

Fiji: What Kind Of Militocracy?

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Abstract

The Republic of Fiji Islands has been under military rule since December 2006. Yet, the regime of Frank Bainimarama is not really like any other military regime in the world, nor does the 2006 coup resemble the earlier military interventions in the country. It is attempting development without freedom, but can it succeed? It is important to recognize that dictatorships can be of very different kinds. What happens with the Bainimarama regime will have a major impact upon the Pacific scene, not only for the Fiji Islands but also for the Pacific Forum and the role of China in regional integration. And the course of future events will depend much upon what strategy Fiji's strongman chooses and what kind of constitution is put in place.

Introduction

The independent states in the Pacific are characterized by institutional weakness. Today global attention is directed on Fiji, which suffers from increasing international sanctions and isolation. The simple truth is, however, that none of these countries can afford such political instability. Why, then, are the political elites in these societies so incapable of finding a *modus vivendi*?

Since December 2006, the islands of Fiji have been ruled by the military. Actually, military rule was not introduced until spring 2009, when a state of emergency was declared, involving the suspension of the constitution of the country. The military leader states that the take-over was necessary to move the country 'forward'. However, questioning this national motive leads one to enquire into the rationale of military regimes: altruistic nation saviours or egoistic rent-seekers? On the international television channels, the military is blamed for the Fiji crisis, in accordance with the official version of Australian diplomacy. However, the Fiji games played among its adversarial political elite is far more complex.

Regime instability is hardly a new phenomenon in the Pacific area, referred to as harbouring an 'arc of instability' (Duncan and Chand, 2002), leading up to the big question of sustainability of entire countries (Hughes, 2004; Curtin, 2005). Yet,

the conditions for political instability are multiple, each country having a unique mix of instability inducing conditions. How come that Fiji cannot establish a stable democracy? There is an elaborate body of research that has enquired into the peculiar situation and historical legacy of Fiji, for example by scholars such as Robertson, Chand, Naidu, Gounder, and Duncan (Allen, Bourke, and Hide, 1995; Chand, 2001, 2009; Daye, 2003; Jolly, 2005; Dobell, 2006; Doornbos and Akram-Lodhi, 2000; Moore, 2004; Lal and Pretes (eds.), 2001; Robertson and Sutherland, 2001; Lawson, 1991; Levine, 1997; Premdas, 1995; Powles, 1996; Durutalo, 1996; Fraenkel *et al.*, 2009).

A regional expert, Reilly – see for instance Reilly (2006, 2007) – speaks of:

The progressive ‘Africanisation’ of the South Pacific region. ‘Africanisation’ refers to four inter-related phenomena that have long been associated with violent conflict and the failure of democratic government in Africa:

- the growing tensions in the relationship between civil regimes and military forces;
- the intermixture between ethnic identity and the competition for control of natural resources as factors driving conflicts;
- the weakness of basic institutions of governance such as prime ministers, parliaments and, especially, political parties; and
- the increasing centrality of the state as a means of gaining wealth and of accessing and exploiting resources. (Reilly, 2000: 262–3)

What needs to be added to the Fiji story is an understanding of the various roles that the military may play in Third World politics, focussing upon Fiji especially and its strongman.

One speaks of a *coup culture* in Fiji, summarizing the tendency of its military establishment to become involved in politics and the running of the country. One may list four coups: 1987, 2000, 2006, and 2009, where the latter achieved what had been initiated as a half measure three years earlier. Actually, the period in between the December coup in 2006 and the March emergency law declaration in 2009 is a most interesting one, the interim government under military commander Frank Bainimarama ruling the country in a semi-legal manner with presidential approval and participation from one of the major parties (Fiji Labour Party) with Fiji-Indian M. Chaudhry as finance minister. Its fate was decided by the famous court ruling in March 2009, triggering the immediate installation of complete military rule by emergency law. Since then, Interim Prime Minister Bainimarama rules Fiji with decrees in the role of sole dictator, surrounded by an entourage of loyal ministers and his army. How does he see the future of the country and his role in a new dispensation for the Republic?

Types of dictatorship

In the comparative literature on military involvement in politics, there is a set of models offering a classification of how the military can interact with civilians

regardless of their basic motivation. It is illuminating to attempt to examine the military establishment in Fiji in terms of the distinctions this literature has provided, drawing upon experiences from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Since the Second World War, a large number of military interventions have taken place in Latin, Moslem, Sub-Saharan as well as Buddhist countries, which have been modelled in terms of the conditions and motives behind these interventions, and the results (Huntington, 1968; Finer, 1969; Janowitz, 1971; Janowitz, 1977; Stepan, 1971, 1988; Hamill, 1995). Where does the present military government in Fiji fit into these models? Military rule has frequently occurred in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The military regime varies in both its form and content – see the following typology:

- (a) Totalitarianism: complete subjection in every sphere of life to domination by the state.
- (b) Tin pots: enough repression to sustain looting but not excessive.
- (c) Tyranny: employment of violence to create servitude.
- (d) Timocracy: benevolent dictatorship. (Wintrobe, 2000: 7–15)

Clearly, this typology, although entirely qualitative, entails a quantitative reduction in repression going from (a) totalitarianism to (d) benevolent dictators. This is not the place to enter into a long discussion of Wintrobe's scheme, especially whether (b) and (c) are mutually exhaustive. Actually, all dictators engulf themselves in some form of looting or other and they would not survive if it were not for the servitude they willingly or unwillingly spread in the population at large. Now, where to put the present Fiji military regime?

From the political point of view, a military regime is always a temporary phenomenon. It cannot lead to political stability due to its own internal logic. Military intervention is supposed to be short-run, assisting the country somehow. When it becomes long run, then it institutionalizes the repressive capacity it is always based upon, as in Myanmar. Bainimarama has frequently, promised a return to democracy, first within a time limit of two to three years, but now not until 2014. The promise of a return to civilian rule is at the core of the logic of military intervention, justifying its occurrence and containing the rationale for accepting the exceptional predicament. However, it is a conditional promise, which when not respected or honoured can be pushed forward into the distant future. When the military regime reneges upon its promise, then its oppression becomes blatant. The logic of a military regime is the *constant questioning of time*: When will there be a return to civilian rule?

Political instability in Fiji

The manifestations of political instability are multiple. Scholars have distinguished between short-term and long-term, violent and non-violent, governmental, societal and constitutional instability, etc. Political instability may occur in both authoritarian and democratic countries. In the former, it may pave the way for the introduction of democracy, whereas in the latter it may result in the overthrow of democracy. Political

instability may become endemic in a country, as a coup legacy is established or as constant deaths from domestic violence occur, such as in countries with rebels or terrorists.

The third military coup in Fiji was very different from the earlier two coups. It was well planned and masterly implemented without much protest internally and little if no political violence. It attempted constitutional recognition by approval from the President and the interim government in place has gone to great length in governing the country, respecting the main features of the legal order of Fiji with the exception of the role of Parliament.

However, the third coup presents the most serious threat to the possibility of democracy on these islands. The regime in place has complete control over events and shows no signs of faltering. Most importantly, the military establishment in Fiji has declared that emergency rule will continue up until 2014, but it can of course be extended as it was in March 2009 after the court ruling on the constitutionality of the military take-over.

Why, then, is Fiji not a stable constitutional democracy? The key hypotheses in the literature on political instability suggests the following factors: poverty, ethnicity, religion, dependency, legacy, and political institutions, as well as a lack of civil society. These factors are not without relevance to the understanding of political instability in Fiji, but they must be complemented with an analysis of the logic of a military coup.

Poverty

Fiji's economy is not a strong one, but the country is far from the level of the so-called '49ers', i.e. the set of poorest countries in the world. Most of the independent island countries in the Pacific belong to this set, numbering now 50 countries. As a matter of fact, the average income of people in the non-independent island countries, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Guam, and American Samoa, is much higher than that of the people in the countries having reached independence. Fiji used to be the most dynamic of the island states, but its economy is facing increasing difficulties due to its dependence upon its sugar exports. Some numbers may help in describing the level of country affluence and the spread of poverty.

In 2008, Fiji ranked number 119 in terms of Gross Domestic Product – GDP (purchasing power parity – PPP) per capita according to the World Bank estimates with some US\$4,300, clearly above Papua New Guinea (PNG) with US\$2,200, but both numbers are far lower than that of French Polynesia. Fiji is far from the level of the 49ers (US\$700), but economic growth has not been high enough to keep up with population growth, especially since 2006. In terms of total size, Fiji ranked as number 143 in 2008, meaning that its economy is small, actually smaller than that of less developed PNG.

The economy of Fiji is characterized by its openness, which index goes almost to 100%. This reflects the basic economic situation of import dependency, as Fiji has little manufacturing and weak agriculture. To pay for the import of most goods in daily consumption, Fiji exports sugar and there is considerable tourism. In addition,

Table 1. *Typology of Dictatorships*

Totalitarianism	complete subjection in every sphere of life to domination by the state
Tin pots	enough repression to sustain looting but not excessively
Tyranny	employment of violence to create servitude
Timocracy	benevolent dictatorship (Wintrobe, 2000: 7–15)

there is some mining and a lot of fishing. However, every year there is an external deficit, which puts pressure upon the Fiji dollar downwards (Table 1). Thus, in 2009 it was devaluated by a large 20%. Despite policy measures, it has not been possible to strengthen agriculture and thus provide for basic nutrition. Fiji is basically living every year at a standard that is beyond its means.

The Fiji economy is in decline, although it is not clear which numbers to trust. Economic growth during 2001–06 averaged around 3% of GDP. In 2007, the economy contracted by a massive –6.6% of GDP. The official statistics from the Reserve Bank of Fiji speaks of minor reductions in GDP for 2008–10, but there is no way to verify these negative growth numbers.

A Fiji government paper has confirmed that more than one-third of the population lives below the official poverty line identified for Fiji. The so-called Strategic Development Plan (Narain, 2002; Ratuva, 2000) says 34.4% of the population is below the basic needs poverty line, defined as a household income of US\$4,675 a year. A household income and expenditure survey found that the average income of poor households was only US\$3,160 a year, or US\$1,500 below the government's own poverty line. In urban areas, the highest percentage of those below the poverty line was actually among the Indians, although poverty is more widespread among the indigenous Fijians. These estimates are in line with those of economists at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Thus, economist Narsey, who dares to openly criticize the regime, has stated that 147,000 Fijians, 109,000 Fiji-Indians, and 8,000 from other ethnic groups lived under the poverty line during the period 2002–03 out of a population of roughly 900,000 inhabitants.

The structural weakness in the Fiji economy derives mainly from its large sugar industry, which is barely viable without support from the EU under the COTENU agreement. Since there is over production of sugar in the world market, the Fiji sugar industry only survives thanks to preferential treatment by the EU, the continuation of which is open to debate, especially after the military coup in 2009. The sugar production in Fiji is heavily dominated by government involvement and regulation, which has not stimulated entrepreneurial initiative to engage in more value added production such as bio fuels. The refusal of the EU to support the sugar industry by some 40 million Euros has plunged the entire sector into disarray, many farmers talking about shifting to other crops and livestock. Recently, Fiji has even imported sugar.

Are poverty and a weak economy a sufficient condition for political stability? Hardly. In any case, it is not the poor people in Fiji who call for regime change and have undone the existing constitution. Actually, there is little political unrest in the country. And there is no organization along class lines. The poverty hypothesis explains little. But it is also true that the Fiji economy has not in any way improved during the period of military led rule.

Regional integration efforts in the Pacific area have not brought much support to the Fiji economy. At present further advances in trade liberalization and regional economic integration under various schemes (PICTA – Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement, PACER – Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations, etc) are more difficult to accomplish given the standoff between Fiji on the one hand and Australia on the other hand with a few island governments taking a position in between.

Dependency

It is true that the Fiji economy is highly dependent upon the international market and capital transfers from, for example, private or international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF. Thus, the country needs both foreign direct investments for its tourism industry and financial assistance for its sugar industry. In general, the country has a considerable debt burden to serve, which has increased lately. Fiji's debt rating has been lowered and the devaluation makes the debt burden more cumbersome.

One may look upon Fiji as peripheral in British colonialism, orchestrated to furnish raw materials to the centre, especially sugar. The EU had somehow taken over this power position by means of its COTENU agreement, which has had ramifications for the trade relations of Fiji with both Australia and the United States. However, there is no other future for Fiji than to accept globalization and try its best to find niches in the international market, supported by means of preferential trade agreements. Fiji hosts the Secretariat of the Pacific Forum, indicating that the country has played an active role in the regionalization efforts in Oceania, involving several trade agreements. Yet, trade talks about further trade liberalization are not furthered by the events that have evolved since 2006. As Fiji has been suspended from the Pacific Forum, it has attempted to develop links with Asian countries, for example China, to compensate for the sanctions against it by its established trade partners. Dependency theory explains little of the present predicament of the economy of Fiji, as global ties also constitute opportunities. Thus, Fiji could probably do much better economically if Fiji's relative advantage was exploited better, for example by producing ethanol.

Ethnicity

The ethnic composition of the Fiji population has been much discussed, although not in relation to politics. The subject is considered a taboo, because it can appear as racism. However, when ethnicity is clearly distinguished from race or racism then the map of ethnic groups is relevant to Fiji's instability, in accordance with general research into the negative consequences of multiple *ethnicities* as well as a clan society (Alesina

and Rodik, 1994; Kimenyi, 2003). Fiji harbours two ethnic groups, natives and Indians, with different cultures, involving language, religion, and ways of life. These two ethnic groups constitute the pillars of the two dominant political parties, the SDL and the Labour Party.

The history of Fiji is dominated by the establishment of British supremacy over the islands in the nineteenth century, resulting in a colony run by a governor up until independence in 1971. During the colonial period, indentured labour from India was imported in order to get the sugar plantations going. The Indian community gradually increased in size due to both high birth rates and additional immigration. In 1966, people of Indian descent made up 51% of Fiji's population. The Fiji-Indian population drop, which had been 0.3% a year between 1986 and 1996, has more than doubled, to 0.7% each year. The Fiji-Indian population decreased by more than 25,000 between the 1996 census and the 2007 census, while the total number of indigenous Fijians increased by 82,000. Presently, the size of the Fiji-Indian community may be estimated to be some 35% of the total population.

Yet, Fiji must be described as a multicultural society with two distinct ethnic groups. Reilly states that theories of ethnicity:

help explain why Fiji, the wealthiest and most developed sovereign state in the South Pacific, has nonetheless suffered several coups while Papua New Guinea, with a much poorer economic record, is nevertheless one of the very few post-colonial states to have maintained an unbroken record of democratic rule. As is well known, in Fiji the dominant ethnic cleavage is a bi-polar one between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, and in both 1987 and 2000 this cleavage was used to mobilise support for an economically disastrous coup. By contrast, there has been no coup in Papua New Guinea, despite a much larger and poorer population, failing infrastructure, declining investment, falling living standards, and weak economic growth. (Reilly, 2004: 484)

Although the relative size of the Fiji-Indian community is declining, Indians play a most important role in both the economy and in the education system. Many of the major enterprises are Indian owned and most of the professors at the University of the South Pacific come from the Fiji-Indian community. Weak employment prospects trigger Fiji-Indian youth emigration. It is a fact that the Indian community was targeted in the earlier coups with considerable suffering. But at present the Indian community is not disadvantaged at all. On the contrary, the interim government pursues a policy of integration, abolishing ethnic markers, allowing for Hindi teaching in schools, and encouraging contacts with New Delhi.

Ethnicity in Fiji has contributed to political tensions in Fiji, but it is hardly the main cause of military involvement and take-over. There is widespread talk about the possibility and desirability of a multi-racial society, but the native community especially insists upon its traditional position as the historical people of the islands. The Fiji-Indian population is projected to decline to roughly 26% by 2030, although

it might happen earlier. Dramatic decline in fertility rates and emigration are two of the contributing factors. The ethno-nationalist policies of the SDL group, during the Qarase government, to enhance the position of the Fiji-Native population were not really attuned with realities. However, with military intervention the relevance of the ethnic cleavages has subsided markedly, as the focus is now on the intentions of Bainimarama for Fiji.

Tradition

Of importance has been the tribal organization of the native community. It has outlasted colonial rule and is very much alive in the tribal classification of the natives under a so-called '*Ratu*'. Many of the natives have vibrant ties with their tribe, even when they do not live in the many villages in the country. Thus, chiefs may be involved in the running of affairs for the native community. Politically, the chiefs have their *Great Council of Chiefs* (GCC) (suspended by Bainimarama), which represents the tribes before governments, participating in the running of tribal matters, the most important of which is land leases. Most of the land in Fiji is communal and not private, belonging in principle to the tribes and administered by the chiefs in collaboration with the Native Land Trust Board, which is a state body for handling the land leases. Much of the land is leased to sugar farmers on a long-term basis, creating a tension between landowners and tenants, which basically coincides with ethnicity.

The traditional or communal form of land ownership in an economy where agriculture constitutes a considerable part of GDP is conducive to political tensions, especially when reinforced by ethnicity. Political stability tends to be positively related to the institutionalization of the rules of the market economy, such as fully enforceable private property rights. The land issues add to a lack of institutional transparency in Fiji that not only restrains economic activity but also leads to conflicts in politics and policy-making. Control over the Native Land Trust Board has been politicized when the military government decided to suspend the GCC. The legacy hypothesis, focusing upon the implications of communal land ownership, is more relevant than the colonial heritage hypothesis or dependency theory (Prasad, 1997; Nithyanandam and Gounder, 2004; Gounder, 2002, 2004, 2005).

Weak civil society

From the point of view of civil society theory, the recent developments in Fiji are most interesting as the military regime is most interested in furthering its objectives by the setting up and supporting a Third Sector organization – the *Citizen Charter Movement*. However, at the same time it faces opposition from one already established group in civil society, the Methodist Church, having some 200,000 members. One may look upon the Charter Movement as a network organization to help pave the way for the making of a new constitution in 2014, when general elections are to be held. Yet, the Methodists represent a genuine civil society group in the classic Tocquevillian framework.

It is often stated that civil society is one of the main sources of opposition to a military regime. Whereas Third Sector organizations constitute schools of democracy – discussion, argument and reciprocal interaction – military regimes are founded upon hierarchy and obedience. Fiji has a rich carpet of Third Sector organizations, comprising not only internationally supported NGOs but also domestic groups, especially religious ones. The largest Third Sector organization is the Methodist Church. But also the adherents of Hinduism and Islam have their organizations. There are several small Mosques in Fiji, but the Hindu groups are more numerous than the Moslems. Religious heterogeneity follows ethnic fragmentation. Thus, the natives are Christians, either Protestants or Catholics, and the Indians are Hindus or Moslems. Traces of animism are not often to be encountered in the native community, where Methodism is strongly entrenched. The Methodists were vocal in their resistance to the military rule. Islamic fundamentalism is not known on the Fiji Islands, where a few mosques testify to the simple truth that not all Indians are Hindus, neither in India or in all the Indian *Diasporas* along the Asia-Pacific arc of emigration.

The Methodists are well organized around the islands and they have key links with both the traditional chiefs and the main native political party, the SDL. In addition, they receive ample support from the global Methodists movement. Also, there is not much religious animosity between the native community and the Indian community. Ethnicity trumps religion in the Fiji islands. The military regime was first at loggerheads with the Methodist Church, pursuing several of its leaders in court for various forms of so-called ‘resistance to the Prime Minister’. Presently, the protests of the Methodists have been silenced. The military regime has clearly understood the implications of the civil society theory, as they have set up their own support organization, namely the so-called *Citizens Charter Movement*. Based upon a manifesto, the Citizens Charter Movement aims at nation building, bridging the ethnic cleavage, and mobilizing support for the development ambitions of the regime.

At first, the Citizens Charter Movement was resisted by key persons and groups within the Fiji-Native community, especially the Methodist Church. But recently a change in attitude has occurred with several chiefs among the Fiji Natives. The position of regime is less contested today, and the Interim Prime Minister often makes explicit attempts to reach out to the Fiji-Native community.

Political institutions: old and new

The now squashed *Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands* dates from year 1997 – Fiji’s third constitution. The first, adopted in 1970 upon independence, was abrogated following two military coups in 1987. A second constitution was adopted in 1990. The Fiji constitution of 1997 provided for a Westminster model democracy with a republic and parliamentarism. It had a one-chamber national assembly with the GCC acting as a consultative body on indigenous affairs. The judicial system was also a legacy from the British colonial period with a high court, an appeals court, and a supreme court. Weak presidentialism together with parliamentarism and recognition

of traditional chiefs would, generally speaking, be conducive to political stability. But things did not work out that way.

The main weakness in Fiji's political system after independence is to be found in the party system that is highly adversarial, partly due to the strange election techniques employed. The 2006 elections were held in accordance with a most unique election formula, combining the highly majoritarian Alternative Vote procedure with a communal classification of voters according to the two ethnic groups.

The party system of Fiji is most strict two-partism with only minor changes in 2006 in comparison with the 2001 election results. The combination of a highly majoritarian election method with a classification of single-member electoral constituencies along ethnic lines can only fuel adversarial politics. The last free elections resulted in a stalemate between the two leading personalities in Fiji politics besides the military, namely Fiji-Native Qarase and Fiji-Indian Chaudhry, the first receiving 44.6% of the vote and the latter taking 39.2%, no other party being represented. The animosity between these two contenders for the Premier position has blocked political consensus that this developing country so badly needs, given the shaky road since independence.

Before 1999, the British first past the post system of voting was employed in elections. The new constitution agreed to in 1997–98 established instant run-off voting, the Australian Alternative Vote technique, allowing votes to be transferred from a low-polling candidate to other candidates, according to an order prescribed by the candidate, which may be customized by the elector. A constitutional revision in 1997–98 reduced communal representation to 46 seats out of 71: of these 46, 23 seats are currently allocated to ethnic Fijians, 19 to Fiji-Indians, 1 to Rotuman Islanders, and 3 to minority groups. The remaining 25 are elected by universal suffrage. The constitutional revision in 1997–98 allowed direct electoral competition between candidates of different ethnic groups with candidates of all races competing for votes cast on a common voters' roll. Open constituencies have proved to be more competitive than the communal constituencies, in which ethnic loyalty to particular political parties generally guaranteed predictable results. But the outcome is two-partism in any case.

When it comes to the judiciary, one may confidently state that it was functionally sound until all the judges were fired in March 2009 when it was also decided that all licenses for lawyers had to be renewed. Fiji had vigorous courts with highly active lawyers organized in its well-known Fiji Law Society, which became very critical of the take-over in 2006. The mind of Fijians is as adversarial as their Westminster legacy, people preferring to sue each other in court than to try to and find common ground and settle their differences by negotiation. When Qarase litigated the interim government for removing him as primeminister, the High Court took the case and ruled on it. Similarly, when Qarase went to the Appeals Court after losing in the High Court, it also took the case, although Fiji has no recognition of legal review.

When in March 2009 all judges were fired by presidential decree the political independence of the judicial system can no longer be safeguarded. The shortage of

judges is such that chief judge A. Gates had to go to Sri Lanka to try to recruit some new judges. Due to the censorship over the mass media, especially the press, there is today almost no criticism or open opposition to the government, neither in the newspapers nor by any court. The regime has issued a law on information and communication that restrains the mass media from reporting criticism or sensational matters, and also forbidding meetings of more than three to five people.

The regime is preparing a new constitution together with the Citizens Charter movement. It may be a presidential regime with direct election of a president of the people. The new dispensation may contain a ban upon the SDL Party from participating in the planned 2014 elections. In any case, both Qarase and Chaudhry are on route for corruption trials, where a guilty verdict would prevent them running again for political office. It would be surprising if there were to occur a major shift in Fiji politics in 2014, as more and more key ministers and administrators are picked from the military. Although the Fiji military still serves in old contracts with the United Nations in the Middle East (Lebanon and Iraq), it no longer receives any new contracts.

The political game

The strong man of Fiji today is without any doubt Frank Bainimarama, who is Interim Prime Minister, holding a number of other positions besides being supreme leader of the armed forces. His government rules by decrees and gets the president to sign any major decision such as the annulations of the 1997 Constitution or the introduction of the act restricting news dissemination and public meetings. Bainimarama is, it seems, not opposed by any of the strong men in his environment. Ministers who give voice to criticism are immediately dismissed. And his closest collaborators coming from the army or the navy are loyal without hesitation. He is a native and the army is mainly composed of natives, although there are some Indian officers. He is distantly related to his chief opponent, Qarase, whom he put in office after the 2000 coup, when he was almost assassinated. Bainimarama at first allied himself with Qarase's political enemy, Chaudhry, but removed him from the interim government in 2008.

Fiji's politics is a nested set of games involving three main groups: the military, the natives, and the Indians. These players are not compact, meaning that there are numerous divisions in these three sets or social groups. Thus, there are two major Indian political parties battling against each other. And the natives host numerous tribes with chiefs who make alternative alliances. But the military appears to be totally behind Bainimarama today, which was not true during the 2000 coup. What, then, drives the Fiji military establishment? It is easy to drown in the details of the Fiji coup story, rendering an account of all and each event, in the belief that accidental or contingent happenings have causal significance. However, one needs a theory of the role of the military in politics in order to interpret the confusing and often contradictory developments in the four Fiji coups.

In the Fiji case, pressure is maintained by the surrounding stakeholders: Australia, New Zealand, the EU, and the US. Since these countries are the main trading partners of Fiji, any international criticism of Fiji imposes a heavy burden upon the regime. It has tried to seek support from other countries, mainly China, Japan, and India. One observes a strong increase in the links with China, assisting Fiji in various ways economically but also in the construction of major infrastructure projects (roads, dams, offices, etc.). The interim government speaks of an open policy, aimed at finding new partners outside of the Pacific Forum, such as China and members of the Asean.

The rhetoric of Bainimarama and his group is a mixture of nationalism and development zest. Without mentioning any benchmarks for what he hopes to achieve, Bainimarama speaks all the time about 'moving the country forward'. On the one hand, he insists upon the right of Fijians to decide their own future without interference from other countries, especially the neighbours New Zealand and Australia. On the other hand, he refuses to reinstall the democratic regime with a national assembly augmented by the GCC, national elections, and the party system. The stated ambition is to create a new Fiji without racism and corruption.

In order to increase the credibility of this official motivation for the military intervention, Bainimarama has criticized the Qarase government for racist policies, especially in regard to the election system, and has taken the former Premier to court for alleged corruption. Actually, both these objectives – promoting a non-racist society and clapping down upon corruption – have been emphasized to a very high degree. Thus, a new constitution has been promised that undoes all forms of racism, and anti-corruption programs have been initiated with considerable running costs.

What is myth and what is reality in this official motivation? Clearly, Bainimarama is reaching out to the Indian community, promising them full citizen recognition. Whether the SDL party under Qarase is to be described as promoting overtly or covertly racism is a political issue concerning the identity of the Fijian society – multicultural or predominantly native-indigenous? The Indian community is proud of its historical and religious legacy, which they wish to promote by all means. The corruption philosophy appears to be very weak in its foundations, as few major cases have reached a court verdict. Probably Fiji is less corrupt than several other Third World countries, given its lively civil society with puritan creed – the Methodist Church for instance.

So far, the military intervention has not been without benefit for the group around Bainimarama, as they have successfully claimed compensation payments for past unpaid service and have raised the remuneration for military service in general, despite considerable reductions in spending on health and education. How, then, to judge the interim government and the military regime: national saviours or merely advanced rent-seekers? No doubt, Bainimarama has surrounded himself with loyal people, handing out nice jobs in government and public administration to several military persons. There have also been pay rises for the military and special over-time compensation. Yet, Bainimarama has not reneged on his promise to hold general elections in 2014 and the economy has not been targeted for extortions. Yet, he seems

more and more interested in finding means to prolong his rule, using a new constitution in order to legitimate his regime. Various scenarios are imaginable for the future, but the most likely one is that the regime somehow stays in power, more, and more backed and helped by China.

The sorrows of dictatorship

The Fijians are experiencing one most concrete effect of the military regime, namely economic decline. Fiji is in negative economic growth, presenting real hardships to the population at large. As GDP contracts, poverty increases and vital investments for the future must be put on hold. Most spectacular is the sharp decline in one of the two basic sectors of the Fijian economy, namely the sugar industry. Sugar production has a long standing in Fiji, started by the British with indentured labour from India. By linking up with EU support programs and preferential trade agreements, this industry not only created much employment in agriculture but also collected much foreign currency. However, the EU decided in 2010 to suspend the program, as the Fiji interim government refused to honour its promise of early free and fair elections, delaying elections until 2014.

With the sugar industry crumbling, Fiji has only one leg to stand on, namely its tourism industry. It is huge and still successful. But it suffers under the international sanctions against Fiji, with the country suspended from several international or regional bodies. Since Fiji imports so much of its consumption, the tourism industry must deliver enough foreign exchange, which task has become increasingly difficult.

It is telling that no attempts have been made to turn the huge sugar fields of Fiji into ethanol production, which it could have done with assistance from Australia with their global expertise in energy. Instead, the Fiji government has turned to China for help, borrowing substantial amounts of funds for the construction by China of a power dam for electricity production.

Fiji is moderately indebted, but its capacity to raise new funds for repaying old loans is very restricted, given its constant deficits on the budget and on the current account. It has asked for a major loan from the IMF for 2012, but it will come with strings attached that Bainimarama may find too restrictive for his interim government.

Yet, the loss of freedom probably causes more hurt than the slow economic decline. The control by government of the news media is total, both television and radio as well newspapers. All forms of open debate in the newspapers and on television have been strangled. Attempts at criticizing government meet with swift and effective counter measures, albeit not using physical violence. The interim government has abstained from the behaviour typical of African authoritarian rule, meaning looting and harassment/killings, although military people have at the same time been recruited massively into government positions. Spending on military items has increased considerably since 2007.

The draconian draft media law for Fiji has sparked protest by news groups, academics, and civil society movements. It provides for the establishment of a Media

Development Authority and a complaints tribunal with the power to fine the news media and imprison journalists for up to five years. It also restricts foreign ownership of news media to 10% with all company directors required to be citizens of Fiji. The Rupert Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* group, for long the country's largest and most influential daily newspaper, has been transferred to a Fiji group. The *Times* has long been an irritant for the regime, which has sought to gag this newspaper along with Fiji Television. Regime Attorney-General Sayed-Khaiyum, who also holds ministerial posts, condemned the newspaper publicly, describing it as 'the purveyor of negativity – at least for the past three years'.

Conclusion

Examining the social structure of Fijian society as well as its political institutions, one would be inclined to argue that Fiji is not poised for dictatorship. It does not belong to the 49ers– the poorest countries in the world. It has been well connected with advanced countries. And it has had Western institutions and several institutional choices after independence. Moreover, it has a vibrant civil society with both domestic and international Third Sector groups. Political instability derives from the presence of a strong and proud military force, which is known for its capability, proven in international missions around the world. Yet, the mere existence of this military establishment with some 4,000 well equipped men does not in itself make stable democracy impossible or improbable. The adversarial nature of the party system adds controversy as well as suspicion to political life, making compromises very difficult to attain among the chief players, to which group the top military also belongs. A culture of trust and bargaining is completely lacking to such an extent that when the political parties were offered a quick resolution of the conflict in 2008, on the condition that they accepted Proportional representation (PR), they all declined. This uncompromising attitude even among parties that would gain from the introduction of PR released the threat of full emergency rule in 2009.

The striking animosity among politicians in Fiji cuts across ethnic boundaries. Thus, one Indian opposition party vehemently opposed Chaudhry's role in the Interim government. The decision by Premier Qarase to show clemency with some of the coup leaders of the abortive attempt in 2000 made matters worse, since Chaudhry suffered personally when he was held hostage in 2000 for many days. No one could understand this leniency towards the perpetrators of the 2000 coup which resulted in the loss of innocent lives. It was actually Bainimarama who put Qarase in government 2000, as he rejected the 2000 coup.

The Fiji military regime presents a major obstacle for regional integration in the Pacific. The stand-off between ruler Bainimarama on the one hand and Australia and New Zealand on the other hand paralyses the Pacific Forum in reforming the trade regimes set up. Fiji is a country with profound social problems, where the deep-seated ethnic cleavage reinforces institutional fragility. The military regime argues that it is part of the solution, but the risk is that it becomes enmeshed into the problematic of

Fiji society and politics. Fiji's military ruler has the future of his country in his hands. Thus far, the rule of this strongman has been benevolent, trying to steer the country towards national unity and development: 'moving the country forward', as he expresses it.

The behaviour of military regimes revolves around three dimensions: authority, nationalism (development), and looting. Various military regimes differ along these dimensions, as preferences and circumstances pull the concrete set of military rulers along each dimension differently. Time seems almost always to be conducive to one outcome: authority in combination with looting, as the developmental ambitions fade or get stuck in the midst of unfavourable conditions (Stepan, 1971, 1988). Yet, there are interesting exceptions with a few benevolent developmental regimes, such as for instance Kemalism. It remains to be seen whether civil society can be brought on board, supporting some sort of solution to the problem of political legitimacy in the republic of Fiji. It would require, I believe, not merely a successful Citizens Charter movement but also some political accommodation with the leaders of the two main communities, the Fiji-Natives and the Fiji-Indians (Ramesh, 2010). In January 2012, Fiji's strongman declared that the emergency law would be lifted so that consultations on a new constitution could begin ahead of elections, now promised for 2014. The conduct of these elections will no doubt be monitored internationally in order to establish whether they meet the criteria of being free and fair under the new dispensation, whether a parliamentary or presidential one.

About the author

Jan-Erik Lane is visiting professor of political science at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. He received the Alexander Humboldt Reward in 1996 and 2008 as well as the Lady Davis Fellowship at Hebrew University twice. Having published in several domains of the social sciences, he now concentrates upon international relations. In January 2012, Fiji's strongman declared that the emergency law would be lifted so that consultations on a new constitution could begin ahead of elections, now promised for 2014. The conduct of these elections will no doubt be monitored internationally in order to establish whether they meet the criteria of being free and fair under the new dispensation, whether a parliamentary or presidential one.

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