Why Security Agencies Always Fail Us

Contributed by Administrator
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Frank Odita, retired commissioner of police and principal consultant, Frankcom Limited, a security company, speaks with Dike Onwuamaeze, principal staff writer, and Ishaya Ibrahim, staff writer, on the disappearance of Aliyu Tishau, from the custody of the security agencies and other security challenges facing the country. Excerpts:

Newswatch: How do you see the altercation between the police and Defence Intelligence Agency, DIA, over the disappearance of Aliyu Tishau from their custody? Odita: I have not had the opportunity of talking to either. It is all speculations from the press. All I can say is that it is unfortunate that such a thing is happening in our country. Who do we blame and where is the suspect? Where does that take us to? The IGP said he has returned the suspect. The suspect said they returned him to the IG. So, Tishau is now a missing person. Where is Tishau? How do you want me to react as a citizen? My reaction will not be different from yours. Newswatch: Let’s get your reaction. Odita: For me, it is an unfortunate scenario that a suspect is now missing between the top security agencies. The DIA and the police should jointly work in synergy to find where the suspect is. Is he missing enroute from one agency to the other because both of them should come out and tell Nigerians where the suspect is? That would be my reaction. Newswatch: What is the implication of having such a suspect at large? Odita: The implication of having such a suspect at large is unfortunate and very risky for Nigeria at this point in time; on the eve of our 51st independence. I do not want to believe anyway that the suspect is missing. I don’t want to believe that such suspect can be missing between the police and the DIA. Newswatch: How did that suspect now appear on a national television granting interview revealing certain vital security information to the public? Odita: Since I am not a spirit, it is not possible for me to be able to tell how he disappeared from top two security agencies to now appear in the press and grant press interview. And of course, wherever he is granting press interview, it is still a security environment. I am sure if he grants press interview in a TV station or a newspaper house, there will be policemen on guard at those institutions. So, if he is really a missing person and he is wanted by any of these agencies, he won’t be going about freely in this country. So, the fact is that we are yet to know the truth. Newswatch: What would you make of some of the disclosures he made that he warned the police on a planned attack in Abuja, three days before the police headquarters was bombed and shortly after the incident, the IGP summoned him to his office where he called the planner of the attack and spoke with him? Odita: I will be surprised that such information got to them. So, I don’t want to believe it. I want to believe that the Nigeria police that I served and retired as a commissioner cannot have such a vital information and refuse to act on it until that incident took place. But I want to believe that it cannot be true. In the best scenario, the police will seize him. They will not let him step out until he has named members of his gang and, of course, state clearly where their equipment for the assault is kept for police to take them over and the police have bomb disposal unit. Newswatch: Why is it so difficult for our security operatives to penetrate the Boko Haram? Odita: I am not too sure that it is difficult to penetrate them. As a security expert myself, and a retired commissioner of police who has held a command position in the force, the system we operate in Nigeria as at today is not what you will describe as the best. We are operating in a dysfunctional society. Our society does not have security at its front burner. Security occupies the back seat. It is only when we get threatened or a security challenge stares us in the face that we will come up, carry out a fire brigade approach and when the issue is over, we go back to business as usual. Newswatch: Do we have money to finance security activities and secure the country? Odita: But we have the money to buy limousines and build skyscrapers and build palatial homes, ride choice cars, wear all manner of dresses that we wear. Newswatch: But we have not made it a priority? Odita: The issue really is that security has not been a priority because even the police are not capable of doing what they are supposed to be doing and that is why we have a proliferation of security agencies. We don’t need too many security agencies to do what one is doing. Take for instance, in this country, we have anti graft organisations. We have a Code of Conduct Bureau, anti graft. We have ICPC, anti graft, and we have EFCC, anti graft. And within the police, we still have special fraud unit, SFU. Each one is operating independent of each other. There is no synergy. How many times have all the agencies held meetings to discuss mutually on what they can do to meet each other’s shortcomings and co-operate. What we are seeing is everybody competing against the other and who should be chosen to be the best instead of saying how far we have gone to achieve a successful network for the benefit of Nigeria. Newswatch: Where will this rivalry and competition take us? Odita: It will take us to nowhere, it will only ground us because any house divided against itself cannot stand.