

PFIPC not a ghost. Presidency's cabal just got caught

by Ugo Onuoha

Nigeria's Presidency has the outlook of the abode of a crime syndicate. Like all presidencies in probably all jurisdictions of the world, it's home to power players, schemers, cloak and dagger politicians, mean bureaucrats, conspiracy theorists, the good, the bad and the ugly, persons with vaulting ambitions and personal agenda, secrecy and dog-eat-dog experts. Some go into it for purely public service, others to feather their own nests. One thing to bear in mind is that no matter the hemisphere – developed, developing, underdeveloped, retrogressing or trapped societies – there is always the presence or the perceived presence of corruption in politics and the ways of the minders of presidencies everywhere. But Nigeria's presidency appears to be different in its capacity for malfeasance. The magnitude of corruption in the first republic [1963-1966] was not that pronounced probably because of the nature of our governmental system. It was the Westminster parliamentary system where we had reasonably strong regions of the Eastern, Western, Mid-Western and Northern regions. Each region had strong and influential leaders at the helm including, Dr. Michael Okpara, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Dennis Osadebay, and Sir Ahmadu Bello. Except through subterfuge neither the President of the Republic, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe nor the Prime Minister, Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, had overbearing influence over the regions and their premiers. Such were the powers of the regions that Bello ceded the prime minister ship of the country to his "subordinate" Balewa.

In 1979 when our country returned to civil rule after decades of military dictatorship, it opted for a significantly corrupted American presidential system of government of winner takes all. The over concentration of power, the inherent corruption and the expensive nature of the presidential system was, in our case, compounded by our extremely poor copying of what obtains in the US. In theory we claim to be a federation while in reality we are practicing a unitary system with powers concentrated in the center. As should be expected, therefore, the contests by politicians for the presidency have become a matter of life or death. You win and live. You lose and die. In a manner of speaking. The enthronement of a unitary presidency with the attached powers has turned the presidency into a coven of evil and a cesspool of corruption since the fourth republic which started in 1999. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo's [1999-2007] quest for an imperial presidency was not in doubt. He worked hard at emasculating the national assembly [NASS] with limited success. As his second term was winding down he made a move to fiddle with the Constitution so he could remain in office. The plot with Senator Ibrahim Mantu, Senate's deputy president, was stoutly resisted by Nigerians and some lawmakers. The project failed. But those were the days of innocence. Obasanjo did not plant corrupt and compromised politicians to head the other arms of government as is the case today. He is also on record for allegedly awarding a multibillion Naira Abuja National stadium contract without appropriation by NASS.

Umaru Yar'Adua who succeeded Obasanjo was a reluctant and reticent president. He was terminally ill and died in office barely three years into his first term. Sixteen years since he died, he is still widely regarded by many Nigerians as a good man. Well, he did not stay long enough for his true person to fully unravel. The man who took over was a paradox. Some Nigerians saw him as a fine gentleman with democratic temperament. Others deride

him as a coward and a spineless president who allowed himself to be stampeded out of office, probably because he came from the Ijaw nation, a supposedly minority group in the context of power politics in the country. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan left office in 2015 after achieving the dubious distinction of being the first incumbent president to lose reelection in Nigeria. He was also the first leader in living memory to pick up the telephone, call his opponent and concede defeat even before the last ballot was counted. Jonathan's enduring refrain was that his reelection was not worth the shedding of the blood of any Nigerian. On the contrary, his rival to the presidency, Maj.-Gen.[rtd] Muhammadu Buhari, had vowed that the country would be soaked in blood if he was not declared the winner of the 2015 presidential election.

To be sure there had been issues with the presidencies of previous occupants, but the presidency unraveled properly under the incompetent Buhari. He was unwell but he held on tenaciously to the presidency. He was frequently out of the country, in hospital beds abroad, yet he wouldn't let go. In one such sortie abroad he was away consecutively for 103 days. Even when he was in town, he was an absentee ruler. And because of that, centers of rival powers proliferated in the presidency which gave rise to the phenomenon of cabals. Buhari's live-in cousin in the Villa was reputed to be the head of a cabal. His wife, now a widow, reportedly was in-charge of a different cabal. Super ministers who had the ears of Buhari created their own cabals and used the name of a distant, absentee and an indifferent president to perpetrate and perpetuate evils, including the looting of the commonwealth. With the advent of Buhari, cabals in the presidency became entrenched. Buhari was of the All Progressives Congress [APC] political party. What an irony that an arch conservative, Buhari, dressed up and passed as a progressive. Tinubu also is of the APC. He's certainly not a democrat. That should not be in dispute for keen watchers of his Machiavellian politics. His bonafides as a progressive are doubtful, his claims to that label in the last 30 years and counting notwithstanding.

Three years into the presidency which he acceded to in highly controversial circumstances, Tinubu has fully unraveled. Or so we think. He has repudiated virtually everything he was associated with in his long sojourn in politics and governance. His advocacy for true federalism is out the window. His erstwhile sing-song about restructuring of the country has become an anathema to him. His touted wizardry on the economy has eluded him. His claim of being a detribalized Nigerian has been found to be that – a mere claim. Just like his personal history, which is sordid anyway, nothing that was said about Tinubu or which he said of himself has turned out to be true. They are all bogus. Demonstrably false. However, under Tinubu the presidency appears to have become a cash register, a POS [point of sales], a bazaar which is under the hammer of unscrupulous auctioneers. Access to the president is monetized. A ranking senator of the president's own political party who is not known to be frivolous told Nigerians this much many months ago. To be fair, monetizing access to the president by their lieutenants is not unique to Tinubu. We have heard of such in the past. But this presidency wins the prize for the monetization of access to the president even for ranking party men, including senior senators. Tinubu's presidency is disorganized, opaque and corrupt. And there's a reason for it. Heist thrives best in an unorganized

environment. It's riddled with serial scandals. But that should not come as a surprise because "mmiri siri na-isi gbaruo" (the stream was polluted from the fountainhead). And moreover "ihe agwo muru aghaghi ito ogologo" (Like attracts like). Tinubu came to the presidency with baggage, and birds of the same plumes must necessarily flock together. Like Tinubu, his chief of staff, Olufemi Hakeem Gbajabiamila [he revels in the title of "Rt Hon], has an unsalutary history trailing him from his days in the United States. They are not the only top ranking officers in the presidency under a cloud. Sometimes the feeling is that you have to be compromised and discredited to be at their table in this regime. Nothing is beyond the setting and structure of the type of presidency that Nigeria currently has. It's only in this presidency that a person who was neither nominated nor screened by the Senate for an ambassadorial post would have his name smuggled into the list, and posted to Turkiye on the eve of a visit to that country by President Tinubu. The crime was detected and aborted before the "ambassador" could travel to Ankara. But the scoundrels [the smuggler and the smuggled] were not identified and punished, at least, not publicly. In this presidency, there are usually no consequences for criminal conduct, no matter the severity.

A combination of persons with sordid precedent and the absence of consequences would only give rise to a Prince Adeniyi Adeyemi Matthew and others like him who are yet to be unmasked. There is no way an Adeyemi could have singlehandedly woven an intricate web designed to defraud without the connivance of persons who are embedded in the upper reaches of the presidency and the bureaucracy. No way. In summary, the disclaimer from a presidential spokesman, Bayo Onanuga, who by the way suffers credibility deficits with many Nigerians, was that Adeyemi was an impostor and a con-artist who created himself as the director-general of a ghost presidential agency. That he should be treated as a common criminal. However, Onanuga left many questions on the matter unanswered. And Onanuga's action was deliberate because this regime has developed a reputation for treating Nigerians with contempt. If this presidency didn't take Nigerians for fools, it would not have issued the press release that was mainly scripted to exculpate Gbajabiamila.

Many Nigerians are diligently knocking the bottom off the contemptible disclaimer of the presidency. One such person was identified on social media as Enitan Bello whose forensic findings on this saga was amplified by the Good Governance Group. It was a methodical and thorough search. We will only highlight the summary. Former president, the late Muhammadu Buhari created a presidential economic advisory council with real members and a legal mandate in September 2019. In March 2024 Tinubu created the presidential economic coordination council. But the Buhari body was not dissolved. Last April the "impostor" DG Adeyemi wrote a formal letter on the headed paper of his "ghost" presidential agency seeking the deployment of civil servants to the "phantom" parastatal. The request was processed and more than 300 staff were deployed.

In the course of 2025 and presumably in line with his busy schedule the "impostor" DG visited with the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Kalu; received some investors from China; met with the Executive Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Ola Olukoyede; briefed the Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Council [NERC] on the then upcoming World Investment Summit; hosted some foreign ambassadors at the Wells Carlton Hotel in Abuja. In the midst of these visits and receptions, the "ghost" agency was slotted into the 2026 fiscal document with budget code 0111062001 and a tidy allocation of N1.3billion. It had ten specific programme lines. The budget passed the "scrutiny" of

NASS and was signed into law by the president on April 17, this year. It was even alleged that the "ghost" agency had a N27billion take-off grant waiting to be triggered. What a pay day it would have been for the bandits inside and outside. Assuming without conceding that Adeyemi was an impostor and a lone wolf, and the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council was a ghost as claimed by the Presidency, who then facilitated the posting of over 300 staff, including directors to his agency; provided an office space in the heart of the federal secretariat, Abuja; gave out the budget code of the Buhari era which agency that used it was not properly rested? How did the alleged Adeyemi's accomplice, Babatunde Tanimola, who purportedly facilitated the payment of part of the money for the DG job die in a mystery fire in an Abuja hotel? How did "impostor" Adeyemi manage to open many accounts including a domiciliary account, with the Central Bank of Nigeria in the name of the "ghost" presidential parastatal and in the names of other entities which also should presumably be fictitious?

The presidency said that Adeyemi was unmasked last year and taken into police custody in October 2025, about the same time that his accomplice, Tanimola, died in a mysterious hotel fire. Where is the body of the dead accomplice? Were electronic devices recovered from his hotel room? Or were his devices and body burnt beyond recognition? What about his residence in Abuja or elsewhere? Was it searched? Were there any recoveries? Did the security agencies establish contacts with the close relations and circle of friends of Tanimola? Were they tracked down and quizzed? Or was he a hermit with no friends and acquaintances? There are just too many gaps in the government story about this curious but dangerous incident. If Prince Adeyemi was caught in October 2025, how come the allocation to his "fake" agency in the 2026 national budget was retained until President Tinubu signed the fiscal document on April 17, six months between after the arrest of Adeyemi and the signing ceremony? Along with other individuals and agencies, the presidency is complicit in this heist.

Trust is critical to relationships between and amongst countries. Every nation is granted the presumption of regularity in its dealings. Can Nigeria, going forward, expect to be accorded the presumption of regularity in the comity of nations when a presidential agency that interfaced with the international community for about one year has been found to be a ghost? How many more of such agencies are still embedded in the system? What about Nigeria's relationship with bilateral and multi-lateral institutions? The damage is enormous. And to think that this regime appears to be in the mode for a cover up. Yes, Prince Adeyemi should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law as long as he is not made the fall guy. When a system works, the head takes credit. And when a system fails also, the head should fall on his or her sword, and have their day in a court of law. No country will make any significant progress if there are no consequences for criminal conducts. The trouble is that this regime is populated in critical and sensitive positions by persons with depressing and odious baggage.