



Center for Global & Strategic Studies

Growing Radicalization in Maldives

Published on 28th December, 2016



The Republic of Maldives is one of the most scenic islands of South Asia and has been the most preferred country for the tourists among all the SAARC countries and the greater region. The country is primarily a cluster of approximately a thousand small islands forming a chain in the Indian Ocean. A member of the SAARC, Maldives has Sunni Muslim population which is nearly 400,000 and the total area is only 115

square miles. Recently, the exotic tourist heaven has been victimized by a growing wave of religious radicalization. The increasing trends of radicalization have threatened the law and order situation in the country and have had negative implications on the economic growth and national security at large.

Political instability and bad governance have been the key factors giving birth to the menace of radicalization in the country. The internal political turmoil of the country has fueled the growing trends of radicalization in the country. The radicals in Maldives are using the same religious rhetoric as of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria. The most alarming development in the post radicalization period is that newly radicalized youth are leaving for Syria to join ISIS. In a country where the total population is nearly 400,000, therefore, a mere insignificant number of recruited terrorists can pose a serious threat.

The rapid recruitment of terrorists in Maldives and their movement towards Syria has caused serious concerns worldwide. Europe and particularly the United Kingdom is most concerned with this problem because a substantial number of British tourists visit Maldives each year. Also, the visa rules of UK are much relaxed for the citizens of Maldives which allows them to easily travel to the UK. This increasing radicalization in such a small country can also put Europe at the risk of a major terrorist attack.

In such a small country, the nature and situation of radicalization have puzzled many international counter-terrorism experts. According to some experts, the emergence of Al-Nusra Front and ISIS in Syria were the catalyzing factors in making the already

troubled situation in Maldives worse. Al-Nusra Front is an affiliate of Al-Qaeda and ISIS is desperate to get its hold outside of Iraq and Syria and towards Asia.



According to some reports, nearly 200 Maldivians have traveled to Syria to attain training and fight alongside ISIS. In such a small country with such a low population, this number is surprisingly alarming and can be devastating with long-term implications on the country and the region. The political turmoil in the country has further created several challenges in fighting this issue, whereas the strict penal code has brought no good to the country regarding peace and stability.

The primary motivation behind the growing radicalization is strictly political. The radicals are opposing the rule of Abdulla Yameen, the current President of Maldives. The rumors of a possible military coup against the Yameen regime have been floating in the international media for the past few months. Followed by these rumors, the Presidency of Maldives had to release a statement declaring any possible coup would be against the international laws. Apparently, the government and



machinery of Yameen regime have failed to control such a small country and the problems like terrorism have started to float as a consequence of the failed policies.

Since its independence in 1965 from the British rule, Maldives has always been a peaceful Muslim country of the SAARC. The position of Maldives in the region and international community has always been regarded as significant and influential. However, the current regime has put the entire national security of Maldives at stake. Previously, Maldives was under the rule of Mamoon Abdul Gayoom for 30 years. Followed by the dictatorial era of Gayoom, the country approved its first constitution and elected its first president in the year 2008. The first democratic government in Maldives was toppled in a coup in 2012.

Recently, the radicals of Maldives posted a video on social media which has caused a major unrest in the country. In their threatening message, the young terrorists have threatened to kill the President. The entire conflict is being driven by political motives despite having a theme of religion to it. The terrorists have cleared that they are against the government. However, they also want an establishment of a caliphate system in the country.

According to ISIS and Al-Nusra Front, Maldives is not a priority for them. Moreover, having a threat of militancy in a strategically important region of the Indian Ocean can benefit such groups strategically. The Maldivians who have become a part of Al-Nusra Front's movement are mainly joining them because of their mutual anti-Yameen stance. ISIS and Al-Nusra are exploiting public sentiments against a failed

government to gain their support and facilitate recruiting, funding and organizing themselves in the country.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The current Maldivian regime has its concerns regarding the import and export of terrorism in the country. However, the on-ground efforts of the government are certainly not proving to be effective in controlling the movement of their citizens going towards Syria with terrorist motives. Also, the country has not been able to handle the protesters and anti-government movements by addressing the concerns of its people or solving the internal conflicts through dialogue. The authoritative style of a democratic government is creating significant hurdles which will have grave consequences on the country. The influence of dangerous global terror groups such as ISIS in South Asia can be very hazardous to the region, and ISIS could not have found any place better than Maldives to launch itself. If the current government and military cannot stop this traffic of terrorism from Maldives to Syria and the other way around, this could harm the entire region of the South Asia. The weak counter-terrorism narrative of Maldives needs to be restructured, and any group regardless of being allied to the government should be dealt strictly. The situation in Maldives is critical, but it can still be controlled through properly devised strategies. The Yameen regime must realize that it is not too late for the country to recover from the damage which has already been done.