

# Pivot towards India or China? The Maldives Might Not Become an Indian Satellite, at Least Not Yet

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Region: [Asia](#)  
Theme: [History](#)

*The opposition pulled off a surprise win in the Maldives' presidential elections last weekend.*

*Ibrahim Mohamed Solih [trounced](#) President Abdulla Yameen by a 16-point margin even though the US, India, and many Western countries fearmongered that the incumbent would resort to vote rigging in order to remain in power. It's for this reason why many of them refused to send election observers because they felt that this would "legitimize" the fraudulent activity that they wrongly assumed would occur, but the infowar concerning this unrealized scenario didn't stop there. In fact, the US and India also appeared to have meddled in the election through provocative statements that could have contributed to shaping the ultimate outcome.*

For instance, the US [threatened to sanction](#) Maldivian officials if any suspected fraud occurred, which could have been interpreted by the population as a signal that further economic restrictions might thenceforth be imposed more broadly upon them, too. Not only that, but an influential member of India's ruling BJP, Subramanian Swamy, channeled the spirit of the late John McCain by [publicly appealing](#) for his country to invade its much smaller southern neighbor in the name of "democracy" and "human rights". This undoubtedly had an effect on the electorate, many of whom were already dissatisfied with Yameen as it was, and the consequences will probably be far-reaching.

The US and India seem to have worked in tandem to shape the international conditions in which the Maldivian election occurred, just as they did three and a half years prior in January 2015 when Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa was unexpectedly deposed in a scenario just like this one. Similarly to Sri Lanka at the time, the strategic situation surrounding the Maldives is much larger than the small island state because of its [New Cold War](#) implications concerning the [Chinese-Indian competition](#) over the Indian Ocean. Yameen was regarded as a close Chinese partner and committed his country to the Silk Road, something that drew India's ire to no end given the Maldives' strategic location "right on its doorstep" and astride some of the world's most important Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC).

The new government will probably move swiftly to pardon former president and [notorious critic of China](#) Mohamed Nasheed as it [pivots towards India](#), though it shouldn't be taken for granted that the Maldives will automatically turn into an "Indian satellite" as a result. China avoided this outcome with Sri Lanka by shrewdly engaging with the post-Rajapaksa government of President Sirisena, so it's possible that it could pull off the same diplomatic feat with the post-Yameen Maldives too. Another point is that the Maldives' security services were considered to be very closely aligned with the incumbent, so it's unclear whether the country's "deep state" will go along with any pivot that subjugates them to their larger

northern neighbor.

Through a combination of what might be “deep state” wars and deft Chinese diplomacy, the Maldives might avoid losing its strategic independence after this shock electoral upset and the country’s seemingly impending consequent pivot towards India, but as with everything in International Relations, nothing can be entirely assured.

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*Featured image: Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen and Chinese President Xi Jinping*

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