

THE MOB VS THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT

Ezana Sehay 2/7/2015

Here is the thing about planting your flag on the moral high ground. If you are going to position yourself as the repository of all that is right and honorable, then you should better make damn sure you live up to that standard because, in the world of politics and elsewhere, there isn't anything as off-putting as saying one thing and doing another.

Ethiopians, will forgive a lot. They just are as forgiving about hypocrisy, which brings as around to the Western special interest groups a.k.a. **Civil Societies**

The notion that these civil society groups primary objective as advocates and promoters of democracy and human rights is starting to ring a little hollow.

Civil societies, at least I theory, are designed to be neutral watchdogs, reporting and organizing campaigns in response to right violations by states in non-arbitrary manner. In reality though unlike the posterior persona they project, the leadership of these groups have evolved in to self-serving political interest groups in compassion clothing.

Furthermore, when dealing with independent minded governments like that of Ethiopian, these groups' record show; instead of providing independent criticism and credible assessment of events they have become an integral part of the political theatre of the assured.

“ISSUE-ADVOCACY NGOS”

The West has a history of imposing or promoting its interest or values on others through different means; covert and overt, carrots and sticks, diplomacy etc. it also uses the issue of human rights and democracy as a façade for its own political agenda. But over time such nefarious activities bore resentment against the West, and as a result, it [the West] lost its sway on the developing world. Consequently, it came up with a new scheme to maintain whatever leverage it has left.

That is when the civil societies; or what UC-Berkley economics Professor Pranab Bardhan calls “issue-advocacy NGOs” stepped in. In other words, western governments apportioned their policy of exerting or dictating events in other countries to the civil societies, which led to the mushrooming of such groups who are glad and eager to accept the task.

These civil societies include: Human Rights Watch [HRW], Amnesty International [AI], Committee to Protect Journalists [CPJ], Freedom House [FH], environment groups such as International Rivers [IR] and the Oakland Institute et al.

Therefore, adds Professor Bardhan “all of these issue-advocacy NGOs have a mission. They are hired democracy promoters”. In a manner of speaking, they are Mercenaries for their donor governments, institutions, or individuals.

According to Scholars Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers; Western governments' reason for relying on civil societies is mainly for "expediency", because civil societies are considered politically "neutral", socially conscious, and can create or influence indigenous civil groups – whereby create the mechanism of influence in the target country.

But Ottaway and Carothers are skeptical about the West's idea of democracy promotion through civil society esp. foreign funded ones. In their holistic overview of the policy; they question the assumption that "what is good for civil societies is good for democracy".ⁱⁱ

"... the point is that some donor's belief that civil society allows them to foster democratization without actually being political, or partisan, is an illusion... recipients... with good reason, often perceive, such donor institutions as highly political despite their protestation of political neutrality".

Furthermore, unlike domestic funded civil societies, those financed by foreign sources tend to pay allegiance more to their financiers and in most cases, end up fueling corruption and foster conflicts.

Orysia lutsevych, in her article, "*How to Finish a Revolution...*"ⁱⁱⁱ concurs with the set forth analysis and states: foreign funded civil societies; far from spurring and developing democracy end up alienating the general public by focusing on gaining influence and thereby creating "NGO-crazy".

The point is, contrary to their stated principles; western civil societies are obsessively preoccupied with control and influence. They have evolved in to being power-hungry, arrogant special-interest groups, who more often than not, will do anything to dictate agendas in other nations. They have become too big for their bridge, so to speak.

In doing so, they adhere to the old Western paradigm of paternal politics. Their religiously pandering of democracy and human rights is a smoke screen for their grand scheme of control and influence. That's why they don't like being drawn to resourceful and hard-working but independent minded governments, like the Ethiopian government.

TARGET ETHIOPIA

The great moral dilemma is that, by any standards, Ethiopia is one of those few developing nations registering progress in every spectrum of issues these civil societies claim to care about.

Notwithstanding, according to this caucus, the Ethiopian government comes across as a bad guy. In fact, they go to some length to avoid the positive reality in the country and go through several convoluted and questionable arguments trying to convince us that things are bad - Go figure.

It is now almost automatic for these groups to see the EPRDF government as a dictatorship imposed on a comparatively helpless people. Apparently, these groups don't know the political dynamism of the Ethiopian people as well as they think they do.

Needless to say, Ethiopia is not the only country on the board-game of the western civil societies. To adduce a few:

UKRAINE

Arguably, no country has suffered as a result of the western civil societies' insidious actions, more than Ukraine.

In 2004-5, these groups in collusion with their countries and donor elites; initiated, financed and triggered what is known as the "orange revolution" which brought to power the pro-West president Victor Yushchenko. However, that "revolution" failed to bear the "desired" outcome, To the contrary, two years later, the Ukraine people voted for a pro-Russian president, Victor Yanukovych.

It didn't take the West to plot against Yanukovych, and so in what looked like a *déjà vu*, in 2013, the West instructed its civil societies to instigate and direct the "Euro-maiden revolution", which led the ouster [overthrow] of the democratically elected president.

This proves the orange revolution or the Maiden uprising has little to do with democracy, everything to do with the West's ambition in Ukraine and countering Russian influence.^{iv}

Russia, which has had enough of the West's political game in Ukraine, annexed Crimea. But for Ukraine the nightmare continues – as we speak its national unity is hanging on a loose rope.

KENYA

Between Dec, 2007 – to Feb, 2008, Kenya suffered its worst humanitarian crisis since independence as a result of ethnic violence; allegedly triggered by a disputed presidential election.

But as we found out later; the civil strife was actually fuelled by some western civil societies in complicity with George Soros [a man who amassed fortune through unscrupulous currency speculation].^v

En passant, just last month, in an amendment to its Public Benefits Organization Act and Counter Terrorism legislation; the Kenyan government passed laws that impose severe restriction and monitoring of civil societies, NGOs, the media.

VENEZUELA

On the guise of economic hardship and government “heavy handedness”, Venezuela was gripped by social violence, from Feb – June 2014, which led to the death of hundreds, wounded thousands and devastated the economy. The truth of the matter is, it was the opposition [which lost the election] encouraged by western civil societies which triggered the civil strife.^{vi}

EGYPT

Some middle-Eastern political analysts believe it is the meddling by some western political/social groups which led for the revolution to make a U-turn and take the Egyptian people back to where they started.^{vii}

ERITREA

Recently, it was revealed, that there was a tri-party conspiracy to topple the Eritrean regime early in the decade. The culprits, according to the report are: **The US state department, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.**^{viii}

And so on...

As a matter of fact, if one looks deep in to any of the hot spots in the world, one is likely to find foot prints of one or more of western civil society groups. Nonetheless, despite their persistence attempts, Ethiopia is one of the few countries that managed to successfully fend of these western civil societies’ subterfuge.

THE HEAD HONCHO

Without a doubt, the most influential of the western civil societies is none other than HRW, Which it is mainly responsible for the scorn people in the developing world have against western NGOs in general.

For over a decade now, this group has been writing fictional stories casting EPRDF as the villain. With bizarre frequency, it has made it a habit of condemning the Ethiopian government for purported human rights violations and political repression – falsehood upon falsehood - , HRW is guilty of egregiously shoddy reporting of sensational and unfounded allegations.

In fairness to the others [AI, CPJ, IR...] certainly are not razing anti-Ethiopian fanatics on par with HRW. Their views are more nuanced than that, even if they are, on balance objectionable. Nevertheless, they are card carrying members of the **Mob** [anti-Ethiopian axis], which has embraced the casual anti-EPRDF bias that permeates HRW.

HRW’s long-running form of blackmailing the Ethiopian government has never stopped searching the right formula. With the above de facto alliance the anti-EPRDF campaign has acquired a new tone and style.

Wherefore anytime one member issues a damning report about Ethiopia, in no time, other members pick up the story and almost instantly pick up their metaphorical pitch forks and join the lynch mob.

THE MOB

The funny thing about mobs is they are rarely satisfied with singular goal. Having failed to ostracize and vilify the government, the Mob keeps flexing its muscle in various forms.

Now it is inarguable, the infant Ethiopian democracy has its flaws. But we are also aware of the democratic deficits evident in some of those countries consider themselves “solid democracy”.

If Truth be told, in the political scheme of things of the prevailing global political reality and in the context of fledgling democracy, the political weaknesses in Ethiopia are small potatoes. But for the Mob, every mishap is good enough to make a banquet of and in the familiar ways of the Mob; the main course is well roasted EPRDF government. Go figure.

The message that any kind of rights violation should not be tolerated – this is not to be questioned - And those who expose the government’s actual [not imagined or fabricated], wrongdoing are to be laudable.

However, in the case of the Mob’s methodology towards Ethiopia; it is fraught. It is not hard to find a situation where the government is accused of political repression or rights violation with nothing in the way of hard evidence at hand. One can imagine how series of accusations under such circumstances could swing public opinion unjustly, one way or the other.

Furthermore, for the Mob anyone who dares tread with caution and discourages hasty judgment, and question the validity of some of its sources and stories are cast as government apologists.

That is not all; The Mob’s definition of human rights and freedom in the Ethiopian context is broad. It allows for presumed victims – by in large civil complaints – to lodge political accusations. But little opportunity is given for the accused [the government], to prove its innocence; there by shifting the burden of proof to the accused which is profoundly unfair.

In the Mob’s judgment, opposition [individuals or groups], who disguise as activists, human right advocated, reporters... but with esoteric bad intentions have assumed the status of iconic transcendental victims. And Accusations by the aforementioned against the government are taken at face value.

Besides the job of assessing, investigating, and judging is left in the hands of the Mob itself. In other words, the informal or formal process begins and ends at the point of accusation; the truth of the claim is immaterial.

So, the first order of business for the Mob is to demand that we always treat every charge labeled against the government as true, unless proven otherwise. Presumed innocent as foundation of

civility? Forget it! According to the Mob, you ought to take all charges against the government at face value. Failing to do so would make one anti-democracy.

It goes without saying, issues of political, civil rights, press freedom, and environmental sustainability is important that demand attention. It doesn't require for self-aggrandizing [often demonstrating only shaky grip on the country's reality], push them in to the spotlight. Be that as it may, they won't be addressed or solved at least equitably by assuming the government is guilty until proven innocent, that the hard line opposition can be taken at their wording while the government must defend itself against unsubstantiated allegations, and that no government voice is worthy of being listened to.

Ordinarily, one would expect people [organizations] should be able to request verification of every allegation of abuse, due process, and the like. Reasonable people [groups] will want to avoid circumstances when false or fabricated accusations can destroy or taint the reputation and credibility of the accused.

But then again, mobs are not reasonable.

This is unfortunate, because had members of the alliance [the Mob], stick to their founding principles, there were so many constructive roles they could have played in assisting the budding Ethiopian democracy.

On many occasions - With eyes open and national interest firmly front and center - the government has expressed, that it is not afraid of frank and sensible engagement with any one of the groups. It has demonstrated its willingness to accept or at least entertain any reform while balancing the need of the country's priorities. But it has made it clear it will not let itself be dictated against its public interest.

Regrettably, the Mob has squandered such an opportunity in place of feeling righteous and demanding unconditional acceptance of its dogmatic interpretations of events. With nauseating platitude about anything under the sun it chose to indulge its instinct to grab pitchfork and torch.

And so the trend continues

Unabashed – and which Western group is ever abashed by mere facts – the Mob has issued another report with same old allegations against the government and new set of demands.

Despite the carnage going on in some corners of the world, the Mob shifts the focus to a flood of accusations targeting the EPRDF – a convenient politically motivated diversion from its moral impotence.

This latest report really undercuts the Mob's credibility. Like its previous political context propagandas, this one is also based on fictional narratives. The same false charges are repeated and amplified. Among the topics covered by the latest screed are:

Narrowing of political space – the reality is the political space in Ethiopia is so wide open it is accommodating over 70 political parties gearing up for the upcoming election. The few that chose to remain outside are; those who refuse to play by the rule of the game.

In the Mob's perspective though; the overwhelming majority opposition parties: who are law abiding and peaceful, don't meet its standard definition of opposition. Who does the Mob consider genuine opposition? Those groups or individuals, who ruffle some feathers, advocate for changing the constitutional order by any means [including violence]. Accordingly, bellicose figures who tacitly [or overtly] Condon terrorism have become democratic commissaries.

Muzzled press - while the right to free speech is enshrined in the constitutional law of many countries nowhere is the right unfettered one. Different nations have reached distinct conclusion on where the limits are. Even in the west – some as its limits and double standards is well debated. For example, there are legislations that prohibit the dissemination of hate speech.

Similarly, the Ethiopian constitution recognizes individual's right to exercise full freedom of expression, but also expects citizens to take responsibility for their actions. Hence the law, among other things, is meant to deal with those who act irresponsibly in the name of democracy or freedom.

Ant-terrorism law - the Mob is well aware that fighting extremism while upholding democratic rights is no easy task. It can't deny Ethiopia's legitimate security concern; it is not the only country grappling with the threat of terrorism.

In spite of that, The Ethiopian ant-terrorism proclamation is in fact a balancing act between civil liberties and public safety, similar to those found in other countries democratic or otherwise. Moreover, Compared to other countries' laws, it is a modest one.

For instance, since 9/11, most western countries have adopted more evasive legislation aimed at preventing terrorism. They have introduced legislation that curtails freedom in the name of national security. Some have outlawed advocating or promoting terrorism and have massively expanded the mandated of their security apparatus

Environment and development - though the Mob considers political issues its main priority, in recent times it has expanded its attention to the very thing the Ethiopian people are passionate about. In guise of "environmental concern", it counter intuitively, has denounced the building of dams for power generation and irrigation.

It also opposes the villagization [collectivization] of pastoralist societies, which evidently is bringing tremendous benefit to the lives of the affected communities.

This reminds me of what the late prime minister once said in response to International River's campaign against the building of the Gilgel Gibe3 dam.

“Western environmental groups don’t want our people to be educated so they could read the National Geographic magazine. Instead they want the pictures of our people [as an example of primitive society], spread all over the pages of the National Geographic magazine for the indulgence of western readers”

The civil society proclamation - this is it! The Mob’s unconscionable chest-thumping ambush of the government of Ethiopia is in protest of this legislation. The reason is obvious: the civil societies [domestic or local] are where the cat’s paws of the western civil societies are imbedded. And it has been proven that the activities of these foot-soldiers and democracy or civility have become mutually incompatible.

Like many other countries, Ethiopia was forced to adopt such legislation in response to such groups’ destructive roles in the country’s affairs. Such law was necessitated because; western civil societies are making a habit of overstepping their stated purpose and circumventing the county’s laws and culture.

The proclamation however, doesn’t prohibit civil societies [domestic or foreign] from operating. It just demands transparency and accountability and is meant to protect political sovereignty.

Another critical factor the Mob takes in to consideration when issuing its report is timing. The current coordinated campaign seems to have been aimed at:

- Perpetuating the trend
- To counter the astute recognition of the country and its leadership on the international stage
- To not only tarnish the reputation of the government, but also damage the credibility of its development partner countries.
- To persuade western governments to shun the government reflexively
- Most importantly, it is aimed at undermining the coming election. This is a deliberate deceptive attempt to sabotage the peace and integrity of the election. It is intended at hitting “hot buttons” of the people’s sensitivities. Rock the boat so to speak.

To sum up: evidently, when it comes to Ethiopia the Mob’s position is unhelpful and in most instances simply dead wrong. Its endless pontification about anything and everything is more hypocritical than honest. It is false on facts, suspect in the sources, and reckless in reporting.

Some are beginning to question: what is happening to these group, are their editors/reporters merely careless, genuinely duped, or willing collaborators in an orchestrated smear?

We may never know the answer any time soon. But one thing is clear; we shouldn't expect a faire assessment of events in Ethiopia from the Mob, which obviously is infected by the anti-ethiopian bug.

Even the report of its next issue – trust me there will be one soon – has already been written waiting to be signed.

In closing; sometimes it is hard to know what to make of a conventional wisdom, doesn't it? It has been a conventional wisdom or assumed that organizations like HRW, AI, and CPJ ... purpose is to promote genuine democracy, civil liberty, free press... in countries that fail to adopt those values.

And yet, sometimes, the conventional wisdom is easily changed by a single event, one that turns on its head everything that just about everyone thought they know. The western civil societies' anti-ethiopian campaign is such an event.

Now that conventional wisdom, the notion of western civil societies being “crucial to democracy” has become sort of cute, in a quaint and nostalgic way, but for all practical purposes, terribly outmoded – bereft of any credible claim to legitimacy.

The western civil societies have proven to be a dismal failure and a monument to the ease with which political interest overwhelms moral principle.

ⁱ Bardhan, Pranab:” *Who Represents the Poor*”? Boston Review July 19, 2011.

ⁱⁱ Ottaway, Marina and Thomas, Carothers: *Funding Virtues: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Nov, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lutsevych, Orysia: *How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*. Russia and Eurasia/ Jan 2013.

^{iv} Contemporary Ukraine Research Forum / March 20, 2014.

^v Journal of Development Economics: [*the Hidden*] *Costs of Political Instability: Evidence from Kenya's 2007 Election Crisis*. March 30, 2012.

^{vi} Creative Time Report April 28, 2014.

^{vii} Middle East Media Research Institute

^{viii} Tigrai online January 8, 2015.