

**THE CAUSES OF FIJI'S 5 DECEMBER 2006 COUP**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the causes behind Fiji's 5 December 2006 coup. It takes a twofold approach, first looking at the background causes which illustrate that Fiji was vulnerable to a further coup after the 2000 coup. The study then moves on to an analysis of the triggering causes. This analyses both the motive; consisting of threats to the military's interests and failures of the government, and the opportunity, consisting of a deflation in the government's legitimacy and military cohesion. To test these factors a cross-time comparison of the five instances of high tension between the Fijian military and Government is presented in an effort to identify how the coup differed from those disputes that preceded it. These periods of tension are: the 2004 reappointment of Bainimarama; the Unity Bill dispute; the January 2006 coup threat; the 2006 election; and the December 2006 Coup. From this analysis it was found that threats to the military's interests were key in generating the motive for intervention, but that governmental failures were not a significant factor; while they motivated the military to be a vocal actor, they did not garner the motive for intervention. The opportunity was only found to occur when there was both a deflation in the Government's legitimacy and strong military cohesion. For Fiji's 2006 coup the motivating factors were the threats to the military's interests, from the scheduled Supreme Court ruling on the role of the military, the rivalry with the fully-armed Tactical Response Unit of the Police, and crucially the pending criminal charges against Bainimarama. This coincided with the opportunity for intervention from a drop in the Government's legitimacy as a result of a crisis in the multi-party Cabinet and the Government's growing ethnic bias, along with strong cohesion in the military.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	-	All Nationals Congress Party (1992-1995)
CAMV	-	Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (political party, dominated by supporters of 2000 coup, was in coalition with SDL from 2001 – 2006)
CRW	-	Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (of the RFMF)
DPP	-	Department of Public Prosecutions
EPG	-	Eminent Persons Group (of the Pacific Islands Forum)
EU	-	European Union
FDF	-	Fiji Defence Force (military during WWI)
FLP	-	Fiji Labour Party
FMF	-	Fiji Military Forces (WWII – Independence 1970) (& 1987 – 1990)
GCC	-	Great Council of Chiefs
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Profit
NFP	-	National Federation Party
PAC	-	Public Accounts Committee
PANU	-	Party of National Unity (1998 – present)
RFMF	-	Royal Fiji Military Forces (Independence 1970 – 1987 Coup) / Republic of Fiji Military Forces (1990 – Current)
SDL	-	Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (political party headed by Qarase, in power from 2001 election up till 2006 coup)
SVT	-	Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (political party, also known as the Fiji Political Party (FPP) in English)
TRU	-	Tactical Response Unit (of the police)
VAT	-	Value Added Tax
UN	-	United Nations
WTO	-	World Trade Organisation

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

## *Chapter One*

### INTRODUCTION

On 5 December 2006 Fiji faced its fourth coup. In many ways this was an unusual coup: by nature coups are generally conceived in secret and surprise the unsuspecting Government and its citizens. This coup, however, was well forewarned, even if many observers did not believe the threats of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). The coup was also unusual for Fiji as it was, for the first time, committed against an Indigenous Fijian-dominated Government, which the powerful chiefly hierarchy and nationalist elements strongly supported. In fact, ethnicity, previously the focus of almost all Fijian political crises, played only a background role in this coup. The RFMF, led by Commodore Vorque Bainimarama, overthrew the Government for the alleged purpose of 'cleaning up' the racist policies and corrupt nature of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and his Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party. While this appears to be an altruistic motive, historically most coups have been justified in a similar way, whereas upon closer examination other causes are revealed as more relevant. Thus, the central question of this thesis is: what were the causes of Fiji's 2006 coup?

The 2006 coup had its roots in the coup of May 2000. Commodore Bainimarama, the Commander of the RFMF, was heavily involved in resolving the 2000 coup; in particular, he removed the President Ratu Mara Kamisese and assumed this role under the Doctrine of Necessity. After several months of negotiations, he was then able to bring an end to the crisis through an agreement

that gave many concessions to the coup perpetrators and set up Qarase as the new interim Prime Minister. Soon after, the agreement broke down and Bainimarama had many of those who were involved arrested, often in a brutal manner. This resulted in a mutiny by those within the RFMF with connections to the coup perpetrators, during which Bainimarama's life was directly threatened. A general election was called in 2001, which was won by Qarase's new SDL Party, largely consisting of the interim regime in coalition with the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV) Party, which was composed of nationalist supporters of the 2000 coup. From this time on, Bainimarama took a very central role in the political process in Fiji. Of particular concern to him was the proper prosecution of the perpetrators of the 2000 coup. The SDL/CAMV Government often did not follow through on this and at times ensured the early release of the most high profile convicts.

These tensions were played out on several occasions in the years between the coups. Of particular note are four instances of high tension between the Government and the military: Bainimarama's reappointment in 2004, the Unity Bill dispute in 2005, the January 2006 coup threat, and the 2006 election. On each of these occasions, the possibility of a coup arose, but nothing eventuated. It appeared some sort of balance had been reached where the military would publically criticise the Government but not go as far as to intervene. As noted by the ex Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi:

After the 2001 elections to the eve of the coup, the military played a generally useful if somewhat vocal part in general debate on issues of national interest and concern. There is little doubt this helped to moderate the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) Government's inclination to pander to the nationalist and more extremist elements in its midst. (Madraiwiwi, 2007).

However, this situation changed dramatically on 5 December when, after weeks of threats, Commodore Bainimarama announced that the military had taken control of the country. The conflict started in early October, when the RFMF issued a three-week ultimatum to the Government to dispose of the Promotion of Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill, and the Indigenous Claims

Tribunal Bill, or to resign. The military, and much of the public, viewed these Bills as ethnically biased, and felt they would take the Government's nationalistic stance to a new and unacceptable level. Tensions soared in late October, when the police held seven tonnes of ammunition at Suva Wharf, afraid that it would be used to overthrow the Government. The RFMF then took this ammunition by force. At the same time the Government tried unsuccessfully to supplant Bainimarama as the Commander of the RFMF. While the military called for the removal of the Government over these actions, at this stage they did not intervene, and it appeared that the conflict would simply die away in a similar manner to those that had preceded it.

However, two weeks later a second ultimatum was issued, this time with nine demands to be met within two weeks or for the Government to resign. The demands included the removal of the three Bills but also that Andrew Hughes be removed from the post of Police Commissioner, and for the Police to drop the investigations that they were conducting into Bainimarama's comments and actions against the Government. Then, in a final attempt at mediation, Qarase and Bainimarama met in New Zealand with New Zealand's Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters. In this meeting all nine of Bainimarama's demands were discussed, and, as far as was politically possible under the circumstances, Qarase conceded to them. By this stage, however, it appears that the coup was inevitable, and upon his return to Fiji Bainimarama announced that the Government had until noon on Friday, the following day, to meet his demands in full or be removed. The next day nothing happened, but after the weekend the military made its move, first seizing the Police Tactical Response Unit's (TRU) headquarters and removing all of their munitions. They then cordoned off all Government buildings and surrounded prominent ministers' houses, effectively putting them under house arrest. Then, at 6pm on 5 December 2006 Bainimarama announced on national television that the military had taken control of the country, and that he had assumed the position of President under the Doctrine of Necessity.

## **Literature on the Coup: Existing Explanations**

As of writing, there has been only a small amount of analysis done on the causes of the 2006 coup. Furthermore, much of what has been done are editorials and opinion papers, and thus there is a scant amount of academic research. From the research that has emerged there is little that has looked at the problem with any analytical depth, and even less that has couched the issue within the immense literature on civil-military relations. It is one of the purposes of this thesis to help to fill this gap.

Among the limited literature on the 2006 Fiji coup, certain patterns have emerged in explaining the civil-military problems in the lead-up to the coup, and for the coup itself. Most of these prevailing explanations were captured by the Pacific Islands Forum Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) Report (2007) on the Coup. They found that the underlying causes were: SDL attempts to pardon coup perpetrators of 2000; attempts to discipline or remove Commander Bainimarama and review the RFMF; introduction of alleged racially divisive legislation; and lastly, issues relating to the conduct of the 2006 election and alleged widespread corruption. These factors are discussed below. However, the last two factors will be considered together as they present a very similar point: that the military overthrew the Government because of its malpractices. Also, this list misses the crucial aspect of the disagreement over the proper role of the military which has featured prominently in some of the best research to date, and thus is included in the discussion below.

### *SDL attempts to Pardon Coup Perpetrators*

Many commentators (Dakuvula, 2004; Davis, 2006; Durutalo, 2006; Michael Field, 2006b; Ramesh, 2006) have expressed the view that the cause of the civil-military tensions and ultimately the coup was the SDL/CAMV Government's often successful attempts to pardon perpetrators of the 2000 coup. The basic argument is that the military believed its role was to uphold the rule of law, and took particular interest in the proper prosecution of the 2000 coup perpetrators. This put

the military in opposition to the SDL/CAMV Government, which included many politicians and officials suspected of involvement in the 2000 coup. The Government, therefore, often gave overseas postings to the suspects to avoid prosecution. Furthermore, for those who were prosecuted the Government often granted compulsory supervision orders, which released them from jail often after only a few weeks or months, to serve their sentences extramurally. This often caused disagreement between the military and the Government, and it is the argument of these authors that such confrontations were the root of all the civil-military problems.

Within this literature there are two opinions on the motivation for the military's stance on the proper investigation and prosecution of the 2000 coup perpetrators. One perspective is that the military, and specifically Commodore Bainimarama, was motivated by the 2 November 2000 Mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, which was backed by many involved in the coup and involved an attempt on the Commander's life. It is then argued that Bainimarama was motivated by revenge, to see those who conspired to kill him put behind bars (Michael Field, 2006b). The other perspective is that the military was motivated by the need/desire to uphold the rule of law. This emerged after the court ruling in 2001 on the 2000 coup, which said that the coup was illegal and that the amnesty offered to the perpetrators in the agreement that ended the hostage crisis was invalid because of their non-compliance with other stipulations. Thus, it is argued that the military was simply trying to keep to this ruling and ensure the proper course of justice (Ramesh, 2006). However, other commentators take the more reasonable and/or realistic stance that it was probably a combination of both factors (Dakuvula, 2004).

This explanation is somewhat problematic, as the Government's attempts to avoid prosecution and pardon coup perpetrators had been a consistent theme since the 2001 election, and if anything became less of a problem in the lead-up to the coup. It is thus difficult to justify the overthrow of the Government by these

actions. Surely, this motivated the military to be the vocal actor that it was in the inter-coup period, but it does not help explain why it went the extra step to overthrow the Government.

*Attempts to Remove or Discipline Bainimarama and review of the RFMF*

It is argued by some (Dakuvula, 2004; Michael Field, 2006a; The Review, 1/1/2005; Yabaki, 2007) that the civil-military problems and the coup were essentially a result of the Government attempting to remove or discipline Commodore Bainimarama, and review the RFMF. Over the years since the 2000 coup there were several attempts by the SDL Government to try to remove Bainimarama, particularly in early 2004 when the Government threatened to not renew his contract as Commander, and in late 2006 when the Government unsuccessfully attempted to replace him with a more placid leader. There were also numerous attempts to discipline or charge the Commander with misconduct. During the 2005 Unity Bill dispute the Minister of Home Affairs Josefa Vosanibola unsuccessfully attempted to discipline the Commander, which further fuelled an already tense situation. In late 2005 Bainimarama was personally surcharged for overspending the RFMF budget, which was later found by the Appeal Court to be uncalled for. Then in late 2006 the police began to investigate Bainimarama's actions, and just before the coup it appeared that charges were imminent. Furthermore, a Defence White Paper written in 2004 called for the RFMF to be dramatically downsized, cutting its numbers and budget in half. While this never really got close to implementation, it was periodically brought up by the Government as an option, particularly just after the 2006 election. The military would always react angrily against the suggestion, and then the Government would not follow it through any further. However, it is presumable that the military thought it was part of the long-term plan to cut the size of the RFMF.

Essentially, these authors argue that the coup occurred because these attacks on the military forced it, out of pride or survival, to overthrow the Government. In many respects this thesis agrees with this basic argument;

however, in this simplistic form this perspective fails to really give any direct causation. As briefly shown above the attempts to remove and discipline Bainimarama, and the suggestion to cut the size of the military, were not exclusive to the immediate build up to the coup. They had been happening sporadically since early 2004, and therefore, by themselves, are not adequate indicators as to the occurrence of the coup.

### *Introduction of Alleged Racially Divisive Legislation, and Government Corruption*

Another common explanation for the coup is that the military was acting in the interests of Fiji, to stop the Government from introducing legislation that the military argued was racially divisive, and also to put a stop to Government corruption (Chandrasekharan, 2006; Morris & Magick, 2007; Shah, 2006; Singh, 2007). The racially divisive legislation argument refers to three Bills: the Promotion of Tolerance Reconciliation and Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli bill, and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill.<sup>1</sup> All three of these Bills, it is argued, were biased towards Indigenous Fijian interests, neglecting the Indian community, and sometimes even threatening the economic growth of Fiji. These authors argue that these Bills were a continuation and escalation of the ethnically-based policies that were common in Fiji, a trend that they saw as holding Fiji back from growing as one nation. This is because politics in Fiji is often divided along Indigenous Fijian and Indian Fijian ethnic lines, such that the major political parties support is based upon one ethnic group. Therefore, when in power they implement policies and legislation to appease their ethnically based constituency, often to the detriment of the other major ethnic group.

Furthermore, there were suspicions of widespread Government corruption, and there was even some suggestion that they manipulated the 2006 election. It is argued that the military saw this as a negative pattern that needed to be broken for

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth explanation and discussion of these Bills see chapter 5 for the Unity Bill, and Chapter 8 for the Qoliqoli and Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill.

the good of the nation. Thus, the military had to intervene to stop this pattern and put Fiji in a situation more conducive towards development.

This argument essentially agrees with the justification given by the military, and implies that the RFMF took control for completely altruistic reasons, so as to put Fiji on a more stable path. However, conversely, it is also possible that the military simply appealed to the common mistrust of political trends and used this as a justification for the takeover, when other motivations were more important. It is extremely difficult to know accurately which of these two arguments is more valid; it is one of the goals of this thesis to try to test to see if this justification holds up under in-depth scrutiny.

#### *RFMF's Role*

The last theme that has emerged in this early stage of the literature is on the proper role of the RFMF. It is argued (Michael Field, 2006; Kabutaulaka, 2006; Ratuva, 2006b) that one of the key reasons for the coup was that the role of the military was not properly described, and was interpreted differently by both sides. The military believed that it had a large mandate that included the protection of the well-being of the general populace, whereas the Government believed that the military should ascribe to the principle of separation from politics. Thus, when the military spoke out against the Government on issues of corruption, the early release of prisoners, or racially divisive legislation, these writers argue that the military did so because they believed that it was its role. The Government on the other hand, who saw the military's role limited to military affairs, reacted angrily to these comments, which is where many of the conflicts were born. This general premise does hold some value, and it shall be discussed in greater depth in 'Chapter Three: Fiji's Coup Risk'. However, it is only a background cause; it can help explain why there were such poor civil-military relations, but it gives no real indication as to why and when the coup occurred.

This analytical literature has only just begun, and few have approached it from a rigorous political science standpoint. Thus, there has been to date no convincing or direct causation given for the coup. Obviously, this is a complex situation and no singular answer will suffice, but even when all of these explanations are taken together there are still substantial holes in the understanding of why this coup occurred. It is the purpose of this thesis to try and fill this gap and provide a rigorous understanding of the factors at play and the specific causes of the coup.

### **Methodology**

The basic methodology of this research is that of a case study, which as noted by Yin should be the method of choice when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (2003: 9). The situation under examination here, Fiji’s 2006 coup, certainly falls into this category. The central goal, as noted above, is to find the causes of the coup, which in effect is the same as asking why and how it occurred. Furthermore, Yin goes on to say that a researcher will use a case study when it is desirable to cover contextual conditions when they are highly pertinent to the study. This research takes this perspective, as the complexities of the contextual situation in Fiji were very important to determining the reasons that this coup occurred.

### **Analysis**

To understand why this coup occurred, the analysis must be broken into two parts. First, the background causes will be examined, which will show why Fiji was particularly prone to intervention in the period between the 2000 and 2006 coups. Second, the triggering causes need to be examined, to gain a more accurate picture of the specific causes that set the coup in motion.

The background causes are analysed using the framework developed by Cottey, Edmunds and Forster (2002), which examines: historical legacies, the

political economic and social context, the international context, institutional factors and military culture and professionalism. This has been chosen because it covers all the major propositions in the literature on civilian control, and thus gives a good indication of the background forces at play. From examining these factors, it has been determined that Fiji had a particularly high coup risk in the period since the 2000 coup. This was primarily because of the country's history of coups, its social divisions, the institutional difficulties of civilian control in Fiji, and the professionalism and culture of the RFBF, which was inherently political. This shows why a coup was always likely in Fiji although it does not show the specific causes that set the coup in motion.

The triggering causes are much more difficult to determine, and identifying these is thus the greatest contribution that this thesis has to offer. The reason that this is so difficult is that it is almost impossible to determine which events were crucially important and which had no impact. To assist in this endeavour, this research shall use a cross-time comparison of the four instances of high tension between the military and the Government preceding the coup. These will be compared to the coup itself, to determine where the former conflicts differed from the decisive events surrounding the coup. To do this, a slightly modified version of Nordlinger's (1977) theory on the causes of coups shall be used. This theory considers the coup from the perspective of the military and asks two basic questions: is the military appropriately motivated to intervene, and is there the sufficient opportunity for intervention? For this research, the motive will be considered to consist of threats to the military's interests, and Government failures, while the opportunity will consist of a deflation in the Government's legitimacy, and military cohesion. These factors have been chosen because they are common in the literature on civil-military relations, particularly when considering triggering causes. Table 1 below illustrates the outcome of this analysis.

**Table 1: Triggering Causes and Outcomes for each of the Five Disputes**

<b>Dispute</b>	<b>Re-appointment</b>	<b>Unity Bill</b>	<b>January 2006</b>	<b>2006 Election</b>	<b>December 2006 Coup</b>
<b>Motive</b>					
Military Interests	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Government Failures	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Opportunity</b>					
Legitimacy Deflation	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Military Cohesion	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
<b>Outcome</b>	Vocal opposition, and accused of planning a coup	Vocal opposition, and indirect coup threat	Vocal opposition, threat of intervention, and attempted mutiny	Vocal opposition of the Government	Coup

This study shows that the military attained the motive for intervention only when the military's interests were threatened. These threats, in the case of the coup, came from the pending Police charges against Bainimarama, the Police TRU, which increasingly resembled a palace guard, and the impending Supreme Court Ruling on the role of the RFMF. While the failures of Government were the purported reason given by the military for the intervention, when a comparative analysis is done with the other instances this appears to have minimal significance. This is because it appears to have little impact upon the military's motive to intervene. The military did not have the motive to intervene in all of the disputes that included government failures, while the motive was present in all the disputes that involved the military's interests. Furthermore, the dispute that resulted in the coup was driven by the threats to the military's interests, and each time one came up there was a clear escalation in the conflict.

The opportunity for intervention appears to have only been generated when there was both a deflation in the Government's legitimacy, and strong military cohesion. For the coup, the deflation in the Government's legitimacy was a result of the three controversial pieces of legislation that indicated an increase in the

Government's ethnic bias, and the difficulties in governing as a result of a crisis in the multi-party Cabinet, which alienated much of the population, and brought their ability to govern effectively into question. The cohesion of the military was also strong, because of Bainimarama's continued efforts to remove disloyal officers and replace them with those willing to pledge an oath of loyalty to him.

Thus, the motive was generated through threats to the military's interests, and the opportunity was a combination of a deflation in legitimacy, and strong cohesion in the military forces. When simplified like this, as in Table 2 (below), then the picture of why the RFMF overthrew the Government in December 2006, and not in any of the other disputes, becomes clear, as the coup was the only time that both the motive and the opportunity came together.

<b>Table 2: Motive and Opportunity for Each of the Five Disputes</b>					
<b>Dispute</b>	<b>Re-appointment</b>	<b>Unity Bill</b>	<b>January 2006</b>	<b>2006 Election</b>	<b>December 2006 Coup</b>
<b>Motive</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Opportunity</b>	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

### **Sources**

The information for this research has come from various sources. For the background causes, most of the information is simply secondary resources, as this section is largely a discussion of pre-established trends. However, for the triggering causes the analysis focuses on current events that have not yet been studied in any depth by other researchers, and as such it has been necessary to rely on primary resources. Thus, the majority of information has come from newspaper articles, with further reinforcement and clarity added through interviews gained in a research trip to Fiji in late November 2006.

While newspaper articles are often an inaccurate source of information, they were the only available source so soon after the coup. Every attempt has been

made to make sure that the information contained is as accurate as possible, by using several different sources, primarily *Fiji Live*, *Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun* and *Radio New Zealand International*. If information between these sources conflicted with one another the information has either not been used, or further research was done to find the most probable reality. Yet, because of the lack of concrete sources and thus the heavy reliance upon newspaper articles, there is a chance that some of the information is not entirely accurate. While every attempt was made to make sure that this did not occur, the possibility of inaccuracy still exists, and later work may show where the sources of information have been misleading. Throughout this research, there are detailed references so as any questionable information can be easily traced to the original source and from there any required amendments may be made.

As a further source of information, the author took a research trip to Fiji in late November 2006. At this stage, the research question focused on the difficulties of civil-military relations in Fiji, and not on the causes of the coup as this had not yet occurred. Interviews were conducted with a number of key figures Jioji Kotobalavu, the CEO of the Prime Minister's Office when Qarase was in power, was able to inform the author of the Government's position to the military, particularly in the dispute leading up to the coup. Asaeli Lave, the chief of staff for the Fiji Times, helped clarify some of the inconsistencies in the newspaper articles used for this research and gave a good account of the feelings of the general populace about the conflict. Michael Green, New Zealand's High Commissioner to Fiji, gave a picture of the official standpoint of one of Fiji's closest and most important allies and trading partners. Dr Steven Ratuva, from the University of the South Pacific, who specialises in Fijian civil-military relations, helped to advance knowledge of the intricacies of the situation, particularly the institutional problems. Lastly, Professor Ron Duncan, also of the University of South Pacific who specialises in the political economy of Fiji, was able to clarify the intensity of the economic problems that the country faced, and the potential outcome of the Qoliqoli Bill. In

addition, a concerted effort was made during the trip to talk to as many ordinary Fijians, both Indigenous and Indian, about the dispute, to gain a greater understanding of the perspective of the general populace.

## **Definitions**

Before beginning on the rest of this study, it is first necessary to clarify some commonly used definitions.

### *Coup d'etat*

Usually simplified down to 'coup'. In the general sense, this refers to the sudden overthrow of a government, usually by a small group of people, who replace the top power figures. This definition suits the 2000 coup well, but it is not sufficient for the 2006 coup. Therefore, for the majority of this research the narrower term 'military coup' is implied in the word 'coup', and thus refers to the illegal or forceful removal of government by the military.

### *Military intervention*

This term is used interchangeably with coup. It is used so as to give a better sense that it is a military action and that they are intervening into the political realm.

### *Military*

When this research refers to the military it is usually concerned with the RFMF. While the military can often be defined in a larger sense to also include the police, for this research 'the military' will only cover the Fijian Army and Fijian Navy that together make up the RFMF. Also, in certain circumstances 'the military' will refer to the officer corps of the RFMF; these instances should be clear from the context. This includes the Commander of the RFMF, Commodore Bainimarama, but also specifically the titles of the Deputy Commander, the Chief of Staff, the Land Force Commander and the Strategic Commander, all of which were held by various persons during the conflict.

### *Civil*

'Civil', as in civil institutions, civilian control and civil-military relations in this research refers to the official parts of a state that are non-military. This includes the government, the judiciary, the police and the civil service. Often in this conflict the RFMF opposed the Fijian Government, the civil service, and near the end also the police; however, the judiciary was largely free from their attention. Thus the term 'civil' is used sparingly, as it encompasses too many of the civilian institutions, some of which were never involved in the conflict, or only at various times.

### *Government*

Instead of the term 'civil', often the term 'Government' will be used. This obviously focuses attention onto the particular Government in power, specifically the politicians in the ruling party or parties.

### *Civil-Military*

'Civil-military' refers to the interaction between the civilian institutions and the military.

### *Legitimacy Deflation*

'Legitimacy' refers to the right of the government to govern. This is conferred on the Government by the general populace, and in this research legitimacy is said to have been gained when the Government adheres to the normative and performance goals of the country. Often the term 'legitimacy deflation' will be used to indicate that there is not necessarily a full loss of legitimacy, but rather a deflation, or dip in the legitimacy of the government.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion on legitimacy see Chapter Two > Triggering Causes > Opportunity.

### *Government Failures*

The word 'failure', used in the context of 'government failures', refers to the breakdown of proper governance through corruption, mismanagement, malpractice, or failure to obtain the goals of modernisation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Limitations**

In general this thesis shall limit itself to the period from the 2000 coup to the 2006 coup. As such, the events occurring since the coup shall only be given minimal attention. Specifically, attention shall be placed upon the four instances of high tension and the coup itself, and therefore some of the irrelevant events in-between have not been examined.

As with any socio-political research methodology, the methodology used for this thesis contains some inherent flaws. First, it is possible that there are other causes for the coup that the author has overlooked, and these may be later be shown to be significant. The literature on civil-military relations is extensive, and it is beyond the scope of this research to give a complete review of all the causes presented. Thus, for the sake of practicality, focus has been put upon those factors which re-occur among the literature, or which appear to have a particular importance in the case of Fiji. Other research may find other causes to be of greater significance; however, since the coup is very recent, it is difficult at this stage to assess the outcome. If the argument of this research is incorrect, and the military did intervene to stop the racist practices and corruption of the Government, then this will start to become more obvious over time as they attempt to correct these wrongs. At this stage, however, it appears that the majority of the pre-coup talk about "cleaning up Government" has not been followed though as professed. Only time will reveal the true extent of this motivation.

The factor of government failures has been found to be insignificant, as it neither peaks in the lead-up to the 2006 coup, nor is it the only time that

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on Government Failure see Chapter Two > Triggering Causes > Motive

government failure and the appropriate opportunity were present. However, it is realised that this factor may have an accumulative effect, and that there may be a 'critical mass' of government failure that needs to be reached before the military will intervene. If this is the case then this factor may have a much larger significance than this thesis argues; however this does not diminish the central argument that military interests were of crucial importance to the 2006 intervention.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into four parts. The first part, Introduction, consists of this chapter and Chapter Two: *The Causes of Coups Methodology and Literature*, where the methodology of this research shall be further discussed, and then the two theories used will be expanded upon and their place in the literature explained.

The second part, Background Causes, includes only Chapter Three: *Fiji's Coup Risk*. This will look at the background causes of the coup, using Cottey, Edmund and Forster's framework, where each of the factors: historical legacies; political, economic and social context; international context; institutional factors; and military culture and professionalism will be looked at in reference to Fiji. This will pay particular focus to the period between 2000 and 2006.

The third part, Triggering Causes, contains Chapters Four through Eight: *2004 Reappointment of Bainimarama; The "Promotion of Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill 2005" Dispute; January 2006 Coup Threat; 2006 Election; and December 2006 Coup*. For each of these chapters the theory as modified from Nordlinger (1977) is applied, to examine whether there was the appropriate motive for intervention, generated from threats to the military's interests and government failures, and if there was the adequate opportunity, acquired from a deflation in the Government's legitimacy and military cohesion. The preferable method of achieving this would be to study each situation by only looking at the motive and opportunity present, filling this out with any descriptive content necessary for understanding, and then concluding on why the outcome occurred. However, after

several attempts it was found that this was impossible, as it made an understanding of the situation difficult, as these indicators did not occur in a chronological sequence. Furthermore, one of the key requirements of a case study is to keep context with the analysis, which would not have been possible if the more narrow method of only discussing the specific indicators was used. Therefore, instead the structure used is to first give a description of the events for the incident, and then to discuss what this means, by looking at each of the indicators and determining if the events described showed whether they were fulfilled or not.

The fourth and final part, conclusion, consists solely of Chapter Nine: *Conclusion*. This brings the analysis back together and shows why the coup occurred. It goes on to indicate some of the implications of the findings, and suggests some further research.

## *Chapter Two*

### THE CAUSES OF COUPS: METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE

This chapter is dedicated to explaining in detail the methodology used in this research, with reference to the literature on civil-military relations. The basic methodology of this research is that of a case study, which focuses on the 'how and why' behind Fiji's 2006 coup. However, the design departs somewhat from that commonly used in case studies where the event in question is described and analytical comments on the specific occurrences are given. Rather, a twofold approach is used. First, the background forces which made Fiji a particularly coup-prone state since the 2000 coup will be studied. Second, the triggering causes which specifically set the coup in motion are revealed.

The first component looks at the civil-military problems in Fiji from a somewhat abstract point of view, in an effort to determine some of the background forces that have made Fiji a particularly coup prone state. In particular, the research will look at the specific conditions of the relationship between the Government and the military in Fiji to show why a coup was always a possibility after the 2000 coup. To achieve this, the theoretical framework developed by Cottey, Edmunds and Forster (2002) from their study into civilian control in Eastern Europe will be used. This looks at five categories that cover the major recurrent themes in civilian control research: historical legacies; the political, economic and social context; international context; institutional factors and; military culture and professionalism. The particular situation in Fiji will be studied in reference to each of these

categories, from which it will be determined that Fiji faced a high coup risk in the period studied.

However, simply determining that Fiji faced a high risk of a coup is not adequate in determining how and why the coup occurred. Thus, the second component of this research looks at the coup itself, in an effort to determine the most pertinent triggering causes, and to give a good understanding and description of how the coup occurred. To achieve this, the cross-time comparison method will be used. This method closely resembles a comparative case study, but instead of focusing on different countries, it examines the same country in different time periods (B. G. Peters, 1998: 23). For this research, the instances studied will be: the 2004 reappointment of Bainimarama, the Unity Bill dispute, the early 2006 dispute, the 2006 election and the December 2006 Coup. Inherently, this method most closely resembles the most similar system method, where almost all the crucial components are the same, but the outcome is different. In this circumstance, all five of these instances were periods of high tension between the military and the Government, but only one of them resulted in a coup. Thus, the goal of the second component is to determine what was different in each of these instances, and therefore reveal the key triggering causes behind the coup. To achieve this, four indicators of the motives and the opportunities for intervention have been developed based upon Nordlinger's (1977) theory on the causes of coups. The motives consist of threats to the military's interests and the failure of the government. The opportunities are a sufficient deflation of the government's legitimacy and cohesion of the military. Each of the five instances of high civil-military tension are then tested in Chapter Three against these indicators to reveal how the 2006 coup differed from the other civil-military disputes.

### **Background Causes: Civilian Control**

To determine the coup risk of Fiji, the framework proposed by Cottey, Edmunds and Forster in their book *Democratic Control of the Military in Post Communist Europe: Guarding the Guards* (2002) shall be used. Their framework

was initially developed as a means for assessing the level of civilian control<sup>4</sup> established over the military in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. 'Civilian control' is the measure of the control civilian authorities have over the military, and thus the framework also works well in determining coup risk. The basic assumption is that a state with poor civilian control is at high coup risk, as the state does not enjoy sufficient control over the military. There have been other studies in determining coup risk; however, most of these concern themselves with large datasets and compile quantitative analyses of only a few major factors (see Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Fossum, 1967; O'Kane, 1981). The framework of Cottey, Edmunds and Forster has been chosen here because it was developed for qualitative research on case studies and thus lends itself well to the investigation at hand. Furthermore, it covers all the major positions in the literature on civil-military relations, and accordingly offers a complete understanding of the important factors. Each of Cottey, Edmunds and Forster's categories shall now be discussed in reference to the literature.

### *Historical Legacies*

There are two key factors under the historical legacies category: the impact of the colonial legacy, and the affect of past coups. A common argument in civil-military relations research is that the colonial role of the military will impact upon the institution under independence (Finer, 1970; Gutteridge, 1964; Thompson, 1975). Often colonial administrators used militaries as a tool to enforce unpopular policies upon unwilling citizens; the military, therefore, became synonymous with harshness or violence against its own population, which is a reputation that is hard to overcome. In addition, the past structure of the military, as well as the recruitment methods which may have aimed to give military authority to a minority group, could cause imbalance in a newly independent state (Gutteridge, 1964:15-17). Furthermore, in developing states not only is it difficult for the civilian

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<sup>4</sup> Cottey et. al. refer to this as 'democratic control': this is similar to civilian control but it also entails the extra, and in this case unnecessary, burden of determining democratic strength. Thus for the sake of simplicity it shall be referred to as "civilian control" in this research.

authorities to create an apolitical military and gain civilian control, but the military itself has a desire to assume a greater role in society. In developing states the military has often had an important role in the establishment of the state. Therefore, it will feel strongly associated with the further development and modernisation of the country, and thus will have a greater inclination towards involvement in politics, especially if the civil authorities fail to solve economic or social problems (Gutteridge, 1964: 177).

Other works also look at the affect of history, but rather than the colonial past they look at past civil-military relations, particularly a history of coups, as an influence of the likelihood of further coups (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Finer, 1962; Londregan & Poole, 1990; Zimmerman, 1983). Several reasons are presented for this connection. First, after a coup civilian institutions such as courts and legislatures will often be disempowered, and much of their control lost. This increases the likelihood of further coups, because the strength of these institutions is a key aspect in deterring military intervention. Thus, when the institutions have been damaged this barrier is reduced (Finer, 1962). Second, previous coups have the effect of lowering the moral barrier to overthrowing a democratically elected government. They legitimise the act of gaining power through the means of a coup. This has a profound impact on the society at large, who will accept another coup more readily, and for the military, who would become aware of its ability to overthrow the government (Belkin & Schofer, 2003).

#### *Domestic Political, Economic and Social Context*

The domestic political, economic and social context gives a good indication of the background civilian environment. If signs of weakness are shown here then it will make civilian control much more difficult, and open the way for a potential coup. The first aspect to be examined is the political context, where the focus is on the weakness of civilian political institutions. One of the most influential works in this literature came from Huntington in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). Huntington argues that military intervention is most likely in what

he terms a 'politicised society'. A 'politicised society' is prone to intervention in many forms, such as corruption, clericalism or praetorianism. "*These causes lie not in the nature of the group but in the structure of society. In particular they lie in the absence or weakness of effective political institutions in the society*" (Huntington, 1968: 196). Simply, the strength of political institutions and governance can be a determinant of the risk of a coup. In addition, the interrelated factors of government failures and a lack of legitimacy could also be considered here. However, for this research these factors shall be considered as triggering causes and will thus be discussed below.

Economic context is also a common cause among the literature, particularly in relation to economic decline (Fossum, 1967; O'Kane, 1981). These authors take the assumption that maintaining a strong economy is the primary responsibility of government, and thus during periods of economic decline the government is open to accusations of poor governance or corruption, whether or not it is the truth. Since such accusations are often either a motivation for intervention or used later as justification, they open the way for a military overthrow (O'Kane, 1981).

Social context is also an important contributor to coup risk. It is commonly argued that divided societies are far more prone to conflict (Horowitz, 1985). A coup is just another way that this conflict is played out. Often a coup will be motivated in some respect by upholding ethnic supremacy or sometimes for a minority to gain control. This is a defining factor for Fiji, as the country is strongly divided, and every coup has had some ethnic rhetoric.

### *International Context*

There are two factors to consider from the international context: the existence of an external threat, and contagion. The significance of an external threat was first presented by Lasswell in his essay 'The Garrison State' (1941), where it was argued that militaries that face high external threats are more prone towards domestic intervention. This is because there is a need for the military to gain a

stronger hold in domestic affairs in times of crisis, combined with the increased militarization of the battle-hardened soldiers. This was written during the Second World War, as an observation of the increased role the militaries around the world were gaining during this time. However, as is noted by Desh (1999), subsequent events have proven this wrong. The best examples of this can be seen through Russia and America. During the Cold War when the external threat was high, control of the military was fairly easy, as it knew its role. Naturally, there were incidents of disagreement between the civilian authorities and the military but these were rather minor. However in the years directly following the end of the Cold War, the external threat was somewhat negated, both countries have since faced much greater problems of civilian control over the military. Thus, Desh essentially theorises that 'idle hands do the devil's work', where a military without an external threat to focus on will more likely focus its attention inwards on the civilian government (Desh, 1999).

Contagion from other conflicts is another common cause of coups in the literature (Li & Thompson, 1975; Pitcher, Hamblin, & Miller, 1978). The basic argument is that violence can often be experienced vicariously through geographically or socially close states. The crucial point is that for this to work the conflict has to be in a similar state, and the conflict similar in nature. Thus, much like the above factor of past coups, the state becomes more prone to intervention by way of public acceptance and military realisation of the possibility of overthrow. As such, while this is a factor that should not be ignored, neither should it have too much emphasis placed upon it, because it is impossible to know accurately how much, or how little influence other conflicts have.

### *Institutional Factors*

The institutional arrangement for the interaction between the military and civilian institutions is a central factor in civil-military relations literature. Traditionally it has been argued that the best form of institutional arrangement is separation, where the military is separated from politics. In countries where the military is

involved in politics there is a high risk of a coup (Born, Caparini, & Haltiner, 2002; Huntington, 1957; Kohn, 1997). However, recently there has been a growing amount of research which argues a different perspective, that the military does not necessarily have to be separated from politics, but only that the institutional arrangement, and role of the military must be agreed upon (Bland, 1999; Fitch, 1998; Lopez, 2001; Schiff, 1995). This comes from an understanding that most militaries are involved in politics in some way or another, which renders the separation argument obsolete. Militaries will commonly be involved in politics to secure their budget, and often have some influence over foreign policy, particularly when it involves sending troops to foreign locations. Additionally, in some developing countries the military may have an even larger role in ensuring the proper development of the state. One commentator has even gone as far to say that *“armed services are involved in policy is not, a priori, a value of judgement but, a posterior, statement of fact* (Edmonds, 1988: 94). In other words, the military is involved in politics whether this is liked or not. Hence, this school of thought tries to divert away from the normative prescription that the military should stay out of politics, and rather looks at the problem from a more pragmatic point of view.

One of the first and most interesting pieces of work in this area is Rebecca Schiff's "Concordance Theory" (1995). In this essay Schiff proposes a new analytical perspective, which she coins 'concordance theory' in which the *“three partners – the military, the political elites, and the citizenry – should aim for a cooperative relationship that may or may not involve separation but does not require it”* (Schiff, 1995: 7). So rather than simply adhering to the separation ideology, cooperation and agreement are the key aspects. A military may be involved in politics but its role must be agreed on by the government and the populace. Douglas Bland (1999) follows a similar line of reasoning, and presents a 'theory of shared responsibility', where the responsibility of control is shared between the military and the civilian institutions along predetermined lines, which have evolved over time. Therefore, when there is agreement between the parties

there is a low risk of a coup, whereas in a society where there is much disagreement military intervention is highly likely.

This factor shows that a military must either adhere to the separation ideology, or, if they are intrinsically involved in politics, the military and civilian institutions must be in agreement over the institutional arrangement between the two, and the role of the military. Where neither of these criteria are fulfilled, there will be poor civilian control as a result of disagreement and bickering between the military and civilian institutions, which will result in an increased coup risk.

### *Military Culture and Professionalism*

This category considers those factors that relate to the military. The strongest of these are the closely related factors of military culture and professionalism, but the relative strength of the military, and the makeup of the officer corps are also important factors. Military culture was first considered in Janowitz' seminal work *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (1960). Janowitz studied the impact of historical forces and theatres of influence on a military, which he claimed would result in either an absolutist or pragmatist approach to military doctrine. The basic difference between the two doctrines is the focus on total versus limited warfare (Janowitz, 1960: 300). The absolutist approach views warfare or the potential for warfare as the basis of international relations, with 'total victory' the goal of all wars. The pragmatic approach views warfare as only one aspect of international relations that must work in tandem with the economic and ideological aspects, thus limited warfare is emphasised (Janowitz, 1960: 303 - 311). The absolutist approach adheres most closely to the general civil-military relations rule that the military should abstain from entering politics, as they are only interested in military affairs. However, militaries that ascribe to the pragmatist approach often attempt to become involved in international and domestic politics, as they see this as necessary to secure the safety of the nation, which can often result in intervention (Janowitz, 1960: 372-374). While this theory is old, the fundamental principle behind it still holds valid: that the driving ideology behind the

military and its view of the duty to uphold the security of the nation will influence its propensity towards domestic intervention.

Military professionalism is a concept that originated from one of the first, and perhaps most famous work in all of civil-military relations literature, Huntington's *Soldier and the State* (1957). Here military professionalism is described as a special type of vocation, such as a doctor or a lawyer, which entails some degree of expertise, but also has a special social responsibility attached. Huntington asserts that in modern developed states the military shows these characteristics. Thus, when discussing the central question of civilian control, Huntington's preferred method is to maximise military professionalism. This, he argues, makes the military a politically neutral and sterile tool of the state (Huntington, 1957). In its most basic form, when this theory is applied to the problem of coups, states with a non-professional military are far more likely to have coups than those with a professional military. Many scholars still hold to Huntington's view that professionalism is the best way to inhibit military intervention (see Born, Caparini, & Haltiner, 2002; Kohn, 1997; Schwam-Baird, 2000). Huntington himself has more recently reinforced this point in relation to the new 'third wave' democracies, which he, in general, commends for their high level of military professionalism and comparatively stable civil-military relations (Huntington, 1995). Thus, the degree to which a military perceives itself to be a professional institution should have an impact on coup risk.

However, at the same time there is some research that takes a different view of professionalism. In particular, Finer (1962) notes that "*the military's consciousness of themselves as a profession may lead them to see themselves as the servants of the state rather than of the government in power*" (22). Thus professionalism may make the military view itself as a servant of the abstract concept of a continuing community or state, rather than a servant of the temporary holder of power. Finer follows on to say:

“[t]he moment the military draw this distinction between nation and the government in power, they begin to invest their own private notion of the national interest, and from this it is only a skip to the constrained substitution of this view for that of the civilian government” (Finer, 1962:23).

If the military holds to some abstract concept of the ‘state’ that it tries to defend then the military will establish its own view on what is best for the ‘state’, which will often conflict with that of the civilian institutions. This will then lead to confrontation between the two groups, poor civilian control and an increased coup risk.

The relative strength of the military is another recurring factor in the literature. This was most famously studied by Janowitz (1964). He describes the wider involvement of the military in domestic, economic, social and political affairs: “it is the result of the sheer quantity of resources that the military establishment, in comparison with other bureaucratic institutions and professional groups, has been able to accumulate” (Janowitz, 1964: 4-5). Thus, he theorises that it is easy for the military to gain control in developing states simply because of its comparative institutional strength. (Janowitz, 1964). The composition and makeup of the officer corps, which was first analysed by Huntington (1957), is also a common factor in the literature. This includes analysis of the social and ethnic makeup of the military, to evaluate its internal mechanics, which may predispose it towards intervention.

### *Assessing Coup Risk*

The aforementioned factors shall be discussed in the following chapter. Each factor will be qualitatively analysed in relation to Fiji, particularly for the 2000-2006 inter-coup period. From this it will be demonstrated that Fiji had poor civilian control, and was thus at a high coup risk. Moreover, the analysis shall provide a thorough background of information to better understand the situation in Fiji during the inter-coup period, and provide the foundation for the later analysis on the triggering causes.

## Triggering Causes

The above factors will determine the coup risk that Fiji faced in the period between the 2000 coup and the 2006 coup. However, determining risk represents only half the issue; there must be some attention paid to the specific triggering causes that set the coup in motion. To address this, the classic “motive” and “opportunity” categories will be used, largely based on the theory set out by Nordlinger (1977), with some modifications to better suit this case study. This will then be applied to the four previous incidences of high tension between the military and the Government in Fiji: the 2004 reappointment of Bainimarama, the 2005 Unity Bill, the January 2006 coup threat and the 2006 election. These will then be compared to and contrasted with the December 2006 coup. From this analysis there will rise some clear points of difference between the situations that did not lead to a coup, and the coup itself.

Nordlinger argues that the military, much like every other public institution, is concerned with enhancing or protecting its corporate interests. Moreover, because of its incredible power derived from its hierarchical structure and monopoly of arms, it has become particularly adept at this, especially through the *coup d'état*. This enhancement or protection of corporate interests, Nordlinger argues, is the primary reason for a military intervention. While coups are usually justified as being necessary for the public good because of incompetent or corrupt governments, Nordlinger states that this is normally not the real reason for an overthrow. However, because of the military's close affinity to the nation they can often justify to themselves that their actions are necessary, as they believe that what is good for the military is good for the nation. The general populace often holds a similar view: the nation identifies itself with the military, through ideas of national honour, sovereignty, and power. This parallel thinking further justifies and reinforces the logic of the military (Nordlinger, 1977). As will become clear throughout this thesis Fiji is certainly one of these societies, where there is much association between the military and society, and thus this theory prevails.

While Nordlinger largely discounts the motivating influence of performance failures of governments, he understood that they often precede coups, and thus must hold some explanatory value. Nordlinger asserts that one of the key reasons performance failures are connected to military intervention is that incompetent or corrupt governments will help galvanise the military's resolve to intervene, but only when the motivating factor of protecting military corporate interests is present. More importantly, when there are severe government failures it will result in the loss of legitimacy of the government, which opens up the opportunity for intervention (Nordlinger, 1977: 85-86). There are three reasons for this. Firstly, overthrowing a legitimate civilian government is viewed as usurpation, which will raise a moral barrier for the military. Secondly, it will often result in public resistance that the military will have to subdue, and fighting untrained unarmed fellow citizens goes against the general ideology of the military. Thirdly, fracturing within the officer corps becomes likely, as there will be some officers who adhere to the principle of civilian supremacy, and will therefore oppose any coup attempt against a legitimate government. This, Nordlinger argues, means that any attempt to overthrow a legitimate government is likely to fail, which will stop military action before it even starts (Nordlinger, 1977: 93-95). As such, for a coup to occur there must be both the motivating influence of protecting the military's corporate interests, and the necessary legitimacy deflation to open the window of opportunity.

When applying this theory to the current research the motives will consist of threats to the military's interests and failures of the civilian government. The military interest's factor is based on Nordlinger's analysis of threats to the military's corporate interests, with the inclusion of personal interests of high-ranking officers, as this has been important in the case of Fiji. Failure of the civilian government has also been included as a motivating factor, and while Nordlinger rightly asserts that it is rare for a military to be motivated by this, it is not unheard of. Thus, it is prudent to include this as part of the motive to be tested in a singular case study.

As such, this will be tested to see if it holds any value, or is simply a galvanising factor, as Nordlinger argues.

The opportunity to intervene can look very similar to the above explanation on coup risk. However, 'coup risk' refers to the underlying structural problems that a society faces, whereas the opportunity to intervene is focused on the specific events that allow for an intervention. Nordlinger argues that the only necessary opportunity is a legitimacy deflation to the point where the entirety of the military officer corps and the general populace will readily accept a military intervention. However, on top of this it is necessary for the military to be cohesive, as fracturing within the military will either inhibit intervention, or greatly lower its chances of success. This factor has been of particular importance for Fiji in the period studied, as there were often problems with cohesion, which appears to be a significant factor.

The underlying assumption is that there should be a convergence of strong motive and strong opportunity in the lead up to the 2006 coup, far more so than any of the other disputes between the RFMF and the Fiji Government. Below, a summary of the literature surrounding each of the factors, followed by a description of the indicators used to identify them, is given.

### *Motive*

The first factor to be considered as a motivating force will be threats to the military's interests. While Nordlinger's analysis has been primarily used for this research, a focus on the corporate and personal interests of the military is not uncommon among the literature (Adekson, 1981; Carlton, 1997; Decalo, 1976; Horowitz, 1980; Needler, 1975; Thompson, 1973). The general argument is similar to that of Nordlinger, that while a military will often cite reasons of governmental failure, often there are far more complex motivations at play. These can either be to protect military corporate interests (Thompson, 1973), to advance the military as an institution (Decalo, 1976), or simply to advance the career of the commander of

the military (Adekson, 1981). Nordlinger's focus on protecting corporate interests holds the greatest value in the case of Fiji, as there were no instances of the RFMF trying to gain extra privileges, or of any senior officer trying to advance into a political career. To elaborate on the idea of military interests the indicators set out by Nordlinger will be discussed below, namely: budgetary support, military autonomy, the absence of functional rivals and the survival of the military, as well as the extra criteria of personal interests.

The first corporate interest identified by Nordlinger is budgetary support. Preceding many coups there is a drop in military expenditure, usually as a result of lessening importance of the military in comparison with other social or modernising institutions. This motivates the military into action, and it is a common theme in such situations for the military budget to sharply increase after the coup (Nordlinger, 1977: 66-67).

The second interest, military autonomy, is often the most important, and will almost certainly generate a strong interventionist motive. This refers to the exclusion of civilian involvement in the educational and training curriculum, the assignment of officers, the promotion of all but the most senior officers, the formation of defence strategies, and any attempt to penetrate the military with political ideas or personnel (Nordlinger, 1977: 71).

Civilian interference has a multiple and decided impact on the officers. Such actions generally lower the professional competence and self-image of the officer corps by substituting political for achievement criteria, call into doubt the soldiers' identities as independent and respected officers, factionalize an otherwise cohesive officer corps, warp the hierarchical structure and weaken the officers' power to defend their other corporate interests. Considering the several important ways in which civilian interference adversely affects the military, we can begin to appreciate why it almost always inspires interventionist motives (Nordlinger, 1977: 71).

This has taken on a particular significance in Fiji. If military autonomy is summarised as non-interference by the government in the affairs and role of the military, then retaining the perceived expanded political role of the RFMF<sup>5</sup> must

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on the perceived expanded role of the RFMF see Chapter Three in the section on Military Culture and Professionalism.

come into consideration. Essentially, the military in Fiji believes that it has a political role, and that this is part of the function of the military. Thus if the government attempts to remove this role then they are encroaching into the affairs of the military, and this will help garner motivation towards intervention. So, both the interference of civilian authorities into the internal affairs of the military, and any attempts to forcibly change the perceived role of the military must be considered.

The absence of functional rivals is the next interest the military will defend. The emergence of a militia, with the purpose of national security, is often viewed as an insult to the worth of the military. This can also result in a dilution of the power of the military, through a potentially reduced budget, and the loss of the monopoly of the use of arms (Nordlinger, 1977: 75). While this can cause interventionist motives, what is even more dangerous is the formation of a palace guard, which is set up to try to stop military intervention. This will often only harden the military's resolve.

The survival of the military can often be the follow-on from the creation of a separate militia with the purpose of national security, which shows that the military is replaceable. This then generates the strongest of corporate interests, and with the survival of the military threatened an intervention almost becomes a certainty.

The last military interest to be considered is the personal interest of high-ranking officers. Nordlinger discounts the importance of the personal interests of officers. This makes sense when constructing a grand theory, as personal interests should fade into obscurity over a large number of cases. However, when considering a singular case study it should be included to give a greater understanding of the situation and pressures at play (Adekson, 1981). As noted by Decalo, it is impossible to accurately explain the incidence of coups "if one of the key variables – the idiosyncratic element, or personal ambitions of military officers – is not taken into account" (1976: 22). For this research this indicator does not relate so much to the political ambitions of the officers, but more to retaining the

status quo, and in particular an effort to keep their position and stay out of prison. This is particularly important for Fiji, as Commander Bainimarama had become a central figure in the RFMF, and so his personal interests had a large part to play in the motive for intervention. This is not to say that Bainimarama necessarily had any personal political ambitions, but because of this central role in the RFMF it was often difficult to distinguish between his interests and those of the military. Thus, this research must consider any personal interests in an assessment of motivations.

There is no set extent to which these criteria must be fulfilled, rather through careful qualitative analysis and solid argumentation it will be determined when there have been sufficient threats to the military's interests to generate the motivation for intervention. The comparative nature of this analysis should increase the clarity here, as it should be easy to compare each of the disputes and the coup itself to find the instances where military interests were the most threatened.

The other factor this research will consider as a motivating force is the failure of the civilian authorities, which is a common explanatory factor within the literature (Germani & Silvert, 1961; Huntington, 1968; Kennedy, 1974; McWilliams, 1967; Perlmutter, 1969; Welch, 1976; Welch & Smith, 1974). 'Failure' here refers to the breakdown of proper governance through corruption, mismanagement, malpractice, or failure to obtain the goals of modernisation. Armos Perlmutter in "The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army" (1969) summarises this view well.

The army's presence in civilian affairs indicates the existence of corruption that is not expected to disappear in the near future; that material improvements and ideological perspectives do not match; that traditional institutions are unable to bring about material improvement; and that modernized elites are incapable of establishing political institutions and structures which will sustain the momentum of social mobilization and modernization. (Perlmutter, 1969: 384).

Therefore, when civilian governments fail, then the military, which will often be intrinsically tied to the development of the state and its politics, will become motivated to intervene. It has been theorised that in situations where the civilian

institutions could not fulfil their duties to the population the military would be forced to intervene for the good of the nation.

Accordingly, instances of government failure such as corruption, illegal activities, discrimination, economic downturn and simply failure to govern effectively shall be discussed to see if they motivated the military in this instance. To determine this, a government failure must not only be identified, but the military must also object to the failure. This should not be too difficult to demonstrate for Fiji, as the Commander, throughout the period in question, was outspoken on government actions and policies that he saw as failures. To show if these were significant in motivating the military, a qualitative comparative analysis will be done. The assumption is that if this is a significant factor, then it should peak at the 2006 coup, or at least be the only time that government failures occur together with the appropriate opportunity for intervention.

From assessing both military interests and government failures the key motivating factors should be determined. These will be the factors that peaked in the lead up to the coup, or the first time that they were paired up with the appropriate opportunity was the 2006 intervention. One of the propositions to be tested in this research is whether the motives for intervention came most strongly from the military's interests, or if it was for the more altruistic and stated reason of governmental failures. This analysis will uncover the truth of this argument, or at least reveal some interesting points of discussion.

### *Opportunity*

The opportunity for intervention consists of a decrease in the legitimacy of the government combined with military cohesion. A decrease in legitimacy is a common factor among the literature on coups. Finer (1962) was among the first to propose this, through what he termed the 'level of political culture'. This theory ranks states on their attachment to civilian institutions and claims that those states with a low level of political culture are far more likely to suffer from coups. From

here this evolved to take a central role among the early literature (Kennedy, 1974; Welch & Smith, 1974). It is argued that a government that has lost the support of the population is more prone to intervention, as its power is not consolidated. Alfred Stepan presented an interesting take on the legitimacy crisis thesis in his book *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (1971). He theorised, in relation to Brazilian civil-military relations, that the likelihood of the military to initiate coups, as well as the success of these coups, was linked to the civilian population's attitudes about the appropriateness of such actions at the time. In other words, if military intervention is socially acceptable then it is more likely to occur and more likely to succeed. This is most likely to be the case in a state where the civilian authorities have a low level of legitimacy.

At this stage it is necessary to give a more accurate definition of legitimacy, as it is one of the terms in the social sciences that is both commonly used and highly ambiguous. Most definitions stem from Max Weber who theorised that power is legitimate when the people who are subject to it believe it to be legitimate (Weber, 1968). Thus the focus has been on the populace's belief in the legitimacy of government, or the right to govern. This has been further extended by various theorists to a requirement of a majority belief in the legitimacy of government, which is best tested through democratic elections (for example see Friedrich, 1963).

However, this formulation has some flaws. Firstly, as pointed out by Beetham (1991), this is an inadequate definition because it puts too much focus upon 'beliefs'. The definition separates out the belief in legitimacy from the reason that people hold this belief. Furthermore, the Weberian definition tends to speak in absolutes: a government is either legitimate or illegitimate based upon the majority belief of the populace. Yet it is far more logical to look at the degree of legitimacy that a government holds, as there will always be differing opinion among different groups within a state on the legitimacy of government (Stillman, 1974). This is particularly the case in Fiji, as it is such a highly divided society. This brings into

question the requirement of majority consent. Is a government legitimate, if it upholds the beliefs and values of 50% plus 1 of the population, while it oppresses the rest? Are the views of the minority insignificant enough to simply not come into consideration? Instead, for the purposes of this thesis, rather than only considering the simple criteria of a majority believing in the legitimacy of the government, the government will be considered to be having legitimacy problems if a significant proportion of the population believe the government to not be legitimate.

The literature on legitimacy has evolved from the initial theory, and most of the more interesting and significant work considers legitimacy to be measured by the extent to which the government adheres to the norms and values of the general population (Alagappa, 1995a; Beetham, 1991). This refers to an ideology that specifies how things ought to be, thus determining the political system and the role of the government. While such 'norms and values' are present and easily identifiable in developed states, many developing countries have not yet matured to the extent that there are universal norms and values. This is the case in Fiji, as it is such a diverse and fractured society. Many crucial aspects of the state's norms and values are contested, such as the political system, and particularly the rights and treatment of the various social and ethnic groups. As such, this is not a good measure of legitimacy. Thus Alagappa has identified that legitimacy, in such states, is rather conferred from normative and performance elements (Alagappa, 1995b). As such, when the government does not perform in advancing the country, or in some way damages the country either economically or socially, then it is likely to suffer from a deflation in legitimacy. This is very similar to the above discussion on government failures, except here instead of focusing on how these failures motivated the military to intervene, the focus is upon how these failures lower the public acceptance and belief in the legitimacy of government.

To get testable indicators, once again Nordlinger's analysis will be used, as this will ensure consistency and it covers most of the suggestions within the literature. Nordlinger argues that such de-legitimatising failures can come from

illegal behaviour, economic downturn, and the inability to handle discontent or opposition to the point of erupting disorder and violence (Nordlinger, 1977: 85). To this, the extra criteria of political crisis shall be added. Illegal behaviour is the most common form of governmental failure; it refers to breaking the law, creating new unconstitutional laws, the arbitrary application of laws, flouting the Constitution, and widespread corruption (Nordlinger, 1977: 86). Economic downturn, as explained above with reference to background causes, can result in a lowered confidence in the ability of the government by the public, which will contribute to a lowered legitimacy (Nordlinger, 1977: 88). As opposed to the background cause, where the focus will be on the overall trends of the economy, here the focus will be on more specific economic crisis and the affect that this has upon public perception of the government. If a country faces political problems that erupt into disorder and violence, then the legitimacy of the government comes under extreme criticism. *"They are unable to fulfil their most basic responsibility: the preservation of public order, protecting life and property"* (Nordlinger, 1977: 90). Political crisis is another government failure that can lead to a legitimacy deflation. Nordlinger overlooked the significance of this, probably because he believed that one of the several other factors would address it. However, in Fiji there have been several instances of political crisis that do not fit well within the other categories, as they do not constitute illegal behaviour, economic downturn, or disorder and violence. The literature argues (Finer, 1962; Hibbs, 1973) that political crises will open the door, making intervention much easier as there will only be fractured political resistance, and a growing disassociation from the public, suggesting a legitimacy deflation.

However, many of these failures are subjective; what may constitute an 'illegal act' for one person may not for others. As mentioned above, there will be no requirement for majority discontentment, rather, just a significant proportion of the population. This may seem a bit vague, but in such a diverse society as Fiji, it is not wise to discount minorities' perspectives. So the question becomes: is the

failure of government severe enough and felt by a significant enough proportion of the population to say that a legitimacy deflation has occurred? This is difficult to measure, but instances of public outbursts against the legality of the regime or questions about their right to govern will give a strong indication that there were legitimacy problems.

The other factor to be considered as part of the opportunity for intervention is the cohesion of the military, particularly the officer corps. Several theorists see this as a crucial prerequisite to a successful military coup (Barracca, 2007; Fossum, 1967; Mendeloff, 1994; Thompson, 1976). While coups do occur when there is low cohesiveness, these coups are much more likely to fail (Thompson, 1976). This is because other factions of the military may act to impede the coup, or the fractured group may simply not have the necessary organisational strength to perform a coup. If the military is viewed as a rational actor, then the likelihood for failure will impede intervention. Similarly, an un-cohesive military will have little confidence in their own capabilities, and thus potentially even exaggerate their lack of ability to overthrow the government (Mendeloff, 1994). Low cohesion will then impede intervention because of the low chances of success, and because of the lack of self-belief that the military is capable of overthrowing government.

In the first 1987 coup and the 2000 coup the RFMF was largely un-cohesive. In 1987 Rabuka was the third in command of the RFMF, and it was only a small faction of the military behind him. This coup was largely successful, but it had strong backing by various groups throughout Fiji, specifically the nationalists. Furthermore, there was no resistance from other parts of the military, which simply stepped aside, and soon after the coup Rabuka appointed himself as Commander. In this way the nationalists boosted the RFMF's organisational strength, and there was little in the way of resistance. Still, after this coup Rabuka had a difficult job securing his goals, which is often the result of a coup performed with low organisational strength (Thompson, 1976). Because of this he had to perform another coup, which he did from a much stronger position, allowing him to dictate

terms. The 2000 intervention was a civilian coup, although it had some military elements particularly from the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW). Again, nationalists boosted the organisational strength, which was an important aspect allowing the coup to be performed. The fracturing within the military made the situation much more complex, and they did have resistance from the rest of the organisation, led by Bainimarama. In the end this coup was a failure, and a significant factor in this was the resistance from the rest of the military who were not part of the intervention.

When considering the 2006 coup, the situation is different. This time there was no large external support from nationalist groups. This was because the nationalists supported the government in power, and the views espoused by Bainimarama often conflicted with the nationalists' ideologies. While some suggested there were actors behind the scenes, such as political figures trying to gain positions of power, it does not appear that this group significantly bolstered the organisational strength of Bainimarama's coup plot. Thus, in this coup there was a much larger requirement for a cohesive military, as there was no strong external group manufacturing a strong organisational strength, and fracturing within the military had proven to be an impediment in 2000. So for this coup, the requirement for a cohesive military is seen as essential for an appropriate opportunity. This will be measured by any vocal dissenters within the military, a spate of unexpected dismissals, or a mutiny.

When assessing the opportunity for intervention it is necessary for there to be both a legitimacy deflation and cohesion within the military, particularly the officer corps, as a lack of either one of these has the ability to impede an intervention. The more difficult question is to what extent each of these criteria must be fulfilled. As argued above, the history of coups and strong military cohesion reduces the requirement for a legitimacy deflation, but it does not replace it. Thus there must be some legitimacy problems, but the amount is uncertain, and can only be answered through careful analysis, and comparison to the other disputes. The

military must be cohesive, but how much so? Does there only need to be a tight group within the officer corps, or does the whole military need to be on side? Again this will only be answered through proper analysis, and will be indicated by any internal problems, the absence of which will suggest cohesion.

## **Conclusion**

Together the background causes and triggering causes will determine the reasons Fiji had its fourth coup on 5 December 2006. Both the background and triggering causes are necessary in explaining why there was a coup, but individually and on their own they are not sufficient. Thus they are mutually dependent in gaining a full understanding. The theoretical framework used to determine coup risk covers most of the major propositions in the literature on coups in developing countries; therefore, it gives a good understanding of the forces at play that resulted in the military intervention. However, most of these forces had been an issue for some time before the coup. Therefore, they do not give any specific reasoning for when the coup occurred, and they do not explain the specific events that set the coup in motion. Thus, there is a need to analyse the triggering causes as well, which are far more difficult to determine in this case. To do this, the common motive and opportunity categories will be used, largely based upon Nordlinger's theory on third world coups. For the motive both the military's interests and the failure of government will be analysed. The opportunity will be based upon a legitimacy deflation of government and military cohesion. A comparative analysis of the several disputes preceding the coup, and the coup itself shall be done using these criteria. From this it will be demonstrated that the intervention was the only time that both the motive and opportunity came together resulting in a military coup.

## PART II

### BACKGROUND CAUSES

## *Chapter Three*

### FIJI'S COUP RISK

Before embarking on an analysis of the events leading up to the 2006 coup the background causes must first be examined to gain some context to the environment in Fiji and understand some of the underlying pressures. The analysis will be based upon Cottey, Edmunds and Forster's (2002) framework as explained in the preceding chapter. The historical legacy of Fiji shows that the colonial regime used the military as an internal suppressor; there was a close connection between the military and the ruling chiefly elite, and there were three previous coups. All this has made Fiji a coup prone state, with an intrinsically politicised military. The political, economic and social context demonstrates the general weakness of the political institutions, the potential for future economic crisis, and the fractured nature of Fijian society. The international context had little influence upon the 2006 coup, but the possibility of contagion from other regional conflicts is discussed. The institutional arrangements between the civilian authorities and the military have had a large impact upon the difficulties faced since 2000, because of the disagreement over the role of the military and the poor mechanisms of control. Finally, military culture and professionalism explains the political interventionist ideology of the military along with its relative strength, and the issue of indigenous Fijian dominance.

#### **Historical Legacy**

This is one of the most important factors in determining the coup risk of Fiji, and therefore will be given a correspondingly large proportion of attention in this

analysis. In Fiji's early history the British colonial regime primarily used the military as an oppressor against uprisings within the country. However, it was the two coups in 1987 that turned the military into an active political player. The 2000 coup had a large impact upon the current military as Bainimarama intervened into the political scene. On top of this, Bainimarama was personally attacked in the November mutiny, which has had an impact upon his actions ever since.

### *Colonial Past of Fiji Military*

When the Fiji Military first emerged in 1871 it consisted of 1000 men, led by an English settler. At this stage it was little more than a group of mercenaries, hired by the pre-colonial Government to suppress an uprising by European settlers in Levuka (Derrick, 1957: 201). In October 1874, when Fiji became a colony of the British Empire, administered by Seru Epenisa Cakobau, the Crown inherited the military (Derrick, 1957: 202). Not long after, it was renamed the Armed Native Constabulary, which was separate from the police until 1905 when the two forces were amalgamated. In this early period the primary purpose of the military was to pacify uprisings against the new Government, which lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many of the populace. In doing this, Sanday (1989: 3) argues that the historical role of the military was to support the chiefly establishment and defend the infrastructure established by the colonial Government to create a capitalist economy. Gutteridge (1964) theorised, that it is common for a military initially set up as an enforcer of a colonial regime to become politicised when the country becomes independent. Thus, this early role of the Fijian military set it up to be a politicised actor and gives good context to its future interventionist nature.

When World War One broke out in 1914, the Fiji Defence Force (FDF) was established. Initially the Government restricted enlistment in this new military to those of European descent; however, after a few years Fijians were slowly filtered in as well ([www.rfmf.mil](http://www.rfmf.mil), 2006). Fiji's involvement in the First World War was slight; however, its presence in the Second World War was much greater, especially in the Pacific arena. It was this involvement that fostered the growth of the Fiji Military

Force (FMF) into a large and powerful organisation (www.rfmf.mil, 2006). After the war the FMF was involved in some external operations, however the Colonial Government predominantly used them for internal security operations, which mainly stemmed from Fijian-Indians protesting for democratisation and improved labour conditions. This was played out through various strikes and protests, which the military was brought in to suppress. Thus, the FMF became strongly associated with in the capital-labour conflict, which pitted Fijian owners against the Indian labourers, and has been one of the central aspects of the ethnic tensions of the country (Sanday, 1989: 10). In 1970 Fiji was given independence and the Military, now called the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), came under the control of a civilian government. The first 16 years of independent history were uneventful as far as civil-military relations are concerned, and thus the next important landmark in civilian control history was not till 1987.

### *1987 Coups*

The national election in Fiji in April 1987 brought about a massive change. The newly formed Fiji Labour Party (FLP)<sup>6</sup> entered into a coalition with the Indian dominated National Federation Party (NFP), ousting the previously dominant Alliance party. Timoci Bavadra, an ethnic Fijian, became Prime Minister of what was in many respects an Indian dominated government.

Around this time several ambitious commoner Fijians on the fringes of power came together to create the Taukei Movement. The purpose of this group was to gain positions of power and influence in order to uphold indigenous Fijian rights.<sup>7</sup> There is strong evidence that this group was the primary backer for the 1987 coup, and as a result many of its members entered positions of power in the years following (R. Robertson & Tamanisau, 1988).

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<sup>6</sup> The Labour party was formed in 1985, as a response to a growing dissatisfied urban working class.

<sup>7</sup> The altruistic goal of upholding indigenous Fijian rights is somewhat questionable, as ambitious self interest was often the driving factor.

Soon after the elections on 14 May 1987 the Land Force Commander Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, the third in command of the RFMF, staged Fiji's first military coup. The new government was announced at one o'clock the next morning and included Rabuka, eleven Alliance parliamentarians including Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara<sup>8</sup> and four from the nationalist Taukei Movement. The speed at which Rabuka was able to form the new government, as well as its composition, strongly suggested that both the Alliance party and the Taukei Movement were heavily involved or at least knew in advance of the coup (Lal, 1988: 79-80).

The Fijian High Court ruled the coup unconstitutional, and as a response the Head of State, the Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau tried to assert executive control. He opened a series of negotiations known as the Debua Talks, between the deposed Labour-NFP Government and the Alliance party. This resulted in the Debua Accord on 23 September 1987, which proposed a government of national unity in which both parties would be represented under the leadership of Ganilau. This sparked Rabuka back into action. Fearing the gains of the first coup were to be lost he staged a second coup on 25 September 1987, and declared Fiji to be a Republic, leaving the influence of the Commonwealth, and leaving Ganilau with little power.

After the second coup Rabuka set up a military regime; however, after only a few months it became clear that it was incapable of holding the country together in such a difficult period. Rabuka decided to hand control over to Ganilau, who in turn appointed Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as Prime Minister. He headed an interim regime that would hold power until 1992 when a general election was once again held.

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<sup>8</sup> Mara was one of the founding figures of independent Fiji, and had ruled for a long time under the Alliance party. He was a central figure in Fijian society and brought with him much respect.

After these coups the military, now named the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), increased its connections to the Government. This was initially done through the appointment of military officers into cabinet positions, the most notable of which was the coup leader Rabuka, who in 1992 under the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) party won the general election and became Prime Minister. Furthermore, Rabuka set up the CRW, headed by Ilisoni Ligairi. The CRW was created essentially as a palace guard to protect the government and the ideologies it stood for as established through the two coups. Thus, this group was, from its formation, politically motivated, a fact that would become painfully clear in 2000.

The stated reason for the takeover was that it was racially motivated and against Indian rule. However, as accurately surmised by Rory Ewins (1992), class, custom and personal interests probably played a more important role. The FLP consisted largely of the dissatisfied urban working class. Ewins (1992) believes that when they came to power, the ruling upper class saw the FLP as a challenge and thus used Rabuka to regain power. The 'custom' explanation is much more complex and revolves around two key areas. First there is the East-West divide, where the Polynesian East has traditionally dominated the Fijian political scene over the Melanesian West. The Labour party represented the West which challenged the East's power, which gave them reason to support the coup (Ewins, 1992). The second focus is on the chiefly system. Because of the increasing urbanisation of Fiji, the traditional chiefs had begun to lose power by 1987, especially with the election of the FLP which epitomised this movement away from traditional structures. Thus, Rabuka easily gained support from the chiefs. Since this time the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) has reasserted its power in Fijian society, and upholding a strong traditional presence is still a priority (Ewins, 1992). The last explanation offered for these coups is one of personal interests. It seems that it was Rabuka's personal wish to overthrow the Indian dominated government, for career advancement and a personal grudge, more so than for the national

good, which was his stated motivation (Ewins, 1992). These extra hidden motivations are important as they continue to play a role in Fiji's political scene.

However, for this thesis the most important legacy of the 1987 coups is the affect that they had upon the military as an institution in Fiji. While prior to 1987 the military was politicised, the coups were the first instance of direct intervention in the internal affairs of Fiji since independence. This has left a continuing legacy of intervention and involvement, which has become ingrained as part of the collective identity of the RFMF (Halapua, 2003: Ch2). Since 1987 the military has become a political actor, as evidence from the more extreme examples of the 2000 coup and the 2006 coup. Moreover, in-between these instances the military played an important and defining role in much of Fijian politics. Thus the statement that *“armed services are involved in policy is not, a priori, value of judgement but, a posterior, statement of fact”* (Edmonds, 1988: 94) holds especially true in the Fijian context. The Western ideal of separation was lost at this point, and trying to form a normative argument will not stand, as from this point on the military became an integral part of politics, and should be treated as such.

### *2000 Coup and Mutiny*

This coup had its origins in the 1999 election, which was the first election held under the new 1997 Constitution of Fiji. This election produced an unexpected result, which shocked the old establishment which had been so dominant since the 1987 coups, bringing to power the FLP, and Mahendra Chaudhry, an ethnic Indian, as Prime Minister. In his time in office, Chaudhry tried to tackle various issues, most crucially the land reform problem. A great number of land leases by Fijians to Indian sugar farm workers were coming up for renewal, but many Fijians wanted their land back or more value for it. He tried to establish a Land Use Commission, which riled the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) which administers all Fijian land, and began a shockwave of backlash against the FLP. One important aspect of this backlash was the reformation of the Taukei Movement which had all but disbanded during the 1990s as a result of the dominance of Rabuka's SVT

party that essentially took its place. Once the public sentiment began to grow against the FLP Apisai Tora, one of the original founders of the 'Movement', declared the Taukei reformed and began hosting rallies; one particular rally in Suva on 28 April 2000 brought together over eight thousand followers. In the face of this backlash Chaudhry continued down the same path, which turned many politicians against him, both from the opposition and within his own party. By early 2000 there were plans by the FLP to remove Chaudhry as leader which were to be carried out after his first year in office on 20 May. There were also plans from opposition parties, led by the SVT, to call a vote of no confidence, however neither plan had a chance to be followed through (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001: 5-11).

It was the CRW unit of the military, organised by their former leader and long-term mentor Ilisoni Ligairi, who initially conspired the coup. They managed to talk several prominent figures, politicians and nationalist leaders into their plan, making a complex conspiracy. The last link in the chain was George Speight, a failed businessman, who had some connections to the political scene and a personal grudge against the Chaudhry Government. He was brought aboard because of his leadership, authority and communication skills, to act as an acceptable front to the public and the media. On the morning of 19 May 2000 Fiji faced its third coup, almost exactly 13 years after the first. The rebels entered parliament at 11:00am, handcuffed Chaudhry and his deputy Tupeni Baba, and rounded up the rest of the government members taking them hostage (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001: 11-15).

At the same time, Ligairi was at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Nabua trying to convince soldiers to join the coup; he expected success, however the soldiers were not persuaded. On top of this, the coup plotters failed to secure Rabuka as a supporter, who they initially expected to have as president of the new regime. Rabuka instead took up the role of mediator. From these two setbacks it looked as if the coup might fail before it even started. However, supporters of the coup began

entering the parliamentary complex which gave the intervention a second wind. The first group numbered around 300, and many more came, including some members of the military and other influential figures. They gained further support from outside parliament from the disaffected lower class, who, with some guidance, rioted and looted throughout the streets of Suva, and would continue to create a climate of disorder throughout the crisis (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001: 17-18).

While this coup is often simply explained as an ethnic rivalry between the Indigenous and Indian Fijians, this is far too simplistic; this coup showed a different problem, pitching Fijians against Fijians. The best explanation of this has come from Robertson and Sutherland (2001), who argue the primary reason for the coup was Fijian socioeconomic disadvantage, built up over years of ineffective governance. While the majority have faced economic downturn, the elite, often represented by the chiefly establishment, have prospered. Thus a large disaffected class emerged, to whom the elite often told that the reason for their position was Indian economic dominance, reinforcing the ethnic struggle. As such, while at first it may have been over Indian domination, as the coup progressed the fight became between the Fijian elite and the economically disadvantaged ethnic Fijians.

Soon after the coup Ratu Mara, in his capacity as President, stepped in to try to resolve the crisis, with Rabuka as his intermediary to Speight. Mara, in consultation with the GCC conceded to many of the demands of Speight and his group. This included appointing several of the coup plotters in a proposed interim administration headed by Mara, a full pardon for all involved in the coup and giving urgent attention to the grievances raised by the rebel coup group and their supporters. However, Speight was still not happy. He was cautious of Mara's political experience and cunning, which could have threatened any future regime. Furthermore, he represented the ruling elite, who the coup rebels were beginning to realise was their real enemy (Lal, 2000: 289 -290). Thus, as Mara followed

through on his plans to set up the interim regime, Speight and his supporters planned to march to Parliament and demand that Mara resign. However, under the advice of the military they called off this action. Instead, on 29 May four army soldiers including Bainimarama and Mara's son-in-law Ratu Epeli Nailatikau asked Mara to step aside. Bainimarama then took executive control of the country, acting as the President, imposed martial law, abrogated the 1997 Constitution and installed a new interim civilian regime headed by Laisena Qarase to govern until a new election. This action is often referred to as a coup within a coup (M. Field, Baba, & Nabobo-Baba, 2005: 136), however, in the author's opinion this was a necessity at the time, but set a negative precedent that would underlie much of the justification of the 2006 coup.

Unfortunately, the military's actions did not have the desired effect upon Speight and his group, who did not agree with the makeup of the new administration (Lal, 2000: 291 - 292). This caused a deadlock, and the danger of a violent confrontation became a real possibility. Then on 15 June Ratu Josefa Iloilo, Western High Chief and Mara's Vice President, offered to negotiate discussion between the military and the rebels at his residence in Muanikau. The rebels dominated these talks, and again almost all of their demands were met, yet when they were supposed to sign the Muanikau Accord on 24 June, they instead appeared with new demands, wanting more of their group in the interim administration. This caused the talks to break down and a more confrontational approach between the RFMF and the rebels to emerge. This played out when supporters of the coup seized control of the Sukanaivalu Barracks and its armoury at Vaturekuka in Vanua Levu. Two hours later in retaliation soldiers entered into a skirmish with the rebels outside Parliament, where the military wounded five rebels, killing one, and arrested fourteen. In response the rebels started a mass campaign of civil disobedience, which in the end forced the military to concede. They agreed the GCC should elect a President, who would then choose his own interim administration and give the rebels immunity from prosecution, for which the

rebels agreed to lay down their weapons and release the hostages. Finally, under these conditions the Muanikau Accord was signed on 9 July (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001: 29-33). This was an interesting decision as, admittedly under duress, the military conceded to most of the rebel demands, including immunity from prosecution. This stance contrasts the position taken by the military in the following years, where ensuring the proper prosecution of the coup perpetrators became a key objective.

On 14 July the GCC met to fulfil its part of the Muanikau Accord where they elected Josefa Iloilo as President; he was not a rebel, but he was the next in line to the position. More importantly however, the GCC elected rebel supporter Jope Seniloli as Vice President. With 80-year old Iloilo suffering from Parkinson's Disease, and often considered to be a weak leader, it appeared that Seniloli would be able to have a strong input into forming the new government. Speight was pleased; he released the rest of the hostages after 57 days in captivity, handed over their sizable armoury to the military, and moved out of the Parliament buildings to the Kalabu Fijian School. However, the rebels may have acted too soon, as on the next day, after a convincing presentation, Iloilo named Qarase as the interim Prime Minister, with only minor inclusion of Speight's supporters (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001: 35-36). Speight and his group were less than satisfied, and made their dislike of the situation apparent, while Bainimarama indicated the rebels had not returned all the weapons. This again raised the possibility of further hostilities (M. Field, Baba, & Nabobo-Baba, 2005: 229-231).

In response to the rising tensions, the military acted decisively. On the night of 26 July the military arrested Speight, Josefa Nata, and their lawyer Tevita Bukarau at a military checkpoint. The next day the military launched a major offensive. First, they raided the Kalabu School arresting 369 men including Ligairi, and found a stockpile of arms that the rebels had not returned. Then they went after the rest of the rebels and other supporters, often using fierce tactics; one man died from the effects of tear gas and a further 40 were wounded. However, some remnants of

the rebels remained; on 8 August they ambushed a patrol of ten soldiers and one policeman, resulting in the death a soldier and the policeman, while at various locations Speight's supporters continued to harass Indians (M. Field, Baba, & Nabobo-Baba, 2005: 232-235).

While tensions between the military and the remaining rebels continued the judicial process began. The first major case started on 11 August, when the state charged Speight and two men from the CRW with treason. Not long after, in an appeal by the State against a quashed attempted murder charge, the High Court ruled the immunity decree was invalid. This was because the rebels invalidated it when they failed to return all the stolen military arms. This was a key ruling which allowed for a mass of convictions, which, as will become evident in latter sections of this thesis, dragged on for years after, and became a real burden upon Fiji (M. Field, Baba, & Nabobo-Baba, 2005: 238-239).

Nevertheless, the hostilities still simmered and it appeared that another major confrontation was imminent. This occurred on 2 November 2000 when the remaining members of the CRW unit, who had strong connections to the rebels, mutinied against the military. The CRW justified their action as avenging the rebels who were often barbarically rounded up by the military. In many respects this mutiny boiled down to an attempted assassination of Bainimarama, which he only narrowly escaped. After a bloody skirmish which claimed the lives of 8 soldiers and wounded 30, the military managed to suppress the mutiny. Five of the dead were from the CRW, and upon a Coroner's examination it was determined that many of them were first tortured then killed, which has left a cloud of suspicion over Bainimarama ever since (M. Field, Baba, & Nabobo-Baba, 2005: ch23). This event, more so than any other, had a profound impact upon Bainimarama. He now holds a degree of paranoia that his life is under threat, from further dissenters within the military, or more likely from the families of those tortured and killed in the attempted mutiny. This has affected the way he has conducted himself ever since. He now takes a band of armed bodyguards with him on most journeys, and, as will

become more relevant in latter sections of this thesis, he has reshaped the officer corps based upon personal loyalty.

At this stage, the coup was over; most of the rebels were arrested or in hiding and the threat of further uprising was quickly diminishing after the attempted mutiny. However, the country was in limbo; it was only an interim regime in power, the planned elections were still years away, and the 1997 constitution lay in tatters. In a remarkable series of events the judicial system took effect and returned Fiji to democracy. This process initially began back on 4 July 2000, when an Indian farmer Chandrika Prasad filed an action in the High Court of Fiji against the Republic of Fiji and the Attorney-General of the Interim Government. The case challenged the legality of the regime and the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution. Justice Gates heard the case on 23 August 2000, and returned a ruling on 15 November, finding for Prasad. Gates ruled that the revocation of the Constitution was illegal and that the Parliament of Fiji as prior to 19 May was still in being, reinstating Mara as the president and charging him with appointing a new Prime Minister and Government. However, Mara felt he could not uphold this responsibility, and a month later officially resigned from the presidency. At first it appeared that this ruling would have little affect upon the current political arrangement in Fiji, however instead of simply ignoring the decision, the interim government decided to take the ruling to the Court of Appeal. A five-Judge panel heard the appeal from 19 to 22 February 2001. They returned on 1 March dismissing the appeal. While disagreeing upon some points of technicality the panel agreed in principle with the original ruling, adding that the 1997 Constitution was still the supreme law of Fiji, and that Mara's resignation was valid, making Iloilo the rightful President. Almost immediately after this decision Qarase announced the country would return to democratic rule, and his government resigned. Iloilo then dissolved the previous Parliament, reinstated Qarase's interim regime as a caretaker Government, and called for a general election (G. Williams, 2003). The election was held between 25 August and 5 September 2001.

Qarase's newly formed Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) Party, which largely consisted of the interim regime, formed the new government in coalition with the controversial Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV) party, which consisted of many of the political supporters of the 2000 coup.

History is thus important in determining the coup risk Fiji faces. The colonial legacy of the military as the suppresser of uprisings, and connections to the Chiefly establishment, set the military up as a politicised institution. The criterion of past coups has been fulfilled in Fiji, which has significantly raised the possibility of further intervention. In particular the 1987 coups, which were military interventions as opposed to the 'civilian coup' in 2000, opened the possibility for the military to intervene when it saw the government failing to do what it believe to be right. Furthermore, the 2000 coup has had a profound impact upon the current leadership of the RFMF. Bainimarama's overthrow of the president, abrogation of the Constitution and installation of martial law all set a negative precedent, and gave the Commander a far too powerful position. The installation of Qarase in the interim regime also created a strange dynamic between the two men, and to a degree it can be assumed that Bainimarama expected Qarase to do his bidding. This has not been the case, and may hold some explanatory value for the difficult relationship between these two men. The attempted mutiny also left lasting scars, with Bainimarama continuously suspicious of those around him, and this paranoid trait may have led to a distorted view of the world.

### **Domestic Political Economic and Social Context**

The political, economic and social context of Fiji goes a long way to explaining why there are such difficulties in the country, as each of these factors have massive problems associated with them. There is a general weakness of governance in Fiji, and a political power sharing relationship that constrains and complicates the political process. Economically Fiji has been fragile since the 2000 coup, and faces problems specifically in the garment and sugar industries. The

various social divisions paint a picture of a fractured society, which always makes any conflict much more likely.

### *Political*

To measure the political strength of Fiji the Governance Index compiled by Gani and Duncan (2004) shall be used. This index covers the period from 1985-2002 and shows that throughout this period Fiji's governance index was on average 0.421, with 0 being poor governance and 1 strong governance. Thus it does show some weakness, however it is not especially low for a developing country. Interestingly, it appears that weakness in governance, rather than being a precursor to military intervention, is more a consequence of intervention. In 1986 before the first two coups the index was at 0.470, where as in 1988 one year after the coups it had dropped down to 0.324. After this it made consistent gains right up to the year 2000 when it sat at 0.568, but again dropping down the next year after the coup to 0.417 (Gani & Duncan, 2004). Thus there was no dip in governance in the lead up to any of the previous coups, but there was a noticeable drop afterwards. While the general overall weakness of governance probably allows for the possibility of a coup, it does not serve well as an indicator for when a coup is likely to occur.

There is a unique aspect to Fijian politics which has made the country unstable. Fiji has three almost equally influential groups, the Native Land Trust Board, the military and the government. The Government must balance each of these groups' power and influence to be able to govern effectively. In 2000 when Chaudhry stepped on the toes of the NLTB this quickly generated resentment across much of the country, resulting in the reformation of the Taukei Movement, who laid much of the groundwork for the intervention. In 2006 the Government probably went a step too far in challenging the military's authority, which, as shall be argued in this paper, was part of the motivation for intervention. Thus in Fiji there is a difficult balance for a government as their power is far from absolute.

### *Economic*

The Fijian economy has had a difficult time recovering since the coup in 2000. While it is partially on the way back to some stability, it is still fragile, and is susceptible to further shocks (Beloni, 2004). The most immediate issue in the period leading up to the 2006 coup was the increasing trade deficit problems. At the end of 2005 the trade deficit was at F\$1.53 billion (US\$0.76 billion), driven by increasing consumerism, deflated exports, and increasing oil prices (Tabureguci, 2006). This looked likely to start to show in a drop in living standards. Additionally, there were other significant economic problems on the horizon for two of the country's top earners: the garment and sugar industries.

The garment industry is entering a difficult stage as both New Zealand and Australia, who were previously preferential markets for Fiji, have committed to adopt free trade in the industry by 2010. On top of this the Fiji Government suspended the tax-free zone the garment industry operated within. These problems have revealed much inefficiency, and without these preferential treatments the industry is likely to fail (P. K. Narayan & Prasad, 2003).

However, the most imminent economic problem that Fiji faces is the sugar industry, which holds an important place in the Fijian economy. In 2001 it made up 7% of the total gross domestic product (GDP); it is the most important source of cash income for rural Fijians and it makes up 22% of all merchandise exports (Levantis, Jotzo, & Tulpule, 2005). Importantly, the sector as a whole employs about one quarter of the economically active population (Prasad & Akram-Lodhhi, 1998). As such it is intrinsically intertwined into the Fijian economy and holds an important social role, as well as providing a lifestyle for much of the rural population. For a long time Fiji has received an inflated price from the European Union (EU) for its sugar. However, in October 2004 after a long legal case the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ordered the EU to stop giving subsidies on sugar, and the Appeal Court upheld this ruling in 2005. This meant that the price that Fiji had been receiving for sugar from the EU would drop by 39%. The 39% cut was not to

occur immediately though; at the beginning of 2007 the first five percent was taken off and subsequent cuts are proposed to be made until 2010 when the full 39% will be fulfilled. A study done at the University of the South Pacific simulated the economic impact of a 30% reduction in sugar production, which is similar to what is expected after the loss of the preferential EU market. The study revealed that this would cause a decline of 1.8% of GDP and 1.5% of welfare for the entire country. The article goes on to say that such a decline has the potential to cripple the sugar industry (P. K. Narayan & Prasad, 2004). Furthermore, a report done for the Steps Toward Conflict Prevention Project, on the 'Constraints and Contributors to Violent Conflict in Fiji' found that one of the major factors that would increase the likelihood of violent conflict would be a collapse in the sugar industry (Doughty, Daryn, & Prasad, 2003).

Thus in the lead up to the coup there were several economic problems which would have put extra pressure upon the Government. Also, the failure to find any real solution to these problems would have also begun to play on the minds of the civilian population, lowering their trust in the regime. When the military began talking about the failures of Government, it would have played on the apprehension felt by the whole country, and both raised support for the military and lowered support for the Government.

### *Social*

Fiji has various social divides. There is the prominent divide between Indian and Indigenous Fijians, which permeates the entire society. There are separate schools for each ethnic group, in the larger cities there are different business and residential areas for each ethnic group, and throughout much of the country there are Indian dominated or Indigenous dominated towns. There is very little intermingling between the groups and the Indigenous often consider Indians to still be visitors to the country, and thus do not belong. Of crucial importance is that this ethnic divide reaches right up to the national level of politics. The largest two parties, instead of being divided along socio-economic grounds as is common in a

Westminster system, are divided along racial lines. Since the 2000 coup the major Indigenous party has been Qarase's SDL party, and the major Indian party has been Chaudhry's FLP. Because this is the strongest political divide often policies are formulated according to which bias the ethnic group of the party in power has in order to appease their support group (Davies, 2005). This became evident in the lead up to the 2006 coup, with the proposed 'Promotion of Tolerance Reconciliation and Unity Bill', the 'Qoliqoli Bill', and the 'Fijian Tribunal Bill'. All of these heavily favoured the Indigenous community, and were central to the controversy surrounding the takeover.

There is a divide between the East and West of the country. Traditionally the Polynesian East has dominated over the Melanesian West. This has led to some resentment from the West, which has played out through calls for independence. While such action is unlikely to occur it has been necessary to pander to the West's interests (Ewins, 1992). The most recent and pertinent example of this is the appointment of Ratu Josefa Iloilo as President, and then his reappointment in the middle of 2006. Iloilo is a high chief of the West, and had worked his way up through the political ranks to the point where he was next in line to be the President. However, it was widely known that he is a weak leader, and easily manipulated, but because of his Western Chiefly title there was no way that he could be passed over without serious consequences (Kotobalavu, 2006). This had implications for the 2006 overthrow, as it was often evident that the military was able to manipulate Iloilo. This gave Bainimarama much more power in the years leading up to the intervention, and in the end made the intervention a much easier task.

There are several divides among the Chiefly system. Often there are several contenders for a single chiefly title. In Fiji such a title brings a great amount of social respect and power, particularly the Bau title that has a direct lineage to the first Fijian leader Cakobau and is ranked as the top in the country. The title has been vacant since 1989; before the 2006 coup the front-runner to take the position

was Senator Ratu George Cakobau, a supporter of the Qarase Government. However, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, a former RFMF Commander and less than subtle supporter of Bainimarama also had a claim to the title. Similarly, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, a government minister who has been convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup, holds the Tui Cakau title, usually considered to be the third most powerful in the country. In 2001 Lalabalavu gained the title over Ratu Epeli Ganilau, one of the strongest political supporters of Bainimarama. It has been suggested that some of the motivation behind the 2006 intervention was, for these men and others like them, to gain powerful chiefly titles (Kotobalavu, 2006). This adds an interesting dimension to the conflict; however, a full examination of this potential cause is beyond the scope of the current research; it is suffice to say there is substantial rivalry for the high ranking chiefly titles.

The socio-economic divide is an important factor and as explained above was in large part to blame for the 2000 coup. There is a growing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in Fiji. The squatter settlements around the major cities are constantly growing, and there is a degree of resentment, which boiled over during the 2000 coup and resulted in much of the most damaging riots and violence. Closely associated with this is the urban-rural divide. Much of the rural community is subsistence based, usually Fijian Chiefly tribes, or Indian farmers. There is a degree of resentment between this group and those in the urban centres; they perceive that there is more wealth, more opportunities and a higher standard of living in the cities. In reality much of these assumptions prove to be wrong, but nonetheless there are still tensions (R. T. Robertson & Sutherland, 2001).

These social divides make Fiji a conflict prone state. While most of these social issues lie dormant, it would only take a catalyst to bring them into full force. Of particular concern is the racial divide; there was concern before the coup that if Bainimarama overthrew the Government then there would be open hostility by Fijians towards Indians, as much of the population would see the coup as

favouring Indian interests. Thus the lack of social cohesion and disunity among the country make for a conflict prone society and definitely raises the potential for a coup.

### **International Context**

The international context did not play much of a role in the 2006 coup. There was not, nor has there ever been in recent history any external threat, which, as noted by Desh (1999) may increase the propensity of the military to intervene domestically. The large size of the military may further exaggerate this. Thus, there is a large military force with no external focal point, which goes some way to explaining why the Fiji military is so volatile.

The idea of contagion, or the spread of conflict from neighbouring states, is something that has become rather common in research on the Pacific region. This stems from the "arc of instability" argument (Reilly, 2000), which purports that the arc of countries above Australia from Indonesia right through all of Melanesia and now stretching onto Tonga are unstable and becoming increasingly so. One of the fundamental underlying assumptions here is that the increasing instability in the region is self-reinforcing, as when neighbouring countries become unstable then it is more likely for the country in question to become unstable. While this theory is disputed, as it takes little to no account of the particular reasons for each of the conflicts, it does still offer some value and may have had some influence upon Fiji.

Within the Pacific region 2006 was a particularly unstable year, with riots in the Solomon Islands and Tonga as well as the coup in Fiji. The riots in the Solomon Islands occurred soon after the election held on 5 April. The result of the election meant that Snyder Rini was elected as Prime Minister, and he brought back into power many of the members involved in the previous and largely unpopular Kemakeza Government. When this was announced a riot broke out in Honiara, which targeted the Asian community, which many of the public suspected had corrupted the process of selecting a Prime Minister. The Solomon Islands,

Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands and an extra contingent of Australian police were deployed to quell the situation, which ended fairly quickly, but nonetheless was the worst public destruction in the history of Honiara (Kabutaulaka, 2007). Tonga also saw problems in 2006. Following on from the public servants' strike in July of 2005, on 11 November 2006 when the Legislative Council adjourned for the year without having made any progress towards promised democratic reforms, democracy advocates took to the streets in protest. The protest quickly degenerated into a riot in the streets of Nuku'alofa. The targets of the riot were initially government buildings, and then businesses, especially those with connections to the royal family, and later people began openly looting. This resulted in the destruction of somewhere between 60% and 80% of the central business district, and eight deaths (theage.com.au, 17/11/2006). However, it is unlikely that either of these events had much impact upon Fiji. The coup was of a different type of conflict altogether, and formed out of its own steam rather than an instantaneous inspiration from other instability.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark suggested that Bainimarama may have been influenced by the coup in Thailand (The New Zealand Herald, 5/12/2006). In September of 2006 the Thai military overthrew the civilian government, in a bloodless and generally well accepted coup (Ockey, 2007). The suggestion here is that upon seeing the relative ease of the Thai coup, Bainimarama became inspired that similar events could happen in Fiji. Again this is unlikely, as Fiji is a very different country to Thailand and the situations surrounding the coups were very different. As such, the surrounding instabilities may have had some influence upon the RFMF, and made the act of overthrowing the civilian government seem more acceptable; however, this is impossible to measure this in any way and it seems the surrounding conflicts were of a different nature or in a too dissimilar country to have much influence.

## **Institutional Factors**

From the historical legacies analysis it should be obvious that in practice the institutional arrangement between the RFMF and the Fiji Government is not one of separation. The military is a political actor whether the civilian authorities and international observers like it or not. Thus, the second definition of institutional arrangements, that there must simply be consensus over the role of the military and its institutional arrangement with the civilian authorities, is much more pertinent. The Constitution of Fiji defines these arrangements. Upon independence in 1970 the first Constitution was brought into force; however it was abrogated in the first coup in 1987. Soon after the coup discussions for a new constitution began, with the general purpose of upholding the Fijian nationalist gains of the coup. This finally resulted in the 1990 Constitution, which was sympathetic towards the Chiefs' perspective with some consideration given to the views of the Taukei Movement (Robert T. Robertson, 1998: 54-61). This Constitution gave political dominance to Indigenous Fijians. The seats were divided along racial lines and an unrepresentative majority given to Fijians, and in general made it difficult for an Indian to gain any real position of power (Premdas & Steeves, 1991: 160-161). This met with widespread criticism internationally, and some locally, for its political suppression of the Indian community, that at the time was formed the majority of the population. The role of the military was set out in this Constitution under section 94 (3): "[i]t shall be the overall responsibility of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and its peoples" (Fiji Constitution, 1990). This gave the RFMF a large mandate, going beyond the common military role of security and defence and giving them the responsibility over "the well-being of Fiji and its peoples," thus reinforcing the political role.

The 1990 Constitution was seen by its drafters as a temporary measure, to hold the country together during a difficult time; as such, under section 161 they ordered that it be reviewed within seven years. After a comprehensive review by a

Government commission, the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee wrote up what was essentially a new constitution, which was passed on 3 July 1997 (Lal, 1998). There were several wide-ranging changes to the 1997 Constitution; however, they kept several seats allocated to ethnic voting but made these far more representative. In terms of the military's role, this Constitution is very vague. Under section 112 (1) it states that "[t]he military force called the Republic of Fiji Military Forces established by the Constitution of 1990 continues in existence" (Fiji Constitution, 1997). Thus the military argues the bold mandate set out in the 1990 Constitution carries over, and it is therefore its constitutional right to be politically active, to secure the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all its citizens. Conversely, the Fiji Government argued that the 1997 constitution overrides the 1990 constitution and that section 112 only stated that the RFMF continued to exist. Furthermore, they believed that the military should have no political role, but rather be an instrument of the state (Laisenia Qarase, 9/11/2006). The institutional arrangement for the interaction of the military and government is also rather weak. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the RFMF; however, he is only supposed to act upon the advice of the Ministry of Home Affairs, thus leaving the Prime Minister out of the whole process. Of course, this was conceived in a time when the military was not aggressive towards the Government; however this system has been shown to be shaky during the period 2000 – 2006.

Thus, there was much disagreement between the RFMF and the Government over the role of the military, and the institutional arrangement for the interaction between the two was weak. This was a strong underlying theme for many of the disputes, and is one of the core reasons for the poor civilian control, and thus the high coup risk.

### **Military Culture and Professionalism**

The culture of the RFMF can easily be described as adhering most closely to Janowitz's (1960) pragmatist approach. The RFMF ascribes to a larger view of its role that means that it must be involved in politics to ensure the proper provision of

'security defence and well-being of Fiji and its peoples.' This is largely a result of the historical role of the military, which has placed it close to the creation of the state, and its continued evolution. In the period from 2000 – 2006 this has manifested itself in a rather specific way. The RFMF sees ensuring the prosecution of those involved in the 2000 coup as part of its larger role. There are two competing reasons for this; a personal feud by Bainimarama against those who conspired to have him killed in the November 2000 mutiny, and a more altruistic attempt to ensure justice was done and to set a precedent against further action. Over the years it seems that these reasons became twisted; as in the end Bainimarama overthrew the Government, which contradicts the second reasoning. However, it is most likely that both of these reasonings influenced this ideology. This is one of the fundamental underlying problems of civilian control in Fiji. The RFMF by its very nature believes it needs to be involved in politics to fulfil its role properly, which can obviously conflict with the civilian authorities.

While there is definitely a politically-minded culture, the current RFMF does consider itself to be a professional institution. In the middle to latter part of the 1990s the Fijian military underwent a massive change, where it began disentangling itself from the Fijian establishment in what has become known as the "re-professionalization" of the RFMF. Previously the RFMF was intrinsically linked to the Chiefly system, and supportive of the indigenous status quo. Through re-professionalization it began to diverge from this and create its own separate identity, which to an extent favoured a more multicultural society (Ratuva, 2006a; [www.rfmf.mil](http://www.rfmf.mil), 2006). As part of this movement, and potentially its biggest indicator, Vorque Bainimarama was appointed as the new Commander of the RFMF in 1999. As a Naval Commander he appeared to be an odd choice for an army-dominant institution. However, it appears that this was part of the general movement of the military away from being the lapdog of the ruling elite to a separate but still politically motivated institution; it is this that Bainimarama has been particularly successful in achieving (Ratuva, 2006a). Consequently this

'professionalism', did the complete opposite to what Huntington (1957) described; rather than making the military a servant of the civilian government it has increased the likelihood of intervention. In defence of Huntington's theory, the professionalism described by the RFMF is not what he had in mind when coining the term. However, when relating this to his base criteria of a special vocation that requires some expertise and a special social responsibility, it does not look too dissimilar to what the RFMF have illustrated. Thus Finer's (1962) explanation has more relevance in this context. The focal point of the professionalism is to uphold the well-being of Fiji and its peoples, thus their loyalty is to the abstract concept of the State, rather than the specific civilian rulers; which, as Finer theorised, has led to a creation of their own principles, which often conflict with the civilian Government's. When this is coupled with their perceived politically active role, it is easy to understand why they openly criticise the Government over any disagreements. This helps explain the outspoken nature of the RFMF in the years leading up to the coup, and the poor civilian control witnessed in this period.

This culture and ideology is then compounded by the relative strength of the RFMF, which by comparison is far stronger than any other institution in Fiji. The military consists of 3500 men, with 2950 active soldiers ([www.rfmf.mil](http://www.rfmf.mil), 2006), which is disproportionate to the security threat that Fiji faces. There are two key reasons for the large size. The first is that the military offers opportunities often not seen in the rest of Fiji. There is a lot of money to be made through the military, particularly in foreign deployments to which many young Fijians will aspire in order to support their extended family group. Furthermore, the military offers a stable career and high social prestige. The second reason, as outlined above, is that the historical role of the RFMF was to be the tool of the Fijian elite to maintain their power, and thus those in power actively encouraged the large size. The 1987 coups also helped ensure a large size, as in the years following the coups the military swelled in size. In 1987 it was just under 2,000 men strong, soon after it reached a peak of just over 8,000. The military budget also drastically increased,

from F\$16.7m in 1987 to F\$29.8m just two years later (Sanday, 1989: 15). After this it slowly lessened in size again, settling around 3,000 men. Furthermore, as is common among all militaries in coup prone states. It is difficult to reduce the size or budget of the military, as this will result in hostilities towards the government. This large size relative to the population, high status, and the obvious monopoly of arms has meant the military has become a powerful institution in Fiji. It is more powerful than the civilian institutions, which has made overthrowing them an easy process; obviously, this contributes to the coup risk.

Another interesting and important aspect of the military culture is the composition of the RFMF. Since its establishment it has been composed mainly of indigenous Fijians (Sanday, 1989: 11). Throughout the early 1980s cadet training was introduced in five schools throughout Fiji, four of which were ethnic Fijian. This demonstrates the deliberate goal of ethnic Fijian dominance (Halapua, 2003: 59). Furthermore, the officer corps was mainly composed of Fijian Chiefs who had strong ties to the ruling elite. In effect this worked to politicise the military as their influence was strong within the military and their voices heard and taken account of by the government of the day (Sanday, 1989: 12). While the officer corps was Fijian, it continued to have a British Commander until 1982 when Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was named as the first Fijian Commander of the RFMF, further reinforcing the traditional chiefly value system in the military. Thus, in this period the RFMF became increasingly politicised, and, as argued by Halapua, they were in effect agents of the ruling Alliance Party (2003: Ch2). This ethnic dominance helps explain the 1987 military coups, which were largely to secure power for the Fijian elite. The theory of ethnic dominance also holds value for the 2000 coup which through the CRW Unit had some connections to the military and also had racial overtones. However, the significance of the Indigenous Fijian dominance within the military has had only a small impact upon the 2006 coup. If anything, the military was standing up for the rights of the Indian community, who are an insignificant part of the composition of the RFMF. This dramatic change in focus

may in itself have caused some disharmony within the military. Many of the soldiers and officers would have still held to the old value system, where the military was there to protect the Fijian elite. The change in focus may have caused some of them to distrust Bainimarama resulting in internal rifts, which in turn may have been the reason behind some of the difficulties in military cohesion, however, the truth behind this has never been revealed.

### **Fiji's Coup Risk**

Together all these factors explain the poor civilian control that Fiji faced during the inter-coup period 2000 – 2006, and thus the high coup risk the country faced. Fiji's civil-military history shows that through its colonial role of suppressor of uprisings, and later its connection to the chiefly elite, the Fiji Military became a politicised institution. This was further reinforced in the 1987 coups, with the 2000 coup giving some context to the sentiments surrounding the civil-military disputes from 2000 – 2006. While Fiji's political institutions were not as strong as would be preferred this did not indicate that a coup would occur. The looming economic problems put extra pressure upon the civilian regime, and possibly lowered their legitimacy in the eyes of many. The various social divisions give some context to the difficulties that Fiji faces as well as showing why the country is inherently conflict prone. International context did not play a large part in this coup, although there is the possibility that there could have been some contagion from the regional conflicts in the Solomons and Tonga, as well as the well-accepted coup in Thailand. The institutional arrangements were a fundamental problem for this period, and fostered a dispute over the proper role of the military and made it difficult for the civilian authorities to control the military. Lastly, the military culture and professionalism has meant that the RFMF believe that it has a larger political role, to secure the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and its peoples. Its loyalty is to the abstract concept of the State rather than the ruling government, which has fostered much dispute. This is reinforced by the relative strength of the military over any civilian institutions in Fiji, and complicated by the Fijian dominance of the institution, which may have been the cause of some of the problems of cohesion.

From this it can be deduced that the possibility of a coup was always there, although individually these factors do not explain why and when the coup specifically occurred. So now the analysis must turn to the events leading up to the coup in search of some triggering causes.

## PART III

### TRIGGERING CAUSES

## *Chapter Four*

### 2004 REAPPOINTMENT OF BAINIMARAMA

The Commander of the RFMF is appointed for a five-year term, and it is customary that he/she serves two terms. In early 2004 Bainimarama came to the end of his first term and was therefore due for reappointment. As this was the end of his first term he rightfully felt entitled to be reinstated. However, in the lead up to this it was suggested by many within the Government that he would not keep his job, which sparked a tense dispute. In the end Bainimarama was reappointed, however this was the first real incidence of open hostilities between the Government and the military. When looking at this dispute the motivation for intervention was probably there during most of the conflict. The military's interests were initially threatened over government interference in the Labasa mutiny court-martial, the central issue of the Commander holding his position, as well as some budgetary worries. Furthermore, there were some minor governmental failures that the military was beginning to criticise. Yet in the end the Government did reappoint Bainimarama, thus negating the greatest motivator and significantly reducing the motivation for intervention. The other major factor stopping intervention was that the opportunity was not always present. The legitimacy of the SDL/CAMV Government was somewhat deflated, primarily as a result of difficulties surrounding the multi-party cabinet; in addition, there were concerns over corruption, and the beginnings of suspicion over deliberate attempts to impede investigations into the perpetrators of the 2000 coup. Crucially though, the cohesion of the military was suffering. Bainimarama dismissed several officers

upon the basis of disloyalty; these officers later accused him of planning to take over Government. Thus, the possibility of a coup was relatively high as a result of the strong military interests at play and the legitimacy of Government being somewhat deflated. However, the threats to the military's interests were eventually resolved negating the motivation for intervention; additionally, the military was fractured, this lack of cohesion preventing the opportunity. These factors ultimately meant that no intervention occurred.

### **Description of Events**

This dispute set the tone for the civil-military relations in the years to come. The tensions that drove it first began back in 2000, as Bainimarama generated a strong position for himself through his attempts to resolve the coup, in particular his dismissal of the President Ratu Mara. The strength of this position was far beyond the normal bounds of a military commander. On top of this, there was a strange relationship between Qarase and Bainimarama, as Bainimarama initially put Qarase into the interim Government after the 2000 coup. Thus, Bainimarama had an unusual degree of authority, which many within the SDL/CAMV Government saw as inappropriate and therefore actively attempted to have him removed. There were several initial attempts at this where he was offered diplomatic postings to New Zealand and the United Kingdom, all of which he turned down. At one stage he was even put forth to be the next United Nations (UN) force Commander in Kuwait, a post which was well out of his reach, and one which he did not receive (The Review, 1/7/2003). In the end, the Government decided to simply not renew Bainimarama's contract when it came up for review in early 2004. However, this sparked a tense dispute and in the end only resulted in Bainimarama gaining further power and authority that would define the subsequent disputes ending in Fiji's fourth coup.

In order to describe this dispute accurately, first the Labasa Court Martial will be discussed, as this set up much of the civil-military tensions. Secondly the multi-party cabinet dispute will be considered, as this indicated a weakening of the

Government, and suggested at least a small deflation in legitimacy. Finally, attention will turn to the events surrounding Bainimarama's reappointment.

### *Labasa Court Martial*

The events surrounding the Labasa Court Martial were the first clear instances of a rift between the Government and the military. On 15 January 2003, 56 soldiers pleaded guilty to mutiny for removing the commanding officer and taking control of the northern military camp at Labasa during the 200 coup. Two Lieutenants, Rupeni Vosayaco and Nemani Valeniyasana, pleaded guilty to the further charge of inciting the other 54 soldiers to mutiny against their commanding officers. For these crimes the two Lieutenants were sentenced to life imprisonment, with the remaining 54 soldiers given lesser terms ranging up to 10 years (*Radio Australia*, 15/1/2003; *Radio New Zealand International*, 29/1/2003). Almost immediately after the sentences were handed down the Government began to criticise the length of the prison terms, as they were far more excessive than the terms given to the mutineers at Suva (*Radio New Zealand International*, 31/1/2003). The Government therefore began a concerted effort to reduce the sentences of all 56 soldiers, to which the military was strongly opposed (*Radio New Zealand International*, 22/4/2003).

The conflict was born when the Government submitted draft committal warrant papers, which reflected what they viewed to be more consistent sentences for the Labasa mutineers. However, the military did not agree with the reduced sentences, or the lack of consultation, and therefore refused to sign (The Review, 1/7/2003). In early April the dispute became more confrontational with the withdrawal of military personal guarding Qarase's residence and Government House (*Fiji Daily Post*, 15/4/2003). Bainimarama then stamped his authority; on 15 April he visited Qarase, on 22 April he went to the President and on 24 April he saw the Minister of Home Affairs Jonetani Cokanasiga (*Fiji Daily Post*, 15/4/2003, 25/4/2003; *Radio New Zealand International*, 22/4/2003). In all of these meetings it has been reported that the Commander made his opposition to the shortening of

the mutineers' sentences apparent. These efforts eventually saw the Government capitulate and the original sentences handed down at the court-martial to stand (The Review, 1/7/2003).

After the Labasa mutiny sentences ordeal, Bainimarama became much more outspoken against the Government and throughout 2003 he made several stabs at the administration. This upset many people, and it created a number of powerful enemies for the Commander, from within the Government, the Great Council of Chiefs and even within certain sections of the military. Thus, when his contract as Commander of the RFMF came up for renewal in early 2004, many people saw this as the opportunity they needed to get rid of what was becoming an increasing problem.

#### *Multi-Party Cabinet Dispute*

At the same time as the Labasa Court Martial dispute the Government was facing a serious constitutional issue surrounding the formation of a Multi-Party Cabinet that threatened to bring down the SDL/CAMV Government. The dispute dates right back to the formation of the SDL/CAMV Government in 2001. In the 1997 Constitution it is stipulated under section 99(5) that:

In establishing the Cabinet, the Prime Minister must invite all parties whose membership in the House of Representatives comprises at least 10% of the total membership of the House to be represented in the Cabinet in proportion to their numbers in the House (Fiji Constitution, 1997).

However, Qarase did not allow any members of the FLP into cabinet even though the party far exceeded the ten percent threshold. His basic argument was that it would bring two parties together with differing views and that this would only cause problems for Fiji. The FLP took the matter to the High Court, which ruled in their favour. The Government then took the matter to the Court of Appeal, which upheld the ruling. However, Qarase was still adamant and decided to take the final step and appealed to the Supreme Court (Radio New Zealand International, 30/9/2002). However, it was made clear by the Supreme Court that this case was not urgent (Radio Fiji, 28/8/2002), so it lingered for some time. Eventually the court

date was set for 18 June 2003, and it looked as if the result would have a major impact upon the political landscape, with some speculation even going as far as to say that if the ruling went against Qarase's Government then it would force a snap election (Radio New Zealand International, 3/6/2003). While the case only took two days to be presented it took the Supreme Court a month to return with a decision, which once again upheld the initial ruling and ordered the Government to include several members of the FLP in cabinet. The Court said that the notion of power sharing was central to the 1997 Constitution, so the multi-party cabinet provision could not be ignored (Fiji Daily Post, 19/7/2003).

Qarase at this point had no option but to adhere to this ruling and he began to set up a multi-party cabinet. Qarase's proposal was to give the FLP 14 ministerial positions, all of which were for minor portfolios and instead of replacing current ministers he decided to expand cabinet to from 22 to 36 seats. This caused much criticism from around the country, particularly from Chaudhry, other senior members of the FLP and opposition leader Mick Beddoes. It was argued that 36 cabinet seats was ridiculous as this would make up almost half of parliament, and within such a large cabinet the FLP ministers would have minimal or even no say (Radio New Zealand International, 27/7/2003). Qarase was unwilling to budge, which resulted in a political deadlock; since there was no clear ruling on the numbers of seats to be given to the FLP or the size of cabinet, there was growing sentiment that the dispute needed to return to the Supreme Court to resolve the crisis (Radio New Zealand International, 7/8/2003). Chaudhry then inflamed the situation further by calling for support from the Pacific Islands Forum over the standoff (Fiji Daily Post, 16/8/2003). The conflict then degenerated to Chaudhry and Qarase exchanging comments through the media over the dishonest practices the other was using. After a few weeks of this feuding the two parties came together again for further talks. This time the discussions focused not on the bloated size of cabinet but whether the FLP should have fourteen or seventeen seats (Radio Fiji, 26/8/2003). However, they did not reach an agreement. Qarase

then offered fourteen seats to Labour members but they refused to take them, causing the conflict to continue.

After further deadlock the case was finally taken to the Supreme Court (Radio New Zealand International, 17/9/2003). Once again, the case took a long time to come before the court, which eventually happened on 11 May 2004, and returned a ruling in early July. The judgement was split, and thus the Supreme Court simply called for the parties to come together for consultation and agree upon a solution (Fiji Live, 9/7/2004). However, each party took the same stance as before and the deadlock continued. Eventually, the FLP formally rejected Qarase's offer to enter into a multiparty cabinet, for the stated reason that they did not want to be part of the deception and corruption that defined the SDL Government (Radio New Zealand International, 24/11/2004).

Thus, the multi-party cabinet dispute put the country into political limbo and put the Government in a weak position. It was at the height of this crisis in the latter part of 2003 that the dispute over the reappointment of Bainimarama first emerged. As such, the Government was already in a weak position and beginning to lose the confidence of much of the public.

#### *Bainimarama's Reappointment*

It had been no secret that ever since the 2001 election the Government wanted to remove Bainimarama. Still, it took the standoff over the Labasa mutineers to make the Government actually state that they would not renew his contract in early 2004. Bainimarama made it clear that he was not going to go quietly. On 16 December he stated his intention to keep the post of military Commander (*Fiji Daily Post*, 17/12/2003). Furthermore, the statement went on to strongly accuse the Government, and specifically those with ties to the 2000 coup, of trying to remove of him so they would not have to stand trial for their crimes (The Review, 1/1/2004). In early 2004 Bainimarama began to focus his attention upon the Ministry of Home Affairs, the body which advises the President on the

appointment of the Military Commander, stating that certain advisors were behind the attempts to have him removed (*Fiji Sun*, 6/1/2004). This was further fuelled when the Ministry revealed that it was keeping a close watch on the military because of recent high level meetings within the RFMF which were suspected to be a threat to national security (*AFP*, 12/1/2004). This infuriated the military which soon retaliated, stating that it was the role of the military to monitor national security, not the Ministry of Home Affairs (*PACNEWS*, 13/1/2004). On top of this the Government also severely cut the size of the military budget for 2004 (*Radio New Zealand International*, 17/11/2003). This brought the conflict to its height, and an intervention seemed like a real possibility.

It was later revealed that, in the aforementioned high-level meetings within the RFMF, Bainimarama was attempting to rally his troops to gain support for his reappointment. However, the situation was not that simple. In an effort to gain cohesion Bainimarama dismissed several officers who were not showing loyalty and promoted those who would support him (*Cabenatabua*, 21/1/2004). This was a significant change in the military, as prior to this move there were still some individuals who did not agree with Bainimarama's approach to the Government. With this one act the military became a much more unified and therefore more powerful force in Fijian society and politics. It was after this move that Qarase finally capitulated and assured Bainimarama that he would retain his position.

As a further effort by the Government to smooth over relations with the military and diffuse the potential for intervention, the Chief Executive Officer for the Ministry of Home Affairs, Jeremaia Waqanisau, was made a scapegoat for the Government's position in the matter. Throughout much of this dispute the military directed most of its animosity at Waqanisau, primarily because he chaired the panel that would decide who the next Commander would be (*Lewa*, 7/1/2004). Furthermore, it was known that he opposed the reappointment of Bainimarama and as such it became a personal vendetta of the Commander to get rid of him. Tensions became especially heated in mid January; in one particular meeting it

was alleged that Bainimarama actually threatened Waqanisau, for which the Ministry lodged a criminal complaint against the Commander, although he was never charged (Lewa, 20/1/2004). Soon after Bainimarama's reappointment, the Government placed the blame for the messy incident on Waqanisau. On 3 February it was announced that he would be posted to China as Fiji's ambassador<sup>9</sup> for the sake of national security because of irreconcilable differences with the Commander of the RFMF (Lewa, 5/2/2004).

The previous fractures within the military became evident on Friday 7 May 2004 when three of the officers who were dismissed due to disloyalty released a joint statement alleging that Bainimarama wanted to overthrow the Government during the confrontation over his reappointment (*Fiji Live*, 10/5/2004a). They claimed that Bainimarama dismissed them because they did not agree with his plans to take over Government. The next Monday the military denied any such plans, and reiterated its backing of the Government; meanwhile, several meetings were held between Government officials, as well as with the police to discuss the overthrow claims (*Fiji Live*, 10/5/2004a, 10/5/2004b). Soon after, Qarase decided to convene an urgent meeting of the National Security Council, which decided to refer allegations to the Government, which in turn decided to have a commission of inquiry into the Commander (*Radio Fiji*, 12/5/2004, 18/5/2004). Bainimarama warned the Government that such a commission of inquiry may backfire, as they may not want all he would say to be made public (*Fiji Live*, 20/5/2004). Qarase then stated that the commission of inquiry would go ahead and no-one could stop it (*Radio Fiji*, 21/5/2004). To add further intrigue to the issue it was claimed by the FLP that Qarase was only using the opportunity for a commission of inquiry as an excuse to once again try and get rid of Bainimarama (*Fiji Times*, 20/5/2004). In mid-July 2004 it was reported that a three-way tussle was underway behind closed doors, between the military, the President's Office and the Prime Minister's Office,

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<sup>9</sup> It is fairly common in Fijian politics for an unwanted official to be posted overseas instead of actually being fired from their position.

over the terms of reference for the inquiry. Even more revealing was that the military had tried to get the President, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the military, to drop the inquiry altogether (*Radio New Zealand International*, 12/7/2004). Only a matter of days after this was reported the President announced that the Government would not proceed with the inquiry (*Fiji Live*, 16/7/2004).

## **Discussion**

The importance of the dispute over Commodore Bainimarama's reappointment as Commander of the RFMF should not be overlooked, as it was one of the closest incidents to fulfilling all the necessary triggering causes, and was thus very close to resulting in an intervention. There were plenty of motives, mostly stemming from the threat not to reappoint Bainimarama. There were issues in legitimacy because of the multi-party cabinet dispute, and when Bainimarama manufactured cohesion by dismissing those disloyal to him, the appropriate opportunity appeared to be present. However, at this stage when tensions had reached their highest point and an intervention appeared a real possibility, it forced Qarase to act. He conceded and reappointed Bainimarama, thus negating the central motivating force. Therefore, all the factors for intervention only came together for a very short period of time, and when Qarase capitulated he removed the primary motive.

### *Motive*

There was the appropriate motive for intervention in this dispute. This was largely generated by attacks on the military's interest. While there were some Government failures that the military spoke out against these were relatively minor compared to several of the following disputes, and thus most likely had little influence. Three military interests were threatened. First, the pre-cursor dispute over the sentences of the Labasa mutineers threatened military autonomy. It was a mutiny and as such it was dealt with through court-martial, which is the realm of the military. When the Government attempted to interfere this sparked the military into action, as it was encroaching on their territory. While there may have been

some real motivation to ensure that the mutineers got the prison terms they were sentenced to, there was probably a much stronger motivation by the military to not allow interference in their affairs. Second, the central issue over the reappointment of Bainimarama attacked military autonomy and personal interests. As mentioned above it is customary for the RFMF Commander to serve two terms. Thus, when the Government stated that it was its intention not to renew Bainimarama's contract it was interfering in the normal running of the military and as such it threatened the military's autonomy. Closely related to this were the personal interests of Bainimarama. Much of this dispute centred on Bainimarama, it was the growing discontent with his actions that motivated the Government to attempt not to renew his contract, and it is presumable that it was his wish to retain his position that drove much of the military's actions. Furthermore, all this was compounded by the reduction of the military's budget for the upcoming year threatening the military interest of budgetary support. This suggested that the Government was trying to find a way to weaken the military, or at least assert some control over the military through one of the only tools they had.

There were some Government failures that the military spoke out against during this dispute, however at this stage they were minor compared to the disputes that followed. There were several stabs at the administration; when the Government announced that it was not going to renew Bainimarama's contract, he retaliated by saying that it was only because those who had connections to the 2000 coup did not want to stand trial for their crimes. In addition, when the Government suggested a Commission of Inquiry, Bainimarama said that the Government would not want all he has to say to be made public, suggesting that there were issues of corruption, or connections to the 2000 coup that he would reveal. However, it is difficult to reconcile Government failures with a motivation to intervene. At this stage much of this talk appeared to be more rhetoric than failures so bad they would force the military to overthrow the Government for the good of the nation.

This shows that there were strong 'military interests' at play, but only minor 'Government failures' motivating the military. Because of the strength of the military interests surrounding the reappointment of Bainimarama, there was a strong enough motivation for this dispute.

### *Opportunity*

The SDL/CAMV Government had some difficulties that would have weakened their legitimacy during this period. They suffered a political crisis over the multi-party Cabinet Case. Due to the ongoing nature of the dispute and because the Government seemed to have no way to solve it, many people would have begun to question their ability to govern. As such, they began to lose support and confidence from many around the country. This was particularly evident when it was said that if the Government lost the case it might result in a snap election, presumably because they would have lost the support of the population, and would need to reaffirm their right to govern. Thus, this was a clear incidence of a legitimacy deflation.

Furthermore, the Government had continuing problems over the ever-present issue of corruption, and efforts by the Government to impede investigations into the perpetrators of the 2000 coup, which much of the population saw as illegal acts, further damaging their legitimacy. In early 2003 the Opposition leader Mick Beddoes accused the Government of trying to cover up people connected to the 2000 coup. It was an emerging sentiment at the time that the Government was deliberately impeding investigations, as evidenced through the lack of results, or even any strong action to find and prosecute those behind the coup (Radio New Zealand International, 4/3/2003). Later in the year the Attorney-General released a report which accused the Government of misusing \$41,783,301 of trust money (Fiji Daily Post, 20/10/2003). Several reports emerged over corruption in the Public Works Department (Radio New Zealand International, 13/11/2003). Near the end of the year a scandal emerged over the issue of fishing licences, which also pointed to massive corruption; Chaudhry even went as far as to ask for a public

inquiry, although he did not get his wish (Radio Fiji, 24/12/2003). All of these incidences together certainly lessened the public's approval of the Government and thus damaged its legitimacy.

While there was some legitimacy deflation, military cohesion was not at its strongest during this dispute. It appears that early on in this conflict the military suffered from some internal fracturing. This would have held Bainimarama back from implementing any intervention plans. Later when he consolidated his power by dismissing disloyal officers and therefore generating a cohesive military, Qarase finally yielded to allowing his reappointment, avoiding the possibility of intervention. Thus, military cohesion was a crucially important factor in this dispute, and was the key reason that an intervention did not occur.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the reason that this dispute did not occur comes down to a matter of timing. All of the factors were present at one stage or another, but they were never present together, or at least not for long enough for an intervention to occur. The motive for intervention was present from the threats to the military's interests, namely the involvement of the Government in the Labasa Court Martial, the insistence not to reappoint the Commander, and the compounding issue over the reduced budget. Also the threats to Bainimarama's personal interests played a crucial role. Yet in the end, the Government capitulated and gave Bainimarama his reappointment, which in effect nullified the greatest threat to the military's interests, and furthermore Jeremaia Waqanisau, who the military perceived to be its greatest enemy, was sent overseas. The opportunity, on the other hand, was not present during much of the dispute. The legitimacy of the Government was deflated because of the multi-party cabinet dispute and some corruption. Yet it appears that throughout much of the dispute the military was fractured. In the end, Bainimarama was able to manufacture cohesion through dismissing the disloyal officers, which brought the potential for intervention to its highest. This was probably also the action that forced Qarase to give in and allow Bainimarama to be reinstated for his

second term. Thus, there was no period where both the motive and the opportunity came together, which is a necessity for a military coup.

## *Chapter Five*

### THE “PROMOTION OF RECONCILIATION TOLERANCE AND UNITY BILL 2005” DISPUTE

The dispute surrounding the ‘Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill 2005’<sup>10</sup> hit headlines all around the world and saw a growth in the boldness of the Commander. Through the Unity Bill, the Government attempted to start a process of national healing to put the events of the 2000 coup behind them. As part of this they proposed to give perpetrators of the coup amnesty for their crimes. This caused a dispute with the military that vehemently disagreed with the premise of this bill. Throughout this dispute the Commander became much more vocal, and began to put his stamp upon the political scene in Fiji. For this dispute most of the triggering causes were present; there was a motivating force coming from the early release of prisoners convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup, and the potential increase in prisoner releases through the proposed Unity Bill. Furthermore, there were some military interests threatened through potential discipline of Bainimarama, and his concern that the Reconciliation Commission may reveal his misconduct during the 2000 coup, including the removal of Ratu Mara and the brutal suppression of the November mutineers. There was also a degree of opportunity. There was some legitimacy deflation; this came from the early release of prisoners, which amounted to illegal behaviour. Additionally there was also bias in the actual Bill that alienated much of the population and caused a political crisis. In addition, the military appeared to be relatively cohesive. However,

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<sup>10</sup> Hereafter this will be simply referred to as the Unity Bill for the sake of brevity.

there was no coup largely because the threats to the military's interests were merely speculative and as such did not give a strong enough motivation for intervention.

### **Description of Events**

To gain some context, firstly instances of the Government intervention shall be discussed, highlighting how coup investigations were impeded and how the Government implemented the early release of the most high profile prisoners convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup, who often had direct or indirect connections to the SDL/CAMV Government. This is necessary as it contributes to much of the motivating governmental failures and also were viewed by many as illegal acts contributing to a legitimacy deflation. After this the events surrounding the Unity Bill will be discussed.

#### *Seniloli, Vakalalabure, Leweniqila, Volavola, Rinakama and Savu Case*

The case of Seniloli, Vakalalabure, Leweniqila, Volavola, Rinakama and Savu included many prominent Fijians. Ratu Jope Seniloli was the Vice-President at the time of the trial, but more importantly he was the candidate put forward by George Speight and the rebels for the post-coup interim Government to represent their interests. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure was the Deputy Speaker of Parliament; Isireli Leweniqilia was the Minister of Sports; Peceli Rinakama was a former Member of Parliament; Viliame Volavola was a former Lieutenant Colonel Army Officer; and Viliame Savu was an already jailed nationalist. The group were suspected of being sworn in as ministers under Speight's administration, for this they were charged on the night of 7 May 2003 with one count of taking an unlawful oath to commit a capital offence, and one count of engaging in a seditious enterprise, to which they all pleaded not guilty (*Fiji Live*, 8/5/2003; *Radio New Zealand International*, 8/2/2004). As will become evident throughout this chapter the legal process in Fiji is often tediously slow, and it was not until more than a year later on 5 August 2004 that all five men were convicted and given various sentences according to their level of involvement in the coup. Seniloli was given four years, Vakalalabure

six years, Rinakama and Volavola three years each, and Savu twelve months (*Radio New Zealand International*, 6/8/2004).

However, it was only after their conviction that this case became interesting. On 23 August 2004 the Mercy Commission<sup>11</sup> made it clear that they did not back a presidential pardon for Seniloli or any of the others convicted, and on 11 November the group's appeal was rejected by the Court, making an early release seem unlikely (*Fiji1*, 24/8/2004; *Fiji Live*, 11/11/2004). Nonetheless, on 25 November, only a matter of days after the appeal was dismissed, Seniloli was released from prison by Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Qoriniasi Bale, under a compulsory supervision order, stating that it was for health reasons (*Fiji Sun*, 29/11/2004).<sup>12</sup> On 29 November the military began to voice its opposition against the early release of Seniloli, with military spokesperson Captain Neumi Lewneni stating that the early release amounted to an endorsement of the 2000 coup, and that it made a mockery of the military, the Police and more importantly the judicial system (*Fiji Sun*, 30/11/2004). This opposition continued well into early 2005 and was the basis of much of the tension between the Government and the military during this period.

Despite the controversy the early releases continued. On 18 January 2005 Viliame Savu was released to serve the remainder of his sentence extramurally (*Radio New Zealand International*, 18/1/2005). Later on in the year, on 17 December Volavola and Rinakama, were also released from jail six months early (Ragi, 17/12/2005). Finally Vakalalabure was also released early on 29 June 2006 (*Fiji Live*, 29/6/2006).

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<sup>11</sup> The “Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy” (or Mercy Commission) is set up under Section 115 of the 1997 Constitution. It is the body which advises the President on pardoning convictions, it is headed up by the Attorney General and has two other members appointed by the President.

<sup>12</sup> Later the sickness of Seniloli was brought into question, as it was revealed, that in a sworn affidavit for his bail application signed in May 2004 Seniloli himself stated that “I do not suffer from any serious illness” (Elbourne, 23/12/2004)

*Tarakinikini*

Lieutenant Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini rose to notoriety during the coup as the Spokesman for the RFMF. Speight then named him Military Chief in his rebel Government, thus, Tarakinikini became under suspicion of involvement. Yet it was not until New Zealand's Foreign Minister Phil Goff accused Tarakinikini of involvement in the mutiny of 2 November 2000 that any attention was paid to him (*Pacific Islands Report*, 6/11/2000). Soon after, Tarakinikini, along with Colonel Ulaiafi Vatu, were placed under house arrest as the investigations into the mutiny began (*ABC*, 8/11/2000). However, within a few days both men were cleared of any involvement (*Pacific Journalism Online*, 17/11/2000). While the police cleared Tarakinikini of any connection to the mutiny, Bainimarama continued to allege involvement.

In early 2001, after some persistence by Qarase, the United Nations appointed Tarakinikini to the post of planning officer in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a position that he eagerly accepted. (*Fiji Daily Post*, 9/3/2001). Then in December 2001, during the court-martial of 15 soldiers accused with the coup and mutiny, Tarakinikini was implicated in evidence given by former Police Officer Jim Koroï (*Radio Australia*, 6/12/2001). This further kindled the military's interest in bringing Tarakinikini to 'justice', and plans began to try and get him home (*Wise*, 13/3/2002). Because of this renewed interest, in early March Tarakinikini handed in his resignation to the military, citing that he no longer wanted to be victimised and saw no future in the military under the current leadership (*Wise*, 12/3/2002). However, the military refused to accept his resignation, while at the same time Qarase was again working the diplomatic channels in an effort to get Tarakinikini's term at the UN extended (*Fiji Daily Post*, 17/3/2002; *Radio Fiji*, 22/3/2002).

Over the next four years the military continued to try and bring Tarakinikini home, most likely to face a court martial over his suspected involvement in the coup. Meanwhile Tarakinikini took the military's decision to not accept his

resignation through the legal system, initially winning in the High Court but then having the decision overturned in the Appeal Court, which was further reinforced through the Supreme Court. Then in February 2005 the President officially rejected Tarakinikini's resignation and called for him to return to Fiji (Lewa & Ali, 5/2/2005). In the middle of April 2005 Tarakinikini filed an affidavit suing the President Josefa Iloilo, Commander Voreqe Bainimarama, and Attorney General Qoriniasi Bale over the refusal to accept his resignation (Marau, 15/4/2005). Tarakinikini once again lost this case and the military persisted in its efforts to bring him back to Fiji, which is where the case stood in the lead up to December 2006, no nearer resolution than in 2002 when it first emerged.

It was clear, from Qarase's persistent efforts to make sure Tarakinikini was appointed to the UN and that his contract be renewed, that the Government did not want Tarakinikini to be brought to trial. Later in 2005 after the military had gained the support of the President, the Government would not back an effort to bring him home, further stifling the military's efforts.

#### *Lalabalavu and Dimuri Trial*

The case of Lalabalavu and Dimuri is closely connected to the Labasa court-martial dispute, as outlined in the previous chapter. The two senior ministers were convicted in a criminal court for their involvement in the Labasa mutiny; however they were released early from their jail term on orders from the Government.

Two members of the controversial CAMV party, the Minister for Lands, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, and Senator and Labasa Chief Ratu Josefa Dimuri, along with two other Chiefs, were charged with mutiny-related offences in early 2003 (*Radio New Zealand International*, 18/3/2003). This is another case that demonstrates the often painfully slow legal process in Fiji, as it was not until May 2004 that they stood before Court and entered their not guilty pleas (Katonivualiku & Nand, 25/5/2004). It took until August for the trial to actually begin (*Radio New Zealand International*, 31/8/2004), which dragged on until 3 April 2005 before they

were finally convicted for the crime of unlawful assembly and were sentenced to eight months imprisonment (Latunagauna, 5/4/2005).

Yet, after serving only ten days of those eight months Lalabalavu and Dimuri were released extramurally on a compulsory supervision order by the Commissioner of Prisons Aisea Taoka (*Fiji Live*, 14/4/2005). Bainimarama was quick to criticise the releases, stating that the hype over reconciliation was a waste of time if those responsible for the political turmoil were being let loose (*Fiji Times*, 19/4/2005), which was a reference to the dialogue surrounding the Unity Bill. For this criticism Vosanibola said he was considering disciplining the Commander, to which Bainimarama retaliated by stating that he would not be gagged (*Fiji Live*, 20/4/2005). This did not amount to much, but it did add to the tensions between the military and the Government. Later on in the year when Lalabalavu and Dimuri's sentences were up they were both allowed back into the House (Lutunauga, 13/9/2005). This was the first time that convicted ministers had been able to return to Parliament, which further infuriated the military.

#### *Expulsion of Peter Ridgeway*

In late June 2005 Qarase demanded that the ex-Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Peter Ridgeway, leave the country immediately. Ridgeway had earlier in the year resigned from his position and had only returned to help with some cases which were connected to the 2000 coup. There were some irregularities in his contract, to which Qarase, rather than trying to mend them, cancelled his contract altogether and ordered him out of the country or he and his family would be sent to jail (*Fiji Sun*, 22/6/2005). While the military did not make any public comments about this, probably because they were focused more on the Unity Bill at the time, this once again shows the deliberate attempts by the Government to impede the investigations into the coup.

#### *Apisai Tora plus Twelve Trial*

Apisai Tora is an interesting character who has a history of involvement in Fijian politics and has been a thorn in the side of the RFMF. This case is no

different. In 2000 before the coup Tora was the leader of the hard line nationalist ‘Taukei Movement’<sup>13</sup> and soon after the coup he became a Senator. Because of his involvement with the Taukei movement, suspicion followed him around and on 28 January 2003 he was charged, along with twelve others, with unlawful assembly, which related to the seizure of an army checkpoint and the blocking of Sabeto Junction on the Queens Highway during the height of the coup (*Fiji Live*, 30/1/2003). On 24 February he appeared before the Court and pleaded not guilty, and was released on bail (*Radio New Zealand International*, 25/2/2003). When it finally came time to hear the case, Magistrate Sayed Mukhtar Shah found that there were huge discrepancies in the witnesses accounts and a general lack of evidence, and therefore decided to acquit Tora and his twelve accomplices of all charges (*Fiji Sun*, 4/11/2004).

The case did not stop there, as on 5 September 2005 Tora and his twelve accomplices once again appeared in front of the Court as a result of an appeal by the Director of Public Prosecutions (Naivaluwaqa, 6/9/2005). This resulted in Tora and his accomplices finally being convicted, as it was found that the Magistrate’s Court misdirected itself on the onus of proof (Seema Sharma, 20/9/2005). On 27 September 2005 Tora was given eight months in jail, while his accomplices were sentenced to four months each (Seema Sharma & Mereseini, 28/9/2005). Yet, less than a month later Tora’s twelve accomplices were set free to serve their sentences extramurally, and in the middle of November Tora himself was also set free on a compulsory supervision order by Qoriniasi Bale (*Fiji Times*, 19/11/2005; Mereseini, 14/10/2005).

Together these cases represent the most prominent examples of the early release of prisoners and the stifling of investigations for high profile suspects of the 2000 coup by the Fijian Government. This became one of the military’s principal

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<sup>13</sup> See Ch3 Background > Historical Legacies> 1987 Coups, for a description of the Taukei Movement.

focuses with the goal to ensure this pattern was ended. It was in this climate that the ‘Unity Bill’ was introduced.

*The Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill*

The “Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill” was introduced on 4 May 2005, and it quickly stirred up much debate. Much of the controversy surrounded the amnesty provision for the perpetrators of the 2000 coup outlined in part 2 section 5(1)e:

Facilitating the granting of amnesty by the President to persons who make full voluntary disclosures of all facts relevant to acts or omissions constituting or causing a violation of human rights associated with a political objective committed during the designated period (“Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill”, 2005).

The important points here are that if persons who were involved in the 2000 coup fully admit to their crimes, and can prove that they were politically motivated then they receive full amnesty. This was to be administered by the Reconciliation Commission, which was to be appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. This was presented by the Government as necessary to uncover the truth about what happened in 2000 and therefore begin the process of national healing. This ties in with the overall purpose of the Bill, which is to promote restorative justice rather than retribution, and to forgive and move on as a nation (L. Qarase, 2005).

However, many did not accept this reasoning. Various concerns were raised about the power of the Reconciliation Commission which, because of its proposed appointment method, would essentially be a political body. There were also issues over the granting of amnesty to the perpetrators of the coup (Chandrasekharan, 2005a; , 2005b; , 2005c; Lal, 2005). Opposition was raised from many corners against the Bill including several legal and humanitarian organisations, but the most venomous resistance came from the military that saw the Bill as a destabilising influence upon the country and an escalation of the trend of early releases from prison of those involved in the coup (Bainimarama, 2005).

It was not long after the Introduction of the Unity Bill that Bainimarama first spoke out against it, calling it ‘reconciliation bull’ on 13 May (*Fiji Live*, 14/5/2005). Then on 29 May Bainimarama and over 20 other military officers dressed in uniform sat in the visitors’ gallery in Parliament in a silent protest against the Bill (Kikau, 1/6/2005). In late May the United States ambassador David Lyon first entered into the discussions by condemning the Bill, saying that it would set a precedent for further coups, for which he was heavily criticised by the Fijian Government (*Fiji Live*, 31/5/2005).

At about this time a personal dispute emerged between Bainimarama and the new Minister of Home Affairs Josefa Vosanibola. Vosanibola was appointed in December 2004 to replace Jocketani Cokanasiga due to the increasing difficulties that he was having controlling the military (*Radio New Zealand International*, 16/12/2004). The new Minister took a much more combative approach to dealing with the military than previous ministers had taken. The first obvious notification of this came in mid-April 2005 when Vosanibola warned Bainimarama over his public statements against the Government (*Fiji Live*, 19/4/2005), and again in May when he condemned the military’s comments and actions concerning the Unity Bill (*Fiji Times*, 28/5/2005b). In early June Vosanibola told Bainimarama to ‘toe the line’ after the sit-in at Parliament; the military simply replied by defending its right to speak publicly, and furthermore the military challenged the Government to try and discipline the Commander (*Fiji Live*, 1/6/2005; *Radio New Zealand International*, 7/6/2006). Vosanibola took up this challenge. He publicly stated that the Commander would be disciplined for his outbursts against the Unity Bill (Marau, 10/6/2005). However nothing eventuated and soon after it was revealed that the President was asked to dismiss Bainimarama, to which he refused, and asked the parties to resolve their differences (*Radio New Zealand International*, 20/6/2005).

In an address to his soldiers on 23 June Bainimarama warned of continued political instability and the possibility of upheaval in the future (Mereseini, 24/6/2005). At the end of the month the military gave its first parliamentary

submission against the Bill, claiming that it would undermine the integrity of the military if the perpetrators of the 2000 coup and mutiny were set free (*Fiji Times*, 30/6/2005).

July brought tensions to their peak polarising the entire country along ethnic, political, and socioeconomic lines.<sup>14</sup> Early in the month, the FLP aligned itself with the military in opposition to the Bill, galvanising the strong political backlash (*Fiji Live*, 11/7/2005). Then on 11 July Bainimarama released an eight-page statement against the Bill, stating that it would send the country into anarchy and warning that the military would take action against any who act to ‘destabilise’ the country (Biumaiono, 12/7/2005). This was met with intense criticism from many, including the US Ambassador David Lyon who said that any action against an elected government by the military would be ‘unacceptable’ (C. Wilson, 12/7/2005). The situation became even more serious the next day when a draft copy of the statement signed by Bainimarama was leaked, in which the Commander threatened to remove the Government (P. Williams, 13/7/2005). In this draft copy, Bainimarama stated “*The RFMF must then stop the Bill from passing or get rid of the Government if it is passed. We can recover without this Government, we cannot recover from this Bill*” (Bainimarama, 2005). This heightened the conflict and forced Qarase and Vosanibola to begin discussing what to do about Bainimarama (*Fiji Live*, 13/7/2005b). From these discussions, it was decided not to remove Bainimarama but to seriously consider disciplining him (Biumaiono, 16/7/2005). Later in the month Vosanibola stated that he would use his constitutional powers to discipline the Commander, (*Fiji Live*, 25/7/2005) however this required the consent of the President, which they were never able to attain; as such, in the end no action was taken. In early October 2005 the military proclaimed victory by stating that the Ministry of Home Affairs had no power to discipline the Commander (*Radio New Zealand International*, 6/10/2005). By this stage it was becoming obvious that Bainimarama had a good deal of influence over the

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<sup>14</sup> As a generalisation the rural poor accepted the government's presentation of the Bill, while the educated urban working class rejected it.

President, and thus there were particular difficulties for the Government in controlling the military.

However, soon after the release of Bainimarama's statement Qarase made his first concessions. On 13 July 2005 he released a three page statement of his own in which he said that the Bill would be reviewed in light of the public reaction (*Fiji Live*, 13/7/2005a). However, tensions did not cool down that easily, and on 14 July it was reported that an ex-RFMF soldier, Viliame Raqio, now a member of the Tel Aviv-based mercenary company Global Security International, offered to defend the Government if the Bill was passed (*Radio New Zealand International*, 14/7/2005). This was refuted by the Government, and at a National Security Council meeting soon after they rejected the idea altogether (*PACNEWS*, 19/7/2005). At the end of the month support began to rise again for the Bill, as all 14 provinces officially supported it. Soon after the Great Council of Chiefs also gave their endorsement, although they left the door ajar by requesting that the Government also consider the concerns raised by the various groups opposed to the Bill (*Fiji Times*, 19/7/2005).

By August the tension began to ease; first, Qarase stated that the best way to resolve the increasing crisis would be through open dialogue with the military, which was a general weakening of the Government's approach (*Fiji Live*, 1/8/2005). Not long after, the Lower House decided to extend the time given to hear submissions on the Bill (*Fiji Live*, 17/8/2005). Then, in early October Qarase announced that the Bill was to have a major make-over to appease its critics (*Fiji Live*, 4/10/2005). Still, the military did not budge in its staunch opposition to the Bill, stating that it would fight it all the way, even if the amnesty provision was amended (*Fiji Times*, 28/11/2005).

At the beginning of December the Parliamentary Sector Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Order, headed by Manasa Tugia, tabled the recommendations to amend the Bill. The Committee recommended restricting the powers of the Reconciliation Commission so as it would not have the ability to

determine which cases to pursue in the court process, or have the power to drop pending cases at its discretion. However, crucially, it did not recommend eliminating the amnesty provision, but it did restrict its application to only cover crimes of non-violent illegal assembly and illegal demonstration, during and after the 2000 coup (*Fiji Times*, 2/12/2005).

In spite of these changes, opposition to the Bill continued into the new year. In February the Government began expediting the process of rewriting the Bill before the election, which caused the military to warn the Government against pushing its will upon the people (*Fiji Live*, 16/2/2006). Once again, though, the Bill was put on hold, this time because of the early election called by Qarase which was set for May, forcing the Government to refocus its attention (*Fiji Times*, 2/3/2006). After the election win the Government again pushed the Bill back into light, with it appearing on the Presidents 'Address at the Opening of the New Parliament' as a goal for the new Government to implement, taking into consideration the recommendations by the Standing Committee (Uluivuda, 2006). In late June it was confirmed that the Government was in the process of presenting a re-written form of the Unity Bill (Vunileba, 30/6/2006). This is where the Bill stood in the lead up to the coup.

## **Discussion**

This was a particularly tense dispute, which set up the civil-military problems that would eventually result in the 5 December 2006 coup. There were some motives at play here largely from Government failures, such as the early release of coup convicts, and the actual Unity Bill itself. There was also the appropriate opportunity because of the legitimacy deflation as a result of the political crisis surrounding the Unity Bill and the illegal early release of prisoners. Cohesion also appeared at this stage to be relatively strong. Yet there was no coup. It is argued here that the reason for this is that the Government failures on their own were not sufficient to motivate the military to intervene. They were sufficient for the military

to protest over the Bill, but because of the lack of any substantial threats to its interests, the military were never going to go as far as a coup at this stage.

### *Motive*

There were only minor threats to the military's interests, and while there were some strong Government failures it does not appear that these were sufficient to garner the motive for intervention. There were three military interests threatened in this dispute, two coming from Bainimarama's personal interests, and the third from a potential functional rival from the offer to protect the Government by Viliame Raio. First, the disciplinary measures threatened by Vosanibola against Bainimarama were directly challenging the Commander's interests. If these had been followed through then the motivation for intervention would have dramatically increased. As it was, the constitutional structure forced Vosanibola to go through the President, who at this stage appeared to be very susceptible to influence by Bainimarama, thus making the likelihood of disciplinary measures very slim. The second and more pertinent personal interest was that Bainimarama felt that the Reconciliation Commission would unveil the truth over his actions during the 2000 coup and November mutiny. The actions included his dismissal of Ratu Mara and assumption of the role of President during the coup, and the treatment of the captured soldiers after the November mutiny, which appeared to have amounted to torture, in many cases resulting in death. The suggestion that this was a motivating factor became popular among observers of Fiji's politics after the military announced that it would fight the Bill even if the Government removed the amnesty provisions. The rhetoric from the military was that this was their only objection to the Bill, and thus when they said that they would fight it regardless of the amendments observers began looking for other potential motivating influences (Lal, 2005, 2007a).

However, neither of these were overt threats, rather they were potential threats. Bainimarama was never disciplined, and since he had such a tight rein over Iloilo at the time it was unlikely that he was ever going to be. The other

interest, of the Reconciliation Commission's potential investigation into Bainimarama's actions, is only speculative. There is no solid evidence to suggest that Bainimarama was motivated by this. Furthermore, even if he was so affected it was only a potential threat. Such a threat was a long way off from materialising, and as such it probably was not strong enough to motivate the military into action.

There was another potential threat to the military's interests from the offer by Viliame Raqio to protect the Government if they passed the Unity Bill. This represented a potential functional rival, and it really brought the possibility of intervention to its peak. As noted in Chapter Two the emergence of a functional rival, especially one taking on the role as a 'palace guard', will usually antagonise a military and harden their resolve to intervention. However, the Government did not take up this offer and thus its effect was quickly diminished.

Government failures that may have influenced the military were particularly high in this dispute. The early release of high profile coup convicts and efforts by the Government to impede coup investigations were repeatedly discussed in the media by the military. This was probably the strongest motivator for this dispute. In addition, in October the military accused the Immigration Department of corruption (Radio New Zealand International, 5/10/2005). Interestingly, this was one of the only times before the December 2006 coup that the RFMF openly accused the Government of corruption. Later this would result in a full restructure of the Immigration Department, as a result of years of suspected corruption (Radio New Zealand International, 9-11-2005). The last Government failure that the military spoke out against was the actual Unity Bill itself, which it saw as an intensification of the Government's leniency towards the perpetrators of the 2000 coup. As discussed in Chapter Three, the military, led by Bainimarama, had the proper conviction of the perpetrators of the 2000 coup as one of its main priorities at this time, whether this was for the good of the country or a personal grudge by Bainimarama is difficult to say. Nonetheless, it had a particularly high interest in

ensuring that this Bill was not passed, and it is hard to dispute that this was one of the key motivating factors behind this dispute.

These failures by the Fijian Government certainly motivated the military to speak out against it, and were probably the chief motivating factor behind the threat to remove the Government in the draft statement leaked in July. However, in comparison with the other disputes that had much stronger threats to military interests, this was a relatively subdued intervention threat. The threat only came in a leaked draft, not in an emphatic and repeated statement. It is therefore the contention of this research that in this case the military never intended to overthrow the Government, because the crucial intervention motivator, of threats to the military's interests, was missing.

#### *Opportunity*

While the motive for intervention was not present in this dispute, the opportunity was. There was a significant legitimacy deflation as a result of several illegal acts, continuing corruption and some economic problems; military cohesion also appeared to be stable. In this dispute, the Government committed many acts that much of the population considered illegal. The early release of prisoners jailed over connections to the 2000 coup and efforts to impede investigation into those involved exhibited signs of preferential treatment, flouting the law and showing disregard for proper practice. Thus, many people around Fiji were beginning to question the legitimacy of these acts, and it brewed a growing distrust of the Government's objectives. However, the most important illegal act was the drafting and promotion of the Unity Bill itself, which raised concerns for many citizens, including the Indian community, the legal community, and some from the indigenous community. These people considered the Bill to run contrary to the 1997 Constitution. Such accusations are a strong indicator that these people saw the Bill as illegal, which would have lowered the legitimacy of the Government.

As always, there were issues over corruption. Corruption within the Fisheries Ministry over the illegal issuance of licences was once again raised, and police

investigations began (Radio New Zealand International, 31/3/2005). A suspended police officer claimed that the Police had him removed because he was revealing too much information about the agricultural scam (Catanasiga, 3/4/2005). This was widely suspected to have been a vote-buying scheme by the SDL party in the 2001 election, and thus once again raised old concerns over the legality of their election win and thus the legitimacy of the regime. The Auditor-General's report released in August stated that there were tens of millions of dollars wasted through various departments from mismanagement of funds and corruption (Radio New Zealand International, 22/8/2005). The aforementioned issue over corruption in the Immigration Department added to this list of corrupt Government practices.

Furthermore, the Government faced a growing economic problem. The price cut ordered on the EU by the WTO for sugar from certain developing countries, including Fiji, was upheld in the WTO Court of Appeal in May 2005, during the height of the dispute over the Unity Bill. This confirmed the reality of a dramatic drop in earnings for this vital industry (Fiji Live, 4/5/2005).<sup>15</sup> Then later in the year in the Auditor-General's report it was claimed that the rampant spending of the Government meant that Fiji's debt was growing faster than the economy (Biumaiono, 20/8/2005). This raised serious questions over the Government's handling of the economy, which further added to the deflation in legitimacy.

As such, there were several performance failures. As with all of the disputes discussed in this research it is difficult to tell whether there was a significant enough legitimacy deflation for a military intervention. In this instance though, the strong resistance to the Unity Bill and the support that the military was beginning to gain during this period suggests that there was either a sufficient legitimacy deflation or enough significant factors to be very close to it. If the military had attempted to overthrow the Government it appears that they would have had the support of enough of the country for it to be a success.

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the sugar reform see Chapter 3 > Domestic Political Economic and Social Context > Economic

As for the other criteria for the opportunity for intervention, military cohesion was relatively stable in this dispute. The offer by Viliame Raqio to protect the Government against the military shows some of the past weakness coming back to haunt the military. Yet it does not show any current problems. However, since this dispute occurred only months before the attempted mutiny by Baledrokadroka, it does suggest that there were some internal rifts, which may have come to the surface if Bainimarama had attempted a coup. However, the attempted mutiny was still several months off so treating it as evidence starts to go into the realm of speculation which should be avoided. So, for the purpose of this discussion it will be considered that there were no problems of military cohesion, which along with the deflation in legitimacy resulted in an adequate window of opportunity for an intervention to be a success.

## **Conclusion**

It appears that there was probably the necessary opportunity for intervention from the Government's performance failures which resulted in a deflation in legitimacy, along with the apparent stability of military cohesion. There were also some motivating factors; the strongest of these was probably the governmental failures surrounding the proper investigation into, and prosecution of suspects of the 2000 coup. In addition there were some threats to the military's interests from the personal interests of Bainimarama, to not be reprimanded or to face scrutiny for his actions in the 2000 coup and November mutiny. Yet these are only speculated by observers of Fijian politics to be motivating factors, and furthermore they were both far from being realised. While there were plenty of governmental failures the lack of threats to the military's interests meant that there was not the motive for intervention. The military was certainly motivated to publicly criticise the Government but the fact that it did not even attempt an intervention even though the opportunity to intervene was present during this dispute suggests that they were not sufficiently motivated. Thus, it is the conclusion of this chapter that there was no military intervention because there was not a strong enough motive because of the lack of threats to the military's interests. Therefore, military

interests appear to be a crucial aspect to generate the appropriate motive. While the failures of the civilian Government may be enough to motivate the military into publicly speaking out against the Government, it does not seem sufficient to push the military that one step further to instigate a coup.

## *Chapter Six*

### JANUARY 2006 COUP THREAT

In early January 2006 the RFMF stated that it would not hesitate to overthrow the Government if they kept up their racist policies. This was certainly a bold statement, which in retrospect was an ominous warning, but why then did the military not overthrow the Government in January? This was primarily because there was not the appropriate opportunity for intervention. As will be shown, there was plenty of motive: military interests were threatened by surcharges put upon Bainimarama for overspending, and there were difficulties in carrying out a military court-martial as a result of Government interference. There were also some Government failures, stemming from the Unity Bill, as well as the Fisheries Bill and Fijian Court System Bill; the military also continued its objections to the early release of prominent figures convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup. However, there was no opportunity; the legitimacy of the Government had largely recovered from the difficulties felt during the height of the Unity Bill dispute, and there was an election to be held later in the year that helped ensure the legitimacy of the Government. Furthermore, there were difficulties in military cohesion, indicated by an attempted mutiny staged by Baledrokadroka, which meant that there was no opportunity for the military to intervene.

#### **Description of Events**

This dispute was the culmination of three ongoing civil-military tussles. The first of these was the continuing Unity Bill dispute, described in the preceding chapter. The other two were the surcharges put upon Bainimarama by the Finance

ministry, and the difficulties faced in the CRW mutiny court martial which will be examined below. The analysis will then move on the actual coup threat and Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny.

### *Surcharge*

In a memorandum from the CEO of Finance and National Planning, Bainimarama was informed, as the Chief Accounting Officer of the RFMF, that the Ministry intended to surcharge him F\$116,379.95, for over-expenditure of over F\$3m incurred by the military without proper authority during 2003. Bainimarama appealed this decision in January 2005, however he was informed that the surcharge would stand, but that the amount would be reduced to F\$49,590.11, to be deducted from his salary at F\$300 per fortnight beginning on 1 March 2005 (High Court of Fiji, 2005). This was part of a larger undertaking by the Finance Ministry, which was trying to get tough on the over-expenditure that was crippling the fragile economy. The Finance Ministry personally surcharged six government CEOs and six heads of departments for exceeding their budgets, of which Bainimarama was one (*Radio New Zealand International*, 31/1/2005).

After it was confirmed by the Finance Ministry in early 2005 that the surcharge against Bainimarama would stand, the Commander reacted angrily and threatened to withdraw the soldiers acting as the Prime Minister's personal security guards unless the surcharge was dropped (Lewa, 3/2/2005). A week later on 10 February the military followed through on this threat. However, the police quickly picked up the security of Qarase, and the Prime Minister's Office said that they had reached the point of no return and would not request army security again (*Fiji Live*, 11/2/2005). Soon after, the Government held a National Security Council meeting where the possibility of disciplining Bainimarama over his actions was discussed, but nothing eventuated from this (Kikau, 13/2/2005).

The RFMF then began a legal battle to have the surcharge revoked. In late February military lawyers filed a legal challenge in the High Court, arguing that the

budget was simply too small hence the military was always going to exceed it (*Radio New Zealand International*, 21/2/2005). This argument focused on the unaccounted costs from the return of 300 soldiers from UN peacekeeping missions in the Middle East as well as the extra cost associated with the court-martial for soldiers associated with the coup and mutiny (*Radio New Zealand International*, 31/1/2005). The military received further questioning, this time from the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), who called the military, among several other departments, to answer for its overspending (*Fiji Times*, 8/3/2005). The RFMF were supposed to meet with PAC on 9 March, but the military's accountants boycotted the meeting, ostensibly because of the pending case over the surcharge, however this merely served to show, once again, who was in charge (*Fiji Times*, 10/3/2005). In mid-April they finally met with PAC, and they pleaded the military's case, maintaining that it was forced to overspend because of increased commitments that Cabinet required from the RFMF, a justification that the Committee chairman Poseci Bune found to be reasonable (*Fiji Times*, 16/4/2005).

In late May the High Court granted leave for an order to stay the proceedings, so that Bainimarama could apply for a judicial review on the surcharge, for which a substantive hearing was set for 10 June. The Judge also required the Finance Ministry to stop surcharging the Commander and refund the money already deducted (*Fiji Times*, 28/5/2005a). At the conclusion of this case on 14 October 2005 Justice Jiten Singh ruled that the charges were brought under improper financial regulations, and were therefore unlawful (High Court of Fiji, 2005). Thus, the surcharge was reversed by the High Court.

This was not the end of the dispute though; in late 2005 it was revealed that the Finance Ministry had defied the Court's ruling and was still deducting the F\$300 per fortnight from Bainimarama's salary (*Radio New Zealand International*, 7/12/2005). The military, after some failed efforts to meet and discuss the issue with the Finance Ministry, filed a contempt of court proceeding in the High Court

(*Radio New Zealand International*, 13/12/2005). The High Court quickly responded, and ordered the Ministry to reimburse the Commander (Lalakato, 24/12/2005). However, it was not until after the height of tensions between the military and the Government in January 2006 that the Ministry finally gave in, stopped the surcharge and repaid Bainimarama (*Radio New Zealand International*, 30/1/2006).

*Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit Mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Court-Martial*

On 2 November 2000 members of the disbanded Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW) of the RFMF staged an attempted mutiny at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the army headquarters in Nabua, Suva. In the ensuing gunfight eight soldiers were killed, five from the CRW and three loyal to the military, a much higher number of casualties than during the actual coup which took place almost six months earlier. In the following months all those suspected of involvement were rounded up and charged with mutiny, and were tried by military court-martial. This was a slow process and it was not until two years later that the first convictions were ruled upon and sentences handed out. Fifteen soldiers were charged and sentenced; the leader of the mutiny, Shane Stevens, was given life imprisonment with the rest receiving terms ranging from ten months to ten years (*Radio New Zealand International*, 14/11/2002).

However, this was only the beginning of what was to become a long and tedious legal process. On 13 February 2003 a second court-martial began of former CRW soldiers charged with mutiny at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks (*Radio New Zealand International*, 13/2/2003). Two of the soldiers pleaded guilty and were given sentences of five and a half years and three years respectively while the remaining 21 went to trial (*Radio New Zealand International*, 20/7/2003). Again the slow legal process in Fiji hampered the trial, and it was not until July 2004 that it concluded, finding all 21 guilty, and sentencing them to terms ranging from three to six years (Lutunauga, 7/8/2004).

This should have been the end of the matter. However, 20 of the convicted CRW members from the second court-martial appealed their sentences (Marau, 24/2/2005). On the conclusion of this case the Court of Appeal ruled a land mark decision, ordering the retrial of all 20 soldiers due to irregularities in the way that the court-martial was conducted (*Fiji Live*, 16/8/2005). As a result nine soldiers were released from prison but were then quickly re-arrested by the military in anticipation of a quick retrial; the remaining eleven were kept in prison as they were serving sentences for other coup-related crimes (Ragi, 18/8/2005).

It was at this stage that the situation began to have an influence on the already tense civil-military relations. In early October 2005 a new ten-member panel was announced for the retrial, led by Judge Advocate Graham Leung (*Fiji Live*, 5/10/2005). A dispute then emerged in late October; the President, in one of the rare instances of defiance against the RFMF, withdrew the convening order for the court-martial because of what he described as a “procedural anomaly” in the appointment of Graham Leung (Ragi, 20/10/2005). After outcry from the military claiming that this was simply because Leung was the choice of the military, not the Government, President Iloilo re-appointed Leung and set the date for the court-martial for 25 November (Ragi, 27/10/2005). Yet, there were further delays and adjournments in proceedings and in mid-December the trial had still not begun. This began to frustrate the military, and on 20 December they remonstrated, saying that the continuing delays were the result of Government interference, and called for the resignation of the Home Affairs CEO Lesi Korovavala, as they believed that he was the primary instigator of this interference (*Fiji Live*, 20/12/2005). The next day the Ministry of Home Affairs retaliated, saying that it could not afford to pay Leung the F\$130,000 offered to him by the military, instead offering F\$30,000 (Qalo, 21/12/2005). The military responded, by calling on senior bureaucrats to stop meddling in the affairs of the military, as Leung's pay was equal to that of the last Judge who presided over the case, and that the money would come from the military's budget, not the Ministry's (Ragi, 22/12/2005). This

dispute caused the already shaky relations between the Government and the military to come near breaking point. However, tensions were relieved on 4 January 2006 as the Ministry of Home Affairs finally gave in and approved Leung's appointment on a salary of F\$130,000 to be paid out of the military's budget (Ali, 5/1/2006).

When the court-martial eventually began in mid-January 2006 it suffered from several further adjournments, which spread the case out until August. Ten soldiers pleaded guilty, and were given relatively lenient sentences ranging from one to three years (*Fiji Times*, 11/2/2006), while the remaining mutineers went to trial and were all found guilty and sentenced to terms from three to six years, the same as the original court-martial (*Fiji Live*, 11/8/2006).

#### *Coup Threat and Baladrokadroka*

Tensions between the military and the Government were high in December 2005 because of the continuing dispute over the 'Unity Bill', the budget surcharges put upon Bainimarama, and the dispute with the Ministry of Home Affairs over the pay of Judge Advocate Graham Leung. Further adding to these tensions Bainimarama asked to relocate his office to Government Buildings, for the stated purpose of being closer to the Minister of Home Affairs to improve the lines of communication. Vosanibola strongly opposed this request, as it would have condoned the RFMF's political role and consolidated the Commander's political presence. Therefore, the Government rejected the idea. Bainimarama reacted angrily, stating that the military would no longer consider itself under the jurisdiction of the Ministry because it did not receive any recognition from the Minister (Biumaiono, 31/12/2005). This was certainly a bold statement; however, probably more relevant was that in the latter part of his spiel Bainimarama first accused the Government of trying to introduce racist laws, pointing specifically to the well publicised Unity Bill, but also to the Fisheries Bill and the proposed indigenous Fijian court system Bill (Biumaiono, 31/12/2005). Vosanibola responded by declaring the proposed move illegal, and Bainimarama's comments

unconstitutional (Vunileba, 1/1/2006). This added further fuel to the issue, and on 3 January Bainimarama called the Qarase Government and Vosanibola 'incompetent' and asked them to resign (*Radio New Zealand International*, 3/1/2006). This resulted in a to-and-fro tussle that came to a head on 9 January, when Bainimarama said that if the Government kept up its racist policies the military would not hesitate to take control of the country (Biumaiono, 9/1/2006). This caused uproar in Fiji, as the statement amounted to a coup threat. Vosanibola called on Bainimarama to respect the elected Government, but for the first time admitted that he did not have the power to discipline the Commander (*Radio New Zealand International*, 4/1/2006). Bainimarama continued to present a confrontational stance challenging the Government to 'sack' him, to which it had no response (*Radio New Zealand International*, 5/1/2006).

The situation was further complicated on 12 January when the army headquarters suddenly closed as Lieutenant Colonel Baledrokadroka staged what has since been referred to as an attempted mutiny (*Fiji Live*, 13/1/2006b). This is an event with two distinct sides: Bainimarama claimed that Baledrokadroka had personal aspirations to take control of the military, to which end he tried to overthrow Bainimarama and actually threatened the Commander's life (Rarbici & Ragi, 15/1/2006). On the other side Baledrokadroka claimed that Bainimarama was positioning himself for a coup, and he questioned the wisdom of this act, and refused to be part of the plans (Biumaiono, 17/1/2006). In either event, Baledrokadroka countermanded the Commander's orders and was subsequently put on leave pending resignation. The military then began setting up a board of inquiry to look into the events and flush out any further dissenters within the ranks (*Fiji Live*, 14/1/2006).

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, who at the time was the acting President as Iloilo was out of the country, then stood up and took much of the burden of responsibility for mending this complicated situation. Initially he held separate meetings with Bainimarama and then with Vosanibola and Qarase to discuss the impasse (*Fiji*

*Live*, 13/1/2006a). Then on 16 January he got both parties together for a meeting, which resulted in the “Government House Agreement”, in which Qarase agreed to deal directly with Bainimarama and Bainimarama agreed to recognise the elected Government and to take his disputes directly to Qarase rather than through the media (*Fiji Live*, 16/1/2006). As part of this agreement regular talks were organised between Bainimarama and Qarase. While these talks helped temper the situation, they did not last. On 5 March Bainimarama decided to cancel the talks with the Prime Minister because he thought they were not achieving what the military desired (*Fiji Live*, 5/3/2006).

At the same time, the situation surrounding Baledrokadroka continued. First, in a show of support for the military, FLP President Jokapeci Koroi stated on Fiji TV that Qarase, Vosanibola and Korovavala influenced Baledrokadroka to challenge the Commander. Qarase then filed an official complaint to the Police against Koroi for inciting violence and disturbing the peace (D. Narayan, 18/1/2006). Nevertheless, Bainimarama continued Koroi's argument stating that he had evidence of a phone call between Baledrokadroka and someone else outside of camp pertaining to the attempted mutiny (Rarabici, 16/1/2006). Subsequently the military re-instigated its bid to have the CEO of the Ministry of Home Affairs Korovavala removed, as it was suspected that he was the primary actor influencing Baledrokadroka (*Fiji Live*, 17/1/2006). Then in late January, a military Board of Inquiry set up to investigate Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny began its investigations. Even though the process was continually hampered by non-cooperation from Government personnel and the refusal of Baledrokadroka to return from New Zealand, the inquiry concluded in late February, finding that three senior army officers including Baledrokadroka would face a court-martial for mutiny (*Fiji Live*, 13/3/2006; *Fiji Times*, 28/2/2006). However, because Fiji does not have a Treaty of Extradition with New Zealand the military was unable to bring Baledrokadroka back to Fiji and the case stagnated.

## **Discussion**

During this dispute the military began to gain the upper hand in the civil-military relations battle. As such, many people around Fiji began to think that an intervention was a real possibility. Yet, this did not occur. It appears that there was sufficient motive from several threats to military interests, but there was no opportunity to intervene. This resulted in the military being either sufficiently deterred, or stopped in their tracks by the attempted mutiny led by Baledrokadroka.

### *Motive*

The strongest motive at play in this dispute was the military's interests. While there were some governmental failures that the military pointed to, these did not appear to be significant in generating an interventionist motive. The military interests of military autonomy, individual interests and budgetary support were all threatened at various stages in these disputes. The precursor dispute over the surcharges upon Bainimarama primarily threatened budgetary support and individual interests. The charges, while not specific to the RFMF, would have been considered an unjustified attack on the military's budget, particularly as they were overturned in the High Court. As the surcharge directly affected Bainimarama's income, it can also be assumed that he was fighting to retain his personal interests, particularly when the Finance Ministry continued to charge him after they were ordered stop by the High Court. The surcharges could also be considered to have affected military autonomy, as this was impinging on the normal functioning of the military. The second precursor dispute, over the appointment of Judge Advocate Graham Leung, was a clearer affront to military autonomy. A court-martial is the realm of the military; the involvement, first of the President, and then later the Ministry of Home Affairs certainly affected the normal running of the military. These two disputes were the motivating force behind the war of words that emerged in early January. The combative stance taken by Vosanibola intensified

the already present sentiments and sparked the call for the removal of the Government.

There was one further threat to the military's interests that came from the suggestion that people from within the Government influenced Baledrokadroka to mutiny against the Commander. Such infiltration into the high-level ranks of the military is a classic example of an attack on military autonomy. The Government strongly refuted this, and there is little evidence to back up the claim. However, when examining motivating forces, beliefs are more important than facts and from the military's statements at the time there is strong evidence to suggest that they believed that there was government interference. However, this emerged when tensions had largely dissipated, and therefore did not result in any action, but it added to the growing number of threats to the military's interests.

There was a distinct lack of noticeable Government failure throughout this dispute. However, in the statement in which Bainimarama threatened to overthrow the Government he referred to the Government's racist policies. This focused on the Unity Bill, the Fisheries Bill, which was soon to become known as the Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bill. The failures present during the Unity Bill dispute of the early release of people convicted of coup related crimes were still present, although somewhat dissipated. The other two Bills, which would become central to the later dispute in the lead up to the coup, had not really matured and except for Bainimarama's statement, did not appear to be on the military's agenda. Apart from this statement the military did not often speak out against the failures of the Government; rather, they were speaking out against the lack of recognition from the Government, and the involvement of the Government in military affairs.

Therefore, the primary motivating force was from the attacks on the military's interests. In this instance the military was motivated further than simply speaking out against the Government, as during the Unity Bill dispute. As evidenced from

the threat to overthrow the Government, which was a bold statement and not simply a leaked draft, the military was fully motivated for an intervention.

### *Opportunity*

While the motive was relatively strong, there was no opportunity for intervention in this dispute. The Government's legitimacy was strong relative to many of the other disputes, and the cohesion of the military, as witnessed through Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny was particularly low. Much like the aforementioned lack of Government failures, there was little evidence of a legitimacy deflation in this dispute. Some of the legitimacy deflation from the illegal acts in the Unity Bill dispute may have lingered; however, by this stage their effect had dramatically decreased, most probably because of the effort by the Government to make concessions on the Bill because of the public disapproval. The issue of corruption was still present. Senior political figures were accused of corruption over the harvest and processing of mahogany forests (Rarabici, 16/12/2005), and investigations began into corruption in the Social Welfare Ministry (Biumaiono, 13/1/2006). Yet neither of these factors were very significant compared to the performance failures in many of the other disputes, and it did not appear to fuel notable discontent.

Furthermore, the election, which was to be held later in the year, would have helped secure the Government's legitimacy. A government's adherence to generalised norms and values is usually a poor measure of legitimacy for developing countries as the norms and values are often very diverse, which is certainly the case in Fiji with the country often split along ethnic lines. However, it is a general assumption that fair and free elections are one of the few generally held norms and beliefs. Since the Government was to hold an election later on in the year, allowing the possibility of it being defeated legally, then any delegitimizing discontent would have been significantly reduced.

Therefore, in this period it is observed that there was very little public discontent, and the only significant dissatisfaction directed at the Government came from the military. As noted above, this was probably motivated by military interests, rather than any Governmental failures that could have also generated the necessary deflation in legitimacy. Consequently, the Government had, compared to the other disputes, a strong hold on its legitimacy. This would have helped impede intervention, as the military would not have had the support of the public and potentially not everyone in the military would have felt an intervention justified.

Military cohesion certainly had some problems during this period, as was witnessed from the attempted mutiny led by Baledrokadroka. Furthermore, after this the military held extensive internal investigations to flush out any further dissenters among its ranks, and it found a few, suggesting that the problems stemmed further than Baledrokadroka alone. The attempted mutiny can be seen as an impediment to intervention from either side of the story. If Bainimarama's assessment of the situation is accurate and the mutiny was a grab for power, then this internal disunity and confusion would have put a stop to any growing interventionist objectives, as the military would not have been in a strong enough position to successfully overthrow the Government. Conversely, if Baledrokadroka's version was the reality, then he stopped a coup in its tracks. Nordlinger argues that one of the reasons that a legitimacy deflation is necessary for a military intervention is to secure the cohesion of the military as there will often be some officers who strongly adhere to the ethic of civilian supremacy. If Baledrokadroka was telling the truth, then it appears that because of the relatively high legitimacy of the Government at the time, several members of the RFMF, led by Baledrokadroka, were trying to stop an intervention in its tracks. Thus, for this dispute there was not the opportunity for intervention. There was neither a legitimacy deflation nor military cohesion, which either resulted in the military being

sufficiently deterred from following through on its coup threat, or an attempted coup was stopped before it even began by internal disunity.

### **Conclusion**

This dispute was the culmination of the continuing Unity Bill dispute, along with surcharges put upon Bainimarama, and the difficulties of the CRW court martial, which resulted in a coup threat. It appeared that the potential for intervention was very high. There was a strong enough motivation for intervention resulting from the numerous threats to the military's interests in the lead up to the dispute. Furthermore, the stated motivation of the Government's racist policies and Bills first emerged, although at this stage it appears that this motivator was not fully matured, as they were seldom discussed, with most of the attention put upon the improper way the Government was dealing with the military. This again highlighted the importance of military interests as central to generating the appropriate motivation for intervention. However, in this instance there was no intervention. This was because there was a distinct lack of opportunity; the Government, relative to most of the other disputes, held a great deal of legitimacy, and there were problems with military cohesion, which was dramatically demonstrated with Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny. This lack of opportunity either resulted in the military being deterred from intervention because of the low likelihood of success due to the high legitimacy of the Government and the lack of cohesion, or Baledrokadroka physically stopped a planned intervention in its tracks with the attempted mutiny upholding the supremacy of Government.

## *Chapter Seven*

### 2006 ELECTION

After the dispute in early 2006 civil-military relations in Fiji were very low, with frequent comments in the media from both the military and the Government. As such the elections looked to be defining moment, which would test the support of the Government, and also once again raise the possibility of a military coup. Qarase announced an early election, which in the end meant that it was poorly executed, although by all reports free and fair. In an effort to see the SDL party beaten at the polls the military launched the truth and justice campaign, which travelled throughout the country telling people of the events surrounding the 2000 coup, and the continued involvement of the SDL party with many of the conspirators. This was obviously received badly by the SDL party, and fuelled the continued bickering. In the end though Qarase and the SDL party were re-elected, and there was no military coup. It is found here that the reason for this is that there was neither the necessary motivation nor opportunity for intervention. There were some minor threats to the military's interests from functional rivals, through the formation of the police Tactical Response Unit, and military autonomy, through the suggestion of a judicial review on the role of the RFMF. There were no new specific Government failures, but the accumulation of failures over the last three years seemed to be an influence. Together the threats to military interests and the accumulated failures motivated the military enough to speak out against the Government, and actively campaign against the SDL party, but did not motivate them enough to intervene. The opportunity was also simply not there the legitimacy of the Government was largely secured because of the election, and the

continuing internal investigations into dissenters within the military would have lowered the necessary organisational strength. As such there was no intervention.

### **Description of Events**

The 2006 elections were much anticipated, they were just the second since the coup of 2000, and held promise of reflecting the true state of political thought in Fiji. Initially most observers believed that they would be held in the latter part of the year, but on 1 March Qarase announced an early election with polling to begin on 6 May lasting one week and ending on 13 May (*Fiji Live*, 1/3/2006). Right from the time of announcement the military raised concerns with the election. Initially because of the huge logistical difficulties in having an early election, including the lack of current census data, which they believed could increase the potential for vote rigging (*Radio New Zealand International*, 2/3/2006). Then on 10 March the military launched the 'truth and justice campaign', which was to use the media and travel throughout Fiji, to inform the population the 'truth' of the events of 2000 (Cheerieann Wilson & Ana, 11/3/2006). Essentially though, this amounted to the military actively campaigning against the ruling SDL party in the lead up to the election. Obviously this did not go down well with the Government, who promptly lodged a complaint with the chairman of the electoral committee (*Fiji Times*, 14/3/2006). Soon after the electoral commission responded by giving a general warning to all parties as well as the military, against intimidating voters or interfering with their right to vote (Rina, 16/3/2006). Vosanibola also once again attempted to have the Commander punished, but was also once again unsuccessful in his appeal to the newly reappointed President (*Fiji Times*, 12/3/2006). Again, Bainimarama reacted angrily, saying that he will not bow to the Government's racially divisive policies (Qalo, 20/3/2006).

A row between the military and the police then emerged, as a result of the procurement of high powered weapons by the police for the newly formed Tactical Response Unit (TRU). The military believed these weapons were initially meant for

them, but were re-directed by the Home Affairs CEO Lesi Korovavala, as a result of the intensifying disputes, thus, the military saw this as a direct challenge (*Fiji Times*, 15/3/2006). Furthermore the military was concerned by the emergence of the heavily armed TRU, which in many respects began to resemble a palace guard. However, this was quickly resolved without incident, after a meeting between the military and the police, although these tensions re-emerged later with devastating consequences (*Fiji Live*, 16/3/2006).

Opposition and resistance to the military's 'truth' campaign then began to mount. The first indication of this came from the paramount chief of the Macuata province, who banned the military from his land and threatened to remove villagers from their homes if they let the military in (Cabealawa, 17/3/2006). This Chief held little credibility though, as he was among those convicted of the Labasa mutiny, and many of his villagers defied his orders (Cabenatabua, 21/3/2006). Still, this trend began to grow, as several more provinces began to voice their concern over the military's tactics, and banned them from campaigning on their territory (*Fiji Times*, 10/4/2006). The military responded through persistence to campaign throughout the whole of Fiji (Cheerieann Wilson, 7/4/2006). On top of this, on 23 March the military was forwarded, from Government House, an interpretation of their constitutional role, which was believed to have come from New Zealand. This argued that the 1997 constitution did not give the RFMF responsibility over the 'security defence and wellbeing of Fiji and all its peoples,' and thus negated its political role. This obviously contradicted the military's stance, and they quickly rejected it, however it showed the growing disapproval of the military's actions from observers outside of Fiji, on top of the objections from within the country (*Fiji Times*, 24/3/2006).

On 27 March Parliament was dissolved in the lead up to the election. On the same day, in what has generally been considered a show of strength and an attempt to intimidate both the population and the Government, 500 Military

personal lead by Bainimarama, staged a march through the streets of Suva (Cheerieann Wilson, 28/3/2006). This received criticism from many within Fiji, which was brushed aside by the Commander as “comments from a bunch of confused people” (Cited in Cheerieann Wilson, 29/3/2006). At the end of the month the Government began considering going to the Supreme Court, to seek a judicial review of the role of the military (*Fiji Live*, 30/3/2006). The Government reaffirmed its position near the end of April, saying that it will go to the Supreme Court if they are re-elected (*Radio New Zealand International*, 24/4/2006b). While the military made it clear that it will try to hold up any decision through the appeal process (*Radio New Zealand International*, 24/4/2006c).

Near the end of April, Qarase began to play the race card when he stated that the country would only be able to achieve stability if the leader was an indigenous Fijian. The military quickly responded to this saying that the SDL party was using unfair campaign tactics and intimidating voters (Semsa, 23/4/2006). To which Vosanibola told the military to keep out of matters that don't concern them (*Radio New Zealand International*, 24/4/2006a). Qarase continued to play on the ethnic tensions, stating that the country cannot afford to have another Labour Government and risk another coup (*Radio New Zealand International*, 28/4/2006). This time the military inflamed the issue by warning that they will take on any group threatening insurrection or instability if a non-indigenous person is elected as the new Prime Minister (*Radio New Zealand International*, 30/4/2006). Furthermore the FLP filed a complaint to the Police over Qarase's comment (*Fiji Live*, 1/5/2006). This issue gave the military some traction from certain sectors of the community in the lead up to the election.

As May rolled over Bainimarama restated his commitment to upholding the security of the nation, if an ethnic Indian was elected, and went on to say that he would meet with the Police to discuss how they could work together to effectively maintain security (*Fiji Times*, 1/5/2006). This was received badly by the Supervisor

of Elections, who in response said that the military should take no part in the elections, as Fiji was not in a state of emergency to merit such measures (*Fiji Times*, 2/5/2006). After which military professed that it never intended to be part of the electoral process, but that it had a commitment to ensure an environment conducive to a free and fair election (*Fiji Times*, 4/5/2006). Later, just before the election, the military tried to further justify its position, stating that, while it did not have official observer status, that it will take a concerned citizens observer role (*Fiji Live*, 6/5/2006).

The first day of the elections was messy, many polling stations opened late, ballot papers were late, and there was poor voter control and administration. All of which the military was quick to point out and declare that it justified their earlier prediction that the elections would be a shambles (*Fiji Live*, 7/5/2006a). To further stamp their influence on the electoral process, on the second day of polling the military took out a full page add in a local newspaper, explaining that the military did have a political role to play, which was far from finished, and that calls for the military to remain apolitical were unjustified (*Fiji Live*, 7/5/2006b). The rest of the election was largely uneventful; while there was a low voter turnout of only around 64 per cent (*Fiji Live*, 13/5/2006), the poor organisation of the first day was not repeated, and in the end the observer missions found that, while there were some problems, it was, in general, a free and fair election (*Fiji Sun*, 15/5/2006). A few days later Qarase and his incumbent SDL party were declared the winners, still, Bainimarama vowed to continue to fight the Government over its 'racist policies' (*Radio New Zealand International*, 18/5/2006). Then in May after the SDL won the election they stated that they would now go to the Supreme Court for a Judicial ruling on the role of the RFMF (*Radio New Zealand International*, 24/5/2006).

## **Motivation**

### *Military Interests*

There were a couple of military interests at play during the election. The formation of the police TRU in many ways represented a functional rival. This was described by some as Fiji's armed defenders squad, however this was not really the case. It was the only division of the police that was heavily armed, and most of its duties were in picking up the security of the Prime Minister which had been abandoned by the military earlier on in the year. Thus it resembled a place guard, and a barrier to military intervention. The TRU could not have stopped a military intervention, it was far too small, but it would have made the process difficult, and potentially caused bloodshed, which might deter intervention. However, as shown in the literature, such a rival is more likely to harden the military's resolve, than deter it from intervening.

The other military interest threatened during the election was the constitutional opinion from New Zealand, which led on to the government proposing a Judicial Review of the role of the RFMF which threatened military autonomy. As outlined in Chapter 2 military autonomy is considered to be threatened if the normal functioning of the military is affected by the Government. Thus a binding judicial review, which would in all likelihood come to the conclusion that the military does not have a role in politics, would have affected the military's autonomy. This like several of the military interests before, was more speculative than immanent. First the Government needed the consent of the President to get a judicial review, which appeared unlikely because of the past actions of Iloilo which usually favoured the RFMF. Second, it was not completely certain that the courts would rule that the RFMF had no political role, as they had in the past expressed their disapproval of the Governments policies, particularly the 'Unity' Bill. Thus there were no strong military interests threatened, and rather than generating the motivation for intervention, these probably just helped keep the military focused on attempting to remove the Government legally through the 'truth' campaign.

### *Government Failure*

The accumulation of failures which the military had been complaining about for the last three years, particularly the illegal early release of prisoners, and the increasingly racist policies, certainly would have motivated the military to carry out their 'truth' campaign. Furthermore the racial dialogue by Qarase and the SDL Party, particularly the statements that the country could not survive an Indian leader, would have inflamed the situation further. However, it is difficult to argue that this would have been sufficient enough to motivate the military to intervene. It appears that the failures of the Government were enough to motivate the military to speak out against them, and actively try to have them beaten in the election, but were not sufficient to motivate physical intervention.

### **Opportunity**

#### *Legitimacy*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, while the definition of legitimacy used in this research, refers more to illegitimate acts, and not to the long term legitimacy of the government, the fact that there was an election would have still negated any possible legitimacy deflation. Also the reaction by many of the chiefs in not allowing the military to campaign on their territory shows that among much of the population, particularly the indigenous chiefly villages, the Government held a great deal of legitimacy. That said, the consent to govern, is often reflected in both the election result and the turnout, which at only 64 percent suggests some problems. However this more reflects the disassociation of the population with the type of Government rather than the specific people in power. Furthermore, this may only be a result of the logistical difficulties, than people not wanting to vote. As such not too much should be read into the low turnout.

#### *Military Cohesion*

Military cohesion was relatively complex at this stage. While cohesion was probably strong after the removal of those involved in the attempted mutiny, the

continuing investigations would have complicated matters. Thus, while there was cohesion as a result of dismissing those disloyal to Bainimarama, the internal investigations would have weakened the organisational strength, and made intervention difficult. With both of these factors taken together it appears that there was not the sufficient opportunity for intervention.

### **Discussion**

This was a tense time of civil-military relations in Fiji, with constant banter between the Government and the military. Upon closer examination though it appears that very few of the motivating factors were present, and that there was not the appropriate opportunity, so the chances of intervention were low. There were some military interests, but these had not yet matured into the full blown problems that would emerge later in the year. There were no great Government failures for the military to pick on, other than the accumulation of failures over the last few years, and Qarase stating that an Indian leader would cause instability. These were strong enough to motivate the military to carry out their 'truth' campaign, but they were not strong enough to garner any interventionist motives. The fact that it was an election strengthened the legitimacy of the regime in this period. Furthermore the internal difficulties that the military was still trying to solve would have made the job of intervening very difficult. Thus there was not the appropriate motivation or opportunity for intervention, yet this was an important dispute as it sets up much of the issues which would come back later on in the year and eventually lead to Fiji's fourth coup.

## *Chapter Eight*

### DECEMBER 2006 COUP

On 5 December 2006 Fiji suffered its fourth coup, almost 20 years after the first. The crisis leading up to this coup began in the political realm with the dispute over the multi-party Cabinet, which put the Government in a position of instability. During this time, the military, after a sustained period of silence since the election, began to speak out against the Government. They issued a three-week ultimatum near the beginning of October, which demanded that the Government drop the Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill,<sup>16</sup> or resign. Near the end of this ultimatum, the situation became tense as the Police would not release from Suva Warf ammunition intended for the military, which the military then took by force. At the same time the Government attempted to supplant Commodore Bainimarama; however, the attempt failed, which caused tensions to soar. At this stage the military did not have sufficient motivation to intervene, and so the situation did not eventuate in a conflict. However, a Police investigation into Bainimarama began to accelerate in early November, which finally gave the military adequate motivation to consider overthrowing the Government. In mid-November they issued another ultimatum, this time with further demands. When the Government did not meet these in full, the military announced that they would take over; a few days later they carried out this threat.

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<sup>16</sup> These three Bills will be referred to as simply 'the three Bills' or 'the three contentious Bills' throughout this chapter for the sake of brevity.

All the triggering causes were present. There were several threats to the military's interests, most notably from the pending criminal charges against Bainimarama, but also from a scheduled Supreme Court Ruling into the role of the RFMF, and the increasing presence of the Police TRU, which began to closely resemble a palace guard. There were plenty of Government failures, particularly over the three contentious Bills, and the on-going corruption issue. However, the Government failures were no more severe than they had been in the other disputes; rather, it appears that it was the strength of the threats to the military's interests that generated the motivation to overthrow the Government. The opportunity was also there as a result of a deflation in the legitimacy of the SDL Government due to its 'ethnically biased' policies and the difficulties in effectively governing during the multi-party Cabinet dispute. Military cohesion was also strong, having fully recovered from the attempted mutiny in January; Bainimarama had once again established enforced cohesion. It appears that each of these opportunity factors were necessary, as they combined to create the appropriate opportunity for the military intervention. As a consequence, the triggering causes came together, the underlying background tensions were enacted upon and the Government was overthrown.

### **Description of Events**

The lead-up to the coup was a very complex time in Fiji, with many interconnected events occurring simultaneously. Of particular importance was the crisis in the multi-party Cabinet, which occurred alongside the increasing civil-military tensions and is where this description shall start. After this, attention will be turned to the military's actions, first, the end of the prolonged silence that was present from the election through to late September and the reasons behind the military's renewed attacks. Second, an examination of the first and second ultimatums will take place; finally, attention will be turned to the coup itself.

### *Multi-party Cabinet*

After the election, somewhat surprisingly considering the problems in 2003 and 2004, Qarase offered the FLP nine ministerial seats in an effort to set up Fiji's first multi-party Cabinet. Chaudhry accepted this offer, saying that they would find the appropriate avenues for working out the inherent differences between the two parties (Fiji Live, 19/5/2006). However, immediately both leaders realised the potential for problems: Qarase admitted that he was surprised that Chaudhry accepted his offer, and that it would present some difficult situations, as the two parties had very different manifestoes (Radio New Zealand International, 21/5/2006). At the same time Chaudhry questioned whether the offer to join the multi-party Cabinet was made in good faith, and foresaw that the Cabinet would hold some great surprises in the future (Fiji Times, 22/5/2006).

The first problem that the cabinet faced was that Qarase did not accept the portfolios nominated by Chaudhry, instead giving the FLP Cabinet Ministers considerably less important positions. In response, the nine FLP ministers boycotted the swearing-in ceremony. The ceremony went ahead as planned, with Qarase stating that he would not let Chaudhry gain authority over him (Foster & Singh, 23/5/2006). This was quickly resolved; the FLP ministers accepted their positions, and the next day were sworn into Parliament (Fiji Live, 24/5/2006). Chaudhry was not one of the nine FLP Cabinet ministers, most likely because he wanted to take the position of Leader of the Opposition, which he was campaigning for. However, after some legal consultation, Iloilo instead appointed Mick Beddoes, the leader of the United People's Party, to the post (Fiji Live, 3/6/2006). In typically defiant fashion, Chaudhry did not give up the physical office for the Leader of the Opposition, and in the end Beddoes capitulated and let Chaudhry keep the office space (Radio New Zealand International, 8/6/2006). Then, on 6 July 2006 Iloilo opened the new Parliament, in which nine FLP members were ministers in the SDL Government. The Leader of the Opposition's party held only two seats, and his office was being occupied by the leader of the

FLP, Chaudhry, who remained outside Cabinet. In retrospect, it is no great surprise that this situation led to a dangerously fragmented Government.

It was not long until further difficulties emerged. On 13 June Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi, one of the FLP Cabinet ministers, told Parliament that the Government should withdraw its affirmative action programs, enforce a code of conduct, consult the FLP on all controversial Bills, and implement the goals and policies of both the SDL party and the FLP (Biumaiono, 15/6/2006). This obviously annoyed the rest of Government, and Qarase even spoke of dismissing or disciplining Vayeshnoi, as it amounted to a Cabinet minister speaking against Government policy, which runs contrary to the common Westminster principle of Cabinet speaking as one (Biumaiono, 15/6/2006). Vayeshnoi continued to speak out against the Government on these issues. However, it was soon revealed by Poseci Bune, the deputy leader of the FLP and Minister for the Environment, that Vayeshnoi was simply voicing the sentiments of Chaudhry (Radio New Zealand International, 15/6/2006), which was the first sign that there was a split amongst the ranks over the proper way for the FLP Ministers to act. This was further fuelled when several FLP Cabinet ministers began to criticise Vayeshnoi for his comments against the Government (Radio New Zealand International, 16/6/2006). However, Chaudhry adamantly rejected any claims that there was a split within his party (Fiji Times, 19/6/2006). Yet, noticeable differences began to emerge, particularly between Chaudhry and Poseci Bune. Chaudhry stated that he expected all FLP members to act along party lines; however, Bune argued that the FLP ministers should take a far more open approach, with the central goal of making the multi-party Cabinet work (Radio New Zealand International, 20/6/2006).

These tensions reached breaking point in late June when a group of senior FLP members including the deputy leader Bune, the Vice Presidents Krishna Datt, Dr Atu Emberson-Bain and board member Felix Anthony, questioned Chaudhry's list of names to be appointed to the Senate (Fiji Times, 28/6/2006). The group were worried about the omission of several notable names and the lack of

consultation with the management board over the formation of the list. Then when Chaudhry was out of the country Bune, as the acting Leader of the party, withdrew Chaudhry's nominations and submitted a new list (Ali & Qalo, 29/6/2006). Chaudhry acted swiftly: he resubmitted his own list and said that those members who opposed him would face disciplinary measures (Fiji Live, 30/6/2006). The depths of the split in the FLP became evident a few days later when Bune received a petition against Chaudhry signed by 17 of the 31 Labour MPs (Fiji Live, 3/7/2006). In early July the President received both lists from the FLP, but in the end he accepted Chaudhry's (Radio New Zealand International, 4/7/2006). The issue of discipline or dismissal for those who submitted the second Senate list hung in the air for some time, but at this time it never went any further than rhetoric. In mid July Qarase, Beddoes and Chaudhry met over the Cabinet problems and set a September deadline to reach a consensus over Cabinet conduct, an indicator that proceedings may have been becoming more civilised (Fiji Times, 13/7/2006). Soon after, four sub-committees were set up to try and resolve these differences (Radio New Zealand International, 19/7/2006).

It appears that for a time these talks helped ensure that the multi-party Cabinet functioned properly. However, in early November the same problems reappeared, this time focused on the 2007 Budget. The FLP objected to the Budget primarily because it included a 2.5% increase to the Value Added Tax (VAT) to bring it up to 15%, which would most harshly affect the urban poor, the FLP's key demographic. Thus, in a FLP Caucus meeting on 9 November it was unanimously decided to oppose the Budget and vote against it (Marau, 10/11/2006). This meant that even those who were part of the Cabinet were compelled to vote against the Budget, even though such actions were strictly against the rules of Cabinet, which must vote as one unit. Qarase reminded the FLP ministers of this and warned that voting against the Budget would result in dismissal from Cabinet (Radio New Zealand International, 9/11/2006). The FLP ministers each reacted differently; some, most notably Krishna Datt, indicated

loyalty towards the Government over the FLP and openly stated that they would go against their party's wishes and vote for the Budget (Fiji Times, 11/11/2006). In response Chaudhry said that Datt should resign from the FLP if he wants to support the Budget, as his constituency was against the increased VAT (Fiji Live, 14/11/2006a). Conversely, others appeared to comply with Chaudhry's wishes, such as Vayeshnoi, who openly stated that he would vote against the Budget; this again raised calls from Qarase to have him removed from Cabinet (Fiji Live, 14/11/2006b). Thus, the rift that emerged in July was still present, and this resulted in a new round of intense infighting within the FLP. At about this time it was revealed that before the Budget was announced Qarase had offered Chaudhry the post of Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Finance. This was most likely an effort to settle the on-going multi-party Cabinet dispute, but it was also suspected to be a ruse to allow Qarase to slip the increased VAT through without protest (Fiji Times, 20/11/2006). Chaudhry rejected this offer in the end, stating that there would need to be substantial changes to both the Budget and the Government before he could enter into any such agreement (Radio New Zealand International, 16/11/2006).

On 22 November the vote for the Budget was held: five of the FLP Ministers were not in Cabinet, even after being explicitly asked to attend by Chaudhry, while the other four voted against it (Fiji Live, 22/11/2006a). This caused the underlying tensions to erupt. Shortly after the Budget was passed, Qarase stated at a press conference that he would advise the President to terminate the appointments of the four FLP Ministers if they did not resign immediately (Fiji Live, 22/11/2006b). Chaudhry advised the ministers not to resign, and furthermore indicated that those who were not present for the vote would be disciplined and potentially dismissed (Radio New Zealand International, 22/11/2006). Discussions were then held between Qarase and Chaudhry to sort out this situation, and it appeared that a compromise was forming, whereby Qarase would not remove the four FLP Ministers who voted against the Budget, and Chaudhry would not dismiss the five

FLP Ministers who were not present for the vote (Janine, 25/11/2006). However, it seems that these talks broke down as a few days later Chaudhry and the FLP expelled the five Ministers after a National Council Disciplinary hearing (Fiji Live, 29/11/2006a). Only a matter of days later the military took control of the country. Thus, in the lead-up to the coup Fiji's political scene was in chaos. Now attention will turn to the events that led up to the coup itself.

### *The Military Breaks its Silence*

After the election, the military stayed silent for an extended time, the longest period of silence since the civil-military tensions emerged in mid 2003. At the time it appeared that the newly elected Government and the military had reached some sort of compromise, however in retrospect it would be more appropriately considered as the calm before the storm.

Whatever the reason for their silence, there were three key events preceding the civil-military conflict that should be taken into consideration. First, in mid September Qarase and his Cabinet once again asked Iloilo to sign off the papers instigating a Supreme Court ruling into the Constitutional role of the RFMF (*Fiji Live*, 26/9/2006). Second, Bainimarama himself attributed his renewed attacks upon the Government to a speech given by US General John Brown at the Pacific Army Management Seminar, who said that decisive "*issues should not be faced with politeness but with honesty*" (Cited in Cabenatabua & Peters, 25/9/2006). The US Ambassador soon after pointed out that the Commander had misinterpreted the General's comments, and that the military must be subordinate to civilian power (Rina, 26/9/2006). Thirdly, in early August the Government tabled the contentious Qoliqoli and Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bills which were to become the backbone of the military's complaints against the Government (*Radio New Zealand International*, 6/6/2006).

These Bills first emerged in late 2005; they received strong criticism, particularly from hotel and resort owners. The Qoliqoli Bill was to give ownership of

the foreshore, seabed and fishing areas (qoliqoli in Fijian) from the State to the traditional owners. While the principles behind the Bill may have been justified, there were several key issues. First, it would, only confer ownership to Indigenous Fijians, and not Indians. Such ethnic discrimination in land ownership is common in Fiji, but most of those arrangements were historical in nature; this Bill would continue an obsolete ethos that would frustrate the Indian community. Secondly, there is a distinct lack of clarity over who the traditional owners are. In some places it is clear, but much of the qoliqoli is contested between two or more villages or individuals. Resolving these disputes would be almost impossible, and would invite conflict between the disputing parties. Such conflict had already started: in July two men were hospitalised because of a fight over the ownership of fishing grounds (*Fiji Times*, 11/7/2006). It was the fear of many in Fiji that if the Government passed this Bill such conflicts would become commonplace. Thirdly, hotel and resort owners were worried: as many Fijians see hotels as destroying the natural habitat, thus if the land was given back to traditional owners then hotel leases may not be renewed which would inhibit further growth of the lucrative tourism industry. They also feared that the cost of the leases, which were currently paid to the Government, might substantially increase when the title was conferred to the traditional owners. Furthermore, they were worried that because of the lack of clarity over who the traditional owner is, they may face multiple rents, making the Fijian hotel business unprofitable.

The Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill was based on New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal Bill and was to settle historical grievances for any land lost prior to the establishment of the Native Land Trust Act 1944. Grievances would be settled in a number of ways, from compensation to conferment of the title for the land if it was still in the ownership of the state. This was criticised because it would give special rights to one ethnic group, whereas Fiji was a multi-ethnic society. Furthermore, it was suspected that there would be very few legitimate claims, and that those that were would be almost impossible to resolve because of the complexities of

subsequent land use and ownership. This, coupled together with the questionable composition of the Indigenous Claims Tribunal, which was to be a political panel, made the potential for corruption great. These Bills exacerbated the problems of the multi-party Cabinet that became deadlocked over the issue. Furthermore, many people in Fiji began to become disenfranchised with the Government, which they saw as taking the promotion of indigenous rights too far (Ramesh, 27/9/2006). It appears that the military also thought that these Bills were going too far, and were most likely a key source of motivation, especially in September and October.

In late September Bainimarama broke his silence, strongly criticising the Qoliqoli and Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bills, warning that they would scare away investors, and "*Fiji will be left with indigenous Fijians and their canoes and grass skirts*" (cited in *Fiji Live*, 22/9/2006). A few days later Bainimarama was once again on the offensive, saying that the Ministry of Reconciliation was wasting public funds and calling for an inquiry by the Auditor-General into its spending (*Fiji Times*, 24/9/2006). That same day Bainimarama made his focus clear, stating that he would "no longer keep quiet, and will not cave in to the Government's attempts to shut him down" (cited in Raicola, 24/9/2006), obviously, referring to the Supreme Court ruling. It was then revealed that Baledrokadroka was short-listed for the job of Commissioner of Prisons. The military reacted angrily to this news, reminding the State that he was still to be investigated by a military Court Martial for his actions against the Commander earlier in the year (*Fiji Live*, 27/9/2006). Attorney-General Qoriniasi Bale then told the military that it should not interfere in the appointment of the Commissioner of Prisons, however eventually Baledrokadroka was dropped from consideration for the post (*Fiji Live*, 27/10/2006b; *Radio New Zealand International*, 29/9/2006). Then in early October Bainimarama made what was to become a defining statement for the actions that were to come, saying that the military would now be the watchdog of all Government policies and would stand up against the Government and its corrupt policies (*Fiji Live*, 9/10/2006).

### *First Ultimatum*

In a bold move that took the Commander's threats to another level, on 16 October, speaking from the Middle East where he was on tour, Bainimarama issued a three-week ultimatum to the Government to get rid of the Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill or resign (*Fiji Live*, 17/10/2006). The Government responded to this move by finally succeeding in convincing the President to endorse the request for a Supreme Court ruling, which was soon after set down for their next sitting in May (Ebourne, 20/10/2006). Surprisingly, the military responded to this relatively positively, stating that if the Supreme Court ruled against them, they would no longer oppose the Government (*Fiji Live*, 23/10/2006). Yet at the same time the military began another offensive, calling into question a possible election scam: accusing the SDL campaign director for the 2006 election, Jale Baba, of connections with known conman Peter Foster (*Fiji Live*, 26/10/2006). This was denied outright by Baba and did not amount to anything, but it served to keep tensions high between the military and Government (*Fiji Live*, 27/10/2006a).

Once again, Vosanibola attempted to discipline Bainimarama. All of his earlier efforts had been failures, and so this time he employed a different tactic. Instead of appealing to the President, he went to the Police. He filed a complaint against Bainimarama because of the recent outbursts against the Government, which he believed would amount to sedition. Thus, there was a renewal of investigations into the actions of the Commander in light of his recent outbursts, however they also looked back to his previous dubious actions, including the treatment of the November 2000 mutineers (*Fiji Live*, 25/10/2006).

Throughout this time Qarase had remained relatively quiet; on several occasions he had called for calm among the population, but it took him over a week to actually respond to Bainimarama's demands, simply stating that his Government would not resign (Qalo, 27/10/2006). The military then began to consolidate its position. In response to what was rumoured to be dissent among

the ranks, Colonel Etueni Caucau was put on leave pending investigation, in yet another example of the consequences of disloyalty (Johns, 29/10/2006). Then 3,000 territorial soldiers were called to report to camp by 2 November, raising the possibility for military action (Radio New Zealand International, 29/10/2006).

At this stage, civil-military relations became very tense over two important issues. First, the Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes refused to release a seven tonne shipment of live ammunition intended for the military. Hughes said that he was concerned that the military may use the ammunition to remove the Government, and thus felt it necessary to hold the shipment until the civil-military tensions eased (Ebourne, 30/10/2006). This infuriated the military and it demanded that the ammunition be released immediately (Fiji Live, 31/10/2006b). The next day the RFMF ordered all 3,000 troops to report to camp by four o'clock that afternoon, which was claimed to be a normal exercise but the act also suggested that the military was strengthening its position for a potential move on the Government (Fiji Live, 31/10/2006a). Then on 1 November the military forcibly seized the ammunition. Hughes claimed that military soldiers came to Suva Wharf with an unrelated import licence, threatened the three Police officers on duty, and then unlawfully took the ammunition (Bola, 2/11/2006). The Police then opened an official investigation (Fiji Live, 2/11/2006d).

At the same time as this dispute was brewing, the Government attempted to have Bainimarama removed. Reports suggest that Qarase asked the Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to replace Bainimarama with Colonel Meli Saubulinayau. Saubulinayau, however, in a demonstration of the strength of military cohesion, refused to take the position as he did not have the support of the military, and pledged his support for the Commander (Fiji Times, 31/10/2006; Radio New Zealand International, 31/10/2006). This inflamed the situation, and Bainimarama once again called on the Government to resign so as to avoid any violence (Fiji Sun, 1/11/2006). Qarase refused, and called on the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) to intervene (Fiji Live, 1/11/2006). Bainimarama did not want the

GCC involved, and he stated that this would only encourage violence and bloodshed (Fiji Times, 2/11/2006). However, the GCC said that it would resolve the situation, just as it had done in 1987 and 2000<sup>17</sup> (Fiji Live, 2/11/2006c). At this stage the Police also stated that it was very likely that Bainimarama would be charged for his statements and actions over the last two months (Radio New Zealand International, 2/11/2006).

These two events raised the possibility of intervention, but just as quickly as the tensions rose, they fell away. On 2 November Bainimarama said that there would be no coup, while at the same time requesting that Qarase step down (Fiji Live, 2/11/2006b). The next day the three-week ultimatum was up, but the military said that there was nothing to worry about, and that there would be no intervention (Fiji Live, 3/11/2006). Throughout this entire dispute, Bainimarama was outside of the country. He returned on 4 November, amidst rumours that the Police would arrest him; however this did not happen, and the situation appeared to settle down (Fiji Live, 4/11/2006b). The Budget was announced and while the military's allocation was reduced, it said that they were happy with its funding (Fiji Live, 4/11/2006a). Interestingly, the Budget did not allocate any funds for the implementation of the Unity, Qoliqoli or Indigenous Claims Bills, however the Government professed that this was not because they were dropping the Bills (Fiji Times, 4/11/2006). However, this did coincide with the announcement that the Government would completely drop the highly contentious amnesty provision from the Unity Bill (C. Peters, 5/11/2006). Many commentators around Fiji considered this as a victory for the RFMF, despite the Government refuting the claim that it was a result of pressure from the military (Fiji Sun, 5/11/2006).

While the major tensions subsided, issues between the military and the Police, Australia and the GCC continued through the early part of November. The Police case against Bainimarama intensified, which, along with the conflict

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<sup>17</sup> Their impact in helping resolve the crises in 1987 and 2000 is highly disputed.

surrounding the removal of the ammunition from Suva Warf and the attempted removal of Bainimarama, sparked a growing dispute between the military and the Police. On 4 November the military publically questioned the integrity of Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes, as he had gone to the media over the ammunition issue even after being asked by the military not to do so (Radio New Zealand International, 4/11/2006). Meanwhile, Hughes pushed forward with the investigations into Bainimarama, and asked for a one-on-one interview with him over his recent threats to oust the Government (Fiji Live, 6/11/2006a). Soon after, he commented that the police file on Bainimarama was almost complete, and that it would soon be forwarded to the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) (Fiji Times, 7/11/2006). At the same time the military, in a written request to Hughes, asked for him to step down as Police Commissioner during the ammunition case, as he could not be both complainant and investigator. Hughes refused to do this, and called the request 'disrespectful' (Fiji Live, 7/11/2006). Military comments through the media continued against Hughes: on 9 November he was accused of being under political pressure to convict Bainimarama (Fiji Live, 9/11/2006b). Then, the military demanded that Hughes resign, as they believed that he was involved in the attempt to have the Commander removed at the end of October (Fiji Live, 16/11/2006). These were the beginnings of a dispute between the military and the Police that would play a central role later in the month in the lead-up to the coup.

During this time Australia started to become a player in the dispute. On 2 November they sent two naval ships to Fiji. The stated reason for this was to evacuate any nationals if the situation got any worse (Fiji Live, 2/11/2006a). However, it made the military nervous, particularly when several Australian nationals arrived in the country carrying 400kg of equipment in 'silver boxes'. The RFMF then warned Australia to not even think about entering Fiji in a Solomon Islands style intervention (Fiji Times, 5/11/2006). The Police escorted the Australian personnel from the airport, and thus the military directed its concerns to

the Police demanding an explanation for the entry of the personnel and information on what was contained in the 'silver boxes' (Ragi, 6/11/2006). The military believed that the boxes contained arms and could be used against it to defend the Government. However, the Australian Defence Force professed that while the personnel were its men, the 'silver boxes' only contained communications equipment (Fiji Live, 6/11/2006b). Later, the head of the Australian Defence Force explained that soldiers were in Fiji, but only to assist the High Commission with administration and coordination, most likely concerning evacuation plans (Fiji Times, 9/11/2006a). The situation quietened down after this but it further damaged the relations between the Police and the military, and made the military suspicious of Australia.

The GCC also started to become involved in the dispute. After a call from Qarase for the GCC to intervene they took up the challenge, and on 2 November declared to seek a resolution to the crisis (Fiji Live, 2/11/2006c). Then on 9 November the GCC met for discussions on the conflict, however, neither Bainimarama, any representative from the RFMF, nor the President were present (Fiji Live, 9/11/2006a). However, the next day Bainimarama did meet with the GCC, where in a little over an hour he briefed them on his position. After this the Chiefs decided to set up a committee comprised of High Chiefs to mediate and resolve the crisis (Fiji Live, 10/11/2006). This was not taken well by the military which stated that the two-day meeting of the GCC was a waste of tax payer's money and that it did not want the GCC to mediate (Fiji Live, 11/11/2006). Subsequently, the RFMF avoided the GCC, and failed to show up at several pre-arranged meetings (Fiji Live, 20/11/2006). However, in general most of the early part of November was quiet and stable relative to the problems in late October, and the crisis in late November.

### *Second Ultimatum*

After the first ultimatum passed with no consequences, Bainimarama kept up his presence in the media, calling for a change of direction of the Government but

at this stage he promised that there would be no coup (Fiji Times, 9/11/2006b). In an attempt to ameliorate the situation Qarase tried to set up a meeting with Bainimarama, but the Commander said that he would only attend if the Government met his earlier demands (Fiji Live, 15/11/2006). Then, Bainimarama started talking about a need to 'clean up' Government and soon after on 21 November he issued a new ultimatum, now with nine demands to be met within two weeks, or for the Government to resign (Qalo & Kikau, 22/11/2006). Once again this ultimatum was set when the Commander was out of the country, this time he was in New Zealand where he was attending the christening of his granddaughter. The demands included the removal of the three pieces of legislation, as requested in the first ultimatum, but also included the sacking of any ministers convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup, dropping the investigations into Bainimarama and the RFMF, the removal of Andrew Hughes as Police Commissioner, and the disbandment of the Police Tactical Response Unit.<sup>18</sup> This clearly showed the prominence of the dispute with the Police, but it also showed a return to the original requests concerning the removal of the 'racist' legislation, and the dismissal of ministers with connections to the 2000 coup. Thus, the dual motivations began to become clear.

Soon after this, the GCC was able to secure a meeting with the RFMF, although without Bainimarama who was still in New Zealand. In this meeting the military reaffirmed their demands which they said must be met if the RFMF was to continue to be involved in any mediation talks (Kikau, 25/11/2006a). Meanwhile, the New Zealand Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters was attempting to set up a meeting between Bainimarama and Qarase on New Zealand soil, where he could act as a mediator to try and resolve the dispute. At this stage Bainimarama would not commit himself to such a meeting, but Qarase was willing to participate (Fiji Live, 23/11/2006a).

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<sup>18</sup> For a full list of the demands by the military see appendix two

At the same time, the dispute with the Police continued to grow. On 23 November the Police confirmed that they would interview Bainimarama when he returned from New Zealand (Fiji Live, 23/11/2006b). Bainimarama responded by asking the Police to write to him first to request an interview and in a clear sign of defiance he challenged the Police to try and arrest him (Fiji Times, 23/11/2006). Hughes then began talking of 'shadowy figures', who he believed were top Fijian politicians, civil servants and army officers, who were advising Bainimarama and manipulating his actions for their own goals (Fiji Live, 23/11/2006c). This served to belittle Bainimarama's purported altruistic motivation of 'cleaning up the Government', and also made a connection to the 1987 coups, where it is commonly believed that Rabuka was used by more powerful forces within Fijian society. Hughes also responded to Bainimarama's accusation that he was involved in the attempt to have him removed in late October, by saying that Bainimarama should step down, as it is common for civil-servants and armed forces personnel to step down from their positions when they are being investigated for serious misconduct (Fiji Live, 24/11/2006a). The Police also made it public that they had completed one of seven charges against Bainimarama, and expected the other charges to be completed soon (Fiji Live, 24/11/2006b).

The already tense relations between the Police and the military were further inflamed when the RFMF accused the Police of raiding the President's office on 23 November (Kikau, 25/11/2006b). The Police said that they searched the President's office, with a warrant, for transcripts from a recent meeting between Iloilo and Bainimarama to assist in their investigations into the Commander. The military did not find this to be a sufficient excuse, and Bainimarama called the search an insult to Fiji and its people, particularly as it was carried out by Hughes, an Australian. He called for the Commissioner to immediately leave Fiji voluntarily or to be forced to do so by the military (Fiji Live, 25/11/2006). Territorial soldiers were then called up by the military and asked to guard the President's office to stop any more 'raids' (Raicola, Marau, & Nand, 26/11/2006). Then, to try and further enforce

his authority, Bainimarama stated in the media that the charges against him would not stick, as the RFMF would simply dismiss them (*Fiji Live*, 26/11/2006b). Vosanibola then publically stated that the Government would not accede to the demand that the investigations into the RFMF should stop (*Fiji Live*, 26/11/2006a). Then on 28 November the DPP, instead of filing sedition charges against Bainimarama, returned the files to the Police (*Fiji Times*, 28/11/2006). The reason for this was never revealed; it is likely that the Police simply had to make some amendments to the file, although there was also some speculation that it was ordered by the Government to stop a confrontation with the military (*Fiji Live*, 28/11/2006). The continuing dispute between the military and the Police seems to have come to a head at this stage. Hughes claimed to have received life threatening threats from the military specific to him and his family, and as such he left Fiji and took leave in Australia (*Fiji Times*, 29/11/2006a).

Meanwhile in New Zealand Winston Peters' efforts to mediate the conflict began to bear fruit. On the weekend of 25 and 26 November it was reported that Bainimarama met with Peters, and together organised another meeting which would also involve Qarase in an effort to resolve the impending crisis (*Fiji Live*, 27/11/2006). On the morning of 29 November Bainimarama and Qarase finally met in a two-hour meeting with Peters mediating, which was described by Qarase as "very meaningful" (*Fiji Live*, 29/11/2006b). In this meeting all of the demands by the military were addressed, many of which were fully agreed to by Qarase, including suspending the Unity Bill, putting the Qoliqoli and Indigenous Claims Bills up for review and a review of the role of the Police TRU. As for Hughes, Qarase said that he was nearing the end of his contract, and that he had been put on leave; this was essentially conceding that his contract would not be renewed and that he would probably not return to Fiji. It was also agreed that, if the Government was so advised from the appropriate authorities, they would drop the investigations into Bainimarama and the RFMF, suggesting that this was a likely outcome.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> For a full brief of the outcomes of this meeting see appendix three

Government was as close as politically possible to complying with the military's demands, and for a time there was a sense of relief in Fiji that the crisis had been averted (*Fiji Times*, 29/11/2006b). However, these concessions were not sufficient for Bainimarama; he wanted all his demands met in full, and immediately. So on 30 November he reiterated his ultimatum, and this time he gave Qarase until noon the next day to meet the demands, or resign (*Fiji Live*, 30/11/2006).

### *The Coup*

On Friday 1 December the entirety of Suva shut down at noon in anticipation of a coup; yet no direct action was taken against the Government (*Fiji Times*, 2/12/2006b). Commodore Bainimarama announced that Qarase's deadline to meet his demands was over, although at this stage he would not reveal his next course of action (*Fiji Live*, 1/12/2006b). Qarase and his cabinet then went into hiding "somewhere" in Fiji, but from this secret location Qarase made a statement in which he said that he would not resign, and that he and his cabinet were still in control of the country (*Fiji Live*, 1/12/2006a). Hughes, speaking from Australia, also refused to resign and said that he intended to charge Bainimarama based upon the evidence he already had (Ebourne, 1/12/2006). On 2 December several final attempts at mediation were made. The Vice-President Madraiwiwi met with Bainimarama and Qarase separately (*Fiji Live*, 2/12/2006b). The GCC committee also had further contact with both men and planned further dialogue in the near future to resolve the crisis (*Fiji Times*, 2/12/2006a). Qarase himself proposed an independent committee to look into the RFMF's grievances (*Fiji Live*, 2/12/2006a). However, none of these had any effect and on 3 December Bainimarama ruled out any further talks with Qarase, saying that his time was up as of the previous Friday and demanded that he resign or he would be forcibly removed (*Fiji Live*, 3/12/2006b, 3/12/2006c). At this stage Bainimarama said that he would no longer listen to anyone but the President (*Fiji Live*, 3/12/2006a).

On 4 December the coup began to unfold; in the morning, fully armed soldiers entered the Police TRU headquarters, locking out the members on duty (*Fiji*

*Times*, 4/12/2006). The military then seized all the weaponry and took it back to their armoury in Nabua (*Fiji Live*, 4/12/2006c). They also set up a roadblock to intercept Qarase on his way to Naitasiri, however the Prime Minister took a helicopter to avoid being captured (*Fiji Live*, 4/12/2006b). The Police called these actions illegal and said that they would investigate all of those involved (*Fiji Live*, 4/12/2006a). On 5 December 30 armed soldiers surrounded the Prime Minister's house and confiscated his car, effectively putting him under house arrest (*Fiji Live*, 5/12/2006f). Similar actions were then taken against several of the top Ministers in Qarase's Government and checkpoints were erected around all Government buildings (*Fiji Live*, 5/12/2006b, 5/12/2006c). It was then reported that Iloilo gave permission to overthrow Government, however this was later denied (*Fiji Live*, 5/12/2006d). Nonetheless, with the Prime Minister and his top Ministers detained, and a perception that the President was onside, Bainimarama announced that he had taken control of Government and would assume the role of the President under the Doctrine of Necessity (*Fiji Live*, 5/12/2006a). Then with his newly acquired powers as President, he appointed ex-military doctor Jona Baravilalala Senilagakali as the new Prime Minister of a caretaker Government, to assist in dissolving Parliament (*Fiji Live*, 5/12/2006e). The next day military soldiers entered Parliament, closed it down and took several senior state officials, including Police officers, state CEOs, and the Speaker of the House to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Nabua, where they were told to comply with the RFMF or resign (*Fiji Times*, 6/12/2006).

At this stage the coup was not accepted by the Police and Hughes in particular was vocal in his criticism, saying that he would return to Fiji and arrest Bainimarama on charges of sedition (*Fiji Live*, 6/12/2006a). Then Bainimarama announced that Fiji was officially in a state of emergency, and would thus be run by a military council (*Fiji Live*, 6/12/2006b). On 7 December several 'troublemaking' officials were dismissed by the military, including Hughes, Public Service Commission chairman Stuart Huggett, Public Service Commission CEO

Anare Jale, the CEO of the Prime Minister's Office Jioji Kotobalavu, Solicitor-General Nainendra Nand, acting Police Commissioner Moses Driver, and Assistant Commissioner of Police Kevueli Bulamaninaivalu (*Fiji Live*, 7/12/2006a). In a strange move, Bainimarama then announced that the ministerial positions in the military interim Government would be publically advertised (*Fiji Live*, 7/12/2006b). In the end, the interim regime comprised of a diverse range of political figures, mostly indigenous Fijian but with almost no connections to the powerful nationalist forces. Bainimarama stepped down as President, and handed the title back to Iloilo, but was then named as the Prime Minister of the Interim regime (*Radio New Zealand International*, 5/1/2007). Other notable inclusions were Vayeshnoi, Bune, Nailatikau, Ganilau and Chaudhry (*Radio New Zealand International*, 9/1/2007). Many of these men had given support to Bainimarama in the past, or, as in the case of Vayeshnoi, were heavily involved in the political dispute.

Since the coup the interim regime has been accused of several human rights abuses, culminating in the death of Nimilote Verebasaga aged 41 and Sakiusa Rabaka aged 19 in February 2007 (*stuff.co.nz*, 6/3/2007). These were the result of a sort of vigilante justice that the military was performing during the 'state of emergency' in an effort to assert their authority. This situation became even more confusing when the Fiji Human Rights Commission openly supported the coup and the military's actions (Madraiwiwi, 2007). However to the military's credit it did lift the state of emergency on midnight 31 May (*Fiji Times*, 1/6/2007). Nonetheless, it has been a troubled time since the coup, and there has at the time of writing been very little evidence that the stated goal of 'cleaning up the Government' is being realised (see Lal, 2007b; Madraiwiwi, 2007).

## **Discussion**

Fiji has undergone its fourth coup. Many commentators, this author included, did not believe that this would happen; rather, it was anticipated that the conflict

would simply fade away, as had happened in the other disputes since the 2000 coup. Upon closer examination, though, it can be seen that all of the motivating and opportunity factors were present, allowing a coup to occur. The purported justification for the coup of the incompetent, corrupt, and racist policies of the Government were strong motivating factors. However, it is argued here that these only motivated the military to be a strong vocal actor in the national debate, just as it had been ever since mid-2003. In all the previous disputes, the military complained about similar failings of the Government but did not go as far as to intervene. Thus, these failings of the Government are not the reason that the RFMF shifted from being a vocal actor to coup instigator. The actual reason for this is that the military's interests were profoundly threatened in the lead-up to this coup. Firstly, the Government finally set a date to go to the Supreme Court for a ruling on the role of the RFMF. Secondly, the police TRU began to resemble a palace guard, antagonising the military. Finally, and most importantly, the Police, led by Commissioner Andrew Hughes, were on the verge of charging Bainimarama for his actions in late 2006 and for historical matters dating back to the events following the 2000 coup. This strongly motivated the military to change from being merely a vocal actor as it was in the first ultimatum, to being the instigator of a coup, as it was by the end of the second ultimatum. While several of Bainimarama's key demands were met by Qarase, by that stage it was too late. The decision to overthrow the Government had already been reached, and there was no going back.

However, none of this would have been possible if there was not the proper opportunity. The actions of the Government, most notably their heavy bias towards Indigenous Fijian interests, had by this stage disassociated much of the population from those in power. Alongside this, the problems that the Government was having with the multi-party Cabinet raised questions about their ability to govern. Together, this resulted in a deflation in the Government's legitimacy, not a loss of legitimacy, but enough of a drop so as that enough of the population was on the

military's side to make a coup publically acceptable. The cohesion of the military was also relatively high. The problems faced earlier in the year with Baledrokadroka had by this stage mostly been eliminated, and again officers who were not loyal to Bainimarama were dismissed and replaced by those who would pledge an oath of loyalty.

As such, the two necessary elements came together. There was a strong motivating force from the threats to the military's interests, and there was sufficient opportunity, which together resulted in a coup. The difference between this and the other disputes was that this was the only time that there were strong threats to military interests, a deflation in legitimacy and strong military cohesion present at the same time. Thus, the failures of Government appear to have little importance in motivating the military and, as was theorised by Nordlinger, only have importance in lowering the public's view of the legitimacy of the Government, and opening up the opportunity for military intervention.

### *Motive*

As could be expected, in the lead up to the coup there were plenty of motives at play, with evidence of both strong threats to the military's interests and large government failures. Military interests were threatened on several fronts. First, military autonomy was threatened through the impending Supreme Court ruling on the role of the RFMF. While the significance of this was later overshadowed, it was certainly a strong motivating factor early on, especially during the first ultimatum. While the military stated that they would adhere to the ruling of the Supreme Court, its actions suggested otherwise. It was one of the core beliefs of the RFMF during the period between the 2000 and 2006 coups that it was its central role to uphold the 'wellbeing of Fiji and its peoples', and thus there was the necessity of a political role. As such, it perceived the political role as one of its core functions, the removal of which would severely impinge on its autonomy. Such attacks on military autonomy in the inter-coup period always resulted in retaliation by the military, and there was nothing to suggest that this would not happen again. Yet, as the

Supreme Court was not to sit until May the next year this was not an immediate threat, and thus explains why it was not such a prominent factor.

The military viewed the Police TRU as a functional rival in this dispute. The RFMF was threatened by this force particularly as it acquired the role of guarding the Prime Minister, effectively giving it the role of a place guard. While there were some previous low-level disputes with the TRU, in the lead-up to the coup its presence became one of the primary motivating factors. This is evidenced by the demand in Bainimarama's second ultimatum that this division of the Police be disbanded, which, it is assumed, was because the military felt threatened by its presence: not because they felt that the RFMF was threatened to be replaced by the TRU, but because it antagonised the military by standing in in-between it and the Government.

The personal interests of Bainimarama were also threatened as a result of the pending charges against him. The significance of this factor became obvious in Bainimarama's second ultimatum where he demanded the charges against him be dropped, and for Hughes, the primary instigator and driving force behind the charges, to be removed. While the Government did show some signs of conceding on this demand in the meeting in Wellington, this suggestion was quickly dismissed by the Police, who said that they were adamant in prosecuting the Commander. In effect, the Police backed the Commander into a corner and it was his only option to come out fighting. Thus, it is the contention of this research that the pending charges upon Bainimarama were one of the primary reasons that the Commander took the final step and overthrew the Government, as he was fighting for his freedom.

There were also several Government failures at play in the lead-up to the coup, which the military used as the justification for the intervention. This primarily focused upon the Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill, and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill. These three Bills were all biased towards indigenous Fijian interests. This bias

had been the norm for the Government since 2000, however many people in Fiji, the military included, believed that these Bills took this to an unacceptable level. The ethnic divisions in Fiji are very stark, and it is one of the greatest issues holding the development of the country back. In an interview with Asrali Lave, the Chief of Staff of the *Fiji Times*, this was made very clear. It was his opinion that the entire country was polarised along ethnic lines, beginning in the schooling process, running right up to the political level. Thus, the political party in power, be it Fijian or Indian, would largely pander to the interests of its constituency, and not look to the further development of the State. He argued that it was this growing trend that the RFMF was trying to stop, and that these Bills, while in themselves would probably not be devastating, represented a growth in this problem (Lave, 2006). In this respect, the military probably did have some altruistic motives for its opposition to the Government.

The military also spoke of Government incompetence and corruption. While corruption was often included in their outbursts against the Government, there were very few specific allegations. Early on in the dispute, the RFMF spoke out against the short-listing of Baledrokadroka for the position of Commissioner of Prisons, suggesting some corruption in the selection process. Shortly after issuing the first ultimatum, it also accused the SDL Party's Campaign Director Jale Baba of connections to Peter Forster, and possible corruption in the handling of the election. However, before the coup, these were the only instances of direct accusations of corruption. After the coup, the military made further allegations of corruption, initially concerning vote tampering in the General Election. It later added claims of endemic corruption in the Public Services Commission and the National Provident Fund, building to accusations of corruption in almost every public institution (Radio New Zealand International, 8/12/2006, 15/12/2006, 31/1/2007). It is difficult to tell if this was a motivating factor before the coup that grew in importance after the takeover, or if it was simply a post-coup justification for why the military intervened. The intensity of corruption did not increase in the

months preceding the coup, such corrupt practices were endemic and had been that way for years, and it is thus difficult to reconcile the RFMF's shift from a vocal opposition to the Government to coup instigator with this factor.

Hence, there were both threats to the military's interests, and significant Government failures. However, it appears that the threats to the military's interests were far more influential in generating the motive for intervention than were the Government's failures. Such Governmental failures were common in the period discussed between the 2000 and 2006 coups. Corruption was present in almost all of the other disputes, and significant failures of the Government were definitely present in the Unity Bill dispute. Furthermore, the dispute that ended with the coup shows that the conflict escalated only when the Government or the Police threatened the military's interests. While the first ultimatum may have been made out of altruistic motives from opposition to the contentious Bills, the most combative situation was when the Police would not release the ammunition to the RFMF; soon after the Government unsuccessfully attempted to have Bainimarama removed. In the second ultimatum, the situation became especially heated when the Police revealed that they were nearing the end of the investigations into Bainimarama, its persistence with this eventually cornered the military and resulted in the takeover. This is why the coup seemed to be on an ad-hoc basis, as though there was not much planning put into it. This is shown by the RFMF advertising for positions in the interim regime: if this was a normal coup, planned months or even years in advance, such measures would not be necessary as there would already be a replacement government waiting in the wings. As such, it was not until the last week of the second ultimatum that the motive for intervention was finally met, and thus made the coup imminent.

### *Opportunity*

In this dispute, the opportunity was present as a result of a deflation in the Government's legitimacy and the strong cohesion of the military. By the time of the

coup the SDL Government was facing somewhat of a legitimacy crisis in the eyes of much of the population, as noted by the ex vice-President Mandraiwiwi:

When the Commander finally mounted the coup, he had a ready constituency beyond the command structure of his officers and foot soldiers. This consisted of the Fiji Labour Party and a large majority of the Indo-Fijian community, scarred by the events of May 2000, and by sense of alienation from the SDL Government because of some of its policies. A majority of the minority communities also felt likewise i.e. marginalized and deprived of opportunities to benefit from Government assistance. It also included the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, a significant section of civil society, elements in the judiciary and the professional classes as well as a portion of the private sector. (Madraiwiwi, 2007)

Thus, a significant proportion of the population was dissatisfied with the Government, suggesting a deflation in legitimacy sufficient to allow for the coup. There were two key reasons for this. First, a significant proportion of the population viewed the ethnically biased policies as illegal behaviour. Because of these policies, many people believed the Government to be racist and running the country improperly. However, most telling of the sentiment that these policies were illegal was the claim by the Fiji Law Society that they were unconstitutional (Siddharta Sharma, 1/11/2006). Nordlinger theorised that one of the key indicators that a government is believed to have committed illegal acts is when key policies are said to be unconstitutional, which will severely damage their legitimacy (Nordlinger, 1977). This disassociated much of the population from the Government in Fiji, and in a research trip to Suva by the author it was noticed that much of the population was discussing the 'racist' and unrepresentative nature of the Government, thus, suggesting a significant drop in legitimacy.

The other major delegitimizing factor was the political crisis as a result of the multi-party Cabinet dispute, which caused many people to question the ability of the Government to rule effectively. This weakness helped open up the possibility of intervention, as noted by Brij Lal:

Had Chaudhry been less tepid about the multi-party Cabinet, and participated in it, Commodore Bainimarama might – just might – have considered the situation differently, deterred by a strong display of multi-ethnic unity on the political front between the leaders of the two main communities in Fiji. (Lal, 2007a)

As shown above the multi-party Cabinet was torn between the responsibility to govern effectively and upholding party ideologies. This was particularly tough for

the FLP Cabinet Ministers, as their party leader who was outside of Cabinet was attempting to make them uphold party ideologies above all else, putting them in impossible positions. This resulted in deadlock over several important policies, and culminated in the disparity over the Budget, where the FLP dismissed five of its own ministers and the other four looked likely to have the same fate at the hands of Qarase. All of this occurred only days before the coup took place. This would have certainly lowered the population's confidence in the Government to govern effectively, and thus made them more accepting of a military takeover, to get the country functioning again.

The cohesion of the military was also very strong in this period. They had by this stage recovered from the difficulties felt earlier on in the year over Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny, and dismissed all those officers involved. In this process they were once again able to establish a climate of enforced obedience to the Commander, with the fear of losing their position if they did not do so. This was once again demonstrated in late October with the dismissal of Colonel Etueni Caucau for alleged disloyalty. This cohesion was evidenced when Meli Saubulinayau refused the Government's request to supplant Bainimarama as Commander of the RFMF. Furthermore, at the time of writing, there have not been any rumblings of dissent among the ranks over a year after the coup. If there were still some difficulties in cohesion then this would have most likely have become evident by now.

Thus, it is the contention of this research that this deflation in legitimacy and strong military cohesion opened up an opportunity, explaining why the coup was able to happen. However, while the Government was certainly facing some legitimacy problems, it is difficult to argue that these were of the nature and intensity that Nordlinger and other theorists were imagining as necessary precursors to a coup. Normally it would be expected that a significant number of the population was more than simply dissatisfied with the Government, but actively rebelling against it. This was not the case in Fiji, and it was a long way from being

so. Furthermore, while there was a significant number of the population dissatisfied with the Government, there was also a large number who actively supported it: mainly Fijian nationalists and the traditional Chiefly structure. Yet, the coup did occur and as at the time of writing it has been a success. The reason for this lies in the heavy background causes present in Fiji, in particular the history of coups. This would have lowered the moral barrier for the military and lessened any public resistance to a coup, as coups have become ingrained as an acceptable part of the political process in Fiji. Thus, those who supported the Government would not have necessarily felt the upsurge of injustice, as coups have become socially acceptable. Even more crucially though, is the cohesion of the military. Normally a military will face internal fracturing if a coup is attempted against a legal government, but in the case of Fiji Commodore Bainimarama had managed to manufacture cohesion, through the dismissal of those disloyal to him and the promotion of those who would pledge an oath of loyalty. Therefore, there was little chance of internal dissent, increasing the opportunity for the coup. Thus, the relatively minor deflation in legitimacy was sufficient, which does not bode well for the future of Fiji, as the requirement for the opportunity for intervention has become very low.

## **Conclusion**

The Government had put itself in a tenuous position since the election due to the multi-party Cabinet crisis, which helped open the opportunity for the military to intervene. However, it was not until late September that the civil-military dispute began, when the military broke its silence after three months with almost no comments in the media. After this, they issued an ultimatum to the Government, to drop the three contentious pieces of legislation or resign. In the end though, this ultimatum simply faded into obscurity, most likely because the military did not have enough motivation to intervene. These actions led to the Police becoming involved, who began investigating Bainimarama for his outbursts against the Government, and also historical crimes. This was the key that generated the

motive for intervention, and sparked the second ultimatum. This time the military had nine demands, to be met in two weeks, or for the Government to resign. Qarase did make some considerable concessions, however these were not sufficient for Bainimarama, and he then overthrew the Government.

The key difference between this dispute and the others was that all of the triggering causes were met. For the motive, there were threats to the military's interests, generated through the scheduled Supreme Court ruling on the role of the RFMF, the presence of the Police TRU and most importantly the pending charges upon Bainimarama. There were also Government failures, from the headstrong attitude towards pushing through the three contentious pieces of legislation, and the continuing issue of corruption. However, these issues were not unique to this dispute, and thus appear to have minimal significance in generating the motive for intervention. The opportunity was also present; there was a dip in legitimacy, as a result of the Government's growing ethnic bias, and the difficulties in governing because of the multi-party cabinet dispute, alongside the unnaturally strong cohesion of the military generated by Bainimarama's dismissals of any soldiers and officers who showed signs of disloyalty. Thus, both of the triggering causes came together, which, coupled with the background causes, explains why the Government was overthrown.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

## *Chapter Nine*

### CONCLUSION

Upon first assessment the causes of Fiji's fourth coup are clouded and veiled behind the complex events and motives surrounding the crisis. This research has attempted to shine some light on the causes, looking beyond the obvious reasons stated by the military and those that have emerged in the early literature on the coup. From this it has been found that Fiji suffered from poor civilian control over the military ever since the 2000 coup. The country was on shaky grounds, and these underlying tensions fuelled tense civil-military relations lasting from mid-2003 up to the coup in December 2006. However, this on-going disagreement seemed to have reached a balance, where the military would actively criticise the Government and often successfully moderate its ethnically biased policies, but not go as far as intervene. Many observers had come to a similar conclusion, which is why the coup took most by surprise. A central question is therefore: what was it that made the military make the shift from a vocal opponent to the Government to the instigator of a coup? This research has found that the reason for this was that the military's interests were threatened, motivating them to intervene, which coincided with a dip in the Government's legitimacy, and strong military cohesion, allowing for the military to act on its grievances.

#### **Background Causes**

From an examination of the background causes, it has been found that Fiji suffered from poor civilian control of the military in the period between the 2000 coup and the 2006 coup, resulting in a high coup risk. Several factors contributed

to this. Historical legacies demonstrated that the military was used as an oppressor of the colonial rule, and from very early on had strong connections to the chiefly elite, thus predisposing them towards a political role. The coups in 1987 further reinforced and solidified this political role. The 2000 coup also had an impact, and while it was not a military coup it did set up much of the poor relations between the SDL party and the RFMF under Bainimarama. The domestic political, economic, and social context illustrated the slight weakness of the political institutions in Fiji. There had also been the economic hardship since 2000 and there were impending crises in the garment and sugar industries. Furthermore, the social divisions rampant throughout Fijian society further increased the risk of a coup. The international context appeared to have a minimal impact upon this crisis. The institutional difficulties were of a central importance to the coup risk that Fiji faced, as there was a great deal of contention over the proper role of the RFMF, and a weak system of control. The culture and professionalism of the military revealed that the RFMF believed itself to have the role of protecting and upholding the security and wellbeing of Fiji and all its peoples, thus adhering its allegiance to the abstract concept of the continuing state, rather than the specific government in power. Moreover, the RFMF is an exceptionally powerful organisation in comparison to the Fijian Government, which meant that a coup was always achievable. From all these factors put together, it can be seen that Fiji had a high coup risk ever since the 2000 coup. However, simply identifying that there was a risk is only half of the issue when determining the causes, and thus it was necessary to turn to an analysis of the triggering causes that set the coup in motion and saw action being taken over these background tensions.

### **Triggering Causes**

The triggering causes in this research were based upon Nordlinger's (1977) theory on the causes of coups. This consisted of analysing the motive of the military to intervene, and the opportunity for them to do so. The factors comprising the motive were threats to the military's interests and failures of government, and

the factors comprising the opportunity were a dip in the legitimacy of the Government, and military cohesion.

### *Motive*

To garner the appropriate motive it is not theoretically necessary that there are both threats to the military's interests and government failures, just that the military is motivated to intervene; this could come from either factor, or a combination of both. The dispute that resulted in the coup had both factors, which makes the identification of the military's motive easy, but it hides the greater question of which of the two factors was more important, or if it was necessary for both factors to be fulfilled. To achieve this, this research compares all five instances of conflict and tension to find those with the strongest motivating force.

The military had the appropriate motive for intervention during the dispute over the reappointment of Bainimarama in 2004. This was shown by the RFMF solidifying its position through dismissing disloyal officers; furthermore, several of those dismissed officers later accused Bainimarama of planning a coup if he was not reinstated. In this instance the only motivating factors were threats to the military's interests, primarily from Bainimarama's personal interests to retain his position, but there were no significant failures by the SDL/CAMV Government.

During the Unity Bill dispute the military did not have the appropriate motive for intervention. There were only minor and speculative threats to the military's interests from potential disciplinary measures against Bainimarama, the potential for the Reconciliation Commission to focus on Bainimarama's actions during the 2000 coup, and the potential for a functional rival from an offer by Viliame Raqio to protect the Government. However, none of these potential threats were carried out, and as such there were no substantial threats to the military's interests. Conversely, there were significant government failures stemming from the Government impeding investigations into suspects of the 2000 coup and securing early releases for several who were convicted, as well as the actual Unity Bill itself

which would further this process. This resulted in plenty of vocal opposition to the Government, and an indirect threat to remove the Government if they passed the Bill, but this was only released as a leaked draft, and thus was not meant to be a direct threat. If at this stage there was the appropriate motive, then it is likely that there would have been a coup, as there was a similar level of opportunity as there was in late November and early December 2006.

In the dispute surrounding the January 2006 coup threat, it was found that there was the appropriate motive for intervention, witnessed by the blatant coup threat, and further reinforced by Baledrokadroka's allegation that Bainimarama was planning a coup. In this dispute there were very strong threats to the military's interests from the surcharges put upon Bainimarama and the Government's interference in the CRW court-martial; this was intensified by the Government's confrontational stance towards the military. However, in this dispute there were insignificant government failures. While the military did mention the Government's racist policies, this was far from its focus.

In the dispute surrounding the election the military did not have the motive to intervene. There were virtually no threats to the military's interests, but there were some government failures indicated by the military in its statements. These focused on the accumulation of failures that the Government had committed over the years, focusing on the early release of those convicted of involvement in the coup in 2000, and the Government's 'racist policies'. However, it never appeared that the military would actually intervene at this time, and was rather simply motivated to try and campaign against the Government to have them removed legally.

Finally, in the lead up to the coup there was the appropriate motive. Military interests were threatened by the scheduled judicial review of the role of the RFMF, the strengthening of the Police TRU that represented a functional rival, and the impending criminal charges against Bainimarama. There were also significant

Government failures largely stemming from three controversial Bills: the Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill, and the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill. The military also spoke of Government corruption; however, they were never specific on this until after the coup took place, suggesting that this was simply a retrospective justification for the intervention.

Thus, it can be seen that in those instances where there were only threats to the military's interests and no government failures, there was the appropriate motive; an intervention was only halted by the lack of an opportunity. Conversely, instances where there were only government failures but no threats to the military's interests did not create the appropriate motive; thus even when there was the appropriate opportunity no intervention occurred.

Thus, this research has shown that the failures of the SDL Government had little impact upon the RFMF's motivation to intervene. The often numerous failures did motivate the RFMF to vocally oppose the Government, but not to overthrow it. Governmental failures on their own were not a sufficient motivating factor. This confirms Nordlinger's theory, but it contravenes the stated justification of the military. This is not to say that there was no goal to stop the Government's performance failures, however if it were not for the threats to the military's interests it would have pursued this goal in the same way that it had been doing for the last four years, by opposing the Government politically and through the media. The inclusion of threats to the military's interests motivated them to go the extra step and remove the Government. Thus, the crucial factors in determining the motivation for intervention were the threats to the military's interests.

### *Opportunity*

For the opportunity, it appears that both a deflation in the Government's legitimacy and cohesion of the military were necessary. This was shown in the first dispute over Bainimarama's reappointment. In this dispute the Government suffered from a legitimacy deflation from the multi-party Cabinet dispute; however

the military lacked cohesion as shown by the dismissal of several officers, who later accused Bainimarama of planning a coup. Thus, the key impediment to intervention was the lack of cohesion in the RFMF.

In the Unity Bill dispute, there was the appropriate opportunity. There was a legitimacy deflation from public perception that the early release of those convicted of coup-related crimes was an illegal act, along with the drafting and promotion of the 'Unity Bill' itself that many people saw as contravening the constitution. Furthermore, military cohesion appeared to be stable with no sign of internal dissent. Therefore, if the military attempted an intervention it is likely that it would have been a success.

In the 'January 2006 coup threat' dispute there was no legitimacy deflation because of a lack of overt illegal acts by the Government, and the impending elections that provided confirmation of the Government's legitimacy and demonstrated its willingness to follow due process. Neither was there cohesion in the military as evidenced through Baledrokadroka's attempted mutiny. Thus, while there was the appropriate motive, a coup did not occur. Similarly, in the dispute surrounding the 2006 election, there was neither a legitimacy deflation because of the current election, nor cohesion in the military, still suffering from the effects of the attempted mutiny.

Conversely, in the dispute that ended in the 2006 coup there was both a deflation in legitimacy and strong military cohesion. Government legitimacy was low as a result of the political crisis surrounding the multi-party Cabinet, and the ethnically biased policies of the Government, both of which began to alienate significant sections of the population. Additionally, after another round of dismissals of disloyal officers early on in the dispute, military cohesion became very stable. Together these two factors opened the necessary window of opportunity and a coup became possible.

Thus, Nordlinger's assessment that the only necessary opportunity is a deflation in legitimacy did not hold true for Fiji, as there was also a requirement for cohesion in the military. The reason for this was that the legitimacy deflations of the Government were never as severe as would be expected. Thus, it was necessary to have a highly cohesive military force, so there were no internal dissenters who were against overthrowing a largely legitimate Government. Theoretically, it is possible that if the Government did suffer a very severe loss of legitimacy then it would not be necessary to have a particularly cohesive military, as it would be easy to convince all of the officers to go along with a coup. However, such a loss of legitimacy never occurred, and thus it was necessary for there to be both a legitimacy deflation and a cohesive military force.

The key difference between the 2006 coup and the other four disputes is that there were threats to the military's interests constituting the motivation, and there was both a deflation in the Government's legitimacy and strong military cohesion, providing the necessary opportunity. In the previous disputes there was often the motive but not the opportunity, or the opportunity but not the motive, and in some instances neither were present. It took both of these forces to come together at the same time to instigate a coup.

### **Implications**

This research has shown that the stated justification for the coup to 'clean up the Government' was merely a façade, covering the more important motivation of protecting military interests. Furthermore, this research has also shown that the requirement for the opportunity for a military intervention in Fiji has become very low. The implications for this are very important for Fiji and for the international community in their relationship with post-coup Fiji. For Fiji, Bainimarama's goals of 'cleaning up the Government' must be questioned, as it has been shown here that this was not the reason that he overthrew the Government. Even so, these goals are central to the ongoing legitimacy of his regime and are thus likely to be at the forefront of his aspirations. However, these goals were not part of a rational

decision when overthrowing the Government. Thus, it is unlikely that Bainimarama and the RFMF considered the difficulty of these goals, the likelihood of being able to achieve them, or had planned how to do so before instigating the coup. As such, the ability of the RFMF to make the massive reforms that they have proposed to the electoral system and in abolishing corruption has to be questionable. Furthermore, the low requirements for the opportunity for intervention in Fiji is concerning. There is no easy or quick solution to this problem, but if measures are not put in place to raise the moral barrier then Fiji will most likely follow the same path of recurrent coups.

While it has been argued in this research that the surrounding conflicts in the Pacific had little influence on Fiji, it has been shown in previous instances of political instability in Fiji, particularly during the 1987 and 2000 coups, that conflict in Fiji affects the rest of the Pacific. Fiji holds an essential role in the Pacific, as the centre of much of the economic activity, and Pacific wide organisations and often the first point of call for international aid to the Pacific. As such this coup will have wide reaching implications for the whole of the Pacific region particularly if it falls into conflict. So ensuring the stability of Fiji in this time of crisis is important for the prosperity of the whole region.

The international community should also be weary of Bainimarama. As has been shown through this coup, threats to his personal interests result in military action. This assumption has been reinforced after the coup as well, as evidenced by the removal of the New Zealand High Commissioner Michael Green for what was reported as 'interference in domestic affairs' (*Fiji Times*, 15/6/2007). As such, antagonising the Commander is not the best course of action; rather, working with him to achieve his ambitious goals as quickly as possible and then bringing about new democratic elections would be a wiser course of action.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

As this study was conducted not long after coup there is a need for further research. Growing discussions and debates over the causes of the coup are required; what is presented here is one perspective, which is likely to be challenged by others as more information comes to light. Through these debates any details which may have been missed in this study will be revealed, and thus a much greater picture of the causes will be determined. Additionally, further research should be conducted into the events following the coup, as these may prove to be of great importance in determining the impact of this coup on Fiji.

This research also showed that Nordlinger's theory on the causes of coups is still relevant in the modern context in helping to understanding why coups occur. The general proposition that the primary driver of a coup is to protect the military's interests held true in this context and is a lesson that should be remembered when studying all coups. All too often this is forgotten in the mass of theories on coups that are common today, particularly when studying recent coups. This research has shown that such an approach is still important and is therefore worthy of greater attention.

### **Final Comments**

This research set out to try to establish the causes behind Fiji's 2006 coup, by taking a political science perspective in an effort to establish the more pertinent reasons for the overthrow. To do this, two theories were used. The first theory, developed by Cottey, Edmunds and Forster (2002) looked at the civilian control of the military in Fiji, from which it was determined that in the period between the 2000 and 2006 coups Fiji had poor civilian control over the military, resulting in a high risk of a coup. The second theory was an adaptation of Nordlinger's (1977) classic study on the causes of coups in developing states, which looked at the triggering causes focusing on the motive and opportunity for intervention. The motive examined both threats to the military's interests and Government failures;

however, it was found that only military interests had an impact on the motive for the military to intervene. While the military often spoke out against Government failures, these only motivated them to be a vocal actor in the political scene, but did not motivate them towards a coup. The opportunity looked for a deflation in Government legitimacy, as well as military cohesion. It was found that both of these factors were necessary to open the window of opportunity. While there were several disputes between the Government and the military in Fiji before the coup, the coup was the only time that there were threats to the military's interests, coupled with the opportunity from a legitimacy deflation and strong military cohesion, which together, along with the strong background influences, were the causes behind Fiji's fourth coup.

## APPENDICES

*Appendix One*

LIST OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Baba, Jale           | - Campaign Director for SDL in 2006 Election   |
| Baba, Tupeni         | - Founding member of FLP. MP in 1987 deposed in 1987 Coup. 1999 Foreign Minister, and one of two deputy Prime Ministers, deposed in 2000 coup.   |
| Bainimarama, Vorque  | - Commander of RFMF 1999 – 2006. Leader of 2006 coup, Prime Minister of post 2006 coup interim regime  |
| Baledrokadroka, Jone | - Land Force Commander of RFMF 11 January – 13 January.  |
| Bale, Qoriniasi      | - Attorney General 2001 – 2006.  |
| Bavadra, Timoci      | - Formed FLP and Leader of FLP 1985 – 1989, Prime Minister April 1987 – May 1987. Died 1989  |
| Bune, Poseci         | - Member of the FLP. Served as Deputy leader of the FLP from June to December 2006. He was one of nine FLP members in the multi-party Cabinet in 2006 as Minister for the Environment, and was at the centre of a rift in the FLP against the Leader Chaudhry.     |
| Chaudhry, Mahendra   | - Helped form FLP in 1985. Minister of Finance and National Planning April 1987 – May 1987. Leader of FLP 1991 – present. Prime Minister 1999 – 2000. Minister of Finance, Sugar Reform, Public Enterprise and National Planning in post 2006 coup interim regime. |
| Cokanasiga, Jeketani | - Minister of Home Affairs 2001 – December 2004.   |

- Ganilau, Penaia - 3<sup>rd</sup> Governor General 1983 – 1987, 1<sup>st</sup> President 1987– 1993.
- Datt, Krishna - Member of the FLP, and party Vice President. He was one of nine FLP members in the multi-party Cabinet as Minister for Labour and Employment Opportunities, and was part of the breakaway group in the party, which caused a political conflict in the lead up to the coup
- Ganilau, Epeli -Son of Penaia. RFMF Commander 1991 – 1999. Elected as a member of GCC in 1999, chairman of GCC 2001 – 2004. Founded the National Alliance Party in 2005, and has been their leader since.
- Hughes, Andrew - An Australian who held the office of Fiji's Police Commissioner from 2003 till 2006 coup.
- Korovavala, Lesi - CEO of the Ministry of Home Affairs 2001-2006
- Kotobalavu, Joji - CEO of the Prime Minister's Office, deposed in 2006 coup.
- Lalabalavu, Naiqama - Minister for Lands and Minister for Mineral Resources 2001 – April 2005. Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation September 2005 – May 2006. Minister of Fijian Affairs and Minister for Lands and Provincial Development May 2006 – December 2006. High Chief Tui Cakau 1999 – present.
- Lewneni, Neumi - RFMF Spokesperson
- Ligairi, Ilisoni - Leader of the CRW upon Formation
- Lyon, David - US Ambassador to Fiji January 2003 – July 2005.
- Madraiwiwi, Joni - Vice President 2004 – 2006
- Mara, Kamisese - First Prime Minister of Fiji 1970 – 1987 coup, and then again from 1987 – 1992. Vice President 1992 – 1993, President 1993 – 2000. Died 2004.
- Nailatikau, Epeli - RFMF Commander 1982 – 1987 coup. Deputy Prime Minister in the interim regime

- after the 2000 coup. Speaker of the House 2001-2006. Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in the interim regime after 2006 coup.
- Qarase, Laisenia - Prime Minister of Fiji 2001 – 2006 under SDL Party.
- Rabuka, Sitivini - Leader of Fiji's first and second coups in 1987. Prime Minister under the SVT party from 1992 – 1999. Chairman of the GCC 1999 – 2001.
- Seniloli, Jope - Vice- President 2000 – 2004, supporter of Speight
- Speight, George - Leader of the 2000 coup
- Taoka, Aisea - Commissioner of Prisons 1996-present, responsible for the early release of many of the high profile coup convicts.
- Tarakinikini, Filipo - Military Spokesperson during 2000 Coup, subsequently began working for the UN in the Department of Peace Keeping Operations 2001 – present.
- Tora, Apisai - Member of Alliance party 1970 – 1987. Leader of Taukei Movement 1987. Member of interim regime post 1987 coups – 1991. 1992 Formed the ANC party. 1998 formed PANU party, left party in 2000. After 2001 election was appointed to the Senate.
- Uluivuda, Josefa Iloilovatu January (Iloilo) - President 2000 – December 2006 and 2007 – present
- Vayeshnoi, Lekh Ram - FLP member first elected into parliament in 1992. He was one of the nine FLP members brought into the SDL multi-party Cabinet in 2006 as Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources, and was often outspoken against Qarase.
- Vosanibola, Josefa - Minister of Home Affairs December 2004 – December 2006.
- Waqanisau, Jeremaia - Appointed as CEO of Ministry of Home Affairs in January 2004, but was removed in April 2004, as a result of the dispute over Bainimarama's reappointment, to serve as

Fiji's ambassador to China, where he currently continues to serve.

*A p p e n d i x T w o*

RFMF SECOND ULTIMATUM DEMANDS 21/11/2006

- A public declaration by the Government that the event of 2000 were illegal; and that the Ministry of Reconciliation educate the society that the events of 2000 were illegal. Those implicated in the coup should be removed from their positions in the government.
- Withdrawal of the three contentious Bills: Promotion of Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill, Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bill
- Investigations against Commodore Bainimarama and the RFMF should be dropped
- The Police Tactical Response Division formed recently should be disbanded
- Terminate the contract of the Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes.
- No foreign Police or military intervention should be entertained
- Removal of the commercial arm of the Native Land Trust Board and focus on the core function of taking care of the land lease.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs must respond to RFMF concerns about force structure, allowances and promotions
- Government must address good governance

Note: the specific wording of these demands may have differed from that used by the RFMF, as a result of the patchy and often inconclusive reports on these demands.

*Appendix Three*

WELLINGTON MEETING OUTCOMES

Meeting between Prime Minister Qarase and Commodore Bainimarama

Government House: Wellington  
29 November 2006

Points of agreement and next steps

Overview:

The meeting between Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and Commodore Frank Bainimarama at Government House in Wellington has seen lengthy, serious and meaningful discussions on the issues raised by the Royal Fiji Military Force. Substantial progress was made in resolving areas of difference.

The areas discussed, and the outcomes reached were:

**Issue: Public declaration by the Government that the event of 2000 were illegal; and all those associated with them must be removed from office.**

Outcome:

The Fiji Government reaffirms that the events of 2000 were illegal.

The Government has undertaken to develop, without delay, a renewed and fully-resourced public education program to take to the public and villages of Fiji an information program aimed at ensuring wide public awareness and understanding that the events of 2000 were illegal.

The Government is prepared to proceed, consistent with Fiji constitutional and legal process, to continue to bring to account those people found by due process to be illegally associated with the events of 2000.

The RFMF has been invited to provide to the Government the names of people whom it believes should face legal process.

Note: the Government of New Zealand has indicated its willingness to assist in providing resources of the public education program.

**Issue: Withdrawal of the three contentious Bills: Promotion of Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill, Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bill**

Outcome:

Action on the Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill has been suspended. The Government and RFMF agreed that an independent review of the constitutionality and legality of the Qoliqoli Bill and Land Tribunal Bill should, with resource-assistance from New Zealand, be accelerated and brought to a rapid conclusion.

New Zealand has undertaken to provide proposals to the Government of Fiji by December 1 on how the review process is to be accelerated through attaching additional legal and analytical resources to the review. The meeting agreed that the review of the Bills will be completed by January 1 with a progress report to be provided by mid-December.

If the review finds that the Bills are legally or constitutionally unsound then action on them will be automatically suspended.

If the review finds otherwise, then the Government will enter into renewed consultations with the RFMF and other interested parties on the areas concerned.

The meeting noted international precedents around issues such as indigenous land ownership and reform typically require lengthy processes of consultation and inclusive processes in order to ensure broad-based consensus and participation. Such an approach would be equally appropriate for Fiji.

**Issue: Investigations against Commodore Bainimarama and the RFMF**

Outcome:

The Government of Fiji, should it receive advice from the appropriate Fiji Government authorities the Solicitor-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and Police Commissioner that the investigations in dispute should be suspended, would be prepared to follow that advice and to confirm publicly that it has done so.

**Issue: Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes' contract to be terminated.**

Outcome:

The situation is that Mr Hughes is nearing the end of his term and has been granted leave.

**Issue: No foreign military/police intervention**

Outcome:

The Government of Fiji and the RFMF agree that there should be no foreign military or police intervention in the domestic affairs of Fiji.

**Issue: Review of the role of the Police Tactical Response Division.**

Outcome:

The Government of Fiji and RFMF agree on the need for a capable and professional police force that retains public confidence.

In that context, the Government agrees to undertake a review of the role of the PTRD.

**Issue: Review the commercial arm and role of the Native Land Trust Board.**

Outcome:

It was acknowledged the NL TB is a statutory organisation and the Government of Fiji cannot interfere in its operations. However, it was agreed that the NTLB would be asked to review its commercial arm and, in this context, New Zealand offered to provide resources and/or international expertise to assist such a review.

**Issue: Ministry of Home Affairs must respond to RFMF concerns about force structure, allowances and promotions**

Outcome:

The Government of Fiji agrees to renewed engagement with the RFMF to address its concerns.

**Issue: Government must address good governance.**

Outcome:

The Government of Fiji agrees to work with the RFMF, and other Fiji groups, to develop higher standards of governance within Fiji.

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