

Inculcating Professionalism in Defence for National Development: Island Nation's Perspective

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Abstract- *Historical evidences show that the rulers of Maldives have taken steps to enhance professionalism of the armed forces to national development, harmony and stability most suitable for that particular time. The role played by the armed forces in shaping the Maldivian State can be divided into four stages; historical state of the armed forces in Maldives, political changes in Maldives and role of the armed forces, governance of the armed forces and its impact on the professional non-political institute and finally structure and civilian control as well contribution of armed forces in achieving and the full fledge multi-party democracy in Maldives. In the early days of Maldives, due to the small nature of the country and few inhabitants, there was no standing army or a military in the Maldivian governance. Whenever the sovereignty and the territorial integrity were challenged an army was summoned from the inhabitants to fight off the intruders. As a result, there is no single body that oversees the defence of the country. The victorious leaders established a culture of professional and patriotic selfless military leadership. During the transformation of the country from a protectorate of Great Britain to an Independent Maldives, the small armed force of the Maldives is utilized to exercise its authority in maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. The rebellions and various disobediences as well as the revolt seen in the country were successfully dealt by the Armed Force. Prior to the establishment of multiparty democracy in Maldives armed forces was primarily utilized in maintaining the internal security and protecting the national resources. However, this role of internal security and policing by the armed forces was seen as a setback and hindrance to the national democratization process. As a result a separate and an independent Police Service were established as a separate law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs. During the drastic and rapid changes in the political structure of Maldives the armed forces had to play a crucial role in sustaining the integrity and safety of the nation. As democratic reforms were introduced at an extremely rapid pace, an element of stability was greatly required in the prevailing condition, and it was the armed forces that had to play this vital role. The introduction of multi-party democracy and the first multi-party election held in 2008, proved the impartiality and professionalism of our armed forces. In the years following the elections of*

2008, the country has continued on its path in the infancy of modern democracy and has come across several challenges. The new political system and conflicts between the three branches of the state ultimately resulted in the resignation of the President in 2012 in an atmosphere of political pandemonium and disorder. The importance of the use of the military in an appropriate manner in alignment with the fundamental military values is greatly emphasized based on the outcome of controversial events in this period.

Maldives is a 1190 island archipelago scattered in an area of 115,300 square kilometers. The land space is just a little over 300 square kilometers and there are 192 inhabited islands lying across the archipelago with various numbers of inhabitants. We have a total population of about 340,000 people as of this year and the armed force is a very small percentage of this number. However, throughout our history each respective government have taken steps to enhance the professionalism of the armed forces to better engage in a contributory manner to national development, harmony and stability.

Therefore, for the purpose of this presentation, I will be discussing on the; historical state of the armed forces in Maldives, political changes in Maldives and role of the armed forces, governance of the armed forces and its impact on the professional non-political institute and finally structure and civilian control as well contribution of armed forces in achieving the full-fledged multi-party democracy in Maldives.

Although small in nature and population, Maldives is blessed to steer through the road of civilization as a country with a history of professional and patriotic selfless military leaders. We as a country had our sovereignty challenged many times throughout the known history. However, except for twice we defended and protected the nation. Historical evidence states that the Maldives was ruled by Portuguese from 1558 to 1573 AD for a period of 15 years and in 1773 Maldives was occupied by a south Indian king for 4 months. Both liberators of these occupation showed utmost sense of selfless service to the nation above and beyond the imagination of any citizen in the history, and setting the

highest standard for the military leadership of the country.

Based on this foundation, historically the armed forces of the country was mainly responsible for countering any act of foreign aggression towards the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Historical evidences shows that the armed forces although were fully aware of the existing political situation, played virtually no role in the political power struggle of the country.

When the Maldives changed from an executive monarchy to a republic, the purpose and role of the armed forces drastically changed to meet the demands and requirement of the nation at the time. As the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1965, the armed forces of Maldives was used to exercise its authority in maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. As such the armed forces were deployed to prevent any rebellions or to stop revolt as the country proceeded to a full-fledged independent nation. Due to these extra ordinary power vested upon the armed forces during the infant stages of the country, a culture of power abuse and inappropriate use of force prevailed among the members armed forces in the 70's. However upon assumption of office, President Gayyoom brought abrupt changes to armed forces governance, including direct oversight of the forces to minimize and mitigate the culture of power abuse instilled upon them during 60's and the 70's.

As more democratic institutions emerged in national development, the whole of armed forces was further separated from internal security matters, and a more resilient and trained group of people were dedicated to oversee the rule of law and harmony in the country. Although this newly established Police wing in the armed force was an integral part, their operations and responsibilities were separated from general duties of the regular forces. Furthermore, in 2004 the Police Service was established as a separate law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Maldives underwent drastic and rapid changes in the early years of this millennium. The rapid changes in the political structure of Maldives drew an overwhelming attention to all affairs of the state, including the armed forces.

During the critical juncture of the country and its political system, the armed forces had to play a crucial role in sustaining the integrity and safety of the nation. As democratic reforms were introduced at an extremely rapid pace from 2004 onwards, it brought about a

revolutionary change to all aspects of the society and state of affairs.

The pace of this rapid changes resulted in a situation where a country which had been experiencing political and social stability for over hundreds of years, was suddenly subjected to a highly dynamic and volatile environment. This, scenario opened a lot of avenues through which the safety and stability of the nation could have been placed in jeopardy and turmoil. Thus, an element of stability was greatly required in the prevailing condition, and it was the armed forces that had to play this vital role.

As the country underwent this journey towards greater national development, there were numerous occasions during which the professionalism and integrity of the armed forces were the key stone in maintaining a conducive environment for progress and development. The introduction of multi-party democracy and the first multi-party election held in 2008, were conducted in a smooth and safe manner, which was greatly dependent on the impartiality and professionalism of our armed forces.

In the years following the elections of 2008, the country has continued on its path in the infancy of modern democracy and has come across several challenges. The new political system and conflicts between the three branches of the state, ultimately resulted in the resignation of the President in 2012 in an atmosphere of political pandemonium and disorder.

In this period the importance of the use of the military in an appropriate manner in alignment with the fundamental military values is greatly emphasized based on the outcome of controversial events. Especially, utilizing the armed forces in situations requiring civil authority and on controversial incidents with other state institutions such as judiciary.

Even with these challenges the country has moved to stable platform and volatile situations were diffused greatly due to the role of the armed forces. Further efforts have been made towards enhancing the role and capacity of the armed forces, including the formulation of key policies such as the national security policy and defence policy which provides guidance to the armed forces and further augmenting the civil authority control over the military.

Also, numerous bilateral and multilateral engagements were undertaken including awareness and education on

legal aspects of armed forces, in cooperation with international partners such as the US and India.

Thus, the long standing effort to strengthen and develop the armed forces has had great benefit to the nation in its development and especially in the journey towards

modern democracy. The armed forces of the nation has always been structured and developed as a professional institution relevant to that era, starting from its inception to the present day.