

HR2003 – Subverting Democracy

By Mekonnen Kassa

For over two years, two naïve American Congressmen have been engaged in a concerted effort to subvert America's fight against terrorism and fulfill the fancy of enemies of Ethiopia under the guise of an American Legislation HR5680.

Their unrelenting attempt was defeated and HR5680 failed to move past the Congressional Committee for Foreign Affairs. As the result, the self-centered duo, Donald Payne and Chris Smith were forced to amend their Bill. They came up with HR2003 with a catchy title designed to deceive the rest of unsuspecting US Congressmen. The US Congressmen, infamous for not closely scrutinizing legislation, failed to address the real issues and concern and passed it without debating the merits of this legislation.

One individual whose testimony was pivotal to pass HR2003 is Berhanu Nega. This is an individual who admitted that he was involved in trying to topple the Ethiopian government using innocent children as cannon fodders. He is a convicted criminal who, on his own recognizance, admitted guilt, wrote and signed a letter begging for mercy, and pledging to respect the Ethiopian Constitution and legal institutions. The Ethiopian government obliged to his request, and pardoned him and his 37 co-conspirators with their full citizen rights restored. A fact, I might add, he conveniently avoided in his testimony.

Birhanu and his friends who failed in their first attempt are now are trying to use an American legislation to undermine the Ethiopian Constitutional order. Birhanu and his subservient Birtukan are felons and renegades who breached their conditions of probation (pardon). They are not qualified nor eligible nor credible to give a testimony in the halls of Congress. They are a power hungry bunch and will not stop from achieving it even at the cost of compromising the sovereignty and very existence of the nation Ethiopia itself. These two individuals while condemning the Ethiopian government in the strongest terms possible, they never uttered a single word against the terrorist actions of ONLF or the Grand Wizard of Terrorism and President of Eritrea Isayas Afewerki. Both ONLF and Isayas are self declared enemies of Ethiopia and hell bent to achieve their end goal of destroying Ethiopia through terrorist activities.

For genuinely concerned Ethiopians, we take HR2003 to be a detriment to the democratization effort currently undergoing in Ethiopia as it threatens to isolate and penalize the legitimate government of Ethiopia. Instead, we believe, the best course of action for US is to continue to engage EPRDF, to dangle carrots, and to put a measured pressure on it to continue making changes. Albeit, quite the contrary, the Bill that requires US to use its stick, which has proven not be an effective, was allowed to pass.

EPRDF has a history of making bold changes when engaged and commended, and it is known to be equally stubborn when threatened and condemned. The Ethiopian Ambassador to the US, who has shown he can be vigilant and now at the fore front of this legislation battle, was quoted on Reuters on Oct 3 stating "(if) the irresponsible legislation becomes law, it would create fresh obstacles to Ethiopia's

bold efforts toward comprehensive democratic reforms." That exactly should be our concern and it should serve as a word of caution that EPRDF may turn away from countries like US and solidify its relationship with other countries that are known to promote a "no meddling in internal affairs" foreign policy.

It is an open secret that EPRDF does not rely solely on US monetary and military support. China, with its voracious appetite for energy could be, if not already, a major supporter of and supplier to the government of Ethiopia. You only need to look at Sudan to realize how far a support from China can carry a government. And China has a vested interest to support EPRDF and gain influence in Ethiopia. A case in point is the fierce competition between US Oil Corporations on one side and China on the other to secure long term energy exploration contract in Ogaden and Somalia. The US contract to explore oil in Somalia signed with Siad Barre may be in discussion to be renewed. But the Chinese are not sitting idle, they will use their good relation with Ethiopia to put pressure on Somalis TFG and try to secure a contract of their own with Somalia. If the US continues to try to isolate EPRDF, that will be reason enough to strengthen further the relation with China.

Maybe it is too late and the Chinese have enough reason to increase their support to EPRDF. I am sure the Chinese are taking note when they see ONLF, a terrorist organization that murdered their innocent citizens in cold blood play a major role sponsoring and supporting this Bill. Then again maybe there is still time for the Senate Foreign Affairs Subcommittee to acknowledge that EPRDF is making a genuine effort to democratize and will do the right thing to help Ethiopia progress. The Senate can reverse the current course by rejecting this legislation that will most likely create a wedge in what otherwise is an excellent US – Ethiopia relationship.

If the honorable Senators can learn any lesson from past legislations, a pen is not mightier than the sword and the sword even blunter when it comes to bringing democracy. What did countless American legislations do against Cuba, China, Iran, Libya, and a list of several other countries? Are these countries any democratic, or any better for that matter as the result of American legislation passed against them decades ago? Let alone faced with an allegedly unwilling government, one cannot intimidate and force a willing partner to do anything if not consensual.

We reasonable Ethiopians can help in this regard. Understand that this legislation has a long way to go before it is enacted to become law. This legislation took more than two years to pass the House. It will take as long, if not longer, to pass the Senate. It has yet to go to the Senate Sub Committee, and then to the full Foreign Committee, then to the Senate floor. By then America will have a new President, whoever that may be, and half changed Senate with a new set of priorities.

This gives us time to play politics American style and change the course of this legislation. To that end, I encourage some of you with excellent command of the English language to call American Radio Talk Shows, preferably conservative ones, this Friday as most of them have "Open Mic Friday" programs. You can e-mail them too. Inform these Americans with the clearest of terms the subversive actions of Payne and Smith to American's fight against terrorism by passing a legislation to penalize Ethiopia: a country that crushed terrorists in Somalia who were responsible for East Africa Embassy bombings and

Black Hawk Down. Tell them how Payne admires Eritrea: the safe haven of Al-Qaeda! I am sure that will nudge American Senators to think twice before considering HR2003 for a vote.