

2027

Who is afraid of Jonathan?

By Taiwo Adisa



Since politicians started flying the kite of the possibility of former President Goodluck Jonathan joining the 2027 presidential race, radio and television commentators have taken the discussion to another level. The decibels, however, went higher when the former Minister of Information, Professor Jerry Gana, said in an interview that Jonathan would return to the Presidential Villa in 2027. Print and online platforms have also featured some commentaries. While some have argued in favour of Jonathan by drawing attention to his achievements as President of Nigeria between May 2010 and May 2015, others have drawn attention to certain occurrences during his tenure. Each of the commentators has tried to convince readers or listeners about the veracity of their claims and the imperatives of their arguments. So far, one can deduce three classifications, including those seeking to lure the Otuoke-born university teacher into the race on account of his previous records and democratic credentials, especially, his famous quote, 'my ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian'. Some who opposed his entry into the race have raised ethnic vituperations, alleging the possibility of Jonathan's entry scuttling the chances of the 2023 presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Mr. Peter Obi, and the chances of an Igbo occupying the nation's presidency in the shortest possible time. A case of an argument based on ethnic political gerrymandering. There is more of such classification in the submissions by some Emilokan advocates as well, who

believed that the presidency of a Yoruba man should not be terminated on account of Jonathan's entry. But some others have simply based their arguments on what we can call pure political talk. Because they are in love with the works of the incumbent, someone like Jonathan should not even aspire to the seat. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), which has also joined the fray, had boasted that Jonathan cannot match the incumbent President Bola Tinubu and that the nation has not forgotten the ills that pervaded his administration. Lagos State chapter of the APC, which reacted to reports of Jonathan's possible entry into the race, said that the plot to drag the former President into the 2027 race, as enunciated recently by Prof Jerry Gana, was a desperate bid by the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to regain the relevance it lost years ago.

The party's spokesman in Lagos, Seye Oladejo, said that the move was rooted in "nostalgia rather than competence." He stated that elections are contests of ideas, competence, and delivery – not nostalgia or recycled rhetoric." He also described the claims ascribed to Prof Gana as premature and "political theatre." Before the APC spokesman in Lagos made public that release, which sounded like a pompous declaration of a confident political giant, some other loyalists of that party had waved off the Jonathan challenge. At a discussion earlier in the year and shortly after the formation of the Senator David Mark-

led African Democratic Congress (ADC), an enthusiast of the APC dismissed the possibility of Jonathan making a significant impact if he ever mounted the podium in 2027. 'Who will vote for Jonathan?', the APC loyalist quipped, apparently reveling in the goodness and mercy he had reaped from the incumbent administration. I remember telling him that if the APC really plans to play good politics and intends to win re-election in 2027, the man they need on their side is Jonathan. I also stated that if the ADC or the dying PDP should play Realpolitik and zero in on Jonathan in 2027, the APC would have a big battle at hand. Maybe he was convinced, maybe he wasn't. I would restate here that the APC is the party that should beware the coming of Jonathan in 2027. Rather than prompt some political jobbers to jump from court to the pages of newspapers, what they needed is to play politics with the man. The government and its apparatus may not know that for Nigerians, the grass appears greener on the other side, regardless of the praises the administration is reaping from the IMF and the World Bank. As long as the ordinary citizens still have to buy a bag of rice at a price far above the federally approved minimum wage, the sing-song of the economy turning the corner would continue to sound like lullabies to the ears of an adult. First, Jonathan ticks many of the dichotomised boxes with which political strategies would want to sell Tinubu. He is a Southerner, like Tinubu. He is even a Christian, whose entry would soothe the fears of marginalization by Northern Christians and their Southern brothers. Jonathan is statute-barred from seeking another term in office, just like Tinubu in 2027, but the fact that the incumbent has been tagged as unfairly allocating appointments between the North and the South, a huge population of Northerners could easily mass behind Jonathan, who was adjudged to be fair in his political appointments during his tenure. Again, the Northern political establishment has emerged as one that is perpetually impatient with its political friends from the South. It happened to President Olusegun Obasanjo. He was courted and supported by the North in 1999, and he won ahead of his kinsman, Chief Olu Falae, who received a massive following from the South-West. Soon afterward, Obasanjo was accused of trying to renege on a one-term agreement, and he became a candidate for possible impeachment. The man had to come back home ahead of the 2003 election by seeking an alliance with the pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, which guaranteed him support and paved the way for his re-election. In 2023, the North gave Tinubu its votes. Though former Vice President Atiku Abubakar also won some good votes from the area, Tinubu's good showing in Kano, Jigawa, and the fact that he maintained a neck-and-neck speed with Atiku across the North paved the way for him in that election. Midway into his tenure, the North is angry and wants all replacement for the Emilokan. The APC would be playing a dangerous game, leaving Jonathan out to be possibly harvested by the "angry North" in the emerging circumstances.

Though some Nigerians who would want to have a nail-biting political contest in 2027 would prefer that Jonathan squares up with Tinubu in a possible two-horse race in that election, those

who love the APC and want it to remain in office beyond 2027 would have to be advised to perish the thought of 'who would vote for Jonathan'. I looked for the confidence boosters and found very few. Those canvassing for Jonathan would say that the average Nigerian earned a better take-home in 2011 and 2015 when his government left the minimum wage at N18,000, which amounted to \$115 US Dollars. Today, if the comparison must be done, the minimum wage stands at N70,000, which now amounts to \$44 US Dollars. If a bag of rice was N7,500 under Jonathan, it now hovers around N80,000, which means that while the minimum worker could buy two bags of rice from his salary in 2015, just before the coming of Muhammadu Buhari, today's minimum worker can't buy a bag of rice with his full salary. Just recently, the Bishop of Sokoto Catholic Diocese, Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah, told the world that the government of the United States of America, led by President Barack Obama, was responsible for the failure of the Jonathan's government to wipe out insurgency because of its desperation to impose Buhari on the nation. It has thus emerged that the advertised insecurity under Jonathan's government was more of an externally imposed burden on his administration. The North

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that demonised Jonathan during his reign now has a lot of good things to say about him-including his commitment to eradicating out-of-school children through the construction of Almajiri schools and his non-violent posture in politics. Above all, Jonathan has earned a good name by voluntarily leaving the space and conceding the election when the results were still being collated. Such a candidate will receive not just local support but international backing. I will say it till tomorrow, Jonathan is APC's real threat in 2027, if the parties are ready to play politics. So far, the offerings from the PDP and Labour Party are nothing to write home about, while the ADC is still finding its feet. As I said earlier, if the politicians adopt Realpolitik, and their chessboard should land a Jonathan, the incumbents will demand many marketers and advertisers. But if they have Jonathan and the people on their side, they can afford to face the warriors in the PDP, whoever emerges in the ADC, and the uncertain LP with the gusto the supporters are already exuding.