

DR. Terrence Lyons

Scribbling And Scribbling

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Terrence Lyons has recently come up with a write-up entitled “*Ethiopia's Muslim Activists Pave a Path for Nonviolent Political Activism*” (*World Politics Review*, 21, Aug. 2013) that draws lineage with another article he published earlier that is titled as “*Generational shift May shake-up Ethiopian politics after MelesZenawi.*” Terrence Lyons of the George Mason University has excruciatingly taken the issue of the up-coming 2015 national election of Ethiopia in the article he published recently. Lyons, an associate professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution and co-director of the Center for Global Studies has issued article that would fail to pass every stringent scrutiny of logical validity.

In my judgment, his articles show no trait of an epigrammatic academic piece one would expect from a professor in academia. The articles I have taken up here have a loose-fitting logical validity and a questionable manner of argumentation. Here I am trying to challenge Lyons views and put his write-ups to the test of logic. “One cannot know of what metal a bell is made if it is not well rung,” so it is said. Thus, the merit or demerit of Lyons pieces cannot be known until we evaluated them through the prism of logical argument. This article has no more than this humble objective.

To begin with, the author who wrote these articles is an intellectual and to that extent, his opinion is assumed to have the same value as the decision or opinion of a reputable judge. Surely, an academic author would have the benefit of a broad and comprehensive survey of the subject he/she chose to discuss. An academic writer is armored with knowledge accumulated over a lengthy period of gestation, and intermittent opportunities for reconsideration. Thus, as an expert writing on an issue about which he has proficiency, would have the ability to make vigorously effective opinion. Therefore, the trenchancy with which an intellectual would express his opinion has a daunting influence on the public.

An intellectual would also have access to detailed information about issue he opts to take up as a subject for review. This again, along with the dexterity he/she may have in the craft of composition, would reinforce his/her ability of creating strong impression. Hence, he/she must judiciously exercise his/her intellectual power, and should take considerable care not to express his/her opinion as an academic finding.

Truly, articles draped with such scholastic gown like Lyons will have more huge impact than those written by non-professionals. Lyons as an academic writer will definitely have the advantage of creating a heavy weight impact in shaping and sharpening the public opinion.

But this is all packaging. If the author fails to deter or reduce the interception and interference of his/her political or otherwise interests that would create dissonance in his/her analysis, argument and judgment, this potential will be spoiled. Lyons keeps on scribbling and scribbling on "*The Rise and fall of Ethiopian Politics.*" This proliferate writer is giving us articles that are sanitized as read, but marred with insidious manipulation of irrelevant facts. He is engaged in the manufacturing of opinions that would defile the picture of the ruling party and the Ethiopian government.

Lyons, a spin-doctor, aided by his apparent skilful argument is trying to persuade us disfiguring the tangible facts of our daily life. I think Lyons has preconceived ideas, which he so firmly held that it becomes impossible for him to concede even against concrete indefensible facts. Being impervious to facts on the ground, and lacking an open-mind disposition, Lyons denied himself the opportunity to learn the truth.

I am baffled by the conclusions he outlined in the above-mentioned two articles where he has attached particular importance to his wild speculation in defining the future scenario of the Ethiopian politics in relation to the upcoming election. Lyons, an armchair critic who loves to express his opinion at the spur of the moment always issued his articles with a guise of an academic piece. In fact, he has a temperate, an apt, firm and persuasive language embedded with a tone that lacks impartiality. As every schoolchild knows, he always has wild allegations that could cause acute dismay to his readers. The article of faith in his recent write-ups is that the Ethiopian government is engaged in "criminalizing dissents."

His opinions are untenable. Driven by his long-standing and deep-seated bias about the Ethiopian government, this “reputable author” wrote rigorously ‘subversive’ articles to incriminate the ruling party. He habitually voiced his fallacious argument in pieces usually crowned with debatable conclusions. His articles are nothing but vilification ventures on the ruling party.

“AGENT PROVOCATEUR”

Dr. Lyons in his latest piece published on August 21, 2013 appears to be acting as an “*agent provocateur*.” He acted like an agent who intends to inflame destabilizing upheaval in Ethiopia. As it stands now, we do not know what contractual situation has been established between Lyons and the “rioters.” However, it is possible to understand the business term looking some background details of his articles.

Seemingly, Dr. Lyons has opted to become a fellow traveler to the cause of the group called “*DimitsachinYisema*.” He chose to work for their cause without being an official member. He openly expressed his high consideration and sympathy for the group. In fact, his real interest lies on the opposition parties. Hence, he is acting as a strategist for campaign in the up-coming election. Thus, as he has no chance to seep into the Ethiopian politics as *Ana Gomiezi*, he appointed himself as “*NegedeGobezie*” of the 2015 national election,.

In any case, to understand the claims Dr. Lyons made in his article of August 21, 2013, I found it useful to read it in parallel with other articles and interviews issued earlier. Back in 2007/08, Lyons had speculated, “Ethiopia in 2008 [will] face challenges on multiple fronts.” Further expounding this point he said, “Prime Minister *MelesZenawi*, who has been in power since 1991, in the past has demonstrated both resilience and the capacity to outmaneuver his rivals.” However, he added, “This year [in 2008], he face a convergence of internal and regional crises that could unbalance Ethiopia and exacerbate conflicts across the region. Each of these challenges feeds and in turn fed by the others. [Thus], an explosive escalation is possible.”

On other hand, in an interview he had with VOA news Dr. Lyons said, “Ethiopia is becoming increasingly authoritarian and potentially faces a convergence of challenges that will stretch the regime’s capacity to manage multiple crises. The ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party weathered the immediate domestic crises that followed

contentious national elections in 2005. Non-competitive local elections in April [2012] and the promulgation of a draft proclamation to restrict civil society organizations in July [2011] indicate that the regime's intent on deepening its control."

To the disappointment of the author, nothing of his forecasts or bad omens has come true. Contrary to what Lyons has anticipated Ethiopia and the ruling party as well as the eastern African region have remained solid in 2008, as it is safe in the year 2013. Lyons had projected "convergence of internal and regional crises." He self-assuredly guessed the convergence of these crises "could unbalance Ethiopia and exacerbate conflicts across the region." This wild conjecture has changed into thin air.

In one of his article, Dr. Lyons has quoted David Shinn as saying, "I see little room for optimism in the Horn of Africa's short-term future." Then Lyons followed up and noted, "There are enough of these negative issues that are still out there - - at least a few of which may even be worsening."

In sum, the general the picture of Ethiopia in the eyes of Lyons has always been gloomy. To be precise it has always been "a very mixed picture." Accounting the major challenges he anticipated, Lyons once commented, "If you look at it a year from now [2008]... it is going to be a very mixed bag."

Terrence Lyons's dream has always been the escalation of violence in the entire region. However, every single prediction he made about the possible political situation in the Horn has successively failed. In fact, he has always been pessimist about every state in the Horn. As if the turn of events were meticulously designed to prove him wrong, the convergence conflicts he conjured up in Ethiopia, Somalia, South-Sudan, and North-Sudan happen to be a convergence of encouraging signs and incredible progress. The *Drafur* situation and the implementation of the North-South Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement have turned out to be commendable and even laudable.

Lyons always decorates his repugnant skepticism with loose-fitting interpretation of events, which would crisply display the acute paralysis of analysis he is suffering from. To start with, his

analysis of the political situation is based on a simplistic model of appraisal. Moreover, it would be an act of a simpleton to forecast the development of the political situation based on unscrewed facts. It is naïve to analyse a political development at a given time by simply filling random variables or factors into the calculating machine. One political factor that Lyons took into consideration in the article he published on April 25 2013 is the *generational shift*.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

Rambling here and there, and extrapolating issues, Lyons attempted to evaluate the possible scenarios in Ethiopian politics following the premature death of the former PM *MelesZenawi*. He also tried to define the possible takings of the 2015 national election and the current shape of the opposition parties. Lyons has described the opposition parties, as “shattered, repressed, and increasingly ineffectual,” while he ascribed EPRDF as an “unshakable ruling party.”

According Lyons, the “unshakable posture” of the ruling party is the result of measures taken by EPRDF to “effectively criminalize dissent and made it virtually impossible for civil society organizations to engage in human rights monitoring or democratization initiatives.”

Here I chose again to refer a write-up the author published on April 25, 2013, titled “*Generational Shift May Shake up Ethiopian Politics after MelesZenawi*” by which he tried to review the post-*Meles* period. Lyons said, “There are endless speculations about what might happen when and if Prime Minister *MelesZenawi* were to step down and who might be the successor.”

This question would definitely assume deeper magnitude and more reinforced by the death of Prime Minister *MelesZenawi* in August 2012. In that regard Lyons remarked, “The death of Prime Minister *MelesZenawi* in August 2012 marked the end of an era in contemporary Ethiopian politics.”

With an expressed intention of evaluating the political scenario of Ethiopia, following the death of the late PM *MelesZenawi* the author has touched upon many issues. Lyons, in his article of 21 Aug. 2013, said the following as an explanation to the background of his claim:

“A year after Ethiopian Prime Minister *HailemariamDesalegn* came to power following the death of longtime leader *MelesZenawi* in August 2012, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) remains firmly in control. It has continued to govern through a collective leadership that includes three deputy prime ministers from the *Amhara*, *Tigray* and Oromo wings of the coalition; *Hailemariam*hails from the Southern People’s Party. Party discipline and coherence has held, although the lead-up to elections in 2015 may reveal destabilizing fissures. But while older opposition parties and armed movements have been marginalized, a social movement of Ethiopian Muslims is an important new development.”

Lyon also noted, “*Meles’s* death did not provide opportunities for the shattered, repressed, and increasingly ineffectual opposition to engage in politics effectively. There are no public signs of a dissident network within the military or ruling party. [Therefore] it is nearly impossible to mobilize outside of those institutions.”

Thus, he concluded, the likelihood of the occurrence of events that could destabilize the ruling party would possibly come from the internal strife within the ruling party itself. He believes the power struggle within the party higher echelon may result in the destabilization of the ruling party.

In fact, Lyons has affirmed, “it is a mistake to think of [*Meles’s*] tenure as a period of one-man rule or his death as creating either a political vacuum or an opportunity for liberal reform, as power, authority and resources never rested in *Meles’s* hands alone.”

According Lyons, “while the networks of power have proved robust, in recent years, the EPRDF has undergone a remarkable transition of party leaders,” which he believe would create inherent tension within the party structure. Then recalling, “A number of senior figures have stepped down from the coalition’s executive committee in 2010”he noted, “Inherent tension between centralized power and ethnic- and region-based parties remains strong.”He then added, “Many strong, authoritarian parties shatter when succession crises create intraparty conflicts.”

While Lyons affirmed, EPRDF “has held together despite the death of its longtime leader.”but “it will be an extraordinary accomplishment if the EPRDF can manage the larger generational transition.”

Here, I would like to remind my readers what a distinguished speaker at an event organized last year in USA to pay tribute to the late Prime Minister *Meles Zenawi* said. A veteran journalist who recounted her reminiscence of *Meles* when she met him as a freedom fighter in the early days of the armed struggle made a striking reference as to how *Meles* and his comrades considered his role in the party. She said, “Both as a freedom fighter and a distinguished statesman, *Meles* has never presented himself, nor his comrades perceived him as one different from them. He was just one among them.” I repeat, “Neither he nor his comrades considered and presented *Meles* as someone different.” Truly, that is the true quality of a great leader and a political party. Lyons, inadvertently or otherwise has acknowledged this fact when he say, “it is a mistake to think of [*Meles*’s] tenure as a period of one-man rule.”

There is another important factor, which Lyons failed to observe in the analysis of event immediately after the death of *Meles*, i.e. the role played by the Ethiopian people in determining the course of events after *Meles*. The public has unequivocally expressed its interest treading along a path *Meles* had opened. To that extent, the people has played significant role in shaping and determining the course of events we that saw after the sudden death of the visionary leader. The ruling party leaders have witnessed and openly acknowledged this fact with, astounding honesty of a freedom fighter. This is an important point that Lyon failed to note in his analysis. As he missed this important variable in his equation, his balance-sheet of the Ethiopian politics after *Meles* became erroneous. Therefore, he concluded, “the lead-up to elections in 2015 may reveal destabilizing fissures.”

On one hand, Lyons underscored the fact that it would be “a mistake to think of [*Meles*’s] tenure as a period of one-man rule. [Because] ... power, authority, and resources never rested in *Meles*’ hands alone.” On the other, he anticipates that competition among the leading members of the ruling party may lead to the breakup of the EPRDF. According Lyons, power struggle between ambitious leaders of factions could tear and shatter the front. Hence, he remarked, “It will be an extraordinary accomplishment if the EPRDF can manage the larger generational transition of power.”

This is baseless. I rather argue, “it will be an extraordinarily weird occurrence if the EPRDF plunge itself into factional power struggle.

I could not figure out how younger generation leaders, who are working under the auspice of the veterans, could possibly by pass the organizational culture and structure that did not give chance to giants like *Meles* to establish a “one-man rule.” How come, the long established organizational culture that did not fall prey to such a charismatic leader like *MelesZenawi*, who is endowed with world-class mind and a domineering intellectual ability that won him a global reputation would be trampled by ambitious younger leaders. It is unthinkable to see younger leaders engaged in power struggle to realize their chance of ascending to the top.

However, Lyons noted that the “distribution of power among different ethnic-based factions is in flux and many ambitious actors now see a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make it to the top. [Hence], the period leading up to the 2015 election will test *Hailemariam*’s political skills.”

Lyons thought that factions who perceive a better chance of gaining or retaining power and make an alternative coalition might challenge “the old guards.” Therefore, Lyons pictured a situation where EPRDF would become brittle and shatter. Finally, he concluded, “Such a scenario, while by no means inevitable, has the potential to become violent and to have significant spillover effects throughout the war-torn Horn of Africa.”

He further pointed, “If a cabinet member from the ethnic *Amhara* party, for example, is replaced by someone from the ethnic Oromo party, it is perceived as a shift in the relative power of the two ethnic groups, even if the EPRDF as a whole remains in charge. This underlying ethnic positioning was evident when *Hailemariam*, from the southern wing of the party, appointed representatives of the *Tigray*, *Amhara* and *Oromo* wings as deputy prime ministers so that each constituent party retained a seat at the table.”

Lyons asserted that the appointment of three deputy prime ministers is evidence that would reveal the factional tendency or struggle and competition for power within EPRDF. Whatever the reason might be for the EPRDF to take that decision, I would say with fair certainty that it is not a measure motivated by a power balance game. Lyons argument in this regard is utterly wrong. Every child knows that ethnic representation is the whole mark of EPRDF politics. But I would argue that this arrangement is not devised just to contain vying tendency of young ambitious leaders. In any case, if Dr. Lyons cannot help thinking that way, so be it. In that case, he should consider the appointment of three deputy prime ministers as an additional organizational devise

that would serve as a safety measures that would appease and check such “selfish motives, ”rather creating fracture that would brittle the front.

The fact that veteran leaders of the front have decided to step-down to give way to the new generation will definitely have impact on conduct of the new leaders. The precedence set by veteran leaders is indeed a higher moral standard. The supreme magnanimity shown by the old-guard” would for sure discourage such lowly motivated power-mongering tendency.

However, Lyons said, “Such tensions could be exacerbated by economic factors,” and he further commented, “Ethiopia’s stability depends upon a rapidly growing economy, and a decline will create enormous political pressures.” Indicating that “actual economic growth from 2013-2017 is forecasted to be closer to 7 percent” he said, “This is quite good, but not enough to meet the GTP’s targets ... which projected GDP growth of 10-15 percent.” Therefore, Lyon argued, “this decline will create enormous political pressures.”

Economic Factors

Under the leadership of EPRDF Ethiopia has registered an incredible economic transformation about which the author shows no interest to deny and has squarely acknowledged the fact that “After demise of the brutal *Derg* regime in 1991, the powerful ruling party that had been headed by *Meles* who led the country through a massive transformation.” Although there have been some bumps along the road, EPRDF’s driving of the economy has largely been successful. Lyons has entirely accounted the current unshakable shape of the ruling party to the impressive expansion of health care system and the progress it has achieved in the economic sector. However, citing the alleged slowdown in economic growth, he concluded, “this economic slowdown would affect the rock solid foundation of the ruling party that has helped it so far to enjoy stability.

According Lyons, the unabated strength of the EPRDF and its continued stability that has even survived the untimely demise of its great leader may lose its firmness in “The lead-up to elections in 2015.” Thus, the upcoming election, he anticipated, “may reveal destabilizing fissures.”

Lyons has acknowledged that it would be “a mistake to think of [*Meles*’s] tenure as a period of one-man rule.” Therefore, it would be wrong to consider “his death as creating either a political vacuum or destabilizing fissures.”

As Lyon argued “power, authority, and resources have never been rested in *Meles*’ hands alone.” Thus the general disposition of the ruling party EPRDF remained to be strong and “the party discipline and coherence has held” after *Meles*. However, he argued, “The lead-up to elections in 2015 may reveal destabilizing fissures” because the stability factors, i.e. the rapid economy growth, has disappeared from the equation.

As the stabilizing factor that has served the front to build-up an unshakable stature vanishes, Ethiopia’s stability would also evaporate. Then, the stability that has been slung on a rapid economic growth will die out. Thus, its decline will create enormous political pressures that “may reveal destabilizing fissures.”

This is the thesis and conclusion of Dr. Lyons. “Rapid economic growth has been a key factor to Ethiopia’s stability and when this factor disappears from the equation, then, the stability of the EPRDF would also die out.”

“Recent data suggest that earnings from coffee and gold, Ethiopia’s two largest sources of export revenues have declined,” hence, (he leaves the rest for us to draw conclusion) disability would reign in the EPRDF.

What would be your reaction if someone just come and say to you, “The world will disappear in the coming year.” This unwarranted assertion and speculation is hard to prove or disprove; hence meaningless. Lyons loose-fitting interpretation and claim based on the “earnings from coffee and gold” has created the same impression.

Opposition parties

Lyons argued, “Opposition political parties that have challenged the regime in 2005, now playing virtually no role in national politics.” The argument Lyons has tried to establish regarding the political activism of the opposition seem to be torn between two equally important factors.

On one hand, he asserted that opposition parties who have been struggling to find channels to influence Ethiopian politics have failed to produce a bit of noticeable effect because of the repressive handling of the ruling party. Thus, their failure to participate actively in the Ethiopian politics is ascribed to the enactment of the anti-terrorism and CSO law, which the EPRDF has successfully used to suppress dissents. On the other hand, he underlined ascribed the fact that the opposition parties “weak structures and leadership.” Here, Lyons argument, far from being logical, it simply leaves us disconcerted.

In sum, repression and the draconian laws, as well as weak structures and leadership, have the concerted influence on the opposition’s ability to operate within Ethiopia. His conclusion, finally led him to assert, “Non-violent political activism is possible in Ethiopia.” He went over the fact that after the competitive elections in 2005 and the subsequent crisis that led to the arrest of much of the opposition leadership and the collapse of the main opposition coalitions, the regime effectively criminalized dissent.

Restrictions on independent media and civil society have “limited the ability of Ethiopians to mobilize outside of the structures of the ruling party.” Hence, he argued, “The EPRDF’s dominance was evident in local elections this year, in which it and its affiliated parties won all but one seat nationwide.”

His latest piece tried to introduce roguish political activism for the oppositions who wish to contend EPRDF. And to that extent, the article can be considered as a piece that discloses election campaign strategy for the opposition who plan to run in the 2015 national election.

According to Lyons, there will be no fierce contest in Ethiopia in the 2015 parliamentary election. He also said, “Unlike the volatile vote in 2005,” there would be no real competition in the coming election. This is due to “a diminished opposition and the total control of the ruling party in all spheres” Lyons argued. Therefore, as Lyons advised the opposition parties have to follow the model of activism exemplified by the Ethiopian Muslims.

Muslims Movement

This issue again prompts us to search for background. To begin with, Lyons named it as a “social movement.” A *movement* is a group of people who work towards the same aim without having membership to a given political party. Therefore, Lyons is referring the activity of the group who claim to sloganeer the legitimate queries of the Ethiopian Muslims as such. He also wanted the opposition parties to copycat this “social movement” and change it into a political movement. This, according to him, will refurbish the effort of the opposition that has already been reduced to rubble. This situation will enhance the momentum of the opposition parties for struggle and political activism. Hence, this will help bring better result in the coming national election. The outcome of the upcoming national election would be decided by renovating their political activities following the commendable precedence of the Ethiopian Muslims.

“The ongoing demonstrations by Ethiopian Muslims, who make up approximately 40 percent of the country, provide neither an important model of politics outside of the ruling party that relies upon neither armed struggle nor the strategies of electoral competition on a hopelessly lopsided playing field,” said Lyons. He added, “The movement has been extraordinarily disciplined and non-violent and has succeeded in part by focusing on a specific set of issues.”

The question is, is it “extraordinarily disciplined and non-violent?”

The movement exemplified by the Ethiopian Muslims, which Lyons has described as “extraordinarily disciplined and non-violent, has aroused two divergent opinions amongst the oppositions. The reception of the political tactic that Lyons has recommended is considered by “Many leaders in the older ethno-nationalist movements, including those with large Muslim constituencies, such as the Oromo and Somali, view the multiethnic nature of the movement with trepidation (trouble). On the other hand, “leaders in the *Semayawiparty*, view it as a vehicle to advance pan-Ethiopian political ideas.” Lyons saw no problem in using religious slogans to advance political goals.

Some Muslim activists propose a strategy of sustained low-level protest that avoids confrontation and recognize that a quick victory is impossible. To move more assertively would spark a military crackdown, and the movement’s leadership is likely to lose control if there is violence. The key dynamics to watch in the lead-up to elections in 2015 are therefore competition within

the ruling party and the potential for the Ethiopian Muslim movement to create new space for political activism.

For many leaders in the older ethno-nationalist movements, such as the Oromo and Somali who have large Muslim constituencies, view the multiethnic nature of the movement with trepidation. While others, including leaders in the Semayawi party, view it as a vehicle to advance pan-Ethiopian political ideas.

He also noted, “Some Muslim activists propose a strategy of sustained low-level protest that avoids confrontation.” Proponents of “strategy of sustained low-level protest” have recognized that a quick victory is impossible,” he said.

Therefore, he concluded, “To move more assertively would spark a military crackdown, and the movement’s leadership is likely to lose control if there is violence. The key dynamics to watch in the lead-up to elections in 2015 are therefore competition within the ruling party and the potential for the Ethiopian Muslim movement to create new space for political activism.”

Analyzing and unfolding the possible development of the hitherto sluggish stance of the Ethiopian politics, he in a way urged the opposition to follow the suit of the Ethiopian Muslims in conducting unabated or sustained protest, which he prefer to describe as “a non-violent demonstration.” He noted that EPRDF has effectively managed military challenges and efficiently suppressed political activism of the opposition parties who have struggled to find channels to influence Ethiopian politics by repression and the use of an anti-terrorism law to criminalize dissent. As Lyons remarked, “the weak structures and leadership of the oppositions has limited their ability to operate within Ethiopia.” In sum, he argued, “restrictions on independent media and civil society limit the ability of Ethiopians to mobilize outside of the structures of the ruling party.”

Under this circumstance, Lyons pointed out, “the ongoing demonstrations by Ethiopian Muslims [would] provide important model of politics outside of the ruling party that relies upon neither armed struggle nor the strategies of electoral competition on a hopelessly lopsided playing field.” He praised the movement for its being “extraordinarily disciplined and nonviolent.” And also

extolled the Muslim activists tendency to “operate within the framework of the Ethiopian constitution without intending to overthrow the regime.”

He commended the perseverance of “the Ethiopian Muslim demonstrators, despite the government’s arrests and condemnations.” Therefore, he concluded, “the movement has shown that sustained, nonviolent political activism is possible in Ethiopia.”

Dr. Lyons has assertively declared, “the demonstration began 18 months ago [just] to protest government interference in Islamic affairs and the regime’s links to the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council.”

According to him, “the movement has been extraordinarily disciplined ... nonviolent ... and emphasize that they are operating within the framework of the constitution and they are not seeking to overthrow the regime.” Dr. Lyons has asserted this, while he is telling us, “What is not clear, however, is the movement’s future.” In contrast, he tended to be severely skeptical about the claim made by the Ethiopian government who alleged, “That the protests were organized by extremists bankrolled from overseas and seeking to establish an Islamist state.”

“Third Force”

As radical critics have repeatedly underscored powerful states in the West has been devastating poor countries with bombshell in the name of humanitarian intervention. And we are here witnessing a scholar promoting violence and chaos in the name of democracy and human right. The stated goals of the Western powerful states in their venture were destruction of terrorist networks, promotion of democracy and human rights, etc are interpreted as part of a cover-up for US interests and that country’s desire to create a ‘global empire.’

Motivated by their neo-liberal purport, some radicals have made unjustifiably ideological critique on Ethiopia. In such cases, the opinion they reflect usually tended to be polemical rather than honest evaluation of facts on the ground. Unable to evaluate ‘things as they are’ they engaged themselves in extrapolating issues with the mere interest of just selling their neo-liberal ideological goods. To that extent, their effort would come to be nothing other than unbalanced poly of market fundamentalists.

These radical critics have often hurled accusations on the Ethiopian government regarding its performance in sphere of freedom of expression and human rights. Indicating that the performances of the government in most economic spheres were good, they demonize its governance indices as rather very poor. In most cases, I believe, the charges are driven by ideological imperatives

One can easily perceive the intention of the West who attempts to contain the Ethiopian government through the hands of the opposition and Western based international organizations. The West has an age-old strategy of exploiting the conflicts that may arise between the government and the opposition parties and have an avid interest to act as a part-time agent for the latter so to play the game of arbiter and balance of power. Besides, the West did its utmost to expand its presence in the internal affair of the country and build-up its political influence on Ethiopia and the region.

This time around, they are trying to maneuver the current popular attitude in the Ethiopian Muslims. They are in fact trying to harness or manipulate this opportunity for their hideous revolutionary purposes. The attitudes of this group in general and the perception of the implications of any such disruptive move made by this violent group who advocate political Islam is regarded as of high significance by the scholars like Lyon. Because, among other things, it is effective to use this violent group as a force who are prepared to take highly disruptive direct action in creating the political turmoil they are aiming and always ready to support.

They have this untamable interest of playing a “third force” role with clear mission of promoting their political and economic interests. They would only get this chance in a situation where there are servile political forces that dispute over a certain political agenda but failed to engage themselves into democratic forum of debate to resolve their difference peacefully. Then western states and interest groups would always mobilize there force with a flatulent, inflated, or pretentious mission of bringing the two opposing political groups or parties together.

Lyons is an activist who is engaged in consent manufacturing industry and indexing agenda. Intellectuals are identified as an important actor who could set news media’s agendas. Consequently, the media’s agenda reflects the priorities of business, cultural and political elites like the policy-makers. Chomsky and Herman (1988) claim and most notably argue this view.

Powerful sources regularly take advantage of media routines and dependency to ‘manage’ the media, to manipulate them into following a special agenda and framework... inundating the media with stories, which serve sometimes to foist a particular line and frame on the media, and at other times to help chase unwanted stories off the front page or out of the media altogether.

All of these factors are capable of shaping the attitudes and actions of individuals across societies and must therefore be fundamental in any attempt to understand the motivations which lie at the heart of competition within and between political, administrative and other elites, and sections of the wider population.

In addition, it should be realized that some of the most powerful political and Business, Technological and cultural (BTC) elites operate across state boundaries and not just within them, and may choose to act in unison with their extensions or counterparts in other states in applying pressure on several states at once. When acting in a non-governmental context, such groups generally are referred to as transnational actors.

Terrence Lyons has raised issues that some of his readers (including myself) would consider as “a flea-bitten” rag public agenda that both local and international analysts, politicians and NGOs have agonizingly crying for the last five years since the ratification of the CSO and anti-terrorism laws.

The Monster

Various Western analysts who can be dubbed with different ideological tendencies had demonized these laws and purportedly taken them as a bankruptcy notice for the democratization process of our country. They deemed the law that was enacted by the parliament to regulate associations and charity organizations as a dreadful notice of warning that barricade them from muddling with internal affairs of our country as they wish.

Putting aside their expressed motives, Western governments and international organizations have an openly perceived interest to enjoy the freedom to manipulate the course of political events and to stick their nose in the internal affairs without any restriction.

These laws have frustrated their interest, bridled their freedom, and unprecedentedly put them incapacitated. That have really robbed them the long cherished liberty of influencing the internal political affairs of sovereign third world nations and closed the hitherto flung-opened door. That in effect dismantled their free port.

These international organizations and opposition parties have been engaged in mobilizing public opinion against these legal schemes. They have been demonizing them all through the legislation process from the drafting to the ratification stage. In fact, these laws are curfew bidding their free ride movement.

Radical critics characterize the activities of the Western human rights activists (scholars, media, and NGOs) as a naming and shaming venture directed against ideological foes of the western states.

These critics also identify oil interests as an explanation for the War on Terror. These authors prefer to call these interests ‘imperial’, and add a few other elements to their critique – the selectivity of Western responses.

They denounce the hypocrisy of the US and British governments who claim to promote human rights but in reality suppress them, both at home and abroad, and civilian casualties that result from ‘liberation wars’. Humanitarian intervention is simply a strategy used by the West to ensure its “imperial expansion.”

Here “imperialism” does not indicate a social situation as an outcome of capitalist production relations. On the other hand, “expansionism” signifies the interest of Western capitalist states that are driven by a constant need to valorize capital, which in turn requires markets and resources. But they did this, in a limited sense of the economic interests of states.

As we all know, Americans generally tended to support pragmatic internationalism but not so much moral internationalism. Therefore, the leaders in the West should strive to show some direct connection that could serve to the betterment of their respective societies. For instance, the American public opinion is supportive of an active foreign policy on trade and other issues such as interdicting illegal drugs from abroad.

In other words, there is a contingent relationship between human-rights activism of the western states, scholars, and NGOs and their political and economic interest. The US and the UK used the notion of human rights and democracy to justify the War on Terror, but radicals dismiss these justifications “as a fig leaf for their imperialist intentions.”

Scholars like Lyons have engaged themselves in promoting in this “imperialist” (in the behavioral term of the word) mission. International Human right Organizations are also engaged in this game of “naming and shaming” of an un-favored states. In a number of situations, they strive to create public pressure on unfriendly states (in an ideological sense), with a view of accruing some ideological gains over time. They may also engage in “judicial lobbying” or legal advocacy by participating in court cases, to press their point of view and its reasonableness under law, until it becomes controlling policy.

We should not also forget that in some instances, taking a public position on human rights abroad might be designed for domestic consumption. But quite often they engage themselves in public diplomacy on human rights simply to embarrass states and dictate the interests of their financiers.

The point that these activists usually forget is that, EPRDF does not reiterates human rights and democracy as owe inspiring and fashionable phrases of a political discourse that would serve to cultivate amicable public relations. Rather, the issue of human rights and democracy is a corner stone and the *‘alpha and omega’* of its political mission. A mission that would determine not only the fate of the EPRDF government, but a political issue that would decide the very existence of the country Ethiopia, as a nation state. EPRDF is striving to build a democratic state, where the individual and group rights of every citizens are respected and where everyone get the pleasure of the full exercises of his/her freedoms and where everyone enjoys an esteemed life in a political system where all his/her human rights are respected.

On the part of EPRDF, the commitment to respect human rights and democracy is not motivated as well as driven by an arm twisting pressures and censures of international human right organizations and Western university scholars like Dr. Lyons.

These activists should repeatedly be reminded that EPRDF’s unwavering commitment for human rights and democracy is inbuilt to its political mission in Ethiopia, and thus it does not primarily

evaluate its commitment and measure its performance in reference to the menacing annual report, press release, and articles issued from the West. It discharges this cumbersome task and builds a democratic political system with unflinching dedication. The focus is not pleasing or displeasing super powers and/or vocalist human right organizations and scholars in the west. It is rather a self-imposed and highly esteemed political obligation of the ruling party and the Ethiopian government.

However, I believe, there are honest human rights organizations and scholars. When scholars and NGOs are genuinely interested in advancing rights abroad, then they would seriously think about ends and means. Nonetheless, sometimes some genuinely interested activists who wanted to advance rights abroad tended to be moralistic, rigid, and politically naïve, in their single-minded pursuit of the issue of human rights.

To be honest, officials sometimes are challenged to manage the contradictions inherent in the effort to blend security, economic, ecological, and human rights concerns into one overall policy. Therefore, it is important to note how difficult it would be for a given poor state that is burdened with multiple tasks and interests. It is not a simple task for poor states to have a consistent record on human rights issues. However, many foreign and local scholars and organizations consider the quest for perfect moral consistency, which seldom disposed them as utopian.

There are surveys conducted which evaluate the impact of these human right activists. These studies indicated that only 11 percent of surveyed NGOs reported success in achieving policy change in favor of the human rights positions they advocated.

Whether one pictures this advocacy as part a lobbying effort or a long-term education, their impact is very small. In fact, most Human Right Organizations publish books, brochures, reports, etc. For instance, Human Rights Watch has a publishing agreement with Yale University Press. Moreover, all human rights NGOs make use of the Internet to disseminate their information. In doing this they wish to pave the road to create a better environment for their lobbying efforts. They publish such reports not only to raise the consciousness of both policy makers and the attentive public, but also to create and maintain a supportive political environment for their interests. But, they can be successful in their advocacy if only they have reputation for accurate reporting of human rights information.

The old maxim about the role of ambassadors does not work for private human rights groups. As the old maxim has it “Ambassadors are sent abroad to lie for their country.” But scholars and private human rights groups exist primarily to report only the truth. They exist primarily to be ruled by higher moral standards. They need to have track-records that would help them to win the minds and the hearts of its consumers- policy makers and the general public. There are not expected to work on behalf of the national interests of their homeland and financiers. The relevant maxim about the role of private human rights groups is: “They do not meddle in the other nation’s internal affair to lie to serve their narrow interest.” In fact, they are just interest groups. Of course, there are some who make argument that human rights NGOs are not interest groups because they are altruistic rather than self-centered actors seeking interests for themselves. But this is not persuasive. However, the private human rights groups do not fare very well, if they do not develop a reputation for accurate reporting of human rights information. The bedrock of all their activity is the collection of accurate information and its timely dissemination. For a group to generate influence on governments and other public authorities it must manifest a reputation for accurate reporting and dissemination of information.

One of the famous (infamous) human rights group is *Amnesty International*, (founded in 1961) incessantly shower accusations about Ethiopian government. Regarding accuracy *Amnesty International* has poor record. In several instances, *Amnesty International* has had to retract public statements and reports, as when it was caught up in Kuwaiti propaganda in 1990. It has erroneously repeated the story that the invading Iraqi forces had torn incubators from premature Iraqi babies¹ (Forsythe, 2006: 193).

Amnesty International is not known for reliable reporting like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). One study found, “*Amnesty International*’s reporting was affected not just by the severity of human rights violations in a nation, but also by such factors as: the nation’s links to US military assistance and prominence in the global media; and *Amnesty International*’s opportunities to maximize advocacy, chance to shape norms, desire to raise its own profile, and other factors (Ibid).

¹David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2006: 193)

On the contrary, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has built up a reputation since 1863 for meticulously careful statements about prisoners of war and other victims of armed conflict and complex emergencies. Its staff of some 800 in Geneva, plus another 1,200 or so in the field (including those seconded from National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies but not counting those hired locally), is extremely hesitant to comment unless its delegates in the field can directly verify what has transpired. In its long history, ICRC has never issued a single false public statement about factual conditions (Ibid). And *Amnesty International* should learn from ICRC.