

The United States' Cable, the Seeming White Elephant Project called the National Fusion Centre and the Continuation of Decentralised Agency-Specific Database Disposition in Policing Nigeria

In this Fourth Industrial Revolution Age where technological innovations succeeds one another in matters of seconds and not minutes, the absence of a centralised database for the policing of Nigerians and Nigeria by ministries, departments and agencies of governments reeks of the height of systemic rot and the accompanying sub-systemic profiteering dispositions of government and agencies involved.

Is it truly possible, in this Fourth Industrial Age and with Nigeria's penchant for political correctness, particularly in matters with international ramifications, to say that Nigeria cannot boast of a centralised one-stop shop for data on Nigerians, available to ministries, departments and agencies, in their governance of Nigerians and Nigeria? Is it possible that the Nigeria Police, the premier and lead agency in internal safety, lacks a centralised one-stop shop database in the line of its work on Nigerians and Nigeria?

The latter query concerns the Nigeria Police and by extension the supervising Ministry of Police Affairs. This is the condition that prompted the Cable emanating from the United States government on the state of database and their use in governance by the police and indeed the government of Nigeria.

I stumbled on Cable that reads thus:

It has been brought to our attention through intel that Nigeria, as a country, in the 21st century is still grappling with issues of non-availability of crime database that enables thorough checks on criminal records. A detailed analysis of all the police clearance documents submitted in all the Embassies in Nigeria for visa applications are invariably fake and unconformable. It's quite worrisome to note that Nigeria, at this critical stage of insecurity, lacks data coordination amongst the security agencies in the country. It's either the lack of it or the lack of use of the available Crime Database, specifically designed for criminal records of individuals or companies. This practice has dire consequences, as the lack of confirmation of such important documents, has led to the influx of terrorists, bandits, kidnappers etc, in country, as a result visas issued. We are constrained to henceforth reject such documents until a database for such issuance is made available. The US government will not

continue to accept such documents that enable terrorists and criminals to access our visas, thereby visiting our country...

There is no gainsaying overstating the place and primacy of the Nigeria Police in law enforcement generally inside Nigeria. Unlike all other agencies carved out of the Nigeria Police with specific mandates of law enforcement, the Nigeria Police alone has role that cut across all of these agencies' specific roles. Thus the Cable from the United States government singled out the Nigeria Police for indictment – and by extension the government – as it failed to perform its lead role in policing Nigerians and Nigeria using a comprehensive database.

In terms of the legal instrument for the Nigeria Police role in creating and maintaining database for its work and those of other agencies with similar albeit specialised roles, the Police Act 2020 and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 empowered the Nigeria Police to build and maintain this database. Section 44 of the Police Act 2020 and Section 15 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 are unanimous in saddling the Nigeria Police with this power.

So, what roles have successive police management beginning with the Inspectors General of Police played and/or are playing to realising the contents of these Acts in the governance of the police's strategic tasks?

The Cable from the United States government contained weighty indictment of the Nigeria Police and by extension of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the owners of the Nigeria Police. The Cable wondered that "in the 21st century, Nigeria was still grappling with issues of non-availability of crime database that enables thorough checks on criminal records." According to the Cable, "a detailed analysis of all the police clearance documents submitted in all the Embassies in Nigeria for visa applications are invariably fake and unconformable." The Cable extended its indictment to other agencies when it noted that it was "worrisome to note that Nigeria, at this critical stage of insecurity, lacked data coordination amongst the security agencies in the country..." It was the Cable's view that this state of affairs was "either the lack of it or the lack of the use of the available Crime Database, specifically designed for criminal records of individuals or companies..."

There two implications from "either the lack of it or the lack of the use of the available Crime Database..." which are worrisome to say the least. In the first place, it is that the Nigeria Police does not have a centralised database. If this is true, it is a shame. In the second place, it is that the Nigeria Police have a centralised database which it is not using. Which of the two

statements explained the condition contained in the Cable's allegations and the state of the Nigeria Police in terms of centralised database?

Until my interaction with the Ministry of Police Affairs and the Nigeria Police recently at the three day workshop on "West African Police Information System (WAPIS)", on the theme of "interagency collaboration on information sharing among law enforcement agencies in Nigeria", where I presented a paper entitled "Centralised Database for Effective Policing among Law Enforcement Agencies", my position was that the Nigeria Police, the entire law enforcement agencies and indeed ministries, department and agencies of government lacked centralised database for their use.

I had criticised the police and by extension the government for always jumping on the initiatives that came from outside Nigeria including the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) which had the backing and input of the European Union (EU). I had wondered why Nigeria should support this initiative when it lacked its own centralised database and would, with time, recourse to using database created and supported by the EU with implication for its safety. My argument was that the WAPIS initiative would serve the EU's security agenda primarily and not Nigeria and/or West Africa for that matter.

In the paper, I had prefaced my intervention with the preamble questions thus: Does Nigeria have a philosophy or nature, meaning and purpose that serves as confluence for governance? Has the questions what is Nigeria, whose Nigeria, what are Nigeria's issues and how can Nigeria be achieved been asked and answered? These questions and their answers are fundamental to the issue of centralised database and the shameful knock on the head that the Nigeria Police, the government and by extension Nigerians received from the United States via the Cable.

It was during the question and answer session that i was reminded of the existence of the National Fusion Centre. The Fusion Centre, which was funded by the presidency directly and was a United Nations requirement, I was told, would be managed by the Nigeria Police. The Centre would embrace all the agencies within the law enforcement community in Nigeria when it became functional, I was told.

The implication of the response I got from the Ministry of Police Affairs officials on the Fusion Centre was that it had not commenced operation and that when it commenced operation, all the law enforcement agencies would have representatives in the Centre whose task was to update and harmonise the contents of the data from their respective agencies for use when required.

So, what is happening to the Fusion Centre which I reliably gathered was 95 per cent completed? What is left of the 5 per cent? Is the 5 per cent enough to deter the Centre from functioning? Is the 5 per cent that is missing in respect of the few staff required to be trained for every office countrywide to ensure compliance? Is the 5 per cent the requirement that all agencies listed on the Centre to post their staff to the building in the Force Headquarters? Is the 95 per cent not enough completion to make the place functional? Is the Centre another white elephant project? Is the Ministry of Police Affairs, the supervising ministry aware of the Centre's importance and thus its necessity in law enforcement? Is the Nigeria Police aware of the Centre and its lead role in making sure the Centre commences operation? Are the Ministry and the Police aware of the importance of the Centre and the need to work towards ensuring it commences of operation as soon as possible?

Above all else, are the Ministry and the Nigeria Police aware of the contents of the Cable from the United States and its implications for Nigerians and Nigeria moving forward? Is the federal government aware of the Centre and the implication of the Cable from the United States government?

In a workshop on enhancing professionalism and standardisation in criminal investigation recently in Abuja, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) informed participants that in ten months of year 2024 alone, the Nigeria Police secured 35,604 convictions out of 128, 988 criminal cases and, other sundry achievements. Where did the IGP get this statistics in the light of the feeble compliance by police formations all across the country with Section 44 and Section 15 respectively let alone the keeping records of convictions? How did the IGP arrive at this figure in the absence of data from database to back it up? What was "standardization" part in the theme of the workshop in the absence of standard database? How much of this statistics corroborated the position of the United States government as contained in the Cable?

Should the Fusion Centre be working, it would have been easier to come up with data supporting this claim. In the event of this, concerned Nigerians would have been sufficiently confident that the data for this claim can be corroborated. For now, the IGP's position remained a claim as there was no data to defend this claim.

The fate of the National Fusion Centre is not too dissimilar with the fate of other projects and programmes in the country and specifically projects and programmes associated with the Nigeria Police. There is something intrinsically unwell with the Nigeria Police.

These were projects and programmes conceived to aid governance or the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigerians. The Nigeria Factor and the ailment called emilokan are at the heart of the fate befalling the Centre. There are other projects within the Nigeria Police that have not seen the light of the day even after completion and are wasting away. One such project was the forensic laboratory in the Nigeria Police Academy Wudil. This forensic facility was built and donated to the Academy by the Central Bank of Nigeria. As at the last time I was there, it was abandoned and not utilised.

What are the implications for Nigerians and Nigeria of the import of the Cable from the United States government? What is the implication of the Cable for the Nigeria Police? What is the implication on the National Fusion Centre? What is the implication on the fight against crimes and criminalities of all types? What is the implication of this development on the Nigeria Police and its primary role in law enforcement inside Nigeria? What is the implication of these developments on the role of the Inspector General of Police in the governance of the Nigeria Police?