

**Sacred King and Warrior Chief:  
The Role of the Military in Fijian Politics**

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## Statement

I, Jone Raiova Baledrokadroka, certify that the enclosed thesis on, *Sacred King and Warrior Chief: the Role of the Military in Fijian Politics*, represents fully work undertaken by myself during the course of my research.



**Jone R Baledrokadroka**

**12 October 2012**



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## Glossary of Fijian Words and Phrase

- Ba- province of western Viti Levu Island, largest province in Fiji.  
Balenabelo- a military exercise area in upper Sigatoka valley.  
Bau- leading pre-colonial island kingdom.  
Bati – warrior, border district.  
Bati leka- a high chief's close protection also responsible for chiefdoms internal security.  
Bati balavu- border warriors responsible for chiefdoms external security.  
Bete- priest.  
Bose ko Viti- Methodist Church annual conference.  
Bose levu vaka turaga- also known as the Great Council of Chiefs established in 1876.  
Bose ni turaga- council first convened after 1987 coup of more than 200 lesser chiefs.  
Bua- province on Vanua Levu Island.  
Buli- district chief under the old Fijian administration.  
Burebasaga- one of Fiji's three traditional confederacies.  
Cakaudrove- pre-colonial state and largest province of Vanua Levu Island.  
Colo- the inland country.  
i Taukei- an indigenous Fijian.  
Kai Colo- the inland people.  
Kalou vu- progenitor, originating spirit and god.  
Komai Naua- senior Bauan chief of Tui Kaba clan, presently Ratu Jope Seniloli.  
Komunisi- Fijianized word for 'Communist'.  
Kubuna- one of the three traditional confederacies.  
Labasa- northern-most town on Vanua Levu Island.  
Lakeba- island in eastern maritime province of Lau.  
Lasakau- fishermen/ sea warriors' clan and village on Bau Island  
Lau-Eastern maritime province of Fiji.  
Lotu- the Christian religion or to practice Christianity.  
Macuata- pre-colonial state and province of Vanua Levu Island.  
Mana- sacred substance attributed to chiefs.  
Masi- native cloth made from the paper mulberry tree bark.  
Matailobau- pre-colonial state and district of Naitasiri province.  
Matanigasau- an offering of reconciliation.  
Matanitu- the central government a political federation of Vanuas or kingdoms.  
Matanitu ni kaukauwa- kingdom of force.  
Matanitu Vanua- native traditional government based on chiefs and the church.  
Mataweilagi- the residence of the Vunivalu on Bau Island.  
Nadroga- western province of Viti Levu Island.  
Naitasiri- pre-colonial state and province of central Viti Levu Island.  
Nakauvadra- mountain ranges in Ra mythological home of the god Degei.  
Nakelo- border district between chiefdoms of Bau and Rewa.  
Namosi- province of south-central Viti Levu Island.  
Navosa- inland province of Viti Levu Island.  
Nayatena- title origins or *ai cavuti* of Roko Tui Kiuva.  
Qaqa- a gallant warrior known for his battle prowess.  
Qaranivalu- paramount chief of the pre-colonial state and province of Naitasiri.  
Ra- province of northern Viti Levu Island.



Ratu mai Verata- sacred king of Verata, a pre-colonial state of eastern Viti Levu.

Rewa- pre-colonial state and province of southern Viti Levu.

Roko Tui- title used for head of Fijian provincial administrator.

Roko Tui Bau- sacred king of Bau.

Roko Tui Kiuva- sacred king of Kiuva District in Bau Kingdom.

Seaqaqa- southern district of Macuata Province.

Serea- chief village of Waimaro (Soloira Division).

Sigatoka- main river town of Nadroga Province.

Soli vaka misinari-Methodist church missionary levy.

Soloira- a chiefdom of the Waimaro pre-colonial state.

Somosomo- chief village on Taveuni Island, home of Tui Cakaudrove.

Sugu- to overthrow by force.

Suguturaga- to overthrow a chief by force.

Suguvanua- to overthrow chiefdom by force.

Sulu- to clothe or dress with wrap around or tailored skirt.

Tabua- whales tooth, of special value amongst iTaukei Fijians.

Tailevu- province of eastern Viti Levu Island.

Taukei- a native, an owner or possessor of a thing.

Tikina- a district, sub-division of a province.

Tovata- one of the three traditional confederacies.

Tubou- chief village of Lakeba Island in Lau Province, seat of Tui Nayau.

Tui- sacred king that ruled with his warlord the Vunivalu.

Tui Bua- sacred king of Bua, a pre-colonial state and province of Vanua Levu Island.

Tui Cakau- paramount chief of Cakaudrove and head of Tovata Confederacy.

Tui Kaba- chiefly clan of Vunivalu of Bau.

Tui Nayau- sacred king of Nayau, the leading chief of Lau Province.

Tui Macuata-sacred king of Macuata, a pre-colonial state and province of Vanua Levu.

Tui Tunuloa- sacred king of Tunuloa District, Cakaudrove Province Vanua Levu.

Tui Viti- king of Fiji, Ratu Cakobau was also styled with this title by Europeans.

Tui Vuda- sacred king of Vuda, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, the late President held the title.

Tui Waikalou- sacred king of Waimaro (Soloira Division).

Tuka- a late nineteenth century native movement based on religion and culture.

Turaga- chief.

Turaga bale- high chief, i.e. head of the confederacies, Kubuna, Burebasaga, Tovata.

Turaga ni koro- village headman now paid by government.

Tu vaka tikitiki- to step or stand aside.

Vanua- a traditional grouping of large kinship divisions of yavusas.

Vanua Balavu- an island in northern maritime province of Lau.

Vanua qali- a village or chiefdom that pays tribute to another chiefdom.

Vanua Levu- second largest island of Fiji.

Vanua tako lavo- the traditional principle of alternate generation relationships.

Vanua vei batiki- a village or chiefdom that is obligated to protect another chiefdom.

Veibatiki- traditional relationship where certain foods are prohibited.

Veiuoto- once residence of Prime Minister and present seat of Parliament.

Verata- pre-colonial state of eastern Viti Levu and district of Tailevu Province.  
Vere vaka bau- Machiavellian politics the Bauan way.  
Viti Kabani- a popular native commercial enterprise from 1913-1917 by Apolosi Nawai.  
Viti Levu- largest island in Fiji archipelago.  
Vulagi- a visitor, a stranger, a guest.  
Vunivalu- warlord.  
Waimaro- pre-colonial state in Naitasiri Province.  
Wakaya- an island in central maritime Lomaiviti Province.  
Yaca ni ravu- a name bestowed on a warrior to valorize his battle deeds.  
Yasayasa vaka Ra- the collective western provinces of Nadroga, Ba and Ra  
Yavusa Ratu- the chiefly clan of the Roko Tui Bau also shortened as Vusaratu.

## Abbreviations

ABC- Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
ACCF-Assembly of Christian Churches  
ALTA- Agriculture Land Tenants Act  
AMAL- Afwaj Al-Mugamah Al-lubnaniyya Lebanese Shiite political group  
ANC- Armed Native Constabulary  
APC- Armoured Personnel Carrier  
ATG- Army Training Group  
BLV – Bose Levu Vakaturaga  
BOI- Board of Inquiry  
CAMV- Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua  
CANZ- Canada Australia New Zealand bloc of Nations  
CAP- Counter-Assault Plan  
CCF- Citizens’ Constitutional Forum  
CEO- Chief Executive Officer  
CISO- Consecutive Internal Security Operation  
CLFC- Commander Land Force Command  
CO3FIR- Commanding Officer Third Fiji Infantry Regiment  
COSLFC- Chief of Staff Land Forces Command  
CRWU- Couter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit  
CRFMF- Commander Republic of Fiji Military Forces  
CSO LOG- Chief Staff Officer Logistics  
CSO PLANS- Chief Staff Officer Plans  
CSO OPS- Chief Staff Officer Operation  
CSO INTS- Chief Staff Officer Intelligence  
CSR- Colonia Sugar Refinery  
CWMH-Colonial War Memorial Hospital  
DALs- Director of Army Legal Service  
DPP-Director Public Prosecution  
DWP- Defence White Paper  
EMICOL-Equity Management Investment Company Limited  
EEZ- Exclusive Economic Zone  
EPG-Eminent Persons Group  
FCA- Fiji Court of Appeal  
FCC- Fiji Council of Churches  
FDB- Fiji Development Bank  
FDF- Fiji Defence Forces  
FHL- Fijian Holding Limited  
FHRC-Fiji Human Rights Commission  
FIS-Fiji Intelligence Service  
FLP- Fiji Labour Party  
FLP/NFP- Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party Coalition  
FMF- Fiji Military Forces (as from November 1942)  
FRU- Force Reserve Unit  
GCC- Great Council of Chiefs  
GDP- Gross Domestic Product  
IDF- Israeli Defence Forces  
JER- Job Evaluation Review

## Abbreviations

LFC- Land Force Command  
LOAC- Laws of Armed Conflict  
LPO- Local Purchase Order  
LSU- Logistic Support Unit  
Lt Col- Lieutenant Colonel  
Maj Gen- Major General  
MFO- Multi-National Forces Observers  
MHA- Ministry of Home Affairs  
MISO- Multiple Internal Security Operation  
NAP- National Alliance Party  
NCBBF- National Council for Building a Better Fiji  
NGO- Non- Government Organization  
NLTB- Native Land Trust Board  
NOC- National Operation Centre  
OPORD- Operation Order  
OTS- Officer Training School  
PAFCO- Pacific Fish and Cannery Company  
PANU- Party of National Unity  
PLO- Palestinian Liberation Organization  
PM- Prime Minister  
PNG- Papua New Guinea  
PTSD- Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder  
QEB- Queen Elizabeth Barracks  
QVS- Queen Victoria School  
RFMF- Republic of Fiji Military Forces  
SAS- Special Air Service  
SDL- Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua or People's United Party  
SDWP- Security Defence White Paper  
SNCO- Senior Non-Commissioned Officer  
SOP- Standing Operational Procedure  
SVT- Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei Party  
TELSAT- Telecommunications Satellite  
UN- United Nations  
UNDPKO- United Nations Department of Peacekeeping  
UNIFIL- United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon  
UNSC –United Nations Security Council  
VC- Victoria Cross  
VLV- Veitokani Lewenivanua Vakarisito Party  
1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn- First Meridian Squadron

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## Abstract

The role of the Fiji military in politics characterized by the 1987, 2000 and 2006 coups has been interpreted through the broad lenses of ethnic tensions and civil-military relations models. This thesis argues that those coups are best understood through an analysis of the interplay between Fijian traditional politics and the predominantly indigenous Fijian military. Like the usurpation of the traditional Sacred King by the Warrior Chief in Fiji's leading pre-colonial state of Bau, the military's role in politics today is an inversion of the neo-traditional political order, and the military has now moved from a mediator role to play a more enduring function in the governance of Fiji.

Given the influence of *vanua* politics in modern Fiji, and the importance of the neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship, models of coups and military-civilian relationships drawn from the literature are of variable usefulness. Finer's Opportunity and Disposition calculus, which emphasizes the coalescence of civilian and military elites in coup making, certainly applies to Fiji and is used in this thesis. On the other hand, Fiji's military professionalism must be seen as differing from Samuel Huntington's civil supremacy model.

An additional consideration examined in this thesis is the influence of international peacekeeping operations on the domestic politics of the countries from which peacekeepers are drawn. In Fiji's case, it is argued; experience in peacekeeping operations has influenced the military's self image as political mediator and encouraged it to adopt a role that encompasses security. This has correspondingly led to the militarization of government by a largely ethnic Fijian military.

## Introduction

This thesis, *Sacred King and Warrior Chief: The role of the Military in Fijian Politics*,<sup>1</sup> is an attempt to understand the military's interventions in Fiji's politics as typified by the coup d'états of 1987, 2000 and 2006. I bring to bear on the analysis my experiences as a former senior Fiji military officer, and one well integrated into and knowledgeable about modern Fijian society. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January of 2006, as Acting Land Forces Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), I was suspended and later charged for alleged insubordination and conspiracy to mutiny against the authority of the Commander of the RFMF, Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama. I was adamant that my action as widely reported in the media was because of my conviction that the Fiji military should be apolitical according to the 1997 Fiji Constitution and Cap 81, the law that governed the military. I was convinced that the Commander was plotting a coup against government. In a meeting with senior officers of Land Forces Command held at the RFMF Officers Mess a day earlier, I had warned them of the repercussions of a coup, using well known coup author Samuel Finer as my authority. Finer wrote:

By any world standards military regimes have shown less than average capacity for statesmanship or economics. And yet, even if it could be shown without doubt that the military intervention had indeed brought material wellbeing and political stability to a country, it is necessary to ask one final, because transcendently important, question: whether the short term political and economic gain is not likely to be overbalanced by a longer-term catastrophe? For in most cases, military intervention has put a stop to constitutional evolution.<sup>1</sup>

The coup happened on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2006. As recalled by Hunter and Lal in the *New Zealand Herald*:

The 2006 coup was the commodore's fourth attempt. In 2000 during the negotiations that ended the Speight hostage crisis he suggested that the military should run the country for up to 50 years but Speight - and the president - would have none of it. In 2004 and again in 2005 he planned to take over the Government but his senior officers refused to commit treason. All were sacked.<sup>2</sup>

My case was never heard in a Military Court Martial and I was granted an honorable discharge in August 2007, after my lawyer agreed to the terms that I would not lay claims against the military. After serving 26 years in the military,

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<sup>1</sup> The terminology 'Fijian Politics' in this title is taken to mean 'Itaukei Politics' and the use of the word 'Fijian' in this dissertation interchangeably means 'Itaukei'.



it is this career changing event – with the invaluable support of ANU academics – that spurred me to research the enigma as posed in the title of the thesis.

I had served on the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) for the Province of Naitasiri and witnessed the workings of neo-traditional politics at the elite level. My family links to Bau and my upbringing on that island, the pre-colonial center of power in Fiji, have rekindled my interest in researching and writing on Fiji's traditional political history.<sup>3</sup> With my military background and education the association that I have had with Fijian neo-traditional society has obviously aided this research immensely. As a former commanding officer of the RFMF Engineers, I have spent more than twenty years in national rural development for both Indo-Fijian and iTaukei communities. I have also done multiple peacekeeping tours of the Middle East culminating in my appointment as commanding officer of the MFO Fijian Battalion in Sinai Egypt in 1998. My first attempt at writing about my understanding of the intervention of the military in Fiji's politics appeared in a *Fiji Daily Post* opinion editorial, 'Cracking the Coup Code.'<sup>4</sup> It is these intimate acquaintances and life experiences, including my intimate knowledge of coup events that I bring to academia in furthering the literature. It must be clarified at the outset that Indo-Fijian politics, which has its own dynamic narrative, is outside the scope of this thesis, although a full understanding of Fijian politics as a whole demands an engagement with Indo-Fijian and indeed colonial political perspectives. This thesis is centrally about the Fiji military's relationship with iTaukei politics.

I should point to the advantages and disadvantages of being a participant in as well as an observer of many of the events I describe, especially those in the coup year of 2000. On the one hand the participant knows many things that are completely unknown to others, who must instead depend on second-hand accounts. As a participant, I possess an intimate knowledge of the Fiji military forces that have played so central a role in the political evolution of Fiji in the last quarter century, and, as a former member of the Great Council of Chiefs, I know the workings of indigenous Fijian or iTaukei politics from the inside – the connections, the relationships, the loyalties, the long-harboured grievances, the ambitions and also the back-stabbing that can lie behind the outward and formal performances of respect in Fijian culture. On key occasions in Fiji's recent

history, I found myself responsible for taking action to restore national stability when it was sorely tested, as happened for example when I led soldiers against the Speight rebels in mid-2000 and, later in that year, when I led loyal soldiers against mutineers in the Queen Elizabeth Barracks and averted a military split that would have been disastrous for Fiji. My direct experience on those occasions constitutes the central research material from which I draw in my chapters on those events.

At the same time, and unavoidably, the participant in events possesses deeply felt views which influence his or her interpretation of them. Such is the case with me. My suspension from the military in early 2006 was not only the consequence of my beliefs about the proper role of the Fiji military forces in a democracy but has also, naturally, coloured my view of the military commander's seizure of power at the end of that year. I opposed the coup then and I oppose it now, and nothing that has happened in between has persuaded me otherwise. This thesis, then, is written openly and unapologetically from the point of view of a coup critic who believes Fiji would be in a better state now if democracy had remained, and who does not believe that military rule since 2006 has been beneficial. An artificial neutrality of view, if I had attempted to adopt it, would have weakened and confused my argument without adding to our understanding of Fiji politics.

Fiji gained Independence from Britain in 1970 with high chief Ratu Mara as Prime Minister and leader of the Alliance Party. The new Fiji Constitution guaranteed communal representation from across the iTaukei, Indo-Fijian and European communities. In the 1977 elections ethnic outbidding brought a split in the iTaukei vote. This was caused by growing support for iTaukei nationalism as opposed to Mara's multiracialism policy. Controversially Mara went on to form a minority government. The Indo-Fijian dominated National Federation Party that had won elections had failed to form government. In the 1987 general elections, after seventeen years of elite iTaukei political rule, the Indo-Fijian dominated FLP/NFP Coalition toppled Mara's Alliance government. This generated Fiji's first coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Rabuka who claimed to be reinstalling iTaukei paramountcy over the threat of Indo-Fijian political

hegemony. Why did Rabuka's coup and subsequent coups happen? Why has the military intervened in modern Fiji politics? These are the central questions of contemporary Fiji history.

According to Cyril Belshaw, "Fijian society, in theory as well as by administrative reference, became the society of Bau."<sup>5</sup> In Chapter One, I set the foundation for my thesis within the Fijian traditional diarchy of the Sacred King and Warrior Chief centered on the kingdom of Bau. The chapter seeks to establish a conceptual framework for the current pattern of military-iTaukei political relationship. Oscar Spate had stated that Fijian traditional society, like all tightly organized hierarchical societies, had its own tensions.<sup>6</sup> Foremost twentieth century chief, Ratu Sukuna had drawn attention to these tensions within neo-traditional Fijian society. In a 1944 memorandum Sukuna stated, "The oldest of these forces and the most powerful as a disintegrating factor is latent jealousy between the principal members of leading tribal families."<sup>7</sup> I argue that the inversion of the role of the Bauan (Roko Tui Bau) Sacred King by the Warrior Chief (Vunivalu) as described by Marshall Sahlins is a recurrent issue in iTaukei political history.<sup>8</sup> I also make the case that the present military's relationship with the office of the President is a modern day inversion of the traditional construct. Chapter Two analyses the modern role of the military in iTaukei politics and its impact on Fijian politics as a whole. It discusses the role of the *bati* (warrior) from pre-historic times, and the role of the military forces from colonial to post-colonial times.

### **Turaga-Bati Relationship**

The coups in Fiji, I argue, have been underpinned by the traditional relationship between the *turaga* (chief) and the *bati* where the latter is theoretically supposed to be loyal and subordinate to the former. Bainimarama in his 2006 coup, however, has inverted this neo-traditional orthodoxy. What was the origin of this relationship? It has its roots in tribal wars. Asesela Ravuvu states:

War had meaning and purpose to the early Fijians. It was part of their way of life, and it provided them with a sense of solidarity and a means of social interaction and cohesion. According to Commodore Wilkes in discerning the psychology of native Fijians, 'it was the principal employment of males', and to Reverend Lawry, 'the noble employment of men'.<sup>9</sup>

Ravuvu argues that Fijians were traditionally a fighting people, a martial race. This is evident in the title, status and role of the Vunivalu or war chief who was the effective leader of a large tribe or *vanua*. Unity was paramount for the survival of the tribe. Ratu Tanoa, the war chief of Bau, killed one of his sons rather than have disunity on the island.<sup>10</sup> The *Turaga-Bati* relationship, one of loyalty and respect for the tribal social order in the person of the chief, therefore became the cornerstone of traditional society. It was the *bati* that ensured this social order was maintained and the *vanua* protected from outside attack. World War II marked a rite of passage for the iTaukei. Battlefield service alongside American and Commonwealth troops brought them respect from their colonial master.<sup>11</sup> With further service in Malaya in the 1950s, the Fijian military acquired an honoured, modernizing and unifying place in iTaukei contemporary history.

Chapter Three analyses Fiji's first military coup by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. The putsch was justified as reinstalling indigenous paramountcy given the alleged Indo-Fijian domination of the government elected in 1987 and their quest for political parity. During this era the manipulation by both Rabuka and the chiefly elite of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship was the enduring feature of iTaukei politics. Arguably this gave rise to intra-ethnic intrigues and further coups.

In Chapter Four, I show how the events of the 2000 Speight coup reshaped the RFMF, which changed from being an agent to the nemesis of ethno-nationalism, and which now challenged the entrenched *Turaga-Bati* ethos. In the first days after the takeover of Parliament Bainimarama seems to have been unsure which way to jump, whether towards Speight's ethno-nationalism or away from it, and there still is conjecture as to where his real sympathy lay. Initially the military's stand towards Speight's group was ambivalent in the view of many, including the international community, but the national crisis that followed over the next two months proved to be the crucible in role transformation where the military began to assert itself over its former political masters, the chiefly elite and their associates. The quelling of nationalist aspirations arose from the stand

and determination of a group of senior officers rather than through the leadership of the Commander Commodore Bainimarama. Yet the military could not re-install the ousted Chaudhry government because it feared an iTaukei backlash.

Chapter Five adds detail and context to the argument that the military is now the nemesis of Speight's nationalist political agenda. This chapter gives an in-depth analysis of military operations that influenced the course of subsequent political events in 2000. It describes in some detail the internal security operations conducted and shows the extent to which nationalist aspirations and propaganda were present nationwide amongst iTaukei Fijians. With the backing of many chiefs, nationalist sentiments that were obviously racist rose to the fore. The outcry was rife amongst Viti Levu provinces given the seemingly unfulfilled iTaukei agendas of the Mara and Rabuka governments. More importantly, Speight's nationalist sympathisers within the military had to be suppressed. This process of suppression, it has to be said, took place with some angst among senior officers because the military was practically an indigenous institution where the *Turaga-Bati* relationship remained sacrosanct.

Chapter Six analyses the military mutiny of November 2000. On this harrowing day, I argue that the forces sympathetic to nationalist and chiefly elites were put down by military professionalism allied to the rule of law. This dark event in Fiji's military history still reverberates within the institution and is engrained in the national psyche. Bainimarama has often harked back to this dark event to shore up his justification for intervening in politics, the mantra being, "Bainimarama or the ethno-nationalist abyss". The narrative describes in detail how individuals and units struggled to wrest control of the military headquarters at Queen Elizabeth Barracks. The outcome would shape the political future of the nation.

In Chapter Seven I argue that the antagonism between Qarase and Bainimarama stems from the unfinished business of the Speight coup of 2000. The public slanging matches all throughout 2002-6 had their roots in the military challenging the iTaukei elite's status quo. I analyse the various tensions and

military tactics used to intervene in the lead up to the 2006 coup. The military's political watchdog role in society continued against pro-nationalist policies drawn up by Qarase's government such as the Promotion of Reconciliation, Truth and Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill.

In Chapter Eight I discuss the hold that the military has over the office of the President and the inversion of power, and I examine the way in which the military was able to manipulate what was essentially a non-political high office for its political agendas against the Qarase government. Furthermore since the Rabuka coup the creation of various units within the military underscores this role expansion into politics where even the chaplaincy department is not spared.

Chapter Nine analyses the main actors and events leading up to and immediately after the 2006 'clean up' coup. The coup from a military point of view purportedly marks the rejection of its nationalist sympathies and Rabuka's doctrine of indigenous political paramountcy in favour of an all-inclusive multi-racial society. I argue not only that Bainimarama and the military have inverted the power structure of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship and the iTaukei political status quo, but that he and his military elite see themselves playing an enduring role in future Fiji politics.

### **Military Intervention Theory- Disposition and Opportunity**

Samuel Finer in his seminal book *Man on Horseback; the Role of the Military in Politics* and Eric Nordlinger in his *Soldiers in Politics: military coups and governments* spearheaded the military interventional discourses throughout the nineteen sixties and seventies. In his disposition and opportunity calculus, Finer identifies the disposition of the military elite – which is bound to its corporate and individual interests - as the push factor. The pull factor is the military's opportunity to intervene where the weakening of public support for government has occurred. The political 'crisis' offers a key condition for military political intervention. The prompting by the iTaukei Movement of Rabuka and the support of political leaders Chaudhry and Ganilau for Bainimarama prior to the coups of 1987 and 2006 respectively are cited as evidence which will be discussed in chapters 3 and 9.

According to Finer's calculus of intervention, the military disposition factor and the military's opportunity factor acting in unison trigger the likelihood of a coup. By 'disposition' Finer means a combination of conscious motive and a will or desire to act. One without the other will lead to failure. Finer further posits that the "military's opportunity- and its public welcome- both derive from the level of political culture".<sup>12</sup> The less mature the political culture the more numerous the opportunities, and the greater the likelihood of public support for military intervention. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, the leader of Fiji's first coup in fact pointed to this less mature political culture when queried in 2012. He said that those who told him to carry out the 1987 coup misled him and he realized this later.<sup>13</sup>

If one were to compare the main traits of the 1987, 2000 and 2006 Fiji coups into a theoretical causal framework, then four constants emerge as a working hypothesis. The first is that Fiji's coups are generated as a consequence of election results and a change in government. The military on the three occasions has intervened to veto election results within a year. The second is that in each case the party that came to power in the eyes of the military threatened its corporate interest and judgement of the national interest. The military's corporate interest is foremost in a military elite's calculus for intervention. The third is that perceived ethnic issues are raised and heightened by political outbidders during electioneering and post-elections. The fourth constant has been the *Turaga-Bati* relationship which has either reinstated or inverted the traditional status quo in Fijian culture, leading to coups. This is the central argument of this thesis. In a sense the military's role in politics is encoded in its historical and traditional origins as a force for coercion.

This thesis endeavours to explain why the military forces have intervened in Fiji's politics so consistently since 1987, the extent to which Fiji exemplifies wider patterns of intervention found elsewhere, the form which intervention has taken at different stages of this story, and the reason for the absolutist character of the intervention that began with the 2006 coup. The following are the leading questions posed in researching the thesis:

- What has driven military interventions in civilian politics as shown in the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006? While some argue that there have been 4, 5 or 6 coups, depending upon how they define ‘coup’, I contend that there have been three major breaks in political continuity that deserve to be called coups – in 1987, 2000 and 2006. At the same time the Fiji coups have all unfolded in two phases – the physical takeover, and the legal overthrow sometime later. In 1987, after the takeover of government in May, the military suspended the constitution and removed the Governor General in September and declared a Republic in October. In 2000 Speight overthrew the FLP government on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May though the military removed the President and abrogated the constitution 10 days later. In 2006 the military takeover was in December and the constitution was abrogated in April 2009.

In order to address this central question, I pose a set of subsidiary questions in this thesis:

- What has been the influence of Fiji’s traditional chiefly elite and what has been the attitude of the military’s top command to the chiefly elite? Ever since the establishment of Ratu Cakobau’s Royal Army in 1871, there has been a close relationship in the *Turaga-Bati* tradition between the chiefs and the military.
- What has been the influence of the Christian religion through the Fiji Methodist Church on Fiji’s politics since the mid- nineteenth century?
- What has been the enduring influence of prominent Fijian statesman and high chief Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna on the Fijian polity? Ratu Sukuna was the product of both the English and Fijian high cultures. Sukuna’s protégé, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, was groomed for political leadership and was of enormous influence in post-Independence Fiji. Sons of Fiji’s high chiefs, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and Ratu Epeli Ganilau, served as Commanders of Fiji’s military reinforcing the aristocratic-liberal democratic relationship between the ruling elites and the military. Voreqe Bainimarama, on the other hand, called for the reform of the Great Council of Chiefs as it was allegedly perpetrating political corruption in collusion with the ruling SDL government.



- What has changed the Fiji military's professional behaviour and how has participation in UN peacekeeping missions influenced military intervention in politics? I examine the colonial role and role transformation of the military after it was allotted nation-building and UN peacekeeping functions. These roles, I contend have led the officer corps to see itself as a mediator of political tensions.
  - How have the actual events that constitute military intervention in politics unfolded in Fiji?
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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback; the Role of the Military in Politics*, Pall Mall Press, London,, 1962, p.242.

<sup>2</sup> *NZ Herald*, 'Fiji police chief tried to get Bainimarama arrested in NZ', 18 Feb 2012, see [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10786336](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10786336) accessed 06 Jul 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See my Wikipedia articles: *Lasakau Sea Warriors* and *Taukei ni Waluvu* in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lasakau\\_sea\\_warriors#Bau\\_history\\_and\\_ethnology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lasakau_sea_warriors#Bau_history_and_ethnology) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taukei\\_ni\\_Waluvu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taukei_ni_Waluvu) accessed 16 Jul 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Jone Baledrokadroka, 'Cracking the Coup Code', *Fiji Daily Post*, opinion editorial, 4 Oct 2008,p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Cyril S Belshaw, 'Induced Political Change in the Pacific: A Symposium Held at the Tenth Pacific Science Association,University of Hawaii',Honolulu,Hawaii,1961 eds Roland W. Force,Bishop Museum Press,1965,p.65.

<sup>6</sup> Oscar Spate, *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects*, Government of Fiji Press, 1959, p8.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Spate, *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects*, p.8.

<sup>8</sup> See Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa*, University of Chicago, 2004, p.57.

<sup>9</sup> Asesela Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, Institute of Pacific Studies Pub, 1988, pp.1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Asesela Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> "Fijians would never be fully recognized until they shed blood for the Empire." Deryck Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna : soldier, statesman, man of two worlds*, Macmillan Pub,1980, p.130.

<sup>12</sup> Finer, *Man on Horseback*, p.85.

<sup>13</sup> *Fijivillage .com*, 'Sitiveni Rabuka speaks about Constitutional Reforms', 27 July 2012.

# Chapter 1

## Sacred King and Warrior Chief

### Introduction

Understanding military intervention in politics, as Samuel Fitch has argued, “requires a ‘historical view,’ that is, a focus on the processes by which a political system changes over time”.<sup>1</sup> This chapter offers an overview of the processes by which the political system in Fiji changed over time, in particular from independence in 1970 to the coup in 2006. Subsequent chapters will examine those processes in detail.

The expansion of the military’s political role was underpinned, in several ways, by participation in international peacekeeping missions, but the trigger in each case was a changing relationship between the military top command and Fiji’s neo-traditional politics. The coup in 1987 reflected the traditional *Turaga-Bati* (chief-warrior) role, and was aimed at protecting Fijian political supremacy, as demonstrated by the adoption of an ethnically skewed constitution in 1990 under the influence of the Great Council of Chiefs.

The second coup, in 2000, proved a turning point, with the military uncertain about whether to side with the forces of chiefly elitism and ethno-nationalism or adopt a new political role in defiance of paramount chiefs. Fiji’s President, *Tui Nayau* Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, was removed from office by the military top command and, once order was restored, the military’s emerging antagonism towards the government of Laisenia Qarase centered on the latter’s association with prominent Kubuna and Tovata chiefs who had sided with 2000 coup leader George Speight.

Fiji’s third coup, in 2006, was aimed at destroying the influence of at least one section of Fiji’s chiefly elite and the associated ‘old order’, supposedly in the interests of modernization. This most recent coup continues to reverberate in the politics of Fiji because it represented a power inversion in the neo-traditional

relationship between the elite symbolized by the Great Council of Chiefs and the military.

This thesis argues that Commodore Bainimarama's 2006 coup – in its relation to the Presidency - mimics the ancient hierarchical power inversion of the Bauan Sacred King (Roko Tui Bau) by his Warrior Chief (Vunivalu), as discussed by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in his treatment of the contrast between Bau and Rewa as pre-colonial states. So there is a causal nexus between the traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship and Fiji's coup 'culture' more compelling than the inter-ethnic conflict thesis advanced by scholars such as Lal, Scarr and Norton. Lal, for example, contends that the power of ethnic emotions was the main dynamic that has underpinned the coups.<sup>2</sup>

Bauan traditional rule in the mid-nineteenth century was an inverted form of dual kingship that subordinated the sacred ruler to the war lord as opposed to the stable Rewa polity.<sup>3</sup> In researching the contemporary role of the Fiji military in politics I argue that the present is rooted in history and the traditional epoch. This approach places the contemporary phenomenon of coups in Fiji in the context of Fiji's past politics, and it emphasizes the persistence of tradition in modern political events.

### **Fijian Traditional Hierarchy**

The foregoing discussion raises a series of important issues in the traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship. Arthur Capell made the point that, "the history of Fiji is the history of chiefly families."<sup>4</sup> The phrase emphasized the hierarchical nature of Fijian traditional society where chiefly power was held sacred. Arthur Hocart and Marshall Sahlins in studying Fiji's chiefly system explained the dualistic relationship of the two chiefs at the apex of Fijian social order, the sacred king or *Roko Tui* and his warrior chief or *Vunivalu*. Sahlins looked at the two leading pre-colonial states of Bau and Rewa. Basil Thomson, Fiji's native lands commissioner of the 1890s, considered Rewa "the most perfect example of a Fijian state known to us."<sup>5</sup> Apart from Rewa and Bau, the sacred king – warrior chief diarchy was prevalent in other pre-colonial states. In the state of Waimaro Colo East, the practice of chiefly dualism was also witnessed by

Brewster in the 1880s stating, “The head chief at Serea was Ro Ra Angatha. He was the Vunivalu or fighting chief of his clan. Associated with him was Tui Waikalou or the Lord of Waikalou.”<sup>6</sup>

As described by early missionaries the Fijian chief of old was perceived to be the embodiment of the *Kalou-vu* or progenitor and God. Hocart puts it succinctly, “If reverence and devotion are required, including belief in the supernatural, to make up religion, then the true religion of the Fijians is the service of the chiefs”.<sup>7</sup>

The custom of respect for the authority and person of the chief was what underpinned the traditional order. In the state of Bau, the dualistic relationship was inverted by the Vunivalu clan through Ratu Naulivou, his brother Ratu Tanoa and his son Ratu Cakobau who overthrew the sacred king the Roko Tui Bau in a rebellion. This was a break in tradition of grand proportions. Sahlins argues that, “The second great transformation of the Bauan polity was the inversion of the diarchy, the overthrow of the sacred kings (Roko Tui Bau) by the war kings (Vunivalu), who thus became in all but ritual respects the supreme power”.<sup>8</sup>

Sahlins’s work in outlining the significance of this traditional coup to the development of a nascent traditional polity establishes a thematic base which has allowed the author to weave the thesis narrative in these terms. As rightfully indicated by Sahlins:

This great transformation in the Fijian cultural order should not be considered in isolation, as independent developments. This indeed is the sense of history encoded in the high Fijian genealogy that accompanies the founding dynasties of the major kingdoms.<sup>9</sup>

This traditional transgression by the Bauan polity became notoriously known as the ‘kingdom of force’ or *matanitu ni kaukauwa*.<sup>10</sup> Scarr in his *Fiji: A Short History* explained, “There was endemic competition for leadership. It provided the chance to display *kaukauwa*, innate capacity and strength, and resulted in a [traditional] state economy”.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, there is a correlation between the rise of the kingdom of force of Bau and the incursion of Western material and ideas in the early nineteenth century. After the reinstating of Tanoa as Vunivalu in 1837, in what was an internal

palace coup, it was widely recognized that his son Cakobau was the power behind the throne. The missionary Joseph Waterhouse verified this by revealing:

Tanoa being infirm, his ambitious son Thakombau now usurped the chiefly authority, allowing the old man to retain the name and dignity, whilst he himself exercised the power of Vunivalu, and secretly directed the actions of his father in all important business. With crafty policy, he claimed all popular measures and renowned deeds as his own, while the opposite were artfully imputed to the parent chieftain.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, for some fifteen years till 1852, when he was finally installed Vunivalu after the death of Tanoa, Cakobau was in fact the supreme ruler of Bau. Bainimarama's relationships with President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and the incumbent President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau are reminiscent of Cakobau's Machiavellian mores.

Kaplan in studying Fijian ritual politics also traces this cultural phenomenon even further back to the Nakauvadra Mountains, home of the Fijian Gods' mythology.<sup>13</sup> According to legend a war had started when the God Degei's twin grandsons, Nacirikaumoli and Nakausabaria, defied him by killing his bird Turukawa. The Twins were banished on canoes to the coast and beyond and were subsequently referred to as the foreigners (Vulagi). Kaplan further explains:

The interior people were the descendants of the autochthonous Degei and the coastal people were powerful upstarts like the twins. From the point of view of the many coastal chiefs their powerful kingdoms are descendants of active superseding lines who successfully usurp the rule. As these powerful upstarts, the Twins are the war gods of coastal polities.<sup>14</sup>

The struggle for and usurpation of power in Fiji's pre-contact history was quite prevalent and witnessed by traders and missionaries in the contact era of the nineteenth century. To illustrate, coups were commonly known in the Fijian language as *suguvanua* or *suguturaga*- the usurpation of traditional or chiefly power.<sup>15</sup> The Fijian definitions still survive today in Fijian surnames valorizing usurpations of past chiefs. The classic case is that of the name *Cakobau* – destroyer of Bau – bestowed on Ratu Seru to commemorate his act of usurpation or *suguturaga* in 1837.<sup>16</sup>

Fijians have often drawn parallels between Fiji's coups and Ratu Cakobau's usurpation and reinstating of his father Ratu Tanoa as Vunivalu of Bau in attempting to explain the present military's intervention in politics. It is argued

that the Fiji coups and the contemporary phenomenon of military intervention in politics are best understood in terms of Fiji's traditional history. In many ways, this approach also casts light on Commodore Bainimarama's feud with chiefs over the last decade. Indeed, his relationship with the office of the President resonates with Fijian politics of old. Timothy Earle in his seminal book, *How Chiefs Come to Power* argues military might is one of the sources of political power. Earle states:

While leaders depend on their warriors to extend political power, they must always be on the lookout for treachery. Ultimately warrior might is a destabilizing and divisive power in institutions of leadership; it is only effective as long as it can be reined in and directed strategically.<sup>17</sup>

In a sense, Bainimarama and the military's role in politics can similarly be understood as acting out Fijian classical strategic culture founded on the Bauan kingdom of force.

Earle further argues that "The fundamental dynamics of chiefdoms are essentially the same as those of states, and ... the origin of states is to be understood in the emergence and development of chiefdoms."<sup>18</sup> Earl asserted that understanding the dynamics of chiefly society, offers an essential view into the historical background of the modern world.<sup>19</sup> The history of chiefdoms documents the evolutionary trajectories that resulted, in some situations, in the institutionalization of broad-scale, politically centralized societies and, in others, in highly fragmented and unstable regions of competitive polities.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in Fiji's contemporary politics, the military that was used by chiefs for political consolidation of a colonial centralized society has turned on their masters to acquire their power and sphere of influence.

### **Neo -Traditional Colonial Construct**

The theoretical discussion of tradition has become trite.<sup>21</sup> It is now held that a salient characteristic of tradition is its changing identity. Indeed Handler and Linnekin argued that, "There is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Inglehart and Baker reasserted Max Weber and Samuel Huntington's claim that 'cultural values are an enduring and autonomous influence on society'.<sup>23</sup> Peter France in his seminal work *The Charter of the Land* traces precisely the founding of a Fijian orthodoxy and how Fijian

“immemorial tradition” was amended by Governor Gordon in colonial Fiji.<sup>24</sup> The Fijian post-colonial traditional polity was created by Governor Sir Arthur Gordon in 1876 based largely on the mixed character of the earlier Cakobau government. Gordon had placed himself at the apex of the Fijian social structure made up of a Great Council of Chiefs (GCC).<sup>25</sup> Twelve of the foremost tribal chiefs were chosen to indirectly rule as government native administrators (Rokos) over subject tribes in newly delineated provinces. The first Roko Tui for Tailevu and Naitasiri Provinces, for example, was Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the son of Cakobau. Each province had a Scribe and two or three Stipendiary Magistrates. Gordon further subdivided the colony into 84 districts, each under a *Buli*, and placed a *turaga ni koro* or village headman in charge of each village.

The use of traditional authority to legitimize colonial political control was seen by the British as the correct way to govern native subjects. A chief's position was legitimated through the enforcement of a Fijian code of Laws and use of courts to exact fines and services.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the division of land into *mataqali*-owned holdings was codified into customary law by Gordon in his professed wish to preserve Fijian traditions and Fijian ownership of land.<sup>27</sup> Timothy Macnaught in his book *The Fijian Colonial Experience* continued this traditional evolution narrative by coining the phrase ‘neo-traditional’ to describe the Fijian order under British colonial rule prior to World War II.<sup>28</sup> The Roko Tuis met each year in the GCC, thus consolidating the link between the neo-traditional *Vanua* and colonial order headed by the governor. The military's present intervention in politics can therefore be described as both a contemporary phenomenon and also the legacy of the authoritarian colonial chieftaincy system of the past.

### **Methodist Church -Chief -Military Relationship**

Adolf Brewster in his nineteenth century account on the *Hill Tribes of Fiji* wrote that, “The Wesleyans like to call themselves Methodists, and so good is their organization that they well deserve the appellation”.<sup>29</sup> Since its establishment in Fiji in 1835, the Methodist Church has had a strong bond with chiefs and the military, and its form of organization had deeply influenced the governing of Fiji. After the conversion of Ratu Seru Cakobau in 1854, the relationship



between chiefs and missionaries took on an eminence of its own akin to a chief's relationship to his priest or *bete* of old. In fact Reverend Frederick Langham stationed on Bau was nicknamed "the Cardinal" by Governor Sir John Thurston for his renown as a close advisor to Cakobau. He believed himself the champion of the Fijians and encouraged annexation by Britain. By 1884 Brewster the Commissioner of the remote hill province of Colo East proclaimed, "Wesleyanism, owing to its dominant numbers has come to be tacitly acknowledged as the state religion, although it has no official recognition as such".<sup>30</sup>

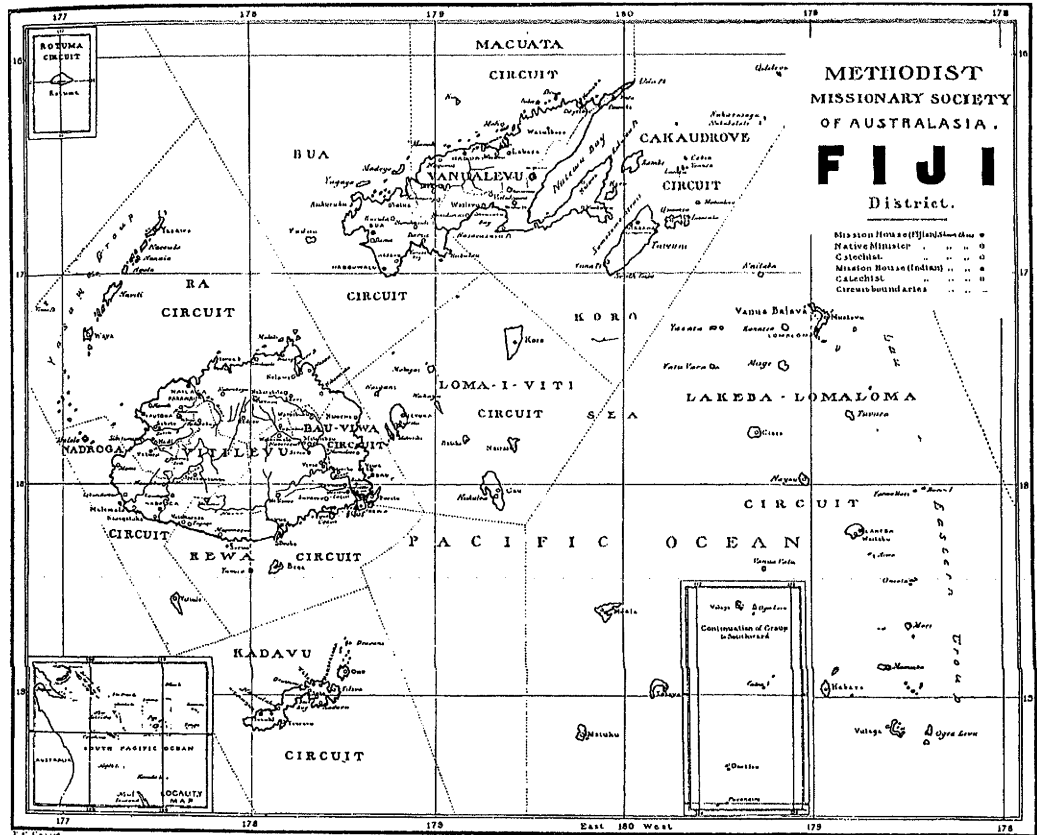
Methodist religious practices such as the annual conference or *Bose ko Viti* held since 1838 and the *Soli Vaka Misinari* (Missionary levy) have become more than church meetings but national and district gatherings of great ceremonial pomp signifying native unity.



**Photo 1. Methodist "Vaka Missionary" at Nakorovatu Village in Colo East 1881 featuring also Europeans. Image: Alexander Turnbull Library NZ.**

Captain Wilkes in 1840 gives the names of what he considered the seven ruling districts in Fiji as: 1<sup>st</sup>, Bau; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Rewa; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Verata; 4<sup>th</sup>, Macuata; 5<sup>th</sup>, Somosomo; 6<sup>th</sup>, Natasiri; and 7<sup>th</sup>, Bua.<sup>31</sup> Conversion to Christianity of the chiefs of these nascent tribal states greatly enhanced the spread of the gospel. The missionaries later delineated the country into church circuits roughly along these powerful

districts providing Western administrative order under leading chiefs. The mapping of these circuits was also to inhibit competition from Roman Catholic proselytisation. These Methodist circuits forged a national identity that later became the basis for provinces of the Cakobau and British Colonial governments.<sup>32</sup> (See Methodist Circuit Map boundaries).



Map showing Circuit Boundaries, 1935.

Map 1.

Since 1963, with independence from its parent body the Australian Methodist Church, the Fiji Methodist Church has become a localized institution of identity for Fijians. In addition, as Brewster stated, “In my time it was the only denomination whose members were employed and paid as chaplains by the government”.<sup>33</sup>

The Church has also had a close relationship with the military. The relationship was entrenched during World Wars I and II and the Malayan Campaign of the 1950s given that the indigenous makeup of the army was predominantly Methodist. The wish of high chiefs contained in the 1963 Wakaya Letter prior to

Independence to constitutionalize a 'Christian State' clause reflects the close political ties with the Church.<sup>34</sup> This call was resurrected in the GCC meeting at the Civic Auditorium after the 1987 coup.

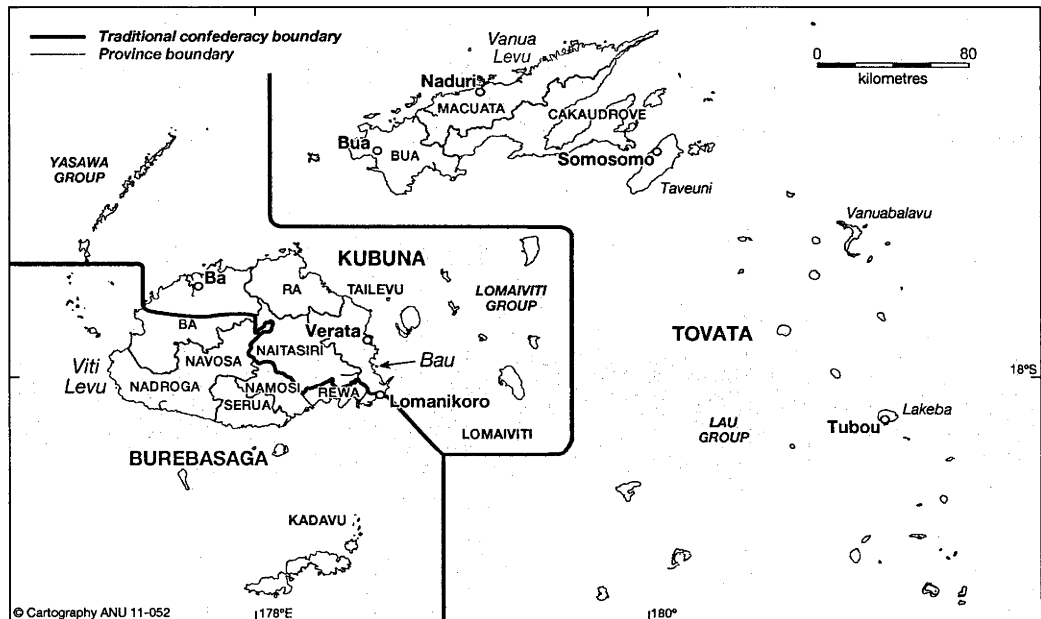


Photo 2. Fijian Provincial Administrators or *Rokos* in 1887.<sup>35</sup>

Gordon had built on the work of early missionaries who had laboured building a national Methodist Christian orthodoxy according to tribal boundaries.

These tribal boundaries were later developed into provinces by the Cakobau and colonial governments. These provinces were traditionally grouped into the three confederacies of Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata centered on the leading chiefdoms of Bau Island, Lomanikoro Rewa and Somosomo Cakaudrove.<sup>36</sup>

(See Map 2)



Map 2 - Neo-Traditional Fiji Provincial and Confederacies Boundaries

The confederacies were a political construct of the Methodist missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century to support the administration of its growing converts through the efficacy of traditional chiefly power.<sup>37</sup> These three confederacies embodied the apotheosis of traditional power. The three head chiefs of the confederacies were elevated to paramount status known as *Turaga Bale* over other provincial chiefs. The legacy of this neo-traditional construct is that in all Fijian social functions the ‘standardized’ formal salutation for the presentation of *tabua* or *yaqona* (kava), pays respect to the three confederacies’ *Turaga Bale* thereby reinforcing the chiefly orthodoxy. This innovation also aided converts to traditionally conceptualize the Trinitarian Christian doctrine of the divinity in order to facilitate the missionaries’ proselytisation work in creating order and unity.<sup>38</sup> The traditional confederacies later became a convenient neo-traditional edifice for colonial native administration. In creating a colonial native administration, Governors Gordon and Thurston were in fact supplanting a Fijian chiefly orthodoxy originally codified by the Methodist Church.<sup>39</sup> It also created a sense of identity of a Fijian nascent nation as missionization became overlaid with colonialization.<sup>40</sup> All was not plain sailing though. Despite Gordon’s and Thurston’s benevolent efforts, outbreaks of Fijian resistance

persisted under colonial rule. Robert Nicole in his book, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji*, gives a detailed account of the major conflicts of Fijians against the colonial establishment such as the Colo Wars, Navosavakadua and the *Tuka* Movement, the Movement for Federation and Apolosi Nawai's *Viti Kabani*. These disturbances were quelled by the isolation of rebel leaders through the use of chiefs and the native administration.

The paramount chiefs in the three confederacies have continued to promote chiefly political authority in post-Independence Fiji. Attempts to create a *Yasayasa vaka Ra*, or Western Provinces Confederacy, after the coups of 1987 and 2000 failed because of the objections from the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). The fear of the resource rich Western Provinces chiefs undermining the neo-traditional status quo may perhaps be a reason.

The attempt to silence and charge certain elites of the Methodist Church by the Bainimarama regime is underpinned by the age old power play between the military and religious ideology centred on chiefs. Earle states the three sources of power in pre-historic societies were economic, military and ideological. Economic power is based on the ability to restrict key productive resources or consumptive goods. At the same time, economic power depends on the other two sources of power – military might to defend resources and ideology to institute rights of unequal access. In modern times, however, religion has become a powerful political mobilizer for social justice issues. In 2012, the head of the New Zealand Methodist Church, Reverend John Roberts, made a solidarity visit to the Methodist Church in Fiji and concluded that it was being oppressed because it had opposed the coup.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, certain senior pastors of the Fiji Methodist Church since the coup of 1987 have used the influence of the pulpit in linking Christianity with ethno-nationalist agendas. Reverend Roberts revealed there have also been 20 pre-court trial conferences involving charges laid against Methodist Church leaders, which have been costly for its members.

### **Chief –Warrior Relationship**

Chiefdoms are characterised by endemic warfare and the rise to power of a chief is always military at its roots.<sup>42</sup> Fijian traditional society was based on the chief

and his ability to maintain unity within his tribes. Hence, in a tribal kingdom there were warrior tribes who were assigned as *bati leka* for internal protection and those as *bati balavu* for external protection. According to Ravuvu, "By emphasizing internal security and defence from outside attack, the chief and his warriors maintained unity within the tribe."<sup>43</sup>

The *bati leka*'s role equates to that of the praetorian guards of the Roman Emperor. In the kingdom of Bau the Vusaradave clan was the *bati leka*.<sup>44</sup> In Bauan pre-colonial history the *bati leka* has become synonymous with intrigue, conspiracy, disloyalty and assassination. The contemporary analogy of the *bati leka* was Rabuka's "elite 60" soldiers that executed the first coup.<sup>45</sup> The Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit that was formed as Rabuka's private army after the 1987 coup had a similar purpose. The Force Reserve Unit formed after the 2000 coup and the present Third Battalion's Zulu Company can also be said to be cast in the *bati leka* role. The *bati balavu*'s role on the other hand was as guardians of a kingdom's borders. The classic example is that of the hill kingdom of Matailobau which was *bati balavu* to several pre-colonial kingdoms of : Verata, Waimaro, Namosi and Bau. As borderers, their allegiance was contingent on the ever changing political tides of the times. As proof of this status, the Matailobau people have the traditional *veibatiki* relationship with those four states. According to tradition, certain foods are prohibited in the presence of the people of the four states to which Matailobau are *bati*. The *bati balavu* as borders were quite independent vassals and have been known to switch sides. Reverend Waterhouse records that during the Bau-Rewa wars the Nakelo and Naitasiri borderers were lured to switch sides by both these contending kingdoms.<sup>46</sup> The *bati balavu*'s role in the nascent Cakobau's Royal Army was also prominent in the spread of Bauan political hegemony. In April 1868 Sir John Thurston, then British Consul, was part of a force to seek culpability for the massacre of Rev Baker and his party in the highlands of Navosa. The *bati balavu*'s of Waimaro (Soloira) and Matailobau were recruited by Ratu Cakobau and played lead roles in this hill campaign.<sup>47</sup> Today the Fiji military role as a whole as guardians of the nation can be said to be playing the role of the *bati-balavu*.

Through Governors Gordon and Thurston this principle of Fijian societal security based on the *Turaga-Bati* relationship was also incorporated into colonial orthodoxy. Service in the ANC was initially by conscription quotas from the established Provinces as allotted to Native Provincial Administrators or *Roko Tuis*. As a result, the military became the national marker of identity for the Fijian people and her chiefs. The uniform still used today – including serrated *sulu* (skirt) worn and the lack of a head dress - indicate symbolic traditional linkages and an implicit veneration of the country's chiefly hierarchy. As Deane explains:

The *masi* was used as a turban, and so became the symbol of chieftainship. No ordinary man dare wear a *masi*-turban in the presence of a chief. The chiefs themselves wore it with studious dignity; they never, for instance, doffed it to anyone except to the representative of the British Crown.<sup>48</sup>

For the military to adopt head wear as part of its uniform might therefore have seemed a sign of disrespect, a factor which helps to explain why Fiji is unique amongst Commonwealth forces in having no head wear as part of its ceremonial dress uniform. The core identity of the modern Fiji military, therefore, has from its inception been crafted around subordination to the institution of chieftainship.

To illustrate the contemporary practice during the 1987 coup, the *Turaga-Bati* relationship was promoted within the newly formed territorial battalion in Labasa given that Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and Rabuka were from Vanua Levu. Territorial officer Lieutenant Colonel Ratu Tomasi Korovakaturaga, the natural eldest son of the Ratu Penaia, was the Commanding Officer and General Manager of the Fiji Sugar Corporation Mill in Labasa. There were officers from the other chiefly families of the *Tovata* Confederacy that also held appointments such as second-in-command Major Ratu Viliame Tagivetaua of the *Tui Bua* clan and even Malayan veteran Captain Ratu Etuate Toronibau of the *Tui Tunuloa*, Cakaudrove was a company commander. Ratu Aisea Katonivere, who later was installed *Tui Macuata* and an ardent supporter of the Bainimarama military regime, was also a territorial officer of the Labasa 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

### **Origins of the Fiji Military**

Fiji's first Governor Sir Arthur Gordon, in establishing a new colony, was faced with many pressing issues, of which internal security was of primary

importance. Because of distance and its underlying costs, he had to rely on native manpower instead of colonial troops.<sup>49</sup> Gordon was also reluctant to bring in troops from outside of Fiji because he figured it could further inflame relations with the still belligerent hill tribes.<sup>50</sup> There was one force already in existence that had experience with the local security challenges confronting the new colonial government. In 1871 leading Fijian chief Ratu Seru Cakobau in establishing his native government, had formed an armed militia. The 'army' was drawn from Cakobau's feudal chiefs and warriors, and European settlers acting as officers. These armed auxiliaries were to protect coastal settlers against marauding hill tribes. Under the tutelage of the European officers, the troops became a well-disciplined unit trained in tactics and the use of fire arms. In 1867, after Reverend Thomas Baker and his party were massacred in the highlands of Navosa, there was pressure on Cakobau to bring those responsible to justice. In 1868, Cakobau accompanied by the British Consul John Thurston, conducted a campaign to subjugate the belligerent hill tribes known to coastal dwellers disparagingly and fearfully as the *Kai Colo*.

By 1873, during the Ba pacification campaigns Cakobau's feudal troops had grown to 1400 men. At cession to Great Britain in 1874, a detachment of the Royal Army was part of the flag raising ceremony in Levuka. By 1875, when the men were paid, the numbers were reduced to an affordable 400.<sup>51</sup> From 1875-76 in what became known as the 'little war' in the highlands of Viti Levu, the ANC was quite successful in quelling the rebellious hill tribes. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1876, Gordon issued a proclamation pardoning all in the mountain villages in order that no lingering resentment was felt by the defeated *Kai Colo*.<sup>52</sup> There were several other smaller rebellions which the ANC was called upon to suppress as in 1882 at Seaqaqa on Vanua Levu Island. The use of locally armed troops to quell internal insurrection, however, has had an indelible effect on the psyche of indigenous Fijians. The legacy of the colonial pacification campaigns persists as there is enduring respect for the military. On the other hand parochialism inevitably exists in any institution that is overwhelmingly made up of one ethnicity such as the ANC and Fiji Defence Force – the forerunner of the Fiji military.



The *Turaga-Bati* relationship was further entrenched in Fijian orthodoxy by Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna. Born on the island of Bau in 1888, he was the son of Ratu Jone Madraiwiwi of the mataqali Tuikaba, and was to become the most famous Fijian of his generation. He was educated in New Zealand and at Oxford, was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Medaille Militaire* from the French Foreign Legion in World War I and returned to Fiji to become Native Lands Commissioner. He played a key role in forming the Native Land Trust Board and in articulating a uniquely Fijian philosophy of government and development in Fiji. His “philosophy was that the Fijian ethos was built around obedience and respect for authority”.<sup>53</sup> Sukuna was the classic example of the blending of two cultures and used his chiefly authority to become an agent for British benevolence.

Ratu Sukuna was instrumental in sending Fijian soldiers overseas during World Wars I and II. He believed that Fijians had to be blooded in battle to be recognized as a people and a nation.<sup>54</sup> The nexus between militarism, nationalism and modernity was promoted by Sukuna as an agent of British benevolence. This patriotic and nationalist ethos probably was further engrained in the high chief through his Oxford education and service with the French Foreign legion. Ratu Sukuna’s belief, echoed in modern Fiji, is an expression of the underlying view of the military that it is the last bastion of Fijian nationalism. This traditional order was further consolidated with high chiefs Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Edward Cakobau commanding Fijians during the Malayan Communist insurgency campaign in the 1950’s. Many Fijian military officers of this campaign became communal leaders and politicians in the 1960s and 70s. The *Turaga-Bati* relationship forged during the Malayan campaign was maintained during the Alliance government of the 1970s-80s. For instance Ratu Edward and Ratu Penaia were Deputy Prime Ministers and senior members of Ratu Mara’s cabinet while junior officers and non-commissioned officers such as: William Toganivalu, Livai Nasilivata, Solomone Momoivalu and Apisai Tora held other ministerial posts.

After independence, Fiji’s civil-military relations pattern was a hybrid between Nordlinger’s traditional aristocratic and liberal democratic models.<sup>55</sup> The traditional aristocratic model of civilian control is generalized from the

European monarchies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when autocracies were the norm. The liberal democratic model entails the depoliticization and subordination of a deferential military to an elected civilian government where democracy is the norm. This hybrid pattern cohered well with the ruling Fijian chiefly elite in the form of the Alliance government of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara which was embedded with high chiefs from the three traditional confederacies of Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata.<sup>56</sup>

The traditional linkages of the Fiji military, in particular its senior command with Fiji's paramount chiefs was critical to the planning, execution and aftermath of the first coup in 1987. Colonel Rabuka, as the *bati* to his Cakaudrove high chief, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau the Governor General and later first President of Fiji, often emphasized his traditional role in the vernacular as coup leader. Moreover, two former military Commanders Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and Ratu Epeli Ganilau were sons of paramount chiefs closely linked to then Prime Minister Ratu Mara through marriage.

### **United Nations Peacekeeping Duties**

Just as World War II marked a rite of passage for the predominantly Fijian military fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Europeans, United Nations Peacekeeping duties in particular in Lebanon, have crystallized its modern political mediator role. I argue that the military's expanded peacekeeping role and its intervention in politics are inextricably associated as the unintended consequence of national policy. The sense of self confidence imbued in the officer corps from international peacekeeping in Lebanon and various other missions reverberates throughout Fiji politics today.



Photo 3. UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon inspecting Fijian peacekeepers in Iraq in 2008 accompanied by Colonel Jonasio Mara to his left the Contingent Commander. Image: Coup 4.5.

On the eve of the December 2006 Fiji coup, the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan warned of consequences for Fiji's military should it go ahead with a coup. Annan's spokesperson said Fiji soldiers who took part in the coup d'état would be unwelcome in UN missions<sup>57</sup>. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations has, however, softened its stance despite the United Nations strongly condemning Fiji's coup and calling for a return to democratic rule and protests from Australia and New Zealand. In May 2007, a spokesperson for New Zealand's then foreign minister, Winston Peters, said: "New Zealand believes it is inappropriate for troops from Fiji to take part in UN operations at a time when the Fiji military has overthrown a democratically-elected government. We are also aware of the financial value of peacekeeping duties for Fiji's military."<sup>58</sup> A spokesperson for the Secretary General office, however, admitted, "The United Nations also struggles to recruit professional and well-trained troops for peacekeeping duties in areas where those soldiers are potentially preventing civilian deaths from conflict. As a result they have often been forced to accept deployments from nations whose domestic human rights records are questionable."<sup>59</sup> The intended outcomes of UN peacekeeping commitment to the new nation in 1978 were invariably

recognition as a 'good international citizen', foreign exchange earnings and employment for youths. The decision of the Alliance government to commit troops to UNIFIL Lebanon however was not debated in parliament.<sup>60</sup> Ratu Penaia Ganilau was then the Minister of Home Affairs under whose portfolio the military was. Two of his junior officers in Malaya, Mosese Buadromo and Paul Manueli, were Permanent Secretary and Commander of the military respectively. The *Turaga-Bati* relationship without a doubt was at play in this monumental foreign policy decision.

The decision to commit to peacekeeping has contributed to political instability ever since. With the Fiji military's present politicized internal security role, there is a contradiction between conforming to international peacekeeping norms and protecting human rights. Confidence in serving with larger nation's militaries in international peacekeeping missions has given the Fiji military an inflated corporate self-image. For Fiji, the transition to independence was peacefully negotiated and not the outcome of a conflict with colonial masters. How has a guardian role developed? Even though coercive force was used as an instrument for suppression as in the Colo pacification campaigns and the suppression of strike action against both indigenous and Indo-Fijians during colonial times, the military has been largely apolitical. In addition the Fiji military in seizing political power is unlike those of other developing nations militaries such as in Thailand and Indonesia that have never regarded themselves as apolitical.

The ideology of political intervention that now pervades the military senior command is the unintended consequence of the military experience in peacekeeping and the legacy of its neo-traditional role. From the Colo campaigns, the World Wars, and the Malayan campaign, the idea of patriotic continuity through international peacekeeping remains embedded in the collective psyche of the mainly Fijian military. In a passing out parade of new recruits Commodore Bainimarama reiterated:

Remember you are now part of a service renowned all over the world for its gallantry [sic] servicemen and women who have graced the battle fields of the past World Wars and Peacekeeping Operations in volatile areas of the world including Fiji's political

turmoil in recent times. Today, this sacred responsibility is passed on to all of you with full blessings and confidence that you will continue to uphold its values and tradition.<sup>61</sup>

To support the unintended consequence argument, a documentary film of the 1980s, *The man in the middle* featuring Fiji's soldiers, captured the dangerous and arduous role of UN peacekeepers and raised their international profile. The accompanying public relations abstract for the film epitomizes the point being made:

Since 1978 a small force of 6,000 United Nations soldiers has tried to keep the peace in southern Lebanon. This multinational peacekeeping force acts out its role as a buffer between the various factions. The United Nations interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has not yet been able to fulfill entirely the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. However, by its presence, it maintains a semblance of peace and restricts armed conflict that might otherwise envelop the entire Middle East. The film tells the story of the effects of war on a land and its people.<sup>62</sup>

The tragic massacre of 102 Lebanese civilians in 1996 by Israeli shelling after they had sought refuge inside the Fijian Battalion's headquarters at Qana, which made international headlines, is another case in point. Fijian soldiers saw themselves playing a humanitarian role in sheltering fleeing refugees as a result of the Israeli Defence Force's 'Operation Grapes of Wrath' against the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance fighters. The Qana massacre became the tragic symbol of 'national unity' for Lebanon and brought global admiration for Fijian peacekeepers.<sup>63</sup> The mediator role enforced as part of peacekeeping in Lebanon in trying to defuse communal factional conflicts has indelibly affected Fijian soldiery. There is little doubt that there is a higher premium on the diplomatic and negotiating skills of the soldier of peace than on his fighting ability.<sup>64</sup> The expanded 'mediator' role of Fiji's military that gave rise to coups, however, is now inconsistent with the western definition of military professionalism as adhered to prior to the 1987 coup. Moreover the military has supplanted its *bati* role for the *turaga* role; a process which this thesis shall argue is the inversion of neo-traditional power. Bainimarama has even objected to the use of 'interim' for his government after six years in power and according to defector senior officer Lt Col Tevita Mara, has intimated his vision of fifty years of military rule. In an investigative article on the Fiji Military's United Nations Peacekeeping contribution since the 2006 coup, Selwyn Manning revealed:

Inquiry shows the United Nations' increased use of Fiji personnel in peacekeeping missions is contrary to the foreign policy positions maintained by Australia and New

Zealand. The inquiry's findings also show the two CANZ bloc nations, while maintaining their respective public hard lines with regard to Fiji, have since mid 2007 remained silent while the United Nations increased the number of Fiji personnel deployed to peacekeeping operations. Meanwhile the United States and China have developed closer ties with Fiji's military regime.<sup>65</sup>

The Fiji military's involvement in domestic politics will continue unless a harder line is adopted by the UN and the international community at large on Fiji's peacekeeping global contribution. Peacekeeping has had an undeniable influence on the military's past corporate behaviour that has given rise to coups. Officers such as Colonels Sitiveni Rabuka in the 1987 coup, Filipo Tarakinikini in the 2000 coup, and Pita Driti in the 2006 coup who were prominent in the political limelight were all former commanders of Fiji's UN peacekeeping battalion in Lebanon.

### **The 1987 Coup**

Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka's coup of 1987 thrust onto the political centre stage the neo-traditional political linkages that had underpinned the chiefs and the Fiji military. Rabuka, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau became key actors in the crisis and the legacy of their decisions reverberates throughout the nation. As opposition to the victorious FLP/NFP coalition government led by Timoci Bavadra gathered momentum after his swearing in as Prime Minister on 13 April 1987, the Governor General on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April and the *Vunivalu* of Bau a day later cautioned patience and a multi-racial national focus for the good of the nation.<sup>66</sup> These exhortations by two paramount chiefs of Fiji were ignored when on the 24th April some 3000 protesters marched through Suva with overtly racist slogans such as, "We don't want this Indian Government." The military takeover of an elected government confirmed the long held suspicion by many that the predominantly indigenous Fiji military would intervene to protect Fijian political paramountcy. Such paramountcy had been boldly articulated in a statement by the Great Council of Chiefs in November 1932

That this Council records its strong and unanimous opinion that Fiji, having been ceded to Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Her Heirs and Successors, the immigrant Indian population should neither directly nor indirectly have any part in the control or direction or matters affecting the interest of the Fijian race.<sup>67</sup>

Again in November 1968, two years before Independence, the Council of Chiefs in an address of loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen stated:

We find ourselves to be a minority people in our own land. The form of government which is being demanded by certain elements in Fiji and overseas, in the name of democracy, would result in our being placed under the political control of immigrant races... We firmly believe that Fijian interests will continue to be acknowledged as paramount in our land by the great power to whom we, in faith and hope, entrusted the care of our people.<sup>68</sup>

As members of the GCC, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and deposed Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese were party to this address. Colin Newbury argues that the quest for Fijian Paramountcy evolved as a result of European and Fijian chiefly elite political maneuvering:

From about the 1930s and certainly from the 1940s, a secondary purpose emerged, in the context of local politics in a very different multi-racial society. A handful of European settlers and Fijian leaders in the legislature, the NLTB and the Council of Chiefs enhanced the symbolic status of the Deed [of Cession] as a justification for the political primacy of indigenous Fijians in the face of economic and political competition from outsiders... By the 1960s, governors and local officials, and officials in the Colonial Office and its successor departments of state, came to share the notion of paramountcy embodied in those assumptions as a way of overcoming reluctance to accept British intentions to decolonize.<sup>69</sup>

The justification for Fijian paramountcy was, therefore, fundamentally due to economic, political and demographic factors during the colonial era and primarily against Indians' call for parity. Also Europeans cooperated with the Fijians politically but in a paternalistic fashion.

As doyens of Fiji's chiefly elite, Ratu Mara and Ratu Penaia became political beneficiaries of the coup. Coup leader Rabuka was often quoted in the vernacular during the initial days of the 1987 coup as acting the role of *bati* to his Cakaudrove chief Ratu Sir Penaia and to the Fijian orthodoxy as a whole. Rabuka's actions saw him elevated as the first commoner to have a permanent seat on the GCC in recognition of his *bati* role in protecting the chiefly order.

Rabuka's coup, although military-led, had been condoned by the *Taukei* Movement which was formed by many ministers of the defeated Alliance party and prominent pastors of the Methodist Church. The initial interpretation of the coup was that of an inter-ethnic conflict with Fijians asserting their power against a coalition FLP/NFP government which were essentially Indo-Fijian dominated parties. What was stirred up by the *Taukei* Movement were unfounded fears within the Fijian population of an erosion of their rights due to

Indian political dominance. Given the Indo-Fijians' economic lead and demographic majority, ethnic tensions were easily whipped up.<sup>70</sup>

The 1987 coup triggered a major expansion in the RFMF's role in internal security and indeed Fiji politics. The size of the military reached 5,600 in December 1988 from a pre-coup strength of 2,600.<sup>71</sup> Apart from an across the board increase in numbers to standing units, a special forces unit, a commercial auxiliary unit, ports security, youth training and a mechanical engineering unit were also formed. By the end of the year in what Deryck Scarr saw as the 'inevitable reality of Fijian political hegemony', Lieutenant Colonel Rabuka was promoted by a pliant President and Commander-in-Chief to Major General.<sup>72</sup> Qualitatively the standard of soldiering in general dropped overnight due to rapid organisational growth. The coup also redefined military professionalism because of the consequence of its civilian role expansion. Senior Officers such as Colonels Ilaisa Kacisolomone and Apolosi Biuvakaloloma became interim government Ministers and others later headed government departments.

Most importantly, the 1987 coup left at least two permanent political legacies. First on the part of Fiji Indians, there was bitter opposition to the political order. Secondly, for many indigenous Fijians, military seizure of power had become an accepted avenue of political action for the military to take. This legacy may be said to be reflected in the ethnically skewed 1990 Constitution as sanctioned by the GCC. According to this constitution, the military from time to time had the power (at least co-equal of parliament or the president) to intervene when it chose.

Another significant aspect of the neo-traditional warrior-chief relationship, however, were the ongoing tensions between Mara and Rabuka. The relationship began to sour during the 1990s after Rabuka wrested the position of Presidency of the GCC-sponsored SVT party from Adi Lady Lala Mara, the paramount chief of Burebasaga and wife of President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The fact that the SVT was led by Rabuka rather than Lala Mara shows the commencement of the military supplanting chiefly authority. Arguably Rabuka in leading the SVT was beginning to wean himself off the status quo, and initiate the process of inverting the chiefs' leadership role, much to the indignation of Ratu Mara, the doyen of Fijian politics and elder statesman.



In 1992 Rabuka was selected PM under this racially unbalanced constitution though ironically he needed the Indo-Fijian dominated FLP to form government. Cracks were already appearing in Fijian political unity.<sup>73</sup> Mara thought Rabuka was unworthy of replacing him. Rabuka responded publically by likening Ratu Mara to a Banyan tree as “nothing grew underneath it.” The 1997 racially inclusive constitution crafted by Rabuka and Jai Ram Reddy, the Opposition Leader, led to both leaders’ undoing in the 1999 elections. This allowed the FLP Coalition led by Mahendra Chaudhry into power under the new alternative vote system.

### **The 2000 Coup**

The May 2000 coup differed in many ways from the May 1987 coup. Although the RFMF ultimately arrested and imprisoned the coup leader, George Speight, there was little sympathy for the ousted government of Mahendra Chaudhry, the country’s first ever Prime Minister of Indian descent. Most importantly, the military did not back the insurrection and was divided, though not along the provincial lines identified by some commentators.<sup>74</sup> The schisms were regional, and reflected a split within and outside the army. Support for the George Speight coup came particularly from soldiers and villagers from the island of Vanua Levu and dissidents from Naitasiri, Ra, Northern Tailevu and other provinces with strong links to the Bau chiefs and the Kubuna and Tovata confederacy. So was this coup driven by the desire to protect the ascendancy of ethnic Fijian chiefs and keep the minority Fiji Indians out of power?

The military responded in an ambivalent manner to George Speight’s coup. Certainly after the hostage taking, military rations were supplied to the CRW hostage takers and personnel were rotated in ‘protecting the hostages’. The common refrain ‘we support the goals (of George Speight’s coup) but not the method’ was echoed not only by many indigenous politicians but also by the RFMF senior command.<sup>75</sup>

While many soldiers and senior commanders backed the overthrow of Chaudhry’s government, the core leadership was not prepared to support George Speight who was seen as a front man. During the prime ministership of Rabuka, a section of the ethnic Fijian middle class and their associates within the Fijian

chiefly class had benefited. Speight was seen by the military to represent these interests.

Furthermore Bainimarama's suspension of the President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara debunked the belief that the military was always to be subservient to chiefs. As later recalled by Mara of the military, "I thought they know that I was the Commander in Chief... and they should behave; know how to behave to the Commander in Chief."<sup>76</sup>

The entire political crisis of 2000, especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000 mutiny, was the turning point in the warrior-chief relationship. It was the parting of the ways of *Vanua* politics and military professionalism that led to a nuanced political mediator role. What had caused it? In the 1990s a transformation towards apolitical thinking was happening within the military with the re-professionalization training of officers. The 2000 coup, however, was also the advent of the military's perception of itself as playing a 'guardian' role, both against Speight and his traditional-nationalist supporters and as regards placing Laisenia Qarase's SDL party in power. Speight as *Bati* and *vasu* had strong maternal links to Bau and the Kubuna confederacy. This was signified by his choice of Bau chief, Ratu Jope Seniloli as then interim vice President through the backing of the former Vunivalu's *Mataweilagi* household, and his demand that Adi Samanunu be made prime minister.

To recall the Machiavellian aspect of Fijian neo-traditional politics and its persistence in modern times, we should note that in 2001 the *Ratu mai Verata* and Kubuna high chief, Ratu Ilisoni Ravoka, publically berated his fellow chiefs for the first time in GCC history. His criticisms came during the all-important GCC meeting to ratify the Supreme Court ruling that the 1997 Constitution remained the ultimate law of the land.<sup>77</sup> Ratu Ilisoni's tongue lashing was obviously directed at the power play between chiefly groupings. One group was headed by Adi Litia Cakobau and her Kubuna backers on the side of Speight against Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as the interim government's Minister of Fijian Affairs and the Military. The old Verata-Bau traditional grievance was also at play here.<sup>78</sup> In Fijian history, Verata was the ancient kingdom vanquished by the upstart Bauan kingdom ruled by the Vunivalu Tui Kaba clan. The progenitor of

Bau's sacred king Vueti of the Roko Tui Bau also was a direct descendant of the Ratu mai Verata. Vueti's descendants Ratu Raiwalui and Ratu Ravulo were overthrown by Tanoa and his son Ratu Cakobau of the Vunivalu Tui Kaba clan. In the twist of neo-traditional politics Ratu Ilisoni was a close mentor to Commodore Bainimarama whose Nayatena clan of Kiuva Bau were subject to the Rokotui Bau and the Ratu mai Verata.<sup>79</sup> Macnaught who wrote on Fijian neotraditional politics explained, "Fijian politics is indeed a familial microcosm of historical grievances".<sup>80</sup>

Bainimarama and the military elite are fully aware of the nexus between modern Fijian politics and chiefly rivalry in especially the clans of the paramount chiefs of the three confederacies and are skilled at manipulating these differences. Pioneering Methodist missionary Reverend John Hunt is even more colourful in his description, "Fijian politics is as mysterious as the black art and indeed bears some resemblance to it."<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps 1840 US Exploring Expedition linguist Horatio Hales's summary of the Fijian attainments in politics that he found is apposite:

To stir up one clan in society against another, in order to take advantage of their dissensions, to make an advantageous treaty with a powerful foe, by sacrificing a weak ally, to corrupt the fidelity of adherents, by bribing them with the anticipated spoil of their own mother, to gain a battle before it is fought by tampering with leaders of the opposing force. All these and many more other tricks of the Machiavellian School they are perfectly familiar with.<sup>82</sup>

The Bauan chiefs throughout the nineteenth century at least were infamous throughout Fiji and especially amongst the *Kai Colos* as practitioners and masters of this 'black art' named *vere vaka Bau*- politics Bauan style. Bauan distrust was captured by an eye-witness account of Cakobau's Christianization war campaign in the Ba highlands as reported in *The Fiji Times* of 23 July 1870:

The mountaineers from Navosa came down to Nalotu, an inland district, hitherto subject to Ba and the advanced fortress, or Bai-ni-mua of the Ba people. They put up a war fence, and then Wawabalavu, the Navosa chief, called out and said, 'You Nalotu people, I am Wawabalavu. It was I who ate Mr Baker, and the Bau men. Do you trust the Lasakau men (fishermen and sea warriors of Bau)? Don't, their trade is fishing.'<sup>83</sup>

In the 2000 Speight Crisis, it was known that the military had used the high chief Ratu Ilisoni as mouthpiece in formally voicing a change in the reverent attitude towards the chiefly institution. Jon Fraenkel also discussed the opposing forces of Fiji's neo-traditional politics during Speight's putsch.<sup>84</sup> This indigenous dimension has been identified as underpinning much of modern politics.

In 2000 the military stabilized the security threat as posed by Speight and his supporters. Commodore Bainimarama and the military council during its 37 day rule isolated Speight and his supporters, removed President Ratu Mara from office, and formulated an indigenous affirmative action policy before handing over to the military installed Laisenia Qarase interim civilian government in July 2000.<sup>85</sup> Bainimarama however had tasted absolute power – ominously- the precursor of things to come for the nation. The 2000 coup proved the turning point in the military guardian role as Bainimarama and the military became antagonistic to a nationalist government they saw as being influenced by chiefly and nationalist political agendas. The military's public criticism of government policies continued even to the overt stage of launching a 'truth and justice campaign' against government prior to the 2006 elections which Qarase's SDL party won with a clear majority.

### **The 2006 Coup**

Fiji's third coup, in 2006, was a fully-fledged military coup.<sup>86</sup> The stated aim of such a coup is usually improving public order and efficiency, and ending corruption. Unlike 1987 and 2000, however, it was not an attempt to dislodge a largely Indian-backed government. According to Commodore Bainimarama, it was a clean-up campaign against systemic corruption propagated by a nationalist, mainly ethnic Fijian, government. The 2006 takeover was legally justified under the doctrine of necessity and the 1990 Constitution's clause that was claimed to have been imported into the amended Section 112 of the 1997 Constitution.

Before the 2006 coup, Bainimarama rejected the GCC's call to the military for a delegation of chiefs to mediate and solve the impasse with the Qarase government. In defiance of the chiefs Bainimarama uttered the now infamous

phrase, 'they (Chiefs) should go and drink homebrew under a mango tree.' This was the height of insolence in traditional Fijian society. In April 2007, the GCC along with its chairman Ratu Ovini Bokini was suspended by the military regime after the chiefs passed a resolution upholding the 1997 Constitution and to the displeasure of Bainimarama failed to ratify Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as vice president, the military regime's nominee for the post. With the deposed Qarase government's symbol of chiefly rule, the newly built \$40 million GCC secretariat building complex completed, Bainimarama converted the premises into a general meeting hall for government functions to further rile the suspended chiefly council.

There is also the nexus between the role of the chiefs, the Methodist church and the military in politics. The unity of the Vanua (chief and people), *Lotu* (the Christian religion) and the *Matanitu* (the Fijian administration), took on an almost Trinitarian solemnity in the inner life of Fijians. The text "Fear God, honour the king" (1 Peter 2.1) has become part of the heraldic apparatus of Fiji; it stands for a freely honoured union of chiefs and people within the Christian faith.<sup>87</sup>

The political and social linkages between the three institutions are very much part of the neo-traditional political orthodoxy. The Methodist church was influential in the forming of the Fijian orthodoxy in the mid-nineteenth century and is now seen as a hybridized Fijian institution. After the 1987 coup a confidential military officers' report was presented to the President and Prime Minister which called for a Christian state echoing past Fijian political sentiments of the 1960s.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, there was a definite link between coup leader and lay pastor Rabuka and certain influential church men before the military takeover in 1987. Similarly George Speight and Sergeant Bill Tikotani, the two main instigators of the 2000 coup, were Seventh day Adventists who had formed a strong bond at church.<sup>89</sup> The linkages between the Vanua, Lotu and the Matanitu will be discussed in Chapter three.

## **Conclusion**

The Sacred King-Warrior Chief thesis posits that a political strategic culture links the past to the present in explaining Fiji's coups. The usurpation of power

has been the story of Fijian mythology that stretches back to Nakauvadra and the rise of the prominent Bauan traditional hegemony with the inversion of the status and authority of the Roko Tui Bau by the Vunivalu. In that light, the 1987 coup was, in part, an attempt to restore the power and authority of the old chiefly-dominated Fijian order. But the trigger of the coups, the iTaukei Movement, represented a new kind of urban mass-based politics of non-chiefly Fijians which also represented a challenge to the primacy of the chiefs, even though its self-declared aims were to defend traditional structures. The coups were led not by a chief, but by a commoner who had an uneasy relationship with the traditional power-brokers of Fijian politics. In fact, Rabuka's second coup of 1987 was a strike against a compromise formulated by the traditional Fijian leadership.

In 2000 the military had increasingly assumed a 'guardian role' and came to see itself as protecting the nation from Speight's ethno nationalism. When the Qarase-led government was installed, his 'mandate' was deemed to be the military's as Qarase was part of the Fijian technocratic elite which Bainimarama often has reiterated 'was to do what it was told to do'. This thinking somewhat resurrects Rabuka's military imposed conditions when handing back government to Ratu Mara in December 1987. This included regular consultations with senior army officers on government policy, and the exclusion of the Fiji Labour Party/NFP coalition members from Cabinet.<sup>90</sup>

In the 2006 coup the military filled the void left by the decline of the paramount chiefs. The military in many ways has seemingly reproduced the long lost order and discipline of Fijian village life, which has been heavily eroded by urbanization and other pressures. Over the last decade the military has publically challenged and inverted the neo-traditional order of the prominent paramount chiefs of the three confederacies at the apex of political power. In a sense Bainimarama in emasculating the GCC is superimposing a fourth confederacy of its own with the military as a national constituent sitting above traditional Vanua politics. By 2006 the military senior command had created a public standoff against the paramount chiefs. A puppet president was retained as a figurehead and a few officers close to the old chiefly order supported Bainimarama obviously hoping for better days ahead. The tensions have continued as Bainimarama struggles to consolidate his power.

By March 2012, Bainimarama through his pliant President Nailatikau finally decreed the abolition of the GCC as an institution. The main reason, Commodore Bainimarama said, “was over the last 20 years, the GCC including its secretariat became highly politicised with its members having political affiliation and membership in political parties”.<sup>91</sup>

In a show of solidarity, Reverend Tevita Nawadra, the Methodist Church general secretary issued a statement decrying the decision adding that the church stood by the GCC and that national consultation should have been held before it was abolished. The statement was made after Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama announced a new body would be appointed to replace it. Nawadra said:

The Great Council of Chiefs has stood the test of time and it was something that all Fijians looked to with respect. Ideally, the views of the people should have been taken into account instead of just making the decision without consultation<sup>92</sup>

The nexus between the Methodist Church and traditional politics has existed since the dawn of Christianity in Fiji when missionaries such as Williams, Waterhouse and Langham made themselves the instruments of political reform. Bainimarama keeps a close watch on the links of the church and traditional leaders especially the three paramount chiefs and the church through his military intelligence and the military chaplaincy network.

Given Prime Minister and Commander of the military Commodore Bainimarama’s relationships with Ratu Josefa Iloilo and now with the incumbent Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as President and Commander-in-Chief, in many ways he behaves like a high chief, mimicking the warrior chief to the sacred king relationship of old. However, with Government’s Draft Constitution released in April 2013, which states that the Prime Minister will also be the Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, power is inverted and monopolized by Bainimarama as Prime Minister and Commander of the military.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Samuel Fitch, *The Military Coup d'État as a Political Process*, John Hopkins University, 1977, p.11.
- <sup>2</sup> Discussions with Prof Brij Lal, 3 Jul 2012 at ANU.
- <sup>3</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa*, University of Chicago, 2004, p.57.
- <sup>4</sup> Arthur Capell, "Local Divisions and Movement in Fiji", *Oceania*, XI, 4, Jun 1941: 327.
- <sup>5</sup> Basil Thomson, *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*, W. Heinemann, London, 1908, p.366.
- <sup>6</sup> A B Brewster, *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*, 1922, Seeley, Service & Co. London, pp.226-227.
- <sup>7</sup> Arthur Hocart, *The Northern States of Fiji*, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London, 1952. p.26.
- <sup>8</sup> Marshall Sahlins, , *Apologies to Thucydides*, p.65. The first transformation of the Bau Kingdom was the reliance on its chiefs on sea power rather than land power.
- <sup>9</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides* , pp.64-65. The first great transformation was that the Kings of Bau based their rule not on native cultivators but on native sailors as in political strategies not on the land but on the sea.
- <sup>10</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides* , p.67.
- <sup>11</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History*, Allen and Unwin, Australia, 1984, p.5.
- <sup>12</sup> Rev J Waterhouse, *King and people of Fiji*, Hayman Brothers Printers, London, 1866,p.95.
- <sup>13</sup> Martha Kaplan, *Neither Cargo nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji*, Duke University Press, 1995, pp.100-104.
- <sup>14</sup> Martha Kaplan, *Neither Cargo nor Cult*, p.102.
- <sup>15</sup> According to Prof Paul Gerahty the now commonly used word *vuaviri* as the Fijian word for 'coup' was an invention of FBC's Fijian Radio Announcer, Masimeke Latianara on 14 May 1987 in describing Rabuka's coup. Conversation with author 12 Feb 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> According to Fergus Clunie in *Domodomo* , there was another older Bauan chief also named Ca Kobau. Clunie claims that Ratu Seru may have been named after this Bauan chief as a *ravu* name.
- <sup>17</sup> Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Come To Power: The political economy in Pre-history*, Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 8.
- <sup>18</sup> Earle, *How Chiefs Come To Power*, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>19</sup> Earle, *How Chiefs Come To Power*, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>20</sup> Earle, *How Chiefs Come To Power* pp. 14-15.



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- <sup>21</sup> R. Ewins, *Changing Their Minds: Tradition and Politics in Contemporary Fiji and Tonga*, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, Canterbury University, 1998, pp.39-90.
- <sup>22</sup> R Handler and J Linnekin, 'Tradition, Genuine or Spurious', *Journal of American Folklore*, 97, 385, 1984: 276.
- <sup>23</sup> Inglehart R and Baker W.E, 'Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values', *American Sociological Review*, 65, 1, 2000: 19.
- <sup>24</sup> See Peter France, *The Charter of the Land*, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp102-128.
- <sup>25</sup> Peter France, *The Charter of the Land*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p.106.
- <sup>26</sup> Colin Newbury, 'Chieftaincy in Transition: Secularization and Tribute in Pre-Cession Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History*, 43, 2, 2008: 167.
- <sup>27</sup> Peter France, *The Charter of the Land*, pp. 102-106.
- <sup>28</sup> Timothy J Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience : A study of the neotraditional order under British Colonial Rule prior to World War II*, ANU, 1982.
- <sup>29</sup> A B Brewster, *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*, p.144.
- <sup>30</sup> A.B. Brewster, *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*, p.141.
- <sup>31</sup> Capt John E Erskine RN , *Journal of a Cruise among the Islands of the Western Pacific*, John Murray Pub, London, 1853, p.214.
- <sup>32</sup> Map taken from *Fiji Methodist Centenary Souvenir, 1835-1935*, Green Press Ltd Sydney NSW, 1935.
- <sup>33</sup> A.B. Brewster, *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*, p.141.
- <sup>34</sup> Brij Lal, *Fiji: British Document on the End of Empire Project Vol. 10*, The Stationery Office, University of London, 2006.p.lv. The *Wakaya Letter*, popularly known after the island on which it was formulated, captured the various strands of Fijian political thinking signed by all the members of the Fijian Affairs Board including high chiefs Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu George Cakobau. Other signatories were; A C Reid and R M Major, both senior civil servants, and J N Falvey, European member of the Legislative Council. The letter wanted the 'spirit and substance' of the Deed of Cession strengthened, links between Fiji and the United Kingdom preserved, along the lines enjoyed by the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, Fijian land rights secured, Fiji to be declared a Christian state, and the policy of racial parity in the civil service enforced.
- <sup>35</sup> Image from *Fiji Methodist Centenary Souvenir, 1835-1935*, Green Press Ltd Sydney NSW, 1935, 'High Chiefs of Fiji', p.43.
- 1-6 left to right, front row: 1. Ratu Luke Tabualovoni, Buli Wainunu, Bua; 2. Ratu Kinijoji Katonivere, Rokatui Macuata; 3. Ratu Tevita Suraki, Rokatui Ra; 4. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Rokatui Tailevu ; 5. Ratu Marika Toroca, Rokatui Lomaiviti; 6. Ratu Nemani Driu, Rokatui Ba kei Yasawa.
- 7-13 left to right, back row: 7. Buli from Colo East Ratu Isikeli Davetanivalu; 8. Ratu Peni Tanoa, Rokatui Naitasiri; 9. Buli from Colo West, Tui Noikoro Ratu Katonisau ; 10. Ratu Luke Nakulanikoro, Rokatui Nadroga; 11. Ratu Sairusi Dula Rokatui Kadavu; 12. Ratu Timoci Tavanavanua, Rokatui Rewa; 13. Ro Matanitobua, Rokatui Namosi.

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## Notes

<sup>36</sup> The Western Province of Ba is divided between Kubuna and Burebasaga Confederacies as approximately shown on Map 1.

<sup>37</sup> Tevita Baleiwaqa ‘*Rerevaka Na Kalou Ka Doka Na Tui: Fear God and Honour the King: the influence of the Wesleyan Methodists on the Institution of Fijian Identity*’, PhD Thesis, ANU, 2003

<sup>38</sup> George C Henderson, *Fiji and the Fijians-1835-1856*, Angus and Robertson, 1931.

<sup>39</sup> According to annual conferences reports since 1838, Methodists were codifying church circuits along chiefly rule boundaries.

<sup>40</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, Verso, 1991, p.224.

<sup>41</sup> *Radio New Zealand International*, ‘New Zealand Methodists details hardship imposed by regime on Fiji church’, 30 Jul 2012.

<sup>42</sup> R L Carneiro, ‘The Chieftdom: Precursor of the State’ in. G D Jones and R R Kautz, eds, *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 37–79.

<sup>43</sup> Asesela Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1974, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> Rev J Waterhouse, *King and people of Fiji*, Hayman Brothers Printers, London, 1866, pp.160-161 and D Routledge, *Matanitu: The Struggle for Power in Early Fiji*, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985, p.50.

<sup>45</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other way*, p.63.

<sup>46</sup> See Rev J Waterhouse, *King and people of Fiji*, pp.147-151 and D Routledge, *Matanitu: The Struggle for Power in Early Fiji*, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985, p.68.

<sup>47</sup> Deryck Scarr, *I the Very Bayonet: a Life of Sir John Bates Thurston*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1973, 1971, pp.76-78.

<sup>48</sup> Wallace Deane Rev, *Fijian Society; or the Sociology and Psychology of the Fijians*, McMillan and Co, Toronto, 1916, p74.

<sup>49</sup> S.B. Brown, *History of the Fiji Police*, Pub. Fiji Police Force, 1998, p.xi.

<sup>50</sup> S.B. Brown *History of the Fiji Police*, p.13.

<sup>51</sup> S.B. Brown, *History of the Fiji Police*, p.xiii.

<sup>52</sup> S.B. Brown, *History of the Fiji Police*, pp.9-10.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji*, Hawaii University Press, 2011, p.94.

<sup>54</sup> “*E na sega ni kilai o Viti e vuravura me yacova ni sa dave na noda dra !*” see Tevita Nawadra, *Ai Matai, Malaya*, Fiji Govt Printing Press, 1995, p.1.

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- <sup>55</sup> Eric Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments*, Prentice Hall 1977, pp.11-13 and Yaw Saffu, 'Changing Civil- Military Relations in Fiji', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 44, 2, 1990, p. 159.
- <sup>56</sup> The leading chiefs in the Alliance government included the Vunivalu of Bau Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Edward Cakobau, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Kamisese Mara. In the senate were Ratu Jone Mataitini, Vunivalu of Rewa and Ratu Glanville Lalabalavu of the Tui Cakau, Cakaudrove.
- <sup>57</sup> 36th Parallel.com, 'Fiji's Military Regime Deploys More Personnel To UN Ops Than Australia, Canada, New Zealand Combined', 13 Jul 2012, See \\capstore01\users\redirections\u4726562\My Documents\Fiji's Military Regime Deploys More Personnel To UN Ops Than Australia, Canada, New Zealand Combined « 36th Parallel Assessments Ltd (NZ).mht (accessed 18 Jul 2012)
- <sup>58</sup> *Scoop News*, 'Govt To Continue To Seek UN/Fiji Peacekeeper Ban', Monday, 21 May 2007.
- <sup>59</sup> *Scoop News*, 'Govt To Continue To Seek UN/Fiji Peacekeeper Ban', Monday, 21 May 2007.
- <sup>60</sup> NFP Opposition Leader Jai Ram Reddy's assertion to Brij Lal as revealed to author on 23 Nov 2009.
- <sup>61</sup> Commander RFMF Military and Police Joint Passing Out Parade Speech, Albert Park, Suva, 26 Jun 2009.
- <sup>62</sup> *The Man in the Middle*, United Nations, Department of Public Information Audio/Visual Promotion and Distribution Unit United Nations, NY 10017,1982. <http://peacemedia.usip.org/resource/man-middle>
- <sup>63</sup> Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*, p.259.
- <sup>64</sup> Ramesh Thakur, 'Ministate and Macrocooperation: Fiji's peacekeeping debut in Lebanon', *Review of International Studies*, 10, 1984: 276.
- <sup>65</sup> 36th Parallel.com, 'Fiji's Military Regime Deploys More Personnel To UN Ops Than Australia, Canada, New Zealand Combined', 13 Jul 2012, See \\capstore01\users\redirections\u4726562\My Documents\Fiji's Military Regime Deploys More Personnel To UN Ops Than Australia, Canada, New Zealand Combined « 36th Parallel Assessments Ltd (NZ).mht (accessed 18 Jul 2012)
- <sup>66</sup> Subash Appana, 'Traditional Leadership at the Crossroads: The Fijian Chiefly System', MPA, USP, 2005.
- <sup>67</sup> Brij Lal, ed, *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B Vol 10, Fiji*, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 2006, p.141.
- <sup>68</sup> Brij Lal Ed, *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B Vol 10, Fiji*, p.352.
- <sup>69</sup> Colin Newbury, 'History, Hermeneutics and Fijian Ethnic 'Paramountcy'', *The Journal Of Pacific History*,46, 1, 2011: 49.
- <sup>70</sup> According to the 1986 census, Indo-Fijians made up 49% to 43% Fijians of total population.
- <sup>71</sup> Jon Fraenkel, Stewart Firth & Brij V Lal, *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji: A Coup to End All Coups?* ANU E Press, 2009, p119.
- <sup>72</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: The Politics of Illusion, the Military Coups in Fiji*, NSW University Press, 1988, p.10.

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<sup>73</sup> See Rabuka's letter to FLP in Brij Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*, ANU E press, 2006, p.97.

<sup>74</sup> See Brij Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*, ANU E press, 2006, pp185-188.

<sup>75</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Taukei vow to remove PM', "Civil protests by the Taukei will continue until the Chaudhry government and the 1997 Constitution are removed", a joint statement by Fijian parties said yesterday, Fri 19 May.

<sup>76</sup> Ratu Mara interview with Richard Broadbridge on *Fiji TV One Close Up Programme*, 29 April 2001.

<sup>77</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Chief Lashes Out At Council', Fri, 09 Mar 2001.

<sup>78</sup> See Timothy J Macnaught, *A study of the neotraditional order under British Colonial Rule prior to World War II*, ANU press, 1982, p.71-74.

<sup>79</sup> Ratu Ilisoni was a former Fiji Navy rating and held title of *Ratu Mai Verata* high chief of the Fiji wide *Vusaratu* clan to which Bainimarama of Kiuva village, Bau, Tailevu owes traditional allegiance.

<sup>80</sup> Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, pp.49-63.

<sup>81</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, 2004, p.213.

<sup>82</sup> Horatio Hales, *Wilkes US Exploring Expedition of the Pacific*, Smithsonian, 1838-1842.

<sup>83</sup> Gravelle, K. 1988. *Fiji's Times: A History of Fiji*, Published by The Fiji Times, p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> Jon Fraenkel, 'The Clash of Dynasties and the Rise of Demagogues: Fiji's *Tauri Vakaukauwa* of May 2000', *Journal of Pacific History*, 35, 3, 2000: 295-308.

<sup>85</sup> See, *Fiji Times* 05 Jul 2000. 'Fijians rights first: PM'- The compact in the 1997 Constitution will be used as a framework to promote the interests of the Fijian community, interim civilian PM Laisenia Qarase said yesterday'.

<sup>86</sup> Compared to the 1987 and 2000 coups, the 2006 coup conformed to what Huntington termed a guardian coup in that it was led by the head of the military.

<sup>87</sup> John Garrett *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982, p.114.

<sup>88</sup> Yaw Saffu, 'Changing Civil Military Relations in Fiji': 166.

<sup>89</sup> See RFMF Board Of Investigation Report 08 Aug 2000 into 2000 coup (Evans Report), p 15.

<sup>90</sup> Yaw Saffu, 'Changing Civil Military Relations in Fiji': 164.

<sup>91</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'No more GCC', 15 Mar 2012.

<sup>92</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Padres stand by the chiefs', 16 Mar 2012.

## Chapter 2

### **‘Aren’t Politics and Security Tied?’ The Role of the Military in Post-Colonial Fiji**

#### **Introduction**

The military which was established as a colonial force to pacify belligerent hill tribes has expanded its defence core role to include governing the country. Since the first 1987 coup, two more democratically elected governments have been toppled with the involvement of the military. Moreover, the military now sees itself continuing in a ‘human security’ role.<sup>1</sup> In 2003, Military Commander Commodore Bainimarama had signaled a change in military thinking by stating:

Aren’t politics and security tied? Aren't they interwoven? We are of the view that if we stay away from politics ...the people who have the 'mandate' to lead and who have a private agenda because of the events of 2000, will do what they want, and who is going to stop them?<sup>2</sup>

Why has the Fiji Military developed such a political role? As discussed in the last chapter and indicated by this quotation, ‘revulsion against civilian incompetence and corruption’ has often been drawn upon to justify military intervention. The Fiji military’s relationship with the past political elite, however, was circumspect. Underpinned by the traditional chief-warrior relationship, the military was the instrument of coercion for colonial autocratic rule and capital. After independence the patron-client relationship continued with the military ensuring the political hegemony of the chiefly elite. In the last decade the military has become an all-pervasive institution of politics for the small Pacific island nation. The transformation of civil-military relations was affirmed by the Bainimarama coup of 2006.

This Chapter examines the origins of power inversion in Fiji’s pre-historic past that is argued to be the persistence of tradition interwoven in the chief-warrior or *Turaga-Bati* relationship. It then focuses on the roles of the Fiji military from its colonial internal security origins to the present ‘human security’ dimension. It examines the neo-traditional chief-warrior martial relationship, which was

embraced and used by the colonial administration. As a result of participation in World War II, Fijians gained a sense of national confidence and became politically conscious as a group. We examine the expansion of the military post-Independence assisted by an Alliance government policy of nation building and United Nations Peacekeeping. We also discuss the attempts by governments to articulate security and defence policies. We then examine the military's role in post- independence ethnic politics.

### **Fijian Pre-History**

Reverend Thomas Williams's classic *Fiji and the Fijians* still provides the best single insight into pre-contact Fijian life, politics and war in Eastern Fiji.<sup>3</sup> Julie Field in more recent archaeological research in Western Fiji found that:

In terms of Fijian prehistory, the results uphold the conclusion made by early anthropologists that the 'patchwork' quality of Fijian patrilineal descent groups is a product of centuries of fission, migration and alliance, and that fortifications and competition were essential elements of prehistoric society.<sup>4</sup>

Fiji was divided into a number of warring chiefdoms when Europeans first saw it and the cockpit of Fijian politics lay in the three competing chiefdoms of Verata, Bau and Rewa along the coast of eastern Viti Levu, which saw the greatest struggle of the nineteenth century. The most significant of these struggles was the twelve-year war between the chiefdoms of Bau and Rewa from 1843-1855. The rise of the political hegemony of Bau in the mid-nineteenth century within Fiji's archipelagic islands hence became central to the works of explorers such as Commodore Charles Wilkes and Captain John Erskine and missionaries. Bau is a small island, only about 20 acres in extent, and outsiders found its centrality in Fijian affairs a mystery. It was through the traditional *vanua qali* and *vanua veibatiki* systems, one of tribute and obligation which gave wealth and power to the chiefs of Bau<sup>5</sup>. Further, Sahlins made the crucial observation that, "The kings of Bau based their rule not on native cultivators but on native sailors and fishers-which is to say in Fijian categories, as in political strategies, not on the land but on the sea."<sup>6</sup> Sahlins's assertion resonates with geostrategist Alfred Mahan's concept of "sea power" which was based on the idea that countries with greater naval power will have greater worldwide impact.<sup>7</sup> This was the great political transformation that catapulted Bau to power over other pre-colonial kingdoms.

The second great transformation of the traditional polity in Bau according to Sahlins “was the inversion of the diarchy, the overthrow of the sacred kings (*Roko Tui Bau*) by the war kings (*Vunivalu*), who thus became all but in ritual respect, the supreme power.”<sup>8</sup> It is argued that the persistence of tradition in Fiji’s modern politics is manifested with a similar inversion by the military of the ruling elite. In pre-historic Bau, and similar to other tribal kingdoms such as Rewa, the hierarchical nature of Fijian traditional society where political power resided at the apex with the king or Roko Tui who was deemed sacred. The Bauan title holder was also the leading chief from the *Vusaratu* clan and apparently referred to by some in the 1830s as ‘the old Governor’.<sup>9</sup> Next to him, was his war lord, the *Vunivalu* in the chiefly traditional diarchy. The *Vunivalu ni Bau* title loosely translated means *Warlord of Bau* or Root of War. The title holder was also the leading chief of the *Tui Kaba* clan. The title was considered subordinate to the *Roko Tui Bau* or sacred king of Bau. The main point is that, by the 1830s, the war lords governed Bau. This inversion of the diarchy which destabilized and transformed the Bauan polity in the Bau kingdom according to Sahlins might even date to the late eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise during Ratu Naulivou Ramatenikutu’s reign (1803 to 1829) as Vunivalu of Bau, probably around 1810, there continued this internal power struggle with the rise of the Tui Kaba Vunivalu as the premiere chief in Bau. This led to the banishment of the sacred king, the Vuaniivi Roko Tui Bau to Vanua Balavu, Lau. The usurpation by the Vunivalu Naulivou and the inversion of the chiefly role led to drawn out internal strife on the island. By the end of Naulivou’s reign, Bau had reached the zenith of its power, considerably aided by the introduction of Western fire arms. Naulivou was succeeded by his brother Ratu Tanoa Visawaqa as Vunivalu. The internal struggle continued during the time of Visawaqa. Riven with tribal schisms, a faction of the Roko Tui Bau and the Tui Kaba then displaced and exiled Visawaqa.

In 1837, Visawaqa’s son, Ratu Seru Cakobau, gained power by subverting the Lasakau people to plot and execute the overthrow of the ruling group, led by Ratu Ravulo Vakayaliyalo of the Roko Tui Bau. Cakobau re-installed Visawaqa as Vunivalu after carrying out reprisals against his father’s enemies. In the ebb

and flow of Bauan pre-historic politics, the support of the warrior clan or *bati*, the Vusaradave and the sea warriors/fishermen of Lasakau, were crucial in the struggle for power. Their manipulation and crafty enlistment however in staging usurpations of the traditional chiefly status quo were common and traditionally known as *suguturaga*. The successful plot by Ratu Seru with the Lasakau clan to reinstall his father is the renowned classic example of *suguturaga* in Fijian history. Ratu Seru was given the *yaca ni ravu*, the valorised warrior name ‘Cakobau’- the destroyer of Bau, signifying his triumph and final inversion of the Roko Tui Bau<sup>11</sup>. Cakobau then installed a chief of his own clan as the Roko Tui Bau. Cakobau eventually succeeded to the title of Vunivalu himself after the death of his father Visawaqa in 1852. He created much of the title’s prestige by also styling himself ‘King of Fiji’ and led the process that culminated in cession of the islands to the United Kingdom in 1874. This thesis argues that the recurring military coups in especially that of 2006 are emblematic of the persistence of tradition, as retold in the specific historic events of the inversion of the traditional chiefly order, by Cakobau and his forbear Naulivou.

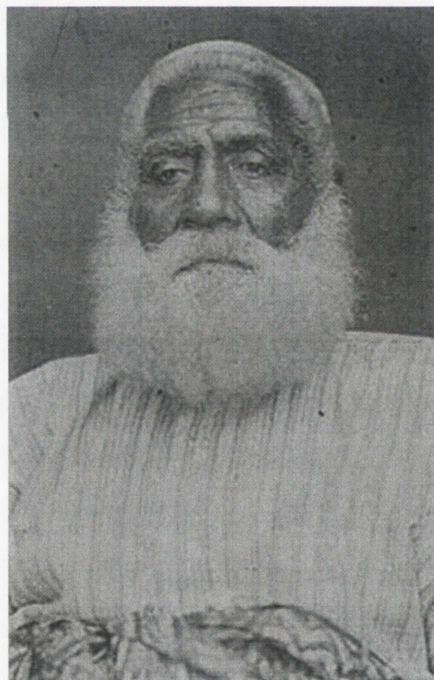


Photo 4. Ratu Seru Apenisa Cakobau Vunivalu of Bau 1852-1883

### **Colonial Rule**

Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874 by its prominent chiefs led by Ratu Seru Cakobau. In return British protection of native land and customary rights was promised. The arrival of the first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, in June of 1875,



just as the Fijians were being decimated by the measles epidemic, gave credence to his implementation of an indigenous protectionist policy.<sup>12</sup> France argued that Gordon's policies were the product of his aristocratic background and social breeding, "He was fully conscious that by nature and nurture, he was providentially ordained to a high role in the expanding empire".<sup>13</sup> France also states, Gordon's policies were also influenced by "an enthusiasm for the emergent science of anthropology and its unilinear evolutionary theories in which he saw parallels in Fijian culture."<sup>14</sup>

Robertson takes a similar view as to why the British government had to initiate such a protection policy given its experiences with the Maoris in Aotearoa as, "sometimes the actions of settlers and business people forced the hand of governments. In 1874 Britain assumed control in Fiji after settlers had so destabilized the country that it feared a repeat of New Zealand's costly land wars."<sup>15</sup>

Gordon went about setting up a Lands Commission to verify all European land alienation and codify all native lands.<sup>16</sup> He also interpreted the Deed of Cession as the charter to his protection policy which carried the provision that, "[T]he rights and interests of the said Tui Viti and other high chiefs the ceding parties hereto shall be recognized as far as is and shall be consistent with British Sovereignty and Colonial forms of government."<sup>17</sup>

The policy of protecting indigenous land, labour and co-opting chiefs into government by way of indirect rule has become the legacy of Governor Gordon. Lal argues this degree of protection of indigenous lands, institutions and customs was unparalleled in the colonial world.<sup>18</sup> Through indirect rule, Gordon formed a workable colonial state government from embryonic pre-colonial states using their chiefs as authority.<sup>19</sup> As stated by Thurston in 1878:

The people are protected by the governing power--petty chiefs are made executive officers in their own towns--superior ones are Magistrates, *Bulis* and *Rokos* and aid in controlling the native population while maintaining their hereditary positions, the character of which alone has changed.<sup>20</sup>

In the formation of a coercive arm of government for the new colony, Cakobau's 'Royal Army' was merged into the Armed Native Constabulary (ANC). Hence the 'character change' alluded to by Thurston was also inherent

in the ANC, the forerunner of Fiji's military establishment. The strategy was consistent with Gordon's benevolent policy. Imported also into the ANC was the traditional chief-warrior ethos of Cakobau's Army. With the cooperation of chiefs, the ANC developed into a formidable force available to the colonial government. Colonial peace however reigned at the turn of the twentieth century, so in 1904 the ANC was amalgamated into the civil police to become the Fiji Constabulary.<sup>21</sup>

## **World War I**

During World War 1, Fiji's British-European subjects despite the 'tyranny of distance' contributed to the Empire's war effort with patriotic zeal. Some 700 of Fiji's male settler residents left for England to join up, mainly with the King's Royal Rifles Regiment. Native Fijian enthusiasm for the war effort though was initially denied. There were legitimate British concerns of further reducing a Fijian population that was still recovering from the measles epidemic.<sup>22</sup> Fijian high chief Ratu Josefa Lalabalavu Sukuna, who had won acclaim with his heroic war service in the French Foreign Legion, in league with the GCC however convinced the Colonial Office to compromise. In 1917 a Fiji Labour Corps company of 100 men including sixteen chiefs left to work on the war docks of Italy and France for the British Imperial Forces. The sacrifices as a whole brought great admiration and respect to the small colony and its Defence Force. As the *Times* noted in June 1918:

To Fiji and other islands in the Western Pacific must always be given a high place in the Empire list of willing helpers, not because their help was important as decisively to affect the issue of war, but because they, the most remote of the British Crown Colonies and Protectorates ... did at least as much as any of the others: which means that they did a great deal more even than those who knew the islands best thought possible. It has not occurred to anyone that the realities of the great issue could have burned so deeply into the hearts of these simple islanders.<sup>23</sup>

After demobilization, military activity was limited to voluntary territorial soldier training followed by annual camps. In January 1920, though, an industrial strike by Indian workers was a factor that provoked government to form a Fiji Defence Force (FDF) for internal security.<sup>24</sup> As will be covered later in this chapter, the labour strikes also stirred up racial tensions between

the Indians and Europeans with the Fijian establishment siding with the latter.

## **World War II**

In 1939 with the outbreak of World War II, given Fiji's central Pacific strategic location between mainland United States and Australia and New Zealand, the FDF came under the military responsibility of New Zealand. In the war effort to stem the advancing Imperial Japanese Army threat in the Pacific, Ratu Sukuna, through the GCC, was again instrumental in recruiting over 7,000 Fijian men into the military. Sukuna was a product and the leading agent of the colonial native orthodoxy. With his exceptional educational background and leadership, the high chief came to epitomize Fijian patriotism. He rallied the people with his recruitment slogan, "Fijians would never be fully recognized until they shed blood for the Empire."<sup>25</sup> This effectively drew thousands of young Fijian men from villages to sign up. Macnaught drew attention to the mutual chief-warrior relationship and how it was strategically used:

In World War II Ratu Sukuna welcomed the opportunity to show off his people's physical prowess, intelligence and loyalty in stemming the Japanese Pacific threat. A tremendous war effort by the Fijians he calculated would achieve several of the goals he had espoused for twenty years: an expanded role for traditional leadership, an appreciation for Fijian cooperation and community and a secure compact with local Europeans to safeguard vital Fijian interests such as Land.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, government policy, backed by the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company, stipulated that Indians who worked the sugar cane fields – the lifeblood of the economy – were reprieved of direct involvement in the war. Although an Indian transport platoon was formed as part of the 2nd Battalion in Lautoka, members were discharged in 1941 for demanding equal pay with European soldiers. There was a socio-political aspect to this demand. With a growing population surpassing Fijians in 1943, an economically astute Indian community had also demanded political equality. Indian labour, in keeping the sugar industry in production during the war years, was however as vital a contribution to the war effort as Fijians were on the battlefields.

In November 1940, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 3rd New Zealand Division of about 3,000 men was dispatched to Fiji. Over the coming months, with the assistance of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces, Fiji's Defence Forces expanded to around

11,000 men. On November 20th 1942 the name changed to Fiji Military Forces (FMF) in recognition of Governor Mitchell's request for Fiji soldiers to fight overseas. The 1st and 2nd Guerrilla Commando units and the 1st and 3rd infantry battalions were henceforth deployed to fight the Japanese in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville.

The social changes effected by the war on the South Pacific islands in general were lasting. For example infrastructure developed as the Nadi and Nausori military airfields were later converted into Fiji's two major airports. The war became a marker of time and a rite of passage for Fijians. Serving shoulder-to-shoulder with Europeans in the war effort raised their self-image and political consciousness. After the war, Sukuna was knighted and elevated to Speaker of the Legislative Council, in acknowledgement of the Fijians war services. Indeed, colonial rule was relished by the Fijian elite.<sup>27</sup> What was also implied was that the interests of the colonial rulers and the chiefs were always to be in convergence, with the military subservient. The chief-warrior nexus affirmed through Sukuna's leadership during the war became the cornerstone upon which Fijian post-World War II political society was built.

The autocratic aspect of colonial government suited the Fijian establishment, who feared decolonization, seeing it as favouring Indian political and economic aspirations and hence destabilizing Fijian society. For the Indians, though, decolonization meant independence and democratic equality. These two divergent views underpinned the Independence debate for the two main races. Between their leaders though, political self-interest gave rise to ethnic stereotyping and myth making as de-colonization became inevitable. The perception of past Indian unpatriotic behaviour during the War was often embellished in countering the Indians' call for common roll elections. This 'past behaviour' coupled with the perception of being a 'non-martial race' discouraged future Indian recruitment into the military.

### **The Malayan Emergency Campaign- Influence on Fijians**

In the years following World War II, Fiji soldiers were again called to arms with volunteers not in short supply. From 1948-57, in what became the Malayan communist emergency campaign, Britain and Commonwealth forces combated

guerrillas led by Chen Peng of the Malayan Communist Party. The 1st Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment arrived in January 1952 and served with distinction till 1956.

The Malayan emergency further exposed Fijians to modern day theatres of conflict. Fijian soldiers became attuned to internal security operations on a national scale. They witnessed firsthand the various workings between the people, the security forces and government agencies that led to a successful political outcome. This insurgency conflict with its ethnic undertones left an indelible mark on Fiji's military institution. Coupled with its recent peacekeeping history, the Malaya campaign imbued confidence in the military to conduct large scale internal security operations post coups, and to adopt a version of Malaysia's concept of Kesban or 'security and development program', in which the Malaysian armed forces played a key role.<sup>28</sup> For most returning soldiers, though, the ethnic issues in the British colony Malaya between the immigrant Chinese and the native Malay resonated to some extent with Fiji. As described by Ratuva:

The Fijians soldiers' version of events as officially indoctrinated to them was simply to 'save' the indigenous Malays (*kai Malaya*) from the evil communists (*komunisi*). In fact the term *komunisi* like Kai Idia (Indian) came to be associated with unscrupulous and arrogant behaviour within the indigenous Fijian society.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, 'Chen Peng' and 'Communist' became household names, albeit derogatory, for Fijians. Further, Fijian provincial camaraderie and the neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship were strengthened through service in the 'Malaya Battalion'. This national bond served the chiefly elite well in the lead up to independence, and was instrumental in the formation of the political Fijian Association, the forerunner of the Alliance Party. Colonel Ratu Edward Cakobau was the President of the Fijian Association. Other former Malaya battalion officers such as Lieutenant Livai Nasilivata, now a teacher in Nadi town, was the Fijian Association branch president in the 1960s.

Further exposures of a predominantly Fijian military to twentieth century military technological advances were to follow. In 1958, the military deployed over 300 troops to Christmas Island as part of the British nuclear testing programme. The Fijian troops were deployed in construction works and naval surveillance, roles that were later adopted in the post-independence military. The military, for this reason, was seen as a modernizing institution by ordinary

Fijians. In 1961 as a direct result of the Fijian Battalion's fine record in Malaya, and because of Fijian communal reforms, 212 youths were recruited into the British Army. Service with the British brought life changing careers for these youths as Fijians started to move from villages to urban centers in search of employment and better life opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

### **Post- Independence Military**

In post-independent Fiji two models characterized civil-military relations – the 'traditional aristocratic' and 'liberal democratic' patterns.<sup>31</sup> In the 'traditional aristocratic' pattern members of the political branch of aristocratic families are accepted as politically legitimate in harmony with the civilian supremacy model.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, inherent in the 'liberal democratic' pattern is the belief that civilian politicians have an electoral mandate to rule. With Ratu Mara's Alliance Party ensconced in power, the liberal democratic and the traditional aristocratic patterns were in union. High chiefs held cabinet posts whilst military officers were drawn from the same Fijian elite. What further consolidated cordial civil-military relations was the chief-warrior neo- traditional relationship between the ruling elite and the military as earlier discussed.

To illustrate the enduring potency of neo-traditional rule, Ratu David Toganivalu, reflecting after independence, said that a benevolent dictator could be appropriate for Fiji. Ratu David further explained that he was alluding to the paternalistic chiefdoms of traditional Fiji.<sup>33</sup> In the transition to independence the Fijian elite who had shared in colonial autocratic rule were wary of liberal democracy, sensing that it would undermine their authority and the Fijian way of life. Moreover the fear that democracy would facilitate Indian domination given that their population numbers by the mid-1960s were in the majority was made prominent by the Fijian elite.

For the time Mara's Alliance Party was in power, 1970-1987, civil-military relations also developed a patron-client dimension added to the fact that successive deputy Prime Ministers, Ratu Edward Cakobau and Ratu Penaia Ganilau, were former Colonels. This close patron-client relationship was influential in the military being given expanded roles, even though for the first nine years after independence Frank Rennie, a New Zealander, and Paul Manueli, a Rotuman and the first local to hold the position, were respectively

Commanders. In 1982 Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the son of former deputy Prime Minister Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau and son-in-law of Ratu Mara, became Commander. This appointment secured the traditional aristocratic aspect of civil-military relations. The move also cemented neo-traditional chief-warrior relations. Fiji's military professionalism was different from the classic professionalism of the British military given this neo-traditional relationship, as Sanday has argued.<sup>34</sup> Military recruitments in the 1970s and 80s continued to reinforce the exclusive nature of the institution with selection overwhelmingly skewed towards ethnic Fijians. Indo-Fijians on the other hand, it was said, did not take to soldiering for historic socio-economic reasons. The Indians of Fiji had developed into an egalitarian social class from a hierarchical caste system.<sup>35</sup> Few Indian martial castes such as Sheikhs and Rajputs where military service was appealing were recruited as *girmitiyas*. In retrospect, however, the failure of the Alliance government to introduce ethnic quotas for military recruitment, given its multi-racial policy stance, entrenched the military as a homogeneous ethnic institution.

Fiji's transition to independence was peaceful and negotiated and did not suffer from decolonisation conflicts. Unlike others, such as the Indonesian military, the Fiji military's *raison d'être* was not determined by external or internal security threats. With government's emphasis on nation building post-Independence, the military was given a lead role. The Alliance government's national development goals in rural areas and maritime surveillance were allotted to the military. The formation of the RFMF's Rural Development and Naval Division Units in 1975 saw regular force numbers increase from 400 to 800.<sup>36</sup> Even today the stated roles of the RFMF remain: 1) Defence of the nation 2) Rural Development 3) Protection of Economic Exclusive Zone and 4) International Peacekeeping.<sup>37</sup>

### **International Peace Keeping**

The adoption of a political mediator role by Rabuka in executing the 1987 coup seemed all too sudden given the Fiji military's much-touted professionalism and apolitical role since Independence. What brought about the change in military mindset? Undertaking a tour of duty in Lebanon mediating and liaising amongst factional leaders such as those of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hezbollah, were all part of a Fijian senior officer's routine. Many of the senior

officers, influenced by their ethnic political loyalties and peacekeeping experiences, approved of the 1987 Rabuka coup. At the strategic level the unintended consequences of Peacekeeping may not have been contemplated thoroughly. Ramesh Thakur first examined Fiji's UN Peacekeeping participation as an instrument of the Alliance government's foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> He analyzed the contributions of mini-states and how Fiji was 'punching above its weight' in international macro-co-operation and creating a niche market for itself. Andrew Scobell later asserted that Fiji's international peacekeeping role was a factor in Rabuka executing the coups of 1987.<sup>39</sup> He emphasized that the threat to the military's corporate interest was a factor that led to Rabuka's coup. Thakur, writing prior to the 1987 coup, saw the positives while Scobell's analysis after Rabuka's coup dwelled on the risks of peacekeeping.

Fiji first sent troops for Peacekeeping with the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1978. For a small and newly independent nation this was a huge international undertaking by any standards. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment was raised with a mix of soldiers from the military's territorial and regular forces. The unit colours that were first proudly flown in the Solomon Islands then Malaya were again overseas-bound for peacekeeping operations in Lebanon. In 1980, a small detachment of soldiers was sent to Rhodesia-Zimbabwe as part of the Commonwealth Monitoring Forces. In 1982, with a growing international peacekeeping reputation, Fiji was invited to participate in the Multinational Forces and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment of 500 soldiers was raised and deployed. By 1985 peacekeeping duties accounted for Fiji's main active duty military role as numbers increased to 2,000 regular force soldiers.<sup>40</sup> By 1986 over 1,100 soldiers, over half the regular forces, were serving in peacekeeping operations in the Middle East. In 1990, military peacekeeping deployments overseas were complemented with the Fiji Police Forces joining UN missions. More overseas engagements were to follow that would portray Fiji as a young and responsible international citizen and provide employment for Fiji's youths. Further contributions were made to missions in Iraq (1990), Kuwait, Pakistan, Rwanda, Namibia, Cambodia, East Timor, Bougainville, the Solomon Islands, Iraq (2004) and Sudan. All this time recruitment heavily favoured Fijians. The huge



ethnic disparity was simply put down to the unappealing nature of soldiering to Indo-Fijians. This heavily skewed ethnic recruitment reinforced a tacit belief within the institution of being the bastion of indigenous political paramountcy. The military's exposure to United Nations peacekeeping in the Middle East heightened the awareness of ethnic and sectarian conflict amongst the ranks. It may be argued that the Military's expanded role in UN peacekeeping was purposely embarked on to reinforce the *Turaga-Bati* political relationship. Robertson and Tamanisau's comments on the political stature of Ratu Mara then may be apt, "To many people Mara was more than the Alliance Party. He was Fiji."<sup>41</sup> Mara's intentions, which aimed at nation building, were deemed noble, echoing Ratu Sukuna's enthusiasm a generation earlier. The recognition for Fiji as a good international citizen given the available resource of a military with prior international engagements was enticing. Mara's deputy, the Minister of Home Affairs, responsible for the military, Ratu Penaia Ganilau needed little persuasion to undertake such a commitment. Mara's decision resonates with Argentina's President Carlos Menem's decision to engage in UN Peacekeeping for, "the low cost opportunity to receive overseas payments and perform a positive military role overseas which converged with foreign policy."<sup>42</sup> The decision later proved to have far reaching stability consequences for the nation.

### **Unintended Consequences of UN Peacekeeping**

The intended outcome of peacekeeping was quite obvious: to provide jobs for youths and uphold basic principles of international conduct as a newly independent nation. Since the first UN peacekeeping mission in Kashmir in 1949, a body of literature has concluded that participation in peace operations is beneficial for military institutions and for civilian control. Recently there has been literature on the unintended consequences of UN peacekeeping on a nation and its military force, although the scope does not include the internal political instability dimension created.<sup>43</sup> Rabuka the coup maker had admitted, "My work as an international peacekeeper reinforced my views about the need for reconciliation when societies and countries are divided."<sup>44</sup>

Deryck Scarr was first to raise the issue that Fiji's UN peacekeeping contributions had considerably raised the country's international profile but had hardly enhanced the army's Westminster brand of professionalism.<sup>45</sup> It is

argued that the expansion of the military's political role since the first coup was underpinned, in several ways, by participation in international peacekeeping missions and that service with UNIFIL Peacekeeping operations established the self-image of Fiji's military elite as political mediators. UNIFIL's mandate as stipulated in UNSC resolution 425 called for the protection of the people of Southern Lebanon from the Israeli Defence Force and various armed elements such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Afwaj Al-Mugamah Al-Lubnaniyya (AMAL) and the more radical Hezbollah. By the time the Battalion had pulled out in 2002, the mediator role forged in Lebanon became engrained in the collective military psyche and memorialized by the deaths of thirty seven Fiji soldiers.

Moreover senior Fijian military officers became attuned to taking on military appointments of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations that was very much in touch with the UN General Assembly and Secretariat. The implication of a 'Lebanon situation' is obvious in Rabuka's coup operational orders (OPORD 1/87). In the conclusion to the OPOORD Rabuka clearly states, "You will see that the sit [sic] Fiji is in is dangerous and will develop into something much worse and resembling Lebanon and other troubled areas of the world".<sup>46</sup>

Again in Rabuka's senior officer's presentation paper on the perceived threats facing Fiji a Middle Eastern scenario was envisaged for Fiji.<sup>47</sup> The deployment of Fijian troops amongst ancient cultural groups in the Middle East conflict gave them a sense of self belief in being part of a complex diplomatic solution on an international stage. Furthermore, being identified with other foreign soldiers engendered a wider sense of corporateness in their profession.<sup>48</sup> Officers who were central to the military's role in coups such as Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987, Filipo Tarakinikini in 2000 and Pita Driti in 2006, were all previous commanders of Fiji's peacekeeping battalion in Lebanon.

## Lebanon Battleground of the Middle East

Lebanon with all its peacekeeping challenges shaped the outlook of the RFMF as an institution comparable to its involvement in the 1950s Malayan anti-communist insurgency campaign. Firth has also made the argument that

Service abroad also accustomed Fijian military officers to the role played by military forces in imposing order, and gave them an understanding of military intervention in civil affairs in other parts of the world. Participation in peacekeeping not only necessitated a much larger Fiji military, it also required a more sophisticated one, whose officers were in a position to work effectively with UN officials, local politicians and other defence forces.<sup>49</sup>

The tragic Qana massacre of Lebanese civilians inside a Fijian UN position during the Israeli Defence Forces Operation *Grapes of Wrath* in 1996 illustrates the point. Unlike the Srebrenica massacre where Dutch peacekeepers bowed to pressure to not shelter Bosnian refugees, Fijians opened their headquarters to shelter fleeing civilians during heavy Israeli shelling of Southern Lebanon. For the Lebanese, the Qana massacre became the tragic symbol of 'national unity' restored, assisted by the humanitarian spirit of the United Nations' Fijian peacekeepers.<sup>50</sup>

Again to illustrate the Fijians' prowess in peacekeeping, during an IDF ground incursion into the neighbouring UN Nepalese battalion's area of operations, an armoured personnel carrier (APC) with a section of Fijian troops was sent as a blocking force. Against a column of Israeli tanks and APCs led by bulldozers, Timur Goskel the UNIFIL spokesman revealed

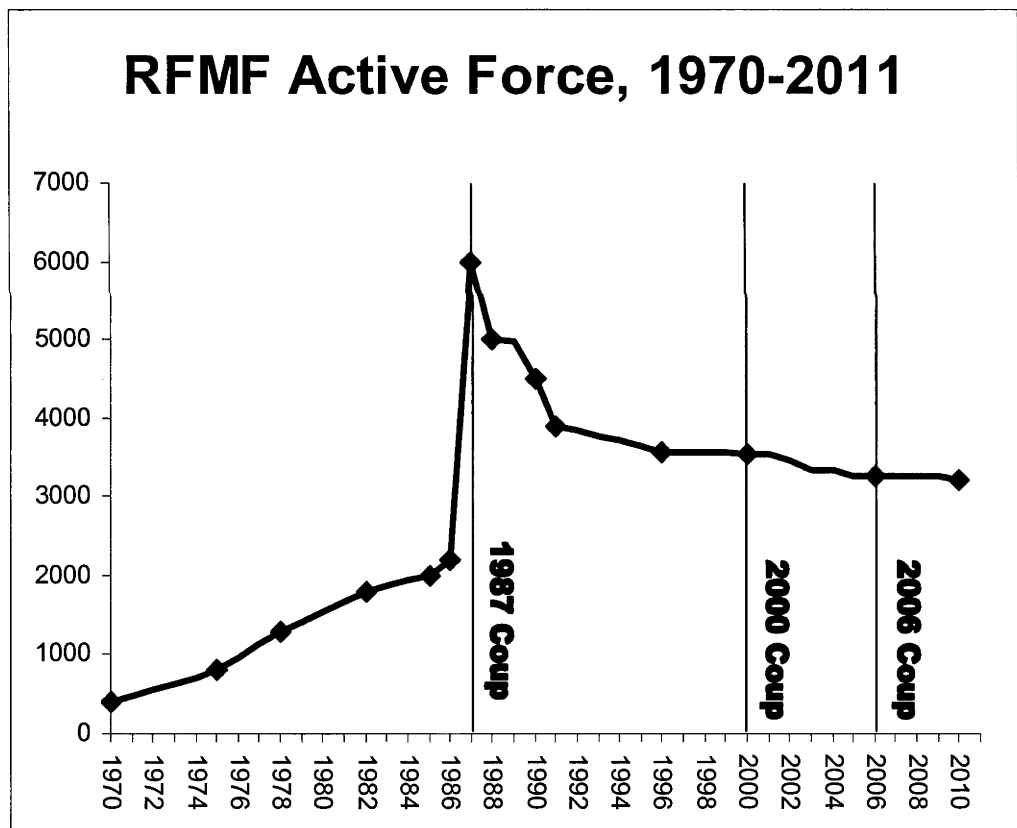
They [IDF] did it by smashing through our vehicles with tanks and bulldozers...there were some fistfights, there were some arguments, and there was some physical pushing back and forth, but nobody used weapons.<sup>51</sup>

Fijian troops serving with the UN have indeed gained a reputation as 'no nonsense' and impartial peacekeepers. Moreover, hailing from a small nation in the South Pacific, isolated from partisan global politics, has reinforced the impartiality image of Fijians, vital to international peacekeeping. A reported incident in 1988 substantiates the point made where a Fijian soldier of the United Nations peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon was wounded in a shootout with Shiite Moslem militiamen. According to U.N. sources

The peacekeeper was shot in the chest during a 20-minute fire-fight with six gunmen of the Syrian-backed Amal militia in Ein Baal, six miles southeast of the southern port

city of Tyre. The sources said the shooting broke out when soldiers manning a Fijian checkpoint in Ein Baal tried to prevent the militiamen from driving their green Volvo station wagon into U.N.-policed territory with their arms. “When the Fijian checkpoint told them they cannot cross, they headed for a dirt road. A Fijian soldier fired a warning shot in the air,” one source said. “The armed elements apparently thought they were under fire, so they shot back and a fire fight ensued in which one armed element also was slightly wounded.”<sup>52</sup>

Peacekeeping as the centerpiece of government foreign policy, then, has spawned political instability because the military capability to intervene in domestic politics became increasingly predicated on numbers swelled by overseas peacekeeping commitments. From a force of 400 at Independence, active duty troop numbers increased to a peak of 6000 by December 1987 as a result of the expanded roles of national development and peacekeeping. Today the Fiji military has strength of 3200 active or regular soldiers and 6000 reservists, or a total of 9200 troops. (See Graph 1)



Graph 1  
2005

DWP 1997 & NSWP

After peacekeeping the further expansion of the military came as a direct result of the 1987 coup. To control the emergency situation, which critics argued had

been created by the military in the first place, the military formed new infantry battalions overnight using reservists and by recruitment drives. The size of the regular force of the military reached 3,600 in December of 1988.<sup>53</sup> An elite counter-revolutionary warfare unit was also formed to protect against anti-government armed insurgency. As a consequence of executing an indigenous supremacist coup, the military appropriated a permanent internal security role. Moreover the defence of the nation role, after the coup of 1987, came to mean internal security rather than external.

By the 1990s, as a result of this rapid expansion, the military had an unwieldy span of command stretching over units nation-wide and overseas. This called for an organisational restructure of the small obsolete colonial garrison-type headquarters. The restructure of RFMF headquarters in 1999 was to have important ramifications for the military's command echelon. Two components were created: a Strategic Command and a Land Forces Command, the latter being more operationally focused as recommended in the 1997 Defence White Paper. The elite counter revolutionary unit of the First Meridian Squadron (1MS) formed by Major General Sitiveni Rabuka still came directly under the command of the Commander RFMF.

Table 1. RFMF Strength Increases since 1970.

	1970	1975	1986-88*	2000
<b>Force Type</b>				
Regular Force	200	800+	2,200~3600	3,545
Territorial	400	400	1,000~- 2,000	3,500
<b>Force/Reserves</b>				
Total	600	1,200	3,600- 5,600	7,045

Source: [www.rfmf.mil.fj](http://www.rfmf.mil.fj) and National Security White Paper 2004, "A safe and prosperous Fiji".

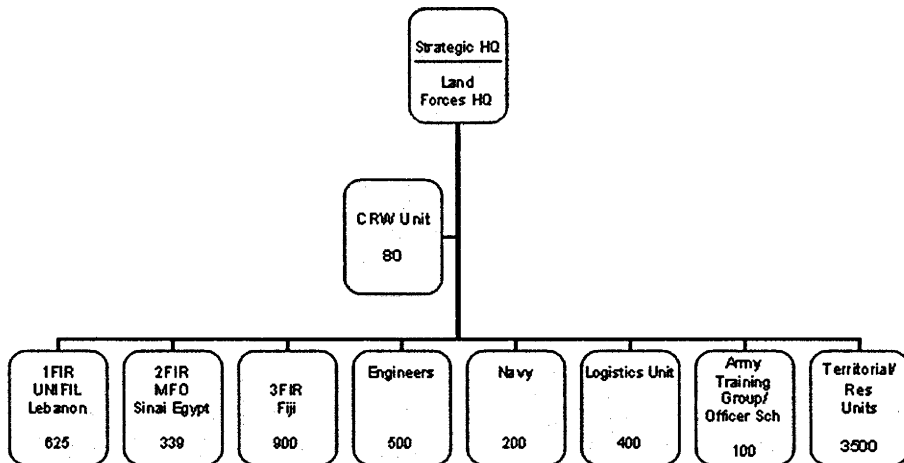
\* Increase due to 1987 Coup

~ Increases due to Peacekeeping UNIFIL and MFO.

+ Increase due to Rural Development /EEZ surveillance.

Diagram 1

## Fiji Military Forces Organization May 2000 (total 7045)



In May of 2000 the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) had an organization as depicted in Diagram 1.<sup>54</sup> Under Land Force Command, the RFMF's units consisted of three infantry battalions and five other units, plus the independent 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron. The First Infantry Battalion of 625, based since 1987 with the United Nations Interim Forces in South Lebanon, (UNIFIL); the Second Infantry Battalion of 339 serving since 1982 with the multi-national forces and observers (MFO) in Sinai, Egypt; and the Third Infantry Battalion, activated after the 1987 coup and based at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Suva with over 900 troops serving with companies in Nadi, Lautoka and Labasa. The Engineers Regiment, with 500 men formed in 1975, was also based at the Queen Elizabeth lower camp. Also formed in 1975 was the RFMF Naval Division with an establishment of 200 men. The Navy's patrol surveillance fleet consists of 3 Australian Pacific class patrol boats and 2 US off shore patrol vessels, which are stationed at the main Stanley Brown naval base at Walu Bay Suva. The Queen Elizabeth Barracks was also the headquarters for the Logistic Support Unit (LSU) with 400 soldiers. An Army Training Group (ATG) based at Nasinu on

Suva's outskirts, with 100 serving personnel, was responsible also for running the Officers' school at Vatuwaqa. The ATG was the military's main training and recruitment centre and also responsible for the pre-deployment training of peacekeeping bound soldiers. In addition to this, the military had four infantry reservist battalions and Naval and Engineers reservists of some 3500 all ranks.

The Officers' Training School at Vatuwaqa was the focal point of those efforts to separate the RFMF from civilian politics, and was simultaneously aimed at building a more meritocratic organisational framework. Former RFMF Commander Brigadier Ian Thorpe opened and ran the school from 1990 to 1999. The emphasis was on conducting junior and mid-level officer qualifying courses and bridging courses paving the way to further overseas military studies. The school cultivated an ethos of military professionalism and favoured an apolitical stance. By the time of the May 2000 coup, all senior staff officers and unit commanders of the RFMF had undergone study at the Vatuwaqa College. It had become the mandatory officer education path prior to engaging on higher-level overseas courses at military institutions in New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, United States and Malaysia. By the turn of the millennium, the military had qualified and experienced officers in its senior ranks who promoted civil supremacy and eschewed military intervention in politics.

The potential for the employment of Fiji soldiers given their reputation as peacekeepers was also being capitalized on by Fiji's former colonial master. In 1998, the British government as it did in 1961, offered Fiji's youth much sought after employment with its armed services. Over 2,000 Fiji citizens have taken up this entitlement as Commonwealth citizens and now serve with the British armed forces.<sup>55</sup> This has had a significant economic impact on the nation with remittances reaching an all time high of more than F\$300 million in 2005. With British Army Fijian soldier casualties from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars mounting, however, the realities of soldiering as a profession are beginning to dawn on the families of soldiers

### **Defence White Papers 1997 and 2004**

Post-independence, there were two attempts to formally review and formulate government defence policy. In 1996, Rabuka's SVT government set up a committee of three, chaired by Berenado Vunibobo, with economist Akuila Savu and former Commander RFMF Brigadier Ian Thorpe. The 1997 Defence White Paper, *Defending Fiji*, contained some effective military reforms. The Labour Coalition government that came to power, with some suspicion, shelved the White Paper. In 1999, though, as recommended in the Defence Paper, Commodore Bainimarama began implementing some of the 1997 Paper recommendations, including the restructure of RFMF headquarters into an upward and outward-focussed strategic headquarters and a downward-focussed operational Land Forces Command headquarters. As part of this restructure, the CRW unit was designated the new name of First Meridian Squadron (1M Sqn) by Colonel Ioane Naivalurua, a co-founder of the unit and Land Force Commander, 1999-2000.<sup>56</sup> For the first time since independence the RFMF had strategic defence directives in place. With the Defence Paper as guidance, there was great resolve within the officer corps that the mistakes of the past, especially as regards military intervention into politics, would not be repeated. Otherwise practically all of the other recommendations were never implemented as government had not budgeted for reforms as recommended. The Fiji Labour Party (FLP) coalition government's obvious fear of military expansionism, having itself been ousted by Rabuka's military in 1987, was undoubtedly a factor. Arguably had the FLP government fostered a closer relationship with the military, through the recommendations in the Defence Paper, it would have gone a long way in mitigating the FLP's fall from power at the hands of rebel leader Speight.

In 2003 the Qarase government, with the prompting of the military and police, commissioned a Security and Defence Paper. Australian military officer Bob Lowry, academic Stewart Firth and economist Jelsoni Vitusagavulu produced the 2004 Security and Defence White Paper, *A Safe and Prosperous Fiji*. The SDWP examined Fiji's strategic interests globally, regionally, and domestically and identified and assessed the threats and challenges to Fiji's security. It



concluded that (a) there is no external military threat to the sovereignty of Fiji; (b) trans-national crime and unsustainable resource exploitation is a growing threat to Fiji; and (c) that the greatest threats to Fiji's security were internal. The Paper strongly recommended that internal security should be the preserve of the police rather than the military. Likewise, domestic intelligence gathering should be the task of the police and not the military, given that the military was tacitly engaged in such activity. However, the DWP recommended that the military role in assisting the police maintain order in times of crisis be continued, when so authorised by the Minister for Home Affairs.

At the broadest level, the SDWP concluded, the threat to internal security derives from the fundamental division of Fiji population into two large ethnic communities, and from the problems experienced in any cultural transition from traditional social and political life to modernity. The 'wild cards' most likely to challenge Fiji's national interests, ignoring global phenomena such as pandemics, major global economic collapses, and terrorist attacks elsewhere are: (a) governments that ignore the relentless drumbeats of progress and fail to implement the development plans effectively; (b) systemic decay from failing to tackle domestic and international crime and institutionalised corruption; or (c) the convergence of events that might be managed individually but in concert can overwhelm the community, for example, the convergence of economic stagnation or decline with political instability, systemic decay and natural or man-made disasters. Controversially the paper called for a halving in size of the RFMF and a reform towards making the selection process for position of Commander more accountable and merit based. After much remonstrance from Commodore Bainimarama in person, the Paper was held in abeyance and never implemented. Unfortunately for the people of Fiji another chance at ensuring the military was answerable to political oversight went begging prior to the 2006 coup.

### **Ethnic Politics and Military Intervention**

We shall first examine what are seen as the political aspirations and grievances of both the major races. In pursuance of his native protection policy, Governor

Gordon introduced a form of taxation which made the native owners farm their own lands, thus depriving the planters of a source of cheap labour.<sup>57</sup> Governor Gordon then came up with the idea of the importation of labour from India. As a former governor of Trinidad and Mauritius, Gordon had experience of the indenture system in these colonies' plantations that made huge profits for the planters. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1879 the first ship *Leonidas* arrived with Indian indentured labourers, a full year before the Australian Colonial Sugar Refinery began its Fiji operations. By the end of the indentured labour emigration in 1916, over 60,000 Indians had been transported to Fiji. Three out of four persons chose to remain after their contracts in accordance with the Salisbury Dispatch of 1875 which promised Indian indentured labourers rights to settle in the colonies.<sup>58</sup> In the 1921 census, given the influx of the Indian population corresponding with the fall of the Fijian population because of devastating epidemics, Indian numbers were at 60,634 to Fijians 84,475.<sup>59</sup>

The colonial government had discouraged the two races interacting socially and economically chiefly to protect the Fijian way of life.<sup>60</sup> Given the fact that Fijians, as a matter of policy, remained in their villages, the major contributor to the economic life of the colony was the Indian community. To achieve equality rather than being looked upon as second-class citizens became their struggle. The 1920 and 1921 Indian laborers' strikes on Viti Levu were the beginning of Indian political and economic consciousness made public. It was seen as the beginning of the post-indenture 'Indian problem' in Fiji: that is a claim to equal citizenship in Fiji, a claim made first against the European order then extended to the Fijians.<sup>61</sup> In the 1920 strike Europeans with Fijians sided against the striking Indian workers by taking up arms to rein in dissenters. Such actions led Winston Halapua rightfully to argue, 'The military represented the repressive arm of capital.'<sup>62</sup> The colonial era left a legacy which made the military conscious of its coercive role within Fiji.

The strike began with Public Works Department Indian labourers downing tools against the high cost of living. The confrontation with government was backed by Indian leader and Gujarati lawyer Manilal Maganlal Doctor and his Indian Imperial Association of Fiji. There was also colonial perception of disloyalty to the Crown given the rise of Indian nationalism throughout India and similar sentiments amongst the Indian Diaspora. The ostentatious use of the Fiji

Defence Force where all European men of military age were alerted to arms was because the strike was seen as more than an industrial disturbance; it was regarded as a challenge to the unquestioned British dominated colonial order. The Fijian native administration also sided with government and Europeans by allowing Fijian auxiliaries and special constables to control striking Indians. This event created one of the enduring and defining cleavages of Fiji politics, the Europeans and Fijians versus the Indians.

Robert Norton, however, took a political economy view of the ethnic polarization. He argued that the source of modern political tensions lies in the contradiction in Fiji's colonial society between the European dominated capitalist economy and a Fijian social system perpetuated on the basis of subsistence cultivation.<sup>63</sup> He termed the Indian farmers as the "front line troops" of European capital.<sup>64</sup> According to this argument, it was the European dominated capitalist economy that stood in conflict with the construct of Fijian communal society. Brij Lal contends though, for the Indo-Fijians, victimization and transcendence of their situation have been the recurring dominant themes from colonial to post- independence Fiji.<sup>65</sup> The Salisbury Despatch has been their charter for equality.

Donald Horowitz asserted that military coups in multi- ethnic states are often simplistically explained solely on the basis of racial conflict without consideration of other important socio-economic and political factors.<sup>66</sup> John Davies describes Fiji's political paradox, inherited from the past, as a protracted 'cold war' that is ongoing.<sup>67</sup> Davies addresses five issues as central to the Fijians interpretations of history and conflict: the indigenous iTaukei loss of identity, the loss of their motherland, the fear of Indian domination, the clash between urban and traditional cultural, and a cold war for the political domination of the country.<sup>68</sup> Davies contextualized the prevalent Fijian political mentality as, "Complaints of the immigrant communities about affirmative actions, or not having sufficient seats in parliament, or about not been able to lease land on convenient terms are sensed by Fijians to be trivial in comparison."<sup>69</sup>

It has been argued by scholars that this grievance and ethnic threat perception have, therefore, drawn Fiji's military into intervening in politics. In spite of Davies's characterization, historically there is a dearth of ethnic tension

evidence to suggest communal conflict has underpinned politics during colonial and post-independence times. The structuralist and primordialist interpretations of ethnic conflict are far less applicable to Fiji than the instrumentalist. As the instrumentalists contend, ethnic conflict has been an instrument employed by politicians in Fiji to create a following and mobilise support. Indeed, it has been pervasive inter-communal outbidding by politicians, and recently the activity of the military, before general elections that has triggered political instability.

### **Towards Independence -Fijian Paramountcy**

With the passing of UN resolution 1514 of 1960, 'The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', the process of decolonization became inevitable for remaining colonies. For Fiji, British sentiments sided with the indigenous Fijians in this process. In an unguarded comment, Governor Sir Derek Jakeway revealed his pro-Fijian sympathies when he said that, "Fijians should never be placed under the heels of an immigrant community and "what the Fijians thought mattered most having peacefully surrendered their sovereignty to the crown".<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, for the Fijian political elite, Gordon's native protectionist policy was interpreted to mean continuing Fijian political paramountcy into the future. As earlier mentioned the charter for indigenous protectionism was the 1874 Deed of Cession.<sup>71</sup> The common Fijian assertion that the indigenous people of Fiji had a right to political paramountcy in their own country, according to Newbury, became a political issue in the 1940s, with the assistance of Europeans, as Indian population numbers began to surpass Fijians. Newbury argues that, "Treaties of annexation conceal a dual political and legal purpose which is contextual according to time and place".<sup>72</sup>

The meaning of the Deed of Cession was being interpreted by Fijians, some sixty years later, in a differing context that concerned Indians rather than Europeans. Lal argues that what was a protective policy had now been re-interpreted as an assertive political doctrine; for it was interpreted by Fijian interests to mean that their rights were 'uppermost.'<sup>73</sup>

In January 1963, on Wakaya Island, self-government talks started with the visit of Nigel Fisher, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for colonies. The *Wakaya Letter*, which was to become the basic negotiating document of Fijians in the lead up to Independence, was first presented here.<sup>74</sup> This letter asserted the principles of Fijian political rights beyond the protectionist context as introduced by Gordon. The Letter wanted the “spirit and substance” of the Deed of Cession preserved, with United Kingdom ties strengthened, land rights secured, Fiji a Christian state and a policy of racial parity in the civil service as the basis for any constitutional changes. The *Wakaya Letter* crystallized Fijian thinking and became the fundamental negotiations tool again at the London independence talks in 1969. In 1970, Sir Lesley Monson the British Permanent under Secretary had asserted that, “It would be hard for the United Kingdom in conscience and in political terms to deny Fijian paramountcy or they [Indigenous Fijians] will take it by force and create a security situation.”<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, independence was premised on Fijian paramountcy. The 1970 constitution was a charade, as Lal argues, that was doomed from the start for three irreconcilable reasons. Independence talks that gave birth to the document had, paradoxically, promised ‘paramountcy for Fijians, parity for Indians and privilege for Europeans’.<sup>76</sup> His assertion is substantiated by examining the 1970 electoral system. Eight seats in the senate were reserved for GCC nominees who had the right of veto over all legislation to do with indigenous interests thereby guaranteeing Fijian political paramountcy. Parity was supposedly granted the Indian community with 12 communal and 10 national seats matching the Fijian allotment. Privilege was retained for Europeans based on their contribution to the economy. A disproportionate 8 seats were allotted to Europeans, despite their numbering less than 4% of the population.

### **1977 Constitutional Crisis**

Fiji’s first constitutional crisis post-independence had all the hall marks of ethnic politics. Brij Lal in tracing Fiji’s political ills argued that, “a feature of Fiji’s political evolution that haunts the nation to this day is its racial character.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed Fiji’s first post-Independence constitutional crisis illustrates the past complexities combined with the fear of future unknowns prevalent in Fiji’s communal leaders then. It was profoundly significant as the

harbinger of things to come. In April 1977, firebrand nationalist politician Sakeasi Butadroka's Fijian Nationalist Party won 25% of the Fijian vote. Butadroka politically was the arch enemy of both the Indo-Fijians and Mara and his Alliance Party from which he was expelled from in 1975. Butadroka, the Rewa Provincial representative in Parliament and Assistant Minister for Commerce, Industry and Co-operatives, had worked in the co-operatives department as a civil servant and was knowledgeable about rural Fijians' socio-economic plight. In October of 1975, he moved a motion in parliament that Indo-Fijians "be repatriated back to India and that their travelling expenses back home and compensation for their properties in the country be met by the British government."<sup>78</sup> In the 1972 elections 25% of Indo-Fijians had voted for Mara's multiracial Alliance Party, but Butadroka's racial anti-Indian rhetoric and accusations that Mara had not done enough for Fijians definitely polarized the two major communities. By the time of the 1977 elections the Alliance party's support from both Indo-Fijians and Fijian was waning. The election results confirmed a split in indigenous support for Mara's Alliance Party which gave a narrow majority to the Indo-Fijian-dominated National Federation Party (NFP). Siddiq Koya, the NFP leader, was expected to become Prime Minister had it not been for some deft political manoeuvring involving the Fijian elite and splits in the NFP. Instead, the Governor-General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, called on Ratu Mara to form a minority government. The events that led to Ratu Sir George's decision, and his reasons for it, are still mired in controversy, with different parties involved telling different versions of the situation, and conspiracy theories have abounded. Others, both in Fiji and abroad, accused the Governor-General, the foremost chief in the Fijian chiefly hierarchy, of deliberate bias. Brij Lal points to the alleged complicity to preserve the government of his fellow-chief (and close cousin), Ratu Mara, as an indication that the indigenous Fijian elite would not tolerate an Indo-Fijian-led government.<sup>79</sup> In hindsight the coups of 1987 and of 2000, both of which toppled governments dominated or led by Indo-Fijians, are evidence of this assertion.<sup>80</sup> Whether this controversial opinion is true or not, few doubt that Cakobau was pleased to be able to reappoint the government dominated by indigenous Fijians given that he and Mara were signatories to the Wakaya Letter. Ratu George defended his actions in a public statement said:

In the recent elections, the people of Fiji did not give a clear mandate to either of the major political parties in the recent general election. It therefore became the duty of the Governor-General under the Constitution to appoint as Prime Minister the Member of the House of Representatives who appeared to him best able to command the support of the majority of the members of the House. The Governor-General has not been able to act sooner as it was not until this afternoon that he was informed who had been elected leader of the National Federation Party. The Governor-General, after taking all relevant circumstances into account, has come to the firm conclusion that the person best able to command support of the majority of the Members is the Leader of the Alliance Party, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. In compliance with the constitution and acting in his own deliberate judgment, the Governor-General has accordingly appointed Ratu Sir Kamisese as Prime Minister.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, after controversial circumstances put down to NFP in-fighting and procrastination (the NFP deliberated for days on who their leader should be) the Governor General and *Vunivalu* of Bau, Ratu George, reinstated Mara as Prime Minister. Mara in a radio broadcast said in reply to Ratu George's momentous decision, 'Sir I will obey your command.'<sup>82</sup> This terse comment implied subservience like a true loyal *bati* on the part of Mara and illustrates the contemporary manipulation of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. Brij Lal stated that Ratu George's 'deliberate judgment' was legally flawed and in actual fact amounted to a constitutional coup. Lal stated that Ratu George was "the direct descendant of the chief who had ceded Fiji to the United Kingdom in 1874: Ratu Seru Cakobau. It was his traditional cultural responsibility to stand by his people".<sup>83</sup> With little doubt, the interpretation of political paramountcy and the assumptions imbued in the *Wakaya Letter* by Fijian elites underpinned the Constitutional crisis of 1977. In fact during the crisis the military was put on alert. The question still remains today, what would have happened had the Governor General Ratu Sir George Cakobau not appointed Mara to form a minority government. The Governor General's decision set a disturbing precedent for future political crises that has subsequently haunted the nation. The assumptions in the doctrine of indigenous political paramountcy became major factors in generating the coups of 1987 and 2000.

## **Conclusion**

The modern phenomenon of the Fiji military's intervention in politics resonates with the centrality of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship in the post-independence period, and in a process that was to reach climax in 2006, the eventual inversion of the traditional diarchy where the Sacred King, the *Roko Tui Bau* was

supplanted by the Warrior Chief, the *Vunivalu* of Bau as supreme chief. Gordon's native protection policy bequeathed a colonial Fijian orthodoxy with many neo-traditional characteristics, central to which was the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. The nascent colonial military was hence imbued with the traditional chief-warrior relationship. During World Wars I and II, Ratu Sukuna used these global conflicts to showcase this relationship and further the interests of the Fijian elite. The loyalty and fighting prowess of Fijians forged even stronger political bonds with the Europeans at the expense of the Indians. The racial cleavage caused by the 1920s strikes was further widened during World War II by what seemed like the Indians' un-patriotic stand in demanding equal pay with European soldiers.

The Malayan Emergency campaign in the 1950s continued to bond Fijians nationally. High chiefs were given command of the Fiji Battalion thus further enhancing the neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship. Fijian national camaraderie was also strengthened as soldiers were placed in companies based on provincial origins. This national camaraderie became the capstone in the formation of the political Fijian Association with former Fiji Battalion commander Ratu Edward Cakobau as national president.<sup>84</sup>

On the road to Independence Gordon's protection policy was interpreted as a politically assertive tool by the Fijian elite to claim paramountcy. Indians on the other hand clamoured for political parity denied by colonial policy. Lal, Norton, Davies and Scarr have argued that ethnic politics has underpinned military intervention in all of Fiji's coups in one form or another. Post-independence ethnic politics led to the 1977 elections crisis. Vunivalu of Bau and Governor-General Ratu Sir George Cakobau's decision to re-instate Ratu Mara as Prime Minister unveiled the hard political realities of race, which were finally laid bare by the Rabuka coup. But as this chapter has shown, ethnic divisions and identities, while they may have provided the occasion for the assertion of ethnic Fijian dominance, were not central to the changes taking place in the key relationship of government and military. What was central was the persistence of tradition, which was the legacy of colonial rule, and which found expression in the unique origins and characteristics of the Fiji military forces as an indigenous institution.



The most prominent unintended consequence of Fiji's involvement in international peacekeeping has been the military's adoption of a political mediator self-image. Peacekeeping as a role has allowed the military to keep a large standing force that is pre-disposed to political intervention. The defence white papers of 1997 and 2004 were unsuccessful attempts to articulate a defence and security policy for Fiji, and thereby mitigate against military intervention in politics. As Scobell argued, the 1987 coup was triggered when the military's corporate interest was threatened. Furthermore the 'Revulsion against civilian incompetence and corruption', is a frequent justification for intervention by military forces in newly-independent states. Today the human security dimension of defence is touted as a prominent role of Fiji's military. This argument has led to the militarization of government and, as we shall see, to an inversion of the neo-traditional chief-warrior relationship. The role of the military in post-colonial Fiji has caused a transformation in civil-military relations. From being subservient to civilian rule, the military has become a mediator in ethnic politics, and in charge of an authoritarian regime. The *Turaga-Bati* relationship underpinned the reasons for the coup.

As we shall examine in later chapters, Commodore Bainimarama has continued with the perception that politics and security are tied. Along that route the military has created security and insecurity for the nation. In the next chapter we will analyze the coup of 1987 and the *Turaga-Bati* relationship between Rabuka and Ratu Mara and Ratu Penaia.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Fiji Peoples Charter for Change Peace and Progress*, 'Realigning the role of the RFMF to include Human Security' 15 Dec 2008, p.15.
- <sup>2</sup> Commodore Bainimarama's interview with Robert Keith Reid in *Islands Business*, 'Frankly Speaking', June 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, London, 1858, reprinted by Fiji Museum. Suva, 1982.
- <sup>4</sup> Julie S. Fields, 'Land Tenure, competition and ecology in Fijian prehistory', *Antiquity*, 79, . 305, 2005: 598.
- <sup>5</sup> Erskine, *Journal: A Cruise among the islands of the Western Pacific*, pp.214-15.
- <sup>6</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 64.
- <sup>7</sup> Alfred T Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, University Press, Cambridge, 1890.
- <sup>8</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 65.
- <sup>9</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 65.
- <sup>10</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 65.
- <sup>11</sup> According to one piece of research by Fergus Clunie in *Domodomo*, the quarterly journal of the Fiji Museum, there was also an older chief by the name of Cakobau who Ratu Seru may have been named after to valorize his deeds as was prevalent in Bauan traditions.
- <sup>12</sup> David Morens MD, 'Measles in Fiji 1875: thoughts on the history of emerging infectious diseases,' *Pacific Health Dialogue* 5, 1, 1996: 119. According to this account over 40,000 or close to a quarter of the total Fijian population died during the measles epidemic of 1875.
- <sup>13</sup> Peter France, *The Charter of the Land: custom and colonization in Fiji*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p.102.
- <sup>14</sup> France, *The Charter of the Land*, p.124.
- <sup>15</sup> Robbie Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalisation: A History of a Developing Global Consciousness*, Zed Books, London and New York, 2003, p.140.
- <sup>16</sup> France, *The Charter of the Land*, p.115.
- <sup>17</sup> Carolyn H. Brown, 'Coolie and Freeman: From Hierarchy to Equality in Fiji', University of Washington PhD Thesis, 1978, p.47.
- <sup>18</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 1992, p14.
- <sup>19</sup> Stewart Firth, 'The Legacy of Colonial History in the Pacific' Lecture in SSGM Pacific Research Colloquium: Developing Pacific Scholarship, ANU, 31 Jan 2012.
- <sup>20</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Viceroy Of the Pacific, The Majesty of Colour –A life of Sir John Bates Thurston*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1980, p. 51.
- <sup>21</sup> Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, p.4.
- <sup>22</sup> Morens, 'Measles in Fiji 1875: thoughts on the history of emerging infectious diseases,': 119.

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- <sup>23</sup> Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, p.6.
- <sup>24</sup> Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*, p.7.
- <sup>25</sup> Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna*, p.130.
- <sup>26</sup> Timothy J. Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A study of the neotraditional order under British colonial rule prior to World War II*, ANU Press, 1982, pp. 148-149.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2011, p.94.
- <sup>28</sup> After the coups of 1987 the Kesban concept of security and development was used as a model as the military arrogated internal security to itself. The role expansion led to the creation of five new battalions and a counter-revolutionary warfare unit.
- <sup>29</sup> Steven Ratuva, 'Ethnic Politics, Communalism and Affirmative Action in Fiji: A Critical and Comparative Study', PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, 1999, p.192.
- <sup>30</sup> The Spate Report of 1959 and Burns Report of 1960 were instrumental in spearheading Fijian administration and communal society reforms towards Independence.
- <sup>31</sup> Yaw Saffu, 'Changing Civil-Military Relations in Fiji', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 44, 2, 1990: 159-170.
- <sup>32</sup> Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*, pp.10-21.
- <sup>33</sup> See Brown, 'Coolie and Freeman: From Hierarchy to Equality in Fiji', p.355. In 1972, Ratu David deputy speaker of the house, in a speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in Malawi.
- <sup>34</sup> Jim Sanday, "The Coups of 1987: A personal analysis." *Pacific Viewpoint*, 30, 1989: 127-129.
- <sup>35</sup> Brown, 'Coolie and Freeman: From Hierarchy to Equality in Fiji', pp. 136-200.
- <sup>36</sup> *Defending Fiji: Defence White Paper 1997*, p.96.
- <sup>37</sup> Source – [www.rfmf.mil.fj](http://www.rfmf.mil.fj)
- <sup>38</sup> Ramesh Thakur, "Ministate and macro- cooperation: Fiji's peacekeeping debut in Lebanon," *Review of International Studies*, 10, 4, 1984: 269-284.
- <sup>39</sup> Andrew Scobell, 'Politics, Professionalism, and Peacekeeping: An Analysis of the 1987 Military Coup in Fiji', *Comparative Politics*, 26, 2, 1994: 196
- <sup>40</sup> Defence White Paper 1997, p.96.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert T Robertson and Akosita Tamanisau, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988, p.105.
- <sup>42</sup> Arturo C. Sotomayor, 'Unintended consequences of peace operations for troop-contributing countries in South America: The cases of Argentina and Uruguay', in Chiyuki Aoi, Cedric de Coning, and Ramesh Thakur, eds, *Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations*, United Nations University Press, Tokyo and New York, 2007, p.1764
- <sup>43</sup> Arturo C Sotomayor, 'Unintended consequences of peace operations for troop-contributing countries in South America: The cases of Argentina and Uruguay,' ; CSR Murthy, 'Unintended consequences of peace operations for troop-contributing countries from South Asia', and Kwesi Aning, 'Unintended consequences of peace operations for troop-contributing countries from

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West Africa: The case of Ghana', in Aoi, de Coning and Ramesh Thakur, eds, *Unintended consequences of peacekeeping operations*, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> John Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji: the authorised biography of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 2000, p.247.

<sup>45</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara*, Crawford House Pub, 2008, p.246.

<sup>46</sup> Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova, *Rabuka No Other Way*, p.167.

<sup>47</sup> See RFMF Senior Officers Presentation Paper to President and Interim Prime Minister, 28 Aug 1989.

<sup>48</sup> Arturo C. Sotomayor, 'Unintended consequences of peace operations for troop-contributing countries in South America: The cases of Argentina and Uruguay', p.186.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart Firth 'Fiji at Forty', Roundtable Paper, ANU, Canberra, 8 Oct 2010.

<sup>50</sup> David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, battleground of the Middle East*, Faber and Faber, London, p.259.

<sup>51</sup> 'Israeli Army hits Bases in Lebanon, piercing UN Lines', *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1992.

<sup>52</sup> 'Fijian soldiers wounded in shootout' *Associated Press News*, 7 Nov 1988.

<sup>53</sup> Jon Fraenkel, Stewart Firth & Brij V Lal, eds, *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji: A Coup to End All Coups?* ANU E Press, Canberra, 2009, p.119.

<sup>54</sup> Prior to the 1987 coup the 'R' stood for 'Royal' in the acronym RFMF. After the Presidential Decree of the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1987 declaring Fiji a Republic, the 'R' now represents 'Republic'.

<sup>55</sup> *The Independent*, 'Fijians Flock to British Army Colours', 3 Dec. 1999.

<sup>56</sup> One of the reasons for the change was that, under the previous CRW arrangements, its troopers could not go on peace-keeping missions. Under the new First Meridian Squadron banner, these soldiers were allowed tours of duty overseas to the Middle East and East Timor.

<sup>57</sup> S.B. Brown, *History of the Fiji Police: From Fiji to the Balkans*, S. Brown, 1998, p.15.

<sup>58</sup> Lord Salisbury was State Secretary for India in the Disraeli government of 1875.

<sup>59</sup> K.L Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance 1920-1946*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1977, p.11.

<sup>60</sup> Gillion, *The Fiji Indians*, p.14.

<sup>61</sup> Gillion, *The Fiji Indians*, p.34.

<sup>62</sup> Winston Halapua, *Tradition, Lotu and Militarism in Fiji*, Fiji Institute of Applied Studies Press, Lautoka, 2003, p.60.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1990, p.35.

<sup>64</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, p.36.

<sup>65</sup> Brij Lal, *Broken Waves: A history of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. 1992.

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- <sup>66</sup> Donald L Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University Of California Press, Berkeley 1985, p.472.
- <sup>67</sup> John Davies, 'Ethnic Competition and the Forging of the Nation-State of Fiji', *The Round Table*, 94, 1, 2005: 47.
- <sup>68</sup> Davies, 'Ethnic Competition': 60-61.
- <sup>69</sup> Davies, 'Ethnic Competition': 61.
- <sup>70</sup> Brij Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*, Asia Pacific Press, ANU, Canberra, 2006, p.15.
- <sup>71</sup> Brown, 'Coolie and Freeman: From Hierarchy to Equality in Fiji', p.47.
- <sup>72</sup> Colin Newbury, 'History, Hermeneutics and Fijian Ethnic 'Paramountcy'', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 46:1, June 2011: 48.
- <sup>73</sup> Brown, 'Coolie and Freeman: From Hierarchy to Equality in Fiji', p.47.
- <sup>74</sup> See Wakaya letter of 1963. The letter was signed by all members of the Fijian Affairs Board, which consisted of three 'paramount' chiefs with the highest ranks in Fiji: Ratu Mara (from Lau), Ratu Penaia Ganilau (Cakaudrove) and Ratu George Cakobau (Bau). Its other signatories were A. C. Reid and R. M. Major, both senior civil servants, and J. N. Falvey, European member of the Legislative Council and the board's legal advisor. The letter asked for the 'spirit and substance' of the Deed of Cession to be strengthened, links between Fiji and the United Kingdom preserved — along the lines enjoyed by the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man — Fijian land rights secured, Fiji to be declared a Christian state and the policy of racial parity in the civil service enforced
- <sup>75</sup> Interview with Prof Brij Lal, ANU, on 'Fijian Political Paramountcy', Wed 1 Jul 2009.
- <sup>76</sup> Brij Lal, *A Time Bomb Lies Buried: Fiji's Road to Independence*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2008, p.9.
- <sup>77</sup> Brij Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Post-Colonial Fiji*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2010, p.82.
- <sup>78</sup> Hansard Report, Fiji House of Representatives, 9 Oct. 1975, p.1104.
- <sup>79</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, pp. 158-168.
- <sup>80</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.367.
- <sup>81</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.158.
- <sup>82</sup> Scarr, *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara*, p.235.
- <sup>83</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.166.
- <sup>84</sup> The Fijian Association was the fore runner and parent body of the Alliance Party.

## Chapter 3

### The 1987 Coup

#### Introduction

The May 1987 coup has come to define the intervention in politics of Fiji's military forces. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, a third ranking officer, the coup was executed in order to re-assert chiefly paramountcy and preempt ethnic violence. It was also a coup within a coup that was planned and conducted without the knowledge of Rabuka's two senior officers and in collusion with civilian elites. Since the defeat of the Alliance Party in the April election the political status quo was perceived to have been undermined in the eyes of many Fijians like Rabuka. The election of a predominantly Indo-Fijian government had galvanized Fijian elites to agitate against the Coalition of National Federation Party and Fiji Labour Parties. The actions of Rabuka's men in storming parliament and overthrowing the sitting FLP/NFP government thrust the military onto the nation's political centre stage. During this crisis the *Turaga-Bati* relationship was remoulded and reshaped as Rabuka's relationship with paramount chiefs Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau was constantly wrought with tensions.

This chapter argues that intrigues between the chiefs and military officers underpinned the 1987 coup. It argues that the manipulation of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship and the use of Rabuka by Fijian elites are critical to understanding the coup. We first examine the post-1987 elections period and the formation of a nationalist coup coalition. Secondly, we examine the execution of the coup and the overthrow of the Bavadra led FLP/NFP government. What were the reactions at large and how did the relationship of Rabuka, Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara unfold? Thirdly, we discuss the relationship between the Great Council of Chiefs, the military and the Governor General which initially set the scene and helped consolidate Rabuka's coup. We also discuss the relationship between the Methodist church, the chiefs and the military that was key to the dynamics of the

coup. We then examine Rabuka's second military takeover in September when Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara were ousted and then re-instated as post-coup leaders. Finally we examine the origins of the military's emerging political role and its new self-image.

### **Post-Elections Agitation and Coup Coalition**

In the April 1987 general elections, Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's political and chiefly *mana* suffered a huge blow with the defeat of his Alliance party by the Indo-Fijian dominated Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party Coalition. There was a low 69% of registered voters turnout. Just over 9% of Fijians voted for the Coalition. At the close of polls, the Alliance Party that had been in power since Independence lost with 48.55% of votes cast and the Coalition came into power with 46.20% of the total.<sup>1</sup> Fijian members who had won seats with the Coalition did so on the back of Indo-Fijian rather than Fijian votes. The victory by the Coalition exposed the deep ethnic political divide embedded in Fiji's society. Even though Mara seemed magnanimous in defeat, the loss no doubt riled the now renowned Pacific Islands statesman and high chief.<sup>2</sup> Lauan and Tovata deputations had approached him at his residence to show that they would not accept defeat. As explained by Robert Norton, "The principle of defending the dignity and authority of chiefs against the political ascendancy of the *vulagi* (foreigners) was at the heart of the ideological justification of the coup."<sup>3</sup>

iTaukei Movement leaders from Cakaudrove and Macuata also sought Mara's audience. The leader of the Lauan delegation, Senator Inoke Tabua of Vanua Balavu, Lau, had pointed out in a letter to the press his skepticism about the Constitution and section 68 pertaining to Fijian protective provisions.<sup>4</sup> Scarr succinctly sums Mara's predicament, "He seemed to be facing the end of the world, and they took his silence for acquiescence."<sup>5</sup> Although Mara had graciously accepted the vote of the people in public, the *Tui Nayau*, the archetypical neo-traditional chief, was reticent and may have been nursing his wounded pride.<sup>6</sup> There was also disparagement, however, amongst Fijians that the *Tui Nayau* had brought the loss upon the Fijian people by his obsession with his own international image and that a more action orientated solution to indigenous political paramountcy was necessary.

Indeed within days of the Indo-Fijian dominated FLP/NFP Coalition being sworn-in, the nationalist Fijian opposition conducted anti-government meetings and mounted a campaign to stir up ethnic tensions. In the weeks that followed, an anti-Bavadra government coalition of politicians, churchmen, and chiefs formed a national front with a destabilizing action agenda. A protest march by Alliance supporters in Lautoka and a village road block of the main Kings Road at Tavua followed in the days after.<sup>7</sup> Alliance Senator Jona Qio Veidreyaki was also charged with the Lautoka fire-bombing of Attorney General Jai Ram Reddy's law office.<sup>8</sup> Apisai Tora, a well-known political chameleon, added to the furore and was subsequently charged for inciting racial antagonism at a meeting of Western chiefs.<sup>9</sup>

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April nationalist supporters protested through Suva, some three thousand strong, some holding aloft anti-government banners such as "We Fijians have no confidence in the Coalition", "Fiji belongs to the Fijians," "Stop this Indian Government", "Fiji now little India Say No", "Fiji for Fijians," and "Change the Constitution Immediately". The *Fiji Times* of April 25, 1987, published the headline, "The Big March". On page three it gave samples of the placards mentioned that were carried by marchers, obviously causing fear amongst the Indian community.<sup>10</sup> Political mis-information and myth-making against government issued forth unapologetically from the newly formed nationalist Taukei Movement whilst anti-Indian sentiments peppered the media.

In the opening debate in Parliament, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, the volatile issue of Fijian paramountcy was purposely resurrected by deposed Alliance member Viliame Gonelevu now on the opposition benches. As a Taukei Movement founding member, Gonelevu asserted without evidence that, "the change in government would lead to the end of the Fijian Race."<sup>11</sup> Coalition Minister of State for Fijian Affairs, Ratu Filimone Ralogaivau, countered, "Let me assure the house that the fear expressed by the Honourable member is groundless and is obviously based on ignorance."<sup>12</sup> Ralogaivau explained that in order to change either the Fijian Affairs Act and the Native Lands Acts a three-quarter majority or 39 out of 52 votes was needed in parliament. The Coalition government with



its 28 members of parliament fell far short of that number. This response by Ralogaivau was relegated to the inner pages of the *Fiji Times* whilst Alliance senator Jona Qio, charged for a firebomb attack on Jai Ram Reddy's law firm, figured on the front page. Conscious of making an impact and to win public support the new government had moved to implement its promised social justice policies by promising ex-servicemen, civil service pensioners and people on social welfare benefits and disabled persons, free travel on buses, in June.<sup>13</sup>

As the Taukei Movement began mobilizing in the wake of the elections key coup conspiracists Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and Reverend Tomasi Raikivi had invited Lt Col Rabuka to discuss the political situation. Rabuka had also solicited the views of his patron the Governor-General and Ratu Mara at a game of golf on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>14</sup> Why this concern by Rabuka? Even though as a military officer he was secluded from mainstream politics, Rabuka had personal relationships in what was a close knit Fijian society. Initially Rabuka justified his pre-coup actions by stating, "When a political party loses, and that party is the sole and final guarantor of your values, you would be forced to do something about it".<sup>15</sup>

Rabuka, buoyed by his various high level consultations, was confident of a ready constituency and convinced by his colleagues that all that was needed was his military leadership. Lt Col Jim Sanday, the ousted military chief of staff, argued that Rabuka was a front man for those who lost power. This assessment by Sanday further pointed to a pre-coup coalescence of Fijian elites.<sup>16</sup> Scobell, however, argued that one of the major factors that had triggered the coup was the military's perceived threat to its corporate interest. Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra's views on the need to down size the Royal Fiji Military Forces struck a nerve with the Fijian traditional institution and client of the previous Alliance government.<sup>17</sup> The 1987 Fiji Labour Party election manifesto had also "deplored the Royal Fiji Military Forces as becoming more of a band of mercenaries for the UN and MFO and its role should be reviewed."<sup>18</sup>

What were these interlinked corporate interests? The military in post-independence Fiji was always to be the protector of: 1) the Fijian national ethos

system, based on the *Lotu*, (church) *Vanua* (Chiefly Tradition) and the *Matanitu* (Alliance Government) 2) the custodian of the Fijian race's martial tradition and cultural capital 3) an exclusive Fijian institution that offered Fijian men employment as soldiers and peacekeepers in a patron–client relationship. The plausible alternate reason, therefore, was the military elite's fear of downsizing which became the primary trigger for the coup.<sup>19</sup> FLP policy induced an instinctively negative reaction from Rabuka and the military elite given its traditional patriotic past and peacekeeping achievements. As pointed out by Scobell 'the RFMF had experienced first hand the realities of chronic ethnic and sectarian divisions and conflict while serving in Lebanon, and the thought of an ethnic insurgency in Fiji constituted a nightmare.'<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the possible use of lethal force against rioting Fijians by the military which was 99% ethnically indigenous was one of the major reasons according to Rabuka for his intervention. Hence it was in the military's corporate interest to protect Fijian communal political interests.

Therefore given its nation-building and peacekeeping roles, the military intervened in politics as the self–proclaimed continuation of this civilianizing trend of its roles. Having entered politics the military began to articulate a separate corporate interest as a result of the intra-national schisms that developed. After the commonly perceived inter-ethnic political schism was eliminated leadership tensions arose between the chiefs symbolized by Mara and Ganilau and commoners Rabuka and the Taukeists.

Rabuka had cited the protection of law and order for his reason to intervene and had acted in the national interest to pre-empt the nationalist Taukei Movement from creating an ethnic purge of Indians.<sup>21</sup> Skeptics of this argument such as RFMF chief of Staff Colonel Jim Sanday, however, suggested that the Fiji situation was not similar to Lebanon because historically there was a marked absence of inter-communal violence in Fiji. It could be said that Rabuka's argument did not hold as he had been colluding with key Taukei leaders prior to the coup. In any case Fijian soldiers had gained a reputation for preventing volatile local ethnic conflict between Palestinians, Lebanese and Israelis during Rabuka's tour in Lebanon and this would have likely influenced his actions.

There are those though who insist that the *Tui Nayau* was complicit in the coup. In response to allegations that he was an instigator in Rabuka's coup Mara had said, "I have denied this many times, but I suppose the suspicion would always be there. I had to do it, because if my house is on fire with members of my family inside. Why should I wait?"<sup>22</sup>

Indeed Indian High Commissioner Sreenivasan asserted that Mara could not but have known what was afoot, "because... nothing important could happen in Fiji without his blessing."<sup>23</sup> Sreenivasan was skeptical in the debate as to Mara's actions during the coup. Since being formed in 1966, the Alliance Party under Mara for over two decades had dominated government and national politics. In fact Robertson and Tamanisau saw the coup in terms of an eastern or Tovata tribal conspiracy.<sup>24</sup> That perception was based upon the long lasting political dominance of Mara, Ganilau and the Tovata confederacy chiefly elite and associates in Fiji's post-Independence era.

The Alliance Party's defeat, for Rabuka at least, was seen as a threat to the status quo and the neo-traditional chief-warrior relationship which he said he staunchly upheld. Rabuka had publically declared, "The chiefs are the wise men in Fijian society, guardians of our tradition. Take that power away and give it to the commoners and you are asking for trouble."<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Rabuka's two senior officers, Nailatikau and Sanday, had espoused firm allegiance to the elected Bavadra government. Rabuka's destiny was sealed when his three Taukei Movement colleagues Inoke Kubuabola, Viliame Gonelevu and Jone Veisamasama pleaded with him, "Then you will have to do it. It is up to you."<sup>26</sup>

### **The Military Coup d'état**

At 10.00am, on the morning of Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> of May in Suva, Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka with a section of armed soldiers of the RFMF Depot Unit stormed parliament and took the Bavadra government hostage, without a shot being fired. Ratu Finau, the son of Ratu Mara, had kept watch on the main door to parliament chambers, "And had signaled to Rabuka as he entered he had spoken to his father advising him not to come to Suva on Thursday".<sup>27</sup>

Immediately after the takeover in a press conference Rabuka said that he had been monitoring events in Fiji since the elections, “...and I saw how these events could lead to serious situations and threaten law and order and property.”<sup>28</sup> He told reporters his action was “pre-emptive”, designed to prevent unrest and violence. He said recent events had caused him considerable concern. Ousted Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra however on the day of the coup emphatically denied radio reports that his government had ever intended to use the army to quell disturbance in Fiji.<sup>29</sup>

The ease with which Rabuka was able to activate support from the Ministry of Home Affairs in which his brother-in-law Tomasi Tuiloma was a deputy secretary points to prior collusion amongst some senior Fijian government bureaucrats. Just minutes before his takeover Rabuka had shared a bowl of yaqona with Tuiloma at the Ministry of Home Affairs next to parliament building.<sup>30</sup> Tuiloma was from Tubou Lakeba in Lau, hence had close blood links to Mara. In his Operation Orders for the coup Rabuka reveals that Tuiloma was briefed to immediately suspend Commissioner of Police Raman from duty after the coup.<sup>31</sup> Things were not all plain sailing though. As a close confidant and patron to Colonel Rabuka, the Governor-General Ratu Penaia, having granted an audience to the coup leader that morning after the takeover of parliament, released a press statement:

As Commander in Chief in Fiji I now call upon all officers and men of the Royal Fiji Military Forces, the Royal Police Force and the Public Service to return to their lawful allegiance in accordance with the oath of office and their duty of obedience without delay.<sup>32</sup>

With this announcement, the Governor-General had reinforced the constitutionality of his office and urged all under his authority to back away from Rabuka's unconstitutional actions that morning. This had international ramifications for the *Turaga-Bati* relationship.

Thousands of kilometers away, news of a military coup in Fiji had been filtering into Fijibatt Headquarter Qana, South Lebanon. The big quandary for the overseas troops was who held authority over them? This was the testing ground for the *Turaga-Bati* relationship and constitutionality. Was it the Governor-General and the incumbent Commander Nailatikau and the FLP/NFP Coalition

Government or was it Lt Col Rabuka? Amongst the officers, knowing how small and close Fijian society was, they were skeptical that Rabuka's coup was a self-thought out military intervention.

That afternoon the first message arrived by telephone from Rabuka to re-assure Colonel Ratu Epeli, the Battalion Commander, that his father, the Governor-General, was safe and well and that no harm would befall him. The high chief still remained in office at Government House as talks of forming an interim government continued into the late night. This reassured the Fijian soldiers that the Commander in Chief whose office as Governor General underpinned the *Turaga-Bati* relationship was still revered by Rabuka. But what about the incumbent FLP/NFP Coalition government? Rabuka also assured Major Draunidalo through Ratu Epeli that his former wife, Adi Kuini, now wife of the deposed Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra, was well and still occupying the Prime Minister's government residence at Veiuto. At least blood was not shed in the first hours of the coup. Although the FLP/NFP Coalition parliamentarians were in custody, the Governor General Ganilau was in control.

Skepticism also came from fiercely nationalist politician Sakeasi Butadroka, who quipped, "This is not an army coup this is an Alliance Party coup! They just put up the Fijians as a front. They were only doing it because they had lost their positions."<sup>33</sup> Butadroka also lamented that being a businessman he should have patented his brand of nationalism as the coupists had misappropriated it from him. This anti-chiefly nationalism that was also intoned at times by the iTaukei Movement was to cause tensions, exacerbating intra-ethnic schism in the coming months. In essence, the argument was that the public justification adopted for Rabuka's coup was 'Fijian political paramountcy' and that, "None of them wanted power to be exercised by anyone else except by the Fijians, preferably high chiefs."<sup>34</sup> To illustrate the point, in her elation, the wife of Prime Minister Ratu Mara and herself the paramount chief of Burebasaga Confederacy was purported to have triumphantly said, "Rabuka achieved in seventeen minutes what the Alliance party had not been able to achieve in seventeen years."<sup>35</sup> Adi Lala was obviously referring to "Fijian paramountcy in the political governance of the country."<sup>36</sup> Rabuka had initially cloaked his actions

using military speak such as 'pre-emptive' action designed to prevent unrest and violence.<sup>37</sup> He further emphasized the national security factor as being uppermost in his action rather than any political motive. In his coup operational order 1/87, Rabuka however stated the mission of the coup was "to install a new regime that will ensure that the RFMF and national interests are protected."<sup>38</sup> Why indeed did Rabuka and his men intervene? Was it to prevent inter-ethnic conflict or to re-instate Fijian political paramountcy, or both? Robert Norton asserted that Rabuka was influenced by three motives- 1) his meetings with the Taukei Movement and the Governor General 2) the desire to avoid the Fiji army acting against Fijians and 3) his service with the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Lebanon.<sup>39</sup>

For the international community, the coup was initially interpreted mostly as an inter-ethnic political conflict. The ethnic conflict argument became the most obvious explanation for the military takeover, the unintended consequence of colonial pluralism. As Donald Horowitz, however, cautioned, "military coups in multi-ethnic states are often simplistically explained solely on the basis of racial conflict without consideration of other important factors."<sup>40</sup> This raises questions about the inter-ethnic conflict hypothesis as the sole basis for Fiji's first coup. Scarr claims that, "there was also a belief that Alliance multiracialism was partly the cause and that "as Fiji had become more prosperous so Fijians became, overall, relatively poorer".<sup>41</sup> Scarr's generalization of the Indians in the eyes of the Fijians was as 'the typical *Kai India* was taken to be the presumably well-off shopkeeper not the barely-employed cane-cutter.'<sup>42</sup> By 1987 Fijians who until the mid-1960s were village bound were closing the economic gap dramatically.<sup>43</sup> Naidu claims that ethnic tensions "were fomented to provide the right environment for intervention and takeover in Fiji's coups."<sup>44</sup> In fact the absences of inter-communal and inter-religious violence akin to Sri Lanka belie the inter-ethnic conflict hypothesis. The ethnic conflict logic for the 1987 coup is weak when one compares the lack of bloodshed historically with the scale of other global inter-ethnic conflicts.

In fact, in his biography, Rabuka acknowledged he was the instrument of members and supporters of the Alliance party.<sup>45</sup> Brij Lal has also contended that, "the presence of such a strong Alliance contingent in the Council

reinforced the rapidly deepening suspicion of the party's collusion with the coup makers."<sup>46</sup> From its inception the Taukei Movement, which many viewed as the militant wing of the former ruling Alliance Party, embodied the grievances that it argued retarded the indigenous race and called for their redress. However, on closer inspection, the key movers and shakers in the Movement were made up of Alliance Party elites and stalwarts who were ruing the loss of political power and control of government's purse strings after being shunned at the polls.

David Robie furthered this hypothesis when he found that the majority of the major actors were derived from the same Cakaudrove-Lau region.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the military elite and the political elite were of a similar socio-political group. The opportunity to intervene was also being manufactured by the same socio-political elite in conjunction with the coup leader, Rabuka. It seemed what the chiefly elite in the Alliance establishment had wanted was now in the possession of an Indo-Fijian dominated party. *Time* magazine made the suggestion that the Alliance 'could not accept its loss of power and the prerequisites of long held office.'<sup>48</sup> Mara, however, argues, "At our first meeting Colonel Rabuka told us that he was a soldier and did not want to run the government and the sooner he gets back to camp the better it would be for all."<sup>49</sup> The implication was quite explicit; Mara was called upon to run government because of Rabuka's impetuous actions and therefore by inference was free of malevolence.

Colonel Sanday, the second in command of the RFMF, who was suspiciously summoned to Ratu Penaia's office during the takeover of parliament, witnessed this relationship within the hour after the coup, when Rabuka entered the Governor General's office to explain his actions. Ganilau was Rabuka's paramount chief and military patron. To illustrate the point according to Deryck Scarr when Rabuka met with the Governor General on the morning after executing the coup, he did not say, 'Well I've done it' as was reported but referred to his having effected what the chiefs had wanted.<sup>50</sup> Sanday later offered an important insight into the *Turaga-Bati* relationship and stressed that the Fiji military professionalism differed from the classical professionalism of the British military.<sup>51</sup> Commenting on the criticism that he was the puppet of the

two high chiefs Mara and Ganilau, Rabuka said, 'They look on me as one of their warriors of old, and a trusted man of modern times.'<sup>52</sup> This enigmatic relationship is what sets the Fiji military apart. Scarr best describes this relationship between Rabuka and Ganilau in their meeting after the coup that morning as 'commander in chief, traditional overlord and long-time personal patron.'<sup>53</sup> This cordial scenario came to define the purpose of the coup and the neo-traditional chief-military relationship.

### **The Great Council of Chiefs and Military Relations**

As a result of Rabuka's coup, the Great Council of Chiefs was again thrust into national political prominence. On 20-21 May the Council was convened by the Governor-General to deliberate on Rabuka's coup. For two days whilst the Council sat at Suva's Civic Auditorium, a pensive yet jubilant crowd of hundreds of Fijians surrounded the main entrance to the venue. A pro-Rabuka coup bias against the moderate stand of the Tui Cakau elect and Governor General was evident amongst Cakaudrove senior chiefs, Ganilau's own province. Mara's wife Adi Lala during the meeting also praised the actions of Rabuka akin to a gallant chief or *Turaga qaqa*. The GCC played an important calming role during these tumultuous days, however much it has been criticized. What the coup showed in its wake was that tribal loyalty, obedience and respect for chiefly authority were still the keystones of Fijian ethical sense.<sup>54</sup> After two days of deliberations, the chiefs expressed support for Rabuka's actions. The Governor-General who had convened the Council was caught between Westminster constitutionality and his fellow chiefs' decision to back the overthrow of government. Rabuka added pressure on the Governor-General by stating that he was still very much in command of the Army and the Police Force with a very strong backing from the GCC.<sup>55</sup> This put Ganilau as Commander in Chief out on a limb. Apparently Mara was also on the popular Rabuka's side for the present at least.

The Colonel's agenda in collusion with the GCC was apparently being impeded by Ganilau. Rabuka reacted, "The Army may continue running the government with its own Council of Ministers if the Great Council of Chiefs disapproves of the Governor General's Advisory Council."<sup>56</sup> This was in lieu of the GCC expressing support for Rabuka's coup and hostility toward the Governor



General's appointed Advisory Council after the two days of deliberations. The initial cordial relationship between Ganilau and Rabuka had worn thin given the latter's rise to political prominence. The GCC's decision to back Rabuka's coup had tainted the native advisory body as nothing more than a political tool of Fijian elites.

The convening of a council of lesser chiefs or *Bose ni Turaga* (BNT) in 1988 that first sat at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, was an attempt to balance the power of the GCC with a semblance of democratic rule. Chiefs elected to sit on the GCC from the provinces were often criticized for furthering personal political agendas at meetings against the wishes of their lesser chiefs in the provinces. Hence the BNT of no fixed composition was open to some 215 chiefs which made up Fiji's vanua. Controlled by the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, the BNT's aim was to get the second and third tier 'grass root' chiefs seemingly involved in vital political development when deemed necessary. It has been convened on six occasions since as a counterweight to what is seen as the growing politicization of the GCC.<sup>57</sup>

The coup also fostered a close relationship between the GCC secretariat at the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and the Military. An all-purpose hall in Queen Elizabeth Barracks was renovated with the Ministry of Fijian Affairs funds and named Rabuka Hall to serve as the meeting centre for the GCC in 1988.

To illustrate the nexus that had developed between the GCC and the military

A prayer meeting by pro-Coalition government supporters had taken place at Albert Park in conjunction with the GCC meeting at Suva's Civic Town Hall. Taukeists began a heated exchange of words as Fijians began bashing Indians. This led to a rampage through Suva by a surging mob. A truckload of soldiers arrived to quell the violence with Lieutenant Filipo Tarakinikini as their leader. The Officer then got onto the roof of the truck and announced to the violent crowd "the GCC has agreed to change the Constitution and give Fijians guarantee that they will always remain in leadership." This quelled the flare up of violence which started at Albert Park yesterday morning.<sup>58</sup>

Affairs were not that simple though as the GCC, iTaukeists, Coalition supporters, Ratu Mara and Ratu Penaia and Rabuka embarked on various political solutions including the setting up of the still born Falvey Constitutional Review Committee to solve the political impasse.

### **The Fiji Methodist Church-Chiefs- Military Relationship**

Rabuka's coup also brought to the fore the close relationship of the Methodist Church elites to the chiefs and the military in national politics. Indeed Rabuka's coup could not have been possible but for the urging and backing of Methodist ministers such as Reverend Tomasi Raikivi who hosted a meeting at his home prior to the coup. Also present were Ratu Finau Mara, eldest son of Ratu Kamisese Mara; Ratu Keni Vuiyasawa, the brother of RFMF Commander Nailatikau and son-in-law to Ratu Kamisese Mara; Ratu George Kadavulevu, son of the paramount chief of Fiji, Ratu Sir George Cakobau; Filipe Bole, former minister in the Mara government; and unionist and Alliance stalwart Taniela Veitata.<sup>59</sup> It was here that Rabuka – a lay Methodist pastor himself – discussed political options, prayed and affirmed a coup coalition with a host of chiefs, politicians and the President of the Fiji Council of Churches Ratu Inoke Kubuabola.<sup>60</sup> Raikivi gained further political prominence as an appointee on Rabuka's Council of Ministers immediately after the coup.

Since the emancipation of Fijians from villages to towns and cities in the early 1960s, many Methodist church circuits were formed in urban areas. Pastors of these urban circuits became quite influential socially and virtually took on the role of village chiefs. The pressures of urban living and modernity coupled with close habitation with other ethnic groups saw the rise of Methodist Fundamentalism led by pastors such as Manasa Lasaro. Christian religious fundamentalism embodies a demand for strict adherence to specific theological doctrines based exclusively on the bible. It is also usually understood as a reaction against the modernist theology of inclusiveness combined with a vigorous attack on outside threats to the fundamentalists' religious culture. To the Methodists, the coup had a religious meaning. In the person of lay Methodist pastor Lt Col Rabuka, it was seen as a biblical moment, proof that the Almighty was on their side as an exclusive Methodist god. Prior to the coup given his deeply religious background and sense of destiny with the political events unfolding, Rabuka validated his actions as similar to the calling of the Prophet Jeremiah.<sup>61</sup> To facilitate his coup Rabuka revealed in *No Other way* that he prayed for rain in order that his soldiers going into parliament that

morning could wear raincoats to conceal their weapons. Rabuka effused, “I asked for rain, and it rained. That really strengthened my faith in God. I believed then that everything I was doing was according to God’s plan”.<sup>62</sup> A ‘messianic mission’ and a ‘personal manifest destiny’, however, have often been used by many a military strongman to justify coups.<sup>63</sup>

The nexus between the Church and the military was displayed when, after the second coup, a Sunday trading ban decree was imposed to appease fundamentalists who had formed a powerful political bloc. For the adherents, in a theological way the coup was an event whose time had come as orchestrated by the Divine. The Sunday ban was an assertion of the exclusive fundamentalist Christian practice. Konrote goes further to assert that during the 1987 military coups

Fundamentalist Methodism became a powerful tool for nationalistic mobilisation and ethnic domination. The social, cultural and political turmoil that followed the coup produced a ready audience of followers within the faith to take advantage of the situation to oust those church leaders within the clergy who did not support the objectives of the coups. Following the military coups of 1987, and the subsequent reinstatement of the ‘Christian clause’ within the new (1990) constitution, the stage was set for fundamentalism to emerge with its own distinct identity within the Methodist church.<sup>64</sup>

On Sunday 18 December 1988 a group of Methodists, led by the general secretary Reverend Manasa Lasaro, blocked off roads at about 70 points in the greater Suva area to protest against the relaxation of the Sunday ban decree. Lasaro and his followers were arrested and jailed though Rabuka as Minister of Home Affairs ordered their release.

Lasaro was immediately suspended by the President of the Methodist Church, Rev. Josateki Koroi, for acting unconstitutionally in not getting church authority in staging the protest. Lasaro’s action split the Methodist Church. In a church coup, Koroi was unconstitutionally deposed by Lasaro and his backers. A court judgement found Lasaro and his group had acted unlawfully. Ratu Mara, knowing the political clout of Lasaro, offered the Methodist minister a position in his caretaker cabinet but this was turned down. Even though traditional reconciliation was later offered by Lasaro to Koroi, the Methodist church has been tainted by this clash. A clique of senior pastors, like Lasaro, in their

religious orientation is generally viewed as upholding Christian fundamentalist principles coupled with an ethno-nationalist agenda.

### **The September Takeover**

After more than five months of attempts to bridge the political divide amongst the various factions Rabuka executed a second bloodless political takeover on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September. This putsch, compared to the May takeover, unfolded as a more coordinated military operation. This was due mainly to the establishment of the first Joint Operations Centre set up in Suva's Central Police Station to coordinate all Police-Army Joint Operations (POLARJO). Lieutenant Colonel Isikia Savua who went on to become the Commissioner of Police in the Rabuka government was in charge of the centre. The command centre also closely monitored and coordinated national security including the activities of all political parties especially the Taukei Movement. Prior to the second coup, it had come to light that some members of the security forces were working with the Taukei Movement in creating mayhem. This suspicion stemmed also from the numerous unsolved arson cases in Suva city's Central Business District. The Naboro Prison mass break-out on the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> September in which controversially the prisoners were escorted through the Capital Suva to meet the Governor General was monitored from this centre. The security arrangements for the second coup of 25<sup>th</sup> September were also coordinated from this centre.

In September, Governor General Ratu Penaia, pressured by the international community, had brokered talks with ousted Prime Minister Bavadra and Alliance leader Ratu Mara and had forged what was a promising agreement. The fourteen point Deuba Accord gave executive authority to the Governor-General who was to appoint a bi-partisan Council of State from the two principal political parties, sharing equal portfolios.<sup>65</sup> Scarr's perspective on Rabuka's second coup after the Deuba Accord, given the relationship between the coup leader and the Governor General, is applicable:

What does seem clear is that Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau overestimated his influence on Rabuka. Perhaps he forgot that traditionally the relationship between *turaga* and *bati* was symbiotic. The *bati* as defender of the borders was a very independent vassal. His support that gave the chief the power could be withdrawn.<sup>66</sup>

Ratu Penaia, bound to his oath of office, was also the custodian of other ethnic groups and was playing hardball to the demands of Rabuka, the GCC and the iTaukei Movement. Rabuka was also becoming restless as Ratu Penaia was treating him as a subject and certainly not a force to be reckoned as his equal. In league with the iTaukei Movement, Rabuka saw the Accord as reinstating the status quo and was now opposed to the political agenda of Mara and Ganilau, the two doyens of the chiefly order. Rabuka later explained his actions to a journalist, "We thought if the caretaker government would carry on long enough, they would forget the real issue which was to change the constitution, ensuring the paramountcy of Fijian interests."<sup>67</sup> Ironically this time, though, egged on by nationalists and guided by the military's corporate interest, chiefly support crucial to his May coup was seemingly abandoned.

Rabuka, now as leader, cobbled together a military government mostly of opportunists and nationalists such as Sakeasi Butadroka, Apisai Tora, Inoke Kubuabola, Timoci Vesikula and Filipe Bole. Prominent in the nationalist agenda was the call for a republic. The Westminster system with the British monarchy as its head was now rejected for a 'new destiny.' On October the 7<sup>th</sup> as head of the military government, Rabuka declared the country a republic and abrogated the 1970 constitution. In the weeks that followed there were internal power struggles within Rabuka's Council of Ministers, exacerbated by inexperience and incompetence. Private agendas, such as Minister of Lands Sakeasi Butadroka's plan to return all Crown land to Fijians, pressured Rabuka to hand back the reins of government to his two chiefly patrons.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, Rabuka dismissed his military government and announced a 25-member mostly Alliance cabinet headed by Mara appointed by a newly installed President in Ganilau. Rabuka had again deferred to the traditional *Turaga-Bati* political status quo. With the interim government now guided by the two high chiefs, Rabuka, also chosen as Minister of Home Affairs and head of the security forces, was tolerant for the present at least of chiefly rule. Through the execution of a second coup, however, what was certain was that Rabuka had asserted military interest as indistinguishable from the national interest. Rabuka, by declaring the nation a republic and abrogating the 1970

Constitution, had created a self-image as the guardian of the nation. Mara's interim government was given a mandate of two years to come up with a new constitution and electoral reforms to entrench Fijian and military interests.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Military's Emerging Political Role.**

By late 1987, Rabuka had changed his political stance to believe that 'the military commander should be a member of parliament and that he couldn't stand by and watch politicians screwing Fiji'.<sup>69</sup> Rabuka, through the Mara-led interim administration, had also given the military a new commercial role with the creation of the Auxiliary Unit and an expanded national youth scheme role that saw the military strength increase to 6,000 from a pre-coup figure of 2,200.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the Police Force, under the military installed Commissioner Josefa Lewacei was obviously receptive to security decisions emanating from the military elite. This subordination to the military during the political crisis compromised Police procedures and independence. By 1989, having fully politicized the military, Rabuka was emboldened to chart a course that deviated from the traditional apolitical pre-coup stand.

The concept of using the military in a political/commercial/community role was modeled on the Indonesian military. The military and Mara's interim regime since the May coup had forged closer ties with East Asian countries including Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia. Rabuka was even contemplating an 'army controlled economy' over a ten year period. Scobell contends that in asserting his political will in his "second-September coup and third-December coup, Rabuka showed that he was independent of the chiefs and the Taukei Movement."<sup>71</sup> Rabuka initially was true to the call of the *bati* in carrying out the May coup, but having tasted power, he engineered a change in relationship in Fiji's neo-traditional politics, between the military top command, the Taukeists and the Chiefs.

Moreover in 1989, the constitutional review process restarted with the appointment of the Manueli Committee, which documented the constitutional wishes of the iTaukei Movement, the chiefs, and the army and largely ignored the wishes of the FLP and NFP.<sup>72</sup> Rabuka and the military's intentions were articulated in a senior military officers' presentation paper to the two distinguished chiefs in power in early 1989. Ganilau, the President, and Mara,

the interim Prime Minister, were briefed in no uncertain terms about the military's wish to play a political role in the national interest.<sup>73</sup> Rabuka and his chief of staff Konrote presented the paper complete with charts describing the military's future political role and intentions. The paper was presented in a military appreciation format in which the national political situation, assumptions, threat, an action orientated programme of priorities and recommendations were clearly laid out from the perspective of the two officers. The crux of the presentation was the military's action-orientated programme priorities with a fifteen year timeline.

Phase one included changing all laws detrimental to Fijian progress, nominating a state religion and implementing new immigration laws to eliminate enemies of the State. Phase two was to complete all issues in sub-topics not completed in Phase one such as on the Vanua, Economy and Citizenship. Phase three entailed all action-orientated programmes to be approved by the GCC, put to the nominated administration and monitored/supervised by the FMF. Additionally, measures were recommended 'to go beyond the bounds of apoliticalness that sanctioned the military prior to the coup' [sic]. These included rejuvenating Operation *Yavato* (Anti-corruption investigations), the survey and registration of native lands and traditional fishing grounds and reversion from Mataqali to the Yavusa as the major Land Owning Unit.

These recommendations were produced after wide consultations with various Fijian government beauracrats and élites. Lieutenant Colonel Pio Wong, Rabuka's chief operations officer and a veteran of peacekeeping operations, and Major Aisake Mataikabara, who had graduated with a Masters in International Strategic Studies, were charged with the creation of this document. The time frame of fifteen years clearly echoed Rabuka's intent for the military to 'not let politicians screw things up' by bestowing upon itself a guardian political role. The role of the military was then established anew in Section 94 (3) of the 1990 Constitution which stated: 'It shall be the overall responsibility of the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and its peoples.' The phrase incidentally remains as Section 130 (2) of Bainimarama's 2013 constitution.

Within the RFMF, one of the well-worn criticisms of the coup has been a lowering of professional soldiering standards due to the pressures of rapid organizational expansion. For example, time in rank and qualification by courses were waived in order to fill newly created military posts. Promotions of senior officers were endorsed by the Commander in Chief Ratu Penaia Ganilau and publicized in the news media. After the coup it also was evident chiefly status and political affiliation mattered throughout the military as Ratu Finau Mara, Ratu George Cakobau, Ratu Keni Vuyasawa and Alliance politician Fred Caine amongst others joined up as officers. At Labasa, where many Fijian civil servants and government statutory bodies workers were being promoted overnight, security for the sugar mill and the port of Malau were controlled by the military. In April 1988, with the news that a container of weapons was smuggled into the country via the western port of Lautoka, the search for missing weapons spread to the north. Large scale searches of Indian owned cane farms were conducted with no results. Indo-Fijian farmers eager to settle old scores with adversaries in their community falsely pointed them out as suspects in what became a wild goose chase. The overnight expansion of the military had brought with it all manner of personnel and logistical challenges that even necessitated the conversion of government property at Vaturekuka Labasa as military quarters and offices. Furthermore instilling military discipline amongst civilian territorial and new recruit soldiers in newly created formations often fell short of professional standards.

### **The Politics of the 1990s**

The *Turaga-Bati* relationship seemed cordial enough after the reinstatement of Mara to lead the caretaker government. Rabuka even praised Mara in 1989 at a recruit passing out parade stating, "In the face of criticism and allegations, the Prime Minister has decided to put his country and its people before his personal wishes."<sup>74</sup> Mara was also favourable to Rabuka by 1989, complimenting the coup leader on the lack of bloodshed saying, "I think we have been fortunate to have had a coup leader like him... and as a coup leader he is an angel."<sup>75</sup> For the military elite, however, the 1990s heralded a period of contradictory philosophies. On one hand a new officers' school with a re-professionalization programme was embarked on yet on the other, the military elite demanded a



national security role. Rabuka epitomized this dilemma as he held the twin posts of Minister for Home Affairs and Commander of the military. Rabuka was conscious that three years after his coup not much had been achieved by way of entrenching Fijian political paramountcy; hence his insistence on pressuring Mara's administration.

Animosity grew between Mara and Rabuka on national issues in Cabinet. Rabuka's public impatience at the lack of progress in the formulation of a Constitution caused him to cross swords with Mara. Rabuka was pushing for Fijian entrenched rights in the constitutional reforms which he stressed were one of the major aims of his coup. After the promulgation of the racially skewed 1990 Constitution, Rabuka finally parted with the military and was made co-deputy Prime Minister with Josevata Kamikamica who was a much favored candidate of Mara as future Prime Minister. With the formation of the GCC backed *Soqosogo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* Party (SVT) as the political entity to unite all Fijians, a tug-of-war for the leadership saw Adi Lady Lala Mara lose out to Rabuka.

The defeat of the paramount chief of the Burebasaga Confederacy and wife of Ratu Mara created a rift in the once convivial *Turaga-Bati* relationship. In the 1992 elections Rabuka went on to lead the SVT ahead of his rival Jo Kamikamica although without the numbers to give him the top post. Needing 36 confirmed votes of those who held seats in parliament, Rabuka with some irony had to strike a deal with FLP's Mahendra Chaudhry to gain the Prime-Ministership. Rabuka was quite conscious that Mara had formed an exclusive diners club of politicians and that "He was the Prime Minister and a commoner in a nation where, for most Fijians leadership was seen as a function of the high chiefs", and that his enemies within his SVT party were many.<sup>76</sup> Rabuka's unsteady reign as Prime Minister took a tumble when six of his party dissidents crossed the floor and voted against his budget of 1993. This unexpected move was more a vote of no confidence in Rabuka's leadership and was plotted by Jo Kamikamica and Ratu Finau Mara who went on to form the Fijian Association Party with, no doubt, backing from Ratu Mara.

In December Rabuka's patron and President Ratu Penaia passed away leaving Rabuka without the steadying advice of his paramount chief, the Tui Cakau and head of the Tovata confederacy. In the 1994 elections, with the support of the ordinary Fijian vote, Rabuka and his SVT party managed a convincing win to resume the reins of government. Rabuka's relationship with the now incumbent President Ratu Mara also plummeted when the high chief publically rued the decision to establish the SVT Party. This decision had been adopted and was first passed at a GCC meeting in 1990 at the Suva military barracks. With the 1999 elections beckoning, it was public knowledge that the President in conjunction with his son-in-law the incumbent Commander of the military, Ratu Epli Ganilau, and certain Methodist Church ministers were founders of the newly formed Veitokani Ni Lotu Vakarisito (VLV) Party, which was a competitor with Rabuka's SVT.

Rabuka's second tenure as Prime minister lurched from one crisis to another prime of which was the \$200 million National Bank of Fiji scam. Rabuka's one lasting legacy with opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy however was the convening of the Reeves Constitutional Review Commission which produced the amended all inclusive multi-racial 1997 Constitution. Rabuka and Reddy despite their best intentions to forge a power sharing arrangement as contained in the 1997 Constitution were humiliated at the polls, a backlash from their deeply divided own communities. The alternate vote system introduced to engender more centrist moderate voting in politically polarised ethnic communities wrought havoc for the SVT/NFP/UGP coalition. This saw the election of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, with the VLV Party's Adi Koila Mara Nailatikau and Poseci Bune as part of his FLP Coalition government.

On relinquishing power to Chaudhry, Rabuka blamed Mara for his 1999 election defeat.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, with a new constitution in place that was hoped to foster a multiracial society, it ironically ended up further fragmenting Fiji politically. For unlike the 1970 Constitution which was derived from talks in London between the two major political parties, the Alliance and the National Federation, the 1997 Constitution was autochthonous. With the close of the

decade and the demise of his political fortunes, Rabuka revealed in his biography he had harbored antipathies towards the Tui Nayau claiming that Mara had “given him the nod” in the weeks before his 1987 coup.<sup>78</sup> Mara threatened to sue Rabuka for defamation.

### **Conclusion**

Rabuka’s coup was a defining moment for the military in Fiji politics. It represented the re-assertion of power by the Fijian chiefly elite. Being the third ranking military officer, Rabuka’s takeover according to Huntington’s classification appeared to be a ‘Breakthrough Coup.’ Huntington had warned that when junior officers or enlisted men seize power, the coup d’état is a mutiny with grave implications for the organizational and professional integrity of the military. For Rabuka the opposite was true. He was the personal embodiment of the Fijian value system. As head boy, Rabuka had been groomed from Queen Victoria School, (*Na Vuli Ni Turaga*) the Fijian boarding school initially set up for chiefs’ sons. He was also a national rugby and athletic representative. As a Methodist lay preacher, he held appeal in Fiji’s predominant Christian denomination. As the commander of the Fiji’s peacekeeping battalion in Lebanon, his military leadership was proven under testing conditions. All these qualities endeared him to his loyalist soldiers and his powerful civilian political network.

Rabuka’s 1987 coup was the assertion of the neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship, where the modern *bati* was protecting Fijian political supremacy. The neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship had been utilized by the colonial administration to legitimize the ruling elite and create a military force. The relationship was further cemented during the World Wars, the Malayan Campaign and overseas peacekeeping operations. This nexus was further maintained through the chiefly rule of the Alliance government of the 1970s-80s. Scarr had argued that the *Turaga-Bati* relationship underpinned such Fijian political control. With the loss of the Alliance party at elections to an Indo-Fijian dominated FLP/NFP Coalition, a national Taukei Movement front agitated against government. The prevalence of ethnic outbidding by political elites has made the instrumentalist conflict view interpretation of the coup more compelling. In backing the instrumentalist view, Brij Lal’s assertion that

Rabuka's coup was manipulated by politicians with personal interests at stake has currency. Lal is adamant the coup was the work of disgruntled Alliance politicians who had lost the reins of government after 17 years in power.<sup>79</sup> These were 'the politicians who were too eager for power and men who made the coup and did not reverse it'.<sup>80</sup>

Lal's description of Mara as being a 'nationalist by instinct and a multi-racialist by necessity' may indeed be apposite.<sup>81</sup> Ratu Mara's, '...I only came in to put the fire out' was a controversial justification for joining Rabuka's coup. His Lauan and Tovata confederacy people had come to support him after his election loss and he as their chief had weighed up his options and responsibilities towards his distraught subjects.<sup>82</sup> Ratu Mara denied any role in the plotting of the coup.<sup>83</sup> However, as revealed by biographer John Sharpham, Rabuka "was prepared to hide Mara's involvement, protecting him as a good *bati*, the warrior doing the work of his chief."<sup>84</sup>

Rabuka's 'second coup' in September though seemed a rejection of this phenomenon. The coup was triggered by the Governor General's successful party talks between the Coalition and the Alliance which gave birth to the stillborn Deuba Accord and a bi-partisan caretaker administration under Ganilau.<sup>85</sup> The temporary parting of ways between the high chief and the military was however re-established after the declaration of the nation as a republic and the abrogation of the Constitution. Rabuka's coup aim was evidenced in the adoption of the ethnically skewed 1990 Constitution under the influence of the Great Council of Chiefs. A parallel outcome of the Rabuka coup is that the Fiji military began to see itself in an expanded security role. With the benefit of three coups in hindsight, we experience a sense of *déjà vu*. The military that had intervened to protect a ruling class has become a political class itself, an inversion of the status quo. The military's adopted mediator role has become an important factor in generating Fiji's coups. With the passage of time and two further coups the Fiji military has no doubt developed a political corporate interest. The military coup of 1987 had only succeeded in freezing the patterns of conflict and failed to resolve the growing socio-economic chasm in Fiji. Indeed coups became a recurring phenomenon for the nation in the coming decades as the military elite continued to redefine its role.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Tuimacilai*, p.314.

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- <sup>2</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.364.
- <sup>3</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, p.143.
- <sup>4</sup> Scarr, *Tuimacilai*, 2008, p.119.
- <sup>5</sup> Scarr, *Tuimacilai*, 2008, p.118.
- <sup>6</sup> *In The Eye of the Storm*, p.364.
- <sup>7</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Roadblock 63 Freed on Bail', 7 May 1987.
- <sup>8</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Senator on Arson Charge', Thur 14 May 1987.
- <sup>9</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Tora Charged with Sedition', Mon 11 May 1987.
- <sup>10</sup> A. Ravuvu, *The Façade of Democracy, Fijian Struggles for Political Control 1830-1987* Reader Publishing House, Suva, 1991, pp.80-81.
- <sup>11</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Government Can't Destroy The Chiefly System', 14 May 1987.
- <sup>12</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Government Can't Destroy The Chiefly System', 14 May 1987.
- <sup>13</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Pensioners to get Free Bus Ride' 6 May 1987. Minister for Communications, Welfare and Transport Mr. Ahmad Bhamji had made the announcement after meeting Fiji Bus Operators Association President Mr. Pramendra Pande.
- <sup>14</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, pp.105-106.
- <sup>15</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, p.133.
- <sup>16</sup> Lt Col Jim Sanday former Chief of Staff of the Fiji Military, in 'The military in Fiji: historical development and future role', Working Paper no. 201, Australian National University. Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 1989.
- <sup>17</sup> Scobell, 'Politics Professionalism and Peacekeeping': 187-201.
- <sup>18</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Fiji The Politics of Illusion The Military Coups in Fiji*, NSW University Press, 1988, p.33.
- <sup>19</sup> See Scobell, 'Politics Professionalism and Peacekeeping': 194.
- <sup>20</sup> Scobell, 'Politics Professionalism and Peacekeeping': 197.
- <sup>21</sup> Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, Double Day Press, 1988.
- <sup>22</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Ratu Mara Solves Crisis', 23 May 1987.
- <sup>23</sup> Lal, *In The Eye of the Storm*, p.366.
- <sup>24</sup> Robertson and Tamanisau, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*, p.97.
- <sup>25</sup> *Fiji Times*, 31 July 1987.

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- <sup>26</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p.97.
- <sup>27</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*: 108. Sharpham had interviewed Ratu Finau in 1998. Ratu Mara confirmed this in an interview, *Fiji Times*, 12 Dec 1991, p.2.
- <sup>28</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army Seizes Power-Coup,' Fri 15 May 1987.
- <sup>29</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Bavadra Speaks,' 15 May 1987.
- <sup>30</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka, No Other Way*, p.65.
- <sup>31</sup> See Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka, No Other Way*, pp.63 and 171.
- <sup>32</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Governor-General issued statement from Government House yesterday', 15 May 1987.
- <sup>33</sup> Robertson and Tamanisau, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*, p.71.
- <sup>34</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.367.
- <sup>35</sup> Lal, *In The Eye of the Storm*, p.401.
- <sup>36</sup> Lal, *In The Eye of the Storm*, p.401.
- <sup>37</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army Seizes Power -Coup,' Fri 15 May 1985.
- <sup>38</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, p.168.
- <sup>39</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, p.138.
- <sup>40</sup> Donald Horowitz. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California: Berkeley Press, 1985, p.472.
- <sup>41</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Fiji the Politics of Illusion*, p.63.
- <sup>42</sup> Deryck Scarr, *Fiji The Politics of Illusion*, p.63.
- <sup>43</sup> The Spate and Burns Reports that investigated Fijian village and communal development were instrumental in instituting Fijian social reforms. Large numbers of Fijians began moving into the urban workforce in the 1960s. By the 1976 Census Indians made up 55% of wages and salaries workers to Fijians 35%.
- <sup>44</sup> Rajend Naidu, 'Myth of Ethnic Tension in Fiji', 4 Feb 2012, [www.pacificscoop.co.nz](http://www.pacificscoop.co.nz).
- <sup>45</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p.97.
- <sup>46</sup> Lal, *In The Eye of the Storm*, p.370.
- <sup>47</sup> David Robie, 'Why the Fijian Plot Theory is gaining Ground', *Times on Sunday*, 12 Jul 1987.
- <sup>48</sup> *Time Magazine*, 25 May 1987.
- <sup>49</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Ratu Mara Solves Crisis,' 23 May 1987.

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- <sup>50</sup> Scarr, *Fiji The Politics of Illusion*, p.73.
- <sup>51</sup> Jim Sanday, 'The Politicization of Military Professionalism in Fiji', in Viberto Selochan, ed, *The Military, the State, and Development in Asia and the Pacific*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1991, pp. 126-127.
- <sup>52</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka No Other Way*, p.148.
- <sup>53</sup> See Scarr, 'The Turaga and Bati,' in *Fiji The Politics of Illusion*, p.73.
- <sup>54</sup> Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, p.63.
- <sup>55</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Rabuka: Army May Stay On', 21 May 1987.
- <sup>56</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Rabuka: Army May Stay On', 21 May 1987.
- <sup>57</sup> *Fiji Sun*, 'Bose ni Turaga Reschedules Meeting', 21 Nov 2008. There are no specific regulations governing the meetings of the *Bose ni Turaga* but records of proceedings of the past five *Bose ni Turaga* clearly indicates that the *Bose ni Turaga* is activated at times when important national issues need extensive consultations on a collective basis. The BNT comprised only the traditional heads of the 215 vanua in the country who in the eyes of Fijians "own the people, the land, the qoliqoli and everything else".
- <sup>58</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Mob Quelled as Violence Flares', 21 May 1987.
- <sup>59</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, p.50.
- <sup>60</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, pp.49-50.
- <sup>61</sup> Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka sincerely believed he was carrying out his coup for which God had chosen him according to Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, p.162.
- <sup>62</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, p.67.
- <sup>63</sup> John J Johnson, *The Role of the military in Underdeveloped countries*, Princeton University Press, 1962, p.92.
- <sup>64</sup> George Konrote, 'Religion, Politics and Society: The case of Methodist Fundamentalism in Fiji', SSGM Working Paper, Oct 2003, pp.2-3.
- <sup>65</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, pp. 417-422.
- <sup>66</sup> Scarr, *Fiji The Politics of Illusion*, p.131.
- <sup>67</sup> Saed Nagvi, 'Marooned at Home: A Demoralised Fiji Indian community,' *India Today* 30 Nov 1987, in Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p.409.
- <sup>68</sup> Dean and Ritova, *Rabuka No Other Way*, p.131. The two years mandate is calculated from December 1987-December 1989.
- <sup>69</sup> *Rabuka No Other Way*, p.151.
- <sup>70</sup> Defence White Paper 1997, *Defending Fiji*, and p.96.



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<sup>71</sup> See Scobell, 'Politics Professionalism and Peacekeeping: An Analysis of the 1987 Military Coup in Fiji', 194.

<sup>72</sup> Sanjay Ramesh, *Fiji Daily Post*, 'The Story of Four Coups', 6 May 2007.

<sup>73</sup> RFMF Senior Officers Presentation Paper, 28 Jan 1989, see Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p.149.

<sup>74</sup> *Fiji Times* 30 Sep 1989, p.1 in John Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p.150.

<sup>75</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p 151.

<sup>76</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p 172.

<sup>77</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p.291.

<sup>78</sup> R Robertson and W Sutherland, *Government by the Gun: the Unfinished Business of Fiji's 2000 Coup*, Pluto Press, Australia, 2001, p.16.

<sup>79</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, pp.95-96.

<sup>80</sup> Stewart Firth, 'The Contemporary History of Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History* 24, 2, 1989: 244.

<sup>81</sup> Professor Brij Lal discussion on Ratu Sir KKT Mara with author, 28 September 2011.

<sup>82</sup> *Fiji Times*, 29 May 1987.

<sup>83</sup> Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *The Pacific Way*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1997, p.195.

<sup>84</sup> Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji*, p. 105.

<sup>85</sup> Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm*, pp. 402-422.

## Chapter 4

### The Origins of the Re-shaping of the Fiji Military, 2000.

#### Introduction

The coup of the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2000 had a profound impact on the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. Initially, George Speight and his civilian followers hoped that, by storming parliament, they would trigger a supportive reaction from the military as in the 1987 coup. This did not eventuate. However even after the initial capture of Prime Minister Chaudhry and his cabinet as hostages, the rebels were able to return to the barracks to obtain more weapons<sup>1</sup>. The military was divided, not only along provincial lines. The schisms were regional, and reflected a split within and outside the army.<sup>2</sup> Support for the George Speight coup came particularly from soldiers from the island of Vanua Levu and dissidents from Ra, Northern Tailevu and other provinces with strong links to the Bau chiefs and the Kubuna confederacy.

The role of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) during the 2000 coup is perplexing. In the wake of the 2006 coup, the military's role in Fiji's society has been portrayed as bridging the ethnic divide and suppressing the forces of ethno-nationalism<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the military responded in an ambivalent manner to George Speight's coup in May 2000. The common refrain 'we support the goals (of George Speight's coup) but not the method' was echoed not only by many *Itaukei* politicians but also by the RFMF senior command.<sup>4</sup> Although the RFMF ultimately imprisoned and arrested the coup leader, there was little sympathy for the ousted government of Mahendra Chaudhry, the country's first Prime Minister of Indian descent. The 2000 crisis was the pivotal point in the reshaping of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship.

This chapter examines the role of the Fiji military during the 2000 coup crisis which was the theatre for the beginning of the inversion of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. Moreover the deposing of President Mara symbolized this inversion and the assertion of the military to political prominence and power. The first section examines the military's involvement in the 19<sup>th</sup> of May insurrection, and its aftermath. With the public leak of a copy of the RFMF Board of Investigation Report chaired by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Evans, into the parliament takeover by George Speight and the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron, much of the sequence of events have been corroborated.<sup>5</sup> It also examines the actions of the Military Council formed during Bainimarama's 37-day government of the 29<sup>th</sup> of May to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. In particular, it examines the RFMF response to the destabilisation around the country orchestrated by George Speight's Group inside parliament. The chapter argues that the RFMF's initial concern was the safety and release of the hostages and the integrity of the military in upholding law and order. At the same time the fact was that the military senior officers from the outset were very much in sympathy with the nationalists. The military's stance was summed up in its 'we support the cause and not the method' mantra. The transformation of the military into now playing the central role in national politics, unfolded during this crisis. It was during Commodore Bainimarama and the Military Council's 37 day rule from the 29<sup>th</sup> of May to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July that the indigenous affirmative actions policy was formulated. This controversial policy was later handed over to the military installed Laisenia Qarase interim civilian government.<sup>6</sup>

The claim that military action had been aimed at rooting out ethno-nationalism only became prominent some years later, when it was in the military's interest to depict ethno-nationalism in negative terms. In September of 2005, for example, military spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Orisi Rabukawaqa, started using this term in media releases to justify the military's opposition to the SDL government's Qoliqoli (customary seashore rights) and Reconciliation bills.<sup>7</sup> When the military embarked on its 'Truth and Justice' campaign during the elections against the governing SDL party in the run up to the 2006 elections, the primary public justification had become an alleged effort to 'cleanse' Fiji of trouble-making ethno-nationalists.<sup>8</sup> The events of the present were justified by a

revisionist historical interpretation of Fiji's 2000 Coup events. According to this view, the RFMF was the saviour of Fiji in 2000, when it stepped in to crush George Speight's coup. What is forgotten is that (1) the RFMF was deeply uncertain about how to respond to the May 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 coup, and some senior officers were implicated in plots to unseat Chaudhry; (2) for some time after the coup, there was uncertainty about which side to take; (3) Bainimarama consistently justified his own abrogation of the constitution on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2000 not (as some suggested) under duress due to Speight's holding of hostages, but also much later, after the release of the hostages, in affidavits submitted at the time of the February 2001 Chandrika Prasad court hearings.

### **The Coup and Aftermath**

The 19<sup>th</sup> of May coup did not come as a surprise. In fact on page two of the *Fiji Times* of the same day was the headline, 'Taukei vow to remove PM'. The article stated, "Civil protests by the Taukei will continue until the Chaudhry government and the 1997 Constitution are removed". Hostility to the Chaudhry-led government did not only come from the opposition benches, where the deposed ministers from Rabuka's 1992-99 government sat. It also came from the Fijian political parties from within the FLP-led coalition, and even from ethnic Fijian MPs within the FLP. Many feared Chaudhry's intentions with regard to land<sup>9</sup>. As aptly stated by firebrand politician, Apisai Tora, "When the Chiefs want to scrap ALTA, Tu Ma (literally Ratu Mahendra Chaudhry) wants it retained. When the Fijians don't want the Land Use Commission, Tu Ma wants it implemented. When the Crown Schedule A and B lands are to be returned to Fijians, Tu Ma puts it on hold. When ALTA leases are revoked, Tu Ma pays out F\$28,000 to evicted Indian tenants under the guise of rehabilitation"<sup>10</sup>.

The Fiji military was aware of these threats to government, as it had built up intelligence about what was transpiring in what is anyway a close knit society. The RFMF had since the 1987 coup been operating a military intelligence cell with close liaison with the Fiji Intelligence Service (FIS) set up by the Rabuka SVT government. In addition soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn and the 3rd Battalion of the RFMF were doubling as intelligence operatives feeding general information into the intelligence cell.

As often retold by Commodore Bainimarama to his officers after the 19<sup>th</sup> of May takeover, a few months after the FLP Coalition Government had won the May 1999 elections, leading Nationalist Sakeasi Butadroka had requested a meeting with him.. The naval officer had only in February of the same year assumed the Commander position of the RFMF. The gist of the meeting as recalled by Bainimarama was Butadroka's appeal for the Army to overthrow Chaudhry's government in a full-fledged military coup. On another front, the close links of the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn with former Prime Minister and Commander Sitiveni Rabuka were even reported in the news to have been rekindled and a plot hatched in the weeks prior to the coup.<sup>11</sup>

Apisai Tora, the leader of PANU, in a meeting to revive the Taukei Movement in the west, announced his intention of bringing down Chaudhry's government, blaming his leadership style and anti-Itaukei proposals on land and constitutional issues.<sup>12</sup> Despite widespread Itaukei disquiet about Chaudhry's leadership, the Prime Minister continued to insist that he had a strong popular mandate<sup>13</sup>. The police Commissioner Isikia Savua had also met with the Minister of Home Affairs, Joji Uluinakauvadra, raising his concerns of Itaukei political discontent. Despite all these warning signs the Minister had assured cabinet that the security forces were solidly behind government, confident after almost a year of being in power. Apparently the minister was basing his statement on blind assessment made for him by the FLP Coalition's information gathering network. The Chaudhry government had disbanded the Fiji Intelligence Service, which it saw as an extension of Rabuka's SVT government's spying apparatus. The ABC's Four Corner's investigative TV programme in July 2000 interviewed Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) economic consultant Navi Naisoro, former Fiji Intelligence Service Director Metuisela Mua, and SVT's Jone Dakuvula for their views on the Speight coup: all stated that a coup against the Mahendra Chaudhry coalition government was widely anticipated in May and pointed out the strength of indigenous Itaukei Fijian political dissent.<sup>14</sup>

As ethnic Fijian politicians agitated against the Labour coalition government the military assured the nation that there would be “no coup.”<sup>15</sup> This public stance, however, did not match the assessment indicated by the military’s internal intelligence reports. According to the Evans report, Lt. Col. Viliame Seruvakula, the commanding officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, through his own unit’s intelligence, was providing the Commander RFMF, Commodore Bainimarama, with information that a coup was being planned.<sup>16</sup> The week prior to the coup, a full briefing regarding these reports was prepared for Bainimarama at the Officer Training School. This was followed by discussions of the military’s contingency plan on the suitable response in the case of such an event. Curiously, Bainimarama chose to go to a seminar in Norway, leaving Colonel Alfred Tuatoko as acting commander in his absence. Bainimarama’s action in the immediate period before the coup is difficult to understand. In spite of being given intelligence of an impending coup, he decided to be away at the most crucial time. President Mara had questioned the wisdom of this decision but had been assured that all was under control. As Mara later recounted:

He said [Commodore Bainimarama] he came to let me know that he is going to Norway for a conference. I said do you believe that this is the right time to go and he assured me and said there was some marches in the West a week ago and everything was all right and the reports I get was ok. I said alright, if you think it's alright, you can go.<sup>17</sup>

### **Key Military Officers**

There were seven key military players who were responsible for the decisions in the unfolding crisis situation of Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2000.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 2;** Senior Military Officers.

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- 1) Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama (CRFMF)\*
- 2) Colonel Alfred Tuatoko, acting Commander and Land Force Commander. (CLFC)
- 3) Lieutenant Colonel Samuela Raduva, Chief of Staff Land Force Command. (COSLFC)
- 4) Lieutenant Colonel Filipino Tarakinikini, Chief Staff Officer Logistic. (CSOLOG)

- 5) Lieutenant Colonel Meli Saubulinayau, Chief Staff Officer Plans. (CSO PLANS)
  - 6) Lieutenant Colonel Viliame Seruvakula, Commanding Officer Third Battalion Suva. (CO3FIR)
  - 7) Lieutenant Colonel Jone Baledrokadroka, Chief Staff Officer Operations. (CSOOPS)~
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\* left for Norway Sun 14 May 2000 and returned early morning of Sunday 21st May 2000

~ left for Sinai, Egypt with 2FIR (MFO) Monday 15 May 2000 returned 5 Jun 2000.

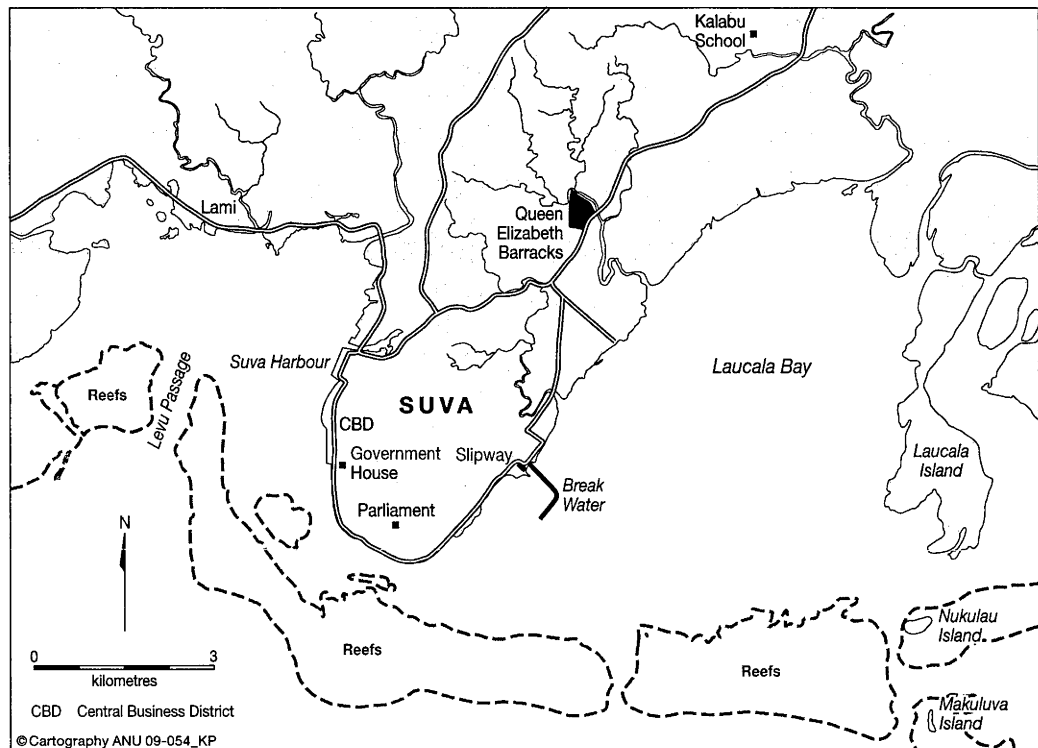
The military commander's absence overseas at the time of the May 2000 coup was reminiscent of the 1987 coup, when RFMF Commander Ratu Epeli Nailatikau had also been absent overseas. The 2000 coup, unlike that in 1987, had been accompanied by considerable uncertainty about who were the behind-the-scenes plotters, and what role the most powerful of politicians played in backing, or at least tacitly endorsing, the activities of their juniors. Bainimarama's trip had been organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs. In addition, I, who held the key Chief Staff Officer Operations appointment at Land Force Command, had left for Sinai to supervise the handing over of the Fiji Battalion command between Lt Col Waqavakatoga and Lt Col Jack Evans on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May.

The Land Force Commander/Acting Commander, Colonel Alfred Tuatoko, his Chief of Staff, Lt Col Samuela Raduva, the Chief Staff Officer Intelligence /Plans- Lt Col Meli Saubulinayau, and the Commanding Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Lt Col Viliame Seruvakula, were the ranking officers in the chain of command responsible for the major decisions on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May and during the crucial days thereafter. Lt Col Filipo Tarakinikini holding the Chief Logistic Officer appointment who became the military spokesman and 'go between' during the crisis was apparently attending lectures at the University of the South Pacific on the day of the coup and reported to Land Force Command headquarters at Queen Elizabeth Barracks shortly after the parliament takeover. Their decisions formed the basis of military orders, both written and verbal during the crisis. The military response, one of ambivalence at first but later as

upholders of the rule of law against Speight's supporters and rebel soldiers, was decided on by their judgement. When the coup happened, with the taking of the Labour Coalition Government's members of parliament as hostages the officers that were in command of the RFMF steered the crisis in such a way as to (a) avoid bloodshed and b) negotiate for a peaceful resolution. However, conflicting with this command intention was the fact that weapons and military rations were conveyed into the parliament complex from the military's Queen Elizabeth Barracks in the preceding days.

Confusion about the events at critical junctures was not confined to senior ranking officers. On the evening of Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, a troop from the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron led by a young troop commander Lieutenant Charles Dakuliga was on Makuluva Island, nine kilometres east of Suva for what was thought to be a unit survival exercise. From a military operational perspective, these troopers may have been prepositioned, in a safe staging location, the nature of the mission unbeknown to them. At around 2230hrs Lt Dakuliga was phoned by a 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn non-commissioned officer Sgt Filimoni Tikotani, instructing him to attend a meeting at the Laucala Bay slipway in order to receive orders from their 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn acting officer commanding Lieutenant Penaia Baleinamau (see Map 1). At the rendezvous that night, Dakuliga was met by Sgt Tikotani, George Speight and his brother Jim Speight, Apenisa Ravutuqica (a reservist soldier) and a public works employee Simone Drole.<sup>19</sup> Lt Dakuliga was then informed of the coup the next morning. However, according to court martial records, some of his troopers, on his return to the island to brief them, were reluctant and hesitant.<sup>20</sup>





Map 3. Suva City Peninsula and Surrounds.

How the command structure was working at this point remains uncertain, particularly as regards the involvement of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn in what was depicted as a ‘civilian’ coup. According to the Evans report at 0315hrs on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> of May phone records show Lt Col Tarakinikini called Staff Sergeant Bainimoli at the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn office at Queen Elizabeth Barracks and then called Col Alfred Tuatoko, the acting Commander, and Land Force Commander, at around 0400hrs<sup>21</sup>. A little later he called Lt Baleinamau, the acting 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn commanding officer. What was discussed nobody knows. However, at 0745 hrs that same morning at the Laucala Bay slipway once again Lt Dakuliga and the troopers from Makuluva Island met Lt Baleinamau. According to Lt Dakuliga, this time the former British SAS soldier and 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn advisor, Major Ilisoni Ligairi, was present. The young troop commander with his forces was then told by Lt Baleinamau that Maj Ligairi would support a mission into the parliament complex and that it was only an exercise. They then drove to another co-conspirator Jo Nata’s Fijian Teachers Association flat at Knolly Street in central Suva to await the final signal<sup>22</sup>. All throughout the late night of the 18<sup>th</sup> May and the early hours of the 19<sup>th</sup> May, George Speight, the coup leader, was directing proceedings from his family

home in Lami town before meeting up with the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn troopers at Jo Nata's flat in Suva's CBD.

There was a high speed chase through the suburban streets of Suva as police gave pursuit of Speight and his group on their way to parliament. Sharp eyed traffic police had spotted a speeding red twin cab 4 wheel drive vehicle followed by a white mini bus and gave chase only to back off when M16 rifles and military issue pistols were brandished at them at the entrance to parliament. At 1040 hrs, the parliament session opened. The signal that it had done so was given by sitting Fijian Association Member of Parliament (ironically a member of Chaudhry's People's Coalition) and co-conspirator, Timoci Silatolu, who was in contact with George Speight by mobile phone. Speight and his armed group of seven stormed into parliament at 1045 hrs.<sup>23</sup> What followed was a confused sequence of events, witnessed by members of parliament as well as school children in the public gallery and *Fiji Times* journalist Matelita Ragogo.<sup>24</sup> The takeover of parliament was timed to coincide with a protest march through central Suva led by SVT /Nationalist Vanua Tako Lavo Party/Taukei Movement stalwarts. It was to be a replica of the 1987 takeover of parliament, a copycat coup. Yet unlike Sitiveni Rabuka's orderly removal of parliamentarians in 1987, Speight was constantly on his mobile phone to nationalist politician Iliesa Duvuloco, leading the march, with the objective of destabilising the situation in Suva.

At 1320 hrs Speight spoke, from within parliament, to a stunned nation:

We, the People of Fiji, in our desire to achieve self-determination and control of our future destiny in all matters pertaining to our livelihood, and the affairs of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, executed this action this morning. There are a small number of us but as I speak and make these announcements, I speak on behalf of every individual member of the indigenous Fijian community. Through these actions I am stressing ownership, asserting control, and asserting executive power over Fiji. We have revoked the constitution and have set that aside. We have revoked the powers of the Republic of Fiji. The executive control of this country currently resides in my hands.<sup>25</sup>

The appeal to the indigenous community, characteristic of all of Speight's speeches at press conferences, was also an appeal to the solidly ethnic iTaukei military forces. George Speight was an unknown in public life and, for those who did know him, his newfound championing of indigenous rights seemed incongruous. In addition, Speight's non-military background generated

suspicion amongst senior military officers. The military top brass would never have supported a civilian-led coup, particularly one spearheaded by a part-European businessman. It was the presence of Major Ilisoni Ligairi and other 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn soldiers inside parliament, which sent a strong signal that officers close to the senior command were in support of the coup. As reported by AF Press on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, Rabuka had revealed the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn unit was not taking orders from Speight. “They are listening to the old man, he is their leader,” he said. The “old man” (*Na Qase*) is a colloquial Fijian term of respect for the unit’s former co-founder and former British SAS trooper Ilisoni Liqairi also nicknamed “Horse”.

Had other alleged secretive military backers of the coup, such as the late Colonel Savenaca Draunidalo MC, stepped forward, it perhaps, would have added greater acceptance of the coup from within the military.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after Speight’s initial press conference, Maj Ligairi left parliament to meet with the Land Force Commander Colonel Alfred Tuatoko and his senior officers at Queen Elizabeth Barracks. He later recounted what transpired:

I went to the senior officers in the army and told them what happened. And I told them that I give (*sic*) the order, and I’m responsible for whatever is going to happen. I know that I broke the law of the Constitution. And I told them, I don’t want any bloodshed.<sup>27</sup>

Tuatoko, an introverted and cautious officer, responded by stalling for time and then informing the President, Mara, of the meeting with the ex-British SAS soldier.<sup>28</sup> On instruction from the President (whose daughter Adi Koila Nailatikau was amongst the hostages inside parliament), Tuatoko permitted Major Ligairi to re-enter parliament to ‘help protect’ the hostages’ lives.<sup>29</sup> Did this decision on the part of Tuatoko indicate tacit support of the Speight ‘cause’? That question could be raised about many of the actions of senior officers and politicians over those tempestuous early days after the coup. Not the least was the President, who, questioned the wisdom of military decisions during the crucial first days. Mara later revealed

Then in one of the discussions, I was talking with [Colonel] Tuatoko in there, I said, I think the best thing to do is to invest the Parliament. There was already a number -200, 2000 or whatever it is - don’t allow anyone to cross Vuya, Queen Elizabeth and Ratu Sukuna [roads]. And see and negotiate. And involuntary [*sic*] Tuatoko said oh... dave na dra (blood will flow). You see the reaction of the man on whom I should depend for security. Well it so happened [that blood] did dave [flow], but I didn’t think it [would] come out from the acting head of the Army.<sup>30</sup>

It seems, from Ratu Mara's point of view, the Military leadership was in cahoots with Speight's group involuntarily. In Tuatoko's case, since he had instructions from the President reinforces the view that his primary concern was the safety of the hostages. Nevertheless, as the acting Commander, Tuatoko was ultimately responsible for the actions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn soldiers. It was Tarakinikini being a former founding member of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn) together with former British SAS soldier Ligairi, who of all the senior command were most likely to have sympathies with the unit if not Speight's stated cause of the takeover.<sup>31</sup>

The President in initially trying to steer a constitutional path after the parliament hostage crisis, condemned the takeover and declared a 'state of emergency'. Appearing on *TV One* he was flanked by the Police Commissioner Savua and the Acting Commander Colonel Tuatoko and a perplexed Colonel Ulaiasi Vatu of Strategic Headquarters. Speight had earlier announced Colonel Vatu as his proposed choice for Commander. It later came to light that Senator Colonel Paul Manueli, also the former Home Affairs Minister in the Rabuka government and former Commander, had warned Colonel Vatu on hearing of Speight's announcement. Vatu was warned to not collaborate with Speight and to appear in solidarity with the President and Colonel Tuatoko on *TV One*. Colonel Vatu was investigated and hounded till his demise in 2004 for this unsubstantiated collaboration with Speight's Group and also the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron's 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2000 mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks.

In response, to the President's TV address, at 1:00pm Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> of May as captured on *TV One*, coup leader Speight swore in Ratu Jope Seniloli as President of the self-proclaimed "Taukei Civilian Government" on a grubby looking Bible. Speight was sworn in as interim Prime Minister then others were sworn in before Ratu Jope Seniloli as members of his Cabinet. The names put forward for the new regime were:

1. Deputy Prime Minister Timoci Silatolu
2. Attorney General and Minister of Justice Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure
3. Minister for Housing and Urban Development Viliame Volavola
4. Minister for Youths and Sports Peceli Rinakama
5. Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Isireli Leweniqila

6. Minister for Land and Mineral Resources Iliesa Duvuloco
7. Minister for Works and Energy Viliame Savu
8. Minister for Information Simione Kaitani
9. Asst. Minister for Lands Mitieli Bulanauca
10. Asst. Minister for Education Manasa Moce
11. Asst. Minister for Urban Development Eroni Lewaqai
12. Asst. Minister for Environment Antonio Tanaburenisau
13. Asst. Minister for Forest Lepani Tonitonivanua

At the outset on his arrival at Nadi Airport from Norway in the early hours of Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> of May , Bainimarama returned to a country and a military in the midst of high intrigue. According to Lt Col Seruvakula, the Commander had to be protected away from the aircraft and out of the airport as a team of 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn assassins were posted in the vicinity. The Commander was then driven via the longer route through the Kings Highway to Suva as a warning of a road ambush along the Queens Highway was evaded.

The first the public heard of Commodore Bainimarama in the news media was when he denied a *Fiji Times* enquiry on the night of Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July that shots fired around the parliament complex were from RFMF soldiers. Apparently rumours were rife that foreign forces were to attack the parliament complex that night which sparked wild shooting by unidentified gunmen<sup>32</sup>. It seems on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May the Speight group security advisors led by Maj Ligairi and Sgt Tikotani were becoming jittery about the military or foreign forces attempting a rescue operation on the hostages. Hence some 200 civilian supporters, both male and females, were let into the parliament complex, supposedly to act as human shields to a rescue operation. These civilians were split into the three traditional confederacy groupings and allocated security for areas within the complex. The inability to control civilians from entering the complex was a major security failure of the police and military. Isolating the Speight Group from its supporters would have denied them crucial moral and logistic support that could have shortened the hostage crisis. The confusion seemed to have stemmed from legislated procedures as to whether the police or the military was in control of security in these early days. Any plans of cordoning off the complex for a rescue operations were severely hampered with the ensuing influx of supporters.

On Friday the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, the day the Great Council of Chiefs announced its support for the President Ratu Mara. After this announcement, later that day, Speight rejected an offer put to him by a delegation from the GCC. Speight and some chiefs had wanted the sacking of Ratu Mara, amnesty, and the installing of his interim *Itaukei* government amongst other demands. The same day in what was a letdown for the RFMF, Major Jo Savua and Sergeant Major Malakai Veisamasama and 18 troopers of the RFMF Engineers marched into parliament to the applause of George Speight and his supporters. Major Savua said his men considered the plight of the indigenous Fijians more important than the uniforms they donned. "Our support is for the plight of the indigenous Fijians and the future of our children", he said. "We are doing this for the Fijian people" he said. The officers marched into the complex an hour after the negotiating committee from the GCC arrived.<sup>33</sup> This desertion from the ranks from a close knit unit such as the Engineers had more to do with Major Savua's close links to his brother the Police Commissioner Isikia Savua than anything else. The Police Commissioner's role to date in the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> of May is still shrouded in controversy.

Tensions began to rise around the parliament complex on the weekend of the the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May as soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion tried to erect concertina wire and check points at entry/exit points. Armed soldiers were forced to back off to avoid an ugly scene at Veiuto as George Speight, accompanied by about 10 armed guards, ordered the soldiers to remove the barricades.<sup>34</sup> Earlier that day Police Commissioner Isikia Savua said military assistance was requested due to an increase of arms being carried around by people.<sup>35</sup> On the night of Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup> May, a horde of rebels from Parliament spilled out into the streets and ransacked *Fiji TV One* station in retaliation to a *Close Up* programme, fatally shooting a police man.

### **The 29<sup>th</sup> of May Military Takeover**

In what amounted to a second coup, Bainimarama in a televised news broadcast to the nation, said, "At approximately 1800 hours tonight, Monday, 29 May 2000, I have assumed executive authority of the country and henceforth declare martial law."<sup>36</sup> The action was a response to the rampaging of Speight's mob through the streets of Suva which resulted in the killing of a policeman and

trashing of the national TV station on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May. That night, the President and his family were evacuated for their safety to a naval vessel close to *Daveta Levu* passage at the entrance to Suva harbour. Aboard that vessel outside the harbour, Commodore Bainimarama with several senior officers presented a *tabua* (whale's tooth) in a Fijian ceremony to the President requesting him to step aside (*tu vaka tikitiki*). The President acquiesced in the Fijian language saying that since the very people who were to protect him had asked for him to step aside from office, he would never again return to the high office. This second seizure of power, following Speight's capture of parliament, was a capture of the President's executive authority (as distinct from, parliament's legislative authority), and was later argued by the military commander's lawyers to have been done in accordance with 'the doctrine of necessity' to save the nation. This power seizure in the broader traditional sense was emblematic of the renowned inversion of the *Roko Tui Bau* by his *Vunivalu*. Only this time the *bati* was asserting political power over the *turaga* in the modern context.

In its public justification, the military strategy of removing the President and abrogating the 1997 Constitution was (again) to appease the George Speight Group and pave the way for the release of the hostages. Bainimarama would become acting President with a military executive council that would pursue affirmative action for indigenous Fijians and appoint a constitutional review commission. It has been said by some officers since, that the 29<sup>th</sup> of May abrogation of the constitution was not the first option entertained by the military council and all that was wanted was for the President to be relocated to Lau and the doctrine of necessity be invoked. Why abrogate the constitution at this point? One plausible explanation was, again, to appease the George Speight Group or were their other interests at work? Some senior judges, including Justice Gates, believed this to have been the case and claimed that Bainimarama was acting under the 'doctrine of necessity'. However, judges sitting on the Court of Appeal in March 2001 disagreed with this interpretation, largely because they had an affidavit before them from the Commander defending the abrogation of the constitution. In other words, the decision to ditch Fiji's fundamental laws on the 29th of May was not done out of expediency, but served some ulterior purpose. On the advice of his Military Council and in

particular former commander Rabuka, Bainimarama tasted absolute power for the first time.<sup>37</sup> For 37 days until the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, he retained executive authority. He was supported by a group of experienced and articulate military officers and senior civil servants that worked together as a team to give his rule credibility.

Let us now examine the actions and philosophy of that government. The Military Council that worked behind Bainimarama during the 37-day government was responsive to conflicting pressures. Although bound by the Fiji Constitution and by the Military Act Cap 81, the crisis had created a power vacuum into which the military stepped. A time limit of 30 days was set by the Council to bring the hostage crisis to an amicable solution. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the former military commander, had been proposed to head the military's Council of Ministers and become interim Prime Minister. However, as the 30 day deadline neared, it was the unanimous decision of the Council and the Military Advisory Group that a person with better professional credentials and who could inspire civilian technocrats to right a flailing economy and articulate the military's Indigenous Action Plan as demanded by the Speight Group was needed. Other members of the Council included Ratu Epeli Ganilau, as well as 1992-99 Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, who was later requested by the Council to withdraw because of a conflict of political interest as he was the chair of the GCC and a former SVT Prime Minister. Rabuka later said he declined an offer by the Commodore to join the Military Council of advisers. "I declined because I felt the Council need people who are apolitical."<sup>38</sup>

Rabuka and Ganilau most influenced Bainimarama during his 37-day government and after his return to Fiji from Norway on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May. Both men had influence over an inexperienced and inarticulate Bainimarama. They were former military commanders who had entered the political arena straight after their terms as Commanders. Both were smarting from defeat in the May 1999 elections. Rabuka's nationalist SVT party had lost its hold on government to Chaudhry's FLP coalition. Ganilau's debut into politics with the VLV had been thwarted when he was defeated in the race for the Cakaudrove West Open constituency by Rabuka. Both men saw the Speight-generated crisis as a stage for regaining their lost political influence. The other officers on the Council



included Major General Joji Konrote, Colonel Alfred Tuatoko and Colonel Ulaiasi Vatu. In addition to the Council a Military Advisory Group was formed of former senior officers headed by Colonel Jeremaia Waqanisau that acted as the think tank for the Council. The Military Council also co-opted a few well qualified technocrats to run the country during Bainimarama's 37 day rule, including banker and financial adviser Laisenia Qarase<sup>39</sup>, Permanent Secretary of Finance Savenaca Narube, lawyer Alipate Qetaki, Public Service Commission Secretary Anare Jale and former diplomat and politician Berenado Vunibobo. This team of civilian administrators headed by Anare Jale acted as an advisory body. They were the intermediary between the military and other government Permanent Secretaries who had assumed executive powers in the civil service due to the stalemated political crisis.

The first meeting between George Speight's group and the RFMF officers occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2000. The RFMF negotiations team consisted of Colonel Alfred Tuatoko (Land Force Commander), Lt Col Sam Raduva (Chief of Staff Land Force Command), Lt Col Filipo Tarakinikini (Chief Staff Officer Logistics and Military Spokesman), and Major Etueni Caucau ( Director Army Legal Services). George Speight's team consisted of Jim Silatolu, Meli Loki, Tevita Bukarau, Sereli Leweniqila, Jo Tuberi and Rakuita Vakalalabure. Speight's group tabled their list of demands which included: 1) a pardon for those that abrogated the constitution, 2) the military executive council of advisers were to be free of people involved in the Alliance, Rabuka or Chaudhry governments, 3) other civilian Fijians were to be co-opted into the military executive council and 4) an interim administration be sworn- in before the hostages were released.<sup>40</sup> The military's negotiation team reported back to the Military Council who took on board these demands in selecting an interim administration. Differences began however, when Speight's group wanted to include in the interim administration, people of its choice though not to the military's liking.

### **Qarase and Military Interim Government**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June at the Great Council of Chiefs meeting at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the Interim Military Government - with Laisenia Qarase as its

spokesman - presented an Indigenous Affirmative Action Plan for endorsement by the GCC. The ex- banker had joined the military regime government on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. To digress, after the FLP Coalition government came to power in May of 1999, a senate committee for indigenous Fijians in business (where Senator Laisenia Qarase was a member) and a select committee on indigenous Fijian education were commissioned. This was in accordance with the social justice compact of the 1997 Constitution. These two committees' findings and recommendations were to be the basis of the Military Council's Blueprint for the protection of Fijian & Rotuman rights and interests (Blueprint) and later the 20-year development plan (2001 – 2020) for the enhancement of participation of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans in the socio – economic development of Fiji, commonly known as 20 Year Plan (20YP). These two documents were a holistic solution to Speight group's list of demands. It was also hoped that this Blueprint would pave the way for the release of the hostages.

**Table 3: Summary of the Blueprint proposals**

Concepts	Description
Constitution	Promulgation of a pro-indigenous constitution (such as the 1990 Constitution);
Land	Transfer of some state land to indigenous landowners;
Land lease	Revocation of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA) which formed the basis of agreement between indigenous land owners and Indo-Fijian farmers to be replaced by the Native Land Trust Act (NLTA);
Fishing rights	Transfer of ownership of offshore areas ( <i>i qoliqoli</i> ) from the state to landowners;
Land compensation	Land compensation for landowners whose land is used for commercial and other purposes;
Fijian Administration	Strengthening the Fijian administration and Great Council of Chiefs as independent institutions;
Fijian trust	Establishment of a Fijian trust fund to facilitate saving and investment for the indigenous community;
Fijian foundation	Establish a Fijian foundation to carry out research into Fijian culture, language, ethno-history and ethno-geography and make these compulsory subjects in schools;
National saving	Establish compulsory national savings scheme to finance indigenous business and education;
Affirmative action law	Enactment of an affirmative action enabling law;
Mineral royalty	Review of underground mineral and water legislation to increase royalty for indigenous Fijians;
Tax exemption	Enact an enabling legislation for tax exemption for indigenous Fijian companies;
Land administration	Improvement of service by NLTB and Native Lands and Fisheries Commission;
Government assistance	Government financial assistance for NLTB and Fijian Holdings Ltd.

Source: Blueprint, 2000

The policy of appeasement towards Speight's demands diminished the status of the military and made it appear ambivalent. And It further weakened a lawless nation with a plummeting economy estimated at the time to have shrunk by nine per cent. Several officers wanted to uphold the integrity of the military by handing over to interim civilian caretaker government post haste and for the military to concentrate with the police on internal security operations. In truth, the majority of the officers were working as a team to contain George Speight's group's threat to the stability of the nation. The potential for ethnic loyalties to create splits was constrained by a deep sense of professionalism. Officers believed that the military had assumed too great a role in the governance of the country, at least for the stipulated time frame of 30 days. It was this sense of professionalism, and subordination to civilian authority, that ensured that – once the threat to national security had passed – officers and former officers advised the Commander to relinquish the reins of power to an interim civilian administration which was finally done on the Friday 28<sup>th</sup> of July. This would not have been achieved had it not been for the successful raid and arrest of George Speight and some 400 of his group at Kalabu the previous morning.

In early June after several rounds of negotiations, the military were still at loggerheads with Speight's Group given their shifting demands. Tensions were high on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June after soldiers fired on Speight's motorcade which the rebel leader believed was an assassination attempt.<sup>41</sup> Speight demanded a written apology from head of state Commodore Bainimarama for shots fired at two cars by soldiers after returning from a meeting with Ratu Josefa Iloilo, Ratu Jope Naucabalavu and GCC negotiator Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi. Military spokesman Lt Col Tarakinikini said it was an 'unfortunate incident'<sup>42</sup>. To insiders in the military the incident was a timely reminder to Speight as to who the boss was.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> of June Bainimarama announced publicly that the military was on the verge of naming a civilian administration by the end of the week. He said the team would be made up of professional, competent and apolitical individuals.

He added that George Speight and his group would not be part of any interim administration.<sup>43</sup>

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2000 Bainimarama, at the urging of his Council, somewhat reluctantly handed over power to a civilian interim government headed by co-opted member Laisenia Qarase. This was after the chiefs and people of Naitasiri province led by their paramount chief the Qaranivalu, Ratu Inoke Takiveikata, had marched to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks main entrance and demanded to meet with Bainimarama. They threatened the takeover of the barracks which sat on Naitasiri land if the military interim government did not hand back rule to the GCC which would then elect a President to form a civilian interim government.

Laisenia Qarase was sworn in as interim civilian government Prime Minister in a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Nabua. He immediately announced a mini- budget in two weeks to address the shattered economy. His deputy was Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the former Commander of the RFMF and also husband of Ratu Mara's daughter Adi Koila, who was still a hostage inside parliament<sup>44</sup>. With the setting up of a civilian interim government under Qarase to deal with running the country and stabilizing the economy, the military was free to focus its attention on the security problem, and resolving the hostage stalemate that had risen with the George Speight group. However the refusal of the Military for Speight or any of his supporters to be included in any interim ministerial or other executive positions of government irked the rebel group.

### **Speight's Group's Destabilizing Activities**

That afternoon at around 3:00 pm obviously in retaliation to the announcement of the military handing over to its installed civilian interim cabinet headed by Qarase, two soldiers on reconnaissance around the parliament complex, were spotted and chased by an angry horde of rebels. A gun battle ensued and lethal 40mm grenade launchers were indiscriminately discharged by the rebel soldiers to provide covering fire for the mob against the soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on duty around the parliament complex. Five rebels were wounded (one later died) and fourteen other rebels taken into custody by police.<sup>45</sup> Also that afternoon in a move that was obviously orchestrated from Speight's group within Parliament, Major Ligairi's grandson, Lieutenant Rupeni Vosayaco, and Lieutenant

Valeniyasana claimed to have taken over the military in the northern town of Labasa<sup>46</sup>. Colonel Alfred Tuatoko and a negotiating team from RFMF headquarters Suva flew that same afternoon to Labasa to negotiate with the rebel officers who had command of the Sukanaivalu VC Barracks and its armoury<sup>47</sup>. However this proved unsuccessful as some northern chiefs and their people had started to enter the barracks and support the rebel officer's cause by staging a protest sit in. A non-confrontational stance was taken by the negotiating team. Furthermore landowners also closed Waiqele airport in Labasa for three hours in support of the takeover at Sukanaivalu VC Barracks.

In the interior of Naitasiri at the Monasavu hydro-electric dam, a group of landowners disrupted the major power supply on Viti Levu by stopping the flow of water into the main station nearby. This in the ensuing weeks forced the Fiji Electricity Authority to limit power distribution because of the Monasavu shutdown which remained unresolved for weeks.<sup>48</sup> From the 4<sup>th</sup> till the 10<sup>th</sup> of July numerous other destabilizing activities were orchestrated by Speight's group from parliament such as: the takeover of Korovou town by reservist soldier and Speight's relative Varinava Tiko and villagers, the kidnapping of Fiji Air pilots at Savusavu airport by Tevita Vakalalabure and his supporters, the burning of the Masonic Lodge and hostage taking at PAFCO Canning Factory Levuka, the takeover of a tourist resort on Turtle island, the roadblocks along the Queens Highway at Nabukavesi and the takeover of police stations at Savusavu, Seaqaqa and Tukavesi amongst others.

The Military responded to all these destabilizing activities nationally by declaring an exclusive military zone around parliament. Lt Col Filipino Tarakinikini in a press interview on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July rubbished rumours of a military strike on parliament. Tarakinikini said, 'The imposition of this military zone will help the two parties focus more on a resolution'. The Decree signed by the Commander restricted supporters bringing in food and supplies and empowered the military to: order residents to vacate the area, temporarily acquire any land or building, prohibit entry of vehicles, aircrafts or vessels, restrict water, power, telecommunications etc, arrest and detain persons and do anything necessary for the purpose of the decree.<sup>49</sup> This strong arm tactic worked. The rebels wanted to resume talks with the military and destabilizing

activities around the country had galvanised people's support for the military. Thus on the night of Friday the 7th July with Ratu Inoke Takiveikata, the Naitasiri high chief acting as mediator, the military suspended indefinitely the military exclusive zone around parliament.<sup>50</sup>

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, another break through deal was again brokered by Takiveikata between Bainimarama and Speight. It became known as the Muanikau Accord.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, there were signs of uncertainty amongst the rebels: in particular, Major Ligairi - the security advisor who appeared to have assumed control at this stage – dithered about whether to comply with the terms of the Accord. Major Ligairi even appealed to former Commander and his Cakaudrove chief Brigadier Ganilau in a meeting in a last effort attempt to lever favour for Speight's cause with Commodore Bainimarama. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July more disturbing news of rebel activities in Vanua Levu were received by military headquarters in Suva. After taking over the military's Sukanaivalu VC barracks, rebel soldiers led by Lieutenants Vosayaco and Valeniyasana seized the police station in Labasa; five police officers were reportedly beaten and the town was held in terror by armed rebel soldiers. As if to reinforce Ligairi's disquiet about the whole deal, that same night, villagers in his home province of Cakaudrove on Vanua Levu, seized the Savusavu police station and the nearby army depot.<sup>52</sup> Also the same day in the Yasawas, rebel landowners captured a luxury island resort and locked up its owner Richard Evason.<sup>53</sup>

Another forty men from villagers around Seaqaqa Macuata province stormed and took over the Seaqaqa police station the same evening. These rebel groups said that they would give up the government facilities and resort once the Muanikau Accord was fully implemented.<sup>54</sup> These rebel groups' actions were obviously being coordinated by Major Ligairi from within Parliament complex Suva. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Speight's potential to create further instability was far from over, and the signing of the Muanikau Accord had not ended his efforts to seize government authority in Fiji.

## Conclusion

This Chapter has examined the role of the Fiji military during the May 19<sup>th</sup> coup and its immediate aftermath. The George Speight coup was an event that profoundly re-shaped the thinking of senior officers and one that entailed a reorientation of the RFMF as a whole. This crisis was the genesis of the inversion of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. In hindsight it has been depicted as a deliberate and concerted effort by the RFMF to tackle the destabilising forces of ethno-nationalism. In fact, RFMF action was driven by a set of pragmatic responses, first to the hostage crisis, and second to the widespread desire not to see the Labour coalition government restored, and third to the threat posed by the George Speight group to the integrity of the RFMF. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2000 and still by December 2006, the military remained a thoroughly ethnic Fijian institution, with a negligible number of Indo-Fijian soldiers. Claims of a multi-racialist orientation, and the historical appeal to the 2000 events as evidence of that preparedness to quash the forces of ethno-nationalism, were propaganda devised, in the later context of growing frictions with the Qarase government, to appeal to Indo-Fijians, domestic elites and overseas sympathisers.

What has surfaced with the Lt Col Jack Evans chaired Board of Investigation into the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn takeover of parliament is the duplicity of intention and shirking of responsibility by Commodore Bainimarama. The finding by the board that, “whether the Commander RFMF had any control of the unit (1MS) could not be ascertained” is damning as Bainimarama himself refused to participate in the inquiry.<sup>55</sup> From the investigation report it was established that:

- 1) Bainimarama personally brought Major Ligairi out of retirement 3 weeks before the coup. Ligairi guided the CRW troops into parliament and then was their leader in parliament.<sup>56</sup>
- 2) The RFMF supplied rations to the 1MS soldiers throughout their time in Parliament.
- 3) The 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn soldiers continued to get paid throughout their time in parliament.
- 4) A senior officer took leave forms for the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn soldiers in parliament to sign so they could be excused from normal duties.

- 5) Bainimarama said he supported the aims of the coup in front of his officers.
- 6) The 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn continued to take arms out of the camp 36 hours after the coup.
- 7) Two separate officers informed Bainimarama there was going to be a coup.
- 8) The President Ratu Mara questioned Bainimarama whether it was wise to travel as there was a possibility of a coup.
- 9) Several of the senior military officers were sympathetic to the George Speight cause.
- 10) Bainimarama refused to appear before the Board of Inquiry.

During the hectic and rapidly shifting events of May–June 2000, institutional survival was the uppermost consideration for the majority of serving senior officers in the Land Force Command. Initially, there was considerable ambivalence and RFMF backing for a full-scale military coup was by no means out of the question. The RFMF might have chosen to support its 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Sqn colleagues inside parliament. Provincial loyalties might have led people from the core rebel provinces like Naitasiri, Rewa and Tailevu to break ranks with those from other parts of the country. When Jo Savua and the Engineers regiment marched into parliament, there might have been a broader RFMF rallying to the George Speight cause. What the senior ranking officers could all agree on was that the crisis had to be handled patiently and carefully due to the hostage situation. The military in 2000, from being seen as ambivalent, came to be applauded as saving the nation<sup>57</sup>. However it was more to do with institutional defence rather than the squashing of ethno-nationalism. In the immediate aftermath of the coup the issue of ethno-nationalism had to be treated sensitively within a predominantly Fijian institution.

The military's ambivalence, stemmed from the military's seeming accession to Speight's changing demands and the Land Force Commander's initial guidance of 'no confrontation-no escalation' adopted after his meeting the President Ratu Mara.<sup>58</sup> However ultimately, the military held out against the hostage-takers and arrested and imprisoned George Speight and his supporters. As explained by military spokesman Tarakinikini after the signing of the Muanikau Accord, "The angle that they (international community) were coming from was they were trying to put a universal template on a solution, to this crisis. They wanted to



treat it just like a straight-out hostage situation. But they did not appreciate what we saw. We understood our own people, our own culture, and that in time things would begin to clarify itself.”<sup>59</sup> It was, as we will see in the next chapter, the formation of the Force Reserve Unit and the initiation of the Consecutive Internal Security Operations concept that played the crucial role in shifting the balance away from the George Speight group, and protecting the nation and integrity of the RFMF in 2000. The next chapter examines why George Speight became perceived by the RFMF senior command as a threat, and how the rebel forces around the country were suppressed. The chapter shows the *bati* now in the process of controlling internal security and subsequently national political affairs.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lt Col Tarakinikini interview, *Fiji Times*, 4 July 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> See Jon Fraenkel, 'The Clash of Dynasties and the Rise of Demagogues: Fiji's *Tauri Vakaukauwa* of May 2000', *Journal of Pacific History*, 35, 3, 2000: 295-308.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Statement by H.E. Commodore J V Bainimarama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji Islands, 62nd session of the UN General Assembly, 28 September 2007; see also the commander's comments in an interview with Graham Davies on Sky TV News, 02 May 2009, [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwN7zgNUV7Y>], accessed 8.6.2010.
- <sup>4</sup> *Fiji Times*, Fri 19 May, 'Taukei vow to remove PM': 'civil protests by the Taukei will continue until the Chaudhry government and the 1997 Constitution are removed, a joint statement by Fijian parties said yesterday.'
- <sup>5</sup> See RFMF BOI Report on 19 May 2000 Takeover of Parliament, 9 Aug 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> See, *Fiji Times* 5 Jul 2000. 'Fijians rights first: PM': 'The compact in the 1997 Constitution will be used as a framework to promote the interests of the Fijian community, interim civilian PM Laisenia Qarase said yesterday.'
- <sup>7</sup> 'Military Spokesman, Colonel Rabukawaqa speaks out on Qoliqoli and RTU Bills', *Fiji Times*, 3 Sep 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> Steve Ratuva, 'The Pre-election Cold War: The role of the Fiji Military during the 2006 elections', in Fraenkel and Firth, eds, *From Election to Coup in Fiji*, pp. 26-45.
- <sup>9</sup> Brij V Lal with Michael Pretes, *Coups: Reflections on the political Crisis in Fiji*, Pandanus Books, ANU, Canberra, 2001, p. 119.
- <sup>10</sup> *Fiji Daily Post* 'Tora Warns of Fiji Coup' 7 Apr 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> *Prabhaat News*, 'Rabuka Denies Coup Plot', 4 April 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> *Fiji Daily Post* 'Tora Warns of Fiji Coup' 7 Apr 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2006, p. 183.
- <sup>14</sup> ABC TV Four Corners, 'Cyclone George', 10 July 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> *Fiji Daily Post*, 'Fiji Army Says No To Coup', April 09 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Evans' Report' named after Fiji military officer Lt Col Jack Evans who led an investigation of officers' involvement in the coup of 2000.
- <sup>17</sup> Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, transcript of Fiji TV One *Close Up* programme interview with Richard Broadbridge, 29 April 2001.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Review*, Tamarisi Digitaki, 'The New Face of the Fiji Army', Feb 2002, p. 16.
- <sup>19</sup> Viliame Seruvakula, citing Charles Dakuliga in court, 20 Jan 2003, reproduced in *Fiji Times*, Elenoa Masi-Baselala, 'Coup weapons left on dinghy', 21 Jan 2003.

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<sup>20</sup> Lt Dakuliga and some of his troopers after the takeover that morning left the parliament complex the same night having realized the enormity of their actions.

<sup>21</sup> Lt Col J.N. Evans, *Board of Inquiry into the Involvement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Fiji Meridian Squadron in the Illegal Takeover of Parliament on 19 May 2000 and the Subsequent Holding of Hostages until 13 July 2000*, RFMF Land Force Command Headquarters, 2000 [hereinafter *Evans' Report*]

<sup>22</sup> *Fiji Times*, Irene Manueli, 'Coup phone calls revealed', 23 Jan 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Field, Tupeni Baba, and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, *Speight of Violence: inside Fiji's 2000 coup*, Reed Publishing, 2005, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Chris Masters, ABC TV Four Corners programme, interview transcript with Matelita Ragogo, 10 July 2000.

<sup>25</sup> *Fijilive.com*, 19 May 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Colonel Draunidalo, who was Deputy Secretary Home Affairs (also responsible for Bainimarama's Norway trip) and the initial Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion FIR in 1988, tried to enter Queen Elizabeth Barracks but was denied entry by Lt Col Saubulinayau that same afternoon.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Masters, ABC TV Four Corners programme, Interview transcript with Maj Ligairi, 10 July 2000.

<sup>28</sup> The government ministers who would normally have convened a security cabinet meeting were held hostage. Therefore Colonel Tuatoko was well within his authority to seek advice from the President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as Commander in Chief of the RFMF.

<sup>29</sup> *Evans' Report*. 09 Aug 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, transcript of Fiji TV One *Close Up* programme interview with Richard Broadbridge, 29 April 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Field et al., *Speight of Violence*, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Gunmen fire warning shots', 22 May 2000.

<sup>33</sup> *Fiji Times*, Matelita Ragogo, 'Major, troops join Speight', 27 May 2000

<sup>34</sup> *Fiji Times*, Akanisi Motufaga, 'Gunman thumps armed soldier' 27 May 2000.

<sup>35</sup> *Fiji Times*, Sainimili Lewa, 'Police ask for Army at Check points', 27 May 2000.

<sup>36</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army takes over State,' Tue 30 May 2000.

<sup>37</sup> *Fiji Times*, Josephine Prasad, 'He wanted it all Tarakinikini says', 18 Apr 2002.

<sup>38</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Back in the Drivers Seat', 31 May 2000.

<sup>39</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Qarase named finance adviser': ' Merchant bank managing director Laisenia Qarase has been co-opted into the military council as an adviser on finance.' 10 Jun 2000.

<sup>40</sup> *Fiji Times* 'Former army chief for PM', 31 May 2000

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- <sup>41</sup> *Fiji Times*, Matelita Ragogo, 'Troops fire on rebel cars', 13 Jun 2000.
- <sup>42</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army tried to kill me: Speight', 13 Jun 2000.
- <sup>43</sup> *Fiji Times*, Reijeli Kikau, 'Army to name civilian leaders' 14 Jun 2000.
- <sup>44</sup> Adi Koila Mara had been the Minister of Tourism in the FLP coalition. She was the VLV's member of parliament for the Lau constituency.
- <sup>45</sup> *Fiji Times*, Reijeli Kikau, 'Troops gun down rebels' 5 Jul 2000.
- <sup>46</sup> *Fiji Times*, Ruci Mafi 'Barracks takeover bid fails' 5 Jul 2000.
- <sup>47</sup> *Fiji Times*, Ruci Mafi, 'Officer tells why he took over base' (after receiving threats that landowners would burn down Labasa town). 5 Jul 2000.
- <sup>48</sup> *Fiji Times* Charles Chambers 'Rebels disrupt power supply', 7 Jul 2000.
- <sup>49</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Out of Bounds', 6 Jul 2000.
- <sup>50</sup> *Fiji Times*, Sainimili Lewa, 'Army suspends exclusive zone', 8 Jul 2000.
- <sup>51</sup> The *Muanikau Accord* was the culmination of many rounds of negotiations involving Sitiveni Rabuka, the GCC's Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi, the Commonwealth's Noel McKinnon and the United Nations' Sérgio Vieira De Mello as mediators over a 53 day period. The accord required Speight to release the hostages and the return of all RFMF weapons smuggled into parliament by the CRW soldiers, but it also offered an amnesty to the hostage-takers. It seemed a victory for Speight with the President Ratu Mara dislodged, the constitution abrogated, an indigenous Blueprint initiated, and the promise that there would be presidential and ministerial appointees in the military appointed civilian government.
- <sup>52</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Rebel Mob takes station', 10 Jul 2000.
- <sup>53</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Group grabs posh hotel', 12 Jul 2000.
- <sup>54</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Rebels hold stations', 11 Jul 2000.
- <sup>55</sup> See *Evans' Report*, pp. 231-232.
- <sup>56</sup> See *Evans' Report*, pp.228-229.
- <sup>57</sup> *Island Business*, Robert Keith Reid, 'Frankly Speaking', June 2003, pp 14-18.
- <sup>58</sup> See statement by Col A Tuatoko Land Force Commander, p.642 of RFMF Board of Inquiry Report, Aug 2000.
- <sup>59</sup> Chris Masters, ABC TV Four Corners programme, 'Cyclone George', Tarakinikini interview, 10 Jul 2000.

## Chapter 5

### Why Speight's Group Became a Threat to the Military

#### Introduction

The ousting of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as President and the declaration of martial law by Commodore Bainimarama on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2000 transformed the crisis into what was essentially a full scale military takeover, a second coup. George Speight, the leader of Fiji's first civilian coup just eight days earlier complained, 'Frank Bainimarama has couped me'.<sup>1</sup> Mara's removal or *tu vaka tikitiki* and Speight's claim of 'military injustice' signifies the ascendancy of the *bati* over the *turaga*. The military, partly by design but more so by accident, found itself in the process of ensconcing itself in Fiji's politics.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2000 after 37 days in power, Bainimarama made a further unilateral announcement of a line up for a civilian interim government, headed by interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. Speight and his supporters felt that the military had again upstaged their civilian takeover of the Chaudhry-led FLP Coalition government. The announcement triggered a gun battle that afternoon between soldiers and Speight's supporters outside the Suva Parliamentary complex, in which six civilians were injured, with one later dying. This struggle for political ascendancy in 2000 between the military and Speight's group was to have a marked effect on Fiji's political landscape for the next decade.

After the military moves undermined Speight's quest for national political participation, the concern was that a nation-wide destabilizing backlash was being orchestrated. This nefarious campaign eventuated and was controlled from within parliament complex to pressure the military and its interim civilian government to accede to the group's various political agendas. From the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, Speight's group coordinated a series of civil disturbances that almost crippled the country. Alarming, the rebels had also adopted a reinvented political ideology based on the *Matanitu Vanua*, or a nationalist government fused with a Christian belief system. This seemingly novel idea was appealing to Speight's naïve though growing band of supporters from the least developed areas in the interior of Viti Levu. Many opportunist chiefs had also joined the Speight bandwagon and had dredged up various historical grievances in particular land issues in sympathy with his 'cause'.

The first part of this chapter will review the military's response to George Speight's threat to national security and the events leading to the signing of the Muanikau Accord. The second part will look at the *Bose ni Turaga* and the *Matanitu Vanua* Government which became the adopted ideology for the Speight's group's political campaign. Part three will review the formation of the Military's Force Reserve Unit. Part four will cover Speight's arrest and the raid on his supporters at Kalabu. Part five will review the military's nationwide clampdown.

### **Military Response**

During the trying months after the parliament complex hostage takeover, senior military officers with years of international peacekeeping experience feared that inter and intra-communal violence could erupt locally. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, in a calculated move the military, in response to Speight's Group's national destabilizing campaign, isolated the Parliamentary Complex by declaring a military exclusive zone around it.<sup>2</sup> The aim was a tried and tested counter-insurgency move to isolate 'the head from the body'. The military's newly formed Force Reserve Unit (FRU), with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and Fiji Navy, were given the task of policing this zone. This strategy worked as Speight and his group holed up with the hostages in the parliament complex saw the ramifications and were forced to return to negotiations the day after.<sup>3</sup>

### **Muanikau Accord- an Uneasy Truce**

The breakthrough created by talks on the suspension of the military exclusive zone around the parliament complex created the vital momentum needed to unlock the hostages crisis. For within 48 hours of getting the two parties talking, Naitasiri Paramount chief Ratu Inoke Takiveikata brokered the Muanikau Accord between Speight and Bainimarama on Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> of July.<sup>4</sup> The Accord called for the release of the hostages, and the securing of all military weapons from the rebel soldiers in return for full amnesty of the hostage takers. Initially it seemed the military had come out the losing party. The Speight group had become emboldened by its 'victory' after the signing ceremony at the Vice President Ratu Iloilo's residence at Muanikau. That night with joyous singing of hymns, Speight and his group marched triumphantly back to the Parliament complex at Veiuto, half a kilometre away. There were still reservations within the Speight camp, especially from security advisor Major Ligairi, that the military would keep their word. It

seemed Ligairi had reasoned that without any of Speight's group appointed to the interim civilian government, their fight for their cause was not achieved. In a move reminiscent of Rabuka's attempt to further legitimize his coup and inhibit the authority of the provincial chiefs of the Great Council of Chiefs, Speight's group looked to convene a *Bose ni Turaga* (BNT) comprising chiefs of districts or *tikinas*.

### **Bose ni Turaga and Matanitu Vanua**

On Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, some 200 lesser chiefs of the BNT assembled at the Parliament complex with High Commissioner to Malaysia Adi Samanunu Cakobau as chief guest. This conglomeration of lesser chiefs integral to the grass root functions of Fijian society was first used by Rabuka to strengthen his Fijian supremacist political agenda. Speight and his supporters were hoping to use the BNT as a similar forum because the GCC was seen as siding with the military and its installed Qarase led interim administration. On the agenda of this BNT meeting was the setting up of a commission of enquiry to investigate anti-Fijian activities of the ousted People's Coalition government and the concept of a Fijian administration to include the issue of sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Speight's cause had now taken on a political ideology based on post-Christian Fijian sovereignty and Methodism's doctrinal harmonizing of the *Matanitu Vanua*. This thinking was based on an academic working thesis that reconciled and reconstructed Fijian post-Christian Sovereignty as practiced by Ratu Cakobau with the Methodists' connexional government.<sup>6</sup> The sentencing of Ratu Mara Kapaiwai, Ratu Cakobau's cousin and antagonistic rival, to the gallows in 1859 as sanctioned by high chiefs in the presence of Methodist ministers points to the existence of such a government.

General Manager of the Native Lands Trust Board, Maika Qarikau, also briefed the convened BNT on the deed of sovereignty concept. This was a sticking point with nationalists who took umbrage that national sovereignty was not returned to Fiji's high chiefs at Independence as they had ceded the country to Great Britain. A *Matanitu Vanua* government as promoted by Qarikau would utilize its own land resources independent of central government. In convening the BNT, the Speight group's immediate aim was obvious. This meeting was purposefully timed to legitimize Speight's *Matanitu Vanua* government and to challenge the military's interim civilian government and Great Council of Chiefs meeting to be held the following day to select an interim President and Vice President at the Military

barracks in Suva. Even the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron's entire cache of arms, ammunition and general Special Forces equipment were put on display at the Parliament Complex to impress the chiefs and general public who had gathered for the BNT.

To national relief, on Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of July Speight and his group kept to their side of the bargain. A bearded and frail Prime Minister Chaudhry and the remaining 26 hostages were released much to the elation of their families and party stalwarts. Concurrently, the GCC had assembled at Queen Elizabeth Barracks and selected Ratu Iloilo the incumbent Vice President as interim President and Ratu Jope Seniloli (Speight's choice for President) as his Vice President.<sup>7</sup> That same morning, the FRU in a show of force had convoyed through Suva and was positioned on the highest conspicuous feature, the Tamavua Reservoir, the whole day to ensure Speight kept his word. After the return of CRW weapons from Speight's group on Friday night the 14<sup>th</sup> of July,<sup>8</sup> (where some 27 weapons were found to be unaccounted for) hopes were high that the over 400 Speight supporters in Parliament, would vacate the premise immediately for their villages. This was not the case as the supporters rallied for the next four days and even held a full burial ceremony in the Parliament Complex grounds for the young villager from Namara, Tailevu, who was fatally wounded during the shoot out of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

In the coming days, through intermediaries such as the Police Commissioner and Ratu Takiveikata, Speight engaged the interim President in his choice for the interim cabinet line-up. For the military, Speight and his group, with his military advisors such as former Lieutenant Colonels Metuisela Mua, Tevita Bukarau and Rusiate Korovusere and his operational commanders such as Majors Savua and Ligairi, had become a formidable threat to the national security of the country. Speight and his lieutenants were now moving around in armed convoys with the intention of participating in the running of the country with the interim military installed civilian government. The group's nationalistic *Matanitu Vanua* government based on a deed of sovereignty involving the church, the chiefs, the Fijian people and their land, was being set up and was gaining momentum in competition with the military installed interim government.



### **George Speight's Political Campaign**

On Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, George Speight and some 500 of his supporters abandoned parliament in a convoy of buses after wilful acts of looting and vandalism. The once esteemed pristine complex was left a burning, stinking mess. They continued their seemingly victorious political crusade and moved base to Kalabu Fijian School at the invitation of Ratu Inoke Takiveikata. Helpless road side vendors at Kalabu market were robbed of their produce by the unruly mob as their convoy rumbled by. Speight's agenda would inevitably clash with the military's endeavours of taking the nation forward with its installed interim government under the GCC-nominated President Ratu Josefa Iloilo. In the following days, as the military attempted to work in tandem with the GCC in consolidating an interim government, trouble was brewing. During the 56 day hostage crisis, the military came under heavy criticism for being powerless, impotent and even clueless in freeing the hostages. Its appeasement policy of 'we support the goals but not the methods' was seen as kowtowing to Speight's ethno-nationalist agenda. What was little known was that the military until about the first week in July, did not have a military option for the rescue of the hostages, or even a national internal security response to protracted rebel criminal activities as the situation deteriorated.

### **The RFMF's Force Reserve Unit**

The change from the military's policy of appeasement to measured military engagement was triggered because of the Speight group's numerous changing demands in negotiations in the month of June<sup>9</sup>. A special Force Reserve Unit of the RFMF was raised on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2000 as instructed by the Land Force Commander Colonel Tuatoko on approval from Commodore Bainimarama. This force was raised because the assessment I reached with Tuatoko and Tarakinikini was that a) a military option had to be planned for in light of Speight's erratic demands and in the event of hostages being killed b) the military was losing the operational initiative in as far as internal security and that c) the police force's integrity had been totally undermined by armed rebels. The Commander's intent was that the force was to be held in reserve and engage decisively on deployment. It had to have experience and toughness as deployment in rugged terrain was envisaged.

The unit was within days fashioned into a force with soldiers from Nadi and Lautoka's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's rifle companies and Suva-based units, especially from the Engineers Regiment. Its base headquarters was set up at the Engineers Headquarters at the lower camp Queen Elizabeth Barracks. A scaled model of the parliament complex was constructed and daily intelligence was gleaned and briefings held on the hostages and the general security situation layout in parliament with assault commanders. Released FLP Coalition parliamentarians were interviewed in constructing an armed assault rescue plan of the hostages. Assault routes and approaches to each target within the parliament complex were planned and rehearsed with backup options. At the height of its internal operations, the unit had pooled some 20 vehicles of all shapes with an array of military automatic arms that included rocket grenade launches and general purpose machine guns. Stun grenades and tear gas canisters were issued per section commander and close combat and fighting in built up areas with gas masks were drilled into the unit. The unit also had a team of snipers and military engineer demolitions experts. Infantry company strength live firing battle drills were rehearsed at the firing range at Vatuwaqa and in the Macuata and Naitasiri Provinces live jungle lane shoots were conducted.

A FRU team of snipers was deployed to Levuka town on the island of Ovalau to reinforce the resident 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion section as a result of rebels burning the 125 year old Polynesian Masonic Lodge and taking over the Pacific Fishing Company cannery.<sup>10</sup> Several rebels and a CRW soldier were eventually taken into custody. On Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2000 the FRU, now code named *Gideon Force*, carried out its first armed operation with the planned storming and rescue of prison wardens. Some 30 prison wardens were held hostage at gun point for four days by hardened prisoners led by notorious criminals Nimilote Nimacere and Aiyaz Ali, at Naboro Maximum Prison.<sup>11</sup> This hostage taking was initiated by George Speight's Group from parliament to create fear in the general public at large and put pressure on the military and GCC as to its choice of President. This was a similar ploy used by the Taukei Movement in the 1987 coup mass Naboro prison breakout. The use of the FRU in this rescue operation was censored in the news media for security reasons.<sup>12</sup> The success of this operation raised the stature of this unit within the military, with the prisons department and the police force as a capable internal security force able to take on the difficult armed rescue operations in a standoff situation.

### **Speight's Arrest and the Kalabu Raid**

The release of the 26 FLP parliamentary hostages allowed the military freedom to deal with Speight's group on a military level. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July the political situation unbeknown to the nation had finally come to a head for the military and a marked change in stance towards Speight and his group was adopted. Their blatant opposition was untenable to the military that was trying to return the country to the rule of law through an interim civilian government.<sup>13</sup> Speight and his group were pressuring Ratu Iloilo, the President, to reconsider the military's civilian government ministerial line up to include his supporters.<sup>14</sup> The President was also cautioned by the Commander that if he did accept Speight's choices then the military would not support such a compromised government. What also forced the military's hand was that Speight's Kalabu camp was being used to train a rebel youth army. The rebel camp had also harboured escaped prisoners who were in cahoots and known to be engaged in criminal activities in the neighbouring suburbs with impunity.<sup>15</sup>

This national security and criminal impasse had been monitored with growing alarm by the military and police. On the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, the operational order was given by the Land Force Commander for the FRU to clamp down. Their first mission was to sever the centre of gravity of the group which was its leadership and command group and their main base at Kalabu. Speight and his entourage in two vehicles were arrested on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2000 on Kalabu Bridge. In the following hours, other Speight Group leaders were arrested from all over the nation. At first light on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2000, the Force Reserve Unit of the military raided Kalabu Fijian School arresting some 400 of Speight's followers including females. One known asthmatic person died as a result of the tear gas used in the operation and soldier Sapper Alifereti Nainoca suffered a gunshot wound in the mêlée that ensued. A few missing weapons and all sorts of stolen goods were recovered. Four of the thirteen prisoners who had escaped from Naboro were captured during the raid, although notorious armed criminals such as Nimacere and Semesa Roko escaped after harbouring with the group.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of the Kalabu raid and the rebel leader's arrest, the threat of Speight and his group meddling in the affairs of the civilian interim government were negated at least for the time being. On the afternoon of Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of July an interim civilian government was finally sworn in of those technocrats the military deemed capable and apolitical. The majority of these officials later stood and won as members of the SDL party in the August 2001 elections.<sup>17</sup>

### **Military Nation-Wide Clampdown**

After the Kalabu raid, the enormous public backing for the military was evident. To seize the initiative gained and sustain the positive momentum the military then came up with the Consecutive Internal Security Operations (CISO) concept that was to be adopted nationally. This concept required the Force Reserve Unit to conduct raids on known rebel areas beginning with the north in Vanua Levu and then Viti Levu in consecutive moves, one area at a time. The lack of military logistic support for national scale operations was glaring, e.g. transportation both road and sea. Hence the option of the military conducting Multiple Internal Security Operations (MISO) using all its units nationally was ruled out for a more cautious sustainable approach. The threat of armed opposition using missing or stolen military weapons was a major constraint that dictated the tempo of operations. Besides, the better part of a container load of Russian military weapons smuggled into the country during the 1987 coup had not been recovered and was believed to be in public circulation.

Following the 26<sup>th</sup> of July arrest of George Speight and the raid on Kalabu, the retaking of the rebel held Military barracks in Labasa was an operational priority. Security forces morale was low in the north and public confidence in the military needed to be regained. Furthermore two foreign pilots were held hostage briefly when their airplane was seized at the Savusavu airport on Vanua Levu. Other destabilizing activities were numerous. Reports of Speight supporters seizing government and police stations and Indo-Fijian farms, and burning cane fields in Vanua Levu were in retaliation to the military raid at Kalabu on 27<sup>th</sup> of July.

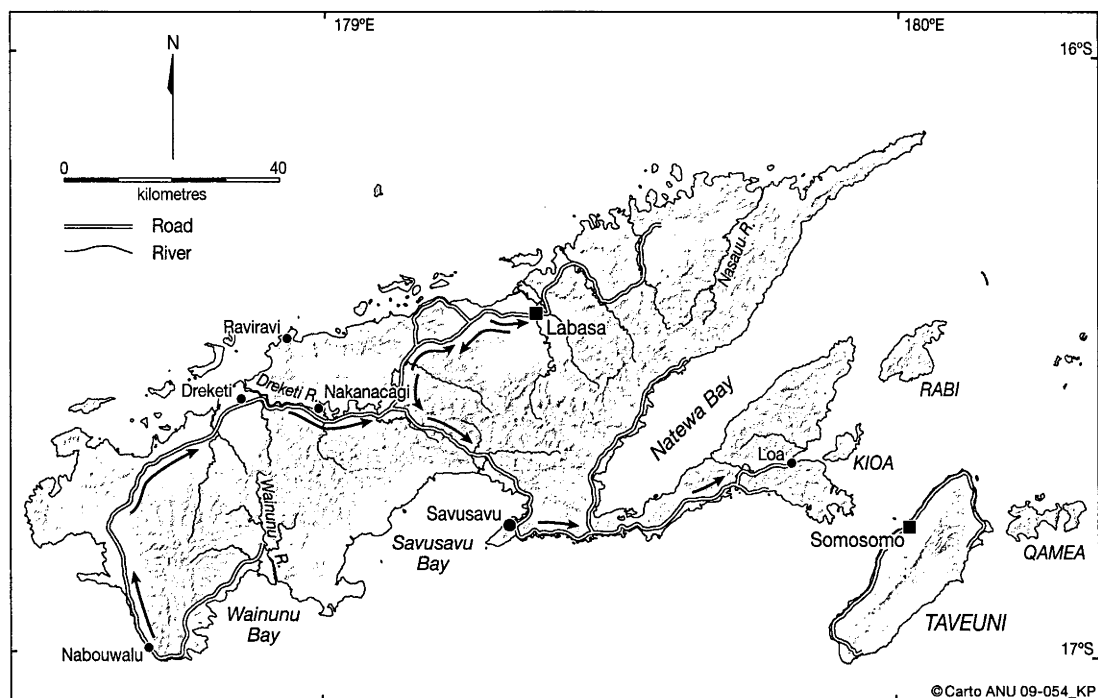
The decision was made to deploy to Vanua Levu at the soonest and training and preparations were stepped up into the night at Queen Elizabeth Barracks Suva. Special blue arm bands were made and issued to all FRU soldiers prior to embarking for Vanua Levu. These were to be worn on armed engagement with rebel soldiers

reported to be still in military uniform from the northern Sukanaivalu VC Barracks Labasa.

In the early morning under cover of darkness on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August the FRU embarked at Natovi jetty Tailevu North on a chartered roll-on-roll-off inter island ferry with all its vehicles and supplies aboard. Disembarking at Nabouwalu jetty Bua Province around 1100hrs the unit began rolling up the Nabouwalu-Labasa main road immediately so as to capitalise on the element of surprise.<sup>18</sup> That afternoon in coordination with local police, the unit swept through to Dreketi government station, Nakanacagi village, Seaqaqa settlement and to Labasa town in search and arrest operations of civil disturbance suspects. One armed mute villager who was part of a rebel group that had invaded and terrorised an Indian farmer's residence including killing his farm animals was caught red handed. On arrest he had escaped armed with a .22 rifle and in the mêlée to recapture him, the notorious mute was shot and evacuated by military ambulance to Labasa Hospital.<sup>19</sup> As numerous arrests were made, the convoy of vehicles increased and government vehicles were commandeered to transport rebels to Labasa police station.<sup>20</sup> On the sweep up to Labasa town, a couple of rebel soldiers were apprehended including a rebel district chief in stolen vehicles fleeing Labasa that same evening. On entering Labasa that night, the FRU placed a cordon around the town and set up road blocks at both ends of the town at Vulovi and Nasekula. The results were instant as Lieutenant Valeniyasana and several rebel soldiers, caught by the speed of operations, were arrested that evening, and were unaware of the FRU presence.

That night the Sukanaivalu VC barracks was freed from rebel soldiers' hands. The next day operations spread over to Cakaudrove via the Labasa-Savusavu Highway and the Hibiscus Highway to Loa in Buca Bay. Villagers from Major Ligairi's village of Nabalebale in the Wailevu district who were largely active with Lieutenant Vosayaco, their kinsman, were arrested for road blocks and other civil disturbance charges. In operations over a week over three hundred Speight supporters and fifty five soldiers were rounded up including the key rebel officers and chiefs.<sup>21</sup>

**Map 4. Vanua Levu-RFMF Force Reserve Unit Deployment Areas**



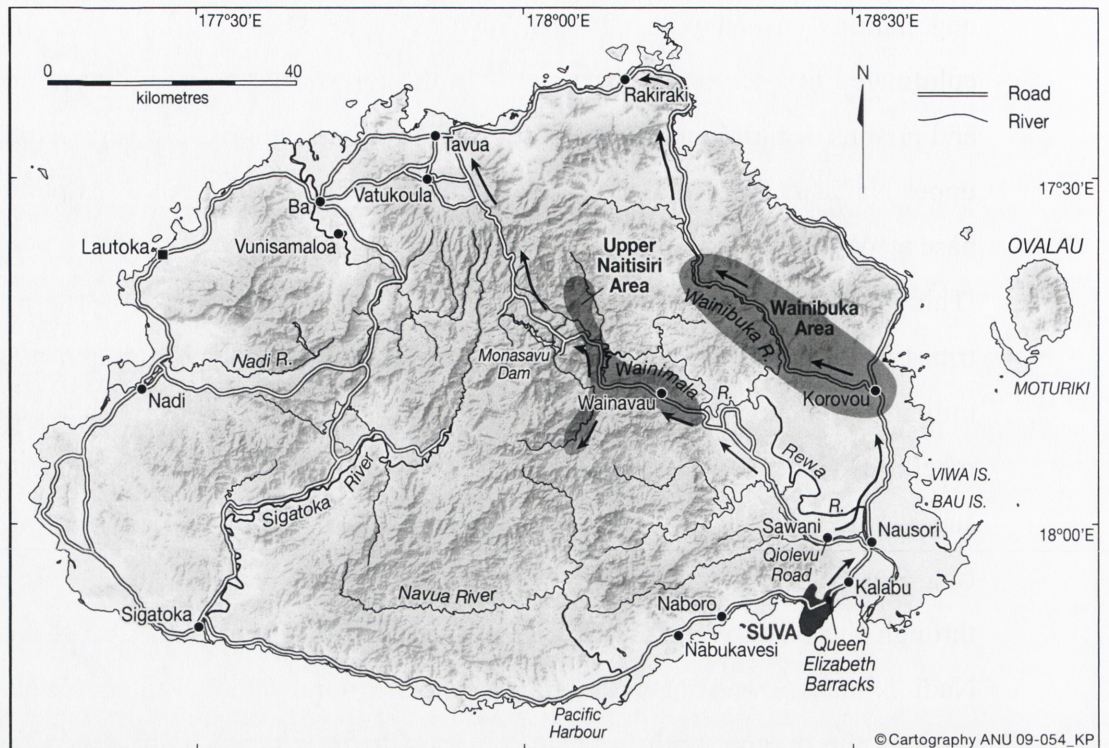
In the early morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2000 in Sawani, Naitasiri province a deliberate armed ambush by notorious criminal Nimilote Nimacere and his group killed soldier Private Joela Welelakeba and policeman Corporal Raj Kumar.<sup>22</sup> This was retribution for the Kalabu raid as Nimacere and group including a former CRW soldier had slipped out during the arrest operation with a few of the military's missing arms.

The Force Reserve Unit was hastily withdrawn from Vanua Levu to hunt these killers down. Other known Speight group rebels who had escaped from Kalabu had sabotaged the Monasavu Hydro-electric dam and were hiding in the highlands of Naitasiri. The Unit on disembarking at Natovi jetty spent its first night at Vunidawa government station in upper Naitasiri. We were then briefed on the situation by police and provincial officials. The next day the FRU moved into the upper Naitasiri area with elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion from Suva. Immediately with this show of force, the Monasavu Hydro-electric dam was secured and villagers arrested. Simultaneously

negotiations ensued with dam landowners as to their long held grievances which culminated in a \$50 million payout.<sup>23</sup> In the following weeks a joint police, military and prisons department search ensued and a public relations campaign launched in the upper Naitasiri, Wainibuka, and Western Viti Levu areas from a temporary military base at Wainavau Wainimala district.

This operation was somewhat reminiscent of the 1874 pacification campaign of hill tribes in the same head water areas of the Wainimala and Wainibuka rivers. To the military it seems these descendants of proud and egalitarian highlanders were as rebellious and independent as their forbearers. Known areas of Speight support were surveillanced and at least thirty rebel individuals including two escaped prisoners and two Sawani ambush suspects were arrested. Long range patrols were conducted through the Nadarivatu Plateau, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka and the Nausori Highlands to Nadi. Nimacere was pursued in jungle terrain around Nadovu village, Wainimala, but escaped the dragnet with the help of sympathetic villagers. The armed fugitive was later fatally shot whilst trying to escape a joint Military and Police search operation in Nadonumai settlement, outside Suva. Another temporary FRU base was set up in the village of Rokovuaka Nalawa Ra in pacification operations along the Wainibuka River and Sawakasa district in Tailevu North the heartland of George Speight supporters.

**Map 5. Viti Levu  
Force Reserve Unit Deployment Areas**



By mid-August of 2000, all rebel areas were pacified and military operations were scaled down as Speight and his group as well as the majority of his supporters nationwide were being brought before the courts. The military had triumphed and was even more feared, as its will had prevailed through successful internal security operations.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron members who had been part of Speight's group were taken back into the military as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion pending a military board of investigation. It was then decided by the Commander that the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron be immediately disbanded. A qualified trauma expert, Father Makario Waqanivalu was called in to counsel all officers and soldiers and especially the errant rebel soldiers who had gone through these stressful months. As a result of these nationwide clampdown operations from July to August of 2000, 3500 people were being investigated, 2115 had been charged and produced before the court, 704 had already been found guilty, 99 had been sentenced to jail, 97 were given suspended sentences, 45 were fined and 461 on bound over or acquitted.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the internal security crisis during these months, the military was still able to rotate troops for Peacekeeping duties to East Timor, Lebanon and Sinai to the credit of the institution. By December of 2000, another two hundred new recruits were only too eager to join the ranks from over two thousand applications.



## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the role of the Fiji military during the unsettling months of July to mid-August 2000 as a result of the 19<sup>th</sup> of May Speight coup. The focus is on a period during the George Speight coup when the Fiji Military senior officers underwent a re-shaping in thinking which partly accounts for what is presently happening in Fiji politics today. During this time the military underwent a process that transformed the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. The time honoured role of the *bati* being subservient to the *turaga* was being redefined. The military had deposed President Mara, got the GCC to back its interim administration and its choice for President, and held Speight's supporters in check. Speight and his supporters had become emboldened by the apparent appeasement policy of the military and were bent on creating national havoc in order to force their intentions and political choices on a divided nation. The RFMF role in the 2000 coup was not directed at tackling ethno-nationalism, but was driven by a set of pragmatic responses, first to the hostage crisis, second to the possible restoration of the Labour coalition government restored, and third to threats to the military as an institution.

Institutional survival was very much the consideration uppermost in the minds of the majority of serving senior officers in Land Force Command at the time even though ambivalence prevailed in the opening days of the coup partly due to the hostage situation. It was the creation of the Force Reserve Unit that gave the military freedom for swift internal security action. This military capability also translated to a tougher negotiations and political bargaining footing that played a crucial role in protecting the integrity of the RFMF in 2000. There were overwhelming sighs of relief from within the military and the national and international community with the successful raid on Kalabu. As news got out, bouquets of flowers and get well cards from local embassies were showered on the injured soldier, Sapper Alifereti Nainoca, who took part in the raid. The existence of the FRU gave the military an operational capability previously unavailable to back the Commander Commodore Bainimarama's tough rhetoric and negotiating stand with Speight's group. The speed with which the military counter-attacked and regained Queen Elizabeth barracks, in less than six hours after fifty CRW soldiers mutinied and attacked on the 2 Nov 2000 (to be discussed in a later chapter) is credited to the existence and professionalism of this unit on that day.

As a political doctrine ethno-nationalism continued to flourish. George Speight's Group leaders went on to form the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV) party with a reinvented political doctrine. The Star of David symbol of the party encapsulates its Judeo-Christian biblical fusion with nationalist political adaptations. To prove its indigenous political potency especially on Vanua Levu and Tailevu North, the CAMV party won 6 seats in the 2001 elections with George Speight even winning his seat from prison. This is proof of the power of this multifarious indigenous political movement that sprang up during the 2000 crisis and stretched the Fiji Military to its fullest capacity. Crucially, CAMV held the balance of power in the Qarase SDL government after the 2001 elections. The military's strongest opponents were in a key position to influence government policy, and the consequence was the precipitation of an ongoing feud between the government and the military. Commodore Bainimarama had tasted power and undergone a huge learning curve in military command during the period covered especially the 37 days he assumed authority as President and Head of State. This was emblematic of the nineteenth century Vunivalu's usurpation of the Roko Tui Bau, an event now re-enacted in another form in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Interview with *Fiji Sun*, 10 Jun 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘‘Out of Bounds’-Military declares exclusive zone around parliament’, 6 Jul 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Army suspends exclusive zone’, 8 Jul 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘It’s a deal: Hostages will go free on Thursday’, 10 Jul 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Envoy guest at chiefs’ talks’: ‘High commissioner to Malaysia Adi Samanunu Cakobau will be chief guest at today’s Bose ni turaga.’ 12 Jul 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Baleiwaqa, *Rerevaka na Kalou ka doka na Tui: Fear God and Honour the King*, pp. 166-169.
- <sup>7</sup> *Fiji Times* ‘Choice was unanimous, says Rabuka’: ‘Newly elected interim President Ratu Iloilo will not be pressured into appointing immediately an interim govt,’ 15 Jul 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Rebels return guns to Army’: ‘More than 100 weapons and ammunitions owned by the rebel group were returned to the Army barracks last night’, 15 Jul 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> *Fiji Times* ‘Rebels want arbitrator’, 8 Jun 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Dissident group burns lodge, seizes factory’, 11 Jul 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Wardens freed after Assault’, 18 Jul 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Wardens freed after Assault’: ‘Prison Commissioner Aisea Taoka confirmed giving the order to storm the compound and said reasonable force was used. ‘‘No one from the Army was involved’’ he said. All the men who were involved were from the Prison emergency unit.’ 18 Jul 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> *Fiji Times* ‘High chief mediates’: ‘Naitasiri’s high chief Ratu Inoke Takiveikata the Qaranivalu mediates as initiated by Police Commissioner Savua with Major Ligairi and Vice President secretary Suliasi Turagabeci, because rebels did not endorse military cabinet line-up’. 21 Jul 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Rebels not happy with cabinet line-up’: ‘A 32 member interim cabinet was announced by Ratu Iloilo but George Speight called the move mischievous as his group was not informed’. 19 Jul 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Rebels Refuse to go’, 21 Jul 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Convicts linked to missing weapons’, 28 Jul 2000.
- <sup>17</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Swearing- in Today,’ 28 Jul 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> FM96/ Navtarang/Viti FM/PINA Nius Online, ‘Fiji rebel shot dead as army moves to end lawlessness in north’, Military spokesman Major Howard Politini announced’, 4 Aug 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> FM96/ Navtarang/Viti FM/PINA Nius Online 4 Aug 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> FM96/ Navtarang/Viti FM/PINA Nius Online 4 Aug 2000.
- <sup>21</sup> *Fiji Times*, ‘Chiefs face coup trail’, 14 Feb 2003.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Fiji Times*, ‘Fiji Soldier, Policeman Killed in Rebel Ambush’, 8 Aug 2000.
- <sup>23</sup> Radio Australia, ‘Fiji rebels give up hydroelectric power station’, 11 Aug 2000.

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<sup>24</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Coup investigation progresses: Driver,' 28 Sep 2002.

## Chapter 6

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2000 Military Mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Suva, Fiji

#### Introduction

The mutiny by members of the military's 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron formerly the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU), shook the very foundation of Fiji's well-disciplined and tight knit military. Around mid-day Thursday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2000, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) was torn apart in a bloody armed struggle as opposing forces vied for control of Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB). On one side were rebel soldiers of the Meridian Squadron sympathetic to a nationalist agenda which the military for months had counteracted. On the other were the loyalist forces that upheld Westminster military professionalism. Late that afternoon in a counter assault, loyalists liberated QEB, the headquarters of the RFMF. This action recast the military from being an ambivalent agent of Fijian nationalism, to the nemesis of the forces of ethno-nationalist politicians and chiefs. The harrowing ordeal saw eight soldiers killed and more than twenty eight others wounded. In a military court martial fifty six perpetrators were sentenced to jail for their crimes.



Photo 5. Commodore Bainimarama laying wreath at mutiny memorial service on 02 Nov 2007. Loyalist soldiers killed that day were Pte Temo R Veilewai, Pte Osea Rokosirinavosa and Cpl Simone Rawaileba. Image: *Fiji Times*.

The military misadventure was inextricably linked to George Speight's May 2000 coup of Chaudhry's government. Speight and his band of elite troopers had stormed parliament taking Coalition parliamentarians hostage and hoping for support from the senior military hierarchy. As previously mentioned, military ambivalence prevailed as the military adopted a no-confrontation, no-escalation policy. The military's complicity with the coupists, its role as the ultimate guarantor of security for the state and the mediating power broker role it took on, were among the factors that led to the mutiny. The role of Naitasiri's high chief titled the Qaranivalu in the mutiny further reveals the influence of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship as discussed in previous chapters. Ratu Takiveikata was later jailed for his part in the mutiny as revealed by mutiny leader Captain Shane Stevens.

In part one we examine the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron and the political and military issues that led the unit to mutiny including the key actors involved. In part two we examine the operational and tactical aspects of the mutiny and the counter offensive that was hastily coordinated as the events unfolded.

### **The CRW Unit -1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron**

In May 1987 after carrying out his coup, Rabuka had established a unit known as Sierra Company. The unit had operatives conducting surveillance on dissidents to his coup and suspects capable of destabilizing the then interim government. A former Fiji senior non-commissioned officer (SNO) in the British Air Services (SAS) Ilisoni Ligairi was recruited. He was promoted to Major to transform Sierra Company to what became known as the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU), and later 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron. In the 1997 Defence White Paper, the role of the CRW is stated under 'Internal Threats' paragraph 7.14 as:

Presently in Fiji the Force assigned to study, train and conduct counter terrorist operations is the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit of the RFMF. It is equipped to carry out specialized aspects of the national counter terrorist operation at times when conventional police capabilities are no longer appropriate and in rare emergencies, only after specific authorization by cabinet.<sup>1</sup>

From its inception the unit was run secretly with its own administration, training and logistics cadre controlled by Ligairi. According to the Evans Report in 2000, even the Unit's Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) remained secret.<sup>2</sup> Major Ligairi had virtually created a private army only accountable to the Commander RFMF.

A mutiny is defined as an open rebellion against authority especially by members of the armed forces against their officers. Lammers defines three types of mutinies: the promotion of interests movement, the secession movement and the seizure of power movement.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this mutiny was to seize military and political power from Commodore Bainimarama. In what is essentially a close knit force how did this sad episode in Fiji's proud military history happen?

By the end of October 2000, coup front man George Speight and others alleged to be key supporters were detained on Nukulau Island, off Suva, facing treason charges. Seven of the elite Meridian Squadron soldiers who had taken part in the takeover of parliament and the subsequent hostage taking of the Coalition government parliamentarians were also incarcerated. This allowed Laisenia Qarase's interim government, supported by the military and the country's indigenous Great Council of Chiefs, freedom in steering the country back to democracy.

The discernible reason for the mutiny was that it was executed as retribution for the arrest and incarceration of George Speight and his supporters who had overthrown the Labour Coalition government. Speight and his group had been arrested in a military raid on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July at Kalabu outside of Suva. This military operation in effect dismantled Speight's nationalist movement's attempts to be part of the interim government.

According to one media report, a Meridian Squadron soldier said the mutiny was led by some of the rebel members who took over Parliament and who were recently released by the army.<sup>4</sup> The soldier was quoted as saying:

We felt betrayed by Bainimarama. When the Muanikau Accord was signed, we gave up our weapons in good faith. We had nothing to do with the weapons that went missing and we thought he would honour the agreement. Instead look at what they did to those who were in Parliament. We were not happy with the way the military treated the civilians, especially those at Kalabu.<sup>5</sup>

### **Grievance or Conspiracy?**

After the signing of the Muanikau Accord between Speight and Bainimarama, members of the Meridian Squadron who had been part of Speight's group were posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Viliame Seruvakula. Though they still had the use of their separate offices and barrack facilities.

On the afternoon of Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, in a traditional reconciliation ceremony seven days before the fateful mutiny occurred, Captain Shane Stevens and rebel Squadron soldiers presented their *matanigasau* to Bainimarama, Seruvakula and myself, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion operations room. The rebel members of the Squadron, in taking over parliament had sought forgiveness of their misdeeds in traditional Fijian fashion. This was accepted by the Commodore Bainimarama in true 'prodigal son' reconciliatory manner. The Commander, however, made it clear to the elite soldiers that the Squadron was to be disbanded. All Squadron soldiers hence came under command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. During the days preceding the mutiny the healing and forgiving process was generally thought to have been well received by the errant Squadron soldiers as friendships were re-established back in barracks. In hindsight, however, the announcement by the Commander had triggered deep resentment within the Squadron and some senior officers who had not warmed to Bainimarama's leadership. Colonel Jeremaia Waqanisau in the Evans Board of Investigation Report had alluded to this state of resentment by asserting, "An army officer must always be the commander of the RFMF."<sup>6</sup> Lt Col Meli Saubulinayau, also in the investigation, went further to state, "We did not like the Commander because he was from the Navy. That is a simple fact. The majority of the green uniform guys did not like him."<sup>7</sup> Such resentments commonly exist in military establishments. As stated by Lammers:

For instance, there used to be a controversy in the British Navy between gentlemen and officers risen from the ranks. Captain Bligh of the *Bounty* rose from the ranks, while Fletcher Christian, the master's mate who led the mutineers was a gentleman; the status inconsistency between this commanding officer and his subordinate may very well have been a factor in the ensuing mutiny.<sup>8</sup>



Bainimarama had risen from the naval ranks whilst army officers like Captain Shane Stevens, the mutiny leader, and Col Ulaiasi Vatu and Lt Col Filipo Tarakinikini who were accused by Stevens of being associated with the mutiny were Sandhurst-trained officers.

Coincidentally, in the days prior to the mutiny, the military's Strategic Command Headquarters consisting of a staff of about 20 senior officers and senior non-commissioned officers co-located with Land Force Command at QEB moved out to their new location at Berkeley Crescent in Suva's Domain area. Officers who were not approving of Commodore Bainimarama's appointment as Commander had been posted to this higher headquarters conveniently away from soldiers. In hindsight, some senior officers may have been forewarned of the ominous plot and this move preceding the mutiny remains suspicious.

Was the mutiny a conspiracy to arrest or even assassinate the Commander, essentially another coup? There were various media versions of the mutiny. Military spokesman Major Howard Politini, in an interview a day later, said, "We believe they were going to get the commander one way or the other. The message seemed that they were not happy with the commander for planning to disband the Squadron."<sup>9</sup>

Politini then revealed that during the mutiny the military refused to listen to any demands from the rebels and so did not know what their wider aims may have been and whether they had been aiming also to free Speight. Politini also strongly rejected claims from New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff that former military spokesman Filipo Tarakinikini, a former founding officer of the Squadron and senior military spokesman, was behind the mutiny. Tarakinikini in a press release denied this accusation. He and Ulaiasi Vatu of Strategic Command Headquarters were cleared in a mutiny inquiry a few months later after being accused by mutiny leader Captain Shane Stevens as co-conspirators. Politini said during the mutiny rebels were talking to the press on a mobile phone "and we are investigating that angle." Politini earlier told *Radio Fiji* the rebel soldiers attacked unarmed and defenceless people working in their offices, "firing indiscriminately" as they attempted to take over the camp. He said, "Loyal troops were now trying to capture all "those who perpetrated this terrible incident against their comrades". *Radio Fiji* reported the rebel target was to

seize Commodore Frank Bainimarama.<sup>10</sup> Suva's *FM96 Radio* on the day reported Commodore Bainimarama was rushed from the camp by eight bodyguards, coming out through the bushes and being sped away in a four-wheel drive vehicle.

### **Mutiny Five Hours on the Brink**

Thursday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November was like any other normal working day at National Operations Centre (NOC) Queen Elizabeth Barracks. I had held the appointment of Chief Staff Officer Operations (CSO Ops) since the restructure of the military headquarters in August of 1999. I was in charge of the every day running of the NOC and had arrived at 0745 hrs at my office. The NOC had controlled and monitored the RFMF's Land Forces units to include its international peacekeeping operations. It was the nerve centre of Land Forces operations consisting of a signals communications centre, an operations and duty officer room, the intelligence cell, the plans office, the operations staff offices and the Force Reserve Unit office. The Force Reserve was a new unit established as its name signified in late June 2000 as a response to the threat of George Speight and his supporters getting out of hand. On settling into my office, I sorted through the routine in-tray correspondence to read the last 24 hours operational situation report and information brief that included national news items of interest. This had been prepared by the night duty operations and intelligence officers. I noted that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's rifle companies were still out doing live ammunition firing exercise and training at Balenabelo range in the upper Sigatoka Valley, Nadroga.

Also that morning, I was briefed that Father Makario Waqanivalu had members of Meridian Squadron undergoing a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rehabilitation session at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's headquarters lecture room. Father Makario was a well qualified PTSD psychologist who had also dealt with such cases in the Bougainville and Solomon Islands conflict. At around 0700hrs that morning, unbeknown to NOC, a section of Meridian Squadron soldiers was detailed by Captain Shane Stevens, the leader of the mutiny group, to clean Squadron weapons that were held at the main QEB armoury. These weapons were thought to be the total unit's holding. Most of these weapons were taken into parliament during the hostage crisis and were now kept in the main armoury

as opposed to the Squadron's armoury. Little was it known, that Squadron troopers had hidden arms and ammunition in their barracks in anticipation for this day.

At around 1200hrs, I joined other soldiers at the Rabuka Hall for an aerobic exercise session for about 45 minutes during lunch break. Lt Colonel Orisi Rabukawaqa, the Chief Staff Officer Plans (CSO Plans), and warrant officer Rakikau the intelligence senior non-commissioned officer of NOC, who had attended the exercise session with me, then went to the swimming pool next to the hall for a swim and cool down. At around 1300 hrs whilst in the pool, rifle fire and grenade explosions were heard from the direction of the National Operations Centre. We were shocked as we knew no training instruction was issued for the day for the discharge of blank rounds within barrack grounds. I remembered with a sense of foreboding that the Meridian Squadron had done a mock exercise in seizing the barracks a few years back.

We then heard the unmistakable sound of live rounds whizzing above the swimming pool and knew that things were definitely wrong. Corporal Bilo, a physical training instructor, came running past the swimming pool ducking his head in response to sporadic gun fire and informed the officers of the worst: the Squadron rebels were on a rampage using live rounds. As we climbed out of the pool, in our swimming trunks, we were told that rebel soldiers had taken over the NOC and were firing indiscriminately at unarmed soldiers. Cpl Bilo was also certain that some soldiers were injured and that he had seen armed rebel soldiers dressed in black tee shirts around the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion headquarters complex. Cpl Bilo had gone to use the photocopier machine at NOC and was lucky to escape as the mutinous troopers stormed and then took hostage staff at the NOC complex.

As fate would have it, I had left my working military uniform at the physical training instructors' office at Rabuka Hall close by. I promptly made my way there and changed into them, all the time mentally figuring out military options as the security of the barracks was my overall responsibility. All my years in the military had not prepared me for such a bizarre military contingency. At around midday, the Army rugby seven-a-side team with Major Mason Smith as manager had assembled at Rabuka Hall awaiting their transport to a tournament

in Ra province. I immediately ordered Major Smith to secure the back entrance to the barracks as soldiers began fleeing for their lives from the indiscriminate shootings.

After getting dressed in my uniform, I sent a soldier on foot to evacuate my wife and toddler daughter from our married quarters within QEB. I quickly assessed from the sketchy information I was able to piece together that rebel troopers were determined on taking over the top QEB camp by lethal force. The rebels had probably succeeded given that they were up against unarmed soldiers. I needed to regain control of the situation. I then proceeded to make my way down to the Engineers Headquarters across the Nabuni creek suspension bridge to my former unit where I had served 17 years of my career. Prior to my appointment as CSO Ops in August of 1999, after commanding troops with the Multi-National Forces and Observers in Sinai Egypt, I had commanded the 500 man strong RFMF Engineers Regiment headquartered at Queen Elizabeth Barracks lower camp along Cunningham Road. In addition, for security and secrecy, the Force Reserve Unit formed in late June of 2000 was based at the Engineers complex. On this day the FRU was in base on rest and recreation with its unit's weapons and ammunitions kept at the Engineers armoury.

That week the Engineers were preparing for Sappers Day to be held on the Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November. A huge temporary corrugated iron shed was being built to house the 500-man event at their headquarters. Sappers Day is an annual event celebrating the work of the Engineers and commemorating the founding of the unit on the 28th of August 1975. Apparently the event was delayed that year because of the political crisis, as the Engineers were tasked for internal security from their normal rural development work. It was thought the political crisis had so stabilized that Sappers were able to meet and celebrate that Friday in joyous comradeship.

On the eve of this Sappers Day, however, events were to take a bizarre turn that will forever be etched in the history of the Engineers Regiment. It was from this unit's headquarters complex that for some five hours on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, the planning, preparation, counter-assault and recapture of Queen Elizabeth Barracks were executed. Engineer troopers especially young Sappers from the

unit's Trade Training School (TTS) made up the overwhelming majority of the counter-assault force which recaptured QEB.

It seemed the mutineers had picked a day when the infanteers were out of camp in numbers, overlooking the fact that the engineers as a unit were at home. This motley bunch of soldiers saved the Fiji Military from certain compromise and humiliation at the hands of elite rebel mutinous soldiers.

Also around 1230 hr that day the Commander Commodore Bainimarama was at lunch at the officers Mess which was perched on the highest western knoll in camp with a commanding view of the top camp Queen Elizabeth Barracks and surrounds. A group of mutinous soldiers, on initiation of the mutiny by Captain Shane Stevens from their Squadron office, headed straight for the officers mess in an attempt to seize the Commander. Other groups of rebel soldiers with the aid of weapons hidden in their barracks were tasked to overpower using lethal force, the NOC, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions operations headquarters and armoury, the Force Reserve Unit's barrack block, the main and back camp gates, the main QEB administration building and the Commanders office building. The main QEB armoury was the first point to be overpowered by rebel soldiers who then held captives, the armourers/ storemen.

Information was also coming through, that rebel soldiers who were undergoing PTSD rehabilitation had suddenly begun discharging their hidden firearms, sending 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion soldiers fleeing in all directions and leaving Father Makario scurrying for cover in a nearby drain culvert. Father Makario was to suffer a serious stroke in the following weeks. This debilitating brain injury was put down to the stress that this incident had on him. It has since left him seriously handicapped for life. Reports filtering in also confirmed that a soldier was shot dead in the FRU barracks whilst fleeing through a window. He was later confirmed by the military hospital to be a loyalist FRU soldier Lance Corporal Simione Rawaileba. Two other loyalist soldiers Private Osea Rokosirnavosa of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was shot from a sniper rifle in the head and Private Jone Veilewai, a FRU orderly room clerk, was shot whilst having lunch. There was also incessant indiscriminate fire by rebel troops around the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion headquarters complex.

Officers and soldiers at NOC, including Major Niko Bukarau and Captain Jone Kalouniwai of the Intelligence cell, were bound and held at gun point as captives in their offices. The main gate of the barracks was also taken over by rebel soldiers.<sup>11</sup> From verbal reports streaming in, it was clear that other FRU soldiers in the barracks were shot and wounded. Many of them narrowly escaped by jumping out of barrack and office windows for their lives. A steady stream of wounded soldiers was being conveyed to the Military Hospital all afternoon as the carnage unfolded.

The mutiny was apparently timed to coincide with the Commander's presence at lunch at the Officers Mess. Bainimarama had entered the barracks through the camp back entrance in his vehicle with his armed escorts in another back-up vehicle and had gone straight to lunch. A team of rebels then opened fire on the officers Mess and were making their way to the Mess dining room but were kept at bay by return fire from the Commander's body guards parked at the back of the mess. One of the body guards had mounted the Officers Mess roof and mounted his Ultimax machine-gun and returned fire. The Commander was saved when Captain Jotama Misivono and Lt Col Silivenusi Waqausa who were lunching with him hurriedly evacuated him to safety down the Namadi gully with body guards covering his escape with fire. A getaway vehicle then picked up the Commander at the bottom of Vunakece Road Namadi Heights. Bainimarama was to suffer the butt of many a cruel joke about this getaway incident. Had he been captured by the rebels no doubt the day would have ended in disaster for him. There is criticism that his body-guards were heavily armed enough to make a stand at the Officers Mess and defend Bainimarama as QEB was 'the Commander's castle.' This would have reinforced troop morale knowing that their leader had not abandoned them.

Meanwhile at the Engineers lower camp, I had met with Lt Col Solomone Raravula, the Engineers commanding officer, his second-in- command, Major Maciu Waqanisau, and Captain Sanaila Seru, the Operations Officer. The unit's senior staff was marshalled to a meeting in the Engineers operations room. The operations room became a hive of frantic activity and phone calls as these officers tried to establish control of the situation.

Officers and senior non- commissioned officers from all other QEB based units who had fled the top camp like Captain Don Sinclair of the Transport unit and

Sergeant Molia of the Band unit were busy helping out. Mobile phones were ringing incessantly at the Engineers Headquarters that afternoon as this drama played out. To add to the confusion the rebel soldiers had intermittently launched live 101 mm grenades into the Engineers HQ complex. Soldiers scampered for cover as the explosions thundered on impact around the complex.

Lt Colonel Silivenusi Waqausa and Captain Jotama Misivono, who were at the officers' mess and helped protect and evacuate the Commander to safety, had later found their way down to the Engineers HQ camp at Nabuni. With them, I started piecing together what had happened. Captain Misivono who was the Operations Officer for the Force Reserve Unit was also a former member of the Squadron and knew most of the current members quite well. He was dispatched to the top camp to make contact with the rebel soldiers in an effort to arrange a cease fire. Misivono kept in touch with me with updates by mobile phone. Situational updates were also being phoned in from loyalist soldiers caught up within QEB's top camp area. This gave me a good picture of what had transpired and what was unfolding. In the meantime, after the "stand to" alert had been activated by the Engineers headquarters at the lower QEB Nabuni camp, soldiers started to draw live ammunitions and arms and take up defensive positions to secure the high features along Cunningham road. Soldiers who had fled the top camp had also assembled at the Engineers HQ and had filled us in on their assessment of the situation.

A disorientated Lieutenant Penaia Baleinamau, the Acting Officer Commanding Meridian Squadron, had also been captured within the top camp and was also being interrogated. From injury reports gained from the military camp hospital it became clear to me that the rebel soldiers were on a killing rampage as victim soldiers with gun shot wounds were completely taken by surprise and unarmed. In a poignant moment during this ordeal female officer Captain Amelia Tadu contacted me by phone stating she had been shot in the shoulder and was heavily bleeding. She was pleading to be medically evacuated whilst the make shift NOC was frantically trying to alert rescue medics and ambulance to other gunshot victims.



Photo 6. Captain Amelia Tadu is helped into hospital after being wounded during the gun battles. Picture : Reuters.

By 1500hrs at least three loyalist soldiers were confirmed fatally shot and dead on arrival with at least another six seriously injured and more victims on their way to Suva's Colonial War Memorial Hospital. I decided that a negotiated ceasefire was futile and that a military option had to be worked out before the last light of day. At this stage, the chief of staff of Land Forces Command Lt Colonel Samuela Raduva, who had fled from his office, turned up at the Engineers operations room. He had before this made his way down to the Ministry of Home Affairs where the Land Force Commander, Colonel Alfred Tuatoko had also withdrawn to and was now located.

Colonel Tuatoko was having lunch at his QEB married quarters when the mutiny started and hastily left for the Ministry to be with the Permanent Secretary, Brigadier Jioji Konrote and interim Home Affairs Minister Ratu Talemo Ratakele. Lt Col Raduva, who was then directed by Colonel Tuatoko to my location at the Engineers Unit, was also a former Engineers Commanding Officer. Raduva was then in phone contact with the Land Force Commander and the Minister of Home Affairs all that afternoon relaying and taking instructions. Later that afternoon a special National Security Council meeting was convened, without Prime Minister Qarase who was on route back from the Pacific Islands Forum in Kiribati. In the five hours or so that the NOC was overrun by the rebel soldiers command confusion often reined. Various senior



officers issued instructions through the use of mobile phones to troops without central coordination. Command decisions were made from the three other military bases in the Greater Suva area: - Army Training Group Nasinu, Stanley Brown naval Base and the Strategic Command that had set up headquarters in Suva's Domain that week. To exacerbate matters, when the mutiny began, Lt Colonel Seruvakula, who commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion responsible for the security of Suva city, was with his rifle companies in a live firing exercise in Nadroga. His 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion headquarters in QEB was also taken over by the mutineers.

Whilst in the heat of co-ordinating the medical evacuation, I was surprised when informed by Lt Colonel Raduva that former Prime Minister Maj Gen Sitiveni Rabuka wanted to speak to me on his mobile phone. Rabuka had entered the top camp and was at the officers' mess. He wanted to negotiate a deal. I flatly refused to speak to him by Raduva's mobile phone. Then, yet again, I was handed a phone to talk with Major Niko Bukarau, the intelligence officer, who was held captive at NOC. Lieutenant Charles Dakuliga, a rebel mutineer officer, came on. I then asked Dakuliga who their leader was. Dakuliga replied that it was Captain Shane Stevens. I then asked to speak to Captain Stevens who apparently was also in the NOC complex. This was denied. It was later heard on radio; Captain Stevens had rung *Radio Fiji* and *Radio FM 96* publicly requesting negotiations for various aired grievances. It was also broadcast on public radio that villagers of Naitasiri province were on their way to enter and picket the barracks in support of the mutineers' grievances.

It was later revealed by Dakuliga later in court that, "Former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka told him to hoist a yellow flag signaling a stop to the fighting and start of negotiations and that he would talk to Lieutenant-Colonel Jone Baledrokadroka."<sup>12</sup> I then told Lt Dakuliga that there was not going to be any negotiation as loyalist soldiers were already killed and seriously injured, and that the rebel IMS soldiers had to surrender. I was then given a phone to speak to Major Bukarau, who was told to stay patient as the military was going to resolve the issue that day even if it meant an all out assault. I was resolute that QEB camp had to be recaptured by last light that afternoon. I strongly suspected

negotiations would have bought time for civilians to enter camp to act as a 'human shield.' This ploy was used during the takeover of Parliament and the Sukanaivalu VC barracks in Labasa. I also knew that an assault in the dark of night was impossible with untrained troops and without night observation devices. Had the assault been done at night, this would have caused many casualties. I knew that had I lost the closing window of opportunity that evening then the next possible time for an assault would have been first light the next morning. By then civilians would have entered QEB making it impossible to assault. It was therefore my lot to make the best of a bad situation, given the troops I had. I was left with no option but a counter-attack assault by last light to regain QEB. This decision was then relayed to the Ministry of Home Affairs that afternoon.

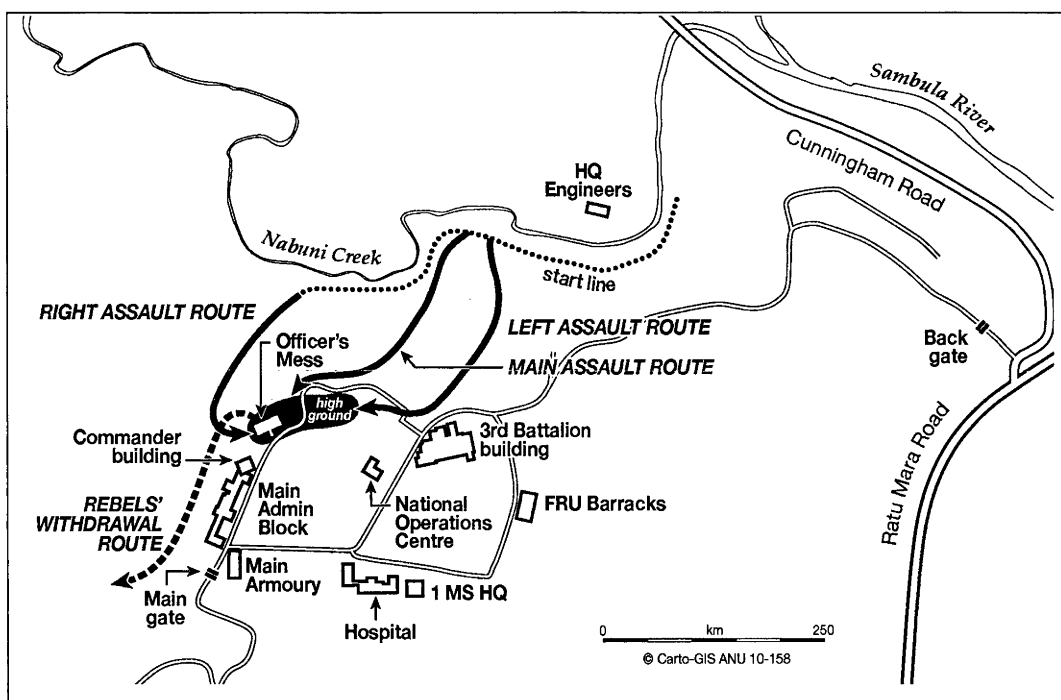
### **Battle Preparation**

Commodore Bainimarama, after his evacuation to safety from the Officers' Mess, turned up at Engineers headquarters. Bainimarama had already been briefed by Colonel Tuatoko at Home Affairs and Lt Colonel Raduva had kept him updated of the situation in QEB by mobile phone. Bainimarama was subsequently briefed by me. The Commander was told to withdraw to the Naval Base as it was too dangerous for him at the Engineers complex which was vulnerable to sniper fire and exploding 40 mm grenades. Bainimarama agreed to withdraw to Stanley Brown naval base at Suva's Walu Bay for his safety. This left me, Raduva, Raravula and Waqausa to deal with the tactical situation. After the medical evacuation of wounded victims, an assault plan was put together by my team of senior officers. Captain Seru the Engineers operations officer was ordered to marshal the Engineer troops into assault groups. Captain Seru was then to alert the Nabua police station of the impending assault in order to warn off the public in the area.

**Diagram 2.**

<b>Main Sequence of Events</b>	
<b>Time (Hrs)</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>0700</b>	<b>Rebel troopers clean unit weapons at QEB Main Armoury</b>
<b>0900</b>	<b>Father Makario commences PTSD classes for rebel troopers at 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion HQ</b>
<b>1200</b>	<b>QEB Lunch Hour</b>
<b>1230</b>	<b>Commander Commodore Bainimarama at Lunch Officers Mess</b>
<b>1255</b>	<b>Mutiny begins under Captain Shane Stevens</b>
<b>1500</b>	<b>Maj Gen S Rabuka enters camp for Officers Mess</b>
<b>1530</b>	<b>Rebels demand negotiations aided by Rabuka. Evacuation of wounded.</b>
<b>1600</b>	<b>Counter Assault Plan (CAP) is completed</b>
<b>1700</b>	<b>Authorisation to initiate CAP given by Govt Security Council</b>
<b>1800</b>	<b>Counter Assault Begins</b>
<b>1900</b>	<b>Counter Assault Successful</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>NOC is restored and QEB secured.</b>

**Map 6. Counter-Assault Plan (CAP)**



The senior officers present then went through the military appreciation process on the whiteboard in constructing a tactical assault plan. We began by summarising the situation on the ground and constructing a profile and strength of our adversary, the Meridian Squadron. We plotted a best course of action as learnt during tactical exercises at our Officers' Training School. This was, however, not an exercise but the "real thing" in surreal circumstances and surroundings. Even our peacekeeping experiences had not prepared us for such an unlikely local event. Years of peacekeeping operations had blunted our skills for real battlefield procedures. Further, the plan was to be executed by soldiers many of whom; their only infantry assault experience would have been during recruitment training. But for those present that afternoon at the Engineers lower camp, we were resolute to take back the upper camp, the core site of the RFMF. The tactical assault plan did finally eventuate, plotted by the makeshift team of officers. (see Counter-Assault Plan) Being amongst members of my former unit, the Engineers gave me confidence and faith as the team sorted out the details of the assault plan. What strengthened the counter-assault was that we had a core of Force Reserve Unit troops. Since its formation in late June 2000, these troops

had been in constant fire and manoeuvre live training exercises. The unit had also endured rugged internal security deployments to Vanua Levu and the Monasavu area.

The plan was to assault onto the Officers Mess high ground in three groups, using three routes from the north making use of the deep northern escarpment as cover. As a preliminary operation, we had to secure the crest of the Nabuni creek escarpment as we feared sniper fire from the rebels. The main assault start line was to the bottom of this escarpment. The main assault group consisting of a company size was organised into section assault teams of eight to ten men commanded by an officer, senior or junior non commissioned officer available. The soldiers were briefed on the assault plan and quick rehearsals of fire and manoeuvre drills were conducted in section teams.

The mission was to capture the vital ground which was the officers mess complex and QEB flagpole high feature. At around 1600 hrs. I gave the final address to the paraded assault formation. I re-emphasized the mission and the importance of teamwork in the coming hours. The mutineers by this time had all withdrawn to the officers mess high feature

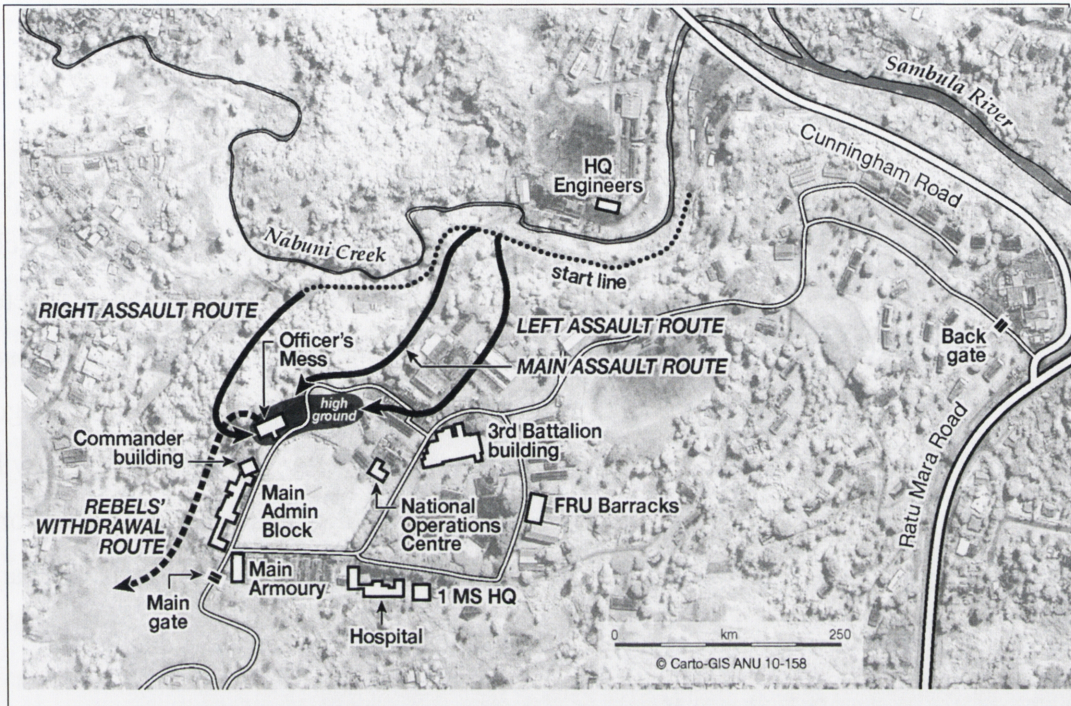
I had contacted Lt Colonel Patrick Hennings, the Commanding Officer of the Army Training Group in Nasinu outside Suva, to close off traffic at the Four Mile Bridge, and secure the camp approaches along Ratu Mara Road. Lt Colonel Hennings had also tried to negotiate with Rabuka and some of the rebel soldiers when the assault started. Lt Colonel Pita Driti, the Commanding Officer of the Logistic Support Unit in QEB, was also told of the plan to assault. After ascertaining his unit's strength he later informed me that they could not form teams in support of the main assault. He was told to hold his position with his troops. Lt Colonel Viliame Seruvakula had by now arrived at the Engineers complex from Nadroga some three hours after the mutiny started. He was told of the plan to assault. He was then told to provide a blocking force from remnant soldiers of his 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion along Mead Road and Namadi Heights.

At about 1700hrs, Raduva, the chief of staff, informed me that authorisation had been given to recapture Queen Elizabeth Barracks by the National Security Council. The Council was convened by interim Home Affairs Minister Ratu

Talemo Ratakele whilst Prime Minister Qarase was attending the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Kiribati. The assault teams were ordered to shake out into assault positions beneath the gully slopes along Nabuni creek. All were issued with additional ammunition magazines, with ammunition re-supplies team formed to bring forward reserve ammunition when called for. The covering fire team with an M60 machine gun was deployed to the Nabuni high feature.

The assault teams were then given clearance to test fire their weapons into the Nabuni far creek bank. This simultaneous thunderous discharging of weapons all along the Nabuni creek bank created doubt in the minds of the rebels as they believed all the noise to be a deception plan. The military deception tactics of 'making noise in the North and attacking from the South' was foremost in the rebels' minds. On that day however our troops confused the rebels by 'making noise in the North and attacking from the North'. I was later told this by one of the mutinous rebel soldiers Feoko Gadekibau in Naboro jail in 2007.<sup>13</sup>

**Map 7: Topographical View and Overlay Map of CAP**



At 1800hrs- H-Hour, on the signal of green flares fired into the failing evening light the assault began. Lieutenant Aca Rayawa with Sargent Akuila Mairewa led the main assault group. The right assault group was led by Captain Etika Kaurasi of the Military Police. The left assault group was led by Sargent Major Maku Veikila. Lt Colonel Raravula brought up the rear with the reserve and resupply teams. The covering fire team on Nabuni Hill had opened up raining live rounds upon the Officers Mess high feature. The initial phase of the assault was cautiously slow as the teams tried to ascend in line abreast. At places the angle of ascent was as much as sixty degrees in incline up the northern escarpment. The setting sun to the west cast the shadows of the Tamavua ridge down the slopes of Namadi heights masking the assault ascent amongst the low bush and reeds. Under the cover of failing light and smoke the main assault team and the left and right flanking teams began their ascent in fire and manoeuvre formation.

I was frequently in contact with Lt Colonel Raravula during the whole approach, assault and securing phases. Lt Colonel Samuela Raduva the chief of staff Land Forces was with me and relaying information to the National Security Council at the Ministry of Home Affairs. The exchange of fire was furious as the assault crested the northern escarpment ridge. The main assault was then joined by Lt Colonel Patrick Henning's, troops from the Army Training Group Nasinu and remnant troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion as they combined forces with the left assault group. As the main assault group reached the top camp ridge line, the covering fire provided from Nabuni feature was lifted. Covering fire was now provided from the left flanking assault teams who were also tasked to clear office buildings. The main assault teams then working in fire and manoeuvre mode fought their way to the officers mess high feature. The speed of the assault and intensity of fire caused the mutineers to escape up the Namadi heights gully under cover of darkness. Raravula then informed me at 1900 hours that they had successfully secured the Officers Mess high ground and that his reserve forces were doing a sweep operation through the lower camp to secure all vital areas before dark.

I then ordered a cease-fire as the assaulting force reorganised on the Officers Mess feature. Rabuka was caught in the cross fire and had taken cover in one of the bachelor officer' quarters. Up until the last moments of the assault Rabuka had been busy trying to avert an assault in favour of a negotiated settlement. The former Commander of the RFMF was apprehended by Lt Col Raravula and detained. Rabuka was later tried for inciting mutiny charges and found not guilty, though serious doubts still linger about his role in the mutiny. I then ordered the assault force to hold the Officers Mess high feature for the night in case of a counter attack by the mutineers. I then ordered the whole make shift operation staff at the Engineers operations centre to make their way to the NOC at the top camp to restore national operations as soon as possible that night.

Fortunately no lives on both sides were lost during the assault. Two mutineers had been injured with gun shot wounds during the whole five hour ordeal.<sup>14</sup> This was the only counter-assault operation casualty report that was sent to Home Affairs that evening once NOC was up back in order around 2000hrs.<sup>15</sup>



That night a stunned military was left asking deep questions of itself. The capture of notorious escaped prisoner Alifereti Nimacere that night at Nadonumai outside Suva raised the spirits of the soldiers somewhat. The next morning, the full effect of the mutiny and counter assault was seen as the military took stock. Building walls were pockmarked with bullet holes, windows, office furniture and equipment were smashed, treasured trophies, photos and other military memorabilia destroyed in the officers' mess, office and barrack floors bloodied. Most of all in Suva's Colonial War Memorial Hospital eight soldiers lay dead and twenty eight other soldiers seriously wounded. In addition seven civilians including Mr James Pillay living some distance from QEB in the Suva suburb of Samabula were injured through stray bullets.<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Why did the mutiny happen? Most of the mutinous troopers had sided with George Speight's nationalist takeover of the Chaudhry government. They had harbored a grievance that the military had sold them out.<sup>1</sup> A few who had returned from peacekeeping duties, driven by loyalty to their elite unit, had also joined the mutineers. What had triggered the mutiny was the announcement by the Commander Commodore Bainimarama the week before, that the unit was to be disbanded. Unfortunately disinformation by some senior officers in the week prior to the mutiny had precipitated the attempt to displace Bainimarama as Commander. Bainimarama who led, or rather misled, the military into a political role in the 2000 crisis has a lot to answer for, given the findings of the Evans report. The report asserted, "IMS was very much a private army, with its own agenda, answerable only to Commander RFMF."<sup>2</sup> Colonel Ilaisa Kacisolomone as president of the military court martial in sentencing the mutineers had also urged Commodore Bainimarama to reveal the names of those who advised him to abrogate the 1997 constitution. He said Bainimarama owed a duty to the nation to name those who advised him. The Colonel revealed those in authority did not really accept the abrogation of the Constitution by the Commander but went along drafting decrees to maintain their respective powers.<sup>17</sup> This may be

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<sup>1</sup> See RFMF BOI Evans Report, 09 Aug 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Evans Report findings, p37.

taken to mean that acceptance of Bainimarama's actions was done more out of self preservation rather than a respect for the law. Sitiveni Rabuka was drawn into the military barracks that fateful afternoon by a phone call by mutiny leader Captain Shane Stevens. Bainimarama was to have been 'replaced' by Rabuka, a co-founder of the Squadron, had it not been for the quick and brave actions of loyalist officers and soldiers.

Perhaps Kacisolomone's summation and sentencing at the completion of the Court Martial trial is appropriate to conclude on. On sentencing, the mutinous soldiers were described by Kacisolomone as "a menace to society who must be restricted in every way"<sup>18</sup>. Captain Stevens was jailed for life and 43 other troops to terms ranging from four to ten years. Kacisolomone had said the mutineers had caused a lot of suffering and devastation to the country during one of its most trying times and acted in a cowardly way with the use of illegally seized weapons. He said the incitement to mutiny and mutiny were the most serious offences that had shocked Fiji's military. He called for an investigation into what he called the 'disloyalty virus' within the military which had the potential to become an epidemic. Kacisolomone said several military officers were sympathetic to those responsible for the political upheaval in 2000. The Colonel continued, "We hear too often from our Fijian leaders that most, if not, all, support the cause but not the means when talking about the 2000 coup"<sup>19</sup> Kacisolomone noted: "Surely, any causes worth pursuing and inculcating into the fabric of our everyday life are those which ensure for us a better future rather than a cause which denigrates human dignity and brings about hatred and sufferings, economic disaster and total disregard for law and order." He said the 'cause' led to imprisonment of high chiefs, brilliant young men, and custodians of law and order.

It was the quick action of a few officers and soldiers that saved the Fiji military from the jaws of defeat that fateful afternoon in November 2000. In effect the event was an attempt to displace what many military insiders saw as Bainimarama's inept leadership. It also showed the RFMF had regrouped in the face of ethnic factionalism though the consequences of a politicized military stemming from the mutiny still haunt Fiji. The event transformed the military into an agent of partisan national politics rather than what many officers hoped

would be an apolitical professional institution. Bainimarama became emboldened by this successful retaking of QEB to shore up his claim that soldiers supported him in a political mediator role when in fact the hasty counter-assault was for institutional survival. After this infamous event, Commodore Bainimarama became fixated on mediating Fiji's ethnicized politics, a fixation that led to the military coup of 2006. The *Turaga-Bati* relationship had also underpinned the mutiny with the involvement of the *Qaranivalu* and high chief of Naitasiri as later revealed by mutineers Captain Shane Stevens and Sargent Bonafasio in the Court Martial. With grievances against the Commander and the military, the mutineers had resorted to traditional chiefly authority for support. In the eyes of the mutineers, the *turaga* was still an essential element in settling political or military grievances. Unapologetically, the military leadership has valorised this military misadventure to play politics and obfuscate the mutiny deaths of the five Meridian Squadron soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

#### Interlude

THE order to assault members of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare soldiers who were in police custody after the November 2, 2000 mutiny could have been issued by the Military Commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, it was revealed when key military witness Colonel Jone Baledrokadroka was questioned. Colonel Baledrokadroka who took the stand before Justice Filimoni Jitoko in the High Court chambers today said he was Chief of Staff Operations around the time of the mutiny and gave no orders for CRW members who had surrendered, to be assaulted during detainment Disbanded CRW unit member Barbados Mills filed a lawsuit against the military for "vicarious liability" after he was taken with five other unit members to the Vatuwaqa Rifle Range where they were alleged to have been assaulted by a group of soldiers.

***Fiji Times*, 'Order to assault could have been issued by Commander: Baledrokadroka', Wed 17 October, 2007.**

## Interlude

THE assault of Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit soldiers after the November 2, 2000 mutiny could have been ordered by any of the four command centres, a key witness in a civil lawsuit against the army revealed at the High Court chambers yesterday.

Jone Baledrokadroka, the first defence witness in the in-chamber hearing before Justice Filimoni Jitoko, said the command centres included the Stanley Brown Base, which at that time was headed by military chief Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama.

Mr Baledrokadroka said he was the head of National Operations or Chief Staff Operations at that time and did not issue any instructions, verbal or written, for CRW soldiers to be assaulted during their detainment in police custody.

On Tuesday, three former CRW soldiers told the court they were released from police custody after a note signed by Colonel Baledrokadroka was issued.

Barbados Mills, a former soldier with the disbanded CRW Unit, is suing the military for "vicarious liability" after alleging he was among five other CRW soldiers taken from police custody and assaulted at the Vatuwaqa Rifle Range by uniformed armed soldiers.

He claims the assault included Sergeant Waisea Salato and Corporal Jack Komaitai.

Mr Baledrokadroka said it was against military law for anyone to act "over and beyond" instructions issued by him after the Operation Orders were issued for the arrest of CRW soldiers.

"That weekend, the commander was in charge of Stanley Brown (base). There could have been communication counter-commanding what I was doing at QEB," he said. "Just because you are in army uniform does not give you the authority to do something like that. I wouldn't. They were acting under someone's orders, but not my authority."

The state of confusion the military was in after it was "under-siege" was "exacerbated" by the establishment of other command centres, he said.

Command centres were set up at the military headquarters at Berkeley Crescent, another was at the Armed Training Group at Nasinu, one at QEB and another at the naval base in Walu Bay, Mr Baledrokadroka said.

He said any orders contrary to his intent were a military offence and disobedience to lawful command or standing orders. While refuting allegations he authorised the release of CRW soldiers from police custody, Mr Baledrokadroka said any such move would have warranted an explanation from him to his superiors including the Legal and Land Force units. The only note that would enable the release of CRW soldiers from custody was a court order, Mr Baledrokadroka said.

He admitted there was a possibility of anger among the ranks - from the top to the bottom - after the mutiny. "It was beyond my authority to release those in police custody. That's only possible through the legal and Land Force Command above me. Be it security or criminal, I have no authority," he said.

"If there was such an assault on CRW soldiers it could have been owed to the tension felt after the mutiny," he said.

***Fiji Times* 'Officer: I never gave order' Thurs, Oct 18, 2007.**

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Parliament of Fiji, 1997. *Defending Fiji: Defence White Paper 1997*, Suva, 1997, p. 35.
- <sup>2</sup> *Evans Report*, p.36.
- <sup>3</sup> C.J. Lammers, 'Strikes and Mutinies: A Comparative Study of Organizational Conflicts between Rulers and Ruled', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 14, 4, 1969: 559.
- <sup>4</sup> *Radio Fiji*, 'Fiji PM Qarase tells details of mutiny, appeals to fugitives', Suva, Fiji Islands, 3 Nov. 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Kalabu is the area in suburban Suva where Speight supporters moved after leaving parliament under the Muanikau Accord. Their camp was later stormed by the army, who said an amnesty under the Muanikau Accord did not apply as all weapons had not been returned.
- <sup>6</sup> *Evans Report*, p. 542.
- <sup>7</sup> *Evans Report*, p. 596.
- <sup>8</sup> Lammers, 'Strikes and Mutinies: A Comparative Study of Organisational Conflicts between Rulers and Ruled': 566.
- <sup>9</sup> Major Howard Politini, 'Fiji PM Qarase tells details of mutiny, appeals to fugitives', *Radio Fiji*, 03 Nov 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> Politini, *Radio Fiji*, 03 Nov 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Trooper revisits 2000 mutiny', 26 Feb 2010.
- <sup>12</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Rabuka gave order, ex-CRW man says,' 01 Dec 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Sapper Feoko Gadekibau was featured in *Fiji Times*, 'Trooper revisits 2000 mutiny', 26 Feb 2010.
- <sup>14</sup> One of the injured was Captain Shane Stevens, the mutiny leader, who was shot in the stomach whilst at NOC complex and was evacuated by ambulance to CWM Hospital prior to the counter assault. The other injured mutineer Pte Koroitavalena was assisted to safety by wheelchair bound Military Provost Marshall Lt Colonel Jimi Koroi and his clerk who were caught in the cross fire in their office.
- <sup>15</sup> Meridian Squadron soldiers who were later killed: Selesitano Kalounivale, Jone Davui, Epineri Bainimoli, Lagani Rokowaqa and Iowane Waseroma lost their lives not as a result of the counter-assault that evening but through individual officers' decisions and actions not authorised by the author following the mayhem that evening. These actions were probably in retaliation for the cold blooded killings of loyalist soldiers: Private Temo R. Veilewai, Pte Osea Rokosirnavosa and LCpl Simione Rawaileba and gunshot wounds to 28 other soldiers. A Police investigation into these IMS killings has been conducted and has been withheld by the military regime that came to power in December 2006.
- <sup>16</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army sued over 2000 mutiny', 18 Sep 2007.
- <sup>17</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Fiji court martial urges Bainimarama to fess up,' 14 Apr 2005.
- <sup>18</sup> Victor Lal, 'One of Yatu Lau Co Ltd directors on NBF debtors list' *Coup Four and a Half blogspot.com*, 15 Jul 2010.
- <sup>19</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Fiji court martial urges Bainimarama to fess up,' 14 Apr 2005.

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<sup>20</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Mutiny victims remembered' 02 Nov 2007.

## Chapter 7

### The Emerging Antagonism between Qarase and Bainimarama

#### Introduction

The emerging antagonism between Laisenia Qarase and Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama was the unfinished business of Speight's coup in 2000. In a *New York Times* interview, Bainimarama said he could think of only one mistake regarding his seizure of power more than six years before: he wished he had done it in 2001.<sup>1</sup> Bainimarama said in 2007 that the 2006 coup was to have eventuated in 2001 but the military wanted to give Qarase a chance to mend his ways.<sup>2</sup> He further lambasted the former Prime Minister stating, "he has never educated our people in the villages about the wrongs of 2000 which have resulted in the ever present coup mentality."<sup>3</sup> Qarase, on the other hand, said the 2006 coup was more a consequence of personal differences than anything else.<sup>4</sup> Both leaders' explanations resonate with John Fitch's analysis in his seminal work, *The Military Coup d'État as a Political Process*. Fitch argues that, 'antagonism and personal ties' appear as a relative constant in individual decisions to support or oppose a coup.<sup>5</sup>

After the failed George Speight coup of 2000 the military adopted a political interest in domestic affairs which it justified as necessary for national security. According to leading Fiji lawyer Graham Leung the military was emboldened to adopt the mediator role by members of the legal fraternity and other political and civilian stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> By April 2005, the Qarase-Bainimarama feud had intensified after a national security review report by a panel of experts had recommended to government a halving of military numbers.<sup>7</sup> The schism was further exacerbated by supporters of Bainimarama such as FLP's Mahendra Chaudhry and NAP's Ratu Epeli Ganilau in opposition to Qarase's SDL Party, the GCC and the Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes. Allegations of government ethnic policy parochialism were countered with military malfeasance. As Commissioner Hughes revealed, "We wanted to arrest and charge Commodore Bainimarama but he was permanently covered by heavy

security. I was very keen to avoid an armed confrontation between the police and the military. So we waited.”<sup>8</sup> By late 2006, the US embassy reported to Washington that Bainimarama privately told European Union diplomats that, “If anyone insulted the army of course we must have them taken to barracks and have them beaten up.”<sup>9</sup> The confidential memorandum went on to further claim, “Telephoned threats of rape have been regularly used by the military to intimidate political activists.”<sup>10</sup>

Bainimarama’s detractors accused him of hypocrisy for vehemently opposing government’s leniency towards perpetrators of the 2000 coup when there were unanswered questions about his role in the same takeover. The antagonism finally came to a head in Commodore Bainimarama’s ‘clean-up campaign’ coup of 2006 that was to challenge the *Turaga-Bati* ideology and reverse the relationship between the military and the chiefly elite and associates.

The central argument Bainimarama advocated in his ‘clean-up campaign’ of 2006 was a familiar one in the debate about Fiji’s politics, and contended that ideas of iTaukei paramountcy and iTaukei identity almost entirely served elite iTaukei interests. Robertson and Sutherland, well-known as advocates of this theory of iTaukei ‘false consciousness’, described the 2000 crisis in these terms:

In 2000 it had another dimension -a Fijian one. Fijians confronted Fijians on a scale not seen since the early days of colonialism. Fijians killed Fijians. Commoners defied chiefs. Chiefs fought among themselves. Tensions between the country’s 14 Fijian provinces ran high. Even the Fiji military suffered. Humiliated by its failure to contain the rebels, it had also to endure the shock of a violent mutiny. If nothing else, the unrest of 2000 shattered the myth of a united Fijian people.<sup>11</sup>

Why, they asked, did intra-ethnic antagonism continue to emerge despite the military’s best efforts as ‘saviours of the nation’ in 2000 and in spite of the military’s installation of the Qarase led interim government in 2001? Robertson and Sutherland answer was that:

Fijian leaders have exploited the disadvantage of the Fijian masses by projecting it as the disadvantage of all Fijian people, the elite included. They have used the ‘paramountcy of Fijian[iTaukei] interests’ to hide the reality of the paramountcy of elite Fijian[iTaukei] interests. How to resolve it is the indigenous question. It is the key question facing Fiji today. It is Fiji’s unfinished business.<sup>12</sup>



This thesis takes a different view. While conceding the force of this analysis as a partial explanation of Fiji's political evolution since independence, it argues that the 2006 coup repeated the ancient hierarchical power inversion of the Bauan Sacred King (Roko Tui Bau) by his Warrior Chief (Vunivalu). In the modern setting, Bainimarama is the Warrior Chief who has usurped power for himself, re-enacting a well-established iTaukei power transition. The key point is that, like other warrior chiefs before him, Bainimarama did not seize power in order to end the subjection of the commoner iTaukei, but rather to replace the chiefly elite in continuing that subjection. Just as they used the paramountcy of iTaukei interests to justify their authority and privileges, so Bainimarama has used the idea of national unity to justify his.

This chapter examines the issues and tactics that were employed by the military in intervening in politics before executing the reversal of the *Turaga-Bati* ideology with the takeover of the Qarase-led nationalist government. The chapter outlines the major schisms that arose between the two major actors and protagonists, Bainimarama and Qarase, and analyses the contentious issues in the lead up to the coup according to Finer's modes.

### **Modes of Intervention**

Samuel Finer's modes of intervention offer us a thematic structure to analyze the antagonism that culminated in the displacement and supplanting of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship.

Finer examined intervention along a continuum where both legal and coercive mechanisms are employed. For practical purposes, Finer condensed military intervention into four levels: influence, blackmail, displacement and supplantment. These levels of intervention are attained by certain characteristic methods or modes, alone or in conjunction with one another. Finer lists them as:

- 1) The normal constitutional channels.
- 2) Collusion and /or competition with the civilian authorities.
- 3) The intimidation of the civilian authorities.
- 4) Threats of non-cooperation with, or violence towards, the civilian authorities.
- 5) Failure to defend the civilian authorities.

- 6) The exercise of violence against the civilian authorities vis a vis a military coup d'état.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed looking at Finer's levels of intervention it can be hypothesized that Bainimarama's coup was played out according to these levels culminating in the final supplanting of the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. In pressuring then outrightly opposing the SDL government from 2001-2006, Commodore Bainimarama and the military, employed all these modes in escalating order culminating in the displacement and supplantment of the ruling SDL Coalition Party and associates.

### **Normal Constitutional Channels**

After Speight's 2000 failed coup and the 1<sup>st</sup> Meridian Squadron's mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the military was determined to bring to justice those who had perpetrated the crises. Former military commander and interim Deputy Prime Minister, Brigadier Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, declared the military's stance stating that

Unadulterated greed and the unbelievable arrogance as was shamelessly displayed by chiefs and people alike on May 19 will not bring about paramountcy in this day and age. Justice has to come before reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

This view was contrary to that of interim Prime Minister Qarase and his political colleagues, who saw traditional *vanua* reconciliation as taking precedence over Western justice. Bainimarama, however, had no intention of seeing Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister Chaudhry's deposed government restored to office as it would rekindle nationalist tensions. The military's stand since the start of the crisis was seen by many as being ambivalent and one of appeasement towards Speight nationalists. After assuming rule on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2000, Bainimarama and the military took up the mantle of national security watchdog to reinstate political stability. NGOs such as the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) applauded the military's stand.

### **Chandrikha Prasad Case**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 Justice Antony Gates's High Court ruling, in the Chandrika Prasad case, held that the 1997 Constitution was not abrogated and that the military installed caretaker government led by Qarase was illegal. An

appeal was lodged by the caretaker government. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2001, the Fiji Court of Appeal (FCA) ruling upheld Justice Gates's constitutional ruling of the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, and also affirmed the illegality of the military installed government. The nation again found itself at a constitutional crossroad. Gates's judgment that the military interim administration led by Qarase had "no constitutional foundation of legality" was a blow to Bainimarama who was credited for restoring normalcy. Bainimarama was adamant, however, that the military would uphold the rule of law and abide with the Appeals Court decision.

The GCC and the President then called for fresh elections under the 1997 Constitution. The FCA ruling further strained relations between Speight's nationalists and the military. Bainimarama had also granted Speight's group immunity through the promulgation of Decree No. 18 which came into effect on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2000. This decree was the outcome of the Muanikau Accord, which gave Speight and his group amnesty from prosecution for treason. In return the Coalition government hostages would be released and all weapons used recovered by the military. This was later to prove a hollow victory for Speight and his group who kept demanding a say in the military-installed interim government. The storming and arresting of Speight and his supporters at Kalabu Primary School later in July 2000 was seen by the rebels as a breach of this decree.<sup>15</sup>

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2002, Justice Wilson in the case of the *State versus Ratu Timoci Silatolu and Josefa Nata*, in the High Court of Fiji, ruled that the Immunity Decree promulgated by Bainimarama in his capacity as Head of Government at the Muanikau Accord, was null and void because it was unconstitutional. The two were being prosecuted for treason. They were later jailed for life with coup leader George Speight for their part in toppling Mahendra Chaudhry's Labour-led government. Apparently they were granted immunity from any civil or criminal prosecution by Commodore Bainimarama. Throughout his first term, as Prime Minister, Qarase found himself carefully treading between his nationalist coalition partner's grievances against Bainimarama and the military's call for justice before reconciliation. Both

leaders were, however, determined to follow normal constitutional channels as a principle, for as often in politics, the rhetoric hid power undercurrents and divergent interests.

### **Collusion with key political actors**

The outcome of the Chandrika Prasad constitutional case saw military attempts to protect its corporate interests come to the fore. In the wake of Speight's coup and the military's installation of an interim government, the Chandrika Prasad court case in November 2000 was a victory for constitutional law. The ordinary Indian farmer had taken the military and the interim government to court and claimed a violation of his constitutional rights. Justice Gates ruled that Commodore Bainimarama had erred in law with his proclamations of the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2000, prime of which was the purported abrogation the 1997 constitution.

As was stated by Justice Gates:

Once the hostage crisis was resolved and all other law and order matters contained, if not entirely eradicated, the Constitution, previously temporarily on ice or suspended, would re-emerge as the supreme law demanding his [Bainimarama's] support and that of the military to uphold it against any other usurpers. The doctrine could not be used to give sustenance to a new extra-constitutional regime. Nor could it provide a valid basis for abrogating the Constitution and replacing it with a Constitutional Review Committee and an interim civilian government. Necessity [doctrine] did not demand any of that.<sup>16</sup>

However, at the Chandrika Prasad ruling appeal, brought by the interim administration, in March of 2001, the judges ruled that it was indeed the intention of the Commander to abrogate the constitution. As stated:

On the basis of the further materials before this Court (including the Commander's affidavits) we have no hesitation in holding that Gates J was in error when he found that the Commander had "no genuine desire to remove the 1997 Constitution". We are satisfied in the light of the further material placed before us that the Commander, for the reasons he conveyed to the President at the time, did have a genuine desire to do just that.<sup>17</sup>

This begs the question whether the Commander's intentions were really as noble as trying to save the country from the scourge of Speight and his supporters in his 'genuine desire' to remove the 1997 Constitution. Or did he have a personal or political motive for military intervention at this early stage of his career as Commander RFMF? The events which have unfolded since tend to suggest that he had political rather than purely professional motives and used Speight as scapegoat.

As the military had installed Qarase with a mandate, his interim government's survival and success depended on the military as the guarantor of national security. Commodore Bainimarama, in submitting three affidavits as part of the interim government's Appeals Court case, however, contradicted the military's stance of standing firm stating, "The next elections should be held under a new constitution because of perception of coup makers that the present constitution had "watered down the interests of the Fijians."<sup>18</sup> In the third Affidavit, the Commander also disputed claims by Jone Dakuvula of the CCF, a witness for Mr Prasad, that Bainimarama would support a government of national unity if the Gates ruling was upheld.<sup>19</sup> Dakuvula had highlighted the fact that the military would uphold the rule of law and had no other option but to support the recalling of parliament.<sup>20</sup> It appears Dakuvula had used a newspaper article that reported Bainimarama and his staff officers had unexpectedly used the occasion of a Cabinet informal visit to the President to give a presentation on the military's stand on the upcoming Appeals Court ruling.<sup>21</sup> Bainimarama said he could not make a blind commitment to accepting the Court of Appeal ruling and would decide as the situation presented itself. What was the cause of the retraction by Bainimarama?

The case of Navy Pay Clerk William Bui provides an insight into Finer's second mode of intervention where collusion is sought by the military to provide a favourable political outcome.<sup>22</sup> On 30 December 2000 a former Navy pay clerk, William Bui, was released after serving only two months of a six year sentence. He was convicted of theft of more than \$80,000 from the military pay office. Bui was an extramural prisoner on Compulsory Supervisory Order to report to Central Police Station every month when he was freed. Commissioner of Prisons Aisea Taoka said it was a ministerial decision. Remissions of prison time, however, were something earned after one normally has served half the sentence. In Bui's case, the Prisons had reduced his sentence by 2 years and the high Court by another 2 years. What spurred such a questionable decision? Bui's abnormally early release had political undertones. One that stands out is that it was a deal in exchange for Bainimarama producing affidavits that reinforced the interim government's upcoming appeal case against the Gates ruling. In addition, after the mutiny and the death of the five rebel soldiers at the

hands of loyalist soldiers, a Military Amnesty Bill for immunity from prosecution for this and other misdeeds was mooted. Consequently it is believed these two 'deals' became the quid pro quo for Bainimarama submitting three affidavits that supported the interim government's case and simultaneously standing up for his 'loyal' soldiers or in this case sailor.

Speculation was rife about the various political options to take the country forward. That crucial decision resided with the acting President, Ratu Iloilo, taking into account the views of major political stakeholders and the all-important advice of the military and the Great Council of Chiefs. After the court ruling, Adi Kuini Speed, the Deputy Prime Minister in the deposed Labour Coalition government, publically backed Labour party deputy leader Tupeni Baba for Prime Minister in a Government of National Unity. She emphatically declared, "The situation in Fiji would worsen if Chaudhry returned."<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile Chaudhry had called on the President and advised him that Fiji could go to the polls in eight weeks and to reconvene parliament only for one day to dissolve the House and have fresh elections with a first- past-the- post voting system in place of the alternative system.<sup>24</sup> New Zealand Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff also supported the move, he said, "We feel a Government of National Unity will heal the wounds created by last year's coup and that the change of having elections will highlight divisions. A Government of National Unity is more useful to address problems facing Fiji."<sup>25</sup>

Bainimarama had, however, warned the National Security Council in a meeting after the Appeal Court ruling that Chaudhry posed the highest threat to national security.<sup>26</sup> His view was that the return of Chaudhry as Prime Minister was politically untenable and would be disastrous for the country. In a deft move coined by Rabuka as 'Mara's kind of Constitutionality', Iloilo dismissed Chaudhry and appointed Tevita Momoedonu as Prime Minister.<sup>27</sup> The former Labour Minister and chief from Iloilo's village of Veiseisei Vuda then advised the ailing President to dissolve parliament and tendered his resignation. Why the change of heart by the military? It can only be surmised that either the military was not confident in providing national security should the interim government lose its court case or else Bainimarama was playing politics.<sup>28</sup>

Bainimarama may have also realised that a Government of National Unity with Chaudhry in it would have difficulty in passing a Military Amnesty Bill for the obvious reason that he had been a victim himself along with his FLP colleagues. The military, which had held to the position of 'upholding the rule of law' after the Appeals' court ruling, had changed tune. By backing the President's decision for fresh elections, the military had colluded with Iloilo and Qarase's power manoeuvring rather than restore Chaudhry and his deposed FLP government. This collusion of personal and traditional factors in Fiji politics are the unique features that underpin Finer's modes of intervention.

### **Intimidation of government**

After the mutiny in November 2000, Bainimarama's animosity towards politicians and chiefs became pronounced. Military indignation was directed at Speight and nationalist co-conspirators and the errant Meridian Squadron. Given Fiji's interlinked political elite, these co-conspirators were suspected of including nationalist chiefs and politicians wanting to topple Bainimarama and change the makeup of the military interim government. This harrowing event, in which Bainimarama just escaped with his life, affected him psychologically. It influenced his irrational view of Fiji's politicians and chiefs as corrupt and a menace to society. Until November 2002, when Shane Stevens, the mutiny leader, was jailed for life and the other fourteen soldiers were jailed from eighteen months to eight years, the court martial was fraught with legal and police issues. During the court martial the police had been accused of tampering with evidence.<sup>29</sup> This only strengthened military suspicion of a SDL/CAMV government conspiracy. Hence the military increased its watchdog role in the news media, cautioning and intimidating government. The SDL/CAMV Coalition was openly regarded by its political opponents, now supported by the military, to be sympathetic towards an iTaukei nationalist political agenda.

Military displeasure with Qarase's government had begun after the August 2001 elections with the formation of the SDL/CAMV Coalition government. To the dismay of the military the ultra-nationalists' political arm CAMV won six seats

– five Vanua Levu communal seats and Speight’s Tailevu seat, which he won even though he was incarcerated on Nukulau Island.

From the initial announcement of the SDL/CAMV merger, it was obvious that old wounds would not heal given the antagonism between Speight’s group and the military during the 2000 crisis. Here was a government, after all, consisting not only of the SDL but also of the CAMV, the party that gave expression to the political aspirations of Speight and the indigenous Fijian nationalists that included key figures who supported Speight’s coup such as the Tui Cakau Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure. Samisoni Tokainavo, brother of convicted coup leader George Speight and a member of the CAMV, countered Bainimarama’s disdain towards his party by reminding all that, “Bainimarama himself committed a series of treasonous acts in removing the then president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and assuming authority unlawfully when he declared martial law after the coup”.<sup>30</sup>

Speight’s CAMV party, with six seats, was vital to Qarase for the formation of government since his SDL party had won only thirty two out of the seventy one seats parliament. Qarase, who was always predisposed towards iTaukei affirmative action and indigenous rights, was now driven to adopt a selective ethno-nationalist agenda. It is plausible that had the SDL possessed the numbers to form government alone, this would have probably been more to the liking of Bainimarama and the military. What riled Bainimarama was Qarase’s stalling over the Military Amnesty Bill which he had promised the military. Qarase had bowed to pressure from CAMV members who were obviously not pleased with the imprisonment of George Speight and his supporters. In fact according to Tokainavo, who replaced his imprisoned brother George Speight in parliament, relations between Qarase and Bainimarama were cordial leading into the August elections. The deterioration of relations between the two protagonists was mainly due to Bainimarama’s brazen demand for military amnesty that became unacceptable to the SDL coalition for legal and political reasons. Bainimarama had often labelled Qarase a ‘liar’, once to Qarase’s face in the presence of the



President Ratu Iloilo at a special meeting at government house in March 2004, because of this 'false promise' to the military.<sup>31</sup>

By mid-2005, the government's attempt to enact a Promotion of Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill, customary fishing rights or Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bills had drawn stiff opposition from a wide cross-section of Fiji's community led by the military. Officers in uniform were ordered to sit en masse in the gallery of parliament to intimidate SDL parliamentary members during the debate on these controversial bills. Many NGOs and businesspersons came together in opposition to such legislation. The military used this cross-section of society to agitate against government. A major bone of contention which infuriated the military from 2002 was the suspicion that the government was renegeing on its promise to bring those involved in the 2000 coup and mutiny to justice. Ironically, after Qarase and his SDL government were elected, they promised that the military would be granted immunity for all acts during the crisis through an immunity bill. The military believed that government was trying to turn a blind eye to those chiefs and politicians who were implicated in destabilising the nation and ignoring the military for its own political survival.

### **Threats to government**

In 2002, the emerging antagonism began to appear as tit-for-tat public rhetorical showdowns in the media. Both sides were urged by the President to refrain from public slanging matches as they only heightened on-going instability. But the public rhetorical duel continued with the military beginning to claim a guardian role in the public interest. A persistent issue was the substantive appointment of Ratu Jope Seniloli as Vice President with Ratu Iloilo as President. There was much regional traditional politicking before the Great Council of Chiefs, the Electoral College for both the high offices, endorsed the appointments on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2001.<sup>32</sup> Seniloli's complicity in the sham Speight government swearing-in ceremony was under police investigation. His appointment drew criticism from the military. The appointment was seen by the military as a coup maker holding high office. Ratu Jope was later jailed for his role in that ceremony but released on a Compulsory Supervisory Order for health reasons. Also later jailed was Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the Tui Cakau and cabinet

minister. Ratu Naiqama was charged for consorting with rebel soldiers in the takeover of the Sukanaivalu VC military barrack at Labasa, Vanua Levu. He was convicted and granted a Compulsory Supervision Order as an extramural prisoner.<sup>33</sup> The sentencing of these two high chiefs appeared to satisfy the call for justice, but was criticised by the military for its leniency. One tactic that was used in threatening government was the pulling out of the President and Prime Minister's military body guards and security at their residences.<sup>34</sup>

### **Commander's Contract Compounds Antagonism**

The Commander's five year contract was to expire in February 2004. From early 2003, this became a contentious issue that embroiled the SDL government and the military in public controversy.<sup>35</sup> A truce brokered by the Vice President, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, between Qarase and Bainimarama lasted only a few months. Bainimarama continued to accuse the government of trying to get rid of him so that it would be free to pursue corrupt practices.<sup>36</sup> According to section 112(2) of the 1997 Fiji Constitution and the Fiji Military Forces Act Cap 81, section 3(3), the commander of the RFMF is appointed by the President on the advice of the Minister for Home Affairs. According to CCF's Jone Dakuvula, the government agenda since winning the 2001 elections was to remove Bainimarama as Commander as his stand in wanting to uphold the rule of law was inconsistent with government intentions of fostering Fijian reconciliation.<sup>37</sup> In early April 2003 the Commander announced in a senior officers meeting that he was informed that government had no intention of renewing his appointment.<sup>38</sup>

In June 2003 it was revealed by retired Colonel and CEO of Home Affairs Jeremaia Waqanisau that an official committee was considering who to recommend to Home Affairs Minister Jocketani Cokanasiga to replace Bainimarama.<sup>39</sup> Government was also considering a Cabinet Minister, two senior civil servants and two government backbenchers, all former military officers, as possible replacements.<sup>40</sup> Waqanisau, being one of the senior civil servants, it seemed, was also a candidate for the appointment. In August of

2003, the military called for the removal as CEO Home Affairs of Waqanisau, who had refuted claims by the military on a radio talk back show that it had put the SDL government in power. Waqanisau, as official secretary in the President's office, also played a key role in the decisions emanating from the President's office in late 2000-2001. Dakuvula argues that Waqanisau was 'without a doubt a political civil servant.'<sup>41</sup> It may be argued that Waqanisau as a civil servant was towing the elected government line.

### **Suspension of Five Senior Officers**

In 2003, one of the more controversial issues was the suspending of five senior officers.<sup>42</sup> The whole drama arose after Bainimarama had physically confronted Waqanisau for allegedly being part of a government conspiracy to not renew his contract as Commander due in February 2004. A police complaint was subsequently filed against Bainimarama. In August 2003, at the height of his much publicised contract extension issue, these officers alleged the Commander also committed sedition at a military conference. As a result, Colonel George Kadavulevu, the Chief of Staff at Strategic Headquarters, Colonel Alfred Tuatoko, the Director Strategic Command, Lt Col Samuela Raduva, the Chief of Staff at Land Forces Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel Akuila Buadromo, a Chief Staff Officer at Strategic Headquarters and Commander Timoci Koroi also a Chief Staff Officer at Strategic Headquarters, were suspended pending investigations in January of 2004. The purging of these senior officers in 2004 set the scene for the final takeover of government in December 2006.

I was away studying at Defence College Australia that year but on a trip to Asia and the Pacific I visited Fiji and, therefore, was able to catch up with Commodore Bainimarama and other peer officers. At Denarau Resort, Nadi, I had personal informal talks with the Commodore who informed me of various military issues bothering him, most of which was the expiry of his contract in February 2004. It seemed at that time, forces within government and some senior officers were keen to see the replacement of Commodore Bainimarama as Commander. By August of 2003 this issue was emblazoned in the news media. What further captivated the nation in December of that year 2003 were the circumstances surrounding the suspending of the five senior military officers.

In mid-March of 2004, the five officers, in a statement released on TV, alleged sedition by the Commander at a 2004 budget conference held at Strategic Headquarters, Berkeley Crescent on Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2003.

The original statement was also hand delivered to me in my office by Lt Col Samuela Raduva on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2004. Reproduced below is a copy of the statement co-signed by Colonel Tuatoko, Lt Col Raduva and Comd Koroi.

### Interlude

**STATEMENT BY 21683 COLONEL ALFRED TUATOKO, CM, MSD, Grad Dip Mngmt Studies, Grad Dip Strat Studies, jssc, psc, Fiji Infantry Corps**

A 2004 budget briefing by DMR (Capt Teleni) was scheduled for Tuesday 16 December 2003. Present in this briefing were CLF, DMR, DSC&FD, CO ENGR, CO 3FIR, Maj Balawa, CO FTG, Comdr T Koroi, Maj S Yatu and WO1 Leweni. During the course of the briefing, Comd RFMF rang DMR and advised him to have all members in the briefing await him and also have COL Kadavulevu present.

When Comd RFMF arrived he took over the meeting and advised us of his intent to remove the current Government except for the MFA&ET and the GCC. Commander RFMF also indicated that some NGO's and Diplomatic Corp are behind him. The Comd instructed that we draw up plans for the removal of the Government and to provide a back briefing to him on his return on the 21 December 2003 from his visit to Labasa. LTCOL Pita Driti then said in the conference "...to, vinaka me caka ni sa rui levu na butako". Commander RFMF then rang the Ministry of Home Affairs and asked to speak to the Minister. When he was told that the Minister was not available, he asked for the Parliamentary sitting schedule for 2004. He ended the conference by saying "dōu cakava vaka totolo na plan de dōu qai kidacala au sa liu sobu i ra."

After the Comd left the meeting we decided that we would not draw up plans for the military takeover as this was a criminal and treasonable act. However the staff of HQ RFMF would draw up an advice for Comd RFMF advising him against his intention to remove the Government.

On Thursday 18 December during Comd's scheduled conference he reiterated his intent to remove the Government of the day save HE the President and that we were to continue to draw up plans for the takeover of government. He added that he did not want anybody sitting on the fence and if anyone does not agree with his intention, is to leave. At the end of this meeting Comd personally interviewed several officers. These officers are Col Kadavulevu, Col Tuatoko, Capt(N) Teleni, LTCOL Raduva and Comdrs Koroi and Natuva.

In my interview with Comd he stated that he would forcefully remove the present government if his term as Comd RFMF was not renewed. I advised him that such an act was illegal and amounted to treason. I advised him that there are legal ways to settle his disagreement with government and that he must follow that legal path. Comd said that doing so would take too much time. He said that removing the government may be legally wrong but was morally correct. He also said that he must remain as Comd because there was no one who could be Comd and pursue the May 2000 prosecutions as he is doing.

I told him that the issue regarding the renewal of his term was a matter between him and government. He should not use the institution as a means of renewing his term. Comd did not accept this and asked where I stood regarding his intention to remove government. I

told him that I could not support him on such an illegal and treasonable act. Comd then directed that I keep out of the planning activities. My interview thus ended.

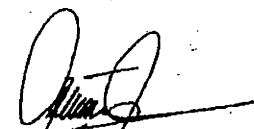
Following the individual interviews we spoke amongst ourselves and accept for Comdr Natuva whom I did not speak to, we all had advised Comd that his intention was illegal and treasonable and that each of us did not support the Comd in such an activity. Col GK then advised us that we must provide Comd with a written advise in order to convince him not to carry out his intent. The advice should be ready for Comd before 31 Dec. The advice was actually tendered to the Comd in early Jan 04.

On 19 December 2003 at the WOs&SGTs Mess, in his address to the officers and senior non-commissioned officers, he said that 2004 will be a difficult year and our individual loyalty to him (Commander RFMF) will be put to the test.

On the afternoon of Monday 12 January, COS HQ RFMF called a meeting of the HQ RFMF staff and advised that he had been relieved of his appointment and told to go leave because of the advice that was tendered to Comd advising him against his intent to remove the government. Comd also advised him that all officers who formed or contributed to the advice are to also go on leave.

Comd RFMF called a conference on Tuesday 13 January 04 and amongst other things advised the conference that we should not be shaken by the ongoing saga over the renewal or otherwise of his term as Comd RFMF. He also advised the conference that he had relieved Col Kadavulevu of the COS HQ RFMF appointment and has nominated LTCOL Baleidrokadroka as COS because he was disappointed with the written advice he received. He also directed that all the officers who formed the advice and all officers at both SHQ and LFC who did not support him on the path he was taking the RFMF, to stick to their principles, take all outstanding leave and when their leave was finished, that they do the honourable thing and resign from the RFMF. He also mentioned that he was only testing us in the interviews and that he would not force anyone to resign.

On Thurs 15 Jan I received a posting order showing amongst other changes that LTCOL J Pickering had assumed my appointment of DSC&FD.



A. TUATOKO  
Colonel

// March 2004

Witness:



S.V. RADUVA  
Lieutenant Colonel

// March 2004



T. T. KOROI  
Commander (N)

// March 2004

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December of 2003, I arrived from Australia with my family. My wife and I were invited to attend the marriage ceremony and wedding function of the Commodore's daughter on the 29<sup>th</sup> December. I was told during the course of the function by the Commodore of his plans to appoint me as Chief of Staff of Strategic Headquarters in place of Colonel Kadavulevu. My appointment as the acting chief of staff was publicised in the *Fiji Sun* subsequently as, "Lt-Col Baledrokadroka was Commodore Bainimarama's right-hand man during the May 19, 2000, attempted coup and the November mutiny. He was in charge of several military operations, which included the storming of Kalabu District School, hunting down of rebel supporters in Vanua Levu and the Counter Revolutionary Warfare soldiers."<sup>43</sup>

On Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 at a conference chaired by the Commander, I therefore began the new appointment at Strategic Headquarters surrounded by the suspension controversy of my colleagues. There were other junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers who were purged at Strategic Headquarters. New staff such as Commander Lesi Natuva, the former Commanding Officer of Logistic Support Unit, was appointed the Director Military Resources to replace Captain Esala Teleni who was selected for Defence College Australia to replace me that year. Lt Colonel John Pickering was appointed Director Strategic Command to replace the suspended Colonel Tuatoko in the overhaul at Strategic Headquarters.

Colonel Alfred Tuatoko had been acting Land Force Commander during the 2000 crisis in the absence of Colonel Naivalurua on course at Defence College in 2000. He was intimately knowledgeable about the twists and turns of the military stances during that crisis. On Naivalurua's return he was posted as Director Strategic Command and Force Development at Strategic Headquarters in January of 2001. As a Rotuman he would have been pressured by Fijian ethno-nationalist politics.

Tuatoko states in his statement that on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 at an interview with Commodore Bainimarama, the Commander said, "He [Bainimarama] would forcefully remove the present government if his term as Commander RFMF was not renewed". In addition Colonel George Kadavulevu

was reported to have told the Commander before being told to go on leave in his interview with him the same day “It is your personal agenda with the Ministry of Home Affairs and you should settle it with the Minister and the CEO. You should not drag the military into it.”<sup>44</sup>

The ensuing suspension of the five officers is mired in the issue of the Commodore’s renewal of contract which is inextricably bound to lingering issues emanating from the May 2000 takeover. In an editorial the *Fiji Sun* backed the extension of Bainimarama’s contract by stating, “What Commodore Bainimarama wants is that all the people who were behind and supporting the May 2000 political crisis and mutiny, be brought to justice.”<sup>45</sup> In the event, the government renewed Bainimarama’s contract under pressure.

### **Fijian Blueprint- Affirmative Action Programme**

Another major issue that irked the military was the corrupt implementation of the Affirmative Action programme. Robertson and Sutherland had asserted that, “economic affirmative action has brought some improvement, but the Fijian elite have benefited much more than the ordinary Fijian.”<sup>46</sup> The military was not against the indigenous affirmative action programme per se, but its manipulation by the iTaukei elite. This social justice policy, however, according to Fiji’s Human Rights Commissioner, Shaista Shameem, ‘violated provisions of the Constitution and compromised Fiji’s international obligations.’<sup>47</sup> Qarase replying to criticism explained

The affirmative action program was an integral part of the Government’s policy of providing access to equal opportunities for all disadvantaged communities as prescribed in the 1997 Constitution.<sup>48</sup>

In fact the affirmative action program had also been the mainstay of the approach of the ousted FLP Coalition government. In June of 1999 at the opening of parliament, the President Ratu Mara had stated

Government will implement affirmative action and social justice programs to secure for all citizens and communities equal and equitable access to opportunities, amenities and services to better their lives.<sup>49</sup>

Qarase explained that the programs were in three-sub categories: education and training, land and housing and participation in commerce and in all levels and

branches of State services. He said there were 29 programs implemented since 2002, which involved a budget of more than \$250million.<sup>50</sup> He said the programs were administered by 16 different ministries and departments and that each program had specific goals and target beneficiaries, means of assistance, performance indicators to measure success and criteria for selecting members of the target group. One of these schemes was the agriculture assistance for rural dwellers scam which was to dog the SDL throughout its rule.

A ploy used to threaten government to withdraw its 'racially biased' policies was to get sympathisers such as Mahendra Chaudhry to announce the threat of a coup as he did in January of 2002.<sup>51</sup> Chaudhry was also making political mileage out of the failure of the SDL side to apologize for comments by the Minister for Women and Culture, Asenaca Caucau, who had been perceived by many as grossly racist. In a Parliament sitting, she compared Indo-Fijians to "wild weeds", just one of the several racially loaded comments made in the House by ethnic Fijian parliamentarians in 2002.<sup>52</sup> This racial slanging by the SDL parliamentary members did not endear them to Indo-Fijians and also to many citizens and NGOs who sided with Bainimarama because of such insensitive public utterances.

### **Agriculture Scam**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2002, a scam was discovered by the Ministry of Finance at the Agriculture Ministry under the Fijian and Rotuman Affirmative Action Agriculture Assistance Scheme initiated after the 2000 coup. It was revealed that unethical procedures were employed by civil servants in the purchase and distribution of farming implements to mainly Fijian farmers and villagers. From June 2000 to October 2001 the scam continued unabated allegedly as an appeasement and vote buying ploy during Qarase's interim government. Prime Minister Qarase accepted responsibility for the \$25 million scam but denied that funds had been abused and refused to step down.<sup>53</sup> The purchase of these implements and the authorisation by senior civil servants who purportedly were acting on behalf of the interim government minister was later exposed in various court trials.<sup>54</sup> The Permanent Secretary Agriculture Peniasi Kunatuba, three other Ministry of Agriculture staff and a businessman were imprisoned for their



roles in the scam. The opposition led by Chaudhry were quick to exploit the scam by casting doubt on the legitimacy of the 2001 elections. The agriculture scam was one of the first issues that apparently drew Bainimarama and Chaudhry together and hardened military opposition against the iTaukei political elites. Chaudhry, obviously in cahoots with the military, predicted that another coup would take place in February 2002 just months after his defeat in the 2001 election. To this veiled threat backbencher Mick Beddoes called for the FLP leader to be investigated.<sup>55</sup>

### **Withdrawal of support to government**

One of the early major issues that saw the military withdraw its support for government was the failure of Qarase to invite the FLP into cabinet in a government of national unity as stipulated in the Constitution. In a thinly veiled threat Bainimarama opined in the media that the government might have to resign as a result of the upcoming Supreme Court ruling on a government of national unity.<sup>56</sup> After the court ruling against the government, Qarase did offer to share power with Chaudhry. But when Chaudhry's response was less than enthusiastic, Qarase promptly dropped the issue. Josaia Daini, the SDL General Secretary, reiterated that after the 2001 elections, adhering to the government of national unity entitlement with the opposition Fiji Labour Party as stipulated in the 1997 Constitution was blind legalism that overlooked Fiji's political reality.<sup>57</sup> It seems Qarase and Chaudhry were not about to commit political suicide as experienced by former Prime Minister Rabuka and NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy in taking a centrist approach. This hard-nosed realist approach, which undermined the provisions of the constitution that called for a government of national unity, was interpreted as racialism by the military. The military saw this as the fault of Qarase and his nationalist coalition partners, the CAMV.<sup>58</sup>

Withdrawal of support for government continued into the policy making arena of the military. After the 2000 coup there were also internal and public calls for vital military reforms. In line with government's strategic development plan 2003-2005 that put priority on security and stability, a Commission consisting of Bob Lowry, Stewart Firth and Jesoni Vitusaqavulu produced the *National*

*Security White Paper : A Safe and Prosperous Fiji 2005*. The last White Paper for Fiji, *Defending Fiji* was produced in 1997 by Rabuka's SVT government. It was never implemented in full mainly because of lingering suspicion towards the military by Chaudhry's incoming FLP coalition government.

This time with the continuing antagonism brewing between the government and the military, the 2005 White Paper became a bone of contention that further strained the already tenuous relationship. The military all throughout the compiling of the Paper was uncooperative and suspicious that it was an attempt to weaken the military. The White Paper 'strongly recommended' that the position of Commander be selected through a Constitutional Office Commission similar to the Police<sup>59</sup>. This was to avoid nepotism and to promote a professional military ethos that ensures that promotion to the highest rank is based on merit.<sup>60</sup> The paper also called for more government oversight of the military in 'subjecting it to the control of the minister' and the means this control is to be exercised.<sup>61</sup> What infuriated Bainimarama was the Paper's criticism that the military was top heavy and that it should also be downsized to half its strength for the sake of stability. I argue that the recommendations of the Paper spurred the Commander to do the opposite and initiate a new policy of *Military for Life Concept* in 2004 where the military extended its role into commerce, nation building and finally politics. Even though prior to elections the government then shelved the National Security White Paper along with a Draft Defence White Paper done by government consultant Nelson Delailomaloma, the damage had been done.

In early January of 2006, FLP President Jokapeci Koroi in a public interview on *Fiji TV One* encouraged the military to conduct a coup. She said the coup was necessary to reinstall her overthrown FLP government to take care of unfinished business. This spat triggered my suspension as Land Force Commander. I was against the politicization of the military.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore the unprecedented anti-SDL party 'Truth and Justice' campaign carried out by the military's public relations teams prior to the 2006 elections signified the total withdrawal of Bainimarama and his cohorts' support for Qarase and the SDL's policies. Ironically eighty per cent of soldiers voted for the SDL party, signifying the

strong communal bond between the military and the nationalist SDL party. This ensured Qarase's second tenure of power where he went on to form the first multi-party cabinet government.

Bainimarama's final withdrawal of support for government came with his call for the early termination of Police chief Andrew Hughes's contract as Commissioner. What had triggered the Commander's call? Bainimarama through his contact at the Director of Public Prosecution Office learnt that the Police were close to arresting him. As Commissioner Hughes later revealed "I had earlier taken a brief of evidence to the DPP and it was agreed that there was a case to answer on a sedition charge."<sup>63</sup>

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2006 Home Affairs Minister, Josefa Vosanibola, while refusing to terminate Hughes's contract as demanded by Bainimarama, had sent the Commander his reply. The letter had stressed under the heading, 'Stop all criminal police investigations against the military officers and investigations against the CRMF':

Your request to government is a total contradiction of your widely acknowledged principle that "no one is above the law". It would undermine the general public's respect for the future of law if special dissipation or selective justice is accorded to military personnel who may have broken the law. Government is in full agreement with your commonly held view that, "justice must not only be done but seen to be done."<sup>64</sup>

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, the Fiji police invited Bainimarama by a letter to attend an interview at 11am on Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2006. They were advised late that day that he was scheduled to travel to New Zealand for a personal visit at 8.40 am out of Nadi on Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> of November.<sup>65</sup> On his return, after the failed attempt by New Zealand's Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters to broker an eleventh hour agreement between Bainimarama and Qarase at Wellington, the military Commander had burnt his ships.

### **Military Coup d'état**

Finer's final mode of intervention, the military coup, like the previous modes, obviously applies to Fiji. How has this phenomenon unfolded? The core argument of this thesis is the reversal of the *Turaga-bati* relationship with the rise of a political military typified by the 2006 coup. We need to revisit this neo-

traditional relationship to examine the final phase of Finer's modes. After Rabuka's coup in 1987, a major actor in Fiji's contemporary politics, Ratu Mara, still loomed large. In fact, it could be said that he was the beneficiary of the coup as the interim Prime Minister from 1987-1992 and later as President from 1993-2000. Mara was a nephew and protégé of Fijian high chief and colonial era statesman Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna. The *Tui Nayau* was the last surviving of the leading chiefs amongst the so called 'big four' from the colonial administration and post-Independence era.<sup>66</sup> It is well documented that the chiefly elite were reticent in embracing Independence for fear of being undermined by democratic rule. After the fall of the Mara-led Alliance Party which was backed by the Eastern chiefly elite, the GCC-sponsored *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) Party was conceived in July 1990 and was launched in October 1991, again, on behalf of the chiefs and the iTaukei community. In Ratuva's words, the party was seen as another "attempt to preserve and perpetuate chiefly hegemony and communalism."<sup>67</sup> According to its constitution it aimed to "Promote the interests of indigenous Fijians, their advancement, protection of their rights and interests and provide means of social, economic and political development in association with other ethnic communities in Fiji."<sup>68</sup>

As previously mentioned, commoner Sitiveni Rabuka edged out Mara's wife and high chief Adi Lady Lala for the presidency of the SVT. The choice of Rabuka exacerbated the schism between the doyen of modern Fiji politics and the 'young Turk'. Ratu Mara later revealed his relationship with Rabuka had "Never been good. Never has."<sup>69</sup> The elderly statesman was also critical of Rabuka's leadership, saying "He showed in the seven years of his... he couldn't run a government."<sup>70</sup> As a close diplomatic observer put it, "In an earlier era, Ratu Mara would have been an ideal king, a benevolent dictator; he became an anachronism when the forces of change swept through the islands."<sup>71</sup>

Mara was not to be outdone though. Going into the 1999 elections, the newly formed *Veitokani Lewenivanua Vakarisito* (VLV) or Christian Democratic Alliance party was widely known to have Mara as its patron. According to Fraenkel et al, "the VLV was a chrysalis for Fijians aggrieved at Rabuka having

usurped the leadership of the chief's party and having compromised with the Indians."<sup>72</sup> The dynastic political ambition of Mara continued into the twenty-first century with the formation of the VLV party. Fraenkel stated, "Many suspected that Ratu Mara's dynastic ambitions included both gaining control over the top Fijian chiefly title and maintaining a firm grip over the senior command of the Fiji military forces".<sup>73</sup> In a twist of high irony, though, Ratu Mara was ousted from office on 29 May 2000 by the military citing the doctrine of necessity. At the time some saw the Military Commander's actions as an attempt to appease George Speight and his coup supporters who were calling for the abrogation of the Constitution and the removal of Mara as President, and Opposition leader Mick Beddoes even called on the Army to answer for its failure to protect the President Mara. Beddoes called it a 'fundamental failure' on the part of the Army.<sup>74</sup> Beddoes's call epitomized the low point in the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. For four more years after his removal Ratu Mara endured, a broken man in retirement. He passed on after a short illness at the age of 83 years. His dynastic ambitions, however, are alive in the present military regime with his two sons-in-law Ratu Epeli Ganilau, the former Minister of Defence, and Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the President of Fiji. Ironically the much publicized falling out of Ganilau and of Lt Col Tevita Mara with Bainimarama in October 2010 is the continuation of this dynastic ambition.

Where do Commodore Bainimarama and Qarase fit into the Mara dynastic agenda? Bainimarama had a seemingly unambitious military career amongst his peers prior to being thrust to power. Qarase, on the other hand, was a capable, diligent technocrat with strong nationalist views. Both became protégés of Mara and his brand of elitist Fijian political paramountcy by accident. Fraenkel et al, in tracing the link of Bainimarama to the Mara dynasty explained "His name was suggested by Brigadier General Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who was resigning as commander in order to contest – unsuccessfully as it turned out – as a candidate of the newly formed VLV."<sup>75</sup> Bainimarama had had a military career restricted to the RFMF Naval Squadron.<sup>76</sup> The leading contender for the post of military commander was Colonel Ratu George Kadavulevu, a capable, senior army staff officer with senior UN peacekeeping command experience. Being of the chiefly Cakobau family of Bau, however, Kadavulevu was seen as an arch rival to

Mara's dynastic ambitions.<sup>77</sup> Bainimarama's choice at the time was hailed by insiders as an attempt to re-professionalize the military and render it apolitical once again. Others, however, saw the appointment was more to do with Ganilau and his backers having a pliant protégé in charge of the military.

An administrative incident that was played up by Bainimarama showed his political skills and probably clinched him the Commander position. In 1998 as the raw incoming Colonel General Staff Operations, Bainimarama brought to the Commander Brigadier Ganilau's notice, on his return from his final visit to Fiji's peacekeeping troops overseas, a senior officer posting order memorandum. This memo was signed by Colonel Kadavulevu as Colonel Administration Quartermaster and a rival contender for the Commander position. This posting order, it seems, was not done in consultation with the Commander. The implication was that Kadavulevu was jumping the gun in assuming that he was the next to be Commander. After this incident Bainimarama became Chief of Staff and a step away from the post of Commander. Among the senior officers of the military it was known the choice of Bainimarama for Commander was because the Navy man would be more malleable to the Mara-Ganilau political agenda.<sup>78</sup> As Bainimarama tasted power, however, he began to plot a political career divorced of the Mara influence cultivated through his mentor, former military commander and the son-in-law of the high chief, Ratu Epeli Ganilau.

Laisenia Qarase began a career in the civil service with a bachelor in commerce from Auckland University in the 1960s. By 1982 he had reached permanent secretary level in the Alliance government administration. He was one of the Lauan islander bureaucrats in the 1970s that had enjoyed the patronage of Mara, as his high chief. In the 1990s he was the business and financial advisor to the Fijian Affairs Board and the Great Council of Chiefs and the main advocate behind the Fijian Holdings Limited indigenous enterprise. He then headed the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) from 1983-98 and Merchant Finance (a subsidiary of Fijian Holdings Ltd) in 1998-2000. His principled stand for indigenous affirmative action had brought about his resignation from the FDB as the architect of the ill-fated Equity Investment Management Company Limited

(EMICOL).<sup>79</sup> This super market venture for Indigenous business people ended in financial failure during the mid-1990s. In 1992 Qarase used his privileged position to controversially secure a loan from the FDB to buy shares in the newly established \$20 million government granted Fijian Holdings Limited in which he was a board member. In 1999 as a GCC nominee, Qarase became a Senator in the upper house. Qarase was also known as a staunch Methodist and traditionalist who by 2006 was himself installed as chief of his clan on Vanua Balavu Island. He had affirmed his strong support for the chiefly system, as quoted:

I believe that the chiefs of Fiji have relevance for all our citizens not just the Fijians; they still represent stability, order and continuity. ... If the chiefs were diminished, the entire nation would be weakened and be vulnerable.<sup>80</sup>

Qarase was a well-known financial technocrat. He was certainly not a novice in elite iTaukei politics. Reflecting on the first days after George Speight's civilian coup, Qarase writing in 2002 in the UK *Parliamentarian* journal said:

I followed the drama of the insurrection closely, as a citizen very much concerned for his country. Fiji was experiencing an unprecedented ordeal and when the army moved I felt it had an opportunity to bring back order and help people to feel safe in their homes again. But at no stage did I think I would be called on to play a part in the saving of the country.<sup>81</sup>

According to Qarase, in early June of 2000, Commodore Bainimarama had approached him and other Fijian bureaucrats to act as advisors to the military administration. Qarase wrote:

I did not hesitate. In my view-and that of many others-the army was motivated out of concern for the country. It gave hope when all was darkness. It was not long after this that I was asked by Commodore Bainimarama to head an interim civilian cabinet with freedom to appoint Ministers of my choice. There was a more difficult decision to make here. Acceptance meant giving up a well-paying and secure post as Managing Director of Merchant Bank. I would be moving into an extremely volatile and possibly dangerous political environment. I had my wife, children, and grandchildren to think about. They were central to my life.<sup>82</sup>

Qarase said some of the issues that led to the coup included the controversy over the extension of Commodore Bainimarama's contract and the deteriorating relationship between the army and his government.<sup>83</sup> This 'deteriorating relationship' was marked by the ongoing police investigation into Bainimarama and the military.<sup>84</sup> The Police Commissioner Hughes had confirmed that police

had files of seven ongoing investigations against Commodore Bainimarama.<sup>85</sup> The ongoing investigations involving the military commander, included: 1) the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution 2) the removal of the President Ratu Mara 3) the death of 5 CRW soldiers during the mutiny 4) military overspending 2000-2005 5) the seditious circumstances surrounding the dismissal of five senior officers in 2003 6) the threat by Bainimarama against CEO Home Affairs Jeremaia Waqanisau's life 7) the illegal removal of a shipping container of ammunitions from customs.

Qarase's politics, according to Robertson and Sutherland, is the continuation of the ideology of iTaukei paramountcy as also perpetrated by Mara and Rabuka. Lawson in her examination of Mara's 'Pacific Way' best describes this political ideology as, " In terms of local politics, it has been closely associated with conservative chiefly leadership where 'consensus' may mean little more than conformity with the wishes of that leadership."<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, this politics of patronage is symbolized in the GCC through the Fijian Affairs Board's creation of Fijian Holdings Limited (FHL), where Fijian institutions and Fijian elites have held shares in what Ratuva describes as the 'politics of communal capitalism'.<sup>87</sup> The former Director of FHL Sitiveni Weleilakeba made the following revelation in the 2012 trial of Qarase, who was charged with nine counts of alleged insider trading in FHL:

The FHL was incorporated in November 1984; its purpose was to accelerate indigenous Fijians participation in commercial ventures. The concept of FHL was borrowed from Malaysia and that Qarase was the officer who did research on the concept. And that to the best of his knowledge, Qarase's research led to the formation of FHL.<sup>88</sup>

Bainimarama and his military regime on the other hand were determined to keep iTaukei elites from using the mantra of 'Fijian paramountcy' to further their political and financial agendas. His escalation of the antagonism inevitably led to the final mode of intervention which was to invert the *Turaga-bati* relationship by a coup.

## **Conclusion**

The emerging antagonism between Commodore Bainimarama and Prime Minister Qarase followed Finer's escalating modes of military intervention.



Indeed, the 2006 Fiji coup was the culmination of this intervention process. The initial concordance between Bainimarama and the elected SDL government headed by Qarase became so strained that the coup was inevitable and came as no surprise to many. In 2000-2001, though, Bainimarama had no intention of relinquishing power and restoring Chaudhry's elected government to office. The military had tried to uphold the rule of law in keeping with its institutional virtues of discipline and order. After the Queen Elizabeth Barracks mutiny of 2000 when Bainimarama escaped with his life, an obvious deep seated distrust of iTaukei political and communal leaders was left to fester in the military leader.

The Chandrika Prasad case appeal judgment that showed Bainimarama wanted to abrogate the constitution poses a distressing question as to the Commander's intentions. He wanted to take the military outside the rule of law by not supporting a return of the Chaudhry government after the hostage crisis and the incarceration of Speight. In retrospect his taste for absolute power had been piqued as he was egged on by opportunist political minders.

The only obvious one who could have influenced Bainimarama at this stage was his predecessor Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who had recommended him for Commander. Ratu Epeli had used his position in the military to launch his political career with the Ratu Mara backed VLV party in the 1999 elections without success. Bainimarama as his chief of staff from 1997-99 was implicitly in collusion with Ganilau, who saw this crisis as an opportunity to reassert his political ambitions.

After the November 2000 mutiny, Bainimarama was intent on bringing rebel soldiers to justice to restore institutional credibility. On the other hand, in protecting its 'corporate interests' the military explored the possibility of an immunity decree and amnesty bill for its own loyalist soldiers with Qarase's interim government and later the SDL coalition government. The CAMV party of the Qarase coalition government had opposed a military amnesty bill. They stalled such a bill for obvious reasons. George Speight and his coup supporters were being prosecuted whilst the military were trying to escape prosecution for

coup misdeeds. Amnesty was denied the military by government that henceforth came under military pressure. As we have seen, one tactic that was used in intimidating government was the pulling out of the President and Prime Minister's body guards and security around their residence.<sup>89</sup> Another ploy used was to get sympathisers such as FLP's Mahendra Chaudhry and Jokapeci Koroi to announce threats of a coup as they did in January of 2002 and January 2006 respectively. Qarase's failure to invite the FLP into cabinet in a government of national unity as stipulated in the constitution had riled the military. Bainimarama showed his displeasure by stating publically that Qarase's government might have to resign.

Bainimarama became convinced that Qarase was not acting in the national interest and that he was peddling an ethnic agenda spearheaded by the iTaukei and Rotuman Affirmative Action Programme, especially in the agriculture scam to buy votes in the lead up to the August 2001 elections. Bainimarama, it seemed, began to rue relinquishing power and suspected SDL/CAMV corruption and cronyism was at play in running government. As time went on, Bainimarama and his military spokesman Major Neumi Leweni became more virulent publically in criticising government. To the alarm of many senior officers, Bainimarama started upstaging in public a government it had initially put in place. Bainimarama's support of government had worn thin by June of 2003 after the Supreme Court ruling on a multi-party cabinet went against government. After his contract was renewed in March of 2004, Bainimarama embarked on a series of public slanging matches that even escalated to the point of conducting an anti-government Truth and Justice campaign prior to the May 2006 elections. The chasm between Commodore Bainimarama and Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase was left unbridged till too late.

In addition Police Commissioner Hughes had confirmed that police had files of seven ongoing investigations against Commodore Bainimarama. There are skeptics who insist that, it was the criminal charges that was about to be served on Bainimarama, that triggered the coup. Qarase in the end was willing to compromise by shelving the controversial Bills. Bainimarama, however, was driven by his misperception and by stakeholders spurring him on to carry out the

2006 coup. In retrospect, a combination of government policies such as the affirmative action programme for the itaukei, and the formation of a military interventionist coalition with politicians encouraged the military leader into politics. The argument that Bainimarama was protecting the national interest and in so doing the corporate interest of the military still persists. In the final analysis the cause of the emerging antagonism and coup was the iTaukei power play that necessitated the inversion of the *Turaga-Bati* political relationship by the military, and brought about the political supremacy of the *bati*, the military commander.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Voreqe: Coup was planned for 2001', 6 Dec 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Fiji Sun*, 9 Nov 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Coup was personal, says Qarase', 3 Dec 2007.

<sup>5</sup> John S Fitch, *The Military Coup d'État as a Political Process: Ecuador, 1948-1966*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1977, p.78.

<sup>6</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Lawyers must cry freedom to the challenge in Fiji,' 9 Jun 2007; 'Remarks by Fiji lawyer Graham Leung at the 20th Biennial Law Asia Conference in Hong Kong', 8 Jun 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'High level Fiji feud dates to April 2005', 2 Nov 2006.

<sup>8</sup> *NZ Herald*, 'Fiji police chief tried to get Bainimarama arrested in NZ', 18 Feb 2012, see [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10786336](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10786336) accessed 6 Jul 2012.

<sup>9</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'US Embassy Confidential Memo, Wikileaks', 27 Aug 2011, see: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/us-cables-reveal-brutality-of-fijian-regime-20110826-1jefr.html#ixzz1WCE5pSEB>

<sup>10</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'US Embassy Confidential Memo, Wikileaks', 27 Aug 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Robertson and Sutherland, *Government by the Gun*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Robertson and Sutherland, *Government by the Gun*, p. xviii.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, p.140.

<sup>14</sup> Robertson and Sutherland, *Government by the Gun*, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Question of immunity', 20 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Judge A Gates, Lautoka High Court, 13 Nov 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Fiji Court of Appeals ruling of Chandrikha Prasad Case, 15 Mar 2001.

<sup>18</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Time for a change', 21 Feb 2001.

<sup>19</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Jury out on Affidavits', 21 Feb 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Jone Dakuvula, 'The Fiji Military Forces vs. The Elected Government of Fiji', CCF Conflict Case Study Paper, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 2004, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Fiji Times*, Margaret Wise, 'Army Stands Firm', 24 Jan 2000.

<sup>22</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Fraudster Freed', 29 Jan 2001.

<sup>23</sup> *Fiji Times* 'Speed for Baba', 6 Mar 2001.

<sup>24</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Chaudhry Opts for Fresh Poll', 8 Mar 2001.

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- <sup>27</sup> Robertson and Sutherland, *Government by the Gun*, p.46.
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- <sup>29</sup> *Fiji Times*, 6 Nov 2002.
- <sup>30</sup> Radio NZI, 'Outspoken Fiji military leader called insubordinate,' 18 Apr 2003.
- <sup>31</sup> The Author heard this on a replay of an audio tape recorder that Bainimarama had on him during this meeting in March 2004.
- <sup>32</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Chiefs will Respect law', 14 Mar 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> Following Lalabalavu's release from his extramural imprisonment on 13 September 2005, Prime Minister Qarase announced his reinstatement to the Cabinet as Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation on 20 September, succeeding Simione Kaitani.
- <sup>34</sup> ABC, 'Fiji military chief warns Qarase he might have to resign,' 20 Apr 2003.
- <sup>35</sup> Radio NZI, 'Fiji Military Commander Warns Politicians', 09 Apr 2003.
- <sup>36</sup> Brij V. Lal, 'Anxiety, Uncertainty and Fear in Our Land: Fiji's Road to Military Coup, 2006,' in Fraenkel, Firth, and Lal, eds., *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji*, p. 26.
- <sup>37</sup> Dakuvula, 'The Fiji Military Forces vs. The Elected Government of Fiji', p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup> *Daily Post*, 9 Apr 2003.
- <sup>39</sup> *Fiji Times* 6 Jun 2003.
- <sup>40</sup> Dakuvula, 'The Fiji Military Forces vs. The Elected Government of Fiji', p. 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Dakuvula, 'The Fiji Military Forces vs. The Elected Government of Fiji', p.8.
- <sup>42</sup> Colonels: Kadavulevu, Tuatoko, Raduva, Buadromo and Koro'i letter to Minister of Home Affairs, 18 Jan 2004.
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- <sup>44</sup> *Fiji Sun*, 'Bainimarama boots disloyal Fiji Military Officers', 21 Jan 2004.
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- <sup>57</sup> *Daily Post*, 'Blind Legalism', 3 Aug 2003.
- <sup>58</sup> ABC, 'Fiji military chief warns Qarase he might have to resign', 22 Apr 2003.
- <sup>59</sup> Government of Fiji, *National Security White Paper: A Safe and Prosperous Fiji, 2005*, p. 91.
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- <sup>61</sup> *National Security White Paper, 2005*, pp.91-93.
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- <sup>63</sup> *NZ Herald*, 'Fiji police chief tried to get Bainimarama arrested in NZ', 18 Feb 2012, see [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10786336](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10786336) accessed 6 Jul 2012.
- <sup>64</sup> Victor Lal, 'Dictator Hides Behind Gun as Qarase Fronts Court', 5 Jul 2012, <http://www.coupfourandahalf.com/> accessed 6 Jul 2012.
- <sup>65</sup> Victor Lal, 'Dictator Hides Behind Gun as Qarase Fronts Court', 5 Jul 2012.
- <sup>66</sup> Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau were known as the 'big four chiefs' that played the leading leadership role for Fijians in the transition to Independence.
- <sup>67</sup> Steven Ratuva, 'Ethnic Politics, Communalism and Affirmative Action in Fiji: A Critical and Comparative Study', University of Sussex, Phd Thesis, 1999, p.162.
- <sup>68</sup> Ratuva, 'Ethnic Politics, Communalism and Affirmative Action in Fiji', p.162.
- <sup>69</sup> Transcript, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara interview with Richard Broadbridge Close Up TV programme, 29 Apr 2001.
- <sup>70</sup> Ratu Mara interview, Close Up TV programme 29 Apr 2001.
- <sup>71</sup> T P Sreenivasan, 'A colossus who died lonely', *The Rediff Special*, 14 Feb 2005. T P Sreenivasan was high commissioner/ambassador of India to Fiji from 1986 to 1989.
- <sup>72</sup> Fraenkel, Firth and Lal, eds, *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji*, pp. 122-124.
- <sup>73</sup> For an early exposé of Ratu Mara's wealth, not at all coincidentally written by Josefa Nata, who was later a key ally of Speight during the coup of 19 May 2000, see 'The Mara Empire; A Fijian Success Story, Family Worth Millions', *Fiji Sun*, 2 Aug 1985.
- <sup>74</sup> *Fiji Times*, 25 Apr 2004.

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- <sup>75</sup> Fraenkel, Firth and Lal, eds, *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji*, p.122.
- <sup>76</sup> See Lt Col Meli Saubulinayau statement to the *Evans Report* p.888. "We did not really like the Commander because he was from the Navy. That is a simple fact. The majority of the green uniform guys did not like him."
- <sup>77</sup> Col Ratu George Kadavulevu's father, Ratu Tevita Naulivou,(1906-1984) was an elder brother of Ratu Sir George Cakobau,(1912-1989) the former Governor General (1973-1982) and Vunivalu of Bau (1955-89).
- <sup>78</sup> Radio Australia, 'Fiji Army Boss Resigns for Political Career', 9 Feb 1999.
- <sup>79</sup> Ratuva, 'Ethnic Politics Communalism and Affirmative Action in Fiji', p.230.
- <sup>80</sup> Prime Minister, Mr Laisenia Qarase Speech, 25 May 2005.
- <sup>81</sup> Laisenia Qarase, 'Rebuilding peace, stability and prosperity in Fiji', *The Parliamentarian: The Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth*, 2002.
- <sup>82</sup> Laisenia Qarase, 'Rebuilding peace, stability and prosperity in Fiji'.
- <sup>83</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Coups was personal, says Qarase,' 3 Dec 2007.
- <sup>84</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Ongoing sedition probe against Fiji army chief', 1 Dec 2006.
- <sup>85</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Who will prevail in the end', 30 Nov 2006.
- <sup>86</sup> Stephanie Lawson , *Post-colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and the 'Pacific Way' : A Critique of (Un) Critical Approaches*, SSGM Discussion Paper 2010/4, p.13.
- <sup>87</sup> Robertson and Sutherland, *Government by the Gun*, p. 94.
- <sup>88</sup> *Fiji Sun*, 'Diplomat first on stand in Qarase trial', 6 Jul 2012.
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## Chapter 8

### The Acceleration of Military Power

#### Introduction

The high profile disputes between Bainimarama and Qarase over 2000-2006 served as the backdrop to the subtle acquisition of power by the military over the office of the President. Each public falling out generated extensive media coverage and a heightening of tension across the country whilst at the same time the military tightened its hold on the senile President. Within the military, those public quarrels served to test loyalty, for rooting out opponents and for the promotion of more loyal officers. Through this process, Commodore Bainimarama cemented his grip both on the officer corps and the rank and file. Of particular importance were the growing RFMF influence on the President's office, the re-location of the Strategic Headquarters and the activities of the Directorate of Army Legal Service. In Chapter 2, we discussed the changing organization of the RFMF in the run up to the 1987 and 2000 coup. Here, we pick up that story and examine how the military prepared itself to undertake the 2006 coup. Why did the military need to accelerate institutional reforms that put it offside government? We argue that this is the consequence of a process of insidious military politicization where government is inevitably superseded in authority.

The move to de-politicize the military in the 1990s, which we discussed in Chapter 2, was reversed by the politicization of the military after the 2000 coup. In many a post-coup standoff, Bainimarama reminded the nation that it was the military that gave the Qarase government the mandate to rule, irrespective of elections. As early as April 2003, Bainimarama had called for the government to resign and let the law take its course, as some within the Qarase government had sided with 2000 coup leader Speight.<sup>1</sup>

By mid-2005, the military was publically signaling that it was operating independently of government. In addressing infantrymen at the Infantry Day



celebrations at Mount Nakobalevu, Bainimarama said he should be the only one whose orders they should obey if there was a new political upheaval.<sup>2</sup> Land Force Commander Colonel Naivalurua, in backing Bainimarama's call, said the Commodore's decisions helped maintain stability. Naivalurua warned; "It's not about anti-Government or anti-Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua, it's about national interest. We are not playing politics."<sup>3</sup> Yet, in fact, the military had consolidated its political role.

In this chapter we will examine the military's institutional changes that accelerated and facilitated military political power. We discuss the military's hold on the office of the Presidency and the role of the President at crucial junctures of national crisis. We examine the establishing of Strategic Headquarters in 1999 and the purging of senior officers. We also examine the 'Military for Life Concept' policy document, the illegal logistic build up to the 2006 coup and Government's Job Evaluation Review of the military. We then examine the influence of the Military Chaplaincy Department. Lastly, we examine the establishing of the Directorate of Legal Services and its influence on politicizing the military.

### **Military hold over President Ratu Iloilo**

There has been much public speculation about the hold of the Fiji Military over Ratu Josefa Iloilo since his ascent to the Presidency after the removal of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in May of 2000. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, the former Vice President, in acting as a character witness for former Prime Minister Qarase prior to his sentencing later revealed in August 2012, "There was a lot of hostile exchanges between the government and the military prior to 2006 and it made it more difficult for the then government as the then President was sympathetic towards the military's concerns."<sup>4</sup>

Iloilo was being criticized for his inaction in disciplining Bainimarama in his outbursts against the Qarase government. The secretariat of the Great Council of Chiefs, however, defended the office of the President stating government officials should respect the high office. The comment followed a report in the *Fiji Times* of the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2005 quoting a government source as blaming

Iloilo for failing to resolve government's standoff with the army.<sup>5</sup> The newspaper quoted the source which was most probably the CEO at the Prime Minister's Office saying requests by the government to the President to discipline Army commander Voreqe Bainimarama in order to maintain national stability were knocked back. Furthermore, the statement questioned Ratu Josefa's capability in performing his functions as head of state.<sup>6</sup> Given the respect for the aging President, the Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes was the first to alert all to what was known by insiders, when he was interviewed after the coup. Hughes publically revealed, "He [Bainimarama] has essentially control on the President's office through the CEO or the official secretary of the President, who's been colluding with the military for some time now."<sup>7</sup>

Where did it all start? Since the coup of 1987, the neo-traditional links between Government House and the military were further strengthened with Colonel Rabuka's personal relationship with Ratu Penaia Ganilau as President. The former 'Malaya Battalion' commander ensured regular officers and soldiers served as aides-de-camp, cooks, drivers, butlers and security details at Government House. With the President's son Ratu Epeli, who replaced Rabuka in becoming Commander of the RFMF in 1991, the line between the office of President, his family and the military profession became blurred, for the President was also the Commander-in-Chief of the Fiji Military Forces which his son commanded. Military personnel attached to government house became part of the President's traditional family retinue, and had insight into palace or *vanua* politics. They often alerted the military commander about government or state matters of military or the Commander's interest. On the demise of Ratu Penaia in December of 1993, Caretaker Prime Minister and high chief of Lau Ratu Mara took up the presidency. Mara was the father-in-law of the Commander Ratu Epeli and the military's close relationship with Government House continued until December of 2000 when he resigned as President. Even after Mara had resigned from office, the military assisted the former President with military personnel as household servants, drivers and security guards and nurse aides until his death in 2004.

After the 2000 political crisis, it was only natural, according to *vanua* politics, that the appointing body, the GCC, should endorse Ratu Iloilo, then Vice President, and Burebasaga Confederacy chief, to assume office after Mara. However, with George Speight and his supporters' opposition to Mara and insisting that their candidate, the Kubuna chief Ratu Jope Seniloli be appointed, a stalemate developed. The GCC was split between the chiefs supporting Speight and his appointment, Ratu Jope, led by Adi Litia Cakobau versus the chiefs in the Ratu Josefa Iloilo camp. Ratu Jope, the *Komai Naua* of Bau, was a retired civil servant and highly regarded chief of the Tui Kaba clan of Bau. Bainimarama suspected the Bauan chiefly clan, including the Cakobau family, of complicity in Speight's illegal takeover of the Chaudhry government. The Cakobaus had also long held political aspirations in competition with the Mara/Ganilau political dynasty. Ratu Josefa, who held the western Viti Levu chiefly title of Tui Vuda, was also a former teacher, provincial administrator, ex-Senator and former Vice President of the Methodist Church. He was also well into his seventies at the time of the crisis and was known to suffer from senile dementia. What made matters more threatening to the military was that the chairman of the GCC was none other than former coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka. The former Prime Minister was smarting from his SVT 1999 elections loss and regaining his political popularity amongst the iTaukei was certainly on his mind.

The *Ratu mai Verata*, Ratu Ilisoni Ravoka, swayed the decision for Ratu Josefa Iloilo over Ratu Jope as President, although he may have been angling to get Mara reinstated as President. Ratu Ilisoni, an ex-naval rating with close traditional links to Commodore Bainimarama, was a known advisor of the military commander and favoured the 'stick' approach as in traditional chiefly authority over subjects. On the unwritten agenda it was circulated that Nailatikau, Ganilau and Adi Lala were still trying their utmost to reinstall Ratu Mara as President with personal approaches to sitting chiefs from other provinces.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, along with the choice of banker Laisenia Qarase as interim Prime Minister, Ratu Epeli Ganilau as chairman of the GCC and Ratu Iloilo as President, Bainimarama had had a hand in all these nationally important

appointments. With his choices for high office entrenched, Bainimarama started claiming a role for the RFMF as guardians of the national security interest. Ratu Iloilo became totally reliant on the Military. Like a pliant sacred chief or *Tui* of the traditional hierarchy, he was now beholden to his warlord or *Vunivalu*, the Commander of the RFMF Commodore Bainimarama, who held coercive powers over the people.

During his whole time in office from 2000 to 2009, Iloilo was cleverly shielded from Qarase and his government's influence by a swarming staff of military minders. These soldiers, who included security guards, drivers, cooks and butlers all came under the Aide de Camp, an army officer. In a military orchestrated routine directed by the Commander, they channeled advice to the President through his wife and had access to all state and cabinet decisions needing presidential concurrence. In addition, the President's position as Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces allowed Commodore Bainimarama unchecked access to the senile chief. In 2011 in a revealing memorandum leaked out of the President's Office, written by former permanent secretary Nacanieli Goneyali, an insight is gained into Bainimarama's control over the President. Goneyali, who had lodged a complaint against Bainimarama, goes on to describe the disrespect and sheer audacity with which Bainimarama treated the senile and sickly president:

The Commander has no respect at all of the office of the President. He was sitting with his right leg flexed over his left knee and both of his arms were fully extended laterally over the sofa at ninety degrees. There is obviously something wrong with this man, as no respectable Fijian will ever behave in this manner in the President's Office.<sup>9</sup>

The relocation of the Commander's office from QEB to the RFMF Strategic Command at Berkeley Crescent in November of 2000 close to Government House aided this close relationship and manipulation of the President on a routine basis. An example was the deliberate manipulation by the Commander to convince the President not to allow an investigation requested by five senior officers suspended for advising the Commander against his treasonous outburst at a conference in late 2003. This case also involved the forging of a Presidential letter and signature on official stationery to the Prime Minister

Qarase outlining the President's decision not to grant a redress of wrong for the five officers' on the advice of Bainimarama. The case of these senior military officers' suspension was highlighted on TV and the local papers and was the precursor to the next major issue involving Bainimarama and the SDL government in late 2003. This was the extension of his position as Commander. The five year contract was to expire in February 2004. It was finally granted, though, through controversial handling by an inept Minister of Home Affairs and a blundering government only too quick to appease an insolent Commander.

As the rift between Bainimarama and Qarase's government grew, other contentious political issues brought Bainimarama out into the national media spotlight. All the time the Commodore ensured that the President was shielded from all government influences including advice from the Prime Minister, Vice President and Attorney General in particular. Ratu Iloilo was totally reliant on the Military in the person of Commodore Bainimarama during the power plays of the 2000 crisis. His military- induced resignation in August of 2009 was because at age eighty-eight years he had served his purpose as a 'lackey' for the military. Furthermore working in collusion with the Commander from mid-2004 till his resignation with Ratu Iloilo in August 2009 was Rupeni Nacewa, the official secretary at Government House and close school friend of Bainimarama. Documents have come to light showing his pliant facilitation of the Bainimarama's salary as commander RFMF and interim prime minister as 'approved' by the President.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the coup of December 2006 the Official Secretary to the President often frequented the office of the Commander at Berkeley Crescent to discuss state matters informally.<sup>11</sup>

Within this web of 'palace staff' the Commander was able to control the aged President and shield him from the more constitutionally correct advice and counsel of the Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi. Ratu Joni had become a threat to Bainimarama's machinations since becoming Vice President in late 2004. Bainimarama had hoped that Ratu Joni would side with the military against the Qarase government given the Commander's close traditional links to the *Roko Tui Bau*. Ratu Joni's legal integrity and long-held commitment to democracy was steadfast and this irked Bainimarama. Ratu Joni was used as the

go-between by the government to persuade Iloilo and Bainimarama to side with government state policies and decisions to the disdain of Commodore Bainimarama. Ratu Joni, who was also surrounded by military minders, led by his aide- de- camp, was eventually hounded out of office and forced to resign in the wake of the December coup.

### **Establishing of Strategic Headquarters**

With his appointment as Commander in 1999, Bainimarama began implementing some of the 1997 Defence White Paper recommendations. The bulk of the White Paper recommendations were not catered for in the 1998-99 national budget as military expenditure was a contentious public issue in the lead-up to elections in 1999. The incoming Chaudhry government practically snubbed the White Paper as commissioned by the deposed Rabuka government. Obviously Chaudhry had no wish to reward the military which had toppled his coalition government in 1987. One major reform that went ahead, though, was the restructure of RFMF headquarters into two entities. A Strategic Headquarters was established which was upward and outward-focussed and a Land Forces Command Headquarters which was operationally downward focussed. The White Paper also recommended the Commander be co-located with the Minister of Home Affairs to strengthen civilian control of the military. This was not to be. Bainimarama thought otherwise and ran the military from two offices at these headquarters, one situated at Berkeley Crescent and the other at Queen Elizabeth Barracks. This arrangement only compounded the rift that had opened between government and the military in 2002.

Once Bainimarama's contract was renewed for another five years in March of 2004, however, a sense of relief was felt that the antagonism was diffused at least for the while. That year, a new team of officers set about upgrading and renovating the wooden colonial building which had been Strategic Command Headquarters since November of 2000. The major reason for the renovation was to entice the Commander to function from the one office at Strategic Headquarters, Berkeley Crescent instead of also working from Queen Elizabeth Barracks as was the case. It also ensured the Commander was in close proximity

to the minister of Home Affairs at the New Government Buildings complex in down town Suva.

In an officer posting order memorandum of August 1999, it was obvious that those senior officers who were perceived by Bainimarama to be unwelcoming of his appointment as Commander were posted to higher Strategic Headquarters at Berkeley Crescent within the compound of the President's residence, Government House. These were the officers described in the media in the following terms: "Some senior army officers could not gulp [sic] the news but vowed to serve and support their new commander."<sup>12</sup>

In this way, Bainimarama denied these 'unreceptive' staff officers access to the rank and file at Land Force Command under the unit commanders. The arrangement kept these mostly senior officers separated from his chosen officers at Land Forces Headquarters who he perceived to be loyal to him. Bainimarama, then operating from his Commander's office at Land Forces Command in Queen Elizabeth Office, was able to have direct access to the unit commanders in charge of troops. This personally 'customized' organizational reform worked splendidly for a now politicized Commander who ingratiated himself with the troops. One of the more effective methods Bainimarama used as reward or punishment of officers was his personal oversight of overseas military courses and training. In addition, cronyism was rife within the force as officers and men in the Bainimarama clique were given multiple peacekeeping tours of duty.

### **Military for Life Concept**

One of the controversial initiatives by the Commander in early 2004 that made senior officers suspicious of Bainimarama's long term career intent was the *Military for Life* concept paper which he signed as Administration Instruction 70 of 29 March 2004. I had drafted the paper and had modeled the concept on Alfred Stepan's military role expansion model coined 'new professionalism.' As the title suggests, the concept called for military personnel, active and reservists to engage in commercial and government enterprise, an expansion of the military's role into national development for life. In simple terms, a military

career involved civilian roles spanning the whole lifetime of a serviceperson. The first major project that was undertaken under this concept was with Telecom Fiji Ltd, the construction of its Tele-communications Satellite (Telsat) bases nation wide. Both the Fiji Navy and the Army Engineers reservists were employed.

### **Telsat Funds<sup>13</sup>**

Between 2004 and 2005, Telecom paid RFMF \$1,515,219 for the installation of modern high quality telephone satellite stations in 87 villages around Fiji. Out of this amount, \$1.2 million was received in 2004. However, a government audit could not substantiate this from the ledgers as the records were not made available. The government auditor noted that the fund was used for purchases of goods and services that were not related to the Telesat project. These include:

- a) The payment of rugby gear and travel expenses of the RFMF rugby team;
- b) Expenses for the Truth and Justice Campaign of which details of only \$55,467 was provided;
- c) Per Diem allowances and advances that were approved by the Commander instead of the chief accountant as required under Finance Instructions 207.

The auditors also noted that the RFMF used an inactive trust account and re-titled it to Telesat RFMF/Telecom Project thus not complying with finance circular 14/03. The auditor's recommendations were as follows:

- a) Expenditure relating to the Telesat project should be met from the Trust Fund.
- b) Necessary action should be taken against officers who abused the fund.

The Audit Department's further comments were:

Prior to the Telesat arrangement there were no specific instructions covering the movement of Telesat funds. Soldiers involved have been duly paid what was entitled to them. Utilising the balance of fund in this aspect is at the discretion of the Commander. The Auditor General has noted that the funds generated were for the direct benefit of troops.<sup>14</sup>

The Telsat project was a direct deal between Winston Thompson, the chairman of Telecom board (a coup beneficiary), and Commodore Bainimarama. The coining of the phrase 'Military for Life Concept' was Bainimarama's idea. Three years before the December 2006 coup, the Commander most probably had envisioned a life long political leadership role, in addition to generating funds that monetary-wise benefitted his constituency of soldiers and sailors.



## **Logistics build up to 2006 coup**

The acceleration of military power inevitably had a logistics dimension. From 2000 to 2005, the Fiji military had major issues with the accountability of its budget. As far back as June 2006, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had been expressing alarm over the RFMF Budget 2006. In an article, ‘Unpublished RFMF Budget 2006 and Coup Nexus’ by investigative journalist Victor Lal, government documents surfaced in 2010 showing Bainimarama and his staff officers had carried out a cover-up to suppress fraud and police investigation into falsification of local purchase orders (LPO) and invoices. A MHA memorandum to cabinet on the military overspending read:

The Auditor General’s Report of 2004 highlighted a surcharge of \$1,612,630 for unauthorized purchase from Lotus Garments Company. Given the above it is indeed unethical for RFMF to continue to do business with Lotus Garments until the surcharge action is finalized ... No further dealing should be made with Lotus Garments forthwith.<sup>15</sup>

It emerged that the military had overspent over \$45 million since the 2006 coup, as highlighted in the 2007 Budget. However, the highly confidential MHA documents were being leaked to the Military High Command from inside the MHA by one of their former own, a military man. In other words, Bainimarama and his coup conspirators were acutely aware of what might befall them, so they began a cover-up campaign prior to the overthrow of the Qarase government. A memorandum prepared for the then Minister for Home Affairs highlighted some of the irregularities that were surfacing in the RFMF Budget 2006. The memorandum read:

The Auditor-General’s report highlighted the falsification of documents. The brief will show that RFMF is yet again committing the same mistake incurring expenses of \$6,179,000. Another local purchase of \$6,136,578.00 is yet to be signed. RFMF is also making purchases without Major Tender Board approval and is stock piling on its protection and winter issues.<sup>16</sup>

In hindsight this over expenditure was done with an obviously sinister motive in anticipation of the December 2006 coup and in blatant disregard of financial regulations.

### **Job Evaluation Review (JER)**

With Qarase and his installed SDL government in power in 2001, the military senior officers pressed for a commissioning of a White Paper on Defence and a Job Evaluation Review (JER). By 2003 both these military-backed initiatives were well underway. In 2005 a draft National Security White Paper was completed though grave reservations by Bainimarama as to its recommendations stalled its implementation. Military pay increases according to the JER came into effect in 2006. As shown by the Minister of Home Affairs budget parliamentary speech:

There is a welcome increase in the overall budget of the Royal [sic] Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). Of significance is the allocation for the job evaluation exercise. The adoption of the "people first" approach is particularly appropriate in looking after our Military and building for longer-term stability in the Force, as well as professionalism.<sup>17</sup>

There was also allocation for the re-location of the Military base in Nadi. The new Nadi base was to provide opportunities for enhanced training and overall development of the military that complemented Fiji's efforts at international peace operations.<sup>18</sup> The SDL government went to great lengths to appease the military by granting new capital works and handsome increases in salaries as evidenced with pay and allowance rises for soldiers from 2003 to 2010.<sup>19</sup>

The obvious rationale was that these increases were seen as part of government's affirmative actions for the indigenous Fijians. However it was also seen by critics as necessary to stave off a coup given the persistent public antagonism of the Commander towards government. Ironically Bainimarama manipulated these salary increases to curry loyalty amongst his officers and men prior to executing the coup.

### **Influence of Military Chaplaincy.**

The bond between the Fiji Military and the Methodist Church and Chiefs has been covered in parts in chapters 1, 2 and 3. As a result of the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006 the bond was further institutionalized as the military's corporate interest also took in the all important religious dimension. In 1989 during Rabuka's tenure as military Commander a full-time Methodist chaplain was posted to the military. Reverend Major Apenisa Naigulevu, the first appointee,

had been the chaplain of the Fiji Battalion in Sinai in 1988. The trappings of being a commissioned officer with successive tours on peacekeeping duties saw the degeneration of relationship between Naigulevu and the church administration. Major Naigulevu ended up being a logistics staff office at military headquarters though later resumed pastoral duties with the Methodist Church.

In 1996, Brigadier Ratu Epeli Ganilau, as Commander, established with the approval of the Methodist Conference a church circuit within the military with a resident chaplain at Queen Elizabeth Barracks. The first posted military pastor was Reverend Major Mesake Tuima, followed by Reverend Major Marika Tuvasu (both deceased).<sup>20</sup> Since 2006 the incumbent military chaplain, Reverend Major Joseva Tikonatabua, in conjunction with the military intelligence unit, has been used extensively to further the military's political agenda and to rein in Methodist pastors who question military rule. For example at a military parade Major Tikonatabua reminded soldiers that "they could only carry out the directive given by their Commanding Officer if they let God lead them."<sup>21</sup> As former chaplains with Fiji's overseas peacekeeping units, these *padres* have had strong religious influence with the majority Methodist military.

Since Fiji military's involvement in overseas peacekeeping, chaplains such as Reverend Josateki Koroi, Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi and Reverend Ilaiasi Ratabacaca, have risen to become President of the Church. Other former chaplains have held important executive positions in the church. The tension between the church and the state embodied by the military has been fuelled to a large measure by their Christian liberation and fundamentalist theology. Much as it was wrong, it was the quest for a 'Christian State' that in part spurred Rabuka's supremacist coup, and drove Reverend Lasaro and followers to take matters into their hands in the 1989 Sunday Ban protests. This led to them infringing on public and church law, which led to the unlawful ousting of Reverend Josateki Koroi the Methodist President, and the damaging court case that ruled for the ejected President.

Again during the 'Truth and Justice Campaign' prior to the 2006 elections, the military had openly used its chaplain and former chaplains network within Fijian society to foster its 'guardian' role of the state. With their lead and 'Christian spiritual guidance', the 2006 coup was morally accepted by the predominantly Methodist military. Ultimately the military chaplaincy was manipulated by the Commander to shore up his political agenda which often was coated in biblical analogy. On the other hand the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill that the military opposed, was called a 'gimmick' for the release of Speight by the Commander. The Bill, however, was fully supported by the Methodist Church which had a former President as a serving Senator. Simmering tension was increased to a new level of hostility when Bainimarama told his troops to change churches should their Methodist pastors use the pulpit to preach support for the Bill.<sup>22</sup> The use of the military chaplaincy network by Bainimarama no doubt accelerated the military to intervene in December 2006. The military has in conjunction with its intelligence unit made good use of this network to keep dissenting Methodist ministers silenced and entrench its political power.

### **Influence of Directorate of Army Legal Service on Military Politicization**

Along with the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU), the other controversial establishment post-Rabuka coup within the Republic of Fiji Military Forces was the Directorate of Army Legal Services (DALs). Prior to this establishment all the military's legal work was handled by the Attorney General's chambers. Rabuka's coup for the first time necessitated the military grappling with the legal gymnastics of the constitutional laws of Fiji and military law. In addition the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) and the treatment of civilians in conflict was a contentious issue for soldiers on Fiji's peacekeeping operations. It was thus necessary to establish a directorate in light of the military's growing commitment to international peacekeeping and to also facilitate its soldier disciplinary cases in such foreign theatre.

After the 1987 coup several government lawyers notable among whom were Isikeli Maitoga, Josaia Naigulevu and Ratu Finau Mara gained military territorial force commissions as officers and legal advisors at Headquarters

RFMF. The political links of these three lawyers to the nationalist iTaukei Movement - the key indigenous political group in the planning of the May 1987 coup- were no secret at the time according to coup authors such as Victor Lal.<sup>23</sup> Isikeli Mataitoga through his links to the inner circle of Rabuka's SVT government scored postings such as Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) and diplomatic postings as Fiji's High Commissioner to Brussels and Canberra. Josaia Naigulevu, a reservist Fiji naval officer, who held the appointment of DPP in the years after the 2000 coup, was an SDL supporter. He was, however, also known to be a close colleague of Commodore Bainimarama who pursued the prosecution of the 2000 nationalist coup supporters.

In the wake of the 1987 Rabuka takeover and Ratu Mara's caretaker government being installed by the coup leader, a pronounced policy of indigenous affirmative action was instituted. The scarcity of iTaukei professionals, especially lawyers, was a major bone of indigenous contention and grievance for the coup. Hence initially in 1988, Ministry of Fijian Affairs scholarships were offered to young military officers such as Captains Tevita Bukarau, Penijamini Lomaloma, Etueni Caucau, Samuela Vadei and Kini Keteca to study law at Bond University, Queensland, Australia. Other noted government legal officers such as Ana Rokomakoti, William Calachini, Davina Chang, Pacolo Luveni and Aca Rayawa were once with the directorate. For most of these officers, DALs became a career enhancer into other government legal jobs. The office of DALs was instrumental prior to the 2000 and 2006 military coups in affording the RFMF Commander legal advice that spurred him towards extra-constitutional considerations. DALs strayed outside its professional military law role and aided the political agenda of the Commander rather than providing purely professional military law advice as contained in the Constitution of Fiji 1997, RFMF CAP 81 Laws of Fiji 1970 and the British Manual of Military Law 1955.

In addition, DALs, in upholding the institution of the military, corrupted the subordination of military law to the laws of the land and indeed the constitution of 1997. This is evident with the DALs erroneous interpretation of the 1990 constitution as to the role of the military being extant and alive in the 1997

constitution. This legal argument was a device used by Bainimarama to justify his 2006 coup and thus DAL5 became the defender of the Commander RFMF's personal political agenda. The Director or a military lawyer after 2000 began having a permanent seat at the Commander Conference amongst other senior headquarters staff and unit commanders.

DALS was also guilty of politicizing the military. Prior to the May 1999 elections, its Director, Lieutenant Colonel Tevita Bukarau, had colluded with the Commander Ratu Epeli Ganilau by resigning from the military and standing in the elections for the VLV Party. This newly formed party was known to have been quietly supported by Ratu Mara and his wife Adi Lala and senior ministers in the Methodist church such as Reverends Manasa Lasaro and Tomasi Kanailagi.

The formation of the VLV was said to have taken shape in the office of DAL5, which included other officers and VLV candidates such as Lieutenant Colonel Inoke Luveni and Major Aminiasi Turaga, both unsuccessful candidates in the 1999 elections. Major Mesake Tuima, the Force chaplain, was very much involved in the VLV formation and was the link to the Methodist church hierarchy to and from the Commander. The replacement for Colonel Bukarau was Colonel Etueni Caucau. He was known to have strong sympathies with nationalists during the coup of 2000. He was thought to have colluded with Bukarau who during the Speight coup was roped in as legal advisor to the coup front man, George Speight. Again in the 2006 coup its present military director, Brigadier Aziz Mohamed, has done irreparable damage to the ethics and integrity of the Fiji Military and to the country as a whole for being the illegal architect of the military intervention.

This officer, along with Aiyaz Saiyad-Khaiyum, the Attorney General, is now the chief legal and political advisor for the Bainimarama regime. He gained prominence through the media and within the RFMF as prosecutor in the court martial of the mutinous Meridian Squadron soldiers' case of 2000 that dragged on for some four years. His successful recruitment of Justice Sidal and Fiji Law Society President Graham Leung was a legal coup for the military and ensured

the credibility of the court martial. The mutineers' court martial case which was widely covered in the national media brought respect and admiration for the way in which the military administered law and justice. The court martial process strengthened the Commander's public rhetoric and depiction of the military as the defender of law and order and national security. DALS became a military weapon in response to an increasingly litigious society after the 2000 coup. It also became the link to the office of the DPP and the legal fraternity and business houses at large.

DALS continue to play a political role in the articulation of quasi civil -military relations roles and concepts such as 'human security' 'national security' and the drawing up of the RFMF military's strategic plan. But more concerning has been its contribution to some of the regime's security decrees. Indeed DALS has been guilty of straying away from its British and Commonwealth military law role including the adherence to Westminster liberal democratic civil supremacy laws.

### **Conclusion**

Several military institutional reforms and strategic initiatives have accelerated the military's role in politics. The purpose of the acceleration process was to expand military executive and corporate powers and effectively aid the inevitable execution of the 2006 coup. The influence the military had exerted on the role of the President at crucial junctures of national crisis has been of strategic design. The establishing of Strategic Headquarters in close proximity of Government House enabled the military to monitor and control state business, through military minders and hand picked pliant civil servants. Bainimarama's *Military for Life* policy and the illegal logistic build up prior to the 2006 coup masked both a personal and a political agenda. In early 2004, the military established this ideology which expanded its societal role at large in disregard of the national security paper that recommended a halving of troop numbers.

The use of the Chaplaincy department to mobilize iTaukei Methodist population support for the military has been effective though it has alienated Methodist Church elites. The Directorate of Army Legal Service since its establishment has become a lightning rod for the military's political involvement. Through the

intimate collusion of DALs with prominent legal entities, advice for the takeover of government and the promulgation of the regimes decrees have been facilitated. The military's effective takeover of government in 2006 was artfully preceded by an internal accelerated reform process to control the Executive, Judiciary and Legislative arms of government.



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> ABC.net.au, 'Fiji military chief warns Qarase he might have to resign,' 20 Apr 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Fiji military chief warns troops of possible upheaval', 24 Jun 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Fiji military chief warns troops of possible upheaval', 24 Jun 2005.
- <sup>4</sup> *Radio Fiji News*, www.fbc.com.fj, 'Beddoes, Madraiwiwi provide character witness in Qarase Trial', 1 Aug 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> *Radio Fiji News*, 'Fiji Chiefs bristle at criticism of President,' 22 Jun 2005.
- <sup>6</sup> *Radio Fiji News*, 'Fiji Chiefs bristle at criticism of President,' 22 Jun 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Hughes against takeover', 7 Dec 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> This is according to the late *Taukei ni Waluvu* Ratu Alipate Baledrokadroka, GCC member (1994-2002) and Naitasiri Chief to Author in 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> See Official Memorandum, Re: Unprofessional Conduct by the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, from N.C Goneyali, Permanent Secretary Office of the President of Fiji to Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, File Ref 6/R/8, 7 Apr 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> See copy of Office of the President Memo to Attorney General, 4 Sep 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> On the assumption of the post of Official Secretary to the President in 2004 after Pauliasi Kunabuli had been transferred out, Rupeni Nacewa paid a visit to the Commander at Berkeley Crescent where the author was present in private discussions.
- <sup>12</sup> *Daily Post*, 'Tension as new army chief named', 26 Feb 1999.
- <sup>13</sup> Taken verbatim from the *Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Fiji Islands*, September 2006, Section 16- Republic of the Fiji Military Forces, www.oag.gov.fj.
- <sup>14</sup> Victor Lal, 'Unpublished RFMF Budget 2006 and Coup Nexus' Coup Four Point Five.com, 15 Nov 2010.
- <sup>15</sup> Victor Lal, 'Unpublished RFMF Budget 2006 and Coup Nexus' Coup Four Point Five.com, 15 Nov 2010.
- <sup>16</sup> Victor Lal, 'Unpublished RFMF Budget 2006 and Coup Nexus' Coup Four Point Five.com, 15 Nov 2010.
- <sup>17</sup> Hon J B Vosanibola, Minister for Home Affairs, 2006 Appropriation Bill Debate, 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Fiji Hansard Report, 17 Nov 2005.
- <sup>18</sup> Hon J B Vosanibola, Minister for Home Affairs, 2006 Appropriation Bill Debate, 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Fiji Hansard Report, 17 Nov 2005.
- <sup>19</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'Army Gets Extra', 27 Nov 2010. After the 2010 budget was revised, the RFMF budget was boosted to \$101 million.
- <sup>20</sup> As a tribute to Reverend Marika Tuvasu after his death in 2006, the Rabuka Hall in Queen Elizabeth Barracks was re-named Tuvasu Hall by Commodore Bainimarama.
- <sup>21</sup> Fiji Sun, 'Strong as ever', 18 May 2013.
- <sup>22</sup> Bainimarama Infantry Day speech, 24 Jun 2005.

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<sup>23</sup> Victor Lal, *Fiji: Coups in Paradise: Race, Politics and Military Intervention*, Zed Books, London, 1990.

## Chapter 9

### **‘Go Drink Home Brew under the Mango Tree’: An Analysis of Military-Chiefly relations during the 2006 Fiji Coup**

#### **Introduction**

After a long campaign of opposition to the elected government, Commodore Bainimarama and the military seized power. On the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, President Iloilo signed a legal order dissolving Parliament, citing the doctrine of necessity, paving the way for the formation of an interim administration. Simultaneously the military had moved into Suva in strategic locations on roads and government premises also seizing minister’s vehicles and disconnecting their mobile phones. Soldiers also entered the Parliament and disbanded the meeting of Senators discussing a motion to condemn the coup. In his takeover of government speech on the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> of Dec, Bainimarama explained the rationale for his coup, accusing Qarase of corruption and of having inflamed tensions between ethnic communities through “divisive” and “controversial” policies. Over the coming days, hapless Prime Minister Qarase and most of his cabinet gathered at his residence, detained by armed soldiers in the glare of international media.

The coup constituted a striking reversal in the pattern of Fiji’s post-independence politics. The principal contrast with the justification of earlier coups was the claim that a coup was needed to finally end the politics of ethno-nationalism and make Fiji a multiracial society. The reversal was typified by Commodore Bainimarama’s criticism that the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) to “meet under a mango tree and enjoy home brew.”<sup>1</sup> Council Chairman Ratu Ovini Bokini like many was alarmed at the flagrant hostility towards the assembly of high chiefs as an institution of traditional wisdom. Bainimarama had made the remark in disparagement of the Council for siding with Qarase’s government against the military’s demands.<sup>2</sup> He had made no secret of his contempt for certain chiefly figures. Military spokesman, Major Neumi Leweni, reiterated his leader’s stance stating, “We will not accept any proposals by the Council,” adding, “We do not recognise the chiefly body during this crisis.”<sup>3</sup> Deposed Opposition Leader Mick Beddoes expressed this breach with past

certainties when he said, “all of the theories about the military always being on the side of Fijian governments were now well and truly out the window.”<sup>4</sup> Beddoes was obviously alluding to the patron-client *Turaga-Bati* relationship, where the warrior was always supposed to follow the political direction of the chief. Why was there open animosity between the military and the chiefly elite, symbolized by the GCC?

Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase had requested a special Council meeting in a desperate attempt to resolve the ongoing row with the military. Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama and his senior officers had condemned the Prime Minister for, “running to the Great Council of Chiefs to resolve its problems.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically former Commander Rabuka and Bainimarama were guilty of the same move in attempting to solve the 1987 and 2000 political crisis respectively. The military did not heed the efforts of the GCC to resolve the 2006 political impasse, and eventually prohibited the chiefs from meeting or deliberating on the affairs of the nation. As the constitutional appointing authority for the President and Vice-President, the GCC was considered the apex of the ‘old order’. The nation’s third coup was aimed at destroying this old order- the influence of Prime Minister Qarase’s SDL Party, and Fijian elites associated with that government, including the key leaders of Fiji’s three traditional confederacies, supposedly in the interest of ‘good governance’.

This was in sharp contrast to previous coups. The 1987 coup did not simply oust a largely Indian-backed government. It also reinstated the authority of the paramount chiefs, most importantly and directly Ratu Mara, but also institutionally because the 1990 constitution galvanized chiefly authority, and because the Rabuka governments of 1992-94 and 1994-99 were accompanied by programmes and policies that strengthened (at least one section of) the Fijian elite. During the 2000 coup, the military was ambivalent towards Fijian political elite pressures: although Ratu Mara was ousted by military action, the GCC was encouraged to deliberate at the military’s Queen Elizabeth Barracks as it sought to establish a way out of the crisis. That ambivalence had vanished by 2006, and Ratu Mara and other paramount chiefs were no longer on the political stage.<sup>6</sup> Bainimarama’s disdainful comment toward the GCC, therefore, signaled that breach with the politics of the earlier post-colonial years.<sup>7</sup> It came as no surprise that the intervention was targeted at the Fijian political elite in the form of the

SDL Party and its cohorts in government and statutory bodies. Bainimarama had often berated indigenous politics as controlled by chiefly patronage and evocative of pre-Christian tribal mores. This view was reinforced by Fijians' supposed political inability to rise above intra-ethnic political struggles as witnessed during and after the 1987 and 2000 coups.

This chapter is an analysis of military-chiefly relations during the Fiji coup of 2006 from the perspective of a former Fiji senior military officer and former member of the GCC.<sup>8</sup> It will examine the core theme as unfinished business from 2000 typified by the Bainimarama-Qarase antagonism, the case for the coup, the attempts to avert the coup, the seizure of power, the coalition that backed the coup and the opponents of the coup respectively.

### **The Case for the Coup**

The 2006 coup's *raison d'être* was to clean up corruption brought about by the Qarase government's ethno-nationalist policies. Ironically, the orientation was the reverse of that given for mounting the 1987 coup – 'Fijian paramountcy' had become the villain rather than the objective.<sup>9</sup> 'Ethno-nationalism' was also deemed by the military to have been the political motive that underpinned Speight's failed coup of 2000. But what had concerned Bainimarama and his military most were the allegations of the politicization of the GCC by Qarase and his SDL party. Like Rabuka and his SVT Party in the 1990s, Qarase's SDL party in the 2000s had become the main Fijian political party which by inference was backed by the GCC. Previously, the performance of the GCC during the 1990s showed how it had deviated from its original role as an advisory body on native affairs. Rabuka and the SVT party that became the government in 1992, were supposed to have united all Fijians under one political organization in the pursuit of the coup's original aim -- Fijian political paramountcy. Intra-indigenous schisms however plagued this pan-Fijian party from its very start and Rabuka's SVT suffered defeat at the 1999 elections mainly because of Fijian disillusionment, and splits in the Fijian vote.

The question of Fijian political supremacy as interpreted by Fijians in the *Deed of Cession* of 1874 had underpinned the coups of 1987 and 2000. The 2006 coup in a sense was a counter-balance of this ideology. Newbury makes the significant counter-point that 'Fijian Paramountcy' was only claimed in the

1940s by Ratu Sukuna and the GCC backed by Europeans in the Legislative Council.<sup>10</sup> As the Indo-Fijian population overtook the Fijians in numbers and started to agitate for political rights, Fijian and European interests were seen to be threatened. The entrenching of a policy of Fijian political paramountcy in collusion with the colonial administration was in response to this political situation.

Given the history of race-based politics and after the shock of the 1987 coup, the 1997 Constitution enshrined a power sharing arrangement which potentially entailed a government of national unity. The FLP Coalition government that came to power invited Rabuka's SVT party into this arrangement. However, due to pre-conditions laid out by Rabuka, that he be deputy Prime Minister and others of his party be appointed cabinet ministers, a golden opportunity was lost to improve the future of ethnic politics. After the 2001 elections Qarase's SDL party, having formed a coalition with Speight's CAMV party, refused to include Chaudhry's FLP in cabinet. Only after a succession of court judgments, all of which found the Qarase government to be behaving in defiance of the law, did the Prime Minister invite Chaudhry's FLP to participate in cabinet, but only through the assumption of specially invented minor portfolios. This proved that Qarase was not genuine and these minor portfolios were subsequently refused by the FLP.<sup>11</sup> Another golden opportunity for multi-party and multi-racial promotion was lost.

The May 2006 election, however, did entail the formation of a power-sharing government, with nine members of the FLP joining cabinet and assuming powerful portfolios such as labour, agriculture and sugar. In this sense, the 2006 coup was a profound blow to the promotion of multiracialism. What had triggered the military takeover given this momentous power sharing breakthrough? One of the motives for the takeover was the criticism by the military and its supporters of a "manipulated political system". As pointed out by Fraenkel and Firth, "scandals over affirmative action distributions from the Ministry of Agriculture were sufficient to strengthen familiar FLP objections that Fijian leaders were rotting the system."<sup>12</sup> Bainimarama even dismissed liberal democracy as a mere "numbers game."<sup>13</sup> According to Bainimarama, Chaudhry and his previously deposed FLP governments were victims of this manipulated "numbers game." Bainimarama later expounded:

Fijians live in a democracy with a mentality that belongs to the Fijian chiefly system. They decide for us who to vote for, our church *talatalas* [church ministers] decide for us who to vote for. These are the Fijians living in the villages and rural areas. The provincial [chiefly] councils dictate for us who to vote for and we go along with that.<sup>14</sup>

Bainimarama's putsch was initially intended as a temporary imposition of authoritarian rule to rectify institutional arrangements that had generated corruption, coups and bad governance, and in the process victimized Indo-Fijians.

In early November 2006, whilst Bainimarama was away visiting troops in the Middle East, Captain Esala Teleni, the acting Commander, released a list of military demands to government. The demands became Bainimarama's motive for the coup. Returning from the Middle East, Bainimarama then scheduled a trip to visit family in New Zealand. Foreign Minister Winston Peters took this opportunity to broker talks in Wellington in an effort to resolve the disputes between Prime Minister Qarase and the military Commander.

The first military demand was that government publically declare that the 2000 coup and the 2000 military mutiny were wrong and remove all those associated with them from office. In addition government was to educate the public that the events of 2000 were illegal. In response to this demand, government reaffirmed that the coup events of 2000 were illegal. Government had undertaken to develop a fully resourced public education programme to take to the public. Government also undertook to continue to bring to account those found by due process to have been illegally associated with the events of 2000. The military was invited to provide to government the names of people whom it believed should face legal process. The government of New Zealand indicated its willingness to assist in the resourcing of the public education programme.

The second military demand was that government withdraw the three contentious pieces of legislation, the *Qoliqoli*, Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity and Indigenous Land Claims Tribunal bills. In response, government insisted that the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill had been suspended. An agreement was reached that a current independent review of the constitutionality and legality of the *Qoliqoli* and Land Claims Tribunal Bill

with resource assistance from New Zealand be accelerated and brought to a rapid conclusion. The review was to be completed by 1st January 2007 with a progress report by mid-December 2006. Should the review find that the Bills were legally or constitutionally unsound then deliberations on these would be automatically suspended. If the review found otherwise, then the government would enter into renewed consultations with the military and other interested parties on the areas concerned.

The third demand was that police investigations into Bainimarama and the RFMF be dropped. The government response was that should it receive advice from the appropriate authorities – i.e., the Solicitor General, Director Public Prosecutions or Police Commissioner -- that the investigations in dispute should be suspended, it would be prepared to follow that advice and to confirm publicly that it had done so.

The fourth demand was for Police Commissioner Hughes's contract to be terminated. In reply, government stated that the current situation was that Commissioner Hughes was nearing the end of his term and had been granted leave. The fifth demand was that there be no foreign military/police intervention. Qarase on behalf of the government agreed that there should be no foreign police or military intervention in the domestic affairs of Fiji. The sixth demand was that the Police Tactical Response Division be disbanded. Qarase agreed to undertake a review of the role of the Police Tactical Response Unit.

The seventh demand was to investigate the Native Lands Trust Board's commercial arm, Vanua Development Cooperation. It was acknowledged that the NLTB was a statutory organisation and the government of Fiji could not interfere in its operations. However, NLTB would be requested to review its commercial arm with New Zealand government offering to provide resourcing and international expertise to assist. The RFMF also had concerns about its force structure allowances and promotions (the eighth demand) and these were to be immediately addressed. Finally, the ninth demand was for government to address and improve the quality of governance. Qarase agreed to work with the military and other Fiji groups to develop higher standards of governance within Fiji. It was quite evident that Qarase in attempting to stave off a coup had agreed to most of the military's demands.



The military's effort to dislodge the police commissioner suggested that personal motivations were in some competition with the broader ideological goals of anti-corruption and good governance. In the run up to the 2006 coup, an uncompromising and professional police commissioner, Andrew Hughes was pursuing charges against Bainimarama. Bainimarama had seven charges pending when he executed the coup.<sup>15</sup> Before the coup, Hughes said that he knew of more than 10 shadowy people acting as advisers to Commodore Bainimarama. He warned all those involved would be dragged into the spotlight and their identities made known. This group included senior military officers, former military officers, senior civil servants as well as former and current politicians.<sup>16</sup> The military elite retaliated against this police pressure with their nine demands on government. Prime Minister Qarase was given an ultimatum to accede to all, or resign.

Qarase was adamant (though in hindsight) that, Bainimarama was determined to take over government by force for ulterior motives.<sup>17</sup> The Police were closing in to arrest and charge the military commander for serious crimes. The reasons he gave for carrying out the coup were "a cover up" for his crimes, said the deposed Prime Minister.<sup>18</sup> He added, "Bainimarama was not prepared or did not have the courage to face up to the full brunt of the law."<sup>19</sup> It can be deduced, then, that the coup was a pre-emptive strike against the police's sedition charges against Bainimarama. By late November 2006, Bainimarama had created an environment of political uncertainty by his anti-government rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> He condemned contentious government policies as an ethno-nationalist conspiracy and called for the immediate expulsion of Hughes. During November, the credibility of Qarase's Prime Ministership was deliberately undermined. The government and its supporters retaliated, at least through press announcements. An editorial in the *Fiji Daily Post* newspaper echoed what many were thinking, "To accede to their demands would be to abrogate the honour of one's office and only a weak and watery government would respond to these demands."<sup>21</sup>

In a press conference on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2007, Bainimarama gave a further long litany of twenty five justifications for the military takeover.<sup>22</sup> The reasons were

as follows: 1) the persistent and deliberate involvement of persons supporting the unlawful takeover of government in 2000 in the Qarase government; 2) the SDL saying it supported law and order but then freeing coup convicts on extramural or compulsory orders; 3) the continued appointment by those tainted by the 2000 events to diplomatic and senior government positions; 4) the failure of the police to investigate all the shadowy figures behind the 2000 coup; 5) the politicization of the prison services; 6) the regular visits by government officials to Korovou Prison to meet prisoners who supported the coup; 7) the racist and inciteful speeches made by SDL MPs which were never checked by Qarase; 8) repeated acts of government and civil service corruption including SDL politicians; 9) growing cycle of corruption, clientelism and cronyism involving unhealthy influence of certain businessmen and women; 10) failure of the Qarase government to pass any anti-corruption legislation in past five years; 11) determination of the Qarase government to pass the Public Reconciliation Truth and Unity, Qoliqoli and Land Claims Tribunal Bills; 12) exclusion of the military from the national Security Council; 13) manipulation of the criminal justice system for political reasons; 14) threat of the use of regional forces to influence the resolution of internal problems; 15) threat of an Australian invasion shown by the hostile remarks of Alexander Downer; 16) PM's failure to keep the President informed of issues relating to state affairs; 17) failure to follow agreed principles under the Biketawa Declaration; 18) repeated attempts to change the command structure of the RFMF since 2000; 19) poor economic policies; 20) May 2006 elections characterized by discrepancies; 21) fleeing from Suva of the PM and Cabinet negating that they were still in charge; 22) untimely absence of the Police Commissioner; 23) Qarase seeking to incite certain people to rebel against the RFMF; 24) Qarase's failure to meet the President on the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> December; 25) Ratu Josefa being prevented by the Vice-President and others from exercising his constitutional powers.

Lawyer Dorsami Naidu of Fiji's other major Indo-Fijian political party, the National Federation Party, was critical of these military allegations: "Whatever the accusation of the Qarase government of which the FLP was a partner is not justification for the coup".<sup>23</sup> Indeed these accusations by the military shows their politicization and intimate acquaintance of the political scene that may have

heightened alarm and made it seem less inappropriate for them to intervene directly albeit illegally.

### **Attempts to Avert the Coup**

The 2006 coup was unique because of the ultimatum issued by the military prior to its execution. Consequently the Pacific Islands Forums Foreign Ministerial Group meeting in Sydney Australia on Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> of December agreed to send an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to Fiji to help prevent a coup after Bainimarama's target date was postponed to Monday.<sup>24</sup> In addition, immediately on his return from the Wellington talks brokered by New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters, Qarase in a newspaper advertisement, tried to de-escalate the crisis by revealing the outcomes of the talks. Bainimarama however refuted any such outcomes calling Qarase a liar in a press release on Thursday afternoon the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006. According to Brij Lal, however, "Qarase had conceded virtually to all of Bainimarama's demands, going as far as he could, although his critics argued that Qarase was merely buying time by attempting to give the impression that action would follow when he had no such intentions. In any event, he had acknowledged his weakness and starkly demonstrated the relative power of elected office versus the military."<sup>25</sup>

After the Wellington talks which the New Zealand Foreign minister had labelled as "fruitful", ominously Bainimarama on return, set a dead-line for midday Friday 1<sup>st</sup> December for government to accede to the demands or be toppled. Bainimarama had visited the President on the morning of Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> of December with his ultimatum for a takeover at noon that day. The deadline was moved to noon Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> of December with the diplomatic persuasion of Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi the Vice President. On Monday morning, in a statement taken to be pro-government emanated from Government House stating, "His Excellency the President Ratu Josefa Iloilo neither condoned nor supported the actions of the military which were clearly outside the Constitution."<sup>26</sup> This statement no doubt would have been inspired by Vice President Madraiwiwi.

That Monday, I was attending the Naitasiri Provincial Council annual meeting at Viria village where the Prime Minister was the chief guest. At about midday after the traditional opening ceremonies, I was approached by the Prime

Minister's private secretary and a former military officer Major Sakeasi Ditoka, to meet Qarase in private. We were then briefed by the Prime Minister's police escort officer that the military had set up a check point at Sawani Bridge to arrest the Prime Minister. A quick arrangement was then made to evacuate the Prime Minister by helicopter to the capital Suva. Upon invitation, I then accompanied the Prime Minister to the Public Works Department Roads Depot at Naqali to await the helicopter for evacuation to Suva. The Prime Minister, his wife and I then were airlifted to Albert Park Suva.

A national security meeting was convened at the Ministry of Home Affairs conference room. Assistant Commissioner Kepueli Bulamainavalu then briefed us on the situation at hand. It was evident that the military had started to erect checkpoints at key road junctions and had mobile patrols mounted throughout the city area. At the meeting, after all options were considered, it was decided a policy of non-confrontation and non-escalation was to be adopted by the Police towards the Military.

That night till early dawn Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup> December I remained with the Special Police Task Force operations cell at Nasova Police Compound as security advisor to the team monitoring the military activities. The military by then were in full deployment mode nationwide, taking up key vulnerable points and premises and rounding up known opponents.

### **The Seizure of Power**

After months of 'saber rattling' the much signaled breach finally dawned. In the presence of international and local media, on the morning of Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of December the military locked in Qarase at his residence and seized all ministerial vehicles. SDL Ministers and members of the multi-party cabinet started to congregate at Qarase's residence on Richards Road as the military takeover unfolded. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, known to be on the side of constitutionality and who was behind the issuing of the initial Government House statement was immediately forced by his own Aide- de- Camp, to vacate his Vice- Presidential residence. Ratu Joni, later finding his position untenable, resigned from office.<sup>27</sup> This unprecedented turn of events prompted Fijian academic Ropate Qalo to point out that "Bainimarama has usurped government authority to the extent of expelling his own chief. He is from *Nayatena* of the

*Rokotui Kiuva* of the *Yavusa Ratu of Kubuna*, headed by the *Rokotui Bau* and Vice President Ratu Joni his paramount chief.”<sup>28</sup> This incident best symbolized the unprecedented breach in chief-military traditional protocol.

At a press conference at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks that afternoon, Bainimarama declared, “As of six o clock this evening the military has taken over the government as executive authority in the running of this country.”<sup>29</sup> He said the Republic of Fiji Military Forces had no choice but to take control because “the Government and all those empowered to make decisions in constitutional democracy are unable to make decisions to save people from destruction”.<sup>30</sup> Commodore Bainimarama continued, as his caretaker Prime Minister Dr Jona Senilagakali stood beside him, “having stepped into the shoes of the President, I shall now in his capacity under section 109 (1) of our Constitution, dismiss the Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.”<sup>31</sup> Qarase that same fateful day had in full-page advertisements in the three daily newspapers, tried to re-assure the public of the “ever changing demands that made it hard for them to reach an understanding.”<sup>32</sup> Backing Qarase’s revelation was the Commissioner of Police. After being threatened and forced out of Fiji only days earlier, Andrew Hughes also revealed from Australia, “He’s a front man as Rabuka was in 1987 and Speight was in 2000. Bainimarama is a front man for power seeking people in Fiji that failed at the last election who are not able to gain power legitimately, so they are using him as a means to obtain that power.”<sup>33</sup> The last word however remained with the President. Ratu Iloilo always closely shielded by his military minders headed by the Aide-de-Camp, Captain Lepani Damuni. In spite of his statement that morning by evening the octogenarian head of state had capitulated and sided with the coup leader. Ratu Iloilo signed the decree dissolving Parliament, and paving the way for the formation of an interim administration.

Reactions to Bainimarama’s televised proclamations were swift from both supporters and opponents alike. Ratu Epeli Ganilau, the leader of the National Alliance Party, and close confidant of Bainimarama, in explaining the takeover said, “The long impasse has propelled the military to act. It is an illegal act but the less of two evils when you think about the endemic corruption and bad

practices that have carried on during the reign of the former administration”.<sup>34</sup> Ratu Epeli also announced without consulting the Chairman of the GCC, Ratu Ovini Bokini, that the chiefs “will come in the next day or two to discuss the situation with the military”.<sup>35</sup> The former ousted Chairman of the GCC and Commander of the military was obviously eager to accept the military takeover. He further stated, “The real situation is that the military is in power and whether Ratu Ovini likes it or not, he will have to convene the meeting.”<sup>36</sup> It was obvious whose side Ganilau was on. He later accepted a ministerial appointment in the military regime.

### **Coup Coalition.**

The coup would not have been possible without substantial support for the RFMF agenda. As Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi observed, “When the Commander finally mounted the coup, he had a ready constituency, beyond the command structure of his officers and foot soldiers.”<sup>37</sup> Although many who were sympathetic to the coup objectives dissociated themselves from the act of overthrowing the elected government, they were soon to join the interim administration. It became quite obvious to locals that an implicit pre-coup networking of elites had fueled the takeover. Bainimarama had become their front man for “moderate politics” as opposed to Qarase’s ethnic outbidding often apocalyptically described as the “ethno-nationalism abyss”. This explains why significant sections of civil society flocked to support the reformist objectives of the coup leader. As affirmed by the director of the Citizens’ Constitutional Forum, Akuila Yabaki, “I think the clean-up was a much bigger calling.”<sup>38</sup> Social justice and religious organizations opposed to Qarase’s indigenous affirmative actions policies warmed to the takeover.

Mahendra Chaudhry, in staking his claim to the political high moral ground and maximizing political mileage for his FLP party, emphatically, declared, “I will not accept anything that is not constitutional or legal, let me make that clear.”<sup>39</sup> Chaudhry proclaimed, “FLP’s record remains untarnished. Despite being victims of illegal takeover twice, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to democracy”<sup>40</sup>. This was in response to SDL’s director Peceli Kinivuwei’s claim that Chaudhry was part of the pro-coup interventionist coalition. Chaudhry however later joined the regime and in defending his

decision said, "Fiji's destruction was inevitable, had the army not intervened. This explains why there was ready support for the army's objectives following the takeover."<sup>41</sup>

Chaudhry's rhetoric in essence garnered widespread support from the Indo-Fijian community. He did not hide his disdain for the ruling SDL party given that he had been ousted by nationalists through two previous coups. A later statement by Chaudhry said, 'the coup was warranted'.<sup>42</sup> He explained, "One cannot forget the current constitutional crisis had its roots in a growing discontent and frustration with six years of bad governance characterized by pervasive corruption, ethno-nationalism and defiance of the rule of law."<sup>43</sup> Dorsami Naidu of the Indo-Fijian National Federation Party, however, countered the FLP leader by claiming, "Chaudhry's desire for political power instead of working with opponents in light of the nature of Fiji's society and problems faced, caused Indians to meet political paralysis".<sup>44</sup> FLP President Jokapeci Koroï following the coup in a speech to delegates of the National Council declared her support for the interim administration and the need for the 'cleanup.'<sup>45</sup>

Months prior to the coup, Koroï had astounded the nation by brazenly announcing on national television news that "she would have no qualms about the military overthrowing the Qarase government and putting Labour back in power to continue its unfinished business."<sup>46</sup> Chaudhry on invitation from Bainimarama, (in spite of all his verbose rhetoric but more so being a victim of the military coup in 1987) became Minister of Finance for the interim regime. His Fiji Labour Party colleague and Chaudhry stalwart, Lekh Ram Veyeshnoi, also joined the regime as a cabinet minister, as did Tom Ricketts.

Chaudhry's abandoning of the high moral ground probably stemmed from a desire to push for political power denied by two previous coups. This Machiavellian switch gave credence to Bainimarama's 'cleanup campaign' and lent the image to Bainimarama's coup as a multi-racial takeover of government. Before the coup the FLP along with certain NGO's such as the Citizens Constitutional Forum's attacks of Qarase's controversial indigenous policies had converged with the military's hard line stance. In fact, as early as January 2006 several FLP members had formed an interventionist coalition with the military

and had publically stated that it would support a military coup against the SDL ruling government.<sup>47</sup>

Other pro-Bainimarama supporters initially played it safe in gauging coup support. Ratu Epeli Ganilau said, "It is illegal and we all know it is illegal" when solicited his views on the coup.<sup>48</sup> Asked if he would join the regime if approached, Ratu Epeli replied, "I would like to think about it because this would be the way forward for the country."<sup>49</sup> In what many saw as an affirmation of his protégé Bainimarama's takeover, he further explained, "The politics in Fiji is very difficult to follow. Our politics is very traditional and sophisticated at the same time. We have the politics of the *Vanua* and the politics of the Confederacies."<sup>50</sup> Ratu Epeli though, in explaining the nuances of traditional politics was also a close advisor to Bainimarama<sup>51</sup> He became the regime's interim Minister for Fijian Affairs, Home Affairs and Defence. It is thought that the initial delay in Ratu Epeli joining Bainimarama's cabinet was that he was disappointed that the interim Prime Ministership post he was angling for was taken up by his protégé. According to Military Council member and defector Lieutenant Colonel Tevita Mara, Bainimarama was not scripted to be Prime Minister.

On 4th January 2007, Bainimarama returned executive authority to the President. In accepting his position 'Ratu Iloilo endorsed the military's 5<sup>th</sup> of December takeover as necessary'.<sup>52</sup> The President said, "He would have done exactly what the army commander did and that it [the coup] was valid under the law."<sup>53</sup> In the same national address installing Bainimarama as interim Prime Minister, the President said, "I fully endorse the actions of the Commander and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces in acting in the interest of the nation and in upholding the constitution."<sup>54</sup> A flabbergasted Prime Minister Qarase retorted, "I did not agree to his [President's] proposition to me . . . I could not do either of those."<sup>55</sup> He later confirmed President Ratu Josefa Iloilo wanted him to accede to all the military's demands or resign.

Qarase, again in dismay, pointed out that Ratu Josefa's statement was contradictory: "If you recall about 24 hours before the coup there was a statement from Government House saying that they did not condone the actions of the military and its illegal activities. They even recalled the military."<sup>56</sup> Qarase further disputed, "The statement from the President is the direct opposite of the



one made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December. More surprising is the statement supporting the illegal takeover of the democratically elected government. I think the President did not get an independent advice.”<sup>57</sup>

Well articulated and sustained political acrimony with a deliberate purge of the SDL ruling elite and Fiji’s chiefly system, however, came from an unlikely source. When Bainimarama’s interim cabinet ministers were announced the position of Attorney General was given to an unknown Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum<sup>58</sup>. The commercial bank lawyer and one-time pro-democracy advocate during the 1987 coup, for all intents and purposes became the powerbroker behind the regime.<sup>59</sup> He was linked to Ratu Epeli Ganilau’s National Alliance Party as its legal advisor during its failed 2006 elections campaign. In 2002 Khaiyum did a masters thesis that questioned Fijian cultural autonomy through its Fijian administration.<sup>60</sup> Now as a key member of Bainimarama’s cabinet it became apparent that he was well poised to put in place his thoughts based on myopic research. In his thesis he noted:

Ratu Sukuna’s interpretation of culture and his solution through a (re) structured separate administration were biased by his half-conscious vested interest in a society in which chiefs were chiefs.<sup>61</sup>

Khaiyum went on to observe:

European contact in Fiji was primarily in the East/North which consequently led to the confirmation of new chiefly elite from those regions. This led to the establishment of a cartel of hereditary leadership families and their cliental network. Madraiwiwi (Sukuna’s father), Sukuna, Cakobau, Mara, Ganilau and lately Qarase have all been beneficiaries of this bias forged through the perpetuation of the separate administration. On the other hand, those such as Bavadra and Gavidu, westerners were not accepted and were outsiders-did not represent indigenous Fijian culture-since they encroached upon the territory of the establishment clique.<sup>62</sup>

Khaiyum in criticizing the GCC as a separate and autonomous chiefly body said it had worked against the state, as was evident in the coups of 1987 and 2000. What according to Khaiyum was needed was for Fijian institutions like the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs) and the Fijian Affairs Board to have evolved or be dissolved over time if they were to keep abreast with the changing needs of indigenous Fijians. He suggested that the perpetual existence of these creatures of British rule could only put such Fijian institutions in a ‘time warp’ and give rise to the consolidation of power to and “self-preservation” of an elite

few.<sup>63</sup> It became evident that immediately after his appointment; Khaiyum had provided Bainimarama a rationale for reformist ideas involving the Fijian administration and its political elite that was at loggerhead with his political view. The Great Council of Chiefs was suspended in April 2007 and abolished in February of 2008 by decree.

The irony was that firstly the method that was to bring about these changes was by absolute decrees organised at best by a narrow group of new elites to perpetuate Bainimarama's authoritarian rule. This recurring pattern of authoritarian exploitation is what constitutes the centrepiece of Professors Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's argument that the most common reason why nations fail today is because they have perpetrated extractive institutions much similar to the colonial era.<sup>64</sup> The example of Zimbabwe is given to illustrate a comparative analysis with present day Fiji. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that the roots of many economic and political institutions in Zimbabwe, as in the case for much of sub-Saharan Africa, can be traced back to the Colonial period.<sup>65</sup> However after Independence Mugabe quickly established his personal control, rewrote the Constitution, he inherited as part of the Independence negotiations making himself President (he had started as Prime Minister). He also abolished white voter rolls and in 1990 and got rid of the senate altogether introducing positions in the legislature he could nominate. A defacto one-party state headed by Mugabe was the result.<sup>66</sup> Given the way that the Bainimarama regime is tracking in promising inclusive though creating extractive political and economic institutions the purging of the Fijian administration and its associates is seriously flawed. Indeed Fraenkel criticizes the Bainimarama regimes rather culturally myopic view, "The utopian goal of seeking to transcend those social forces by destroying them is tantamount to aspiring to leave indigenous Fijians rudderless, inarticulate and estranged."<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, even though British colonialism had integrated the social structures of the Chiefly System, Christianity and Common Law to legitimize what was accepted as the right way to govern, by Independence and as stipulated in the 1970 Constitution, Christianity was not a state religion and chiefly power could only be exercised through a nominated senate in a narrow capacity to do with Indigenous Bills. Condemned by some modern day critics as exploitative, the Fijian chiefly system was the medium of native social interdependence and a

cultural contract shared by the indigenous clans of a bygone era, which was justly utilized for colonial rule. Since Independence the chiefly system has had to adapt to the demands of modernity and urbanization called for by the Spate and Burns reports on native reforms in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the 1980s a sizable urban Fijian working class had been established divorced from village chiefs and communal constraints. Similarly chiefly political authority in both urban and rural communities has considerably diminished. For instance in comparing the 1999, 2001 and 2006 general elections the number of chiefly candidates declined to just 11% of total candidates by 2006 and only an average of 4% was elected in these three polls.<sup>68</sup> Judging from these figures the role of chiefs in modern political leadership has drastically declined to insignificance. Rather than blaming chiefs, nations fail today because their extractive economic institutions (which are similarly being perpetrated by Bainimarama's regime) do not create the incentives needed for people to save, invest, and innovate.<sup>69</sup>

One who purported to be saddened by the purge of the Fijian administration via the suspension of its premier body the Great Council of Chiefs was Sitiveni Rabuka.<sup>70</sup> The former chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs argued that the body was a political stabilizing force for Fiji and still had a role to play in modern Fiji. He wrote:

By publishing that suspension regulations, the interim Government had, for only the second time in the history of this nation, suspended the operations, offices and membership codified or not, of the body that engineered the Deed of Cession in 1874, accepted the move toward Independence from 1965 to 1970, calmed the nation after the coups of 1987, approved the 1990 Constitution which enabled Fiji to return to parliamentary democracy and general elections in 1992, agreed with the proposed changes to that Constitution which resulted in the enactment of the 1997 Constitution Amendment Act, again provided the calming influence after the 2000 coup and the move toward a military-backed interim Government in 2001 and elected all our presidents since 1987 except for the first part of the first President, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, who was appointed by the then Brigadier-General Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka in his military government decree No. 25 of December 1987.<sup>71</sup>

Rabuka was of the view that traditional hierarchy had a place in Fijian politics. He cautioned, "There were those who gleefully accepted the [suspension] move for they had always opposed the perpetuation of traditional hierarchy and advocated merit-based leadership in all aspects of national leadership. Even some diehard nationalists, with their views on the trusteeship of native land, unconsciously supported this move."<sup>72</sup>

The leaders of Religious organizations ( not necessarily the rank and file) such as the Catholic Church, the Hindu reformist Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (Arya Samaj) and the more conservative Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabha, on the other hand warmed to the multiracial reformist agenda and aligned with the military regime. Archbishop Petero Mataca, in a thinly veiled newspaper opinion piece, obviously referring to SDL ministers and in support of the military takeover said, “In hindsight we should have protested strongly against allowing convicted persons to stand for elections or accept cabinet, senate or ambassadorial positions.”<sup>73</sup> He went so far as pleading with the international community in an opinion editorial that, “There is no real purpose in imposing sanctions on Fiji.”<sup>74</sup> Fathers Kevin Barr and David Arms, following the Archbishop’s lead, joined up and were key players in Bainimarama reforms. These religious organizations then went a step further in collaboration by consulting with the regime on the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF).<sup>75</sup> With Bainimarama, the Archbishop, co-chaired, the NCBBF which produced the 2008 *Peoples Charter for Peace and Progress*. The Peoples Charter initially upheld the legitimacy of the Constitution though the document lost much credibility after the abrogation of the same Constitution in April 2009.

Other prominent NGO’s indirectly voiced support for the putsch. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2007 Shaista Shameem as Director Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) released a thirty two page report defending the December 2006 military coup, alleging that the previous government of Laisenia Qarase had committed human rights violations and crimes against humanity. She maintained that the 2006 elections were unlawful, and supported claims that Australia had intended to invade Fiji. FHRC Commissioner Shamima Ali, however, dissociated herself from the report.<sup>76</sup> Prominent Fiji constitutional lawyer Richard Naidu dismissed the report as ‘mostly laughable’<sup>77</sup>. Naidu explained, “to use Ms Shameem’s logic would mean all laws after the 1987 coup is illegal including the Chaudhry government after the SVT government and including the law that set up the Fiji Human Rights Commission”.<sup>78</sup> Naidu then made the acerbic point that, “Shameem’s latest effort illustrates the danger of academic sociology types to study serious subjects like law.”<sup>79</sup>

Adding his criticism Fiji Law Society President Devanesh Sharma alleged that some members of the legal profession outside the military were heavily involved in giving legal advice, doing research and writing speeches supporting the military.<sup>80</sup> Most prominent of these who threw their weight behind the regime were Justice Anthony Gates and Justice Nazat Shameen. Controversially Shameem had stood in as illegal Chair of the Judicial Services Commission which appointed Justice Gates as Acting Chief Justice. This extra constitutional move gave rise to allegations of prior knowledge on the part of these judges. As pointed out by former President of the Fiji Law Society Graham Leung, “There is a serious rift in the legal profession, which lends every appearance of not being independent. Some senior lawyers tacitly support the military coup, driven to do so by their dislike of the ousted government and its policies”<sup>81</sup>. It was obvious to local and international observers alike that the unfinished legal business of the 2000 coup had come back to also haunt the high judicial echelons of the nation.

### **Coup Opponents**

The so-called old elite of the Church and the Great Council of Chiefs rallied behind the toppled Qarase government. Traditionally even before the coming of Christianity these two institutions had co-existed. Missionary Reverend Waterhouse had observed, “The influence of the priest over the common people is immense, although he is generally the tool of the chief. Indeed these two personages most usually act in concert.”<sup>82</sup> After the coup, the Fiji Council of Churches (CCF) and the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF) through its President, the Methodist Minister Reverend Tuikilakila Waqairatu, had condemned the military takeover, calling the coup a manifestation of “darkness and evil.”<sup>83</sup> Pentecostal Christian Mission Fellowship President Suliasi Kurulo, a pillar of the ACCF, even described Ratu Josefa Iloilo’s public address of the 4<sup>th</sup> January as “shocking” and said Ratu Josefa was a “puppet of the military”.<sup>84</sup> Ratu Iloilo had acted contrary to the traditional political norm it seemed. To some, like Catholic Archbishop Petero Mataka, now a military regime supporter, Reverend Tuikilakila’s language rang hollow. Mataka in another thinly veiled reference to some senior Methodist ministers said, “We

can no longer turn a blind eye to the biased political stances that some of our churches have taken.”<sup>85</sup>

As mentioned the Great Council of Chiefs was vigorously and unambiguously opposed to the takeover. Chairman of the GCC, Ratu Ovini Bokini, who before the coup described as “disgusting” comments made in spite of the GCC by military commander Bainimarama, condemned the coup d'état outright. He clearly stated that the Council would refuse to recognize the interim government appointed by the military.<sup>86</sup> The military's actions to return executive authority to Iloilo may have however ‘thrown the GCC off-guard’ as it would have been pleased to see its resolution to recognize him as President fulfilled.<sup>87</sup> As events unfolded Chairman Ratu Ovini became wary of the military's hold over the President, saying, “the GCC could reconsider its support for the President Ratu Iloilo if comments he made yesterday were illegal.”<sup>88</sup> Ratu Iloilo had supported the military takeover as “necessary at that time”. Bokini had earlier denounced his predecessor, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who was apparently claiming to be mediating between the Great Council of Chiefs and the Military.<sup>89</sup> Ganilau sympathized with the motives though not the method of the coup. Ratu Epeli then became interim Minister of Fijian Affairs. For his stance against the military, Ratu Ovini was hounded out as chairman by the military in the wake of the coup. He was finally removed and the Council suspended in August of 2007 after it did not back Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, President Iloilo's and the military regime's nominee for Vice- President.

Consequently in what became the extensive purging of the Fijian administration under the previous Qarase government, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs Adi Litia Qionibaravi responsible for the GCC secretariat was dismissed for ‘non co-operation’ on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December by the regime. The majority of Government CEO's of the Qarase administration were to follow and had their contracts terminated as well. Meli Bainimarama the older brother of the Commander took over the CEO Fijian Affairs post. Adi Litia, like many other indigenous Fijian government and statutory body executives was also accused of alleged corruption by Bainimarama and detained by the military.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to analyse the role of the military in Fijian politics as defined by the three coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006. The concept of the usurpation and supplanting of the traditional Bauan sacred king by the warrior chief as symbolizing and inspiring military intervention in politics is the crux of the thesis. This event in history is emblematic of the role of the military in Fijian politics. The sacred king-warrior chief thesis shows that there is a political strategic culture that links the past to the present in explaining Fiji's coups. The usurpation of power by the young from the old has been a recurring theme in Fijian culture that stretches back to the Nakauvadra mythology. The rise of the pre-eminent Bauan kingdom with the displacement of the Roko Tui Bau by the Vunivalu resonates with contemporary politics.

Commodore Bainimarama's relationship to Ratu Josefa Iloilo and the incumbent President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau in many ways echoes that of a traditional Vunivalu, mimicking that of the warrior chief to the sacred king. Emblematic of the old order, military and political power, however, resides with Bainimarama as Commander of the military and Prime Minister. The manipulation of the President's office has been a feature of the military's rise to power. The Government's Draft Constitution released on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2013, which states that the Prime Minister rather than the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, strengthens my argument and thesis by locating key state power and authority over the military in the figure of the *bati* turned *turaga*.<sup>1</sup> These sections of the new constitution do not follow the logic of the Westminster tradition, which endows an apolitical Governor-General or President with authority over the armed forces, but instead the logic of Fijian cultural tradition which, under certain circumstances, places overwhelming power in the hands of one man over his people.

The custom of respect for chiefs was codified and buttressed the colonial Fijian orthodoxy. The nascent colonial military was imbued with the traditional chief-warrior relationship based on customary law. During World Wars I, II and the Malayan Anti-Communist Campaign, Ratu Sukuna used these global conflicts

to showcase this relationship and further the interests of the iTaukei Fijian elite. The loyalty and fighting prowess of Fijians forged even stronger political bonds with the Europeans at the expense of the Indo- Fijians. The thesis, therefore, placed emphasis on the Fijian elite-Fijian military relationship.

The salient characteristic that has underpinned the coups has been the tumultuous relationship between the Fijian institution of chiefs and the military elite as encapsulated in the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. Rabuka's and also Bainimarama's relationship to chiefs has been turbulent. The relationship between the Methodist Church and traditional politics has also existed since the advent of Christianity in Fiji. Early Missionaries readily saw themselves as agents of political and social reforms. This nexus underpinned the coups and influenced the thinking of prominent Methodist pastors such as Reverends Tomasi Raikivi and Manasa Lasaro, who played leading roles in the 1987 coup. Bainimarama, wary of these links, has kept a close watch on church and traditional leaders. During the 1987 coup, the military and these two Fijian institutions, the chiefs and the Church, seemed to be acting in concert though fundamentalist aspirations were to mar relations. Rabuka's coup was, in part, an attempt to return the rule and right of the old chiefly-dominated Fijian order.

What initially activated the coups was the social and neo-traditional bond between Rabuka and his group of officers with the political pressure group, the iTaukei Movement. This hastily assembled political front embodied a new political force of urban mass-based Fijians from all social strata. They were a challenge to the dominance of the chiefs, even while claiming to defend inherent traditional structures. Given Rabuka's commoner background and at times impulsive military demeanour, his relationship with the traditional power-brokers of Fijian politics steadily became strained. Rabuka's asserting control in September of 1987 was an affront to the compromise formulated by the traditional Fijian leadership of Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara in the stillborn Deuba Accord. Rabuka, however, was granted a life membership in the Council signifying an acknowledgement of and silent assent to his actions. This was an unprecedented political compromise undertaken by what was basically a chiefly institution for chiefly deliberation.



Rabuka's coup was often explained as the result of inter-ethnic political tensions where indigenous Fijians having lost political power were claiming what was theirs perpetually. The ethnic conflict hypothesis, however, as a generator of coups in general is arguable. Instead the prevalence of ethnic outbidding by political elites has made the instrumentalist conflict view for the 1987 coup compelling. It is argued that Ratu Mara and elements from within his Alliance Party were the benefactors of Rabuka's coup. Brij Lal is adamant that the takeover was manipulated by politicians with personal interests at stake, a substantiation of the instrumentalist view. Rabuka's 1987 coup therefore reflected the protection of the neo-traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship, where the modern *bati* was protecting Fijian political supremacy and the authority of the chiefs. This is evidenced in the adoption of the ethnically skewed 1990 Constitution under the influence of the Great Council of Chiefs.

The unintended consequence of Fiji's involvement in international peacekeeping has been debated. It is argued that peacekeeping has led to the military's adoption of a political mediator self- image. Peacekeeping as a role has allowed the military to keep a large standing force that is pre-disposed to political intervention.

The 2000 coup profoundly re-shaped the thinking of senior officers and one that entailed a reorientation of the RFMF as a whole. Initially, there was considerable ambivalence and RFMF backing for a full-scale military coup was by no means out of the question. The RFMF might have chosen to support its IMS colleagues inside parliament. Provincial loyalties might have led people from the core rebel provinces like Naitasiri, Rewa and Tailevu to break ranks with those from other parts of the country. Regional loyalties also surfaced with the *Yasayasa vaka Ra* calling for autonomy for the West from the three traditional confederacies. When Major Jo Savua and the Engineers regiment marched into parliament, there might have been a broader RFMF rallying to the George Speight cause. What the senior ranking officers could all agree on was that the crisis had to be handled patiently and carefully due to the hostage situation. The military in 2000, from being seen as ambivalent, came to be applauded for saving the nation. However, its actions had more to do with

institutional defence rather than the squashing of ethno-nationalism. In the immediate aftermath of the coup the issue of ethno-nationalism had to be treated sensitively within a predominantly Fijian institution. The military's ambivalence stemmed from the military's seeming accession to Speight's changing demands.

Ultimately, the military held out against the hostage-takers and arrested and imprisoned George Speight and his supporters. In 2000, the military had increasingly assumed a 'guardian role' and came to (i) see itself as protecting the nation from Speight's ethno-nationalism, (ii) when the Qarase led government was installed, deem his 'mandate' to be that of the military as Qarase was part of the Fijian technocratic elite which Bainimarama often has reiterated 'was to do what it was told to do'. This thinking resurrects Rabuka's military-imposed conditions when handing back government to Ratu Mara in December 1987. This included regular consultations with senior army officers on government policy, and the exclusion of the Fiji Labour Party/NFP coalition members from Cabinet. Claims of a multi-racialist orientation, and the historical appeal to the 2000 events as evidence of that preparedness to quash the forces of ethno-nationalism, were propaganda devised in the later context of growing frictions with the Qarase government, to appeal to Indo-Fijians, domestic elites and overseas sympathisers. During the hectic and rapidly shifting events of May-June 2000, institutional survival was the uppermost consideration for the majority of serving senior officers in the Land Force Command.

After the military mutiny of 2000, when Bainimarama escaped with his life, an obvious deep seated distrust of Fijian political and communal leaders was left to fester in the military leader. In retrospect a combination of government policies such as the affirmative action programme for indigenous Fijians, and the formation of a military interventionist coalition with politicians encouraged the military leader into engaging in politics.

Bainimarama became convinced that Qarase was not acting in the national interest and was peddling an ethnic agenda (in particular via the agriculture scam to buy votes in the lead up to the August 2001 elections). Bainimarama began to rue relinquishing power and suspected SDL/CAMV corruption and

cronyism were at play in running government. As time went on, Bainimarama and his military spokesman Major Leweni became more critical of government publically. The chasm between Bainimarama and Qarase was left unbridged until it was too late. It allowed room for the argument to take hold, among a broader coalition beyond the military, that Bainimarama was protecting the national interest.

The cause of the emerging antagonism between Bainimarama and Qarase was mainly political misperceptions that led to wrong policy choices. Qarase in the end was willing to compromise by shelving the controversial Bills. Bainimarama however was driven by his misperception and by opportunist stakeholders spurring him into escalating his antagonism with Qarase and finally into executing the 2006 coup.

Since the 2006 coup the military has filled the void left by the decline of the paramount chiefs. The military in many ways has seemingly reproduced the long lost order and discipline of Fijian village life, which has been heavily eroded by urbanization and other pressures. Over the last decade, the military has publically challenged and inverted the neo-traditional order of the prominent paramount chiefs of the three confederacies at the apex of political power. In a sense the military, in emasculating the GCC, is superimposing a fourth confederacy of its own with the military as a national constituent sitting above traditional Vanua politics. The military still remains 99% ethnic Fijian despite the regime's espoused multiracialism, casting doubt on Bainimarama's claims to be transforming Fiji in a multiracial direction. By 2006, the senior military command had become estranged from the paramount chiefs, although a pliant president was retained as a figurehead and a few officers close to the old chiefly order stood alongside Bainimarama hoping to cash in on an authoritarian future.

The 2006 coup, again to recapitulate the core theme, typified the power inversion of the sacred king by the warrior chief. The neo-traditional chiefly elite-military relationship had previously functioned in a symbiotic patron-client political relationship post-Independence. As epitomized by the removal of President and high chief Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the 2000 coup figuratively

was the fulcrum of this relational shift, which was under way at that time but not complete. The political antagonism from 2001-2006 reflected this power swing in the making as the military began rhetorically countermanding and confronting the ruling SDL government and its associated elite. The origin of the 2006 military takeover of the elected SDL-FLP government is, therefore, argued to be rooted in the unfinished business of the 2000 coup. Bainimarama on numerous occasions has referred to the 'events of 2000' and the 'ethno-nationalist threat', to warn his opponents or justify his coup of 2006.<sup>2</sup> Coup sympathizers such as Mahendra Chaudhry and Dr Shaista Shameem also belaboured the 'events of 2000' to legitimize the 2006 coup.

We have analyzed the case for military intervention in the 1987, 2000 and 2006 coups. After the 1987 coup, the military reinstated high chiefs Mara and Ganilau and adhered to the doctrine of Fijian paramountcy. In 2000, the military began a process of asserting its control over the chiefly elite and its associates. Through the 2006 coup the military has inverted the traditional *Turaga-Bati* relationship, and assumed control in its own right -- though still behind the figurehead of a chiefly president, as indeed was true of ancient Bau, where, despite the revolution, the post of *Roko Tui Bau* ('sacred king') remained despite the new ascendancy of the *Vunivalu* ('warrior chief'). We described the emergence of the pre-coup coalition between the military, civil society groups and political stakeholders and how the coups of 2006 like those of 2000 and 1987 was supported by irrational political fears.

Even though the government tried to reduce the risk of a coup by acceding to all military demands including suspending controversial Bills and increasing pay and allowances for the military, the coup nevertheless took place. Bainimarama exaggerated the threat of ethno-nationalism, depicting the nation as being at the political mercy of its corrupt adherents. Allegations of manipulation of the democratic process as inherent in the SDL political agenda were rife though they proved baseless. Today, the human security dimension of defence is underpinned by the mediator role of Fiji's military. This argument has led to the militarization of government and the re-defining of the traditional chief-warrior relationship. The *bati* has replaced the *turaga* as the ruling elite, and the

inclusive institutions vital for a prosperous democracy have also been supplanted rather than promoted.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiji Government, *2013 Draft Constitution*, Chapter 4, Part B, Sect 91(2) p.46, 21 Mar 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Fiji Sun*, 'Warning to the Great Council of Chiefs', 9 Mar 2006.

## Epilogue

### Introduction

In April 2009 the Fiji Court of Appeal, ruled the 2006 coup illegal. This time the coup regime had no intention of accepting the judgment of the courts on its legal authority, and no intention of returning to the voters, at least for a number of years. On the day after the judgment, the coup leader Bainimarama set in train a military revolution and 'New Legal Order' that far superseded anything seen in Fiji before. Acting through an ailing and compliant President, he dismissed the entire judiciary, abrogated the constitution and handed the country over to himself and his military forces for the next five years. He declared a state of emergency, muzzled the media, expelled foreign journalists, blocked the FM transmission of Radio Australia, detained the highly respected Governor of the Reserve Bank, Savenaca Narube, and, in an effort to avert a foreign exchange crisis, devalued the Fiji dollar by 20 per cent. He also turned decisively against the GCC, the Methodist Church and the Labour Unions.

### Militarization of Government

In the days after the takeover of the Qarase government, Commodore Bainimarama in announcing his 'clean up campaign' made it explicitly clear that, 'no one in the military would benefit from the coup.'<sup>1</sup> Over five years after the coup, having occupied the position of Prime Minister himself, along with seven other ministerial portfolios, Bainimarama and more than fifty other officers are entrenched in senior government appointments in support of this anti-corruption campaign. Indeed since the coup, military officers have become beneficiaries of the takeover in a nation where, economic growth has been poor and human rights abuses common.<sup>2</sup> Claims of massive political corruption were critical to the justification of the coup, but with the passage of time concrete evidence has been lacking, convictions have been few and those show trials that have been conducted have largely targeted the regime's enemies. In August 2012, Qarase was finally jailed for a year on dubious charges, allegedly committed two decades ago unrelated to his time as Prime Minister. Serious charges against former Chief Justice Daniel Fatiaki were dropped after he accepted a payoff, and thus made less likely any challenge to the government's

new appointee in that post. The emphasis for the regime though has shifted to ‘long overdue’ economic development and electoral constitutional reforms to create a stable political order. The military elite now see themselves as more than mediators; they see themselves as rulers supplanting the chiefs and their associated elites, whom they blame for Fiji’s political instability.

What is apposite is Morris Janowitz’s definition of this ‘professional self image’ and even more so the ‘politics of wanting to be above politics’ now being cultivated by Commodore Bainimarama and his military elite.<sup>3</sup> A photo that appeared in the *Fiji Sun* after the swearing-in ceremony of the Constitution Commissioners captures this pervasive political oversight by the military regime.



Photo 6. Constitution Commission Members after swearing-in at Suva High Court. Sitting from left, Penelope Moore, Taufa Vakatale, Professor Yash Ghai Dr Satendra Nandan, and Professor Christina Murray.

DPP Christopher Pryde (standing second from left and Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum (standing third from left), Col Mosese Tikoitoga (standing far right), Image: *Fiji Sun*.

To further illustrate the point, in July 2012 even before the five member Constitution Commission began soliciting public submissions, the regime had promulgated a decree requiring immunity for those involved in the 2006 and earlier coups to be entrenched in the new constitution. In a press statement intended for the regime and the military, the Commissioners stated ‘This type of prospective immunity is most unusual, perhaps unique, and, we believe,

undesirable.’<sup>4</sup> The Ghai Draft Constitution was subsequently discarded in December 2012 with the aid of the compliant President, Nailatikau.

Karawan had described this self image of the Egyptian Free Officers Organization that gave rise to the recently deposed regime of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak:

The army officers perceived themselves as efficient nation builders, as members of a meritorious and not-ascriptive institution, as possessing highly needed organizational and administrative skills such as discipline, planning, and familiarity with modern technology. They compared these self images with their images of the politicians of the old order: social decadence, endemic corruption, privileges for the few, and lack of effectiveness in meeting the national challenges. These challenges the leaders of the new order argued, could be met only by getting rid of the divisive features of competitive systems and building one organization to mobilize the public in pursuit of superior objectives for the nation.<sup>5</sup>

This description is pertinent to the present Fiji military elite’s political epoch that has emerged. The military started out, after independence, as the instrument of a parallel state staffed by paramount chiefs and their associates. The Great Council of Chiefs, the Fijian Affairs Board, the Native Land Trust Board and the provincial councils gave the state a dualistic aspect, and coexisted alongside the formal edifice of Westminster democracy, multi-ethnic municipal councils in the towns, and a multi-ethnic if largely Indo-Fijian -led labour movement. Even as it seized power in 1987, some tension was apparent in military relations with that ruling hierarchy of Fijian chiefs. That friction was magnified by the 2000 crisis, and in the years that followed the military increasingly broke away from its former controls. Given the historical *Turaga-Bati* relationship and the military’s overwhelming ethnic Fijian makeup, many had assumed that the corporate interests of the ruling elite and the military would always converge. This premise has been overturned. Since the 2006 coup, the military has staked out its own interpretation of national interests and ‘good governance’ at the expense of the chiefly elite and its associates.

Contrary to Bainimarama’s assurances about the coup-makers not benefitting from their action in overthrowing the government, there has been a deliberate staffing of the upper echelons of government with military officers. Reversing his previous position, Bainimarama claimed in 2010 that ‘only the military can bring about change.’<sup>6</sup> It became apparent to Bainimarama that in order to bring



about the revolutionary changes he wanted in society; he would have to rely on his military officers and military autocratic rule.

Since the 2006 coup, the militarization of senior government posts has continued unabated. Regular, reservist and retired military officers now hold or have held senior positions as President, Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors and as board members of various statutory bodies in the military interim government (see Table below). Furthermore, families of military officers have also conspicuously been elevated to various statutory bodies. It became quite apparent that in order to enforce and sustain his authoritarian regime, Bainimarama co-opted fellow senior officers to run government. By appointing senior serving military officers as Commissioners of the four Divisions, Bainimarama was able to ensure a high military profile in national development. The most significant aspect of the militarization of the top echelons of government however were the appointments to cabinet of the two high chiefs and former Commanders of the military – Brigadiers Nailatikau and Ganilau – and the subsequent elevation of Nailatikau first as Vice-President and then as President. This inclusion, within the military at least, served to reinforce the *Turaga-Bati* relationship. The militarization process has also seen officers in multiple positions or switching appointments with regularity at the whim of Bainimarama.

Table 4; *Military Officers in Cabinet and the Civil Service since December 2006.*

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**A. Cabinet**

Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama	Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and National Planning and Sugar, Public Service, People's Charter for Change, Information, Provincial Development, Indigenous and Multi-Ethnic Affairs.
Captain Timoci Lesi Natuva	Minister for Public Utilities, Works and Transport.

Colonel Samuela Saumatua	Minister for Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment.
Commander Viliame Naupoto	Minister of Youth and Sports.

**B. Ambassadors/Diplomatic Corp**

Commodore Esala Teleni	Ambassador –China.
Lt Col Neumi Leweni	First Secretary –China.
Lt Col Pita Alifereti	First Secretary- China.

**C. Civil Service**

Commodore Esala Teleni	Commissioner of Police.
Brigadier Ioane Naivalurua	Commissioner of Prisons/Police.
Lt Col Ifereimi Vasu	Commissioner Prisons.

**Permanent Secretaries**

Lt Col Pio Tikoduadua	Prime Minister’s Office.
Lt Col Mason Smith	Ministry of Agriculture.
Cmdr Francis Kean	Public Utilities, Works.
Lt Col Inia Seruiratu	Provincial Development and Multi-Ethnic.
Lt Col Neumi Leweni	Lands.
Lt Col Manasa Vanigi	Sugar.
Cmd Viliame Naupoto	Fisheries and Forestry.

**Deputy Permanent Secretaries**

Colonel Apakuki Kurusiga	Fijian Affairs Board.
Lt Col Serevi Vananalagi	Min of Works, Transport and Public Utilities.

**Divisional Commissioners**

Lt Col Mosese Tikoitoga	Divisional Commissioner Central.
Lt Col Inia Seruirtu	Divisional Commissioner Northern.

Lt Col Ilai Moceica	Divisional Commissioner Northern.
Lt Cmdr Jo Cawaki	Divisional Commissioner Western.
Lt Col Ifereimi Vasu	Divisional Commissioner Eastern.
Lt Col Bale Tuitubou	Divisional Commissioner Central.
Lt Col Netani Rika	Divisional Commissioner Eastern.

**Others**

Maj Nemani Vuniwaqa	Director Immigration.
Lt Col Jonasio Mara	Director Government Pharmaceuticals.
Captain Aca Rayawa	Director Public Prosecutions.
Lt Commander S Naqali	Director Fisheries.
Lt Cmdr E Salusalu	Director Government IT Services.
Lt Col George Langman	Deputy Commissioner FICAC.
Lt Pajili Dobui	Director DISMAC.
Capt Sanaila Seru	Chief Investigator FICAC.
Commander Francis Kean	Fiji Govt Shipping Head. <sup>2</sup>
Capt I Raturala	Director National Planning.
Major Tukana	Logistic officer Prisons Dept.
Major Kaurasi	Training officer Prisons Dept.
Maj Aseri Rokoura	Private Secretary to PM.
Maj Penioni Naliva	Private Secretary to PM.

**D. Military Officers on Boards of State-Owned Enterprises and Government or Quasi-Government Authorities**

Fiji Post	Brig Ioane Naivalurua.
Airports Fiji Ltd	Lt Col Pio Tikoduadua.
Fiji Rugby Union	Col Moses Tikoitoga.
Fijian Holdings Ltd	Brig Aziz Mohamed.
Fiji TV	Lt Col Neumi Leweni.
Fiji Ports Corporation Ltd	Cmdr Joeli Cawaki, Francis Kean.
Tropik Wood Industries Ltd	Lt Col Ratu Tevita Mara.
Fiji Broadcasting Commission	Capt I Raturala.
Housing Authority	Cmdr Mosese Semi.

## **E. Former Senior Military Officers in key Government Positions**

Brigadier Epeli Nailatikau	President.
Brigadier Epeli Ganilau	Minister Defence, National Security and Immigration. <sup>7</sup>
Commander Netani Sukanaivalu	Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.
Major Ana Rokomakoti	Registrar Ministry of Justice.
Maj Timoci Tuisawau	CEO Airport Fiji Ltd.
Colonel Dr. Jona Senilagakali	Director RFMF Medical Scheme.
Major Isikeli Mataitoga	Ambassador Brussels/Japan.
Major Sila Balawa	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chief Protocol.
Major Laifone Osborne	Principal Officer Immigration.
Major L V Seruiratu	Principal Officer Immigration.
Maj Jo Vucago	Special Administrator Lautoka City Council.
Major Pacolo Luveni	Principal Legal Officer Police Force.
Sgt SoroToutou	Deputy Elections Supervisor.

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### **Notes;**

<sup>1</sup> Panels A-C include serving military officers at the time of the coup of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006 who were subsequently given civil service appointments, entailing salaried public service positions, or on various boards and held these as of 1.4.2010. Panel D includes top-ranking government officials who are reservists or with close family links to the RFMF.

<sup>2</sup> In April 2010, it was announced that the Fiji Navy, under the direction of Commander Francis Kean, were to take over the running of Government Shipping Services Ltd. (*Fiji Sun* 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

### **The Future of the Turaga-Bati Relationship**

In its haste to create an equitable society, the military regime dismantled Itaukei institutions and purged its associated political and business elites it blamed as the root causes of political instability and backwardness. Perhaps we need to take stock of recent literature to understand what has really happened globally and what is happening as in the case of Fiji. In *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of*

*Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, authors Professors Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson brilliantly make the case that inclusive political institutions in support of inclusive economic institutions are key to sustained prosperity and political stability.<sup>8</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson argue through numerous historical examples right up to the Arab Spring in Egypt and Syria, that a nation's economic fate is not determined by geography or culture but by its man made institutions. Powerful people always and everywhere seek to grab complete control over government, be they crony capitalists, communist politburos or despotic dictators. Powerful elites rig the rules to benefit themselves at the expense of the many.

In many post colonial and post cold war states, polities that are characterized by extractive institutions reproduce themselves overtime in recurring patterns. These institutions controlled by elites ossify or fail to adapt undermining broader social progress. Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs and its associated elite's controlled Fijian Holdings Ltd have been singled out as such by the military regime. Unfortunately many despotic rulers in promising inclusive political and economic institutions and empowerment of the people have reneged on those assurances and instead delivered more extractive and repressive institutions in collusion with new elites often constitutionally sanctified by law.

Father Kevin Barr, a coup apologist turned whistleblower, who was the chair of the Fiji Wages Council, provides an insight into the repressive Bainimarama regime. In an article titled, '2011 Was Not a Good Year for the Workers of Fiji' on an anti-regime website, Barr said the regime introduced the controversial Essential National Industries Decree without consulting the Employment Relations Board. The priest mentions a strong lobby of employers who have the ear of Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum and who were operating outside due process.<sup>9</sup> He described it as 'crony capitalism'. He also said the 2012 Budget did not put money in workers' pockets as claimed by the regime.<sup>10</sup> Father Barr further contested a statement made by Attorney General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum that said, 'The Bainimarama Government, as you can see from our track record, has been on the forefront of improving wages for those workers who have been on the margin of poverty.'<sup>11</sup> Barr revealed, 'I wish to take a brief review of 2011

from the viewpoint of the workers of Fiji. It may have been a great year for employers and investors but not for the ordinary workers of the country.<sup>12</sup> Startling revelations also came from former Fiji Court of Appeal judge William Marshall QC who claimed that 'there was no longer judicial independence in the country and that Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum should be dismissed.'<sup>13</sup> These are classic examples of 'new cronyism' where in an attempt to eradicate extractive institutions and 'old cronyism,' the incoming military regime has in fact set up its own elites to shore up its authoritarian rule and continue its own extractive institutions.

The supplantment of Fiji's indigenous institutions such as the GCC and its political associates the SDL Party and their illegal removal from power have only served to recreate the extractive institutions in other forms with new elites. The *bati* have replaced the *turaga* as ruling elites, but the inclusive institutions vital for a prosperous democracy have also been supplanted with politically extractive ones and the *bati*, despite the promises of 2006, have failed to revolutionize society by any measure. Furthermore, five years after the much promised clean up coup, economist Biman Prasad echoing fellow economist Wadan Narsey, has claimed Bainimarama has not delivered economic prosperity.<sup>14</sup> The disillusionment of coup supporters such as Father Barr, Ganilau and Chaudhry reflects this shift. Nevertheless, 'crony capitalism' continues to flourish. Acemoglu and Robinson stated that many nations that fail to produce prosperity and perpetuate poverty fall into the coup trap by promising inclusive political and economic institutions. They in fact perpetuate extractive institutional patterns as a result of this vicious cycle of repressive regimes. The supplantment of the *turaga* and their associates by the *bati* has led to the reincarnation of extractive rather than inclusive political and economic institutions. The military that had intervened to protect a ruling class had eventually become a political class itself, an inversion of the status quo. Coups have been the critical turning points in this military self re-definition. The Fiji military has 'become a *homo politicus* in its own right'.<sup>15</sup>

Further still, there is conjecture as to Bainimarama's potential usurping of the presidential role in the future. This would entail a further shift away from Fiji's

neo-traditional politics based on the Westminster Parliamentary model. In March of 2013 the Government's Draft Constitution was unveiled in place of the discarded Ghai Draft Constitution. The Government's Draft assigned to the Prime Minister, (amongst other powers) the office of Commander-in-Chief of the military, previously held by the President. The role inversion emblematic of the *Vunivalu* over the *Roko Tui Bau* and the *bati* over the *turaga*, finally I suggest, has become a political reality. Not only in actual deed but formerly constitutionalized.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Fiji Times*, 'All About Good Governance', 17 Nov 2007

<sup>2</sup> See International Monetary Fund, *Republic of Fiji, IMF Country Report 12/44*, at [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org).

<sup>3</sup> Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*, University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> Fiji Constitution Commission Press Statement, 19 Jul 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Ibrahim A. Karawan, 'Egypt' in C P. Demopoulos and Cynthia Watson, eds, *The Political Role of the Military: An International Handbook*, Greenwood Publishing Group, London, 1996, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Fiji Village.com, 'Political Upheavals Won't Happen Again', 11 Mar 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Ratu Epeli resigned in Nov 2010 as Minister after being asked to expel the American chief executive of Fiji Water's local bottling operation, David Roth.

<sup>8</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://crosbiew.blogspot.co.nz/2012/03/2011-was-not-good-year-for-workersof.html> accessed 14 Aug 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Coupfourandahalf.com, '2011 Was Not a Good Year for the Workers of Fiji,' 31 Mar 2012.

<sup>11</sup> *Fiji Times*, 8 August 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Coupfourandahalf.com, '2011 Was Not a Good Year for the Workers of Fiji,' 31 Mar 2012.

<sup>13</sup> *Radio New Zealand*, 'Former Court of Appeal judge in Fiji calls for AG's dismissal', 18 Sep 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Biman Prasad, Pacific Update Fiji Presentation at ANU Crawford School, 6 Sep 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Lawson, 'The Military Versus Democracy in Fiji: Problems For Contemporary Political Development', in R. J. May and V. Selochan, eds, *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2004, pp. 132-147.



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## **List of People Interviewed and Personal Communication**

### **Academics**

Appana, Subbash (Dec 2011)  
Aspinall, Edward (Aug 2009)  
Chand, Satish (May 2009)  
Croissant, Aurel (Mar 2012)  
Dinnen, Sinclair (Apr 2009)  
Hegarty, David (Aug 2009)  
Kabutaulaka, Tarcisius (Nov 2010)  
Korovavala, Lesi (Sep 2009)  
Kumar, Avinash (Nov 2011)  
Lamour, Peter (Dec 2011)  
Lawson, Stephanie (Dec 2011)  
Lowry, Robert (Jul 2010)  
Macnaught, Tim (May 2009)  
May, Ron (May 2009)  
Meo, Jovilisi (Oct 2010)  
Narsey, Wadan (Oct 2010)  
Nation, John Dr (Jun 2011)  
Nayacalevu, Ramulo (Feb 2012)  
Norton, Robert (Oct 2010)

Okole, Henry (Feb 2011)  
Rakuita, Tuinawi (Oct 2011)  
Ratuva, Steve (Dec 2011, Jul and Sep 2012)  
Rika, Nacanieli (Sep 2009)  
Samisoni, Mere (Nov 2011)  
Scarr, Deryck (May 2009)  
Tonkin-Covell, John (Oct 2010)  
Tuwere, Ilaitia (Jul 2011)  
Vakaoti, Patrick (Jan 2012)  
Vakaoti, Vanisha (Oct 2011)

### **Fiji Police**

Driver, Mosese former Deputy Commissioner (May 2009)  
Rasiga, Jo former Dir CID (Sep 2011)

### **RFMF**

Cakau, Isireli Sgt CRW (Dec 2007)  
Dakai, Serupepeli Lieutenant (Aug 2011)  
Driti, Pita Brigadier (Nov 2011)  
Gadekibau, Feoko Private, CRW (Dec 2007)  
Gavidi, Isoa (Jun 2010)  
Henning, Patrick Lt Col (Nov 2005)  
Kacisolomone, Ilaisa Colonel (Mar 2006)  
Lotawa, Viliame Sgt CRW (Aug 2009, Jun 2010)  
Mara, Tevita Lt Col (June 2011, Nov 2011)  
Miller, Sachiko (Feb 2011)  
Mills, Barbados Cpl CRW (Dec 2007)  
Misivono, Jotama Captain (May 2013)  
Mohamed, Aziz Brigadier (Aug 2007)  
Mua, Metuisela Lt Col (Dec 2007)  
Nabukete, Kele Lt (Mar 2012)  
Namulo, Pauliasi- Pte CRW (Dec 2007)  
Pickering, John Lt Col (Mar 2006)  
Pickering, Samuel Lt Col (Feb 2011)  
Raivoce, Sakiusa Lt Col (Mar 2009, Apr 2010)  
Raravula, Solomone Lt Col (Feb 2013)  
Saubulinayau, Meli Colonel (Jan 2013)  
Seruvakula, Viliame Lt Col (Aug 2009)  
Tarakinikini, Filipino Lt Col (Aug 2011)  
Tikoduadua, Pio Lt Col (Jun 2012)  
Vinaka, Navi Lt (Jun 2011)  
Vonolagi, Tevita Sgt (Sep 2011)  
Vosavere, Kaminieli Cpl CRW (Dec 2007)  
Vuniwaqa, Nemani Maj (Apr 2009)  
Wainiqolo, Tomasi Lt (Jun 2011)  
Waqa, Uraia Maj (Dec 2008)  
Waqateirewa, Eparama Pte CRW (Dec 2011)

### **Others**

Ah Sam, Glen (Mar 2012)

Anthony, Felix (Jul 2012)  
Apted, Jon (Feb 2009)  
Baravilala, Manasa (Feb 2012)  
Batley, James (Apr 2009)  
Bavoro, Tukana (Apr 2009)  
Bhim, Mosmi (Mar 2011)  
Bolatiki, Maika (Jan 2009)  
Cakacaka, Nemani  
Cakobau, Ratu Apenisa (Jan 2009)  
Chaudhry, Mahendra (Jul 2011)  
Chaudhry, Rajendra (Jul 2011)  
Chetty, Kishore (Jan 2009)  
Cokanauto, Ratu Tuakitau (Apr 2007)  
Dakuvula, Jone (Apr 2011)  
Daunitutu, Suliasi (Mar 2012)  
Dorney, Shaun (Feb 2012)  
Fields, Michael (Jul 2011)  
Forster, Loius (Dec 2011)  
Forster, Sofie (Jan 2009)  
Hazelman, Nezbit (Jan 2009)  
Huggett, Stewart (Aug, Nov 2011)  
Jamanadas, Dilip (Jan 2009)  
Jinna, Kanti (Oct 2011)  
Jinna, Shanti (Jan 2012)  
Kaitani, Simione (Nov 2011)  
Kamakorewa, Ana (May 2011)  
Kawalevu, Keni (Mar 2012)  
Kepa, Ro Temumu (July 2007)  
Khan, Ballu (May 2009)  
Kinivuwai, Peceli (Jan 2012)  
Korodrau, Kelepi (Oct 2010)  
Korovavala, Mereani (Sep 2009)  
Kotobalavu, Joji (Dec 2011)  
Krishna, Radah (Jan 2009)  
Lal, Victor (Jun 2011, Dec 2011, Feb 2012)  
Lalabalavu, Ratu Naiqama (Aug 2007)  
Lavaka, H.R.H. Tupoutoa U (Jun 2011)  
Leahy, Peter Gen. (Aug 2010)  
Leung, Graham (Oct 2011)  
Lobandhan, Vincent (Jan 2009)  
McCully, Murray (Feb 2011)  
Naidu, Adish (Jan 2009)  
Naidu, Kit (Aug 2011)  
Naidu, Richard (Feb 2009)  
Nailumu, Mosese (Dec 2008)  
Naulago, Sivaniolo (Dec 2011)  
Nawaikula, Niko (Nov 2011)  
Nawaqakuta, Rupeni (Dec 2011)  
Qarase, Laisenia (May and Dec 2006)  
Qionibaravi, Adi Litia (Feb 2010)

Railoa, Sai (Sep2011)  
Reddy, Yanktesh Permal (Dec 2011)  
Rinakama, Ratu Peceli (Dec 2007)  
Rotem, Yuval Ambr (Jun 2011)  
Rounds, Mark (Dec 2011)  
Sami, Jaganath (Dec 2006)  
Sanday, Jim (Apr 2009)  
Savu, Tui (Oct 2010)  
Sharma, Devanesh (Apr 2009)  
Sigabalavu, Bale (Nov 2011)  
Solomon, Arthur (Sep 2011)  
Speight, George (Dec 2007)  
Speight, Sam Jnr (Jun 2011)  
Susu, Apimeleki Rev.  
Tabete, Alisi (Aug 2011)  
Tabua, Ilivasi (Jul 2009)  
Tabulutu, Pauliasi (Mar 2012)  
Tagaloa, Peter (Jul 2011)  
Takiveikata, Ratu Inoke (Dec 2007)  
Tasere, Ili (Sep 2011)  
Tikaram, Lawrence (Jan 2009)  
Tikoduadua, Isikeli (Apr 2007)  
Toloi, Wame (Sep 2011)  
Tui, Jone (Jun 2011)  
Tuiloma, Eliesa( Sep 2012)  
Tuisolia, Ratu Sakiusa (May 2010)  
Tulaepa, Sailele .M Hon. (Jun 2011)  
Urai, Daniel (Jul 2009)  
Verebalavu, Penaia (Mar 2012)  
Vitusagavulu, Jesoni (Dec 2009)  
Waqateirewa, Pita U (Jan 2012)  
Yabaki, Akuila (Aug 2011)  
Young, Ted (Oct 2011)  
Zinck, Kenneth (Dec 2007)