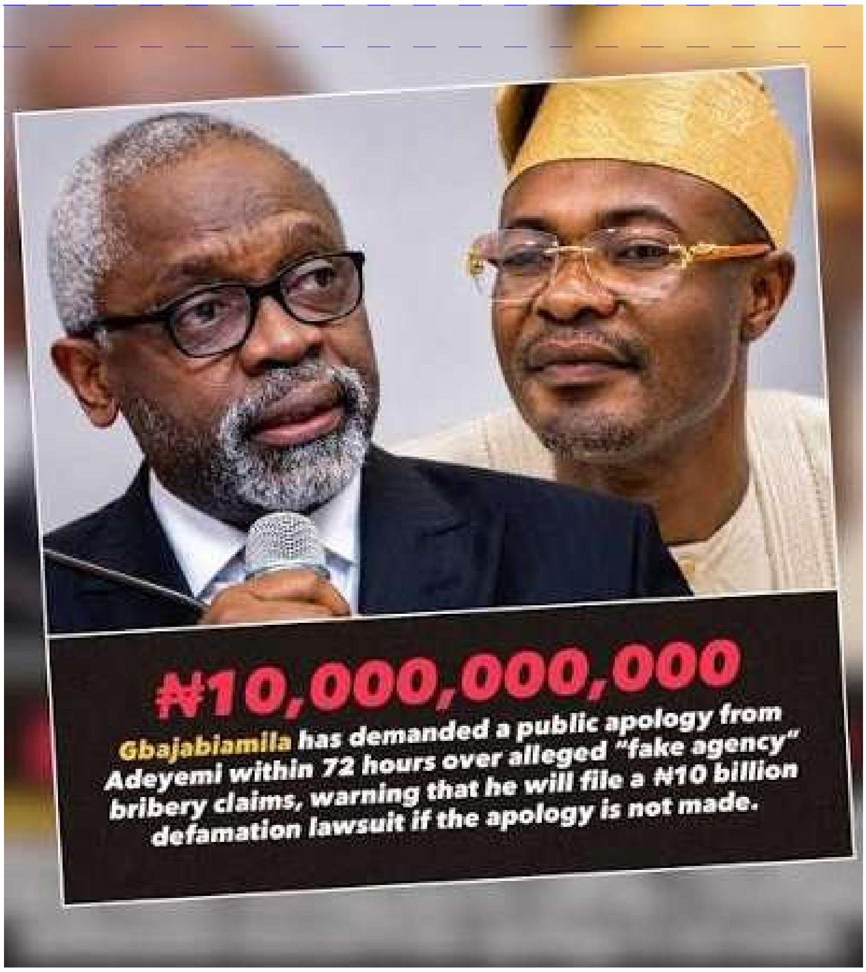
The Pantom Presidential Council Scandal

By Farooq Kperogi

I first received a WhatsApp forward about the scandal from notable University of Texas history professor Toyin Falola. I didn't read it. I thought it was just another corruption scandal, the sort I have become tragically inured to. A few days later, my friend Professor Moses Ochonu forwarded another version of it to me. I told him Professor Falola, mentor to both of us, had already sent it to me but that I didn't bother to read it because I had become jaded on issues like that. But social media soon became suffused with different tidbits of the scandal, and I could no longer ignore it. I am now suspending the travelogue I had planned to write on my recent visit to Trinidad and Tobago where I was invited to deliver a keynote address at an international conference on media and communication. Nigeria, as it often does, has imposed its madness on my literary itinerary. The story is almost too insane to be true. A certain Prince Adeniyi Adeyemi Mathew, also written in official statements as Adeyemi Adeniyi Matthew, presented himself as Director-General of the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council, sometimes twinned with the Presidential Economic Advisory Council. The Presidency now says the body does not exist. In a June 11 disclaimer and a fuller July 1 statement, the State House said Adeyemi was an impostor, that his appointment letter was forged, that he falsely paraded himself as a presidential appointee and that the police had already filed criminal charges against him. According to the Presidency, the drama began when the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission complained in October 2025 that another supposed government body was operating in its orbit. Foreign Affairs also reportedly grew uneasy after Adeyemi held meetings with ambassadors.



The Chief of Staff, Femi Gbajabiamila, then wrote the DSS and the Police to investigate what he described as forged appointment letters. Adeyemi was later arrested at an office in the Federal Secretariat Complex in Abuja. Police reportedly searched his office and residence, found documents they characterized as forged and accused him of operating 34 bank accounts, including nine in the names of allegedly fictitious entities. The Presidency says he even used his papers to open a CBN account by misleading the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation, although no government money was transferred into the account. If that were all, this would be a straightforward story of a brazen con man who found a costume in the wardrobe of power and decided to wear it. But that is not all. Before the Presidency disowned him, Adeyemi and his council were not anonymous. He led a management team to the EFCC headquarters. Premium Times reported that the visit was part of a partnership to strengthen Nigeria's investment climate ahead of a proposed World Investment Summit. PM News similarly reported that EFCC Chairman Ola Olukoyede received him and his team. In the images and accounts that circulated later, the EFCC encounter took on even more symbolic weight because of claims that Adeyemi received an EFCC plaque. Whether or not every detail of that ceremonial exchange survives independent verification, the larger fact is that a supposed fake agency gained access to the nation's foremost anti-corruption institution, among several prominent institutions. Perhaps the most curious is the council's appearance in the national budget. ICIR and Channels TV reported that the council was captured in the 2026 budget with more than N1.3 billion. That single fact turns this from a case of impersonation into a study in state porosity. An impostor can print a fake letter. He can design a fake letterhead. He can borrow solemn English from government circulars and paste a coat of arms on a document. But The.gov.ng domain controversy deepens the absurdity. Nigeria's gov.ng domain is not supposed to be bought from roadside web designers. It is reserved for government institutions and requires official authorization and verification.

If pficp.gov.ng existed, and if it passed through the required government gatekeeping protocols, then somebody either forged papers successfully through a sleeping verification system or someone within the state gave it a helping hand. Either possibility is damning. Adeyemi, for his part, has not gone quietly. He says he had a genuine appointment. He has accused Gbajabiamila of collecting N400 million through a proxy, demanding another N200 million and asking for 48 percent of a purported N27.4 billion take-off grant. He says his refusal to surrender the share caused his troubles. These are grave allegations, but they are still allegations. So far, the public has not seen bank records, messages, recordings, receipts that would independently establish them. Adeyemi is not a neutral witness in his own cause, so we can't assume the facticity of his claims on face value. The Presidency and TheCable have drawn attention to his earlier public self-fashioning as a leader of the World Youth Organization, which Nigerian newspapers once reported as an affiliate of the United Nations. That claim later came under challenge because no such UN youth organ existed in the form he presented it. In other words, the man at the center of the PFIPC scandal. But the Presidency should not celebrate too quickly. Adeyemi's credibility problems do not absolve the state. A thief who steals police uniform is a criminal. But if he uses the uniform to sleep in police barracks, command patrol vans, receive salutes from officers and collect allowances from the police budget, the scandal no longer belongs to the thief alone. It belongs to the police. That is why the most plausible explanation is not a tidy binary. It is not simply that Adeyemi beat the system. Nor is it yet proven that Gbajabiamila co-designed the scheme and later turned on him after a quarrel over loot sharing. The evidence available to the public supports a more troubling middle ground. Adeyemi was likely the prime mover of an elaborate institutional fraud, but he almost certainly benefited from either complicity, negligence or the habitual stupidity of Nigerian bureaucracy. There are global parallels, but none is an exact twin. In Gujarat, India, a man named Sandeep Rajput allegedly created a fake Irrigation Project Division office, forged seals and signatures, submitted official-looking proposals and got more than 40 million Indian rupees in government grants released.

That is probably the closest parallel because it involved not just impersonation but entry into public finance. Also in India, Kiran Patel allegedly posed as an official of the Prime Minister's Office and enjoyed official security and hospitality in Jammu and Kashmir before his arrest. His case resembles Adeyemi's use of proximity to the presidency as a password to bureaucratic reverence. In China, Zhao Xiyong posed as a State Council official, toured provinces, gave speeches and was received by local leaders who apparently lacked the courage or curiosity to ask basic questions. In Ghana, a fake U.S. embassy operated for years, issued counterfeit visas and survived partly because corrupt officials were reportedly paid to look away. These cases tell us something universal about power. Bureaucracies worship symbols. A seal, a title, a convoy, a letterhead, a foreign-sounding summit, a grandiose acronym and a confident fool in a well-cut suit can suspend institutional reason. In societies where hierarchy is fetishized, verification is often treated as disrespect or, as we like to say in Nigeria, “rudeness to constituted authority.” The Nigerian state is at once overbearing and absent, performative and incompetent, obsessed with protocol but contemptuous of process. It will ask a poor widow for a sworn affidavit before paying her pension arrears but will allow a phantom council to stroll through elite institutions with the swagger of presidential legitimacy. The question Nigerians should insist on is not merely whether Adeyemi forged documents. The Presidency has made that case and the court will decide.

The bigger question is who opened the doors. Who gave him office space? Who received his letters? Who cleared his delegation? Who processed his domain? Who inserted or failed to remove the budget line? Who saw the words “Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council” and did not ask, “Which law created this body?” The scandal is not that Nigeria produced a man audacious enough to impersonate the state. Every country produces such men. The scandal is that the Nigerian state, with all its security agencies, protocol offices, budget departments, domain regulators and anti-corruption theatrics, may have been too hollow to notice that it was being impersonated from within its own shadow. Adeyemi may yet be shown to be a lone con artist. Gbajabiamila may yet be vindicated. Or an independent investigation may uncover something darker. But what the public already knows is enough to indict the system. A government that can be mimicked this successfully has already confessed to being indistinguishable from its counterfeit.