



MALDIVES RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Maldives has recently emerged on the horizons of India's foreign policy in an unprecedented manner. There have been significant developments in the last few years, which has gradually moved India and Maldives away from their traditionally robust relations cemented with common history, culture, religion, and interests. The changing dynamics are attributable to China's forays in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in general and her engagement with the Maldives, in particular. The China-Pakistan collusion against India is visible in the Maldives affairs as well. The combined effect of China & Pakistan has led to interference in domestic regime change and consequently her progressive alienation from India.

KEYWORD: Maldives.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the present regime in the Maldives has come into power, the growing bonhomie with China and Pakistan has become a cause of concern. These relations are primarily aimed at marginalizing the long-established Indian clout in the region and is also directed at stymieing India's growth and security aspirations in the region. Backed with Chinese support, the Maldives regime is becoming ever-increasing hostile to India and as a result of which the bilateral relations have reached their nadir. The only silver lining that can be seen is the upcoming general elections in the Maldives (September 2018), in which India would hope a regime change. There is no guarantee that the new regime would be pro-India; still, some positive outcomes can be expected after a 'reset' button is pressed. The regime change is also incumbent on free and fair elections, which is a distant dream, given the irregularities observed in the previous elections in 2013.

India is facing a major foreign policy challenge in the form of Maldives. The situation warrants some firm actions on the ground but is not aligned with the overall policies of India. Alternatively, being inactive and watch things unfold will also compromise India's position and interests. There is a need to act before it is too late. But the challenge is how to respond and to what extent. Failure to calibrate the response mechanism may lead to a major crisis in otherwise a peaceful region. Hence, present and forthcoming years will be seminal moments in India-Maldives relations and it is expected that jostling for space between India and China would continue for a considerable time.

There are chances that the 'Maldives Model' of defiance of Indian authority may spread on to other smaller neighbors in the region, especially when China is making considerable endeavors to wean away from India's neighbors.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research intends to focus on the geostrategic importance of the Maldives given India's neighborhood policies. It also examines the recent developments of bilateral relations between Maldives and China and Maldives and Pakistan. It further examines the consequent implications that emerge out of Maldives relations with China and Pakistan.

The changing dynamics as a result of Maldives - China - Pakistan nexus necessitates a detailed analysis of the evolving situation to identify the implications so that a robust response mechanism can be carved out. The main objectives of the study

are as under :-Strategic importance of Maldives, Maldives relations with China and Pakistan, India- Maldives relations, China's interest in the Maldives and the region, Implications for India and Conclusion and/or Recommendations Amidst the strengthening relations of Maldives with China and Pakistan and alienation with India, there are severe implications towards India's national interests. The research intends to identify the implications for India's national interests due to factors emerging from Maldives - China and the Maldives - Pakistan relations.

The growing relations of Maldives with China and Pakistan and the recent collusively has serious implications towards India's national security, the research shall be carried out through a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary sources would include the stated foreign policy objectives of the Ministry of External Affairs of the nations concerned and interviews of the government authorities responsible for various aspects of the topic. The secondary sources would primarily be articles from internets, journals, newspapers, and books on the subject. The information obtained from all the sources will be collated and analyzed to prove or reject the hypothesis.

MALDIVES RELATIONS WITH CHINA

Maldives' relations with China are not based on any strong ancient ties or cultural affiliations. In the last decade, the bilateral relationship has gained prominence of unprecedented magnitude which is attributable to China's aspirations in the IOR and also to Maldives' geostrategy under Mohammed Yameen. The relation between the two countries could be as unusual as a marriage between two parties exclusive to each other and have no common lineage. It is merely an arrangement for mutual gains and at the peril of others, especially India. Hence, it is essential to analyses the dynamics of this nefarious relationship and anticipates the consequent implications.

MALDIVES RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN

The Maldives Pakistan relations have no ancient linkages as such since Pakistan itself is a newly born nation carved out of greater India with which the Maldives did have deep-rooted relations. Post-independence of Pakistan, the Pak-Maldives relations originated on July 26, 1966, and were sub-optimal like bilateral relations with many other nations.

The geographical separation and absence of direct linkages have been the primary reasons for the 'disconnect.' However, in recent times, the relations between the Maldives and Pakistan have taken new dimensions. From the scant linkages of religion and societal, the new era relations are based on global and regional issues as well, as was conveyed during the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visit of the Maldives in 2017 wherein the leader expressed "Our relations are marked by cordiality and commonality of views on major regional and global issues. We wish to deepen further and broaden relations with the Maldives in all fields of importance." Earlier in 2015, the then President Yameen stated: "Our relations are characterized by cordiality, mutual respect, and commonality of interest." A similar sentiment is echoed by Mr. Ahmed Saleem, High Commissioner of the Maldives to Pakistan in his interview "Maldives and Pakistan have always enjoyed close and cordial relations. In fact, it is a special relationship based on bonds of common religion, mutual trust, confidence and affinity between the peoples of our two countries that serve as an example in respecting one another and serving the cause of two brotherly nations, working in conjunction for their mutual benefit and that of the region as a whole." The common linkages are religious and social.

IMPLICATION INDIA

Origins of Indo-Maldives Relations: India and the Maldives share ancient cultural linkages that are deep-rooted. Be it the name 'Maldives', language, food, traditions, or culture, and everything have an Indian and Sinhalese (Sri Lanka) connect. The Maldives islands were very much frequented and influenced by kingdoms of Sinhala and South India. Not much is known about the history of the Maldives, as there has been no formal research or interest shown in history. Maldivians themselves, after having adopted Islam in 12th Century, have not been inclined to trace their history.

They have been exploring the history of Arabs and the Muslim world. The only authoritative work in the history of the Maldives has been carried out by H.C.P. Bell in his seminal work 'The Maldives Islands: Monograph on the History, Archaeology and Epigraphy,' in which he has narrated the pre-muslim era events

and has established Buddhist linkages to the Sinhala Dynasty. However, the formal acceptance of these facts is lacking. Another seminal work on the culture of the Maldives is by an American origin anthropologist, raised in India, Clarence Maloney in his book 'People of the Maldives Islands.'

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