The Maldives: From Dictatorship to Democracy and Back? (1978-2012)

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July 2012

Summary of events related to the use or impact of civil resistance

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Conflict Summary:

The Maldives is a nation of 350,000 people living on an archipelago of more than 500 islands in the Indian Ocean, roughly 500 miles south-west of Sri Lanka. In October 2008 the Maldives held free and fair elections which ended the 30-year rule of corrupt autocrat Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The elections were possible in part because a popular civic movement successfully de-legitimized the Gayoom regime among Maldivian citizens and various foreign states. Along with pressure from the European Union, and other international actors, the movement used Gayoom's unpopularity to leverage a process of constitutional reform in 2004. Civic pressure was sustained for three years during the reform process in an effort to ensure that the process would be legitimate and that the new constitution would reflect the ideals of the Maldivian people. The new constitution was ratified in 2007 and allowed Maldivians to democratically elect Mohamed Anni Nasheed as their leader in 2008.

Political History:

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom took power in 1978 when Ibrahim Nasir decided to retire after having served two terms as president. Under the system in place at the time, the president was voted in by the Majlis (the parliament) and then a national referendum was held to affirm the Majlis' choice. This single candidate system favored the incumbent or a president's chosen successor. When the Parliament nominated Nasir a third term he rejected it and facilitated an orderly and peaceful transfer of power to Gayoom.

Upon taking office Gayoom promised liberal reforms but instead quickly set about consolidating his personal grip on power. He replaced the leaders of the security forces with loyalists; placed his brother, Abdulla Hameed, as chief governor of all the provinces; he placed a brother-in-law as the head of security and trade; and placed another brother-in-law in charge of the nation's only media, a radio station. While also allocating him the task of developing a rudimentary TV station into an instrument of the state. For the next 20 years Gayoom steadily built bulwarks around his position of power while chipping away at nascent Maldivian civil society. In 1997 the Special Majlis, a selected group of parliamentarians, produced a new constitution that vastly expanded his executive powers. All of this was done under the

guidance of Gayoom's brother Abdulla Hameed and served to effectively entrench Gayoom in office long enough to become one of Asia's longest standing dictators.

Gayoom was educated in Cairo, Egypt and while in power he modeled his regime after Hosni Mubarak's secular Islamic state and was tough on terrorism, drugs, and extremism. By doing this, Gayoom delineated himself with the west. He also used his control of the Maldivian media to manipulate international audiences and in doing so coasted under the international radar for 30 years, jailing and abusing dissenters.

During his presidency, Gayoom incrementally pushed the Maldivian economy to be based on luxury tourism. However, income distribution was deeply skewed; there was an obvious discrepancy between those who profited from $5,000-per-night hotels and the employees who worked in them. A 2008 article in The New Statesmen quoted Tricia Barnett, director of an organization called Tourism Concern that fights exploitation in global tourism. She stated: "It is not paradise for anybody," "Living conditions for most Maldivians are akin to those in sub-Saharan Africa. There has been no trickle down of the extraordinary amount of money being generated." This did not stop Gayoom from flaunting his wealth. A report from the Maldives' national auditor stated that Gayoom's personal spending was "out of control." Among Gayoom's assets mentioned $9.5 million spent for a luxury yacht, $17 million to renovate the presidential plaice, as well as the purchase of 11 speed boats and 55 cars with government money. This kind of corruption, exploitation and the resulting poverty for ordinary Maldivians—40% of whom were living on roughly $1 per day—was a significant source of public grievance.

Most importantly this rapid urbanization and economic inequality had the effect of fragmenting the traditional family structures and community values that once functioned as a form of social security. The result contributed to lingering problems such as destitution, crime, Islamic extremism and drug abuse. The most widely used drug is a low-grade form of heroin that Maldivians call "Brown Sugar." And the densely populated island city of Male' is an environment where it is easy to become addicted and stay addicted due to close proximity to other users.

Estimates have been made saying that 1 in 10 Maldivians struggle with substance abuse. More recently a United Nations Development Program study estimated 40 percent of Maldivian youths were using hard drugs; in a country where roughly 60 percent of the population is under 25, this places number much higher.

This high number of intravenous drug users contributes to a rising rate of HIV and other blood-borne diseases as well as the sexual abuse of female users. Female addicts are often forced into sex slavery to feed their habit. Drug use has been a problem in the Maldives since the 1990s and it is still a problem even to this day. However during the pro-democracy movement it was a problem that many Maldivians blamed on Gayoom's government. The high cost of drugs and the former regimes drug's policy was additional grievance contributing to the popular disdain that eventually ousted Gayoom from power.

Gayoom did little to address this problem, and some sources even suggest that the regime was in fact closely connected to drug trafficking operations. The regime did however impose strict laws stating that an individual convicted for possession can potentially receive a sentence of up to 25 years in prison. These laws, in combination with high volumes of cheap heroin have contributed to overcrowding in prisons; prisons in which two thirds of all inmates are serving sentences for drug related crimes.
Maldivians were also aggrieved when the same conditions that contributed to widespread drug abuse, were attributed to a rise in Islamic fundamentalism. Decades of political repression under Gayoom had driven a once reputably moderate culture of Islam to search for more extreme methods of influencing society. Alienated Muslims began forming radical flank groups that were more militant, secretive, and ideologically rigid than the popular nonviolent movement. Starting a few years prior to 2008, extremists took up the practice of kidnapping young girls and forcing them into a lifestyle of Islamic fundamentalism. Threats of terror poised by these groups only enabled Gayoom to justify harder crackdowns against the popular opposition.

Opposition began to emerge 1990s but was quickly snuffed out. An independent bloc in the majlis began a reform movement comprised of a number of younger, western-educated reformers that had little confidence in Gayoom. One member of this group, Mohamed Latheef, was simply stripped

of his seat for voting against Gayoom. Others were arrested and charged with terrorism after a series of explosions occurred in the capital city, Male'. For the past three decades Gayoom refused to acknowledge any political parties, declaring that the existence of opposition parties would be inimical to the homogeneous nature of Maldivian society. In response the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) began organizing itself in Britain starting in 2001. The MDP was formed by a number of like minded citizens, with little political experience. Over the next few years the party would play a key role unifying and organizing the various opposition groups into one coherent popular nonviolent movement. After the movement leveraged the right to hold free and fair elections, the MDP campaigned as the true embodiment of popular ideals and was thus able to defeat Gayoom in the 2008 elections.

Strategic Actions:

On September 19, 2003, 19-year-old prison inmate Evan Naseem was beaten to death by prison guards while serving time for drug offences. He had refused to cooperate with the guards, who were attempting to remove him from his cell and seeking to punish him for the actions of other cellmates. His mother, Mariyam Manike, refused to stay silent about the killing and voiced her anguish, urging people to rally in the streets on the day of his funeral. She opted for an open-casket funeral so that others could see the extent of his injuries. As word spread, Naseem's fellow inmates rioted inside the prison. Four were killed and several were injured. This series of events ignited further protest demonstrations in the capital city of Male'. The regime responded with violent repression and arrests.

Jennifer Latheef, daughter of Mohamed Latheef, a co-founder of the MDP, was one of the demonstrators. She was a photojournalist who was there to document the protest as well as to express her opposition to the human rights abuses that had been committed. In a written account later published through Amnesty International, she was able to chronicle how this event was able to trigger such public outrage. She wrote:

"The place was packed when I arrived—people seemed to want to bear witness, to see for themselves the kind of things that can happen under a brutal regime. Torture is commonplace in Maldivian jails, and I have many friends and relatives who have lived in its shadow. My paternal great-grandfather and my grandfather were both tortured to death in jail

under the previous regime—that's why it's so hard to describe my feelings when I saw Evan Naseem's lifeless body. The simplest way to sum it up is to say that he became family from that moment on."

She was also able to chronicle the brutality of the government crackdown against the demonstrators by recalling the death of a friend's brother who was shot in the back as he retreated from the violence. The following day Latheef and other demonstrators were arrested in what came to be the first active round up of political dissidents by government agents.

She was charged with "terrorism" and sentenced to ten years in prison, and was declared a "prisoner of conscience" by Amnesty International. She was later placed under house arrest before finishing her sentence. Before her arrest she had been jailed several times prior for her work as a human rights activist and for nonviolent opposition to the regime.

In the eyes of many Maldivians, Latheef's arrest came to symbolize the callousness and desperation of the regime. The public knew that she was incarcerated because she expressed views that were critical of the government and that her father had done the same. What Gayoom failed to foresee was that his actions would demonize him while giving the opposition a face; not the face of a terrorist, but of a young, peaceful, female dissenter. Amnesty International also noticed Gayoom's actions and organized a campaign around Latheef's arrest and detention.

Shortly afterward Gayoom was declared the winner of the October 2003 presidential election by receiving 100% of the vote. He ran unopposed. The state-run Maldives News Bulletin quoted the President thanking the Majlis for delivering his sixth, five-year presidential term, which was "clear evidence that the people firmly supported his policies."

The Maldivian constitution, drafted in 1997 by Gayoom's brother and a group of hand selected Majlis, gave Gayoom the power to pursue an aggressive policy of parliamentary domination. He had "dared" potential opponents to run against him and not surprisingly, just like in the 1998 elections five years earlier, no serious candidates had materialized.

However, his 2003 'victory' reignited residual backfire from the September crackdown. He now faced widespread civil unrest and a potential international human rights crisis. In June 2003, before the crackdown, Amnesty International released its first ever special report on the Maldives

titled Republic of the Maldives: Repression of Peaceful Political Opposition. The title was in reference to Gayoom's ongoing purge of political dissidents who were opportunistically tried on terror-related charges in the wake of 9/11. This report started to awaken the international community to the regime's repressive tendencies and the September crackdown along with the subsequent election helped to affirm some of these suspicions.

Amnesty International kept its focus on Gayoom's government claiming that it engaged in political repression, torture, arbitrary detentions, and unfair trials. Much of this criticism also addressed the hypocritical "tourist brochure images" of the Maldives. In June 2004 this newfound and unwanted international attention pressured Gayoom to announce reforms.

On November 11, 2003 he announced the beginning of the "Governance Reform and Modernization Program" and promised to re-draft the Maldivian constitution. A Human Rights Commission was also set up in accordance with the UN human rights guidelines articulated in the Paris Principals. Its function would be to monitor national institutions to ensure the protection of human rights. Gayoom also promised an agenda for a complete overhaul the country's criminal justice system, a presidential commission responsible for investigating the death of Evan Naseem, and a law giving international organizations the right to observe Maldivian prisons.

In February 2004 a constitutional assembly began work on a new constitution. However chaos and confusion quickly erupted and the first meeting was adjourned without setting a date for a second.

Amidst the "Governance Reform and Modernization Program" and the constitution drafting process, the human rights situation did not match the government's new rhetoric of reform. Activists continued to be arrested, intellectuals were harassed and anyone could still be arbitrarily detained. The announced reforms technically gave citizens freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. This led citizens to establish "minivan debates" ('minivan' means 'independent' in Dhivehi) in which they would gather to talk about political problems facing the country. In response, the regime sent police to disrupt these meetings and harass participants.

Eventually minivan debates were declared illegal but citizens persisted in holding them, sometimes tricking police by staging fake birthday parties and other social gatherings. The debates were very popular; anyone could share

information regardless of political, ethnic or religious background. This was a newfound freedom for Maldivians, many of whom had grown accustomed to living under decades of complete censorship.

Minivan debates were also a vital tool for spreading information and fostering solidarity. In recognition of this, exiled activists sought to maximize their effects by broadcasting them illegally over shortwave radio. This became known as Minivan Radio, which in the coming years would evolve into the movement's own media channel that would broadcast news and information in addition to debates.

On August 12, 2004, MDP supporters staged a nonviolent demonstration in Republic Square in which they gathered roughly 10,000 people on the capital island Male' demanding the release of several activists and the resignation of President Gayoom. The demonstration continued to grow until it was dispersed by a violent crackdown on the following day. Several people were injured and more than 250 activists were imprisoned, the day later became known as 'Black Friday.'

Mobile phone and internet services were turned off to block communications and prevent news from getting out. A state of emergency was declared and the Constitutional Assembly's meager effort to redraft the constitution was officially suspended. However both the demonstration and the subsequent repression were documented by Minivan Radio and other non-state news sources. This enabled an honest account of events to reach the outside world, and this account incited further international criticism against the regime.

The diplomatic and political fallout from the crackdown turned out to be disastrous for Gayoom. He was now under pressure from the UK, US, India, Sri Lanka, and receiving strident criticism from members of the European Parliament, some of whom were calling for an end to all non-humanitarian aid as well as a travel ban. This would have had enormous consequences on the Maldivian economy, which was heavily reliant on tourism as a source of revenue.

The regime attempted to silence its critics by lifting the state of emergency, and moving several detained activists from prison to house arrest. Soon after, the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami hit the Maldives and nation was in great need of humanitarian assistance. This gave international

donors such as the EU the leverage it needed to apply additional pressure to Gayoom's reform process.

In 2005 the regime agreed to meet the opposition for the first in the UK, this series of meetings was called the Westminster House talks. During the talks the regime was quick to agree to more reforms, some of which included the formation of commissions for 'police integrity' and 'judicial services.' The regime promised to invite UN human rights special mandates to the Maldives, and to uphold the values dictated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The international community praised the meeting as a progressive step toward reform despite the fact that the Gayoom did nothing to honor these commitments.

It became more and more clear to the opposition that a strategy centered on international advocacy could not in itself generate enough power to displace Gayoom. The opposition began to focus more on organizing additional protests, speeches, and sit-ins. And civic organizations were established to perform functions that the government did not and/or could not perform. These new efforts were less focused on appealing to outside forces and more geared toward building capacities domestically and strengthening self rule.

The realization that Maldivians must take full charge of their struggle was channeled constructively into the process of building the nation's civil society, which grew rapidly from scarcely any nongovernmental organization activity in 2004 to having more than 20 NGOs in 2008. These organizations served as the basic civic infrastructure around which a greater movement was built.

The opposition became increasingly organized. The the MDP served as the political wing, domestic organizations functioned as the civic wing. Meanwhile international organizations were used to publicize events and communicate with international audiences.

A UK-based organization called Friends of the Maldives worked to support the pro-democracy movement by, developing independent media capacities, and exposing human rights abuses to the international community. The latter objective was now shared with other international human rights

organizations such as Amnesty International and an increasing number of smaller, newly formed Maldivian NGOs.

For example, the Maldivian Detainee Network was established in 2004 to monitor human rights conditions in jails while providing support services, protection, and information for detainees and their families. Other organization such as Transparency Maldives, which received official recognition in 2007, began promoting collaboration, awareness, and education as a means to improve governance and eliminate corruption.

Additionally many international NGOs gave resources, training, and support to apolitical causes, which worked to strengthen the skills and experience of the burgeoning Maldivian democratic movement. Some international NGOs even helped organizers fine-tune their civic action strategies, elevating the effectiveness of public demonstrations.

Since the announcement of reforms in 2004, the regime had been engaging in informal talks with MDP members in Sri Lanka facilitated by the British High Commissioner. In 2005, Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed was making preparations to return to the Maldives from exile in Sri Lanka so that he could organize additional resistance on the ground. This put significant psychological pressure on Gayoom as well as some of his closest advisors and many began defecting under the pretext of going abroad to pursue higher education.

In June 2005, under pressure from the Attorney General, the parliament, and the public, Gayoom lifted the ban on political parties, which gave formal recognition to the MDP as well as a slew of other parties. One of these, "The New Maldives" party, was made up of the newly appointed "pro-reform" members of Gayoom's cabinet. While the legalization of political parties was surly a significant strategic victory, the MDP was skeptical that this alone could not lead to free and fair elections and thus they remained committed to removing Gayoom through direct action.

Through 2006 the MDP organized demonstrations on various islands demanding freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, and Gayoom continued to quell these demonstrations with violent repression. On November 10, 2006, the MDP attempted to organize "the largest rally the Maldives has ever seen." Organizers planned to bring 15,000 to 20,000 protestors from many different islands to of the capital city of Male' by boat.

In the days leading up to the protest, police arrested more than 100 MDP organizers, stating that they were planning an illegal demonstration with the goal of overthrowing the government. Police prevented boats filled with protesters from docking in Male' and the MDP called off the protest to prevent bloodshed and further imprisonment of their supporters.

In March 2006 a long overdue "Roadmap to Democracy" was published with a clear timetable for the reform process. It included proposals for revision of the constitution, more commitments to human rights, and proposals for government investment in civic institutions.

Proposals for the revision of the constitution included: The reduction of the judicial powers that were currently vested exclusively in the president; a parliament elected in a more proportionate manner; the direct election of the president by the people with a two term limitation. Also the right to legal representation, which had been abolished, was set to be reinstated, and a modern penal code was to be implemented over the next five years.

Furthermore, diplomatic and popular pressure compelled the regime to allow all international human rights organizations to operate within the Maldives. This meant that an official United Nations Human Rights Advisor would be placed in the government, and would serve under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights. Under these new terms, The International Committee of the Red Cross signed an all access agreement with the regime for the inspection of its prisons. This made it more difficult for the regime to use torture as a weapon of fear or as a means of extracting information.

The government also began accepting international assistance and consultation on its efforts to train judges, reorganize prisons, improve government media, and train journalists. More promises seemed to temporally satisfy the international community once again, but it did little to improve his relations with domestic opponents.

Many who took an active role in the reform process saw the fragmentary reforms as a strategic effort by the regime to maintain its autocracy while providing a veneer or legitimacy. Various opinion polls and surveys showed that the public mood was still largely pessimistic about the prospects of real change and many still believed that elections would be rigged.

The increased civic space that the reform efforts produced was used by the MDP and its supporters, but also by the Islamic fundamentalist minority. Gayoom was quick to capitalize on this, stating that increased reforms made it likely that these once dormant forces would rise and take over the government. However it was clear to most Maldivians that radical Islamist sects were not interested in democracy or economic inequality. Many of them were militant and thus were committed to using violence and terrorism to achieve their goals. This was a boon to Gayoom because he could use these incidents to justify additional repression against all opposition groups, or categorize all opponents of his government as terrorists.

In August 2007, changes to the constitution were ratified, paving the way for official democratic elections to be held within the next year. Top government ministers started to defect due to the pace of reforms, including the Justice Minister and the Attorney General. Gayoom ran for re-election on a platform of reform, but the fact that he had failed to uphold nearly all of his promises made over the course of the four years severely undermined his credibility. However Gayoom still had complete control over the only broadcast TV station, the state-run TVM Maldives and he used it as his personal propaganda apparatus.

But this was still only a theoretical advantage that the movement countered by executing effective informational campaigns aimed at reaching out to Maldivians that were not yet fully acquainted with the movement and the MDP. Because the movement did not have access to broadcast television, opposition media such as minivan radio proved critical. The movement made the strategic decision to allow a wide variety of opposition groups to use their already established movement media channels. This served to greatly expand their audience, create solidarity with other groups, and eventually increased participation in the movement and support for the MDP.

Although the opposition failed to unite under one party, the majority still backed the charismatic MDP leader Mohamed “Anni” Nasheed. Nasheed was a former journalist and political prisoner, whose arrest in 2006 inflamed popular opposition against Gayoom. He was also was one of the founding members of the MDP.

Nasheed was popular among many young and energetic dissidents who had little trouble transforming into effective political campaign strategists and organizers. They found it easy to apply the tactics of civil resistance to a

legally recognized presidential campaign. Simple tactics including the use of catchy slogans, and the creation of eye-catching or humorous signs, stickers, banners and T-shirts proved to be most effective.

Young activists also began arranging mobile music shows where popular musicians vocalized the spirit of resistance by singing anti-Gayoom songs. A "Go-Vote" campaign was also designed to inform the people of their new rights as voters and to entice alienated youth to take an active role in the political future of their country. All of this amounted to a vibrant and colorful campaign that was able to achieve a high rate of participation.

As the date for the elections drew closer, Gayoom was unable to prevent the opposition from campaigning effectively because he did not want to place the legitimacy of a possible victory at stake.

A website called MaldiveVotes.com and the "Enough" campaign took full advantage of this by producing anti-Gayoom flyers and other materials that succeeded in drawing further support from the youth. It also unified the opposition because instead of supporting Anni exclusively, its goal was to promote anti-Gayoom sentiment in general. The MDP ran using the symbol of the frangipani flower, a cultural icon of the Maldives, instead of the image of Anni Nasheed's face, fearing that a younger looking candidate would alienate older and pro-establishment voters.

The election took place on October 28, 2008. Diplomatic missions from the UN along with the NGO Transparency Maldives monitored the election. Gayoom lost the elections receiving 46% of the vote with the remaining 54% going to the victor, Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed.

2012 Coup (addendum)

After taking office in 2008, President Nasheed became known internationally as a leading advocate for action on climate change. His argument, that failing to take decisive measures in the next few years would render the Maldives uninhabitable in the future, was a tangible example of impending consequences. Less widely known were the efforts he made in rebuilding the nation's decaying political, social, and economic infrastructure.

Mohamed Nasheed inherited the monumental task of repairing the accumulated damage brought about by 30 years of dictatorship. Gayoom's rapid and harsh transformation to an economy based on luxury tourism, was

extremely beneficial for the wealthiest one percent of Maldivians and disastrous for the rest.

He introduced a new economic policy that expanded the economy from negative growth in 2008 to a growth rate of 9% per year, set up a universal health care system, a pension fund for the elderly, and the nation's first university. He also removed import duties on staple goods and implemented progressive methods for mitigating the problem of drug addiction in the capitol city.

After the collapse of former regime NGOs have been able to play a central role in curbing the problem of drug addiction by bringing a more innovative set of strategies to the table. Many of these strategies focus on prevention via education, and treatment via rehabilitation. Simultaneously the new democratically elected government has attempted to introduce legislation aimed at reducing extremely harsh sentences that were put in place by Gayoom.

Upon taking office President Nasheed sought to build cases against others who had acquired significant ill-gotten gains under the protection of the former dictator. The goal was to repossess the extravagant sums of money garnered under decades of corrupt rule and then reinvest the funds into projects aimed at benefiting the wider population and restoring the economy. Nasheed saw this process as a vital step toward rebuilding crumbling and public assets and, starting in 2009 the new government initiated an ongoing effort to recover some $400 million in misappropriated funds, which, according the finance minister of the Maldives, could go a long way towards alleviating the nation's debt problems.

The biggest obstacle impeding this process was the nation's judiciary. Even during Nasheed's presidency the entire judiciary was in the midst of a legitimacy crisis because it was the governmental body that remained most connected to members of the old regime. Most of the judges had been appointed during by Gayoom on the basis of personal ties, or political debts, this meant that the body was both corrupt and inept.

Chief Justice of the nation's criminal court, Abdulla Mohamed, was seen by many as the embodiment of this corruption and ineptness. Chief Justice Mohamed, appointed under Gayoom, was known for his repeated efforts to dismiss cases involving members of the old regime and for his minimal

training. He has once asked a child to re-enact the sexual abuse he had endured in front of his abuser in the court.

However it was his record of repeatedly stymieing attempts to address the injustices carried out by individuals with connections to the former regime that incited constitutionally appointed committee, tasked with judicial oversight, to suggest that the Abdulla Mohamed be investigated. At first he simply refused to cooperate with the investigation by failing to show up when summoned for questioning, he then quashed his own arrest warrant. Without any remaining formal procedure for holding the Chief Justice accountable, president Nasheed ordered the Maldives National Defense Force to arrest Chief Justice Mohamed.

Opponents of Nasheed's government, particularly the Adhaalath Party (Islamic Party) were quick to capitalize on these events. Since 2008 have been ideologically opposed to Nasheed's more secular vision of governance and they saw these recent events as an opportunity to attack his legitimacy. The group accused him of unlawfully detaining one of the nation's highest judicial authorities and urged their supporters to take to the streets. In the weeks that followed, gatherings, ranging from about 100 to 500 people, were held in Male' to demand Nasheed's resignation.

To support President Nasheed, pro-MDP gatherings also started forming simultaneously and the two groups clashed, at times violently, over the 22 days of unrest. On February 6, 2012 the Maldivian security forces suddenly joined the opposition protesters in calling for Nasheed to step down.

On February 7, 2012 Nasheed, now under threat of imminent violence, he resigned as president of the Maldives and signed over power to the Vice President Mohammed Waheed Hassan. Many outsiders including the U.S Government did not know the details of the incident, and thus it appeared at first to be a crude yet constitutionally valid transfer of power. However in the weeks that followed evidence began to emerge that that the transfer of power was in fact a bloodless coup incited by residual factions of the old regime and carried out by a small number of traditional political opponents.

When compared to the tens of thousands of Maldivians who had organized in support of Nasheed in the years before the 2008 elections, the number of coup plotters and whose who supported them were relatively small. However, in the days leading up to the coup, the plotters were quick to label

the small but loud and violent mob that was protesting the decision to arrest the Chief Justice as representative of authentic popular unrest. This storyline was initially reported in most international mainstream media outlets.

In contrast, it was often overlooked that President Nasheed and the MDP were supported by a large majority of Maldivian citizens. In addition, Male's mostly secular population of 100,000 voted in support of Nasheed, electing his party to 9 out of the 11 possible seats in a parliamentary referendum that took place the previous year.

Shortly after President Nasheed stepped down his communications advisor, Paul Roberts, who was with the president on the day of the coup, was interviewed by Democracy Now. Over the phone and from an undisclosed location within the Maldives, Roberts explained his version of the events leading up to Nasheed's resignation. He stated that on the day of the coup police and military officials joined the crowd of protesters and proceeded to forcefully take control of the main military headquarters. They then raided the central MDP party office and the state television station, pulling all the coverage of the events off the air and locking all of the journalists in a room. Many additional sources affirmed Roberts' statement detailing how Nasheed was coerced out of the president's office and taken to a secure location, by roughly 50 armed military officials, where he drafted a letter of resignation. From there he was whisked off to a press conference where he announced his resignation, and then placed under house arrest.

In his announcement, President Nasheed stated that the primary reason for his resignation was his assumption that not doing so would require him to use violence to suppress the opposition. However later he went on record multiple times stating that he was forced, at gunpoint, to hand over control of the government to vice president Waheed, who he says also played a part in planning the coup.

A day after his resignation, Nasheed published an op-ed in the New York Times titled The Dregs Of Dictatorship in which he sent a warning to other aspiring democracies:

Dictatorships don't always die when the dictator leaves office. The wave of revolutions that toppled autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen last year was certainly cause for hope. But the people of those countries should be aware that, long after the revolutions, powerful networks of regime

loyalists can remain behind and can attempt to strangle their nascent democracies."

The following day Nasheed along with other MDP leaders attempted to organize a peaceful protest against the coup but the demonstration was violently dispersed by police acting on orders from the new government. Amnesty International's Maldives researcher Abbas Faiz reported that "People who were peacefully exercising their right to protest were beaten on the head with batons, kicked and sprayed with pepper spray. This use of excessive force violates human rights standards." The number of people detained and injured on that day has yet to be released.

Nasheed's immediate future, as well as the future of the Maldives is still unknown, he's currently facing charges though on April 1, 2012 he told the Guardian newspaper that he was still unsure what exactly those charges are "I don't know, one time they said it was terrorism, another time they said it was acting against the constitution, another time they said it was alcohol."

On July 15, 2012 Deputy Prosecutor General Hussain Shameem said that Nasheed has been formally charged with illegally ordering the arrest of a senior judge. If convicted the former president could face a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment or banishment to a remote island. This announcement caused MDP supporters to protest calling for the current president Waheed Hassan to resign and for early elections to be held.

The British Commonwealth of Nations has responded by threatening to revoke the Maldives membership if Nasheed and Waheed Hassan do not begin talks centered on planning new elections by the end of this year. Hassan, the current president, says he will hold elections in July 2013, the earliest time permitted by the constitution.

When asked recently by a reporter if he thought he would win a new election, President Nasheed replied: "I am very, very confident that the people will decide upon us. And the thing is not who wins an election – it's the fact that you have to have one. It's the fact that a government is formed through the people.

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