

European Union intervenes in Maldives

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Late last month a European Union delegation visited Maldives and held separate meetings with government leaders and representatives of the opposition coalition, who are engaged in intense political infighting ahead of next year's presidential election.

The trip followed a European Parliament (EP) resolution on October 5 calling on its member states to impose sanctions on Maldives. The strategically located nation has a total population of about 400,000 people, spread over 1,000 coral islands and covering 35,000 square miles of the Indian Ocean.

The resolution declared that the sanctions were in response to “the deteriorating political and human rights situation in the Maldives and the increasingly authoritarian rule of President Abdulla Yameen.” It called on Maldivian authorities to reform the judiciary, release political prisoners and guarantee the constitutional rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

The resolution also voiced concerns about reintroduction of the death penalty, the growing number of Maldivians joining extremist groups, the suspension of one-third of licensed lawyers and harassment, intimidation and arrest of elected members of parliament. It declared that the situation had worsened since a 2015 December resolution, which urged EU members to freeze assets and impose travel bans against top Maldivian leaders.

The Maldives foreign ministry issued a statement on October 6 in response to the EP resolution, denouncing it as “highly motivated by one-sided political rhetoric and contains inaccuracies, contradictions, misrepresentations and baseless allegations.”

Contrary to its “human rights” posturing, the real aim of the EU intervention is to secure the domination of western powers over the Maldives and facilitate a regime-change election defeat of the current pro-Chinese president, Abdulla Yameen.

On October 29, the EU delegation met with a group of opposition parliamentarians, including those from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) of former President Mohammed Nasheed, the Jumhooree Party (JP) and the Adhaalath Party.

Prior to the meeting, the MDP issued a statement complaining that next year's election could not be free and fair “while opposition leaders are under arrest or serving sentences on trumped-up charges, designed to disqualify them from the elections.” It also demanded the government “immediately release all political leaders and political prisoners, and drop all charges against opposition lawmakers.”

The opposition group has denounced Yameen government moves to frame-up and jail Nasheed, JP leader Qasim Ibrahim and several other leading opposition politicians and thus stop them running in next year's elections.

On October 30, the EU delegation met with Foreign Minister Dr Mohamed Asim, President Yameen and Attorney General Mohamed Anil. The Maldivian foreign ministry claimed that the talks focused on “environment and climate change, counter-terrorism and violent extremism, socio-economic development, strengthening governance and democratic framework.”

Yameen's office issued a statement saying he was committed to maintaining “judicial independence, democracy, rule of law and human rights, and in continuing to cooperate with international partners in upholding the standards of good governance.”

Notwithstanding Yameen's claims, his government is stepping up its repressive measures. Government-sponsored legislation to establish a new media regulator that will be able to impose hefty fines, and even temporarily shut down newspapers and television stations, is currently before the parliament.

The EU is supporting former President Nasheed and spearheading the current opposition campaign. A

stooge of the US and other western powers, Nasheed was released from jail in January last year by Yameen's government, following pressure from Washington and Britain. He had been sentenced to 13 years' jail in March 2015.

To safeguard its increasingly fragile rule, the Yameen government has stepped up its repression of the opposition. It was only able to stop an opposition no-confidence motion against parliamentary speaker Abdulla Maseeh Mohamed on July 24 by deploying Maldives National Defence Force officers and police to prevent opposition MPs entering the parliament on that day. The government crisis is by no means over.

In early October, 56 lawyers were suspended by judicial authorities for accusing the courts and other institutions of not upholding the rule of law. The lawyers had submitted a petition to the attorney general complaining that courts were conducting cases behind closed doors. The government responded by claiming the petition was illegal and those signing it were in contempt of court.

The political warfare within the ruling elite of this tiny archipelago is fueled by Washington's aggressive military-strategic offensive against Beijing and involving India and other western powers. While German and French economic and political interests are not exactly the same as the US, they are anxious to undercut China in the region.

Beijing's relations with the Maldives are part of its "String of Pearls" and "Silk Road Economic Belt" strategy, which envisage a massive infrastructure development linking the Eurasian landmass, as well as Africa, to counter Washington's efforts to isolate and encircle China. Diego Garcia, America's principal Indian Ocean base is 800 miles south of the Maldivian capital, Male.

The Maldives is located close to important sea-lanes linking the Middle East and Africa to East Asia, South East Asia and Australia and which provide China, Japan, South Korea and India with Middle Eastern oil. An estimated two-thirds of the world's oil and half of its container shipments passes through the region.

In September, US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Alice Wells presented a submission to Congressional subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific on "Maintaining US Influence in South Asia: The FY 2018 Budget." The

document expressed concerns about "the state of rule of law and democracy" and "the growth of Islamic extremism" in the Maldives. US concerns about Islamic extremism in the Maldives and elsewhere are thoroughly bogus.

Wells called on the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee to provide \$US440,000 in foreign assistance to the Maldives for maritime security cooperation over "narcotics trafficking, piracy in the Indian Ocean, and seaborne trade in illicit materials of potential use for terrorist activity." This finance will be used by Washington to strengthen its relations with Maldivian security forces, on which Yameen is currently relying to secure his rule.

The "democratic" posturing of the western imperialists is a complete fraud. Its purpose is to undermine Chinese influence and establish a pro-western government in the Indian Ocean nation. With the US President Donald Trump stepping up US political and economic threats against China and North Korea, the region is being drawn into an explosive geopolitical conflict.



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