

15 Mapping military reform in Fiji

Timing it right

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Introduction

The Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) originated as the Armed Native Constabulary (ANC) established in 1871 by Ratu Cakobau, the highest chief at that time, but commanded by British Officers. It was tasked to suppress any resistance from the local tribes that were not aligned to Ratu Cakobau and his alliance with the British settlers (RFMF, 2010). By the Second World War (WWII), New Zealand was tasked to exercise control over Fiji's military responsibilities; hence it was renamed RFMF and its military capacities were increased, leading to deployment to the Solomon Islands during WWII (*ibid.*). From 1978, RFMF entered into another phase, which is still relevant today: their participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Between 1978 and 2018, approximately 34,000 RFMF soldiers have served in peacekeeping missions, bringing an income of about US \$200 million to Fiji (*ibid.*). In recent years, participation in the Iraq war increased that income as approximately 1,000 Fiji Islanders have worked as escorts, guards and drivers for private companies in Iraq, remitting money back to Fiji (Firth & Fraenkel, 2009).

The contemporary RFMF has a relatively small manpower of 3,596 active soldiers and 4,425 reservists (FBC, 2019); however, most Pacific Island countries do not have any military capacity at all. RFMF is a highly structured and professional military. However, RFMF is composed almost entirely of indigenous Fijians and the military structure reflects the *iTaukei*¹ traditional chiefly system, as many high-ranking officers are from chiefly *iTaukei* families. For instance, both Epeli Nailatikau and Epeli Ganilau, Commanders of the Fiji Military Forces in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, are high chiefs in their own right. Additionally, they are both sons-in-law of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was the Commander in Chief of the military in Fiji in his role of former President of Fiji, as well as being the highest-ranking chief prior to his death. As the military structure is intertwined with traditional *iTaukei* society, military personnel are accorded respect similar to that bestowed on the warrior class in the pre-modern era. The military is generally viewed as an *iTaukei* institution both physically and symbolically and largely viewed by *iTaukei* people as the ultimate guarantor of *iTaukei* power (Lal, Chand, & Naidu, 2008; Baledrokadroka, 2015).

The military in Fiji has been intertwined with coup d'états since 1987 and continues to play a significant role in the political arena, with the increasing presence of former military personnel at many levels of government and politics. After the 1987 and 2000 coups, the military was glorified by most iTaukeis for its role in the overthrow of democratic governments to retain iTaukei hegemony in politics (Ratuva, 2006b). However, when the military overthrew the government in 2006 on the basis of bad governance, the military was glorified by many of the Indo-Fijian community, but was held in lesser regard by significant numbers of the iTaukeis as they saw the military as going against "their own" (Chang, 2008).

Various reasons are postulated for the different coups and each coup has been linked with others, particularly through key players. The first coup, executed by military personnel, Brigadier Sitiveni Rabuka, was largely carried out to reclaim the iTaukei hegemony in the political arena and stifle non-racial discourse. The second coup, again by Commander Rabuka, saw the end of Fiji's ties with the Commonwealth that very same year, when the country was declared a republic and the theme of hegemony was reiterated. The third coup was a civilian one in 2000, but accomplished with the assistance of an elite military faction, the Counter Revolutionary Forces and was the bloodiest in Fiji's documented history (Firth, Fraenkel, & Lal, 2009). While it was initiated to give political power back to iTaukeis, this coup brought to the forefront previously hidden divisions among them. It also exacerbated factions within the Fiji military (Firth et al., 2009). The roots of the 2006 coup can be traced to the 2000 coup: the former was an overt manifestation of a praetorian military against a weak government unable to exercise civilian control over its military (Firth et al., 2009; Chang, 2008). The 2006 coup was also executed by a military Commander, Commodore Bainimarama.

With each coup, the military became more politicised and less accountable to the democratic government oversight. This was starkly demonstrated by the public display of frictions between the military and the Qarase government in late 2006. In addition to this, after each coup by the military, all coup perpetrators were granted full impunity. In the words of Chang (2008, p. 21): "The seeking and granting of amnesty has become a customary feature in the planning, execution, resolution and legitimisation of coups, a strategy Bainimarama has gleefully adopted from Rabuka and Speight". However, Speight, who was a civilian, is the only coup leader who has been held accountable for his actions and is currently serving a prison sentence. This can be interpreted as an example of the influence of the military organisational culture in Fiji and highlights the need for military reform.

The military centrality theory argues that in many developing countries, post-independence, the military is more professionalised in comparison with other state institutions and thereby are more powerful (Jenkins & Kposowa, 1990). In addition, they may harbour political aspirations, thus increasing their likelihood to intervene in politics through coups d'état (Nordlinger, 1977; Finer, 1988; Jenkins & Kposowa, 1990). In most countries, colonial military institutions were largely formed to suppress internal uprising, therefore the military had been accustomed to political interference (Jenkins & Kposowa, 1990, p. 862). As the military

powers increased in some post-colonial countries and the newly democratising countries lacked strong political institutions to maintain civilian control over the military, military intervention increased (*ibid.*). According to Collier and Hoefler (2005), military intervention in the political arena can be minimised by increasing military budget, hence placating army grievances. However, this can lead to rebellion from other sectors of society, because governments can be deemed as repressive in their intent to potentially use the military against their populations (*ibid.*). Some elements of this theory are applicable for coups in Fiji as the military is more organised and professional in comparison with other state bodies and RFMF was created to suppress internal disturbances during the colonial period.

It has been argued that to maintain democracy, it is crucial for the military to be politically neutral and controlled by civilian authorities (Joinet, 1997; Orentlicher, 2005), while allowing the military some level of professional autonomy (Finer, 1988; Huntington, 1968; Janowitz, 1981). Lack of civilian control of the military would indicate failure of political institutions, creating space for the military elite to entrench themselves within the political system, which could lead to military coercion in domestic security (Luckham, 1971). The military should be apolitical and allied to the democratic government and not to ruling parties or politicians within preferred parties (Ashkenazi, 1994; Kemp & Hudlin, 1992). Alliances between political parties and the military could be used to allow the preferred political party to lead unfair electoral processes, suppress opposition and commit human rights abuses while providing leverage to the military. Conflict analysts have stated that military's disengagement from politics is linked to strengthened democracy and lowered threats of coups d'état (Welch, 1975).

In countries coming out of conflict and making attempts to deal with the past, sequencing of reform efforts is crucial to ensure that stability and peace are achieved (Murithi, 2010). Research undertaken in 2015 to investigate military reform in Fiji indicates that some respondents were sceptical about reform as Fiji military remains strong and enjoys its monopolistic position as the only armed institution in the country. Others also indicated that such reforms can be done by the former Military Commander and current Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, since he has a strong following within the military and because as the elected Prime Minister, he could legitimately start implementing reforms. Such reforms would need to be done gradually and need to be seen to be working with and not against the military. If reforms are too fast and the military are not engaged deliberately in the process, a praetorian military, such as Fiji's RFMF could derail the whole reform process. Additionally, Bainimarama also has a proven track record of reforming problematic structures and policies in Fiji. Some of these reforms were almost inconceivable in the past, for instance, the dissolution of the Great Council of Chiefs, the electoral reforms and the use of the term "Fijian" for every citizen of Fiji, irrespective of ethnicity, among others. It could be argued that Bainimarama needs to utilise his current political and military clout to carry out reforms as history shows that by the time former Military Commander and former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka realised the errors of his ways and wanted to de-politicise the military, he no longer had the patronage of the military.

Bainimarama still continues to enjoy military patronage (Baledrokadroka, 2015) and this gives him a unique opportunity to carry out military reform.

Any Security Sector Reform (SSR) design and implementation would need to consider factors such as the nature and type of democracy within a given country; the role of the military in the political arena and level of praetorianism²; the ethnic composition of the reformed military; sustainable attitudinal change amongst relevant stakeholders and the wider community's view towards the military. This paper argues that SSR programmes should align technical and social reforms to deconstruct ideologies to change attitudes on issues of security, safety, justice and human rights. It also argues that SSR programmes would be more effective in countries with structural conflicts, such as Fiji, than in countries coming out of violent conflicts.³ SSR reforms are fraught with challenges such as impunity, fragmentation within the security sector, donor driven programmes and lack of local ownership, capacity problems and contextual and structural barriers.

The paper argues that while most security sector reforms are taking place in countries with a history of overt violence such as Afghanistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), East Timor, etc. SSR would be more effective in countries experiencing structural conflict without widespread violence, as is the case in Fiji. It argues that advocates of transitional justice need to reconceptualise their various mechanisms to target countries such as Fiji to prevent structural conflicts escalating into protracted conflicts in the future.

Methodology

In consideration of the various strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, a combination of methods was utilised. In total, three specific methods were used to obtain data for this research: focus groups, semi-structured questionnaires and key informants. Although triangulation has been criticised for assuming a single fixed reality (Seale, 1999), it is still a useful tool in qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to reflect on reasons for the differences in data obtained from different methods used and document them as part of the research process. However, the focus group interviews were discarded after the first focus group interview due to the lack of trustworthiness of data obtained in this session. For the rest of this paper, the term "respondents" will mean the respondents of the semi-structured interviews and the term "informants" will mean key informants.

In total, 59 individuals were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires and 16 key informants were interviewed using an in-depth approach. While the number of respondents may seem low, the rationale for this research is not to have generalised findings, but rather to get rich data with many issues identified and discussed in depth. For the semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling was utilised to identify individuals who had some understanding of these issues, such as youths, military personnel, civil servants, tertiary students, civil society organisation staff and smaller number of unemployed persons. This was to acquire their views on military personnel and organisation in link with security.

Key informant interviews were also used. Generally key informant interviews are used to obtain data about a pressing and/or sensitive issue from a limited number of experts in the area of interest or those who have insider knowledge and usually entail in-depth interviews with each informant (Marshall, 1996). Accuracy can sometimes be doubtful because individuals usually have different perspectives on the same event, they are most likely to distance themselves from bad decisions they made in the past and they may not accurately recollect significant facts or details (Lilleker, 2003). To minimise this, any unusual and/or incorrect data will be verified against other sources for same or similar information. While key informants are advantageous given their insider and in-depth knowledge of a particular issue, their perspective can be elitist. Additionally, informants can also be subjective based on their positions and even misleading in an attempt to portray their organisation in a positive light (Field-Springer, 2018).

To minimise the issue of elitism, some interviews were conducted with individuals who have insider information, but are not high-ranking public figures, such as an administrative officer and two university students. The administrative officer works in the judicial office and interacts daily with many key political and legal officers. This informant was particularly useful in substantiating information related to abuses of office, weak rule of law, corruption and so on. The student informants were both from prominent iTaukei political and military families, but had distanced themselves from their kinship links in coup related events and were able to provide an informative insider perspective on kinship ties, chiefly and military patronage politics and many related issues. Additionally, more than one informant was interviewed within some similar organisations or in relation to particular events to minimise the subjectivity of a singular point of view. For the purpose of this study, 21 potential key informants were identified. They represented past and present coup perpetrators, members of past and present governments who were removed from office by a coup, human rights activists, the legal fraternity, academics and chief officers of NGOs and other agencies. In total, 16 key informants were interviewed, yielding a 76% response rate. The interview time ranged from an hour to a maximum of two and half hours.

Security sector reform

The United Nations Security Council defines the security sector as “both State and non-State actors that have a stake in security and justice provisions” (UN Security Council, 9 February 2007, p. 2), but it limits the definition only to “traditional” security institutions (UN, 2008: §§ 14, 17). The OECD DAC and the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) expand the definition of Security Sector Reform (SSR) to include the media, civil society organisations (CSOs), the judiciary, the executive and the legislature (OECD, 2007; DCAF, 2008). The UN and OECD have also emphasised that as well as effectively providing security, security sector institutions should be accountable to the population and adhere to rules of governance, democracy and the rule of law (UN General Assembly Security Council, 2008; OECD, 2007).

The military has strong links with violent conflicts in three ways: through structural causes of conflict, as a trigger factor and by perpetuating societal cleavages (Clingendael, 2002). For instance, the issue of iTaukei hegemony in the military is widely accepted, but the dominance of iTaukeis in the military is often perceived as a threat by Indo-Fijians during times of tension. In 1987, this was overtly felt when the military singled out Indo-Fijians for harassment and threats (Firth et al., 2009). However, in 2006, the military commander singled out Methodist Christians and the traditional chiefs for harassment through various restrictions (Firth et al., 2009).

Secondly, the military has triggered conflicts in Fiji in the most overt form by threats of executing coups d'état and use of harassment to suppress any resistance to its position (Trnka, 2008). In the past, the alignment of some, if not most of the military personnel with the nationalist factions triggered underlying disparities and in 2000 this led to street riots against Indo-Fijians (Trnka, 2008). Additionally, the two coups in 1987 and 2006 were carried out by the military. The 2000 coup was undertaken with the assistance of 30 Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU) members, an elite unit within the military (Trnka, 2008). This unit was formed after the 1987 coup d'état as an intelligence arm of the military, but was disbanded after a mutiny by some members against other sections of the military in late 2000 (Trnka, 2008).

Thirdly, the military can also perpetuate social cleavages by being part of factors that prolong conflicts. For instance, since the 2006 coup in Fiji, a number of statutory bodies, state enterprises and public service departments such as the police force, immigration, justice, prison, airport authority and the Commission against Corruption have been militarised by appointment of military personnel to senior positions across all these bodies (CCF, 2014). The military has explicitly stated that it has plans to be part of politics and to monitor government activities in future (Robertson, 2017). This oversight role that military has given itself has and may continue to perpetuate further conflicts unless the military is brought under civilian control.

Multi-ethnic military

Institution reform is a common concept in Security Sector Reform and this section will link the concept of military reform with the issue of inducing civic trust, through pluralism in the military. Armed forces which do not reflect the social composition of the broader society tend to be distrusted by the minority within the society in times of conflicts (Adekanye, 1996). This is particularly problematic in multi-ethnic states and could lead to diminishing trust towards the military by minority groups (DCAF, 2006), as it can be perceived as representing the interests of a single ethnic group (Mason, 2007). To minimise this, the military should have a common unifying “vision that transcends the different identities of its members in order for them to perform cohesively and effectively in the field” (DCAF, 2006, p. 2). A military which is more representative of the population “will also better understand the concerns of all population

groups because its representatives will speak their languages, comprehend their cultures, appreciate their traditions” (Mayer-Rieckh & Duthie, 2009, p. 232) and could help to foster inter-ethnic tolerance. This was observed in post-apartheid South Africa, where power sharing arrangements at the political level were also reflected in the military hierarchy leading to a more stable situation during that period (Nathan, 1996). By contrast, in Fiji, the military personnel and politicians have manipulated each other by citing traditional iTaukei and chiefly allegiance.

During times of peace, the ethnic composition of the military might not be an issue. However, during and after conflict, the military’s composition can lead to certain groups aligning with or against government, particularly if the military was involved in the conflict, as they may perceive this as “them” against “us”. For instance, prior to the 1999 elections in Fiji, it was not uncommon to hear nationalist groups utilise the fear of another coup to deter people from voting for the Labour Party, which had a larger number of Indo-Fijian supporters. Indo-Fijians considered this a real possibility as only 15 of the approximate 4000 military personnel in Fiji were Indo-Fijians in 2010 (Firth & Fraenkel, 2007). As a result, it was perceived that iTaukeis had inside information regarding a coup.⁴

While the Fiji Military Forces do not explicitly exclude Indo-Fijians from their recruitment, their portrayal as an overtly Christian organisation may have deterred Hindus and Muslims. SSR programmes would need to emphasise active recruitment of different ethnic groups for the military to calm the fears that minority populations have towards the military in post-conflict situations.

Having different ethnic groups within the military may also lead to the military being less intrusive in the political arena. While recognising that military institutions in general tend to be organised in a very hierarchical manner and that questioning authority is often associated to insubordination, one could argue that cultural differences between the indigenous and Indo-Fijian communities related to authority could influence the military’s relationship to politics. For instance, in Fiji, iTaukeis have a strong allegiance to the traditional chiefly system and the military is seen as an extension of this system. The military commanders have an almost unquestioned authority over junior officers in the particular iTaukei context. However, the history of the Indo-Fijian community has led it to have a less hierarchical community structure and a history of questioning political authority. As such, perhaps having significant Indo-Fijian military personnel may lead to this sub-group questioning the commander or senior military personnel actions, particularly with regard to interference in politics.

Democratic rules require that political parties accept defeat at the polls or through legislative process and until a country’s political system matures to that level, a new democracy is always at risk (Mason, 2007). While democracy is under threat in many parts of the world, it is even more under threat in ethnically divided societies as political parties are often formed along ethnic lines (Horowitz, 1985). Attempts to form multi-ethnic parties are challenged by nationalist groups (Mason, 2007) and when population groups are increasingly dissatisfied with the government in power, either the state uses its military to suppress

potential uprisings (Mason, 2007) or the military becomes praetorian: that is, it assumes control of civilian authority forcefully (Uzgel, 2003).

Praetorian military

The military becomes praetorian when it threatens to use or uses force to dominate the political arena (Nordlinger, 1977). It is argued that the following conditions allow praetorianism to develop: ineffective civilian government; lack of legitimacy of the civilian regime; failure of political and social institutions to provide legitimate space for channelling political participation and mediating social conflicts; polarisation of social groups; and the military gaining high levels of popular support, at least in the initial stages of its involvement in the political arena (Perlmutter, 1981).

Coups d'état by the military are the most overt form of praetorianism. For instance, the military has retained a strong link with the political process in Fiji since the 1987 coup and minimising its role abruptly may lead to an escalation of the conflict. SSR programmes need to take into account the strength of the military and their role in the political sphere (Malan & Weir, 2007). Interventions need to engage with the military to rebuild a stable civil-military relationship, but I argue that gradual changes would be more effective. A praetorian military could derail the whole reform process unless it is deliberately courted. Lessons learnt from DDR (demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration) programmes show that when the military is engaged and given incentives, it is willing to embrace that reform (Smyth, 2004). Similar approaches could be used in SSR reform, particularly if the military is to be downsized, as not involving them could be perceived as threatening their existence. For instance, when Andrew Hughes was appointed by the Qarase government in 2003 to reform and strengthen the Fiji Police Force, which involved setting up an armed police unit, the military became convinced that this unit would be used against them (Khan, 2015). As a result, the unit was summarily disbanded on the day of 2006 coup. Additionally, the military ensured that Hughes would not return to Fiji and appointed a senior military person in his place (Ramesh, 2006). The Qarase government and Hughes could have justified to the military why the armed police unit had been established in order to placate their fears rather than side-lining them on the basis that the military had no place in political decision making.⁵

In designing SSR some issues to consider are: the role of the military; appropriate civilian control and professionalising security personnel; oversight bodies; allocation of resources; institutional separation of duties as well as supporting reformers and minimising the impact of spoilers (Wulf, 2004; Ball, 2004). Many of these factors align with liberal democratic principles, with the understanding that the military needs to be under civilian control.

Where civilian control of the military is promoted in SSR, it also needs to be emphasised that the democratic government should follow democratic principles and good governance. In many newly democratic governments, including some elected governments in Fiji, have come to power through corruption, repression and nationalist tendencies, which do not give them much legitimacy

among the professional military (Firth & Fraenkel, 2007). Reiterating the above notion, oversight bodies also need to promote good governance principles, rather than assuming a dogmatic approach. For instance, in Fiji, the National Security Council (NSC) exists as an oversight body for the security sector, but it consists only of members of the government and its work is shrouded in secrecy. The NSC should be expanded to include the police, military and civilian experts on national security, as well as representatives of relevant CSOs to allow inclusion of different viewpoints (Ratuva, 2006a). This would also establish a transparent and democratic process within the security governance framework and ultimately regain trust for different agencies (*ibid.*).

Perception of military in the community

The glorification of the military by different communities also gives the military added legitimacy for their actions. SSR and transitional justice would need to understand how to address such an abstract issue if civilian oversight of the military is to develop. For instance, the 1987 coup undermined the military's international image and was vilified by the Indo-Fijians, but the nationalists hero-worshipped the new leaders (Ratuva, 2006b). This view became so pervasive amongst the iTaukeis that anyone voicing their concerns against the military was taunted for siding with the vulagi (migrant) Indians (Ratuva, 2006b). However, when the military overthrew the government in 2006 on the basis of bad governance, the military was glorified by many Indo-Fijians for removing Qarase, who was increasingly perceived by them as racist (Ratuva, 2006b). At the same time, the military was vilified and demonised by the iTaukeis as they saw the military "going against their own" (Chang, 2008). SSR and transitional justice need to work with the wider community to identify how glorification of the military after upheavals can encourage the military to be praetorian. Communities' perception of the military also needs to undergo a paradigm shift through education and awareness of democratic principles. Such programmes should emphasise a demarcation between the government and the role of the military in statebuilding.

Timing of military reform in Fiji

The issue of Fiji's military reform has been discussed widely since the late 1990s, but to date no constructive reform has occurred. Both the 1997 Fiji Defence Review (Parliament of Fiji, 1997) and the 2005 Fiji Defence White Paper (Lowy, Firth, & Vitusagavulu, 2004) questioned the need for a military as there was no external threat to security in Fiji. In most countries, the military is usually retained for external security so it was suggested that the military in Fiji be downsized or even disbanded altogether. Unsurprisingly, these ideas were strongly resisted by the Fiji military (Radio NZ International, 2006).

Table 15.1 shows that only 14% of the respondents felt that the military should be disbanded and 25% considered downsizing as a reform measure. A significant 29% wanted the military to remain the same and 14% wanted to increase it.

Table 15.1 Do you think Fiji military should be?

<i>Do you think military in Fiji should be:</i>	<i>Total</i>
Disbanded	14%
Downsized	25%
Increased	14%
Remain the same	29%
Don't know	12%
NR	7%
Total	59

Table 15.2 gives the reasons for their suggestions. Similar to the Defence Review suggestions, 20% of the respondents stated that there was no need for a military in Fiji. Fifteen % of respondents were concerned about the military's interference in politics even though two-thirds of this group of respondents wanted the military to remain as it is, but 19% felt that the military was doing a great job and they considered either increasing the military's size or letting it remain the same.

Aquila Yabaki, Director of Fiji's Citizens' Constitutional Forum, believes that we may never be able to disband our military, as their UN peacekeeping missions are a major source of income for many families and relatives: "The reality is that in the last 20 years or so the peacekeepers brought in a lot of foreign exchange for their families and thereby for the country. Therefore, disbanding it would be almost impossible". The respondents did not feel so strongly about this view as only 3% considered the military as a source of income, but both respondents in this group wanted the military to retain its present size.

The Fiji White Paper (commonly known as the 2005 Defence White Paper) recommended that the military should be downsized from 3,330 to 1,700 personnel, as this number was optimal for partaking in peacekeeping operations (Lowy, Firth, & Vitusagavulu, 2004). Despite Brigadier Aziz's comment, Radio NZ International (2006) reported that the military felt threatened by the changes suggested by the 2005 Defence White Paper and highlighted the social and security implications of such changes if they were to be implemented.

Respondents who had suggested disbanding or downsizing the military were asked what should be done with the military personnel who would be affected by the reform process. Thirty-five percent of the respondents suggested that such personnel should be resettled in the villages to farm the land, 22% recommended secondment to a civil sector job and 17% indicated seeking employment in the international security sector. Figure 15.1 addresses the issue of allaying fears for any reforms relating to disbanding or downsizing the military. A considerable 50% of the respondents stated that any concerns of the military personnel could be addressed through creating awareness of such reforms. Eight percent suggested work assurance and 8% considered other effective measures such as secondments to other government departments and specialised trainings for the remaining personnel, while 21% stated that the military is too powerful at the moment to be disbanded or downsized.

Table 15.2 Reasons for suggested military reform (or not)

<i>Reasons why military should or should not be disbanded, downsized, increased, remain the same or increased.</i>	<i>Disbanded</i>	<i>Downsized</i>	<i>Increased</i>	<i>Remain the same</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>NR</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No need for military in Fiji	6	5		1			12	20%
Military should not interfere in politics		3		6			9	15%
Invest in infrastructure		3		1			4	7%
Don't trust military anymore	2						2	3%
Hold military accountable		1			1		2	3%
Military is a source of income				2			2	3%
Military is doing great		2	6	5			11	19%
Mixed responses		1	1	1	2	1	7	12%
NR		1	1	1	4	3	10	17%
Total	8	15	8	17	7	4	59	100%

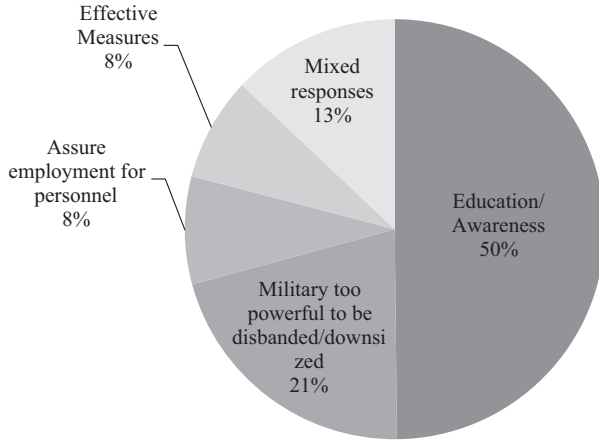


Figure 15.1 How to address fears of military personnel for any disband/downsize reforms?

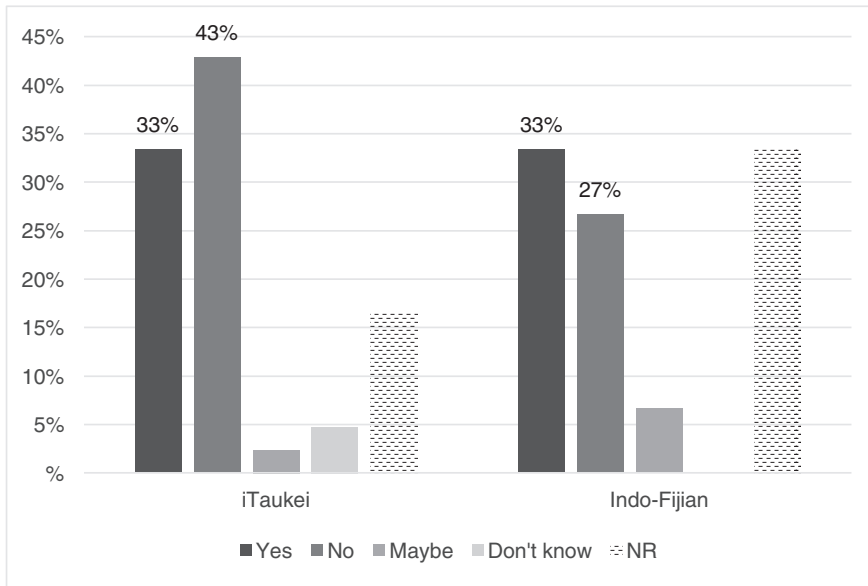


Figure 15.2 Would iTaukei resist to military reform, by ethnicity?

As the Fiji military is largely viewed as an indigenous body and also as a source of employment for many iTaukeis, it was important to consider the perception of any resistance from this group. Figure 15.2 illustrates that 33% of iTaukeis and a similar proportion of Indo-Fijians believe that iTaukeis would resist military reform, but interestingly, 43% of the iTaukeis do not think that there would be

resistance from their group. This sentiment would need further investigation if and when any military reform is planned to ensure wider acceptance of reforms and reduction of any potential threats of violence.

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) are largely seen as an iTaukei organisation as the majority of the personnel are iTaukeis with only 4% Indo-Fijians. In pluralistic/multicultural societies like Fiji, it is usually best practice for the military to be more representative of the different ethnic populations (Khan, 2015). In Fiji, the military system seems to parallel the chiefly system for the iTaukeis as both are very closely aligned with most of the military elites coming from chiefly families. The argument is that, if representative numbers of Indo-Fijians are recruited into the military, with their lack of chiefly allegiance, there is a possibility that it could reduce tension amongst Fiji Islands military and may also induce trust towards the military amongst the Indo-Fijian community. Table 15.3 shows that the majority of the respondents from both communities are receptive to having more Indo-Fijians in the military with 53% agreeing to this.

Figure 15.3 illustrates the reasons respondents believed recruitment of Indo-Fijians in the military should or should not be carried out. A significant proportion of the respondents (25%) were agreeable to the idea and justified their preference on the basis that integration in the military might lead to peace with others, stating that all citizens should be given equal rights as Fiji Islanders. Twenty-two percent of the respondents stated that since Fiji is a multiracial society its military and other sections of the government should reflect this more closely.

Despite the support for Indo-Fijian recruitment to the military, respondents also noted in interviews the challenges to this process. For example:

The recruitment of Indo-Fijians could be done through policies as you can use human rights law to promote affirmative action within government institutions because government institutions are funded by the tax payers' money. But they also need to make the institutions amenable to the Indo-Fijians. For instance, if they bring Indians in but don't provide their food, emphasise only Christian values with military then it would be difficult to recruit even with affirmative action policies. The culture of Indo-Fijians is not reflected in the way that they live in the barracks, so how will that encourage Indians to join?

(Imrana Jalal – Human Rights Activist, Personal Communication, 23 March 2010)

Table 15.3 Should the military actively recruit more Indo-Fijians?

Yes	53%
No	8%
Maybe	2%
Don't know	3%
NR	34%
Total number	59

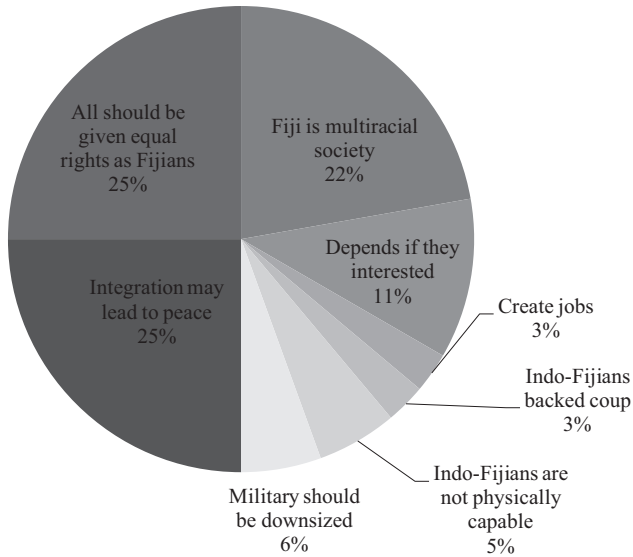


Figure 15.3 Why should Indo-Fijians be recruited in the military?

In addition, as discussed earlier, there is also an assumption that the military culture in Fiji is specifically aligned with the indigenous structure of authority and warrior identity:

The Fijian military personnel, I believe see themselves very much on the concept of ‘bati’ [traditional warrior class in Fijian culture], so military and rugby both perpetuate that mentality. So military is very much an expression and extension of that culture in Fiji. Inherent in that is the protection of the chief at all costs so these are the cultural values that are perpetuated within the military as well. So if the Commander says to do something, they will do it due to their cultural thinking and their military discipline on top of that.

(Andrew Hughes – Former Commissioner of Fiji Police, Personal Communication, 10 March 2011)

Discussion

Military reforms have been suggested for the Fiji military since the 1990s, but no government in the past has been able to achieve this. Some people are sceptical about military reform in Fiji while it remains so strong and enjoys its monopolistic position as the only armed institution in the country. The research responses also indicated that while many would like to see the military reformed, they also accept that this is unlikely to happen soon.

I argue that military reform in Fiji is possible, but it needs to be done gradually and the military community's concerns and apprehensions should be taken into consideration. Some criticisms of military reforms mooted in the past were:

- 1 The suggested downsizing was too and much too soon: the 2005 recommendation was to downsize the military by almost 50%. A more gradual downsizing of 5% per year for the next 10 years would be less dramatic and the redundant military personnel could be better absorbed in other employment sectors.
- 2 The 2005 reforms were suggested by the Qarase government, which was already on antagonistic terms with the military at the time. The military considered the suggested reforms as a reprimand and retaliated with anger and resentment (Khan, 2015). Any military reform should be implemented by a government that works closely with the military and the reforms need to take into consideration the military's concerns.
- 3 Suggested reforms in the past were always recommended by a civilian aligned government and as the military in Fiji is praetorian, it would take such recommendations as offensive and react in a militaristic way. As such, one could argue that Bainimarama may be well placed to recommend military reforms as he is a career navy and military officer and his views are likely to have wider acceptance within the military.

Additionally, Bainimarama also has a proven track record of reforming problematic structures and policies in Fiji, reforms which were almost inconceivable in the past. But the window of opportunity may not be open for long. It is argued that Bainimarama needs to take this unique opportunity to carry out military reform as he continues to enjoy the patronage of the military, and that otherwise, it would be a missed opportunity, as Sitiveni Rabuka wanted to de-politicise the military, but it was too late, as by that time he no longer had the patronage of the military.

While vetting of military personnel by incoming government was considered in the questionnaire as a means of reforming the military, the research responses indicated that vetting could be difficult to implement for the military only and although the link to vetting is weak the Fiji Independent Commission against Corruption (FICAC) has started some work to combat corruption.

Notes

- 1 In this paper, the term "iTaukei" is used to refer to indigenous descendants of Fiji and the term "Indo-Fijian" is used to refer to descendants of indentured labourers and free settlers who arrived from India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Within Fiji, the two groups are usually referred to as "Fijian" and "Indian", respectively. The term "Fiji Islander" is a collective reference to all peoples of Fiji.
- 2 The military is considered praetorian when it uses explicit or implicit force to control governance of the country.
- 3 Structural violence is linked to Galtung's work on negative peace and is defined as the implicit form of violence that is embodied by the social, political and economic structures of the society (Galtung, 1969: 167–191).

- 4 Data obtained from a Fiji Military Forces presentation which was accessed on 26 December 2009 from www.forumsec.org.fj/_resources/article/files/Etueni%20Caucu-Military%20Presentation-RFMF.pdf
- 5 Particularly as at that time, the military and the Qarase government were on confrontational terms, the armed Police Unit setup was viewed suspiciously by the military.

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