Why do South Pacific Nations Need Armies?

By Benjamin Reilly

Here we go again.

On Tuesday troops moved in and placed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase under house arrest. The country of Fijian has repeatedly undermined democratic insti-
tutions and created unnecessary volatility. Its time they stepped down.

In Fiji, elections held earlier this year led to the first multiethnic power-sharing govern-
ment in the country's history. A constitutional provision guaranteed cabinet seats to all signifi-
cant parties, including the country's Indo-
Fijian minority. This was a major step towards resolving ethnic tensions.

But Fiji's Bainimarama has been unreliant, in his campaign against Mr. Qarase. The departmentalist's methods have irrevocably debased the norms of accountability, constitutionalism and the rule of law in his country. If Fijian is true, this will be Fiji's fourth coup since 1987 and will mark a new chapter in the country's quest for a genuine multiethnic dem-
cracy.

Fiji's descent into a Pacific-style banana re-
public is only the latest example of military forces in the Pacific region posing a threat to their own democracies. But it is hardly the first.

The collapse of public order earlier this year in East Timor, for instance, was sparked by the government's attempt to downsize its bloated military, but quickly turned into an us-
versus-them struggle between the military and police units based on ethnically-driven factions.

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test in Port Moresby, demanding a 100% pay rise (they eventually received a more realistic 40% increase). In 2001, the PNGDF was frontal battle, burning down buildings and breaking into the armory following a high-level review that called for a 60% reduction in force size. The downsizing plan was abandoned, and PNG maintains an excessively large and expensive military.

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