Fiji: Coups In Paradise Race, Politics, And Military Intervention

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It is 13 years since Fiji experienced its first two military coups in 1987. Since then there have been riots (1988) and a military rebellion (1996) in Vanuatu; the decade long struggle of Bougainville to break away from Papua New Guinea; and the ongoing (since 1998) conflict between the Guadalcanal and Malaitan people in the Solomon Islands. This article seeks to explore the major forces behind the May 2000 Fiji crisis by putting these in the wider context of trends and patterns of conflict in Melanesia. Race has undoubtedly been a key factor underlying the Fiji coups. The Fiji population of 800,000 is presently divided between 51 per cent indigenous Fijians and 43 per cent Indo-Fijians. At the time of the 1987 coups the percentages were reversed, with Indo-Fijians in the majority.