



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an outsider. I could live in Fiji for a life time and always be, in the eyes of the locals, no more than an outsider. Whilst I have read of her history, I don't profess to have more than a vague overview of Fiji's rich and complex past.

Fiji is a extremely multifaceted country, that has its "chiefly ways" that a foreigner will never fully grasp. We do our best to respect the culture and the protocols, but we won't ever really comprehend or appreciate their ways.

I have a deep and residual love for Fiji and its people from childhood. My mother has been visiting her shores for over 50 years. It holds a place in my mind full of happy memories of summer vacations at a time of my life well before my worldwide controversies.

I was raised since I was in nappies by Fijian nannies who would live with us in Australia as part of our family. My favourites being Kata and Rusila and Lisa. We have stayed in touch with them all. That's what families do.

---

## THE FUTURE

When I was outed by the Fiji Times newspaper as the money man behind Dr Tupeni Baba and New Labour in the 2001 election, and described as a "conman", Kata, my first nanny would travel throughout the night by bus to Suva to see Dr Tupeni Baba to tell him that, "peter was a good boy" and he should ignore what he read in the newspapers. It had been 35 years since Kata had been my nanny, but her defence of me speaks volumes for the warmth, generosity and decency of the people.

It is for this reason that I feel so passionately about Fiji's future and the need for the world to understand the recent actions of the Commander Frank Bainimarama.

I don't attempt for a moment to explain in any depth the events of the past 22 years since the first coup of 1987. There are many scholars, journalists and commentators who have thoroughly reported them. They have done a far better job than I ever could.

## PERSONALLY SPEAKING

I can only speak from my own personal experiences, and report on what I saw and heard during the years of the horrifically corrupt Qarase government.

I am not an academic. But I have been an undercover operative for the Australian Federal Police (1993-94 and 1997) and Derbyshire Force Intelligence in England (1996) so perhaps it is in my nature to take risks and seek redemption for my own sins and misdemeanours by trying to expose evil.



**Peter Foster**

---

I was given a very rare insight. I infiltrated the hierarchy of the government and became privy to their crimes and conspiracies.

It is a story that has to be told. If the truth will set you free, then both Fiji and I will benefit from the release of this dossier and the tapes, and from all of us outsiders, worldwide, having a better appreciation of the liberation process Fiji is undergoing. Please consider.

Yours Sincerely,

**Peter Foster**  
Australia, August 2009

---

## THE TRUTH REVEALED OF THE FIJI COUP TO END ALL COUPS

---



### **An Outsiders view from the Inside by Peter Foster**

I have seen the inside of 16 prisons in six countries, such is the life of an International Man of Mischief. It's not anything to be proud of, just an occupational hazard.

As you would expect, I have met with the cruel and the crooked. The dangerous and the deranged. Murderers and maniacs. Rapists, sociopaths and psychopaths, paedophiles and parasites, junkies and bikies. Even a psychotic necrophiliac, who believing that once was never enough, after burying his victims, dug them up several days later to sexually violate the corpses, yet again. Oh yes, I've met them all.

But nothing I encountered in the cess pools of humanity would prepare me for the truly evil I would meet occupying the seats of government in Fiji.

Most crims perpetrate their offence against an individual. A Prime Minister and his cabinet's raping and pillaging of a nation affects every man, woman and child. In Fiji's case, that's 800,000 victims of crime.

What does it say about us as a people when we, as members of the Commonwealth, proud United Nation flag wavers, sit back and allow this to happen? It's akin to witnessing your neighbour's family being taken hostage by armed terrorists and choosing to close the blinds and turn up the telly rather than calling for help.

What the people of Fiji needed was a saviour. But of course we don't invade a foreign nation, no matter how evil the dictator and his questionably elected government. Robert Mugabe's tyranny over Zimbabwe a recent case in point.

We just don't get involved and we don't use military force.

Well, not without United Nations resolutions and support, unless of course under all that sand is an ocean of oil. Like Zimbabwe, sadly for Fiji, under all that sand was just more sand.



The people of Zimbabwe's votes at the polls counted for nought. The monstrous Mugabe was re-elected by blatant voter intimidation and fraud. We all got it. It was transparent. But still we did nothing.

We all understand that Zimbabwe needed a saviour. But of course without the guns the people were powerless.

How the world would have embraced a hero if one had emerged from within the military of Zimbabwe to remove that crooked government. We'd collectively cheer his courage and commend his bravery. He'd be the new 'Nelson Mandela' of the continent. He'd dine at the White House, receive a standing ovation at the United Nations, and see his biography become a bestseller thanks to the Oprah Book Club. And with financial aid from the World Bank, IMF and donor nations, and the support and best wishes of the western world, Zimbabwe would prosper. Oh, happy days.

There is not a thinking man, woman or child who would not support a military coup to overthrow a criminal administration that was elected fraudulently. Yes, we know you can't allow the military to remove a democratically elected government, but when the election was not fair and the government stole power by fraud and vote rigging, then the ends justifies the means.

But of course Zimbabwe is not really our concern, given that very few Australians ever have any dealings with its people or visit its shores. However to our utter shame, just off the continental shelf, lies a problem that Australia not only ignored, but promoted.

Fiji, that much loved holiday destination of generations of Australians, has for too long suffered a government of crooks and conmen who seized power not by the will of the people but by deception and fraud. It was a crime that could not have been committed without outside assistance from powerful allies. They would receive it from the John Howard Australian government who needed to retain control over the South Pacific.

The Howard government supported and partly orchestrated the fraudulent election of the failed head of the Fiji Development Bank, Laisenia Qarase as Prime Minister in 2001. They did so knowing him to be one of the dark men behind George Speight's coup, as well as a liar, cheat and a thief, but one they believed they could control and would do what he was told by Canberra. Qarase would hold power for six years, and Fiji would pay a heavy price for the pretence of democracy.



## THE COUP FIJI NEEDED TO HAVE



**Commodore Frank Bainimarama**

As a result of Australia's interference from 2001- 2006, the military coup of December 2006, led by Commander Frank Bainimarama that removed Qarase and his cronies, was the coup Fiji needed to have.

Those of us who knew it was in the making waited eleven months for the Commander to make his move. When he did we believed it was for all the right reasons.

This was not a man seeking power or in the search of personal wealth. Those who criticise the Commander's actions in recent times fail to acknowledge that he declined the opportunity to be Prime Minister in 2000 following the George Speight coup.

He was seeking to rid the country of corruption. It is a message he has been unable to get across to the world as he stumbles from one public relations disaster to another, led by the hapless Secretary for Information, Major Lewini.

Fiji, much like Zimbabwe, desperately needed a hero and saviour. It is my belief that Commander Frank Bainimarama, is Fiji's last hope. But to succeed he needs Australia and other countries to stop hindering, and start helping him bring about the changes that will benefit the people of Fiji. If Commander Frank Bainimarama is given the support of foreign governments, and is allowed to implement his idealistic program, he might just have pulled off the coup to end all Fiji coups.

At a time when 50 years of sanctions against Cuba are starting to be lifted, shouldn't we learn from others mistakes, rather than repeating them all over again to the detriment of the people we purport to want to protect.

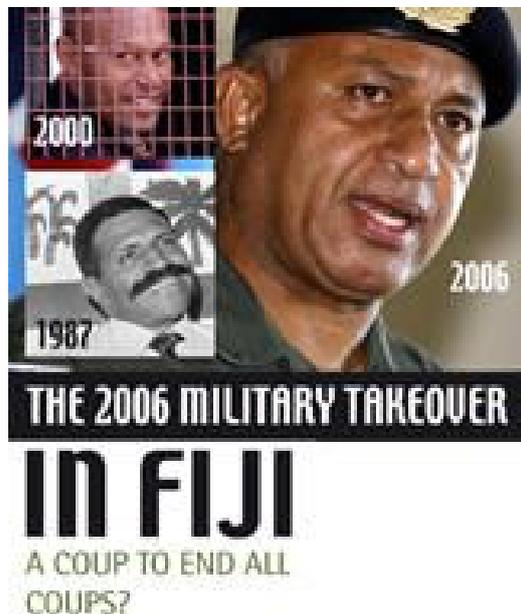
If only the world would understand what we know. Those of us who have been a part of the political process in Fiji and seen it from the inside, only to discover it was riddled with a cancerous corruption that was eating away at the soul of the society. Like a cancer, to allow the previous government to remain and not be cut out, would have proven fatal for Fiji.

To understand the future we are told to first study the past...



## UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

---



Fiji has endured four coups in 20 years. There is little doubt this has an effect on the young men who have never known life without the coup culture.

It has brought about an attitude of 'I want, what I want, when I want it'. And if all else fails, I'll take it.

But to understand Fiji today you do not need to go as far back to **Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka**, and the first coup in 1987.

Those events of 22 years ago, where FLP leader Bavadra was elected prime minister, but was overthrown a month later in the coup led by Rabuka, using Melanesian chauvinist rhetoric, has no bearing on Fiji today and would just be a distraction.

It was the same tactic of distraction that the government of Fiji employed in 2006 when they placed Rabuka on trial, two decades after the coup.

During the intervening period he had been fairly elected in open democratic elections, and had been Prime Minister from 1992-1999, and had tried to bring about reconciliation between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, only to be soundly defeated at the polls when his message of unity was rejected.

He was then revealed by former President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as being one of the co-conspirators in George Speight's 2000 coup. Rabuka faced two counts of inciting a mutiny to overthrow Voreqe Bainimarama as military chief on or about July 4, 2000. Commodore Bainimarama was forced to flee for his life before troops loyal to him regained control.

However, the 2007 show trial was nothing more than smoke and mirrors to divert the attention away from the government of the day's dark and evil origins which were coming under wider scrutiny.





**Major-General Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, OBE, MSD, OStJ**

Rabuka and I would chat outside the Suva Courthouse. We were both facing court proceedings and between us occupied much of the daily newspapers front pages. We would each jokingly wish the other the lead story for the following day.

Rabuka knew he would be acquitted. I have seen men on drink driving charges in the Brisbane Magistrates Court more apprehensive and agitated than Rabuka, who faced life in prison if convicted. Whilst he no longer wields any influence in Fiji, he knew the government of the day would not let him go to prison, given their sinister secrets that they shared. They didn't. In the end High Court judge Gerrard Winter cast his deciding vote after a split decision by four of the five members of the panel of assessors. It's the Fijian way.

To understand Fiji today, you only have to look at the events at the turn of this millennium.

## THE 2000 COUP

---



**George Speight**

The first great con perpetrated on the world was the misconception that the 2000 coup was orchestrated by **George Speight**, and the second great piece of propaganda was that it was based upon the racial divide between indigenous Fijians, and the Indian Fijians.

I know George's dad, **Sam Speight**, and he would be the first to admit George is not the sharpest machete stuck in the coconut tree. Sam was an opposition member of Parliament when George was brought into the coup conspiracy only a matter of days before parliament was overrun. He was always intended to be nothing more than a front man and the fall guy.

One of the masterminds behind the coup in 2000 was economist and political king maker, **Navitali Nasori**. A man with a brilliant intellect, educated at universities in England and the USA, he was a prolific womaniser and mighty drinker. Needless to say we found we had much in common after being introduced by the mother of one of his children, **Laisa Volokuro**, the singer and recording artist affectionately regarded as the *Aretha Franklin* of the South Pacific.

Navi was to become a friend of mine, perhaps my best friend in Fiji. We would drink from dusk 'til dawn. We laughed until we could laugh no more. We shared secrets. He planned coups. I listened. He rigged elections. I watched. He was charged with conspiracy to blow up the airport. I flew in my lawyers to defend him. He plotted political murders. I drew a line in the sand and shopped him to the military.

We were not always friends, in fact at one time we were political enemies. When I financially supported New Labour to the tune of a million dollars in the 2001 elections, and became Chief of Staff to party leader and former Deputy Prime Minister **Dr Tupeni Baba**, he was the Chairman of the SDL party which formed the interim government and held power.



It was Navi who would derail our campaign a week out from the elections by exposing me as the mystery money man behind the party, and using my criminal history to raise suspicions as to my motives and the indebtedness of the government to me if elected.

When Navi was asked by Laisa what he had against me when the attacks became so personal, he replied, “Nothing, only that New Labour found him first. We could have used his money better ourselves”.

He arranged for me to be expelled from Fiji as a political activist. I took my case to the High Court for review, and failed. Yet four years later, at the request of Laisa on my behalf, within 30 minutes of her pleading to him, Navi had the Minister for Immigration lift my ban and allow me to return to Fiji. Realising his powerful influence, I made it my business to form an alliance.

The events of 2000 were not Navi's first coup. He cut his teeth in the 80's assisting Rabuka with his two coups. When the first was launched in 1987, Navi was accompanying the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji to Washington to seek financial aid from donor nations. Navi handed the Governor an envelope when they left Fiji airspace, and told him not to open it until they reached Hawaii for refuelling. When he did, the letter simply said, “By the time you read this note, Fiji will have become a republic. You now work for me.” Whilst the Governor wanted to immediately fly back to Fiji, Navi insisted they continue on to Washington to show the world that it would be business as usual in Fiji. In any event, he had the military seize the airport and close all inward bound flights. Navi would prosper as permanent secretary to the Fiji Ministry of Trade and Commerce under the government appointed by Rabuka and go on to become chairman of numerous companies, including the Fiji Development Bank.

Thirteen years later Navi interviewed George Speight for the job of coup front man and he was sent in to overtake parliament where he held parliamentarians hostage at gunpoint for 56 days. Speight spewed the racist propaganda and quite possibly believed half of it. But the events had nothing to do with the racial divide of Rabuka's era.

The 2000 coup was all about the forests. Whoever said money doesn't grow on trees hasn't seen Fiji's massive mahogany plantations. They are the second largest in the world at 42,000 hectares and estimated by the Department of Forest to be valued at over \$500 million.





**Mahendra Chundhry**

The 2000 coup was funded primarily by **Mr Hari Punjah**, an Indian businessman with a vast business portfolio and undoubtedly the wealthiest man in Fiji. He and Navi, who was at that time chairman of Fiji Pine Limited, believed they were going to secure through another company the contract to harvest the mahogany.

However, the thorn in their side was the Prime Minister, **Mahendra Chundhry** who let it be known that it was not going to be awarded to them at all.

George Speight's link to the mahogany millions was obvious. He was formerly the chairman of Fiji Pine Limited, a position Navi took over. While Chairman of the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Ltd, Speight was a consultant to a company bidding for harvesting rights in Fiji. Speight lost a lot of money after the Chaudhry government awarded a lucrative mahogany harvesting deal to a British company, rather than to the company linked with Speight. He was also sacked from his position as Chairman by the Chaudhry government.

Navi's and his co-conspirators, the indigenous elite, plan was simple. Overthrow the Mahendra Chundhry Labour government, put in the coup perpetrators' own choice as Prime Minister, and go about robbing and rorting by awarding multi-million dollar contracts to themselves and looting the treasury.

Of course there were those involved who were fuelled by racism and the quest for regaining power and influence. The Cakobau dynasty from the island of Bau had been at the heart of power in Fiji since the first Tui Viti, (the king of Fiji), Seru Cakobau, unified the islands by force and ceded them to Queen Victoria in 1874.

Having lost much of their influence under former Prime Minister and then President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, descendents of the first king, Apenisa Cakobau and some members of the Cakobau family encouraged the coup and supported George Speight. Television pictures of Apenisa and Speight lunching together at the height of the coup reinforced the widespread belief that the coup was racially driven. This was further supported given that one of Speight's demands was a new constitution that would only permit indigenous Fijians to hold the posts of prime minister and president.



There is a saying in Fiji that roughly translates as: "Well, that's Bauan politics for you." It encompasses double-crossing, backstabbing, speaking with a forked tongue, posturing and outright lying. Little wonder they had been at the forefront of Fijian politics for so long.

Navi and his crew of businessmen and financiers behind the coup, of which there were reportedly in the region of 20, also enlisted the support of the **Police Commissioner, Colonel Isikia Savua**. He attended post coup strategy meetings. George Speight even telephoned him only minutes before storming Parliament with his armed mob of bandits.



**Police Commissioner Savua**



His role was to ensure the Police did not interfere. They didn't. May 19, 2000 was chosen as the day for the coup as it was the People Coalitions government's first anniversary in office.

Around 10 a.m. that day, seven gunmen, led by Speight, stormed the Fiji parliament taking Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 27 MP's hostage.

At 12.49 p.m. that day, approximately two hours after George Speight stormed parliament, a riot broke out at the upscale Tappoo's department store, during which it was extensively damaged and looted.

When rioting spilt onto the streets of the capital, Suva, Police Commissioner Isikia Savua refused calls to allow the Police to restore law and order. Chaos gripped the city. Shops were looted and torched. The coup would last 56 days, and was a wicked success.





For 56 days the honestly elected members of the government were held hostage inside the Parliament buildings.

Prime Minister Mahendra Chundhry was bashed and terrorised at the hands of George Speight's mob.



With only the military to protect Fiji, the Police being virtually useless because of Commissioner Isikia Savua's inaction, it would fall upon **Commander Frank Bainimarama** to negotiate the release of the hostages.



It would be the start of a tumultuous year for Fiji. Commander Frank Bainimarama was almost killed and men loyal to him lost their lives, and this is said by some to be at the root of his hatred of those who perpetrated the coup and the attempted mutiny. He reminds people often that each one of these men was someone's son, brother, husband, sweetheart or father. His feeling of loss is palpable.

After nearly two months of negotiations and demands, Speight freed the hostages, only after declaring himself leader and believing he had been given immunity from prosecution by the President.

Families were finally reunited with their loved ones. For eight weeks no independent outsider had been able to see the hostages except Red Cross director, John Scott. He alone was able to carry messages between the hostages and their families as he delivered food supplies and medicines.

Commodore Bainimarama declared martial law and ended the 2000 coup before handing power to an interim Government led by **Laisenia Qarase**, instead of reinstating the deposed government of Mahendra Chaudhry. Laisenia Qarase became interim Prime Minister, without ever having previously had a vote cast in his favour at any level.

Navi and his co-conspirators interviewed several candidates for the position of Prime Minister whilst Speight was still holding hostages. One of those he considered was failed businessman Laisenia Qarase.



## QARASE



**Laisenia Qarase**

Navi had employed Qarase when he was Chairman of the Fiji Development Bank, and Qarase was his Managing Director. Qarase was the man they could rely upon to give a multi-million dollar loan, no collateral, no guarantees, no hope of repayment. It was as easy as stealing coconuts.

Qarase would all but bankrupt the bank. Unsecured and poorly documented loans were provided and some bank employees systematically siphoned off funds for themselves, while others arranged kickbacks.

The bank became insolvent with a loss of \$220 million

It has been said that the coup was planned at the boardroom of Fijian Holdings, an indigenous Fijian equity investment company that was plundered by its directors. Several years later Qarase would eventually be charged with corruption over him having his family own shares in Fijian Holdings Limited while he was still a director of the company.

Navi and his coup colleagues chose Qarase to be part of the coup, but not to be simply the spokesman, or fall guy, but to be the interim Prime Minister who would have to be appointed after the coup succeeded.

The year previously, in 1999, Qarase received his first political office, when the Great Council of Chiefs nominated him to fill one of the 14 seats allocated to them in the 32-member Senate, where he soon gained a reputation as a vociferous opponent of Mahendra Chaudhry's government.

Laisenia Qarase was entrusted with the task of being interim Prime Minister by Commander Bainimarama who thought at the time that he would be the lesser of the other evils. The problem was that he was really just the puppet of the promoters of the coup.

Whilst the Commander acted in good faith and with optimism, the underlying problem was Qarase's loyalties, as he only became Prime Minister because he passed the job interview that Navi Nasori held for the position. He was a more presentable face to the world than George Speight, who was contaminated once the coup developed into a two month stand off, with hostages and people were killed.



Qarase and his government would, indirectly, be tainted with the blood of more than fifteen people killed in the aftermath of the May 2000 coup. He would use government funds and resources to win the election held several months later, by rigging the ballot boxes. Worse still, over the next six years he and his Ministers would betray the people of Fiji and cultivate a culture of corruption.

Under mounting pressure from foreign countries, Speight was arrested when senior army commanders accused him of breaching the conditions of the amnesty deal by failing to hand over weapons stolen from the military and used in the uprising. He was seemingly fed to the sharks by Navi and the other coup hierarchy, including now Qarase, who knew that the coup had dragged on too long and been too public a spectacle with too many lives lost making worldwide headlines. Someone had to take the fall if Fiji was to expect financial support from foreign countries.

However the killing didn't end when George Speight released the hostages. Several months later one of the most descent men Fiji had embraced was murdered.

### **JOHN SCOTT'S MURDER AND COVER UP**



Red Cross Director, John Scott, a fourth generation white Fijian educated in New Zealand, inadvertently became an independent witness to the happenings behind the walls of Parliament during the hostage drama. He was the one man allowed to deliver food and messages to the prisoners, and saw those who were holding the guns, and those who were barking the orders. He was the only true impartial witness and had received threats and warnings to leave Fiji.



As a result of this he was scheduled to be a prosecution witness at the trials. But he would never give evidence.

He and his partner, Greg Scrivener, were found sadistically massacred by machete in their Suva home. They were nearly decapitated, their fingers and hands cut off. Police Commissioner Colonel Isikia Savua, even before the bodies had been removed to the morgue, was telling the media on the doorsteps of the murder scene that it was a gay revenge killing and that John Scott was a paedophile. He spoke of white powder suspected to be cocaine and hardcore X rated videos found in his home. The totally inappropriate speculation by the Police Commissioner, that would seemingly justify the murderous attacks, made even the most hardened reporters stomachs turn.

Isikia Savua, said: "People are focusing on the good side of Mr Scott and his partner Greg Scrivener. But these people tend to forget he is a practising homosexual. I don't profess to understand everything about homosexuality... it's just that they tend to be more vicious than the normal heterosexual relationship."

The murders were portrayed as intimately connected to their "sordid" lifestyle of cocaine use, promiscuous gay sex, and home-made pornography. Although Scott and Scrivener had an open relationship, the "white powder" found at their home was in fact baking soda to clean silver; the porn didn't exist.



**John Scott and partner Gregory Scrivener**

Colonel Isikia Savua's allegations were deliberately defamatory, despicable and groundless.

John Scott was in a stable monogamous relationship and was much loved and respected in the community.

Gregory Scrivener's family said they have evidence that they were tortured and then executed by more than one person but Fijian police were adamant there was only one killer. Fueling suspicions of assassination was the fact that the fingernails on one of Scrivener's hands had been yanked out. A private autopsy was performed by a New Zealand coroner, who concluded that Scrivener was tortured, then beheaded.



Colonel Isikia Savua attributed the killings to a deeply disturbed man, 22-year-old Apete Kaisau, who was swiftly arrested and made to confess. I have spoken to people who know him. They say he had become obsessed with the bible and took everything literally. He was acting like a lunatic.

He would tell you the grass was blue and the sky was green if you asked him. He swears to God he spoke to Captain William Bligh when he rowed his boat through the Yasawa Islands after the mutiny on the bounty in 1789. None of this came out at his sentencing where he pleaded guilty. Nobody really believes he killed them on his own volition. If he had anything whatsoever to do with the killings, he was doing it on the instructions of others. He was just another fall guy.

Apete Kaisau was spared jail and instead sent for treatment in a mental hospital after being found not guilty of the murders on the grounds of insanity. Many believe the verdict is questionable.

## A PRESIDENTIAL WITNESS



Speculation that Colonel Isikia Savua was part of the coup was widely known.

President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara said in an interview with Fiji Television on 29 April 2001, his last media appearance before being incapacitated by a stroke, that Isikia Savua was a party to the planning of the coup.

Now it became a public concern that he had played a role in the cover up murder of the Red Cross director to protect the coup players.

Qarase was becoming increasingly embarrassed by Colonel Isikia Savua. However, instead of calling the man to account for his role in the coup, allowing the streets of Suva to burn whilst he kept his men at barracks, and deliberately lying about the John Scott massacre, Prime Minister Qarase promoted him and made him Fiji's Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. He would blindside all calls from Fiji to return and give evidence at the coup trials.

George Speight was convicted of treason and sentenced to death. It was immediately commuted to life in prison.





Ten kilometres off the coast of Suva is picturesque Nukulau Island, a three hectare piece of paradise that had been a favourite for day trippers to enjoy a picnic and frolic in the warm pacific waters. Qarase closed it to the public and turned it into a prison camp for George Speight. Comfortable bures were built with every convenience

### **Nukulau Island**

No razor wire fences. Wives and girlfriends could come over on week-ends and enjoy traditional feasts and private intimate moments. The kava flowed freely. Volleyball was played every afternoon between Speight's party and the guards who were more like resort staff to Speight and his merry bank of co-accused. It was the type of idyllic Fijian escape Australian tourists would pay several hundreds dollars a night to enjoy.

Qarase "punished" the coup perpetrators who were responsible for such atrocities, by rewarding them with their own luxury hideaway whilst the world believe them to be doing hard time. They would live there in luxury for the next 5 ½ years.

However, within days of taking power in the coup of December 2007, Commander Frank Bainimarama implemented his "clean up corruption" campaign and sent George Speight and his coup co-accused back to a maximum security prison, and re-opened the island to the public as a picnic spot.

Some, however, didn't even have to serve their sentence. In August 2004, Ratu Jope Seniloli who was the Vice President of Fiji at that time, was convicted in the High Court for the criminal offence of taking an engagement in the nature of an oath to commit a capital offence. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

On 26 November 2004 (only 3 months after the conviction), the then Attorney General & Minister for Justice, Mr Qoriniasi Bale, authorised Ratu Jope's release on a compulsory supervision order (CSO) on medical grounds. Mr Bale purported to act on a medical report that he had obtained for this purpose. However, to date this medical report has not been made available to any person. Unfortunately, it cannot be located and is now missing from the records kept by Ministry of Justice. Five years on, and Ratu Jope's health is as robust as ever, making a mockery of Qarase's governments decision to release him after only three months of a four year sentence.



## THE 2001 ELECTIONS

---



In 2001 the interim Qarase government set about retaining power by forming the SDL party, (Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua) which soon earned the nickname the **Stealing, Deceit, and Looting** party. It would insidiously adopt the white dove as its symbol. With the majority of the population illiterate, the dove was an icon they associated with the Christian faith. It had religious overtones that dispensed with the need for a manifesto to be understood by the masses.

To divert attention from SDL's coup connections, Navi and his co-conspirators encouraged the more aggressive nationalistic members to form the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua party. They even had George Speight stand as a candidate, even though he was in jail awaiting trial for treason. Even more staggering was that he won his seat in a landslide. Speight was being held on Nukulau island and was unable to attend parliamentary sittings. As a consequence he forfeited his seat, so his father took over the seat for him and then his brother stood on his behalf and won the by-election.

Qarase felt that SDL could put a bit of distance between themselves and the hardcore coup perpetrators by the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua party being so extreme and anti-Indian. This would make SDL appear to be moderate and a more attractive proposition to the world at large.

Revelations that Qarase's government in barely one year of office had become the largest and most expensive cabinet in the country's history had fuelled major discontent. Its salaries bill cost almost \$3 million, at a time when the number of Fiji Islanders reported to be living below the poverty line has soared from 25 percent in 1991, according to the Fiji Poverty Report, to an unofficial estimate of 40 percent.

I became actively involved in the 2001 elections out of frustration when it became apparent that Laisenia Qarase was misusing the financial resources of the interim government to fund the election campaign of the SDL party. Staggering sums of money were spent on television and newspaper advertisements paid for by the government, singing the praises of Qarase. At a time when many villages still didn't have clean running water, electricity or proper sanitation, I found it obscene.

But it was more than that which caused by discontent. Qarase was an extension of George Speight. More than a dozen people had died so he could seize power. Thirty four candidates who stood for election were on an international blacklist for allegedly being involved with the coup.

Fiji deserved a better man. And there was one who many felt was that man, University Professor, Dr Tupeni Baba.

Qarase, through George Speight's coup, overthrew Mahendra Chaudhry's labour party government. However, Chaudhry should never have been Prime Minister in the first place. Mahendra Chaudhry had promised Dr Baba the Prime Ministership before and during the 1999 election campaign, and reneged on that promise. When the people cast their vote in 1999 for the labour party, most believed that Dr Tupeni Baba would lead the country if labour won power. They were swept to power, however at the first caucus meeting Chaudhry became leader and Prime Minister, making Dr Baba his deputy.

In my opinion Dr Tupeni Baba is simply too gentle a man to be in politics. He's probably just too honest. Mahendra Chaudhry, on the other hand, was arrogance personified. He also had a shadowy past that troubled me.

He had previously been jailed in 1978 for drinking driving causing death. The troublesome part of the story is that whilst driving home he struck a woman pedestrian, and instead of rendering aid, or taking her to the hospital, he left her on the side of the road to die, and went home to hide from Police. She would have survived if he had thought of her, and not himself. He was jailed for 6 months. I felt that whilst everyone is entitled to a second chance, the characteristics he displayed, of a coward, are not that I believe should be in the leader of a country.



Even though I had never met him, or shown any interest in politics, I telephoned Dr. Tupeni Baba and offered my assistance. I asked him if there was anything he needed. He simply replied, “Letterhead would be helpful”.

I flew to Suva and met with him. I have been told by those who meet Nelson Mandela for the first time that he has an aura and a dignity and decency that is overwhelming. I found the same with Dr Baba. He was just a very good man.

The New Labour Unity Party, which was a break away splinter group from the labour party, had no financial resources whatsoever.



**New Labour Unity Party Executive Committee. Peter Foster third from left.**

I formed an Executive Committee and became Chief of Staff. I gathered experts from around the world for the six weeks of the campaign. We took a dozen suites at the Sheraton Hotel where we established our campaign headquarters. The group included Dr Leah Marcal, a brilliant economist from California State University, and political scientist Professor Stephen D’Alton. My barrister Sean Cousins was recruited due to his experience as president of the Young Nationals in Australia.

New Labour preached reconciliation and unity. We endorsed reformist policies favouring the country's cane farmers, labourers, garment workers and skilled youth - people battered by economic hardship since the Speight coup.



In an attempt to shorten the racial divide we had an equal number of Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijians candidates, and we had more women candidates than any other party.

I flew in a television production crew from Australia to make a series of TV commercials, using Bob Marley's theme of "One Love". I enlisted the support of Sevens Rugby legend **Waisalei Serevi**, a national icon. During the lead up to the election, Serevi campaigned vigorously for the NLUP with full page advertisements in local dailies, and also television commercials.

In *Fiji Times* newspaper advertisements, Serevi was pictured with the slogan "Give peace a chance" and quipped: "Every winning team needs a good captain - and Fiji needs Dr Baba.". Serevi encouraged people to vote for NLUP and said that there was only one man who could unite this country - Dr Baba.



**Dr Tupeni Baba and Waisale Serevi**



**Serevi calls for Fiji to get together**



**New Labour Unity Party rally in Suva**



We held massive rallies at football stadiums, and with Serevi, pop singers and free hotdog for the children, Dr Baba charmed the biggest ever crowds for a political gatherings in Fiji. There was widespread respect for a very slick and honest campaign.



## THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT'S MAN



On the other hand, Qarase had never stood for election previously and the newly formed SDL party had no experience in running an election campaign.

However they could rely upon Australia for assistance and guidance. Liberal Party pollster and John Howard's stalwart supporter **Mark Textor** was sent to Fiji to assist the Qarase government to become elected. Textor would make several trips over the next six years to advise Qarase and the SDL election committee, of which Navi Nasori was Chairman.

The first time I saw Textor was when, quite by chance, we were both staying at Homestay, a luxury alternative to hotel accommodation in Suva which was known for its privacy. Mark Textor was booked in there so as to avoid the more public hotels. It was several weeks prior to the election, on a lazy Saturday morning, when I was surprised to see Prime Minister Qarase striding up the pathway to the outside pool area together with party heavyweight and campaign director Jale Baba (no relation to Dr Tupeni Baba) and several other ministers.

I was curious to find out what was going on, so I stayed in the kitchen and perched myself on the window ledge, so I could eavesdrop, realising that they had set up the table on the veranda for their meeting.

I sat there for the next three hours, listening to their strategy for election, and the man introduced as Mark Textor constantly refer to Mr Howard's support and assistance. Sadly for my ego my name wasn't mentioned at all, although in a few short weeks I would be making headlines for all the wrong reasons. It troubled me though why the Australian government would be supporting the SDL party and Qarase, as they had to be aware of his involvement with the coup.

What really disturbed me though was Textor's talk of "wedge-politics". Wedge-politics seeks to divide communities. Wedge strategies help political parties stay in power by seeking to highlight fears against the other.

If you are a wedge strategist, you must first gather enough research from such things as focus groups and polls, to find out which issues will divide a community or raise fears against one particular group, then you find out which



voters will be swayed by highlighting those differences, and then you push-poll to ensure the fear and rumours proliferate throughout the community.

Textor outlined this strategy, and SDL and Qarase would campaign based upon racial divide and fear. Qarase's campaign focused on indigenous Fijians' fears of political domination by ethnic Indians, who make up 44% of the population. Almost all ministers in Qarase's new government were indigenous Fijians.

The fact that people wanted peace and a change became apparent when one week before the election TV One news broadcast the findings of their opinion poll that had Dr Baba's New Labour Unity Party 5 points clear and set for victory.

The following day the US Ambassador asked to see me. When I declined, saying he should direct his enquiries to Dr Baba, he located Dr Marcal via her mobile phone and after ascertaining that she and I were dining at Chef's restaurant in Suva, he ambushed me with a series of questions as to *my* intentions for Fiji should New Labour win government.

This was the first clear indication to me that Fiji was important to foreign governments because of its position in the south Pacific. He told me that the US Embassy had seen the pollings and expected New Labour to form government, probably in coalition with other moderate parties.

Meanwhile, Qarase and members of the SDL illegally used public money to secure the votes of Melanesian Fijians by introducing an "affirmative action" program called the Farming Assistance Scheme (FAS). The scheme offered free farming implements to Melanesian Fijians in rural communities, some of whom received up to F\$500,000 worth of equipment.

Three months prior to the election, the Court of Appeal ruled that the FAS was illegal as it had not been legally approved by parliament. While similar assistance schemes had been legal under previous governments, they had required beneficiaries to contribute a proportion of the funds needed to purchase equipment. The Qarase-led government ignored this requirement when it introduced the FAS.

Following the Court of Appeal ruling, Qarase recommended that parliament urgently release more than F\$23 million for use in the FAS. As a direct result, more than F\$16 million was spent in the three months before the general election, a staggering sum for a small country with a failing economy.



Provinces where SDL candidates had previously been elected with narrow margins were targeted for FAS funds. Rotuma, where candidate Marieta Rigamoto beat her only opponent by just 0.76% of the vote in the previous general election, received up to F\$500,000 worth of equipment under the FAS. The money did not go to struggling individuals but to the local council and unelected village chiefs.

Despite this, there was widespread support for NLUP and the Fiji Labour party. It was an obvious coalition to form government. Except to everyone's surprise, Dr Baba would not hold his seat. It would be five years until I learned that the election had been rigged against New Labour.

SDL received 26 percent of the vote, well short of the 32 percent polled by the Fiji Labour Party, but helped by preference deals with other ethnic Fijian-dominated hardline and coup supporting parties it became the largest party in Parliament, with 32 out of 71 seats. It formed government by making a deal with the delegates of the devil, the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua Party.

Fiji's misery was just beginning...and so was mine.



## THE 2006 ELECTION

---

In the five years following the 2001 elections the Qarase government and its ministers did nothing except line their own pockets. As more time passed between the events of the George Speight coup, several of Speight's co-accused terrorists, once released from short jail sentences, became government ministers under Qarase.

Qarase even had the gall to appoint Mr Qoriniasi Bale as Attorney General and Minister for Justice, even though he had previously been struck off as a lawyer for stealing money from his Trust Account. Bale did not stand at the elections. No one ever cast a vote for him, but instead he was nominated for the position of Senator by Qarase in a curious arrangement Fiji has where the Prime Minister can appoint senators without the need for them to win election at the polls. This made Bale the highest law maker in Fiji, being the Attorney General and Minister for Justice, yet for a time he was not even allowed to practice law in Fiji as a solicitor.

The cabinet of Qarase was made up of cons, thieves and murderers. They had no shame or fear. Several government ministers even changed the number plates on their government owned cars before selling the vehicles and pocketing the money. There was no accountability. The Qarase government ignored the military's demand that those involved in the 2000 coup should not be appointed to public office. Even more disturbing, they talked of pardons for all those jailed and involved with the coup.

Despite the Qarase atrocities on the finances of the country, tourism had prospered from the events of 9/11 and the attacks on New York and the Twin Towers, and then the Bali bombings. This made Fiji, with such a large Christian and low Muslim population, the favourite holiday destinations for frightened Australian and New Zealand travellers wishing for a safe haven.

However the people of Fiji would not benefit under Qarase. There was no investment in infrastructure, schools or hospitals. The roads deteriorated into a sorry state. There were no street lights to speak of, or basic services.

As then opposition leader Mahendar Chaundhry said, "When 50% of the people live in poverty or at risk of poverty, struggling to find one decent meal a day, when 100,000 people live in undignified hovels without piped water, electricity or sanitary facilities, when the young boys and girls are forced into prostitution to survive, it becomes a cause of serious alarm."

Kickbacks became the order of the day. Every government department was operating through corruption. Unless you paid a bribe, you didn't get what was legally your entitlement.



By this time I had adopted the adage, “if you can’t beat them, join them”. I had become bogged down with the corruption that was sweeping through the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB). Legitimate land leases were being ignored or blatantly cancelled. The NLTB management were not only ripping off the foreign investors, but also the landowners, the very people they were entrusted to protect.

I had experienced this first hand when the Deputy General Manager Semi Tabakanalagi had unlawfully acted to cancel a valid land lease I had bought for no other reason than a third party was willing to pay a bribe to obtain the land. I had a multi-million dollar investment threatened by one man’s refusal to act according to law.

On Navi’s advice, if I ever wanted to do business in Fiji, I needed to “get in tight” with the Qarase government. The first step, he suggested, was to hire as my advisors JRA Fiji, the advertising agency and public relations firm of the ruling SDL party.



One of the partners of this firm was Jale Baba who was the National Director of the SDL Party and the Chairman of the SDL Party Election Committee, and the right hand man to Prime Minister Qarase.

Jale Baba and his partner **Mohammad Salamat Ali** were retained as my consultants.

#### **New Labour SDL National Director, Jale Baba**

Jale would be my access to the Prime Minister and the cabinet, and Mohammad Salamat Ali was put in charge of arranging my work permit and all my business affairs that required government consideration.

Despite Jale Baba and I being opposed at the 2001 elections, he said he admired my marketing skills and the slick campaign we had run. He asked for some advice and guidance with the SDL campaign and I was flattered to be asked to assist.

Jale Baba would give me a letter of recognition, copied to the Prime Minister, saying how grateful the party was for “your valuable input during the election campaign”. In this letter he wrote to me dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 2006, he thanked me for my "constructive thoughts on re-election strategies", and went on to say that



“some of these suggestions had been adopted” which had helped the party win a second term. He also offered me support for my investment plans in Fiji.

I was also given an opportunity to personally endear myself to Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. Jale Baba told me that Qarase had taken an overdraft upwards of \$200,000 from the ANZ bank on behalf of the SDL party and had personally guaranteed it. Jale suggested that I should pay out the loan for Qarase in return for future favours.

It was shortly thereafter that I learned the election in 2006 was a farce, as was the previous election of 2001. Given that Navi, the master manipulator, was Chairman of the Election Committee for SDL, the election never stood a chance of being open, fair or transparent.

After calling the election Qarase refused to stand his government down, but allowed the Ministers to continue to use the government’s resources whilst they campaigned.

It was similar tactics to the \$30 million Agriculture scam Qarase used to win the previous election. This was an outrageous criminal misuse of public funds. It was a blatant bribe to buy votes. Tens of million of dollars of aluminium boats, outboard motors, tractors, etc., were given away to chiefs and influential people in the communities in return for them guaranteeing their village would be told to vote SDL.

I came upon a friend of mine the day she collected her free 100 hp Evinrude outboard motor. I was surprised, and said to her that I didn’t know she had moved from her farm in the mountains to live on the water. She replied she hadn’t moved, it just that they had ran out of tractors.

What many foreigners do not understand is that the average Fijians doesn’t vote for the candidate of their choice, but the person they are instructed to vote for by their chief, or their church minister from the pulpit on Sunday. After the President of the extremely influential Methodist Church (two-thirds of all Fijians are Methodists) had become a Minister in the Qarase government, every church congregation was instructed to vote SDL.

Qarase then set about winning the support of the Great Council of Chiefs. This is a most peculiar group of individuals that was established by the British, when they were colonial rulers, as an advisory body when Fiji was a British colony. The 52 members, mostly chiefs from around Fiji wield unquestionable authority and power in their districts. However, most are uneducated and have very rarely left their own village and have no insight into the outside world, government, finances or other issues of importance.



At a time when Fiji was suffering financial hardships, Qarase built them a \$20 million Fijian style palace in Suva. Navi said all the chiefs were good for was to come to Suva to “sleep with the young girls and drink kava”. To facilitate this, Qarase built them their luxury clubhouse.

Despite Qarase’s government having the resources to bribe and influence, Navi was still aware that there were ten marginal seats that could make or break the election. SDL held 31 of Parliament’s 71 seats, and governed in coalition with the hard line pro-Speight Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV) which had six seats, but two were unfilled as their members served coup related time in jail. Navi wasn’t taking any chances as he could sense that there was disharmony amongst the educated Fijians as to the extent of Qarase’s corruption.

I dined with Navi and Jale Baba at the Millennium restaurant near Nadi during the week of the election. Elections are held over several days to allow people to get to the polling stations from remote areas.

When Jale asked me if I had considered paying off the overdraft for Qarase, I said that I had no guarantee that he would be re-elected and that my \$200,000 could be wasted.

Navi and Jale laughed and assured me that the election was beyond doubt. Seeing that I needed convincing, they boasted that the ballot boxes had been rigged and it had been done right under the noses of the clueless observers and inspectors from the United Nations Fijian Electoral Observation Mission (UNFEOM).

For this to have been able to happen, blame must be shared by the Australian government.

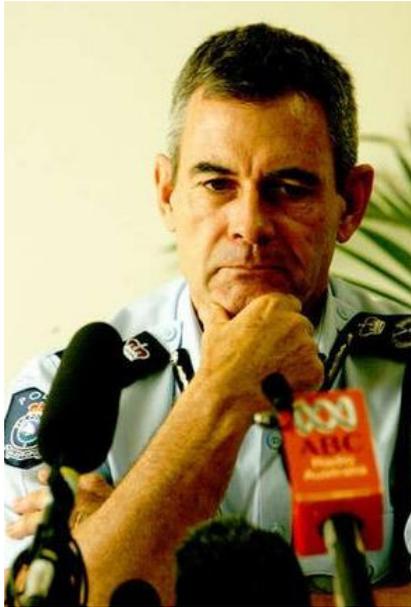
The John Howard Australian government was responsible for Qarase appointing an Australian to head the Royal Fiji Police force. The AFP nominated Andrew Hughes for the role of Fiji Commissioner of Police following a request by the Fijian Constitutional Officers Committee. It was just further evidence of the Australian government’s desire for control.

Inspector Hughes was the former deputy commissioner of the Australian Federal Police in the ACT. He was nicknamed James Bond by fellow Fijian police officers. He was so vain he thought it a compliment, when in reality they were taking the piss out of him for being so supercilious.

Defamation laws will not allow me to repeat what Navi told me. I will just state some facts. As to the role some people may have played, as to what they knew, as to whether they made bad judgement calls and nothing more sinister than that, as to whether they were hoodwinked by others, is a matter of personal opinion, of which I have none. The fact is though, the Police let Fiji down.



## POLICE ASSIST IN ELECTION RIGGING



Commander Frank Bainimarama publicly offered to have the army protect the integrity of the ballot boxes in conjunction with the police. Given the rumours of vote rigging in the 2001 election, this was a sensible proposal.

However, Inspector Hughes refused the military offer and would not allow them anywhere near the voting stations.

It would be the Police who would assist the Qarase government in tampering with the votes. They did more than turn a blind eye. It was the police officers who physically removed the seals on the ballot boxes.

### Fiji Police Commissioner Hughes

Navi had told the supervisor of elections, Semesa Karavaki, who colluded with SDL to cheat and rig the result, to print hundreds of thousands of extra ballot papers.

Having printed more ballot papers than necessary, they then stuffed the ballot boxes with false votes for SDL and removed votes for the other parties. The 10 marginal seats were all won by SDL. Qarase remained in power.

In the election, held on 6-13 May, the SDL won 44 percent of the popular vote (including 81 percent of the ethnic Fijian vote), and 36 out of 71 seats. All 23 Communal Constituencies allocated to indigenous Fijians were won by the SDL, most of them overwhelmingly; the party also won 13 of the 25 Open Constituencies elected by universal suffrage. The SDL failed to make any significant inroads into the Indo-Fijian community, polling barely 2 percent of the Indo-Fijian vote, and also lost the one minority voters' constituency it had held.

For any thinking person in Fiji, another five years of Qarase was just too much to contemplate. Those of us who knew were hoping that the Commander would make his move.

Meanwhile things were getting sticky for Navi. Former 2000 coup convict Maciu Navakasuasua, revealed a plot involving Navi and Konisi Yabaki to blow up Nadi Airport at a time when as Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry was transiting through the airport in 1999.



The names and information released to the Police by Maciu Navakasuasua was backed up by statements given by Josaia Waqabaca, who, like Navakasuasua, was hiding in Australia. These two, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for their illegal activities connected with the May 2000 coup, disclosed names of coup plotters and financiers with whom they had personal dealings.

Waqabaca had also implicated two senior ministers of the SDL government and had mentioned the involvement of Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, who was then serving as Fiji's High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea.

Navi asked me to come to the capital, Suva, and I met with him at L'Opera Italian restaurant. I entered the bar and was surprised to find Prime Minister Qarase also there. Navi suggested we talk privately in one of the private dining rooms,

Navi told me about the campaign *The Fiji Sun* newspaper was running against him and others involved with the 2000 coup. They had interviewed Josaia Waqabaca in Australia, and were determined to have him charged.

I asked him if Qarase would protect him. He replied, "He's having enough trouble protecting himself at the moment. In any events, these bastards soon forget who put them in power once they get a taste for it."

He said Qarase and the Attorney General Bale had assured him that he wouldn't go to jail. That the investigation would go nowhere and just to let it ride.

Navi, the master strategist, wasn't so confident. He didn't want to take any chances. He wanted Waqabaca and Navakasuasua killed and he wanted it done in Australia. Worse still, he wanted me to arrange it.

He said that he knew I had contacts in the underworld in Australia and wanted me to assist him with organising their murders. I tried to persuade him that those days of me having contacts amongst Sydney gangsters were far behind me, and in any event most of them were now feeding fish (dead), doing time or playing golf. I suggested that instead he should use "the old pal's act" to get the Attorney General to stop the investigation.

Navi explained that Inspector Hughes was under pressure from the media and former Prime Minister Mahendar Chaundhry to investigate the allegations. Hughes, at the request of Qarase, had been stalling for several months but couldn't stall much longer. Navi expected to be taken in for questioning within the next few days.



He showed me a letter written to the commissioner from Chaudhry , which read,

“Commissioner, as Leader of the Opposition and the principal victim of the 2000 coup, I am very concerned at the fact that the real leaders of the coup and their financiers have not been brought to justice. We all know who these people are. It seems very unfair that they should be allowed to escape the arm of the law because they are either people of standing in society or have very strong political connections.”

“It took the Police more than six months to send someone to take Navakasuasua’s statement from the time I initially informed you that he was prepared to provide valuable information to assist the Police bring to justice certain elements who have avoided investigation/persecution so far.”

“Navitilai Naisoro’s name has come up time and again – is he under investigation by the Police? If so, what is the present status of the investigation into his alleged close involvement in the coup and the destabilization campaign leading to it? What of Watisoni Nata of SAS Ltd. at Nadi Airport? Watisoni is the brother of coup convict Jo Nata.

What of the investigations into Isikia Savua and Ratu Inoke Kubuabola? I myself furnished information to the Police regarding these two which certainly provide a prima facie case against both.”

“Surely Qarase can put pressure on Hughes,” I asked.

“John Howard has Qarase by the balls and Hughes is doing the squeezing,” he said. “He’s John Howard’s appointment, he knows about Qarase’s links to the coup and all the corruption, the vote rigging and they know about money he has stashed away in Australia and New Zealand.”

It was then that I first saw how truly brilliant Navi was as a strategist.

“Things are starting to fall apart,” he said. “Qarase and Bainimarama are at each others throats. It’s getting ugly. Heads will roll.”

But Navi, as always, had a cunning plan. He was going to manipulate the situation to pit Hughes against Bainimarama and hope they took each other down.



“If Hughes has Bainimarama arrested when he is in Auckland, then he’ll have to leave Fiji as his life will be in danger by the military. With Hughes out of the picture, things can get back to normal and this investigation will drop. Qarase is stoking the fire with Hughes and he’s now become Qarase’s little pit bull.”

Navi said the alternative was to kill Hughes, if all else failed, but Qarase was against that idea, so he would have to arrange it without them being involved.

I was able to persuade Navi to sit back and wait and not pursue the plan to kill Waqabaca and Navakasuasua at this time. I agreed to immediately fly my Australian lawyer and barrister in to assist him should the police take him in for questioning.

A few days later, as Navi predicted, I received a phone call at 5 a.m. from him, telling me the police were outside his house. I woke Sean Cousins, my Australian barrister who had arrived from Australia the day previously in preparation. He was staying at my house to be available at any time. The time was now.

Sean advised Navi to let them in, say nothing, and that he was on the way. Navi was interviewed and would ultimately be charged. My Fijian lawyer, Faizel Koya would represent him. This singled that Navi’s days as the master manipulator were coming to an end.

Meanwhile JRA Fiji attempted to have my land lease resolved. They certainly had influence. On the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2006, Jale Baba wrote to the Prime Minister seeking his assistance to have the NLTB act lawfully and do as they had been directed.

Less than a week later, on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2006 JRA wrote me to me advising that, “the Prime Minister was rather concerned about the inaction of the (NLTB) management...” and promising action and that, “The Minister also reaffirmed that the lease will be reinstated.”

We were told to start building our resort as our agreement to lease was binding.

For that letter, I was handed a bill from JRA Fiji for \$75,000. Clearly the fee was not for the drafting of a letter but an intended kickback to the Prime Minister.

For the country’s sake, something had to change.



## THE 2006 MILITARY COUP

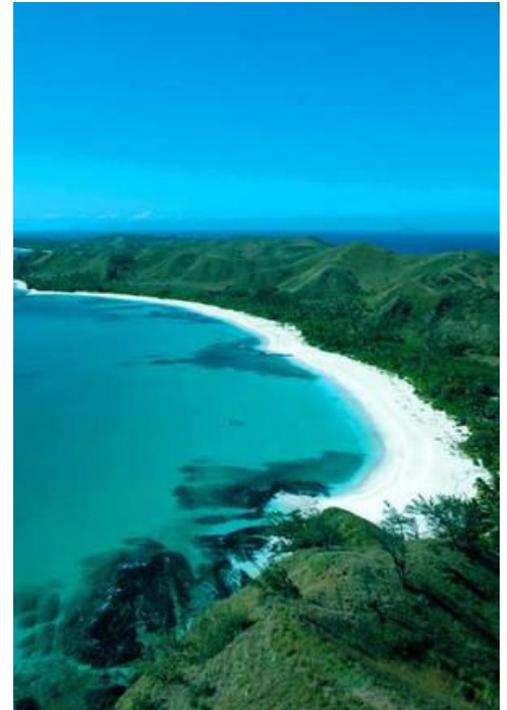
---

Having won the election in May, the Qarase government became ever more arrogant and brazen with its dishonesty. Relations between Qarase and the military were at an all time low.

In an attempt to expose the corruption within the NLTB, my local Fijian partner had filed a suit in the High Court.

The unlawful actions of the NLTB were motivated by nothing more complicated than corruption. The High Court action was to stop their insanity and hold them accountable.

I first saw the land that lies at the heart of this matter in 2000 when I cruised the Yasawa Islands. It is a magnificent bay at the northern most island in the Yasawa group of islands.



I would become friends with a New Zealand businessman who had the only house on the island and he would allow my family and I to stay there. We would spend weeks at a time on the island and would become very friendly with the villagers. We would buy them clothes, food, toys and educational instruments for their children, medicines and do whatever we could to improve their quality of life. I think it is best summarised by the fact that in gratitude Ben Tui, our house boy, would name his youngest son, Peter, in honour of me. This had to be approved by the Chiefs and I was very humbled.

During these visits the tribal leaders would approach me and sit around a kava bowl until late in the night and tell me of their woes. They had entered into an agreement with my then-friend to develop their land, but after 10 years they had seen no development, and no money.

They explained that the old people were dying, the young people were growing up, and their only asset was not bringing them any financial benefit. They felt they had been exploited.

The New Zealand man would ask me to do a joint venture with him on developing the land and build a resort. However I learnt that he had entered into the normal Native Land Trust Board lease. This would see that the landowners family, (in Fiji called the “mataqali”) given only 2% of the profits of any development.



I was horrified at this abuse of uneducated people and the exploitation of their only asset, their ancestral land. In early 2001 I met with the then Manager of the NLTB West Office, **Semi Tabakanalagi** to discuss the project further and to see if there was a way a better deal could be made for the landowners.

I never saw myself as a money hungry land developer who wanted to make his fortune out of Fiji. I made my money from health products. I saw Fiji as a place to make a wonderful way of life, that just happened to also produce a financial benefit. I also wanted to be 50%-50% partners with the landowners.

My belief was that for long term success, you needed to approach the relationship with the landowners like a marriage. If both parties did the right thing, and shared 50/50, then it had the potential for success. However if the foreigner got 98%, and only gave the villagers a measly 2%, it would create problems either for me, or perhaps my son or grandchildren – you could not sustain a 99 year lease from generation to generation build upon exploitation. Richard Evanson, the owner of Turtle Island had, during the 2000 coup seen his guests and him removed from the island at gun-point by the original landowners for that very reason – they felt they were exploited and getting next to nothing when he was selling accommodation for \$2000 a night.

My proposal to Semi Tabakanalagi to share 50%-50% with the landowners caused him great anxiety. He said if I did that, it would create a bad precedent that all Fijians landowners would want and would and destroy the NLTB current arrangement that involved thousands of leases. He said it would affect all future tourist developments.

I argued that was a good thing, that the current arrangement was wrong. I said tourist operators would never go broke making a profit, and 50% of a profit was still a profit, and that they had to remember that they got the lease in the first place for a nominal fee – a few hundred thousand dollars , but had they bought the land they would have to pay tens of millions of dollars and have interest payments that would take a chunk out of their 98% in any event. He was unmoved.

I was to learn that Semi Tabakanalagi was corrupt and rather than using his position at the NLTB to protect and advise the uneducated native landowners in their dealings with foreigners, he was only interested in doing the best deal he could for the foreign investor. Many foreign investors would tell me how they had paid Semi bribes, and given him overseas holidays and gifts. In fact I would witness one cash payment made to Semi at Chef's Restaurant in Nadi in 2001.



This is of relevance as this why I became *persona non grata* with Semi Tabakanalagi at the NLTB. This would be the reason that he would attempt to unlawfully terminate my lease in 2006 when he heard I had agreed to do a 50%-50% joint venture with Jone Tui and his mataqali.

We would obtain and submit to the NLTB six independent legal opinions, stating that attempts by the NLTB to cancel the lease were unlawful. Furthermore, the NLTB's own lawyer Mr Kitone Vuataki of Vuataki Qoro Lawyers advised them after reading the brief that they were in the wrong and the lease could not be cancelled, nor could an offer to lease be made to a third party. The NLTB's response was simply to sack their lawyers.

Even the Chairman of the NLTB, the Honourable Naiqama Lalabalavu MP, (a former coup perpetrator released from jail) who was the Minister for Fijian Affairs, saw that what the NLTB was doing was just too blatantly illegal, which is saying something given his past. He advised the NLTB board that the termination was unlawful and instructed them to reinstate our lease. Yet, his underling, the Deputy General Manager of the NLTB, Semi Tabakanalagi refused to follow the directive and took a \$300,000 payment from a third party for the lease.

Navi arranged a meeting between me and NLTB Western Division Manager Solo Nata and NLTB Deputy General Manager Semi Tabakanalagi.

Solo's pedigree was not encouraging. His two older brothers were involved in the 2000 coup. Joe Nata was in prison and Watisoni Nata was under investigation with Navi over a plot to blow up the airport. Solo Nata was supporting their families through his illegal practices at the NLTB.

The upshot was their demand was that if I gave them a \$600,000 kickback, they would reinstate the lease I already owned.

I then met with Mohammad Salamat Ali and Jale Baba in their boardroom offices of JRA Fiji, to discuss the proposed kickback.

"Why \$600,000" I asked. "The other guy has only paid them \$300,000 to try and steal the lease from me."

Ali replied, "They have to give him the \$300,000 back, then there's \$100,000 for the Prime Minister, \$100,000 for Semi and Solo, and \$100,000 for Jale and me. Once that's paid, Qarase will order it reinstated."

I said that Qarase may not be Prime Minister too long the way the Commander was talking.

Ali said, "When he leaves the country next, he won't return."





**Mohammad Salamat Ali**

“How can you be so certain,” I asked.

“Hughes is going to have him arrested,” he said. “Jale just came back from a meeting with the PM, Navi and the Attorney General. It’s all been agreed that he’ll be arrested for sedition when he goes to New Zealand.”

Ali said that if that failed there was a plan to kill the Commander.

Corruption had just become second nature and was now way out of control. It became clear to me that the only seemingly honest man left in some form of authority in Fiji was the man they were all criticising, Commander Frank Bainimarama.

All he was trying to do was root out the corruption. All the others were plotting to do was to do away with him and be allowed to continue with their robbing and roting and pardon the coup perpetrators, including George Speight.

It occurred to me that I was only one of a number of hundreds of people being treated unfairly by the out of control NLTB management. I was simply fed up with the corruption within the NLTB specifically by its Deputy General Manager Semi Tabakanalagi, and the government that condoned it.

I decided to draw a line in the sand and refused to pay JRA consultants the \$75,000 fee for the letter to the Prime Minister or the \$200,000 overdraft for Qarase, or the additional \$600,000 to buy back my lease which I already owned. I would take my chances in the High Court. Surely there was one last bastion of honesty and integrity remaining in Fiji.

It was one thing to hire lobbyists to put your position to people in power, but it was another to pay blatant bribes. To do so would be just to feed the corruption and become part of the problem.

I decided there and then that I would pick up where I left off in 2001, try and expose the Qarase government’s corruption and how it had affected every branch of administration, and see a truly democratically elected government installed. I had invested over a million dollars in 2001 hoping that New Labour Unity Party and Dr Baba could defeat those who surfaced from Speight’s coup.



I would rather channel money into promoting democracy than paying bribes and being associated with those who plotted murders for political gain.

I told Mohammad Salamat Ali that I was no longer going to use his services and that I had to rethink my position in Fiji.

For the first time, in a long time, I was now on my own in Fiji and became a little worried. I rang Navi and told him what I had done in cutting off all ties with Ali and JRA Fiji, and in effect SDL and the government. I told him I couldn't stomach being around them a moment longer, although he was the architect of all that disgusted me.

It was apparent Navi was also starting to feel he was on his own. He was talking of going to visit some of his children in the USA for a while until things sorted themselves out. He said he's obtained a second passport, anticipating that he may have to surrender his passport if charged.

Clearly Navi wasn't as confident as Ali, Jale Baba, Qarase and the others that the Commander could be outflanked.

"He's a military man," Navi said. "He's a warrior, these other guys are just pen pushers. They are in for a surprise, a nasty surprise."

My first step to "out them all" was to covertly send out press releases through the internet aiming to expose the NLTB's dishonesty.

I grossly underestimated my enemy. What happened next still amazes me...

## THE HUNTER BECOMES THE HUNTED



A matter of days later, in early October 2006 I woke up to see it reported in *The Fiji Times* newspaper and other Fiji media organisations that I was under Police investigation for allegedly defaming a senior manager at the Native Land Trust Board, accusing the organisation of corruption and dishonesty.

How this could possibly be a criminal investigation was beyond me, but that didn't deter the Australian appointed Commissioner of the Fiji Police, Inspector Hughes from issuing a search warrant on my house and naming me as a suspect.



This was the same copper who took over six months to send someone to take Navakasua's statement in relation to the plan to blow up the airport and the financiers behind the coup, but acted within 24 hours to try and arrest me on the most minor allegations of defamation of the most corrupt organisation in Fiji, the NLTB. When did defamation become a criminal offence?

Hughes was driven, but only in my direction. Instead of investigating the serious allegations of NLTB corruption, on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006 police raided my house, together with an Immigration official. The government also purported to cancel my residency permit and it was their intention to expel me from Fiji. Clearly my attempts to expose the corruption was being thwarted by the police.

Hughes was so keen to discredit me, that the morning of the police raid, before the Police had even arrived on my door step, he was speaking on BULA FM radio news telling how he had sent a squad to my house. I happened to be driving in my car back from the bakery with the bread and newspapers when I heard the news bulletin, and was able to turn around and go into hiding to allow my lawyers time to sort it out. I had millions of dollars invested in Fiji and I wasn't going to be hustled out of the country without putting up a fight.

I was able to speak to Steve Mc Culley, an Australian journalist working at *The Fiji Times*. He said the Police were trying to link me to reports published in his newspaper defaming a developer by linking him to a gay resort.

*The Fiji Times* had originally published the article in question, but at no time did they have any direct or indirect dealings with me but was supplied the information by Mohammad Salamat Ali. Steve Mc Culley said that he was surprised I was named as the instigator and singled out for investigation.

*The Fiji Times* subsequently published an apology to the man who was defamed. The paper attributed the blame entirely at the feet of Mohammad Salamat Ali. There was no evidence of my knowledge or involvement and ultimately the Fiji Police did not interview me over this matter even although they publicly stated on numerous occasions that they wished to question me.

I now knew that Mohammad Salamat Ali was behind the accusations levelled at me and the SDL government had me in their sights. Despite my lawyers lodging an appeal against the cancellation of my residency permit, the Minister for Immigration blatantly stated in *The Fiji Times* that he would read my appeal documents, but didn't care what it said, he was going to expel me no matter what. He didn't even pretend that he would make a lawful decision on the facts or grant me natural justice. Clearly word had gotten out that I was out to expose the government and I had to be silenced.



It turned out that Ali had a brother in the Fiji Police Force. From the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 he would send me text threats saying that he had met with the police at his house and unless I paid him the money he demanded, I would “rot in jail”.

In late October 2006, after three weeks of hiding and lying low, and unable to wait any longer for the lawyers to get an appointment with the Minister for Immigration or the police to clear me of any wrongdoing, I planned to flee Fiji in a boat for Tonga and then catch a plane to Australia.



**Peter Foster arrested at Pacific Harbour**

However, I would be betrayed, and as I went to board the vessel, was arrested by members of the Armed Tactical Response Team of the Royal Fiji Police.

Seeing they were carrying guns, I dived into the river and hoped for the best. The police circled me in a small boat and we had a swim-off for thirty minutes whilst I treaded water and dived under their boat as they approached.

Totally frustrated by my refusal to surrender, one policeman tried to smash me with the boat anchor, and then clubbed me, like a seal, over the head with an oar. Fortunately I didn't lose consciousness until reaching the shoreline. Bleeding profusely, I was bundled wearing only my underpants into the back of a red utility, an image I would rather forget, but never will be able to, as it was broadcast around the world.

I was hospitalised for 12 days, and I was in a critical condition for the first 24 hours. The gash on my head required 28 stitches.

The Fiji Police would state that I had suffered the injuries by being accidentally struck on the head by the propeller of their small motor boat. They lied. That one policeman would lie to cover his wrongdoing is nothing new. That eight fellow officers would corroborate his story spoke volumes about the corruption in Fiji, and deeply troubled me about its future.

The following day *The Fiji Times* was contacted by numerous members of the public who were eye witnesses and hotly disputed the Police version of events. Dozens of witnesses stated that a member of the Fiji Police intentionally smashed a large heavy wooden oar over my head whilst I was offering no physical resistance to the Police. One man stated he was yelling to the Police, “Stop, don't kill him”. Others stated that they feared I would be killed and all



concluded that the force used by the Police to arrest an unarmed man was excessive and unnecessary.

From my hospital bed, I went on a hunger strike demanding an enquiry. After several days the Director of Police Professional Standards Unit, SSP Armogam Goundar confirmed that the police team that me were being investigated for police brutality after several witnesses accounts matched mine.



After being released from hospital I was immediately taken in for questioning by the Police, over allegedly falsifying my work permit application.

This was just another ruse to get me thrown out of the country by Ali and the Qarase government.

It soon became clear Ali was behind this as it was he and he alone who dealt with my work permit application.

I had kept the text threats from Ali. They are on a SIM card for my mobile phone that was seized by the Fiji Police at the time of my arrest. I would tell Inspector Puran of the existence of these threats and blackmail and how the evidence would be found on the SIM card, but he showed no interest in pursuing this angle. I was to later learn that Inspector Puran was also rotten to the core.



I appeared in the Suva Magistrates Court on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2006 and was granted bail that required me to reside at JJ's Hotel in Suva, under 24 hour Police guard.

But not until after spending one night in Suva's infamous remand jail. Rats the size of Alfie Langer ran around the cell at night, and open sewerage spilt into the court yard. It was a jail that had been condemned by Human Rights inspectors as being unfit for human habitation. If I hadn't obtained bail, I doubt I would have survived long term.



The only bright light for me, and the country, was the possibility of a military coup. However Australia, whilst not prepared to entertain Prime Minister Qarase's requests for military assistance, did their best to intimidate Commander Bainimarama and instil fear into the Fijian public.

In late November 2006, Australian Prime Minister John Howard stationed three Australian warships, with at least 100 soldiers on board, inside Fijian waters. A number of men, possibly SAS troops, were stationed in the Australian High Commission in Suva after secretly entering the country on November 3 with a cache of communications gear and weapons.

Howard also convened a meeting of Pacific Islands Forum foreign ministers to adopt the so-called Biketawa Declaration authorising a potential Australian-led intervention. This measure—backed by the then opposition Australian Labor Party—played a central role in destabilising the Fijian government by heightening the antagonisms between Qarase and Bainimarama. Fiji's police commissioner at the time, Andrew Hughes, similarly inflamed the situation by threatening to arrest Bainimarama.

Inspector Hughes having pledged to stand and fight, fled Fiji in the middle of the night a couple of days before the coup. In one of the more comical moments, he flew to Cairns in North Queensland where he told the media gathered around his hotel swimming pool that he was still the Fiji Commissioner of Police and in control.

The Howard government would reward Hughes for his loyalty by obtaining for him the position of Chief of the United Nations Police. Like the Fiji Police commissioner Colonel Isikia Savua before him, no bad deed goes unrewarded.

Within days of the coup, I was approached at my hotel by members of Fiji Military Intelligence to assist them in their "corruption clean up campaign". I repeatedly declined to become involved. They knew that I was witness to the corruption of the SDL government. They also knew I was trying to expose the corruption of the NLTB when the allegations were made against me and I went into hiding. They had seen the letter from Jale Baba thanking me for my assistance and knew that I had gained an insight, not seen by outsiders.

One evening I received a telephone call in my hotel room from a military officer who only identified himself as Fred. He said he was waiting down stairs in the lobby and wanted to see me. When I ventured down he told me that a dark blue car would be arriving out the front and I was to hop in the back seat. I said that I couldn't as I had a police guard and would be in breach of my bail if I left the lobby. He told me not to worry about the police officer, he would keep him busy.



A dark blue CRV pulled up with two military officers in uniform sitting in the front and the windows blacked out in the rear. Another vehicle with armed soldiers pulled in behind it.

The rear door opened and the first thing I saw was an automatic rifle laying between an officer and the space I assumed was for me to sit.

He introduced himself as Colonel Mara, the son of the former President who had been threatened at gunpoint by Speight. He told me they had seen the letter from Jale Baba and he knew from their intelligence that I was very close to Navi Nasori. He also knew that Navi met every Sunday with Prime Minister Qarase, Jale Baba and the Attorney General Bale, to discuss government business.

He said that he knew I was disenchanted with the Qarase government and said that they wanted my assistance to expose them. I asked to sleep on it.

The next day a Lieutenant Patti came to the hotel unannounced. He was a fine young man, in his late 20's, who had completed his military training at Sandhurst in England.

I was waiting for him to explain the purpose of his visit, when he pulled out his mobile phone and made a call. Once it answered, he handed me the phone and simply said the Commander was on the phone and wanted to speak with me.

Commander Frank Bainimarama was at this time the acting President, having only removed the Qarase government a week earlier. He asked me if I had thought about what Colonel Mara said and if I was prepared to assist him expose the corruption that was suffocating Fiji.

We spoke for about 10 minutes. He was very polite and had a gentle manner on the telephone. He was prepared to listen and fully understood my fears for my safety and the safety of my family if I became involved and was exposed.

It is hard to explain why, but something told me he was genuine. He was sincere in his desire to demonstrate to the world just how crooked the Qarase government had been. I knew it, he knew it, we just needed others to know it.

I decided to take one step and see how it panned out. In many respects I was motivated by my own self interest as I wanted to clear my name, and I wanted to know why Ali had lied about me altering my work permit. To do that I needed to speak to Jale Baba.

The following day I arranged under the instructions and guidance of Fiji Military Intelligence to covertly video record Jale Baba who was still the high profile National Director and Campaign Manager of the deposed SDL party.





**Video camera hidden in cabinet at far left**

In my room at JJ's Hotel technicians from the military installed a video camera in a television cabinet, which they could monitor from the adjoining room. I invited Jale up to my room that evening to discuss the coup and get an update as to what was happening with Qarase and the ministers.

Jale arrived at about 9 p.m. after visiting with several former ministers of the government and speaking on the telephone with deposed Prime Minister Qarase. We sat in front of the TV cabinet and I poured wine liberally and we ate leisurely from an elaborate cheese platter. Jale was very talkative and although exhausted from the events of the military takeover, seemed in no hurry to leave.

In more stunning revelations than I could ever hope for, he firstly admits that I was not responsible for falsifying the work permit, which was the offence with which I had been charged and granted bail.

Jale admitted his partner, Mohammad Salamat Ali, forged the criminal history without my knowledge and that Ali had told him to lie in a Police statement in an attempt to frame me. Jale would eventually sign an affidavit confirming that he lied and I was innocent of the allegations.<sup>1</sup>

He was not apologetic. He was not in the least bit sorry for his actions. The fact that I could have gone to jail meant nothing to him. It was just business. Dirty business. That's the way the government did things. You were either with them, or against them. When I chose not to pay the kickbacks, I was against them, and the assistance and guidance I gave them during the election meant nothing.

"I could have gone to jail," I said.

"So what, we all could go to jail. Qarase, me, Navi, the bloody cabinet, we all could go to jail," he replied.

<sup>1</sup> See Affidavit of Jale Baba dated 21.12.2006



He then went on and said when speaking of the Qarase cabinet, “all of them are corrupt”. When I asked about Qarase, he said, “he’s the biggest crook of the lot.”

He explained that is why they were chosen to be ministers, because they were corrupt. They were selected solely for their ability to be dishonest. After all, Navi was the Chairman of the SDL Candidate Selection Committee.

This was stunning evidence to obtain as this was the face of the government speaking, and it was all captured on video.

He was not only Prime Minister Qarase’s right hand man, but he was his official spokesman, and was the national director of the party and the campaign manager. Next to Navi, and the Attorney General Bale, no one else was more influential or a bigger insider.

Later that evening Lieutenant Patti and other military personnel sat in my room and watched the video be played back. It was dynamite. They knew that I was the key to getting all the evidence against Qarase and his cronies.

The following morning I spoke again to the Commander on the telephone. He congratulated me on capturing Jale Baba on DVD and thanked me for being involved. I said that I was prepared to continue to assist him, however I was on bail to the hotel and couldn’t leave the premises. If I was to try and covertly tape up the other members of the former Qarase government I needed to be able to move around and meet them in their own environment.

He said to leave it to him and he would get back to me. That afternoon representatives of the military went and saw the Magistrate in chambers and advised him that they were going to take me into their custody. *Operation Free Fiji* was born and I was its main operative.

That evening I was escorted on the three hour drive from Suva back to my home at Denarau, near Nadi, by a mini van with six police officers and two carloads of soldiers. I was told that I would have eight armed soldiers protecting me 24/7. Lieutenant Patti became my Team Leader in this covert operation and the liaison between the Commander and me and would stay by my side for the next four weeks.

He positioned two heavily armed snipers outside my house day and night. I would be accompanied by soldiers every time I stepped outside the house.

Once home I was able to telephone Navi and tell him that my lawyer had my bail varied to allow me to return to Denarau. He was delighted and we agreed to meet the next day for lunch.





We chose the Hilton Hotel at Denarau for our luncheon.

Lieutenant Patti went and saw the manager of the hotel and arranged for his soldiers to dress in hotel security guard uniforms.

This in itself posed problems. The security guards were mostly Indians, and were of a tall slim build.

The Fijian soldiers were barrel chested with arms like coconut trunks. To see them try and squeeze into these tiny uniforms was one of the lighter moments of a very intense and stressful time.

Navi and I sat at the top left hand table near the pool. Two soldiers dressed as civilians were at the table nearest to us. Four others were disguised as hotel security.

Navi and I would spend the next five days together, having every lunch and dinner. I had a mini DVD camera sewn into a man handbag which I carried.

Lieutenant Patti created a panic signal in the event that Navi twigged that I was carrying a video recorder and microphone. If I was in trouble I was to accidentally knock the wine bottle over and hit the floor. That would be the signal for the soldiers to swing into action and take Navi down. I almost trembled every time I poured the wine, fearing I would accidentally drop it and cause all hell to break loose.

During those days we talked about everything. Navi is a massive drinker. Most probably an alcoholic. Lunch would turn into dinner and I would rarely get home before midnight. I would be up at 5 a.m. and start transcribing the tapes with two other military officers. At noon, I would meet Navi again and repeat the whole process.

Navi confirmed in these covertly video recordings that Prime Minister Qarase was deeply dishonest and corrupt, as were all his ministers. The election in 2001 was rigged against Dr Baba's New Labour Unity Party because they knew that a coalition would be formed with the Labour party to create government. Dr Baba had won his seat in Suva, Navi told me, but they had fixed the result against him.

Navi also confirmed that the 2006 elections were rigged with 10 seats targeted.



On the video recording, I am surprised at such a crude attempt to rot the electoral system.

"If I did it, I'd get 10 years prison," I said. "Why didn't anyone investigate it?"

Navi replied: "Because they're all into it...all of them".

I asked why the police didn't stop it. He replied it was the police who did it for them.

He also confirmed that Qarase had millions of dollars stashed in Australia and New Zealand bank accounts and with the Habib Bank in Pakistan.

His accusations of corruption included ministers from the Methodist church and the Great Council of Chiefs as well as virtually every minister in Qarase's government.

He explained that is why they were chosen by him in his capacity of chairman of the SDL candidate selection committee in the first place, because they were all corruptible.

Navi was dismissive of Qarase's ministers, as demonstrated by this extract from one transcript.

**FOSTER** Are there any of the ministers, if we put a company together with you involved, are there any one of them we can actually bring on board to give us credibility?

**NAISORO** I have more credibility than the whole bunch of them together. I never went through the same thing. These people are all unemployable.

**FOSTER** You think they are all finished?

**NAISORO** Finished.

When I asked if he (Naisoro) thought any of the deposed ministers were going to get into another government, he said: "I wouldn't use them, they are idiots, they are broke."

**FOSTER** Why?

**NAISORO** They are all broke, they will be headaches, they are imbeciles.

**FOSTER** So why did you make them ministers if they are imbeciles?

**NAISORO** Because they are imbeciles and you can control them.



**FOSTER** So you can control them so you make them ministers?

**NAISORO** Yes.

**FOSTER** Why?

**NAISORO** Because you can control them.

Most interestingly, Navi said the coup by the Commander was the best thing that could happen to Fiji. I asked why, and he explained, “He’s an honest guy. Most men are too stupid to be corrupt, he’s just too honest. He’ll be good for Fiji, you need a cyclone to come along every so often and clear away the rubbish. This is it, cyclone Frank,” he laughed.

Speaking of Qarase and the government, Navi said, “They went too far. Too greedy. Didn’t care about the people. They stopped listening to what I was trying to tell them, they forgot who put them there. ”

This was a staggering admission by a man who had been the power behind the throne for more than 20 years. Navi knew when the game was almost up.

After a few days Lieutenant Patti and I flew to Suva to meet the Commander to discuss face to face what I had obtained.

We arrived at his home about 2 p.m., just as five 4WD vehicles full of heavily armed soldiers pulled up. The commander was buried amongst them. He had travelled by road back from Nadi to Suva, having met his daughter at the airport after she flew in from New Zealand for Christmas. I counted more than 20 armed soldiers around him.

The Commander guided me into a very pleasant room which may have been a breakfast room. To my surprise, we were alone. No bodyguards followed us. It was just the commander and me sitting on a lounge chatting like old friends. I had been told he had allocated 15 minutes for our meeting. We would talk for closer to 45 minutes.

He reminded me of my idol, the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, the legendry Muhammad Ali. The first time I met Muhammad Ali privately he was so unlike what I had anticipated. He was strong and powerful, but he was also humble and decent. He was also very kind and considerate, nothing like his public image of a braggart.

The Commander was the same, more of a kindly grandfather than a military man to be feared. He was keen to listen. I told him of what I had obtained from Navi and gave him a copy of the DVD and the transcript.



I said to him, “You were right all along. The world needs to know the truth. You have to get the message out so CNN, BBC, ABC, people all around the world know what you did was for the right reasons, that this was the coup Fiji needed to have.”

The Commander asked me to suggest how we should release the information to the media. I told him that I had spoken to my friend, Matt Condon at the Brisbane Courier-Mail newspaper and he proposed that it should be released over several days, not all at once. I said I should first go and see more former ministers, and if possible, Qarase himself. Then once I had covertly taped everyone possible, then he could release it. We agreed that New Years Day would be best.

The Commander said he had viewed the Jale Baba DVD recording which confirmed what I had stated to Police, that I was not guilty of falsifying my work permit or and that he I had been set- up by Mohammad Salamat Ali.

The Commander said that the military appointed Police Commissioner had agreed to ask the DPP for a *nollie prosequi* to be entered into, which effectively means I had no case to answer and the charges against me are withdrawn.

I left the meeting with great respect for the Commander. I could see he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. He was being heavily criticised for the coup, for all the wrong reasons.

I returned to my home at Denarau determined to continue the covert recording of conversations and provide the commander with the evidence he required to show the world.

However, a day or so later the DPP brought a writ of *habeas corpus* (produce the body) and the Court ordered that the military return me to JJ's On The Park hotel in Suva. Despite the request by the Police Commissioner, the DPP refused to withdraw the charges notwithstanding the evidence of my innocence, stating that they did not recognise the military appointed acting Police Commissioner.

Clearly there was a hidden agenda. It appeared as though the DPP were acting on instructions from someone within the previous government in an attempt to stop me working for the military.

Lieutenant Patti and I flew back to Suva and I was escorted back to the hotel at about 3 p.m so as to comply with the Court's order.



I couldn't work out who was responsible for going to court to get an order that would seemingly get me away from the military. Lieutenant Patti told me to wait at the hotel and he would go and see the commander personally and see what action could be taken.

I sat in the bar with only one unarmed policeman guarding me. Having had heavily armed soldiers with me every inch of the way the previous week, I felt very vulnerable. If the DPP knew what I had been doing for the military, then everyone would know.

I was hoping that the bar at JJ's hotel, being such a public open place would provide a certain safety.

It wasn't long after Lieutenant Patti left that a white man, obviously an Australian by his accent, came and sat next to me. He said, "I understand you have been able to see the commander face to face without anyone else present".

I said, "Do I know you?"

He replied, "Come on, you know very well we're Federal Police"

I replied, "I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about."

He sat back and smiled. He then said, "For a conman you're a lousy liar."

"Can I see some identification," I asked.

"I'm not here in a formal capacity. When are you seeing Frank again"

"Frank who?" I asked, feigning ignorance.

"Look Peter. If I had my way you'd be in handcuffs. I'm offering you a life raft here. You're going to want to come home one day after you're tired of flitting around the pacific, and when you do you don't want any nasty surprises awaiting you. If you want to assist us, life for you and your family will be a lot less complicated. "

I asked, "Assist you how, doing what?"

"The current situation cannot be allowed to continue. Certain people need to be decommissioned."

"What do you mean decommissioned, like a navy warship is decommissioned, is that what're you're saying, like killed, you want the commodore of the navy, Commander Bainimarama decommissioned, killed?" I asked.



“That’s not a subject for discussion right now. But if you follow events in the Middle East, you’ll understand that people can be removed from a position of influence without the need to be killed.”

“What are you talking about, poison, or something. Inducing a coma, what? ” I asked.

“There’s no need for us to go into specifics now.”

“Are you responsible for me being brought back here?”

“It was the only way we could get to talk to you without your army buddies.”

“Well, I think they will be back any minute now,” I said.

“They won’t be back for an hour or so, and if they do, we’re just old friends having a chat and a drink.”

“We have nothing to chat about,” I said.

“We can either chat here and now, or the next time I see you I’ll be arresting you,” he said.

“For what, not wanting to help you kill the Commander,” I replied. “The press will love that one.”

“Or maybe the next time I’ll see you, you’ll be on life support.”

I would like to say I wasn’t scared, but I nearly wet myself. It struck me that I was in deeper than I ever imagined. I could so easily have been killed when the police clubbed me in the river at Pacific Harbour. Had there not been dozens of witnesses on the bridge, I may have been recorded as a death by drowning.

“I have to call my Mum, she’s expecting me home soon,” I said, and walked to the other side of the bar and dialled Lieutenant Patti’s number instead.

He was still waiting outside the Commander’s office waiting to see him. Once I explained the conversation with the Australian, he told me not to move and that he would have someone join me.

Less than ten minutes later two soldiers, wearing civilian clothes, came and sat down next to me at the bar. They faced the Australian and held his stare. To my surprise the Australian didn’t seem intimidated or make a move to leave.

A few minutes later my mobile rang. It was the Commander. He had been briefed by Lieutenant Patti and told me not to be scared. He said I was to stay at the bar and not move. He said he would take care of everything, just to relax.



I sat at the bar with Peter Massey, the owner of JJ's Hotel on the Park. The Australian remained in the corner having been joined by another man who also looked like a copper. The cheap haircut is a dead giveaway.

At about 8 p.m, the restaurant was a buzz of activity. It was very close to Christmas and office workers were celebrating, coup or no coup. I had my back to the entrance, but didn't need to look to know what was happening. Within seconds, a silence fell upon the crowded bar and restaurant. You could hear the beer taps drip.

I turned to see what everyone else was staring at. Marching across the hallway was Lieutenant Patti, in military greens, with eight heavily armed soldiers. He approached me, and in a loud clear voice, he said, "Are you Peter Foster?"

I beamed with absolute delight.

"Yes, I am."

"Peter Foster, you are under military arrest. Please come with me."

I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. I turned to look at the Australian and his colleague, but just caught their backs as they headed for the nearest exit.

Lieutenant Patti then lent closer and whispered, "Will you look serious, most people are terrified about now."

The little policeman look terrified enough for both of us. The military grabbed him by the arms and bundled him outside. The military took me and my little copper away to Queen Elizabeth army barracks.

Once we arrived at the barracks, we drove to the rear exit where a civilian car waited to take me the three hour journey back to my home at Denarau.

I asked what was going to happen to my policeman.

"We'll just drive him around for three or four hours until you get home safely, so he can't alert anyone, then when we're safe in your house, we'll let him go," Lieutenant Patti said.

I approached the policeman and handed him fifty dollars.

"Don't worry, they won't hurt you. You'll be home with your family for breakfast," I assured him.

A wave of relief flooded across his face. This wasn't the worst day of his life after all. And \$50 was more than a week's salary to him.



The following day The Fiji Times would publish the story that the Police had confirmed what had happened and had even made a formal complaint against the military for detaining their Police officer and taking him to the army barracks.

I was able to convince Navi that I had been taken to Queen Elizabeth barracks, and released after being interrogated, having said nothing.

The next day I recommenced my covert recordings with Navi and other SDL party members and ministers.

It was during this time that Navi said there was a plot in the making to kill the Commander. He said that there was a faction in the military that was still supportive of Qarase.

I asked him when he thought this would go down, and he nominated New Years day. He explained that it is a significant day in Fijians' lives, a new beginning and it would be symbolic. It was the Fiji way, to have these events on symbolic days, like the Speight coup.

I wondered if the Commander had a leak in his office, as January 1 was also the day we had earmarked to release the first of the covertly recorded DVD's to expose the previous government's corruption.

Lieutenant Patti telephoned the Commander and warned him of the possible assassination plot and the date to be aware of, suggesting the obvious, that security around him be increased.

A couple days ahead of the January 1 release date, the Commander released to the media the first of the covert video recordings I had obtained. It created a furore. This first DVD showed Navi admitting that the 2006 general elections had been rigged. He admitted the vote rigging was accomplished with the assistance of members of the Fiji Police by the tampering with ballot boxes in 10 constituencies.

The evidence was widely reported and published with seemingly no consideration of the necessity for my involvement to remain anonymous. I had been publicly exposed and I now wondered how I could ever expect to be safe in Fiji, notwithstanding how many soldiers were guarding me. *Operation Free Fiji* alleged criminal wrongdoing by not only members of the previous government but also members of the Fiji Police.

The other video recordings which were to be released over several days contained evidence of dishonesty and corruption of former Prime Minister Qarase as well as numerous former government ministers, members of the



powerful Great Council of Chiefs, members of the influential Methodist Church, and included allegations of millions of dollars stashed away in foreign bank accounts, extortion, blackmail and even conspiracy to murder.

It was apparent that I was in a terrible situation. Having done what was requested of me by the Fiji military and obtained serious allegations of criminal offences on video tape, I had alienated myself from those who still supported the deposed government, not only members of the public, but influential Chiefs, former government ministers, members of the Police force and a faction in the military that did not want this information to become public.

Some of the chiefs did not want to see Qarase pursued for corruption. These chiefs were disturbed by the allegations contained in the first DVD and placed pressure on the military men from their villages to intercede.

These were uncertain times, the only thing certain was that I had outstayed my usefulness. I was now being used as a club to bludgeon the Commander.

My reputation was being dragged up to suggest that I was unreliable and the tapes should be dismissed. I urged the critics to listen to the words of those I recorded, and judge them on their own words from their own mouths. Listen to the confessions of the two closest men to the Prime Minister, Navi Nasori and Jale Baba, I implored, not me.

"It is not a matter of Peter Foster's credibility," I told the Fiji live news. "It's not Peter Foster making these comments. These are the captured words of Navi Naisoro. I'm just the silly bugger who carried the video and the microphone."

Despite the logic of my argument, the spin doctors set to work to divert attention from the real issue. As Navi had always said, if you can't play the ball, play the man.

Qarase said that the taped conversations between me and Navi and Jale were "probably staged". It was a ridiculous suggestion, that his two closest aids and confidants would participate in staging a confession, when they could both be arrested for corruption and spend countless years in jail. If that was the best he could come up with, I knew my allegations had hit the target.

Even more interestingly, and disturbingly, AFP Police Commissioner Keelty was reported as saying, "It was out of order for Foster to be questioning the credibility of Fiji's deposed government."

How so? What was out of order was an Australian Federal Police Commissioner speaking on the matters of foreign affairs. What was he trying to cover up and what was he afraid of becoming public knowledge? Has he ever spoken before about Fiji's affairs before, I wondered.



When Keelty was told by the media that Fiji's military released a videotape showing me getting the official from Qarase's party to admit votes had been stuffed into ballot boxes in key races in the election in May last year, he became defiant.

"The tape is an effort by the military to justify the coup by proving corruption in the Qarase government. You have to look at that carefully," Mr Keelty said.

"I mean, Peter Foster is someone who has been convicted in our own country for three counts of inducing witnesses to give false testimony and here we find him suddenly turning up with evidence that suddenly suits (Fiji Military commander Frank) Bainimarama's circumstances.

"You'd have to question why Peter Foster would be suddenly relied upon by someone like Bainimarama to advance his own cause," he said.

I was surprised that Keelty would throw that old chestnut that I was unreliable as I had been convicted of inducing witnesses to give false testimony. That was from 1993, yet it didn't stop the Australian Federal Police from enlisting my support as an undercover operative for them in 1993-4 and again in 1997.

Former Federal Agent Ian Eriksson said in his affidavit<sup>2</sup> filed in the Suva Magistrates Court and the Brisbane Magistrates Court, "Peter Foster agreed to travel to Sydney and wear listening devices and attend meetings with targets involved in illegal activities, being the suspected large scale attempt to import cocaine into Australia and money laundering."

Former Federal Agent Eriksson says, "I believe Peter Foster placed his life at risk in obtaining this information for the AFP. He did so knowing that there would never be any public recognition for his efforts, and his safety and the safety of his family relied upon his role remaining anonymous. The targets were considered very dangerous and capable of killing anyone who acted to their detriment."

Eriksson also says, "His role, and the risks he took, was confirmed in a formal letter from the Australian Federal Police, which remains on file at the Gold Coast District Court having been presented to Judge John Newton. In 1997 Operation ERUDITE was formed to target the suspected large scale attempt to import cocaine into North Queensland. Again, Peter Foster volunteered to go undercover and covertly recorded face to face meetings with criminal targets. In so doing, I believe he again placed his life in danger."

Given my history with the AFP, I became very concerned of their attempts to discredit my work for *Operation Free Fiji*.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Affidavit of former Federal Agent Ian Eriksson dated 16.11.2007



After Keelty, it was the turn of Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer to have a crack. The ABC reported him saying that he “criticised Fiji's coup leaders for using Australian conman Peter Foster to investigate allegations the deposed government was corrupt”.

The Howard government's actions to discredit *Operation Free Fiji* spoke volumes for their duplicity. A reasonable position by any government would have been to investigate the claims first before trying to shoot the messenger. Downer was never one to listen at the best of times though, to the constant frustration of the diplomats in Suva.

On January 2 the second DVD was not released as planned. Major *Lewini*, the Military Spokesman, had told the media that they would release further video evidence obtained by me over the following days, but nothing was forthcoming. The message Lieutenant Patti received back from the Commander was that the other four DVD's were just the same as the first.

This was the first real concern we had that there was a problem in getting the information through to the Commander. Lieutenant Patti and I and two other officers had personally transcribed each of the four DVD's and they were all very different. They contained over 10 hours of confessions. That someone close to the Commander would replace them with the same first DVD was troublesome.

I was warned by my Team Leader in this covert operation that there were factions in the military still loyal to the deposed Prime Minister and the evidence I had obtained was causing a rift within the military and some hesitation by some for it to be released. He said that Ratu Epenisa Cakobau, from the chiefly island of Bau, had been trying to get military personnel to sabotage *Operation Free Fiji*. All of a sudden we were unable to speak to the Commander direct. He wasn't getting our messages and Lieutenant Patti was being stifled by his superior officers.

We were mindful of the previous attempted mutiny against the Commander and there was talk of possible further attempts. If the Commander was to lose control, my life would be worthless in the hands of those I had exposed. It was time to leave Fiji.

The exact circumstances surrounding my departure from Fiji must remain a secret. I can only say I was spirited out of the country with the assistance of some members of the Fiji military as they feared that they could no longer protect me from those who did not want my further video evidence to be released.



I was told to be at the main river frontage of my home at Denarau Island at a specified time late one evening. A team of commandos landed on the shore in a small inflatable boat. They were dressed from top to toe in black and wearing balaclavas. I was impressed by how they had landed without me hearing their approach. I was given a black blanket to wrap around me and told to lie on the floor of the boat. It sped for about 15 minutes under cover of darkness until it joined the former navy minesweeper, Retriever One, idling off the coast. It would take me on the three day journey to Vanuatu.

My arrival in Vanuatu was no less exciting. It was too risky for the vessel to enter Port Vila with me still on board. As we approached the main island, I was taken by small craft as far as the outlying reef, from which I had to swim the last kilometre or so to shore.

The fact that the Fiji military were aware of my departure is supported in evidence released publicly by the Vanuatu Police, stating that I arrived in Port Vila on the morning of Monday January 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 after a three day boat trip from Fiji. However, the following day, Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January, the Fiji Military spokesman officially advised the media that I was still, as of that afternoon, with members of the Fiji military in Fiji. This was widely reported in the Fiji press on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

I had left Fiji with reluctance and hoped the assistance I had lent the Fiji military would have cleared me of any wrongdoing with regard to the allegations made against me by the Police, exposed extensive government corruption and allowed for the “clean up campaign” of the Fiji military to pave the way of a corruption free government. I would hope to one day return when the Commander had completed his clean up campaign, and retain the land lease and build my hotel resort.

My mother remained in Fiji for a further three weeks and had soldiers at the house around the clock.

I entered Vanuatu without my passport and was arrested for entering the country illegally, after a manhunt co-ordinated by the AFP. Again it struck me as peculiar the AFP had such an interest in me in a foreign country.

Outside the Vanuatu magistrates court every day was the Australian man who approached me at the bar in Suva with the proposal to decommission the Commander. I wondered if he was really from the Federal Police, or was he from the **Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)** doing a joint operation with the AFP, or perhaps the **Australian Secret Intelligence Service**



(ASIS) or even some other organisation. I never did see his ID, but I sure as hell will recognise him if I see him again.

As I passed him all I said was, “if you want to look like a spook, buy yourself a decent pair of sunglasses, not those cheap throwaways you’re always wearing.”

I was due to plead guilty in the Vanuatu Magistrates Court on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2007, receive a fine and return to Australia where I had no charges to face. Or so I thought.

However, the AFP put pressure on the DPP to manipulate the court process so as to hold me for a further two weeks to allow them to send investigators to Micronesia. They had the matter transferred from the Magistrates Court to the Supreme Court and back, and then said the prosecutor was on holiday for two weeks. I would have to sit in a Vanuatu prison for three weeks before I could get my case heard.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2007, nearly three months after the allegations of mortgage fraud had been raised and thoroughly investigated, Cromptons Lawyers for the Micronesia bank wrote to my lawyer Mahboob Raza stating that it was a civil matter between the Bank and me and advised that they had not made a complaint to the Fiji Police, and had no intention of doing so. My mother faxed a copy to the Australian High Commission in Suva, stating that this clearly exonerated me of wrongdoing. Perhaps she made a mistake in tipping our hand.<sup>3</sup>

During the three weeks I sat in Vanuatu, Diplomats from Australia put pressure on the Micronesia government for the bank to reverse their position and make a complaint. For whatever reason, sometime in February 2007, Cromptons Lawyers wrote to Raza Lawyers and said their position in their letter of the 9<sup>th</sup> January had changed, and the offer for a civil resolution had been withdrawn.

A civil matter had become criminal, not as a result of any angst from the bank, but Australian government pressure on the small island nation. As a consequence, the money I had transferred from Micronesia to Australia became a money laundering offence. Had I known, or thought for a nanosecond, that the transfer of money from the Bank of FSM to Australia was a money laundering offence, I would not have participated.

There was never any attempt by me to disguise the source or origin of the money transferred into Australia. The Australian recipients were never misled as to the origin of the funds or its purpose. The money obtained from the bank was not for my personal gain. I was not diverting money from the project for

---

<sup>3</sup> See letter from Cromptons Lawyers dated 9.1.2007



my own benefit in Australia, but rather paying for consultants and services and the reimbursement of costs relevant to the resort project, the subject of the mortgage. It was, as they say, an old fashioned stitch up.

I would be arrested when I returned voluntarily to Australia and denied bail. Again the sinister hand of the AFP was evident.

Clive Porrit of the DPP, the same man who misled the court over the Dr. Haneef case after being given false information from the AFP, would tell the Court that I had been deported from Vanuatu and had no choice but to return to Australia.

The reality was quite different, as I displayed a willingness, in fact an eagerness, to facilitate the course of justice. I flew back to Australia from Vanuatu voluntarily, aware I was to be arrested upon my arrival and charged with this offence.<sup>4</sup>

I telephoned an Australian lawyer and asked him to meet me at Brisbane airport, after telling Peter Fitzsimmons and Mike Carlton listeners on Radio 2UE that I was returning to Australia that evening.

I purchased my own airline ticket but I would not be given credit for coming back to face my accusers, and would be denied bail as a flight risk.

I would ultimately plead guilty, under duress, to a technicality of money laundering and be jailed for 4 ½ years to serve 2 years 3 months. I can't help but think the whole money laundering offence was all a ploy by the AFP to silence me and take me out of the picture.

I was released from jail on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009 and served with a directive that would forbid me from speaking to the media for another 2 years 3 months, whilst I was on parole. If I did speak to the media, I would be taken back to jail.

This was not a condition of my federal parole that I entered into on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 and could not be lawfully imposed after the fact. The action was an invalid abrogation of a constitutional right of free speech.

After a series of letters from my lawyers and threats to bring an application before the Supreme Court of Queensland, the powers that be relented and realised they could gag me no longer.

You have to wonder why they were so determined to keep me quiet. What did they have to fear? It doesn't take Einstein to work that one out.

---

<sup>4</sup> See letter from Ridgway Blake Lawyers 29.03.2007



## TIME TO LISTEN

There is now a new Government in Australia, New Zealand and the USA since their initial misguided support of Qarase, and unjustified criticism of the Commander's actions.

There is a chance for a fresh start. Mr Rudd and his Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith can break from the past and open up dialogue.

"My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us," US President Barack Obama said. Of course he wasn't speaking to Fiji, but Iran.

If he can offer "a new beginning" of engagement with Tehran, and offer to reach out to the Iranian people and the government of the Islamic Republic, promising a new start and relations based on mutual respect, then surely Australia and New Zealand can offer the same willingness to talk to Fiji.

It is time to listen, not threaten sanctions. Sure the Commander has made mistakes. But a man who doesn't make mistakes, normally doesn't make anything. He is a good man and he is trying to do the right thing.

Very few people have as many reasons to be disillusioned and even bitter about Fiji as I do. But I can see past the evil that stole power through bogus elections and look towards a future for Fiji free of corruption.

These aren't just the ramblings of a conman. The Fiji Human Rights Commission director Shaista Shameem accused the Qarase government of "rampant abuse of power and privilege" and said the military had acted for "the security, defence and well-being of Fiji."

Now what is it about that statement don't our politicians understand?

(ends)

## **COVERT RECORDED TAPES**

To view and listen to an extract of the covert recorded tapes go to:

<http://www.fjibuzz.com/latest/2006-fiji-elections-rigged-by-sdl-the-video>



