

Washington Update - by Mesfin Mekonen
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The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has unanimously passed S. 3199, the Ethiopia Peace and Stabilization Act (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/117/s3199/text>). The bill, which will become law only if it is passed by the full Senate and the House and signed by President Biden, attempts to avoid taking sides in the conflict between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, to support an end to hostilities and efforts to hold accountable individuals on both sides who are guilty of committing or ordering atrocities. The legislation seeks to hold all parties who have committed crimes against humanity, including the TPLF and OLF/Shenne accountable for their actions and promote civil society and the rule of law. The legislation states that “It is the policy of the United States to support a peaceful, democratic unified Ethiopia, and to use all diplomatic, development, and legal tools to support an end to the conflict that began in northern Ethiopia, an end to violence throughout Ethiopia.

In describing the conflict, S. 3199 pinpoints the origins in the TPLF’s Nov. 4, 2020 attack on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces. It describes killing and violence against civilians committed by both sides. The bill states that before the war started, the political and human rights situation in Ethiopia was deteriorating as the Ethiopian government jailed opponents and censored the press.

The bill commits the U.S. to support conflict resolution, mitigation and management, and reconciliation.

It also seeks to ensure that the U.S. takes actions to the human, civil, and political rights of all Ethiopians.

S. 3199 also gives the Biden administration the power to impose economic sanctions. While sanctions may be well-intentioned, in practice they will inflict suffering on innocent people in Ethiopia, including millions who are living precariously, and will have minimal impact on the ruling elites. Staff for Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), said he opposes the following sanction Multilateral Sanctions.—The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Commerce, as appropriate, should seek to engage with other member countries of the United Nations Security Council, other member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the African Union, and any other relevant actors to achieve a

coordinated imposition of multilateral sanctions and export controls on persons described in subsection .

In opening remarks at a March 28 hearing, Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said: “Today, we not only shine a light on the extra-judicial killings, mass sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, and civilian humanitarian aid blockades as being used as weapons of this war, but we also take a big step to end these atrocities by setting up a policy framework that calls for a determination by the Secretary of State related to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, a critical element in holding perpetrators accountable.

“The conflict in Ethiopia has shifted since we first introduced this important bill, but the core issues remain the same. This bill provides the tools to hold all parties to this conflict accountable for the many atrocities committed and a deadly humanitarian crisis. This legislation also focuses on the role of disinformation and foreign actors in this war, which have increased its lethality and persistence,” **said Ranking Member Risch**. “The unilateral humanitarian ceasefire announced by the government of Ethiopia late last week is a welcome signal. However, humanitarian access remains at a stalemate, not all parties to the conflict have signed on to the ceasefire or agreed to come to the negotiating table, and the road to national reconciliation for Ethiopia is long. This legislation sends a strong message that Congress is still serious about accountability and resolving the conflict.”

Senators who voted for the bill, as well as Secretary of State Blinken, praised the Ethiopian government’s unilateral ceasefire as a positive step. They also said that much more must be done to create a lasting peace, emphasizing the need to allow humanitarian assistance to reach people throughout Ethiopia, to stop violence, and to initiative a process that will hold perpetrators of crimes against humanity accountable for their actions.