conservative viewpoints. Some were pro-establishment e.g. the New Nigerian, the Daily Times, the Democrat and the Concord. Others were centrist, e.g. The Guardian. We can also categorize them, for what the public saw them, as Lagos-Ibadan press and Kano-Kaduna press or the southern press and the northern press. For analytical purposes, we have also categorised them as interventionist press (those who advocated government intervention) and isolationist press (those that advocated non-intervention) and the insular press (those that followed government lead). Three newspapers, The Guardian, the Concord (and the Champion) sent correspondents to the frontline. The Government also sponsored its journalists to visit the arena. The Democrat and the National Concord canvassed the opinion for the Nigerian Government to intervene because of regional security and on humanitarian grounds. The Guardian wanted the Government out of the quagmire and criticised it for dragging its feet in evacuating Nigerians and considered any intervention as interference in Liberia's internal affairs in support of the embattled President Samuel Doe. The Daily Times and the New Nigerian supported Government position. The Government sited regional security as reason for intervention. The work is based on three assumptions. First, whenever there is an external crisis in Africa, the Nigerian Press report and comment on it extensively. Second, whenever an external crisis threatens regional security or portends humanitarian problem, the Nigerian Press call for Nigerian government intervention to resolve it. Third, the Nigerian Press have contributed a great deal in making the Nigerian government and public conscious of the implications of the Liberian crisis.

Keywords: Nigerian Press, Foreign Policy, Liberia

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Introduction

According to Olajide Aluko (1973), in the absence of parliament, newspapers are a major means of expression. They provide avenue for the government to react to public opinion on an issue and even make its stand known to the world. The press is therefore an avenue for discussing foreign policy issues. Yet, literature on the press and foreign policy making in Nigeria is scanty although the press has been the primary source of data for the few works on domestic sources of the country's foreign policy. Akinyemi (1986:xi) said that apart from a few publications by political parties, which quantitatively were far less than their public pronouncements, newspapers formed a major source of his work. He studied how regional powers in a federal system influenced foreign policy making. Gambari (1980:iii) also indicated that major Nigerian newspapers and magazines were one of the sources of his work. He examined domestic political structures and processes, particularly political parties, and their influence on foreign policy making. Oyinisan (1979) studied Radio as an instrument of foreign policy in Nigeria. Restricted to the electronic media, the work in addition, was primarily concerned with propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy. Its scope is limited and therefore necessitates a study like this one that specifically focuses on the print media which enjoy greater freedom of expression than the hitherto exclusively government owned radio and television. Sotunmbi's study (1981) on Nigeria's Recognition of the MPLA Government of Angola examined the inputs, process and consequences of the decision.

He treated the press superficially by lumping them with other interest groups, like labour and the university intellectuals. Moreover, he analysed, or merely mentioned only two government-owned newspapers in the case study - the New Nigerian and the Daily Times. It is not surprising that Sotunmbi arrived at some sweeping generalisations. First, that the press followed government lead. Second, that they did not have any input in the government's popular decision to recognise the MPLA. Third, that the press do not have the resources for in-depth reporting and analysis on events beyond the country's borders. Fourth, that therefore neither the newspapers nor the public, nor yet the intellectual elites influenced the decision to recognise the MPLA government. The work examined the structure and process of decision-making under a military administration, General Murtala Muhammed's, and the external factors, i.e. South African invasion, which ostensibly threatened Nigeria's security and thus coloured the perception of the leaders which influenced their course of action. He did not test the Press as an independent variable in foreign policy decision-making. Moreover, the domestic environment, which includes the press, has become more sophisticated than it was in the Murtala years (1976). So both the public and the press may not be expected to be passive to events now as they were in the mid 70's. In addition, the Nigerian press have increased numerically and improved professionally. They are fully aware of the effects of events and policies on Nigeria in particular. They make in-depth reports, they assign specific correspondents, desk officers and specialists on particular issues and in the case of Liberia sent reporters to cover the ground and to investigate government claims. They in fact canvass opinion.

These changes in the perception, interests and capacity of the press are so great that a fresh study on their impact on policy becomes necessary. It is obvious that since Angola, subsequent regimes have realised that a wider section of the press and public have become increasingly interested in foreign policy which governments cannot simply ignore. One study that has perhaps put in a better light the role of the Nigerian press in foreign policy making is Aluko's "Public Opinion and Nigeria's Foreign Policy under the Military (1973)." The work examined the role and influence of public opinion on foreign policy making during the Gowon military administration. Aluko assessed the ease with which the newspapers, the pressure groups and the different interest groups tried to influence the direction of the government's foreign policy. He appraised public opinion on major foreign policy issues, namely the Rhodesian Deadlock, Expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana and Britain's Bid to Join the European Economic Community (EEC) during 1970-72. Aluko concluded that public opinion played little role in the formulation of the country's foreign policy, except that some of the ideas expressed in the press tried to modify government stand on those issues subsequently. Yet, Aluko recognised that despite its limitations on foreign news coverage, a section of the press, like the New Nigerian and the Daily Times, was fairly good, perhaps one of the best in Africa. This has made a study purely focused on the press even more imperative. Another study that comes closer to this work is Ajibola's Foreign Policy and Public Opinion (1978), which was an attempt to conceptualise the role of the domestic environment in foreign policy making and exertion. He applied the concepts to the role of three structures in Britain, namely the mass media, pressure groups and parliament, in affecting the British government's attitudes to the Nigerian civil war of 1966-1970. Ajibola treated three interconnected variables.

In micro-analysis of this nature, variables should be examined independently, in order to arrive at a more specific answer. Again, the work was on Britain, which necessitates a similar one on the Nigerian press? A case study conducted by Whitman on “The Press and Neutron Bomb” (1986), which examined the impact of a major American newspaper, the Washington Post, on foreign policy making is very relevant to this work. The chronology of events on the decision to manufacture Neutron Bomb from day one (June 6, 1977) when Walter Pincus’s story appeared: “Neutron Killer Warhead Buried in ERDA (Energy Research Development Administration) Budget,” to the last day (April 7, 1978) when President Jimmy Carter released the statement announcing the deferral of ERW (Enhanced Radiation Weapon i.e. Neutron bomb) production and deployment amply demonstrates how the press heavily influenced the decision because of the adverse reports on it. This is a study on America, which also makes one on Nigeria necessary. The Media and Foreign Policy (ed) by Serfaty et al (1991), a collection of a three-year study by journalists, academics and politicians in the United States, is another relevant work. Despite its wide scope and variety of cases it is limited to the United States. It is primarily an attempt to answer the questions asked for many decades: who sets the agenda - the media or the government? To what extent do the media affect the substance of national policy as distinct from its presentation? Is the media’s coverage of foreign events and issues distorted or biased?

Do the competitive pressures cause the media to act irresponsibly on vital national security issues such as terrorism or arms control? Is the media’s adversarial relationship with government officials injurious and what, if anything, can or should be done to make this relationship more constructive? Is a code of conduct needed for either or both and if so, who is to devise it and enforce it? The questions are relevant and even wider in scope. Serfaty answered those questions: that in the United States, the media is being seen as a major force that influences both the substance of national and foreign policy and the process by which it is formulated. The effects of this influence are: civil rights coming top on the American consciousness; President Nixon’s resignation in the Watergate aftermath; defeat of President Carter in his presidential re-election bid; the impact of the bitter controversy over the Iran-Contra affair shook the Reagan administration which was only overcome by his unprecedented popularity. The limitation of that work is that it is Americo-centric, relying mostly on the experience of the American government and the American media, which is “unique in history.” One cannot agree with the authors more when they pointed out that these facts alone make it difficult to generalise from the American experience. It thus, stopped where this work begins – by focusing exclusively on the Nigerian experience. This is more so at a time when, according to Akinyemi (1974), it has become a marked feature of international politics for non-governmental institutions to be interfering in foreign policy formulation.

Nigerian Government Perception of the Liberian Crisis

General Ibrahim Babangida it was who first moved ECOWAS into establishing a permanent mediation committee to deal with all conflicts within the region, starting with Liberia. He made the proposal during the 13th Annual Summit of the ECOWAS in Banjul, Gambia in May 1990. That was five months after the outbreak of the Liberian civil war and as the situation worsened. The committee comprised four countries - Nigeria, Ghana, Togo and Mali. Again, in August 1990, when the Committee met in Banjul over the escalating crisis, General Babangida proposed the establishment of the ECOMOG. It comprised Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Gambia and Sierra Leone. Other countries and organizations joined later – Senegal and Mali in 1992, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Uganda in 1993 and 400 observers from the United Nations.

In the first two years, Nigeria committed more than 10 battalions to the ECOMOG, making it the biggest contributor of forces. Subsequently, the leadership of the operation which was given to Ghana initially turned to Nigeria in September 1990. This followed the capture of the Liberian leader, Samuel Doe, in the ECOMOG camp and his subsequent execution by a rival faction. Nigeria was also the leading contributor to the ECOMOG Fund. Its contribution by 1992 was said to be in the region of N2.8 billion. Nigeria’s former minister of information, Chief Alex Akinyele, disputed this figure, but said that Nigeria’s financial contribution did not at any time exceed ten per cent of ECOMOG’s funding. No figure of the total fund was made available. Former Minister of External Affairs, Major-General Ike Nwachukwu (rtd), also denied the N2.8 billion figure but said that Nigeria provided seventy per cent of ECOMOG funds. The latest figure was by Nigeria’s foreign minister Chief Tom Ikimi who told the world in a press conference in September 1995 that Nigeria spent \$30 million US dollar on the ECOMOG. Nigeria was the single largest financier of ECOMOG. Similarly, Nigeria’s diplomatic effort in resolving the crisis was commensurate with its military and financial commitment in the peace-keeping operation.

A retired career diplomat said that in foreign policy matters like the Liberian operation, the Foreign Ministry had greater freedom and independence of judgement than the Ministry of Defence which in most cases is only to work out the logistics and other operational framework for action.

In analysing the decision to intervene in Liberia, Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Rilwanu Lukman said that the press generally influence public opinion which rebounds on policy makers and in turn has some effect on the direction of foreign policy. This is more especially when the press extensively analyse events as they occur on current basis. He added that to some extent they make impact, depending on the issues involved, and in relation to Nigeria's interest in the particular matter. The former minister pointed out that the press, by their extensive coverage and commentaries on the Liberian situation played some role in giving Nigerian authorities a picture of what was going on, which formed the basis of action. The other sources are the diplomatic missions, the international media, special envoys and personal contacts. But he asked: how involved could one get involved? Nigeria could have been involved alone, but as he said it would be seen as an intervention in the internal affairs of a sister country. So, the regional approach was adopted.

Government perspective on the crisis was in the first instance therefore defined as a local affair of Liberia but it later assumed a greater dimension, the consequences of which spelt disaster on the west African sub-region. Therefore, the government had to act in the national interest. It was the official Nigerian government's position that if the Liberian situation was allowed to spread someone could wake up one morning and take-over another country, and may be helped by somebody from across the border. That trend could be dangerous to the region as a whole. For the relative peace and stability that the region enjoyed, this could be a dangerous precedent, the minister said. However, he did not rule out personal interests of individual actors, e.g. the Head of State "who is the real foreign minister" of his country. His personal inclination and disposition towards a foreign policy issue matters a lot. If a leader does not like to be involved, no matter the pressure, he cannot be forced to. In the Liberian case, regional officials such as Dr. Abbas Bundu, the then Executive Secretary of the ECOWAS, played important role also in cobbling the coalition of states to form ECOMOG.

If the personal inclination of a President matters a great deal in foreign policy decision, such as Nigeria's involvement in Liberia, what was President Babangida's definition of the Liberian crisis? What made his government to decide to intervene in Liberia? A section of the Nigerian press and public regarded him as friend of Doe's. Newspapers quoting official reports have indicated that he had leased to, or given the Liberian leader, a plane and helped him with weapons and food supplies. In June 1990, General Ibrahim Babangida agreed to play a more active role in the on-going crisis in Liberia while receiving a delegation from the Togolese leader Gnassingbe Eyadema, a member of the ECOWAS mediation panel. He stressed that the interest of Liberian citizens should be their paramount consideration in the efforts to resolve the crisis. This was six months into the war. This shows that after regional security considerations, in which all ECOWAS leaders were interested and committed to, humanitarian crisis was apparently another major factor considered by the government of Nigeria. Babangida had also suggested to the visiting Togolese delegation that their mediation effort should be based on the ECOWAS Charter which he explained later in his press conference.

On October 31, 1990, President Ibrahim Babangida suddenly walked into the Nnamdi Azikiwe Press Centre in Dodan Barracks, Lagos, then Nigeria's capital, during the quarterly press briefing by his vice-president, Admiral Augustus Aikhomu. In the address entitled "The Imperative Features of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the Crisis in Liberia" (New Nigerian, November 1, 1990), President Babangida denied any ulterior motives behind Nigeria's decision. The President said that the principal consideration of Nigeria's international relations, after the defence and protection of the country's territorial integrity from internal and external aggression, was to ensure and encourage peaceful co-existence. This is on the belief that crises or conflicts in neighbouring countries would inevitably have spill-over effect on Nigeria. According to General Babangida, this belief was consistent with Nigeria's policy of shared common interests, aspirations for peace, security and economic progress that explained the efforts to restore peace in Chad, which shares contiguous boundaries with Nigeria. He said Liberia on the other hand, completes the three concentric circles governing Nigeria's Foreign and Defence Policies, and that the three interlocking and conterminous elements, namely sovereignty, ring-countries and region, constitute the only realistic analysis of Nigeria's primary security boundaries. General Babangida pointed out that in the sub-region of sixteen countries, where one out of three West Africans is a Nigerian, it was imperative that any regime in this country should relentlessly strive towards the prevention or avoidance of the deterioration of any crisis which threatens to jeopardise or compromise the stability, prosperity and security of the sub-region.

He said that since those considerations formed the objectives of Nigeria's pioneering efforts for the establishment of the ECOWAS itself, then there was no gainsaying that when certain events occur in this sub-region, depending upon their intensity and magnitude, which are bound to affect Nigeria's politico-military and socio-economic environment we should not stand by as helpless and hapless spectators. The Nigerian leader stressed that if the events are of such a level that has the potentials to threaten the stability, peace and security of the sub-region, Nigeria was duty bound to react or respond in appropriate manner necessary to either avert the disaster or to take adequate measures to ensure peace, tranquillity and harmony. The President contended that many people do not know, nor appreciate either, the danger or international embarrassment the Liberian crisis portends for the sub-region in particular, and to Africa and the black race in general.

On humanitarian grounds, President Babangida said that critics tended to ignore the appalling catastrophe that the Liberian crisis had created for the sub-region. He pointed out that while Nigeria had no territorial ambition in Liberia or anywhere in Africa, or worldwide, yet neither Nigeria nor the other members of the ECOMOG forced their way into the Liberian conflict in a manner remotely resembling military adventurism. This is the key point of the speech. Nigeria, said Babangida, was a member of a sub-regional group that took solemn decision to restore peace by separating the warring factions in a sister country, Liberia, which had been temporarily put out of action. He further argued that events in Liberia have led to massive destruction of property, the massacre by all parties of thousands of innocent civilians including foreign nationals, women and children some of whom have sought sanctuary in the Churches, Mosques, Diplomatic Missions, Hospitals and the Red Cross Society, contrary to all recognised standard of civilised behaviour and international ethics and decorum. He wondered how they could watch while Liberia burnt. Babangida stressed that ECOWAS was on a mission of ensuring the restoration of peace and normalcy to that sister country so that its citizens and other nationals in that Africa's first and oldest Republic would live in peace and security and continue to contribute to the general progress and orderly development of our sub-region. He said their task was protective and promotional for all Liberians and humanity. Quoting the UNHCR, he said that the Liberian refugee crisis was one of the worst in the world, with 600,000 outside and another half a million inside Liberia. General Babangida concluded that in ECOWAS, as in the Liberian crisis, there was no discrepancy in objectives at the national or international levels.

Soon after the AFRC had ratified the decision to establish ECOMOG, General Babangida explained that the delay in the evacuation of Nigerians living in Liberia, was because Nigerians and Liberians or any other blackman within the continent of Africa were the same people. He was referring to the evacuation of Americans and Europeans. Liberians, he said, were brothers and the Nigerians over there saw themselves as part of that society and the government had been hoping that the situation would improve. General Babangida added that it was wrong for any government to create distinction between fellow Africans. Then he said the ECOWAS was sending its troops because there was now a situation of total anarchy. So the priority of the Nigerian government was not just Nigerians in Liberia, it was the entire unfortunate people living in Liberia.

Diplomatic shuttles peaked in earnest by delegations and the leaders of ECOWAS even before the May 25th Summit in Banjul. President Doe of Liberia visited Babangida in the first week of May to condole with him over the April 22 abortive coup incident. He used the opportunity to brief Babangida on the rebel activities in his country. A few weeks later, ECOWAS foreign ministers began the pre-summit conference in Banjul to draw the agenda, which included the Senegal-Mauritania border crisis and the Liberian conflict. Just then a civil society organization, MOJA, sent an urgent letter to Babangida pleading for intervention in Liberia. The letter came when the fighting between the government forces and the rebels was "just two hours away from Monrovia." The MOJA urged Babangida to take emergency action to prevent further killing of Liberians. At the summit in Banjul, President Babangida presented his proposal for a mediation committee on disputes in the sub-region. The modalities, membership, terms of reference, number and time-span of the committee were all set out in the proposal.

In their communiqué after the summit, the ECOWAS leaders expressed grave concern on the disputes and conflicts among some member states which had disrupted normal life and functioning of the community. They highlighted the article on no-aggression in the ECOWAS Treaty and then established the standing mediation committee comprising Mali, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana.

Subsequently, the Nigerian government issued a release assuring that it would ensure the safety of all Nigerians in Liberia. The release came from the Ministry of External Affairs.

This time, the government made one of its most serious reactions yet to the Liberian crisis, regretting the deteriorating conditions there, in spite of advice and efforts of well-meaning friends of that country to seek a peaceful solution (New Nigerian, June 6th). This indicated the exasperation of the Nigerian government over the situation and attempt to do something for the Nigerians trapped there. This followed increasing press reports and criticisms of the government apparent inaction. Significantly, the statement added that the ministry was closely monitoring the situation and that the government was fully committed to the security of Nigerians living there. The ministry reiterated its concern over Nigerians living in Liberia, which it hoped would not be target of molestation or ill-treatment. Similarly, a Nigerian envoy issued a statement denying alleged Nigerian involvement in Liberia in favour of one side. This followed a report by The Guardian on Sunday on June 10, 1990, that Nigeria was involved in the negotiations to find asylum for Doe. The Democrat, June 12, 1990, also reported that a Liberian envoy was sent to Nigeria to request an emergency intervention in the crisis. One other Liberian envoy was simultaneously appealing to the OAU and the ECOWAS for such action. President Babangida himself, while responding to a plea by a visiting Togolese delegation, announced that he had agreed to play a more active mediatory role in the Liberian crisis. He also said that his government was willing to work together with other well-meaning countries in the sub-region to reconvene the suspended peace talks (New Nigerian, June 20, 1990 & The Democrat June 21, 1990). The announcement followed the failure of the Freetown peace talks which Eyadema blamed on the absence of a strong mediator. He was apparently referring to Nigeria. This was Babangida's first major announcement on Liberia since the Banjul Summit in May 27-30, 1990.

The OAU sent a peace delegation to Liberia headed by Ambassador Ahmad Haggag, Assistant Secretary-General, Coordination and Missions. He expressed concern over the refugee situation there and also applauded the peace discussions in Freetown under the auspices of the Church leaders (NN June 21, 1990). In addition, Herman Cohen, the American Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, warned that Monrovia would fall in the event of any rebel attack (NN June 22, 1990). President Babangida at this time ordered the airlift of relief materials to Liberia as a result of a firsthand account of the plight of the refugees from a special envoy of President Joseph Momoh of Sierra Leone. He directed the Ministry of External Affairs to carry out the instruction immediately. He expressed Nigeria's anxiety for steps to be taken immediately to avert massive bloodshed and save innocent Liberian citizens from further sufferings. Consequently, Nigeria, he said, would request that the ECOWAS Mediation Committee be put into effect immediately to deal with the situation. President Momoh's envoy said his country's view was that the leaders of the sub-region should intervene urgently to restore peace in Liberia. Ghana's military leader, Jerry Rawlings, sent a message to his Sierra Leonian counterpart, Joseph Momoh, expressing deep concern over the Liberian situation and offered to work within the framework of the ECOWAS to ensure a peaceful settlement of the conflict. In the message delivered by a high-powered delegation, Rawlings supported any collective efforts to bring the situation in Liberia back to normalcy. Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire were worst affected in the refugee crisis.

As press reports increased, diplomatic efforts intensified in the region. Nigerian diplomats in Monrovia at this time hurriedly moved to Freetown. ECOWAS leaders were making moves with Sierra Leonian leader, Joseph Momoh, asking President Doe to quit Monrovia. General Ibrahim Babangida meanwhile, told Airport correspondents in Lagos, after seeing off President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin Republic that Nigerians in Liberia would be evacuated if there was any threat to them. Babangida also pointed out that it was the moral responsibility of everybody in the region to stop the carnage. He referred to a move being made by the ECOWAS Executive Secretary.

ECOWAS mediation panel met in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on July 5, 1990, to find acceptable solution to the crisis. The meeting invited Sierra Leone and Guinea, the two non-members yet the worst affected. The meeting followed Dr. Abbas Bundu's fact-finding mission to the Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Togo and his "conclusions" with President Babangida. A report of the meeting showed that Nigeria and Sierra Leone were the only members interested in a military operation. Dr. Abbas Bundu himself publicly credited President Babangida for the idea of a peace-keeping force. Meanwhile, a radio broadcast by the protestant mission ELWA, said Monrovia was on the verge of collapse as Taylor's forces were closing in. It also reported that President Doe had introduced proposals to the Liberian legislature for intervention by the United Nations or the OAU and a machinery and modality for early elections in January 1991.

Two Nigerian ships set sail for Liberia on July 15, 1990, to evacuate Nigerian citizens. The Federal Government warned that it would not tolerate any situation where harm would come to Nigerians abroad. It reaffirmed its commitment to finding a peaceful settlement to the crisis. Dr. Abbas Bundu again praised General Babangida, in an interview with the *New Nigerian*, for the peace initiative on Liberia as the ECOWAS resumed its peace talks. Among the Nigerian ships, one was a landing ship, the other a Fast Attack Covette (FAC) for support. The landing ship could carry a battalion plus heavy equipment. The Flag Officer Commanding Western Naval Command, Rear-admiral Babatunde Elegbede, confirmed the departure and added that other nationalities who might seek assistance from Nigeria might be evacuated also. He pointed out that Nigeria was a regional power. He too debunked the notion that Nigeria was late in evacuating its citizens. Significantly, the senior military officer said that Nigeria had up to the minute detailed report on the Liberian situation and that there were no apparent threats to Nigerians so far in Liberia.

With the first batch of Liberian refugees arriving Lagos on July 28, 1990, and Charles Taylor announcing that he would not allow President Doe leave Liberia two days later, the moment of decision was around the corner. Media blitz by the Nigerian press was intensified, intense diplomatic shuttles in the region increased and harrowing news from Liberia was pouring. President Ibrahim Babangida left for Banjul, The Gambia, on August 5, 1990, to attend an emergency meeting of the ECOWAS mediation committee. In concert with other ECOWAS nations, Nigeria was said to be considering a military intervention.

President Dauda Jawara of The Gambia, who was also the ECOWAS Chairman, told the meeting that given the loss of lives and property and the refugee problem in Liberia, they could not let the situation deteriorate further. Present at the meeting were President Babangida of Nigeria, President Rawlings of Ghana, President Momoh of Sierra Leone and President Conte of Guinea. Others were the Malian Foreign Minister, the Togolese Minister of Justice, the OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim, Dr. Abbas Bundu, and a representative of the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee in Liberia, the non-governmental organisation involved in the mediation efforts. At the end of the meeting on August 8, 1990, Dr. Bundu announced that an ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) would be established in Liberia for the purpose of keeping the peace, restoring law and order and enforcing the cease-fire. He also highlighted ECOMOG's operational structure which would be under a Commander from Ghana and a Deputy Commander from Guinea. The leaders assured the people of Liberia that the sole purpose of ECOMOG was to create the necessary conditions for normal life to resume.

Back in Nigeria, President Ibrahim Babangida met on August 9, 1990, with the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) to consider global developments as they affect Nigeria. Among the issues were the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (August 2, 1990) and its effect on oil prices and the proposal for military intervention, involving Nigerian soldiers, in Liberia (NN August 9, 1990). Soon after, Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Rilwanu Lukman, began to canvass support for the decision. He addressed heads of diplomatic Missions in Nigeria and called on their governments to support the ECOWAS initiative. An emergency fund of US\$50 million was created to finance the military operation and the immediate humanitarian needs of the Liberian people. Earlier, Lukman had met with the Ambassadors of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The meeting with the heads of Missions was also meant to erase the belief that ECOWAS intervention was a design to serve one party or punish the other (*New Nigerian*, August 10, 1990). After the AFRC meeting, President Babangida announced that each of the ECOMOG contributors would be responsible for their troops (NN August 10th, 1990).

At inception, the ECOMOG members were Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea and The Gambia. Ghana and Nigeria were members of the ECOWAS mediation panel; Sierra Leone and Guinea are Liberia's neighbours and Gambia was the Chairman of the ECOWAS.

The Nigerian Press and Nigeria's Foreign Policy

The mass media of communication, namely the newspaper, radio and television are regarded as the watchdog of the society. "The daily and informal contact with the public makes them a giant prism, separating the huge mass of public affairs into discrete and salient items – individual beams so to speak – that illuminate particular areas of public policy" (Cohen, 1966). These reports apparently connect primary actors, the much larger number of observers and even would-be participants in the political system. This point has been given a practical expression by a British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Douglas Hurd (*The Democrat*, Oct. 4, 1993). He said that policy-makers needed the media despite the complex relationship between them. In short, the press is important in the process of making policy.

In Nigeria today, the press have assumed an active role in both domestic and foreign policy matters. A study in 1978 has shown that the government had realised that a wider section of the public was becoming interested in Nigeria's external relations (Sotumbi, 1981). That is evident in the number of articles, columns, reports and editorials on foreign issues published on the pages of the Nigerian newspapers. The role increases as the degree of freedom increases. The Nigerian press is generally regarded as the freest in Africa (Aluko, 1973). One thing, there are buoyant and vibrant private newspapers which compete favourably with government ones. Moreover, some of these newspapers are adopting the best technology to reach out to various arenas of diplomacy and conflict and could instantly report events as they happen. They also try to furnish their newsrooms with foreign desks that specialise on international relations and employ foreign policy analysts. For example, the Democrat Weekly used to have a retired career diplomat with flare for writing, Ambassador Mahmoud Yahya, as a columnist. His column alone called the attention of ordinary readers and policy-makers. He confirmed that he stopped his weekly columns because of the indignation officials showed on some of his comments e.g. the William Keiting Affair, a British journalist working as correspondent for the Financial Times in Lagos. He was deported by the Babangida Administration for his reports on the whereabouts of the gulf war windfall. As stated earlier, various works on Nigerian foreign policy sourced their data from the Nigerian press. Olajide Aluko (1973) even said that in the absence of parliament, newspapers have become a major means of expression. Newspapers provide avenue for the government to react to public opinion on an issue and even make its stand known to the world. The press is therefore an avenue for discussing foreign policy issues. Through the newspapers governments fly kites to gauge public opinion.

The press are avenues for making foreign policy pronouncements and sometimes they could even influence policy. Akinyemi (1974) contended that the Daily Service editorial on the Congo crisis in the 1960s, formed part of the speech of Nigeria's Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, at the United Nations. The press influence foreign policy decisions by spinning the issues or raising it for public debate. This helps the government to gauge public opinion before proceeding on its action. Sometimes by exposing certain plans, the press make governments to alter their course or postpone it.

In Liberia the main actors in the civil war resorted in most cases to reaching out to the world through the media, mostly radio stations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The Nigerian press report such interviews and statements the next day which policy makers and diplomats find very handy. Such reports are analysed by governments for action. These press clips in large measure compliment the demarches received from diplomatic missions by home governments for further consideration. Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman, Nigerian Foreign Minister (1990-91), said that he made sure clippings of foreign news items of newspapers were made and kept for him everyday even when he was out on foreign trips. Some of the papers could make their independent investigations and publish them. For example, the Guardian reported that military intervention was being considered by Nigeria for the Liberian problem (The Guardian on Sunday, June 22, 1990). Dr. Olatunji Dare said that their editorial position on Liberia was influenced by their liberal editorial policy which frowns upon arbitrary rule in any guise or disguise. The paper suspected that Nigeria's intervention flowed from President Babangida's friendship with Doe in addition to serving as a means of embezzling public funds. The paper also knew that the intervention was not well planned. There were pressing problems at home which Liberia seemed a deliberate diversion. After the intervention got underway, there was lack of accounting on casualties and cost. The paper also suspected that it was going to be an open-ended operation. On the other hand, some editors or writers are also guided by the same considerations as government officials on an issue and they make their independent analysis which tallies, without necessarily supporting, the official position such as the Congo editorial referred to above. For example, the editorials of The Democrat and the National Concord on the worsening crisis in Liberia in June and July tallied with the explanations given by President Babangida on the imperative features of Nigeria's foreign policy and the crisis in Liberia which he made in October, 1990. As a member of the Editorial Board and Foreign Affairs Editor of The Democrat newspapers [1990-96] the author can say that there was absolute independence of judgement in our papers' editorials on the Liberian crisis. As for the Concord, independence is evident in the reports and editorials it published that were very critical of the government inaction in comparison to other governments on the evacuation of nationals. Moreover, most of its editorials were made much earlier than the government decision.

Editorial comments play an important role in the foreign ministry's analysis of an issue. This depends on how authoritative the editorials are on the issue.

A survey of newspapers in the United States of America provides an explanation of factors that affect the perception of the press in their choice of foreign news items (Schelling, 1968). These are: threat to world (and regional) peace; anticipated reader interest... and involvement and; loss of lives and poverty. In addition, most editors focus more on factors having significant impact or consequences, especially when security and national interest are involved. Similarly, co-relational analysis indicates that editors' perception of foreign news is determined by individual differences and organisational constraints in the newsroom. The context and content of news events have an impact on the way editors, as gate-keepers, perceive and select the stories they run daily. Context-Oriented explanation looks at foreign news event and its relationship with such contextual variables as trade relations, cultural relevance, political involvement and geographical proximity. Cultural affinities and economic association between countries are also determinants of news coverage of an issue or area by newspapers. Content-Oriented explanation on the other hand focuses more on the characteristics inherent in the foreign event itself regardless of external setting. This follows the long-standing definition of what is newsworthy: timeliness, impact or consequence, human interest and the conflict. It is very clear that regardless of the origin and context, a foreign event that satisfies the above criteria tends to be judged important by the editors. Thus, readers' interest comes first. So also is the nature of the events, the impact and the consequences they have on the country. The survey also shows that editors perception of foreign news factors appear to be a function of individuals and organisational difference, such as political ideology, professional experience, availability of news hole and wire services.

The ten newspapers studied in this work exhibit, most, if not all the factors enumerated above in considering the Liberian problem. The Democrat and the Concord, which are private press, defined the Liberian crisis and the need for external intervention within the context of humanitarian and regional security concerns. Another private newspaper, the Guardian, despite the humanitarian crisis which it admitted causes a lot of concern, yet defined it as an internal affair of Liberia from which the Nigerian government should steer clear. It even accused the administration of pursuing a personal agenda in Liberia. It thus regarded the motive of any involvement as sinister.

The Nigerian Press and the Liberian Crisis

The Nigerian press became interested in the Liberian crisis as it increasingly took a dangerous dimension on both the humanitarian and regional security aspects. This is evident in the news reports and editorial commentaries that the newspapers splashed daily about the crisis. The crisis came to the public through the medium of an international broadcasting service, the London-based British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) when Charles Taylor phoned on New Year's Day in 1990 and introduced himself as the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) with the aim of overthrowing President Samuel K. Doe. Later, a British journalist, Mark Huband, was abducted by the NPFL forces in a train ambush, and his subsequent release gave the world the first eye-witness account of Charles Taylor's operations and the strength of his forces (Focus on Africa, July 1990:18). The Nigerian press initially, and in most cases later on, obtained their news reports from secondary sources such as the BBC and the government-owned News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) which itself relies heavily on the major international news agencies like the Reuters, Agence France Press (AFP) and others around the world. However, their selection of the news items depended entirely on their editors' judgement. This in turn is based on certain factors, which affect editors' perception and selection of news. The factors are universal and researchers have shown how important they could be in newspapers coverage of foreign news (Schelling, 1968).

Reports and editorial commentaries of the ten newspapers spanned one full year (1990) from the first day any newspaper ran a story about the Liberian crisis to the last day of any newspaper report or commentary. The Democrat newspapers take the credit for being the first to open and the last to close the chapter within the period. Its first report was on January 3, 1990, and its last on December 28, 1990. It is also the first to publish an editorial on the crisis. It is also important to know that all the newspapers heavily relied on foreign news agencies such as Reuters and Agence France Press (AFP) which provide the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) with such foreign reports far and wide, as well as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) based in London, which has become the primary source of foreign news for the Nigerian newspapers, particularly interviews and on the spot coverage of events by its correspondents in nearly all parts of the world. It is noteworthy also that Charles Taylor introduced himself to the world through the BBC in a telephone call when he launched his offensive on Nimba County.

Despite their heavy reliance on foreign media, it is instructive however, that far into the crisis, when Nigeria had become deeply involved, some three newspapers, the Concord, Guardian and Champion sent their reporters to Liberia for independent coverage. Later, in reaction to the initiative of the private press and in order not to be outwitted journalists from government print and electronic media went on a guided tour to Liberia. BBC's Elizabeth Blunt and Concord's Nwabueze were caught in the crossfire in September when Johnson stormed the ECOMOG camp and abducted President Doe.

Let us see how the newspapers defined and perceived the crisis. For analytical purposes the newspapers are grouped into three: the interventionist press, which wanted an international/Nigerian intervention; the isolationist press which warned the Nigerian government against involvement and; the insular press which supported any policy by government on the issue.

I. The Interventionist Press:

(a) The Democrat

Exactly one month after the outbreak of the crisis in Liberia, beginning with Charles Taylor's incursion on Nimba County on December 24, 1989, The Democrat published an editorial simply titled "LIBERIA" which is the first by any newspaper since the crisis erupted. It traced the history of the Liberia as a Republic, the leadership of the Americo-Liberians and their overthrow by Sgt. Samuel Doe, his repressive rule marked by at least seven coup attempts. It pointed out that the current crisis has turned Liberia into a pathetic situation with unarmed civilians and villagers on the run. The paper predicted that if it continued, the country may collapse or fall prey to further American machinations. According to The Democrat, this could be inimical to the so far relatively peaceful West African sub-region. The paper then provided figures of refugees fleeing Liberia into neighbouring West African countries: 12,000 to Guinea and 24,000 to Côte d'Ivoire. The editorial from the onset set the The Democrat on humanitarian and regional security line which it consistently and continuously toed throughout the one year period. This set the basis also for its proposals to, and support for what became a regional, and Nigeria's leading role in the effort to resolve the crisis.

In June, the paper published another editorial, "Liberia's chequered peace," commenting on the peace initiative organised by the Liberian clergy, the Interfaith Conference in Freetown, Sierra Leone. It observed that the conference ended in a stalemate and that the peace broker might soon be the United States (The Democrat is traditionally anti-American). It alluded to the call by Liberians, who saw the US as a historical ally, for an international peace-keeping force. To underline its opposition to President Doe however, which was also the mood of the Nigerian public the paper said that it was not easy for Doe to gain the sympathy of the Americans, but that Taylor was no better replacement or saviour. Though it did not like the United States as a peace broker the paper appealed to the United States, in the interest of humanity and the innocent victims of the civil strife, to act. This has further pointed to its humanitarian concern in the crisis.

July was a critical period in the crisis. It marked the climax of the carnage and the worsening humanitarian situation in which countries began to evacuate their nationals in earnest. Liberia was grinding to a halt and governance was running out as killings became indiscriminate. Embassies were turning into refugee camps for their nationals, particularly ECOWAS members.

The Democrat published an on-the-spot BBC report on "How the embassies fare." Guinea was said to be doing marvellously well for its nationals, while Ghana, and particularly Nigeria, were doing virtually nothing for their trapped nationals. Nigerian embassy staff were said to have all gone to Freetown in neighbouring Sierra Leone, for talks on the Liberian situation, Ghana's Ambassador was said to have totally refused shelter for Ghanaian nationals who ran to the embassy. Incidentally, Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea became the principal members of the ECOMOG operation. They were accused by Charles Taylor of supporting President Doe.

On August 1, 1990, The Democrat published another editorial on the deteriorating condition in Liberia which has become tragic. Headlined "Savage and Barbaric," the editorial commented on the stories it previously carried on its front page Foreign Briefs column about the massacre of 200 people, mostly women and children, at the Tubman Boulevard Church, where they were seeking shelter, and the killing of another 30 people at the JFK Hospital and the abduction and killing of another 200 people in hospitals, while corpses littered the streets in the capital, Monrovia. These incidents were largely referred to by President Ibrahim Babangida in his press conference later in reply to criticism by a section of the press and the public opposed to Nigeria's involvement. The Democrat denounced all the three rival factions, namely President Doe, Charles Taylor and Yormie Johnson.

The paper supported the European Community Ambassadors call in Monrovia for a concerted international involvement to stop the crisis. The editorial suggested that since there was no legitimate government in Liberia the international community join hands, under any guise (the ECOWAS; OAU; UN) to send troops to restore sanity. This editorial came three days before the ECOWAS mediation committee met in an emergency in Banjul on August 4, 1990, at which the ECOMOG was established following Nigeria's proposal. Interesting enough, General Babangida and the ECOWAS Executive Secretary, Dr. Abbas Bundu, again pointed those very circumstances as compelling reasons for their decision to establish ECOMOG. The Democrat suggested that all the three warring factions be decapitated and their military adventures thwarted by an international force for the sake of the poor citizens. The paper reiterated that they should be cleared from the scene. It further argued that political considerations such as non-interference in internal affairs of countries should not be allowed to constraint reasonable actions to save lives. This obviously meant military action by members of the international community. The significance of this editorial, and that of the National Concord below in the history of Nigerian press and foreign policy making, is similar to that of the Daily Service in 1960 during the Congo crisis which Akinyemi believed had also influenced the Nigerian government.

On August 9, 1990, The Democrat led its front page with the decision of the mediation committee to establish an ECOWAS peace-keeping force for Liberia to end the 8-month civil war which was spilling over to the neighbouring countries. The paper quoted Bundu announcing establishment of an ECOWAS cease-fire monitoring group (ECOMOG) in Liberia for the purpose of keeping the peace, restoring law and order and ensuring that the cease-fire was respected. He said that ECOMOG would be placed under a commander provided by Ghana to be assisted by a Deputy Commander from Guinea and that the Heads of State and Government had assured the people of Liberia that the sole purpose of the ECOMOG was to create the necessary conditions for normal life to resume.

On September 4, 1990, an Interim Government was formally set up as ECOMOG fortified Monrovia against rebel activities. But on September 10, 1990, the worst came when President Doe was captured in the ECOMOG camp in Monrovia by Prince Johnson and subsequently killed.

The next day, The Democrat published its fourth editorial on Liberia's nine-month civil war. It recounted ex-president Samuel Doe's inglorious past but still condemned the attack on his family. The paper said this was bad for the future of the already grounded country. It suggested, for the umpteenth time, that all factions should disarm, relinquish their claims to the presidency and allow a disinterested party, under a government of national unity, to come to the stage and reorganise the country before handing over to an elected government. In fact, the paper said that its Liberian policy hinged on a true national government based on those objectives. This was similar to the ECOWAS peace plan. The paper supported the ECOMOG, pointing out that without it Liberians would continue to die. It reported that about 500,000 Liberians were reported to have fled the country.

The Democrat published yet another editorial on November 7, 1990, on the crisis within the ECOWAS, which resuscitated the traditional rivalry between the English-speaking and the French-speaking members. Entitled "ECOWAS: To be or not to be?" the editorial came out on the day of another Banjul meeting aimed at ironing out the differences between the two groups over ECOMOG. Burkina Faso and the Côte d'Ivoire led the opposition while Nigeria and Ghana led the pro-ECOMOG side. The Democrat urged, in its oft-repeated regionalist call that the Banjul Summit should work out an acceptable compromise in the best interest of the Liberian people. It concluded by urging the summit to ensure the survival of ECOWAS and ensure a peaceful resolution of the Liberian crisis.

The paper closed the yearlong Liberian crisis with another editorial on December 11, 1990, entitled "When ECOWAS Smiled." The editorial gave kudos to the Bamako Summit which many people thought could mark the end of the sub-regional organisation as a result of the division among members over the presence of ECOMOG. The paper said the meeting turned out to be a big success with thirteen out of sixteen members attending, including the main Liberian rebel leader. Stamping the seal of approval on ECOMOG, the paper pointed out that but for ECOMOG, Liberia perhaps may have been different today. It said that the lesson to be drawn from ECOMOG with correct understanding and positive cooperation from the international community was that Africa was in a position to solve its problems. In drawing analogy between the success of ECOMOG and the failure of OAU's Tchadian peace-keeping initiative, The Democrat said it was due to the involvement of extra-territorial powers, the United States. It saw ECOMOG as a new diplomatic thrust in Africa.

The paper then made its usual humanitarian appeal that the Liberian crisis was a symbol of self-interest pursued along brutal lines and crimes against the people. In its contextual definition of the crisis The Democrat described non-interference as suicidal and unpardonable when thousands of people were being murdered by self-seeking, merciless adventurers while at the same time African countries were condemning racist South Africa. The paper said that Liberia was the recent African shame and only ECOMOG saved the day.

(b) The Concord

Like The Democrat, the National Concord gave an early account of what was happening in Liberia. A few weeks after the invasion of Nimba County by Charles Taylor, the National Concord in January published a story predicting that civil war loomed in Liberia. It is difficult from the onset to know the stand of the paper but the mention of civil war indicated that it regarded it as an internal affair.

In its first editorial three weeks later on “The Liberian blood-bath,” the paper said the Nimba County incursion and the civil strife had claimed about 600 lives and the spectre of the bloodbath was yet to be dispelled. It said further that the insurgency which all but degenerated into a civil war was the tenth attempt to unseat Doe since he seized power in 1980. Like all the other Nigerian newspapers, the National Concord blamed President Doe and his actions that read like a chronicle of unrelenting brigandage. In what might be defining the crisis as an internal affair of Liberia but which could spill over to neighbouring countries, the editorial opposed the violation of any country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, pointing out however that the latest clashes in Liberia must be understood in their proper historical and political context. The paper suggested that Doe must allow Liberians to freely determine their destiny.

In another editorial on Liberia’s embattled press, following the fire in the Daily Observer the national concord blamed President Doe for his crude attempt to silence the press, citing cases of arrests of journalists. It accused him of replicating the same reprehensive practices which the world persistently condemned in South Africa. This has given the international dimension of the crisis. The paper urged governments, journalists and lovers of freedom all over Africa to denounce in unmistakable words the climate of intolerance and repression that was engulfing Liberia. The paper has clearly ignored the sovereignty and internal affairs of Liberia by inviting the world to say something.

In another editorial, calling on Doe to give peace a chance, the national concord gave a lurid account of the situation in Liberia and took a humanitarian and regionalist approach to the issue. It described the situation as anarchy, alluding to the continuing stream of refugees and fleeing foreigners. The national concord said the International Red Cross in Liberia had failed to mediate in the conflict. It appealed to President Doe to spare the citizenry from further bloodshed and destruction by coming to the conference table. The editorial urged the leaders of other West African countries to set up the table between Doe and the dissidents and save the good people of Liberia from further ruin. This editorial, like The Democrat’s of June 22, 1990, came before the ECOWAS Summit in Banjul that set up the mediation committee. The editorial appeared on May 8 while the summit of Heads of State met three weeks later, on May 27, 1990.

On June 15, 1990, the concord published another editorial on resolving the Liberian impasse, following the agreement by Doe’s government and the rebels to enter into direct talks. The editorial commended the gesture of peace by both sides and urged them to submerge their pride, place their own narrow personal interests and do anything that would restore peace, security and orderly governance to the good people of Liberia. The paper suggested that Doe resign and leave the country; an interim government be established to conduct elections and evolve a new national leadership within one year; a framework for cease-fire be worked out; the Armed Forces be reconstituted and; all weapons be properly documented in order to restore security.

On June 16, 1990, the weekend concord published an exclusive report, front page, on the situation of Nigerians in Liberia. Frank Igwebueze of the African Concord, who went to Liberia, wrote that thousands of Nigerians were under the threat of the NPFL rebels, who believed that Nigeria was supporting President Samuel Doe. Details were given in the subsequent pages and the edition of the African Concord (June 18th, 1990) on Nigerians who, the paper said, were eager to run home but could not do so like citizens of other countries who were evacuated by their governments. The Democrat published a similar story crediting the BBC but this did not change its stand. The Concord began to criticise President Babangida’s relationship with Doe which, it said, the rebels found unpardonable. On July 15, 1990, the Sunday Concord published a story evacuation of Nigerians.

In another editorial, the national concord reacted to rebel attack on the Nigerian embassy and to previous threats on the lives of Nigerians. The paper again alluded to the Nigerian support for Doe which Taylor alleged. It described the evacuation as late and it doubted the effectiveness of the warnings issued by Nigeria and the practicability of the exercise. The editorial challenged the Federal Government that the Nigerian National Shipping Line (NNSL) had no vessels of the kind it said would be used. In a clear departure from the interim government solution, the paper advised the government to persuade Samuel Doe to leave Liberia after which a consultative engagement could be held with the emerging government all in the long-term interests of Nigerian citizens and those cherished principles that underscored Nigeria's foreign policy. This probably meant the principle of non-interference. The paper blamed the government for the embarrassing predicament, lack of foresight and errors of judgement that characterised its responses to the Liberian crisis. It criticised the government for ignoring expert opinion and newspaper editorials that had repeatedly urged more imaginative and decisive action. This editorial appeared just before the meeting of the ECOWAS mediation committee in Freetown.

On August 2, 1990, the paper published yet another editorial: "Arresting the Liberian Genocide." It shifted its position once again back to its initial humanitarian and broader regional stance. It restated the gravity of the savagery from the reports of massacre of 600 refugees in the Lutheran Church in Monrovia. Describing the situation as inter-tribal genocide the paper cited the statement by the European Community envoys in Liberia that the country could no longer enjoy recognition and respect as a civilised and sovereign nation. It blamed President Doe and the rebels. The Concord called on African countries and the international community to put up a multi-lateral intervention force under either the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) or the United Nations to restore law and order, to establish an interim government to organize elections in the country. The paper said that the situation made the option regrettably inevitable.

The Sunday Concord then came out with a Front Page story, "Nigeria leads rescue mission to Liberia." The story gave the first indication of an ECOWAS intervention plan. It said that Lagos was abuzz with red hot indicators that Nigeria might lead other ECOWAS countries to rescue their citizens. The story revealed that the military option came in the wake of a meeting of ECOWAS next day at the instance of Sir Dauda Jawara of Gambia."

It is noteworthy that despite the Concord's July 15 editorial berating Nigeria for complicity with Doe, for the late evacuation exercise and for insensitivity to newspaper editorials and expert opinion it yet published more reports of scholars in the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and other in-house columnists that not only supported but encouraged military intervention by the ECOWAS.

On September 13, 1990, it published an editorial: "That ECOWAS may not die," in which it lamented the in-house division in ECOWAS between the francophone and the Anglophone members. The paper regretted the scarce notice of the Liberian situation by the international community. It supported the decision to establish the ECOMOG. It praised Nigeria, and Ghana, for leading the ECOMOG into Liberia to end the bloodshed and restore peace and democracy. The paper described the ECOMOG as the result of eminently good intentions.

Concord's regionalist and humanitarian approach to Nigeria's policy on Liberia had even made it to juxtapose the crisis with the Gulf crisis, which erupted on August 2, 1990, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The paper accused the international community of scarcely noticing the carnage in Liberia and focusing attention on regions considered more strategic to super power interaction. It charged that when the world finally glanced at Liberia, it was only to evacuate their citizens as and leave the country to sort out its problems. Ironically, the paper had once in its editorials accused the Nigerian government for belatedly evacuating its citizens and engaging in diplomatic blunders. This can however be explained by its concern for the national interest first and foremost also.

In Sunday Concord's first editorial on Liberia, entitled "ECOMOG's new mandate," following the capture and killing of President Samuel Doe and the subsequent change of ECOMOG's operational guidelines, the leading role of Nigeria in the operation was emphasised and the transformation of the group from a peace monitor to a peace enforcer was supported. The paper suggested that the financial burden be shared equitably. It called for the full and immediate evacuation of all Nigerians stranded in Liberia which it said should constitute the foremost priority of the Babangida administration.

Once again, the Concord defined the crisis in the context of regional security and humanitarian concern. It published an editorial: "Babangida's charge to African leaders" during his visit to Uganda.

The editorial was not on the Liberian conflict, but the paper alluded to it when it lamented the inability or unwillingness of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to decisively resolve any of these festering conflicts by often taking refuge in the principle of non-interference. The paper even suggested that the OAU work out a machinery for its effective involvement in and meaningful mediation of these nasty wars. Despite this nationalistic fervour, the Concord however, did not hide its ethnic bias against the Nigerian government. Its anonymous columnist, SNOOPER, bore this tendency when he accused the Nigerian Ambassador to Liberia of neglecting his station and fleeing Liberia, leaving Nigerians to die, but he was not removed from office because he was “well-connected to Arewaland,” i.e. the North and it said that the “Arewaman’s” God-fathers would not allow “this quota man” to be touched despite petitions by colleagues.

Another editorial by the Sunday Concord: “ECOWAS leaders look beyond Liberia,” commented on the need for understanding and trust for the economic viability and future integration of the sub-region in the face of the rapidly evolving markets in the world. The editorial, which appeared two days to the Bamako Summit of the ECOWAS, urged the leaders to bring the Liberian crisis to an end. It appealed to the countries that support the rebels to give peace a chance.

In another editorial, “Liberia: Our Right to know,” the national concord criticised the government for hoarding information about its noble military expedition to Liberia. It described recent government’s defence of its Liberian mission as belated, coming three months after the military campaign began. It cited the United States government press relations during the Gulf crisis and commended Ghana for keeping its public informed about the casualties and the amount of money it budgeted for the operation (about 60 million US dollars by the end of 1990). The paper said that lack of information on such issues tended to give credibility to news reports of foreign radio stations. It pointed out that even the details of the progress being recorded by ECOMOG came largely from them. It urged the government to appoint a spokesman in the presidency on Liberia. To the credit of the concord, a press secretary to the ECOMOG Field Commander was appointed. Mr. Nkem Agetua was the State House Correspondent of the New Nigeria. He was stationed at the Presidency in Lagos.

In its last editorial on Liberia in the year, the national concord commented on the Liberian Rehabilitation Fund. This followed President Babangida’s announcement after a meeting with Liberia’s interim president, Amos Sawyer, and that the public would contribute to it. The paper, as usual, supported the idea on humanitarian grounds. It recounted Liberia’s ordeal and said that though Nigeria must lead in the assistance programme, as it led in pacifying Liberia, it should not do anything that could portray her as taking sides. It still criticised the international community for looking the other way while Liberia burn. Now, it said, the community should come in because the devastation in Liberia was unprecedented in independent West Africa.

II. The isolationist Press:

(a) The Guardian and the Guardian on Sunday

The Guardian newspapers suspected a tacit friendship between Nigeria’s General Babangida and president Samuel Doe of Liberia. So they did not support Nigeria’s military intervention in the crisis. This establishes the fact that some newspapers find their way in the foreign office and by leaking some information they gathered to the public, they make government to alter or postpone a cause of action. This is a form of influence in itself.

The first report on the Liberian crisis appeared on The Guardian on Sunday: “once again Doe survives an invasion.” Then subsequent stories spoke about humanitarian conditions, e.g. “Amnesty appeals to Liberia to halt killing” and “Côte d’Ivoire wants assistance for Liberian refugees.”

The first editorial was on January 26, 1990, one month after the incursion into Nimba County. Entitled “Liberia: Another Reprieve for Samuel Doe,” the editorial traced Doe’s political history, the rule he perpetrated and its consequences, one of which was the Nimba County uprising. It said that his ability to crush it, sending 50,000 into refugee status, was a reprieve for him to make peaceful dialogue possible. It predictably warned him not to push his luck too far.

The Guardian On Sunday reported on its front page “Nigeria’s move to settle Liberia-Côte d’Ivoire Row.” It was the first paper that mentioned the Babangida-Doe personal friendship and this influenced its editorial policy throughout the war. The paper led its front page again with a revelation: “Questions over secret Aid Airlift to Liberia,” in which it reported a clandestine airlift of food and arms to Doe. The report quoted diplomats projecting the collapse of Doe and that the arms assistance from Nigeria could only delay it.

The paper suggested that government should keep off Liberia. The airlift followed President Doe's solidarity visit to General Babangida on the botched coup d'etat of April 22, 1990, Orkar Coup.

Even though other papers continued to report on the harrowing scene in Liberia The Guardian group continued to report the clandestine relationship between Babangida and Doe. For example, "Doe seeks asylum in Nigeria To be turned down, Freetown is likely destination," and "Nigerian Envoy says Nigeria is not involved in Liberian crisis." Another report was "How Nigeria bought over Liberia's debt."

Another editorial of The Guardian came six months after the crisis broke out: "Liberia: The way forward." The paper referred to the peace talks between Doe's government and the rebels in the US embassy in Freetown although there was no formal cease-fire. The paper called for broadening of the table to include other interested parties. It recommended that a transition government devoid of Doe and Taylor run the country for 18 months to organise elections and foster national reconciliation. Obviously, the Guardian has failed to influence the decision of government and since ECOMOG [led by Nigeria] is already in action, the paper is now seeking to influence the composition [or even direction] of the operation. It called for UN peace-keeping. Actually, the UN later sent observers. Other countries sent token number of soldiers to dilute the criticism that ECOMOG was entirely a Nigerian [or even a Babangida] affair for his own reasons. The editorial did not refer to the ECOWAS peace plan following the Banjul Summit in May, though it contained most of the elements in the plan.

In its second editorial on the crisis in a week, The Guardian spoke about "Nigerians in Liberia" and recalled the threats on Nigerians by Taylor's men because of president Babangida's complicity with Doe. It said, accusingly, that Nigerians could not leave the unsafe environment because their government had made no arrangements to evacuate them in order to create a facet of stability in Liberia. The paper appealed to both parties in the war to leave Nigerians out of their conflict. The paper then called on the government to evacuate Nigerians as a matter of responsibility because not all was well.

On June 27, 1990, the paper published a back page report that: "Nigerian diplomats in Liberia hurry to Freetown."

Then The Guardian on Sunday published a front page report on June 22, 1990, which demonstrated its opposition to Nigeria's military intervention. The report said that ECOWAS peace-keeping plan had been dropped as members were reluctant. It said that the idea floundered and finally died over the composition of the force, which saw Nigeria and Sierra Leone as the only interested members.

Later, The Guardian published another editorial, "The Liberian Impasse," coming seven months after the civil war and four weeks after Taylor's advent on Monrovia. The paper said that the Liberian people should find a formula for peace and the countries that had any leverage over the combatants should persuade them to join an amicable settlement.

Another editorial by The Guardian asked, amazingly: "An ECOWAS Force for Liberia?" It described the decision as a bad precedent, likening it to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It says ECOWAS should have stuck to their earlier move of finding peace. The paper predictably feared that ECOWAS may be bogged down in the quagmire. It however prevaricated by concluding that the impasse, anarchy and bloodletting situation was a Hobson's choice for ECOWAS.

In a subsequent disparaging editorial entitled "Quagmire in Liberia," The Guardian described the situation as fineness, in which ECOMOG, a peace monitoring group, was becoming a party to the conflict. The paper said that considering Doe's and Taylor's opposition to it and the human and material costs in staying for a long-time to protect the interim government, ECOWAS had no choice but to bring all the parties to the conference table. The paper is now feeling vindicated.

The Guardian's next editorial was on "Doe's death," which it described as a blood rite of passage through life. The paper recounted his ten-year rule of crippling limitations and bloodbath, pointing out that his Nemesis lay in his greed for political power. Few people, said the paper, shed tears for Doe, the manner of his death being poetic justice and that in their lust for power the Does bring their societies down with them.

Another editorial appeared the following day, titled "Liberia after Samuel Doe." Covering half a page, The Guardian dwelt extensively on the future of the country. In a volte face, the paper supported the ECOWAS mission, saying the objectives were noble but it still criticised the "misguided process of its establishment" and the role it played, counting the failures more than the successes.

It suggested a rethinking and the involvement of experienced organisations in peace-keeping such as the United Nations. It further urged the Nigerian government to evacuate Nigerians from Liberia.

As a follow-up, The Guardian published yet another editorial, suggesting ways to resettle: “The refugees from Liberia,” which was directed at the Nigerian government. This is an attempt also to influence decision. It was concerned with the Nigerians who would obviously seek refuge in their country. The paper said that relief measures ought to have been in place so that no one was caught unprepared.

The Guardian’s last editorial on the crisis in the year was on December 7, 1990, entitled “Liberia after the cease-fire.” The paper expressed satisfaction that the fragile cease-fire was holding and described the recent Bamako Summit as a just and realistic international response to the agony of the Liberian nation and people. It once again called for the formation of a mutually acceptable interim government.

III. The Insular Press:

(a) The Daily Times/Sunday Times

The Daily Times group is largely owned by the federal government. As a matter of policy, it usually supported government.

The Daily Times first reported the Liberian crisis on January 13, 1990, on page 14, titled: “Liberia: Refugees flee fighting.” By touching first on the refugee issue, the paper took a humanitarian angle to the crisis. The report said about 11,000 residents of Liberia’s strife-torn Nimba County had fled into neighbouring Guinea, while government troops had evacuated hundreds more in recent days, quoting travellers accounts. Burying the story inside (p.14) also indicates the level of importance the paper attaches to it.

In an editorial commentary, the Daily Times spoke of “Doe’s Nightmares” and said his regime had experienced nine coup attempts with the latest one being more than just that. The paper predicted that in its unfolding dimensions, what had been widely tagged a coup d’état might end up being a regional insurrection of secessionist dimensions. This is a sound editorial judgement, indicating the quality of the paper. Right from the beginning the paper set the tone of its Liberian policy on humanitarian concern and regional security. The paper referred to the loss of lives, the 30,000 refugees and the counter-accusations between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire of genocide against each other’s citizens. The editorial blamed Doe for all the Liberian blood that had been, and was likely to continue to be, spilt if Doe continued in his present approach.

In another editorial the following day, without mentioning Liberia, the Daily Times commented on “ECOWAS and its debtors.” The paper extolled the virtues of Nigeria’s economic and political leadership in ECOWAS.

Again in March, the paper published another editorial, the second in a two-part series, entitled “Foreign Policy after South Africa II.” It advised that in West Africa, Nigeria must safeguard against political instability and economic recklessness by putting the house in order and encouraging sister states to see that the distance between Abidjan and Lagos is closer than between Abidjan and Paris. This regionalist approach to foreign policy by the newspaper bore vivid traits on its perception of the solution to the crisis in Liberia later, which favoured a concerted regional effort led by Nigeria.

In another editorial, “Nwachukwu’s Second Coming,” the Daily Times reminded the new Minister of External Affairs that all appeared not well with ECOWAS. The paper specifically mentioned the Liberian crisis bore the discordant voices in the organisation. The editorial served only as a reminder and not a stimulant in foreign policy making because it came four days after the paper made a front page report that Nwachukwu had singled out Liberia as his priority. That is quite in the tradition of the paper.

In its characteristically pro-government stance, the Times group had in most cases waited for government to act before commenting editorially in support of the action. That is why the papers have not been suggesting what should be done but supported what was done over the Liberian crisis. Nevertheless, the daily times had consistently reported the refugee problem and the possible spill over effect of the war in the region.

Typical of this posture was an editorial, “Refugees on our hands.” It reminded the government of the need to resettle the Nigerian and other Liberian refugees. It pointed out that the arrival of 7,000 refugees dramatised one of the serious implications of the Liberian crisis for the nation. It argued that Nigeria’s specific involvement in Liberia, its status in the ECOWAS sub-region and indeed in the whole continent proved specific responsibilities on the matter of the refugees. It concluded that regional importance and global significance could not be attained without, among other things, playing host to refugees now and again.

“For ECOWAS Sake,” was another editorial published by the Daily Times, in which it recalled the recent plea by both Nigeria’s President Ibrahim Babangida and his Togolese counterpart, Gnassingbe Eyadema to all members of the Economic Community of West African States to close ranks and ensure that peace returned to Liberia. It said that the plea could not have come at a better time when the regional grouping was facing the danger of split over the issue, between the Anglophone and the Francophone countries. The editorial came just after an unsuccessful summit called by the Côte d’Ivoire which Nigeria and others boycotted and a few days before another summit in Banjul, The Gambia, which the paper said was properly summoned by the ECOWAS Chairman, President Dauda Jawara of Gambia, over a similar issue on Liberia. It is significant that Nigeria had earlier described as improperly called, the botched Yamoussoukro meeting in the Côte d’Ivoire, in explaining its boycott. The paper said that Yamoussoukro Summit was illegally convened and further alleged that it was aimed at subverting the ECOMOG. It dismissed any reservations about the manner of its formation or its objectives. It called for understanding of the full implications of the Liberian conflict and lamented that some member states of the ECOWAS allowed their colonial affiliations to bedevil what ought to be resolved by Africans. The paper also called for a United Nations Resolution backing the ECOMOG.

As the interim president of Liberia, Professor Amos Sawyer, was about to assume office, the Daily Times published an editorial: “For Peace in Liberia.” It hailed the fresh wind that blew into ECOMOG which it argued should make opponents see things in a new light. The paper said it neither subscribed to intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states nor did it want Nigeria to be a bully in the sub-region. Yet, it believed that where crisis in any one state posed a threat to the peace and stability of the entire sub-region, it ceased to be just an internal affair. This is the Times group perspective of the Liberian crisis. It then advised government to play the leading role in the Liberian reconstruction efforts in the spirit of brotherliness.

A week later, the Daily Times again commented editorially on “Liberia: Pax Africana.” It hailed the Bamako Summit of November 28th, 1990, where a peace accord was signed by all parties. The meeting agreed on an immediate cease-fire, expansion of the ECOMOG forces to include countries that were able to join and that the future of the peace-keeping force be determined by the ECOWAS and future interim government in Liberia. The rest of the editorial was encomiums paid to African and ECOWAS leaders for their astute diplomacy in the Bamako Summit.

(b) New Nigerian Newspapers

The New Nigerian Newspapers, which comprise the New Nigerian and the Sunday New Nigerian (later New Nigerian on Sunday), much more than the Times group, are owned by the federal government. The New Nigerian’s coverage of the Liberian crisis became prominent about five months after the outbreak of hostilities. The centre page usually carried foreign reports but on May 29, 1990, the paper led its front page with the ECOWAS Summit in Banjul, reporting President Babangida’s proposal to establish a Standing Committee on disputes in the sub-region. The report said that the proposal contained the modalities, membership, terms of reference and the number and time-span of members. This indicates the paper’s authoritative status in reporting government decisions. Notably, as the crisis simmered, the paper devoted more space on its front, back and centre pages to the Liberian crisis, particularly when the Nigerian government was involved. In an apparent attempt to influence public opinion in favour of the government decision, the paper interviewed scholars who tacitly supported the proposals on Liberia being discussed in Banjul, on the same day as the meeting was taking place.

On August 9, 1990, four days after the Banjul Summit, the New Nigerian published a front page story that Nigeria’s Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), was going to meet that day to discuss global developments as they affected Nigeria. According to its sources, such global issues included the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its effect on oil prices, the Liberian crisis and the just concluded mediation committee meeting at which proposal of military intervention involving Nigerian soldiers was adopted.

On August 10, the paper reported on its front page that the federal government was seeking international support for peace in Liberia, following a meeting between the Foreign Minister, Rilwanu Lukman, and the heads of the various foreign missions in Nigeria. On the same page, it reported President Babangida as saying that participating countries in the ECOMOG were to bear their own cost.

Again in an editorial tersely entitled “Liberia,” similar to The Democrat’s first editorial on the crisis in January, the New Nigerian, eight months into the war and one week after the decision to establish ECOMOG, described the Liberian crisis as a pain in the neck for the West African sub-region.

It looked at the effect of the conflict in the region. The paper supported the neutral force under the auspices of ECOWAS for intervening. The New Nigerian also welcomed Nigeria's call on the international community, particularly members of the United Nations Security Council, to lend a financial hand to the ECOWAS peace initiatives.

This was followed by another editorial a week later, which was boldly entitled "Pax ECOWANA." It was published as a special front page comment. In the first paragraph, the strategic, geo-political and demographic importance of Nigeria were given, which put the country in a leading position to be ignored only at Africa's peril. This fell within the context-oriented explanation of editors' judgement of foreign news items. Coming at this time, the editorial was only defending government's position, as it touched on the critics of the country's military involvement. It said that the war could involve neighbouring countries whose tribesmen were being massacred. Furthermore, the paper pointed out that Nigeria's involvement was neither unilateral nor aimed at enforcing a Pax Nigeriana. It concluded that whatever the consequences of the decision, it was a price Nigeria had to pay ultimately to save West Africa from exploding.

Even the Sunday New Nigerian began to devote its front page on the Liberian crisis at this time, though it hardly published editorials, just like most of the weeklies.

After the capture and subsequent death of President Doe, the New Nigerian published an editorial, the "Demise of Doe," describing the loss of lives there as the worst ethnic pogrom in West Africa. It also commended ECOMOG's peaceful umbrella under which the Liberian interim government of Dr. Amos Sawyer would seek shelter.

The New Nigerian published another editorial "the Liberian quagmire," which it said was the third in a month on the Liberian civil war. It said that the continuous examination of all discernible options was necessary because of the deteriorating security situation there. Here the paper was expressing fears about the military option. The paper asked policy makers not to let the cease-fire slip away. This probably followed ECOWAS decision to transform ECOMOG from peace keeping to a combative force as a result of the capture of President Doe in ECOMOG camp. The paper called on the government to ignore those asking it to withdraw from ECOMOG. This came after President Babangida declared that the withdrawal of ECOMOG from Liberia was not possible. Interestingly however, the paper advised the authorities, as did the national concord, to evolve an effective communication method for convincing Nigerians why and how it got involved in the Liberian quagmire. It concluded that Nigeria should not chicken out at the eleventh hour.

In its only editorial on the crisis in the year, the Sunday New Nigerian (SNN) re-echoed the call on the warring factions, jointly made by President Ibrahim Babangida and his Togolese counterpart, Gnassingbe Eyadema, to give peace a chance, and other ECOWAS members to stop channelling arms to the warriors. Entitled "Go back to the negotiation table," the SNN was worried that, and wondered why, despite the good objectives of ECOWAS as a regional unifying force the Liberian crisis should be allowed to threaten its existence. The paper blamed the crisis, and its attendant anarchy, on former President Doe, who suffered the consequences of his refusal to step down as earlier advised. It also pointed out the disunity of member states regarding the mode of intervention in the crisis. It then predicted that it would be a sad commentary not only on ECOWAS but on the whole of Africa if the efforts failed. Surprisingly however, the paper apparently wavered on its support for ECOMOG unlike its sister, the New Nigerian. On the ECOWAS in-house crisis, the paper said that the Anglophone members could not do without their francophone counterparts.

On its part, the New Nigerian continued unwaveringly to support government's policy on Liberia. In one of its longest editorials ever, covering more than half its front page, the paper described "Nigeria's Business in Liberia," as an achievement which should earn the commendation of all reasonable people. This editorial came after ECOMOG's major success in halting Taylor's advent on Monrovia, providing a breathing space for the new government of Sawyer. It was also after President Babangida's press conference. More emphatic than ever, the paper believed that ECOMOG operations were justified given the continued violence in Liberia.

The New Nigerian's last editorial on Liberia for the year (1990), commented on the "Truce at Bamako." It said that Charles Taylor's acceptance of the cease-fire was heartening. It added that if the cease-fire held Africa would have displayed its ability to resolve conflicts through diplomatic channels. The paper praised the African leaders who brokered the cease-fire.

We have seen, from the foregoing, how the Nigerian press engaged the government and the public in the battle for Liberia for one year. By so doing they sought to influence government decision to intervene or not to intervene in the crisis in Liberia. Significantly, it was the first time that newspapers sponsored their reporters to cover an African civil war. This made government too to sponsor its own journalists. Chris Imoghedi of The Guardian disappeared and is believed to have been killed in the war front.

Conclusion

In this work, we studied the role of the Nigerian press in the government's decision to intervene in the Liberian crisis. We examined three assumptions. First, whenever there is an external crisis the Nigerian Press report and comment on it extensively. Second, whenever an external crisis affects Nigeria's security or is fraught with humanitarian concerns, the Nigerian Press call for Nigerian government's intervention. Third, the Nigerian Press have contributed to the Nigerian government decision to intervene in the Liberian crisis. We selected ten newspapers using the most objective criteria - wide circulation, class of readers, seriousness and effective foreign news coverage in terms of competent foreign desk and sound editorial judgement.

We are able to establish all three assumptions. First, the Nigerian press coverage of the Liberian crisis provided a framework for public debate on the issue. Second, the newspapers reported and commented extensively on the Liberian crisis and debated whether Nigeria should intervene or not. Some of them sent their reporters to the battlefield. In all, 43 editorials; 674 reports and; 9 opinion surveys were published by the ten newspapers within the first year of the outbreak of the crisis. The Democrat and the national concord have consistently urged the government to intervene. The Democrat published 6 editorials, the national concord 10 and the Sunday Concord 2. The Guardian group on the other hand consistently opposed any intervention, publishing 10 editorials. The New Nigerian and the Times group were consistent in supporting government. The NN published 7 editorials and the SNN 1; the DTN published 7 editorials. Thirdly, the government reacted to these publications - evidence that the newspapers were very provocative on the issue, leaking and sometimes suggesting courses of action. The national concord and The Guardian heavily criticised, consistently, the government for denying the public the right to know about the happenings in Liberia, particularly on the casualty figures and the financial commitment. Concord suggested the appointment of an official spokesman on Liberia in the Presidency to regularly brief the press. To its credit, the government appointed a press secretary, Nkem Agetua, to the ECOMOG Field-Commander and stationed him in the Presidency. In addition, General Babangida had to, in an earlier reaction address the press on Nigeria's foreign policy with special reference to the Liberian crisis. This was prompted by press criticism of government on the issue which he admittedly referred to in his address.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the Nigerian Press have provided the framework for a national debate and government action on the Liberian crisis. The limitation of this work is that it considered only one variable, the Nigerian Press. Other intervening variables are also significant. No study on the Liberian intervention can ignore interlocutors like Abbas Bundu of Sierra Leone, who was the Executive Secretary of the ECOWAS.

Another variable worth studying is the military. Indications that General Babangida was friend of Doe's, suggesting that Babangida consulted the Armed Forces only after he had made up his mind, are worth examining also. There was a consultative forum of military officers from Colonels. Opinions were canvassed and superior arguments usually prevailed. Babangida canvassed variety of opinions not just from one group. Even in the days of the Supreme Military Council the members used to have advisers, many of whom were civilians and academics. Minutes of meetings of military officers were taken in the same way as it is done by civilians and matters could be reviewed as they arose from previous minutes. But once the President concludes on an issue it is final. However, the National Security and Defence Council could take decisions for the AFRC to rubberstamp. Even then, individual persons could still see the President and give their piece of mind on such matters. This is typical of the bureaucratic model in the foreign policy decision-making theory.

Still another thesis is that President Babangida in particular, was moved into action by the passionate letter from the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA). The letter coincided with the Mediation Committee meeting on August 2, 1990, at which the decision to establish ECOMOG was reached. This thesis sounds spurious because in all probabilities President Babangida came to the meeting with an agenda. The details of the ECOMOG operational guidelines read out by Abbas Bundu appeared to be well thought out, probably by the Foreign Ministers, before the summit of the Heads of State.

Another explanation is given by Brigadier-General Adesina, a veteran of Sierra Leone intervention. He says that the need to supplement global efforts at resolving African conflicts was basically what also led to the ECOWAS sub-regional initiative for self-help in West Africa.

Yet, one more thesis is given by Aning who argues that the regional security regime instituted in West Africa implied an implicit indication to signatory states of support in periods of crisis which often leads to coercive or diplomatic responses by the regime or individual regime members.

These theses vindicate Snyder who cautioned that single case studies should not be confined to big decisions because major decisions or crises are atypical of determinants of choices of actions as they may not be associated with typical structures and processes. Concrete influences in foreign policy making could best be established by routine examination of daily affairs which is difficult since the field itself ticks because of its top confidentiality. A retired career diplomat said that seventy percent of the issues are not known to the Press. By its nature, foreign policy is an elitist affair where decisions are confined to a tiny group, numbering 12-20, who assume a moral high ground to take decisions even if they disagree among themselves and sideline one another (DOUGHERTY & PFALTZGRAFF, 2001:598).

Finally, President Babangida's press conference on the imperative features of Nigeria's foreign policy and the crisis in Liberia said it all. The President included all the plausible reasons for intervening in Liberia. What is empirically significant in this work is that the Nigerian Press magnified the crisis and drew public attention to it, which even a military government could not ignore.

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