

# Our real allies are Ethiopians who are fighting Meles – Ed Royce

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By [Ed Royce, U.S. Congressman](#)

Nineteen years and counting. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his ruling EPRDF party are cruising to an easy "victory" in the May 23 elections. Taking power in 1991, Meles is as entrenched as they get.

Meles' win did take some work. After the 2005 election, in which the opposition did too well for his liking, the hammer fell. Since then, political opponents and local journalists have been jailed. Foreign journalists denied visas. The internet jammed. Newspapers closed. There are credible reports of food aid being used as a political weapon. The government jams our Voice of America broadcasts, despite the nearly billion dollars of aid we give it each year. The State Department reports that Ethiopian security services commit politically motivated killings. The Meles government has the repression thing down pretty good.

Meles has buddies. Throughout the continent, several leaders are into their second, third and nearly fourth decades in power. No democrats here. The State Department tends to put them on pedestals, especially Rwanda's Kagame and Uganda's Museveni. Along with Meles, the Clinton Administration lauded these "new African leaders."

I ran into the Ethiopian Ambassador last week. On democracy, he pleaded for time. African democracy is young, for sure. But that absolves sins of omission, poor infrastructure that frustrates voting, for example. Political hits and other violence against democrats are inexcusable. The Ambassador didn't mention that his government is committed to "revolutionary democracy," a collectivism that tolerates no dissent. The New York Times quotes a prominent Ethiopian dissident saying, "They still have this leftist ideology that the vanguard party is right for the people." Trust me, they always will.

Last week, with seven other members of Congress, I wrote the State Department charging that in recent years it "has rarely spoken out about the Meles government's human rights violations." Diplomats, never wanting to offend, always short democracy. They go especially easy on Ethiopia because it checks jihadists in neighboring Somalia. I doubt the Ethiopian government hits them as hard as its political opponents.

Getting excited about democracy risks driving the Meles government into Chinese hands, some argue. Beijing is pouring billions into Ethiopia. This possible dance with Beijing says a lot about the Meles government's true colors. Clearly, our real allies are the brave Ethiopian men and women fighting the rot of years of Meles' unchecked reign. Aid them. Sadly, power has gotten to the point of absolutely corrupting Meles' 19-year rule.

(Ed Royce, a Republican member of the United States House of Representatives from California, is a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and a former chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa.)