

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Country Reports on Terrorism 2016

Report

MALDIVES

Overview: Since 2010, concerns about the activities of a small number of extremists who support violence and are involved with transnational terrorist groups have increased. Young Maldivians, especially those within the penal system and otherwise marginalized members of society, are at risk of becoming radicalized and some have already joined terrorist groups. According to reporting in the Maldivian media, radical Maldivians have made connections to terrorist groups throughout the world and a small but steady stream of Maldivians have left the country to train and fight with these groups. In June, Defense Minister Adam Shareef Umar told the press approximately 50 radicalized Maldivians were fighting with terrorist organizations in Syria. The United Nations and other media reports estimated the number of Maldivians becoming foreign terrorist fighters at approximately 200. In February 2016, a family of 12 that had allegedly gone missing in India was confirmed to be in Syria.

The prosecutor general's office reported three cases of arrests for participating in a war abroad. In February, authorities arrested three Maldivian men at the Turkey-Syria border and returned them to Maldives, where they were charged with attempting to travel to Syria to fight with terrorist groups. No action was taken against a fourth man who failed in his attempt to travel to Syria. In June, Maldivian authorities said three Maldivians traveled to Syria despite having been placed on a government watchlist. Another case submitted in December is against a man who was arrested and charged with participating in a war in Pakistan. These incidents illustrated the continuing pattern of Maldivian nationals having the intent of becoming foreign terrorist fighters transiting through third countries.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The 2015 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) defined acts of terrorism and set forth penalties of between seven to 25 years imprisonment for those convicted of these acts or inciting others to do so. The PTA's other provisions criminalized committing terrorist acts or joining or fighting in a conflict abroad; granted the government permission to suspend certain constitutionally guaranteed rights for persons "detained or arrested on suspicion" of committing acts of terrorism; established legal procedures for handling terrorism-related cases; and granted permission for the issuance of a monitoring and control order by court order upon reasonable suspicion, which was defined as the "Minister's belief based on logical or reasonable evidence or reasoning that one or many of the acts transpired or may occur." A monitoring and control order permitted the government to determine a suspect's place of residence; search him/her and his/her residence; disclose, inspect, and seize a suspect's assets; monitor his/her telecommunications; and impose a travel ban. The PTA had originally required the president to publicly release a list of designated terrorist groups, but the parliament amended the provision in March to allow the list to remain secret. The government continued to use the PTA to arrest and prosecute political opponents and restrict political and media activity unrelated to terrorism.

Maldives continued to participate in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program, which provided trainings on fraudulent document recognition, protecting soft targets, and airport security management. Numerous other western countries provided training in a variety of aspects of police work related to counterterrorism, including a table top exercise on soft targets. The leadership of the Maldivian Police Service (MPS) recognized the need for improvement and made requests for assistance to bring its abilities up to international standards.

Maldives established a National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) in 2016 with the mandate to coordinate interagency efforts on counterterrorism and to liaise with international security partners. The NCTC was led by the Maldivian National Defense Force (MNDF) with participation from the MPS, customs and border protection, immigration, and other agencies. Responsibility for counterterrorism efforts was divided among the MPS and MNDF, the latter of which has navy, marines, and coast guard branches. In 2016, information sharing among the agencies was limited.

The Maldivian government has installed the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) at Maldives' main international airport and at Male seaport, and in December agreed to an upgrade of the system. In an effort to stem the number of Maldivians traveling to Iraq and Syria to join terrorist groups, the MPS began randomly questioning Maldivian citizens traveling by air to Turkey.

Maldivian officials worked with U.S. government personnel to develop and implement programs designed to counter radicalization, improve counterterrorism capability, and enhance the operational effectiveness of the MNDF.

The prosecutor general's office reported approximately 21 people were charged in 2016 under the Counterterrorism Act.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Maldives is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. In 2016, the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA), the country's central bank, suspected that funds were being raised domestically to support terrorism abroad since a large percentage of suspicious transaction reports received by the MMA were connected to Maldivian citizens. It reported that funds were transferred through informal money transfer networks (*hawala*) between the islands, although the extent to which these systems were employed to transfer illicit funds was unclear. The MMA also lacked reliable information regarding amounts involved.

In June, Maldives passed the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Act, which criminalized money laundering and terrorist financing. Maldives prosecuted no cases under the Act in 2016, but the Maldivian prosecutor general's office was confident the law would enable police and prosecutors to better identify links between suspected terrorists and their finance networks based upon the very wide investigatory powers authorized by the Act.

The Maldivian government monitored banks, the insurance sector, money remittance institutions and finance companies, and required the collection of data for wire transfers. Financial institutions other than banks and intermediaries in the securities sector, however, were not subject to anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations. Insurance companies and intermediaries, finance companies, money remittance service providers, foreign exchange businesses, and credit card companies therefore operated outside of the AML/CFT framework. The MMA had earlier established a financial intelligence unit, the Capital Market Development Authority, which lacked the technical capacity to analyze vast amounts of new data on financial transactions. In 2016, a former manager at the Bank of Maldives presented evidence that indicated state institutions were allegedly being used in money laundering.

The Maldivian government implemented the UN Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and al-Qa'ida sanctions regime, and monitored and regulated alternative remittance services. The Maldivian government did not report any efforts to seize terrorist assets in 2016.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Maldivian government continued to recognize that counterradicalization to violence efforts are a critical component to long-term success against violent extremism. Since 2011, the government has sought to counter the influence of violent extremist ideology by actively intervening in religious life. These interventions included mandating persons wanting to serve as imams to undergo a six-month state-approved training and disseminating government-approved sermons, which the imams were required to use for Friday prayers. Media sources reported incidents where the government has not taken action to investigate those spreading violent extremist ideology. In September, a group of masked men distributed materials that urged Maldivians to commit violence after a mass Eid prayer at the Maafanu stadium in Male.

A government-sponsored Islamic university in the capital city of Male opened in the last quarter of 2015 and in 2016 held several workshops for “moderate” Islamic scholars. The university’s goal was to promote the academic study of religion and “moderate Islam” as a counterweight to extremist discourses and messaging. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs held seminars for student groups and a religious dialogue on the topic of jihad. An Indian university signed an agreement with the Maldivian Defense Ministry to conduct counterterrorism and extremism awareness training. In cooperation with an NGO, DoD personnel implemented the second phase of a de-radicalization program in conjunction with the Government of Maldives for individuals vulnerable to extremist recruitment. The program included vocational training programs designed to increase future employment opportunities.

Regional and International Cooperation: Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and is a party to the SAARC regional convention on the suppression of terrorism.

In 2016, India signed a defense cooperation plan with Maldives, which includes setting up a bilateral counterterrorism mechanism with intelligence sharing. In October, the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, in association with the United Nations and the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry, hosted an international symposium on countering terrorism and violent extremism. Experts from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and the United States attended the event and shared best practices.

The MNDF was a member of the Global Special Operations Force network, which collaborates on common security challenges and actively supports multilateral and regional security cooperation efforts, such as global programs that focus on counterterrorism and de-radicalization.