Lessons of Experience in International Democracy Promotion: The Case of Australia in Post-Coup Fiji

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Abstract

The international democracy promotion which began in the 1980s continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. Today it is one of the major policy goals of the western democracies and the international organizations—the two main drivers that have turned the exercise of international democracy promotion into an industry on its own. However, despite this surge, the exercise of international democracy promotion has not received widespread acclamation because it is an issue that is under-studied, poorly understood and above all is hotly debated. This paper considers the above predicament by assessing Australia’s role in democracy promotion in Fiji after the military coups of 1987 and 2006. The stand of the international community towards the restoration of democracy in Fiji included mainly two strategies— incentives and conditionality. The incentive strategy includes direct or indirect engagement with the authoritarian regime through impetus such as democracy assistance while the conditionality strategy involves the imposition of punitive conditions for the purpose of isolating the undemocratic regime. Based on the analysis of the Australian involvement in the two coups in Fiji, this paper argues that the incentives strategy is more effective than the conditionality strategy in relation to international democracy promotion.
Introduction

The role of the international community in recent times has been elevated to new heights vis-à-vis democracy promotion around the world. This new phenomenon called ‘international democracy promotion’, which began in the 1980s and accelerated through the 1990s, still continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. Today, the exercise of democracy promotion is considered a ‘world value’ and is one of the major policy goals of the Western democracies and the international organisations – the two main drivers that have turned the exercise of democracy promotion into an industry on its own (Burnell, 2009; Diamond, 1997; McFaul, 2004). There is a general belief in the international community that democratic systems offer the best chance for peace and stability by healing past wounds (Kumar & Zeeuw, 2006; Zürcher, 2011) and that democracy can be promoted in new and fragile states through external involvement (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004). However, despite this surge, the exercise of democracy promotion has not received widespread accolade, mainly because it is an activity that remains under-studied, poorly understood and above all, hotly debated (Schraeder, 2003). Notwithstanding its universal value, the exercise of democracy promotion has had mixed implications for the overall democratisation process around the world, including Fiji, the country on which this study is based which has had substantial disruptions to its democracy via extra-parliamentary forces.

The international community has played a significant role in restoring democracy in Fiji after the coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006. The stance of the international community towards the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Fiji has mainly included two strategies – incentive and conditionality. The incentive strategy has included direct and indirect engagement with the undemocratic regime through stimulus and impetus such as democracy assistance, while the conditionality strategy has involved the imposition of punitive conditions (both directly and indirectly) for the purpose of isolating the incumbent regime. As expected, the two different strategies produced mixed results for the cause of democracy promotion in Fiji.

This article specifically focuses on the role of Australia in restoring parliamentary democracy in post-coup Fiji. Parliamentary democracy in this article refers to the basic prerequisites that characterise this model of democracy: the existence of political parties, the occurrence of periodic and free and fair elections, and the existence of a functioning institution of a parliament (see Lijphart, 1999). Based on the evidence of Australia’s involvement in Fiji after the 1987 and 2006 military coups, this article argues that the incentives strategy is more effective than the conditionality strategy vis-à-vis international democracy promotion. The article first highlights the origins and the rationale of international democracy promotion; secondly, it briefly outlines the various strategies involved in international democracy promotion along with the key actors and some of the problems associated with this exercise. The next two sections analyse the Australian involvement in supporting the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji following the military coups in 1987 and 2006. Finally, a brief conclusion is drawn from the overall analysis.

The Origins and Rationale of International Democracy Promotion

Traditionally, the vast democratisation literature emphasised the importance of domestic factors and ignored the external ones in relation to democracy promotion as it was generally argued that
the international forces exerted little or had no influence in the democratisation process. Hence, much of the democratisation literature essentially focused on the impact of the domestic factors within a polity, such as the relationship between the governing and the opposition parties; the nature and the impact of the local CSOs (civil society organisations); or the nature of the existing political culture. However, the failure of the domestic factors in producing stable democratic transition and consolidations in most emerging democracies led to the re-examination and subsequently the inclusion of the external forces, notably the role of the international community in the exercise of democracy promotion (Schmitter, 1996; Schraeder, 2003).

Some key reasons underlie the advanced Western democracies’ policy in spearheading the international promotion of democracy. While the pressure of the Cold War often led the Western democracies to collaborate with non-democratic regimes against communist incursions, the main rationale for democracy promotion during this time was to defend the ‘western variant of democracy against its non-democratic adversaries, and replacing its manifestation wherever possible’ (Barkan, 1997: 372). Hence, democracy promotion in the new and fragile states by the Western democracies is not a new phenomenon. However, in recent decades its objectives and the strategies have been modified to meet the challenges of the international environment, where the dominant democracy aid providers are gripped with a ‘world increasingly populated by countries not conforming to clear or coherent political transitional paths’ (Carothers, 2009: 5). According to Dimitrova and Pridham, changes in the international environment have altered democracy promotion in three broad ways: as a foreign policy concern; as a manifestation of the growing acceptance of the idea of foreign involvement in internal affairs of sovereign states; and as an example of the propagation of ways to target outcomes rather than processes (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004: 91). Overall, these new outlooks have provided the international community with more opportunities for democracy promotion around the globe, which according to Barkan has made it like a ‘growth industry’ within both the established democracies and also those emerging from authoritarian regimes (Barkan, 1997: 373).

The Strategies, Key Actors and Problems of Democracy Promotion

Although many labels have been put on democracy-promotion strategies, there are three that stand out: control, conditionality and incentives (Either, 2003). Control is a harsh strategy that implies a unilateral imposition of democracy by foreign actors on another country through conquest or direct interventions. The notable examples of it include the allied powers' imposition of democracy in Japan, Germany and other West European nations after World War II, and Britain’s establishment of Westminster-style democratic systems in its colonies before granting them independence. In recent times the classic case of the control strategy has been employed by the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite its success in some cases (Either, 2003), the control strategy is perhaps the last option that is employed by the international community to promote democracy, since it is loaded with numerous complications (see for instance Cranenburgh, 2011; Peceny, 1999; Schraeder, 2003, 1992; Suhrke, 2008). In the Pacific, the most recent use of the control strategy is the case of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), whereby in 2003, a force of soldiers, police and civilians from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, on the request from the Solomon Islands Government along with
the approval of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) under the 'Biketawa Declaration', intervened in Solomon Islands to control civilian unrest and assist in the rebuilding of the state (see Fraenkel, 2004b: 159–188).

The two most common strategies that are employed by the international community to promote democracy today include the conditionality and the incentive strategy. Conditionality strategy includes those measures that the international community enforces strategically on an authoritarian regime for a move or change towards democracy. The latter are deprived of future benefits if it fails to comply with the conditions set by the international community. These include economic sanctions and political conditions to punish the undemocratic acts of the authoritarian regimes and in countries where democratic regimes have been illegally removed. This strategy to some extent may be interpreted as part of the control strategy with the exception being the position or the location of the international community: in the conditional strategy the involvement is indirect whereas in control strategy the involvement is direct on the ground. The incentive strategy on the other hand, includes the engagement by the international community through financial aid or other means in assisting institutional reforms for strengthening democracy i.e. the international community gives free assistance to a sovereign state so the latter could implement democratic reforms in the future.

Overall, the main consideration of the international community vis-à-vis democracy promotion includes supporting pro-democratic assistance to a wide array of subjects including (but not limited to) electoral assistance; political party support; support to CSOs; human rights promotion; support to the media and institutional strengthening (Barkan, 1997; Burnell, 2009; Carothers, 1997; Diamond, 1997; Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004; Schraeder, 2003). However, the nature, circumstance and the impact of the democracy promotion largely depends on the key actors and their strategies.

Without doubt the country that has been most heavily involved in international democracy promotion is the United States (US). With the end of the Cold War, the US became more involved in democracy promotion as its leaders supported the ‘growth of democracy as an essential task’; as a result it spent around a staggering US$8.75 billion between 1990 to 2005 on democracy promotion abroad (Azpuru et al., 2008: 151–153). In essence, the US became the leading nation in democracy promotion and set the benchmark for other Western democracies to follow. Apart from the US, the other countries involved in international democracy promotion are the other established Western democracies including Britain, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and even Japan, a non-western democracy. While some country-sponsored organisations focus on a wide array of projects, others have a narrower range. A notable example is Australia’s Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) based in Canberra, which concentrates on strengthening parliamentary and political parties in Indonesia, Vietnam and the Pacific Islands. Apart from these bilateral democracy promoters, other key regional organisations include the EU and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) in the Pacific, in addition to multinational international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank and the Commonwealth of Nations, which are heavily involved in promoting democracy through various means. For instance, the UN’s major development agency, the UNDP, spends almost US$1.5 billion annually on democracy promotion (Burnell, 2009: 461). Similarly, through
the World Bank Institute (WBI) which aims to strengthen the capacity of parliaments, the World Bank runs the ‘Parliamentary Strengthening Program’ (see The World Bank, 2011).

Despite the good intentions of the international community, the exercise of democracy promotion have created some critical concerns. The international community has been accused of ignoring the institutional structures while promoting democracy assistance. For instance in Africa, democracy assistance has aided some rulers in countries with presidential or semi-presidential systems to enhance their power (Crannenburgh, 2011). International democracy assistance has also made some countries so dependent on the donor nations that the institutions that have been supported by the latter lack the capacity to function on their own. A classic example of this is the newly created Afghanistan legislature. Suhrke notes that although the international community has promoted democratisation in Afghanistan, it has ‘simultaneously created a state so dependent on external support that it deprives the critical institution of liberal democracy, the legislature, of its meaning’ (Suhrke, 2008: 645). The international democracy promoters have also been accused of using a ‘spectrum of violence’ in the name of democratic promotion while engaging in direct intervention strategy exercises (Schraeder, 2003: 26). For instance, the international community has been criticised for direct military interventions such as the case of the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan (Peceny, 1999). The US has also been criticised for funding paramilitary groups such as guerrilla insurgency to overthrow authoritarian regimes in some third world countries during the 1990s (Schraeder, 1992). Some Western countries have also been involved in covert intervention against authoritarian regimes that in many ways has undermined the principles of democracy (Patrick & Mitchell, 1995).

Overall, it can be fairly stated that the exercise of international democracy promotion is loaded with complexities. Hence, a wide gap between theory and practice is a cause of tension and debate among the donors and those who receive international democratic assistance. Australia’s involvement in democracy promotion in post-coup Fiji is a notable case.

The Role of Australia in Democracy Promotion

Like other established Western democracies, Australia plays an important role in international democracy promotion. Notably, it has been one of the key drivers of democracy in the South Pacific, a region whose history of instability has prompted some in Australia to label it the ‘arc of instability’ (see Ayson, 2007; Rumley, 2006) or compare it to the sub-Saharan African region – the ‘Africanisation of the Pacific’ (see Reilly, 2000; Fraenkel, 2004a). Australia is also considered a ‘big brother’ in the South Pacific region and is expected to play a crucial role in assisting development of the region (Smyth et al., 1997). The Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) are highly dependent on Australia for trade and aid. Australia for its part is interested in the PICs for security and strategic reasons, regarding it as ‘second in importance only to the Australian continent itself’ (Firth, 2013: 362). Indeed, for Australia, an unstable South Pacific would pose numerous security threats (see Firth, 2011; Hayward-Jones, 2011b; Herr, 2010). Compared to other, smaller PICs, Fiji – a country that has had four coups since gaining independence in 1970 – holds a very keen interest for Australia. Since this interest is based mainly on Australia’s strategic reasons, it has had considerable influence over the outlook and the process of parliamentary democracy in Fiji, especially after the military coups. The following section analyses Australia’s role in Fiji after the coups in 1987 and 2006.
Australia and Democracy Promotion in Fiji after the 1987 Military Coup

The news of the 1987 coup in Fiji was met with shock in Australia by both sides of politics and the wider Australian community. Both the Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, and the Opposition Leader, John Howard, supported each other in calling for a speedy return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. On the day and the days following the coup, numerous press statements were issued by Government and Opposition MPs, individuals and CSOs, including Australian academics, the media, the trade unions and other NGOs, in condemning the coup and at the same time calling for the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji.

Prime Minister Hawke was very apprehensive and sought to monitor the coup and at the same time requested all its allies to assist Fiji towards a democratic path. The main reason for his concern was that the military coup in Fiji transpired at a time when there was a threat of instability due to the intrusion of USSR and Libyan influence in the South Pacific. The Australian Government was accused of neglecting the Pacific for too long. In fact, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Bill Hayden, had not made any official trip to the South Pacific in the previous four years (Skehan, 1987).

The initial option in response to the coup, proposed by the Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, was military intervention, a strategy that had implications for Fiji, the Pacific region and Australian domestic and external politics. However, the Australian Government totally rejected this option, considering that the Fiji situation more ‘political’ than ‘military’, and unlike the cases in Latin America (Kelly, 1987). Hence, Australia’s approach from here on was directed towards restoring parliamentary democracy in Fiji. In a statement issued on 21 May 1987, Prime Minister Hawke categorically condemned the illegal military government and confirmed Australian Government’s support for the Governor General of Fiji, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, for upholding the 1970 Constitution. Mr. Hawke declared that Australia recognised only the deposed Government of Dr Timoci Bavodra and reiterated that any fresh elections must be under the existing 1970 Constitution. In addition, Prime Minister Hawke held talks with his New Zealand and Papua New Guinea counterparts. At the same time, Australian diplomatic missions were constantly conveying the Australian position on the coup to the other governments in the region and abroad.

Directly in response to the May coup, the Australian Government took specific measures that included a freeze on Australian aid and the suspension of a range of activities in defence cooperation: the hold-up of all defence cooperation activities; the suspension of all routine Royal Australian Navy (RAN) visits and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) flights to Fiji; the suspension of plans for future activities with the delivery of new equipment to Fiji’s armed forces; and non-acceptance of further Fiji armed forces personnel for training in Australia. In addition, the Australian Government decided against any further bilateral talks with the Fiji military regime but sought to intensify dialogue with Commonwealth countries for the restoration of full parliamentary democracy in Fiji (Prime Minister’s Office, 1987).

Notwithstanding these measures and intense pressure from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), the Hawke Government was opposed to the imposition of immediate economic sanctions on Fiji. According to Prime Minister Hawke, economic sanctions were inappropriate
because the ‘economic penalties on Fiji will be difficult to retrieve and likely, if left unchecked, to damage permanently the existing base for the economic welfare of all Fiji citizens’ (Prime Minister’s Office, 1987: 4). However, the Australian Government maintained that the option of economic sanctions remained if there was any further escalation of the military rule (Logue & Molloy, 1987). Australia was also successful in carrying out a boycott threat to keep a high-profile member of the interim government (deposed former Prime Minister, Ratu Mara, whom the military regime had appointed as its Foreign Affairs Advisor) from attending the South Pacific Forum meeting in Western Samoa in July 1987 (Greene, 1987). In that meeting, the Forum leaders selected Bob Hawke as the leader of the three-man mission to visit Fiji for discussions on reinstating parliamentary democracy. Though this offer was rejected by Fiji’s Governor General, Prime Minister Hawke was willing to talk to ‘anyone’ including the coup leader, Col. Rabuka. This move signalled Australia’s willingness to engage in dialogue for a return to democracy in Fiji (Keith-Reid, 1987). However, Australia’s position changed when Rabuka abrogated the 1970 Constitution and declared Fiji a Republic on 7 October 1987. Much of the Australian Government’s response to the October (second) coup was similar to the first coup carried out on 14 May 1987: it condemned the second coup and again refused to recognise the new Republic but only the executive authority of Fiji’s Governor General (Humphries, 1987).

However, against the backdrop of condemnations and harsh measures, the leaders of the PICs at the Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in October 1987 sought to recognise the Republic. Though the leaders deplored the military takeover, they recognised that ‘they had to live with Fiji and deal with the authority in power’ (Brown, 1987: 1). After consultations with the leaders of India and New Zealand, the Australian Prime Minister endorsed the CHOGM position despite facing political pressure at home as well as opposition from the deposed Bavadra Government (Malone, 1987). Furthermore, Prime Minister Hawke made it ‘abundantly clear that his Government would eventually be recognising the Rabuka regime if it survived and holds elections under a new constitution’ (Hywood, Sargent & Williams, 1987: 1). Eventually, in a private meeting, Prime Minister Hawke and the Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen, reached an agreement on 15 October that the Governor General’s ‘resignation and Fiji’s interim withdrawal was the only way an avenue could be created for the restoration of some form of democratic rule in the troubled country’ (Logue, 1987: 1).

The central motivation for Hawke’s active pursuit of political stability in Fiji during this time lay in the country’s strategic importance – an issue that was pushed by the United States – as Fiji remained one of the Pacific locations where American naval vessels could berth without the fear of nuclear bans. Australia’s concern not only related to Russian and Libyan influence in the Pacific, but also to the French interest as the latter was accused of offering military aid to Fiji. Hence the Australian Government was in a dilemma as it could not condone the overthrow of an elected government, and at the same time apply pressure for a return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji (Kitney, 1987). For Australia, Fiji remained one of the main telecommunications centres in the South Pacific because of the major cables running through the island group carried ten to thirty per cent of the trans-Pacific telecommunications traffic with Canada and the US. This vital communications link would have been endangered by a hostile government. In comparison to other PICs, Fiji had (has) well-equipped diplomatic representation at the United Nations and
in the past had collaborated regularly with the Australian diplomats. Apart from this, Prime Minister Hawke was also 'keen to demonstrate to the US and the Commonwealth nations that it was providing leadership in the Pacific' (Sargent & Davies, 1987).

With some restrictions in place, Australia resumed its aid program to Fiji by February 1988 and after three months re-established diplomatic relations with the appointment of a High Commissioner. The new Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, made an official trip to Fiji to hold talks with the interim Government and the deposed Prime Minister, Timoci Bavandra. Trade links were also restored as the Australian businesses were keen to take up the proposal of Tax Free Zones offered by the Fiji Government (Canberra Times, 19 October 1987). However, the rift in the relations between the two nations resurfaced when Fiji's interim regime implemented a new constitution in July 1990, which Australia labelled a 'seriously flawed' document. Both sides of Australian politics, as well as the governments of New Zealand and India became steadfast in condemning the new racially weighted constitution. Eventually, this rift subsided when the Australian Government reversed its policy and dropped its call for a broad-based constitution. Despite the opposition at home and abroad, Prime Minister Hawke accepted the reality that 'despite the flaws of the constitution ... no other constitution was likely to be accepted there in the near future' (O'Callaghan, 1990). Senator Evans also believed that diplomacy was important in reforming the 1990 Constitution and the Australian Government was working towards that goal (Canberra Times, 27 June 1991). To this effect, Senator Evans made an official visit to Fiji in February 1992 and held discussions with Col. Sitiveni Rabuka and other political party officials who were preparing for the first post-coup elections in May. Rabuka assured Senator Evans that the 1990 Constitution would be reviewed later (O'Callaghan, 1992).

In July 1992, the new Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, recommenced full diplomatic relations with the resumption of military aid to Fiji. Mr Keating also invited Fiji's new Prime Minister, the coup leader Col. Rabuka, as a guest to Australia. Keeping to his earlier promise, Col. Rabuka appointed a parliamentary committee to review the 1990 Constitution, a move that was widely welcomed in Fiji as well as in Australia and abroad (Brough, 1992a). In August, Rabuka visited Australia with full diplomatic courtesy. In September, more defence links were announced between the two countries on the basis of the revision of the 1990 Constitution. Overall, Australia had taken the new approach of influencing political reforms in Fiji through established links (Brough, 1992b) and it was 'committed to help Fiji take full advantage of the opportunities now available to promote national reconciliation and harmony' (Metherell, 1992). Australia also backed Col. Rabuka for a national unity government in 1992 (Age, 7 December 1992).

In 1993, the Australian Government also invited Fiji's Opposition Leader, Mr Jai Ram Reddy, for an official visit. In 1994 Rabuka again visited Australia and sought the latter's assistance in the review of the 1990 Constitution (West Australian, 23 May 1994). Some prominent Australian constitutional experts later provided their services for the review of the 1990 Constitution (Campbell, 1997). Eventually, the Australian Government welcomed the successful review of the 1990 Constitution and the promulgation of a new multiracial constitution on 25 July 1997. Furthermore, Australia specifically supported and welcomed Fiji as the 54th Member State of the Commonwealth of Nations on 1 October 1997 (Sydney Morning Herald, 2 October 1997).
Overall, this case illustrates the Australian Government’s response to the post-1987 military coup situation and its subsequent responses towards the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. Its initial response was to isolate and condemn the Fiji military regime. However, this stance changed because of its own strategic interests, the nature of the international environment and its commitment to democracy promotion. Notwithstanding the situations, it can be argued that Australia was quite successful in its pursuit of promoting parliamentary democracy after the 1987 military coup in Fiji because it utilised the incentive strategy. However, the same cannot be said for Australia’s response to the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Fiji after the 2006 coup, because it adopted the conditionality strategy.

**Australia’s Role in Post-2006 Military Coup in Fiji**

The Australian Government’s immediate response to Fiji’s 2006 military coup was similar to that in the 1987 case: condemnation and a call for the restoration of parliamentary democracy. One of the first measures of the Australian Government was the imposition of travel restrictions, which included a ban on all travel to and through Australia by the coup leader Commodore Bainimarama, the military regime members and their families. Furthermore, the travel warnings were upgraded for potential Australian tourists to Fiji during and after the coup, a move that angered Australian business owners in Fiji, who cited the implications of travel and the possible trade sanctions on the AU$1.5 billion trade between Fiji and Australia (Dubecki, 2006).

Along with the New Zealand Government and other key partners, the Australian Government sought to impose ‘smart sanctions’. Intended to frustrate the new military regime, these so-called smart sanctions were based on two principles: first, they were designed not to hurt ordinary Fiji citizens, and secondly, they targeted programs that related to the military regime. Accordingly, on 20 December 2006, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, announced the suspension of the Australian Government’s support for three crucial areas: the ongoing public sector reforms; the Fiji Elections Office and some agencies in the law and justice sector; and the Fiji Police and Prisons Department. However, at the same time, Downer announced the continuation of the Australian aid in other important areas including health, education and community development (Downer, 2006).

As after the 1987 military coup, Australia suspended defence cooperation (worth over AU$4.4 million) and at the same time called on other countries to impose similar penalties on Fiji’s military regime. The Australian Government was successful in swaying Britain to halt the recruitment of Fiji nationals in the British military, a move that Britain considered a potent signal of its displeasure of the military coup. France also suspended its military ties with the Fiji regime (Wilson, 2006) and the US suspended all financial aid and weapon sales under its Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (Davis, 2007). Australia was also successful in suspending Fiji from the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) by withholding all funds, which denied Fiji the opportunity of taking the lead role (which it was expected to take on a rotational basis) (Stewart, 2006). Furthermore, Fiji was also partially suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations in December 2006 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011).
During the October 2007 PIFS meeting in Tonga, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, pressured the PICs leaders to demand that Commodore Bainimarama make a quick return to parliamentary democracy in Fiji. This pressure seemed effective as Bainimarama declared that the elections would be held in March 2009, with some changes to the 1997 Constitution. He further agreed that the Fiji military would accept the outcome of the elections. In response Downer agreed to ease sanctions against the Fiji regime if the 2009 deadline was met satisfactorily (Dodd, 2007). Unfortunately, the Fiji regime defaulted on this promise when the President of Fiji abrogated the 1997 Constitution on 10 April 2009, following the landmark Court of Appeal decision that declared the 2006 military coup illegal. Not surprisingly, the President appointed Bainimarama as the interim Prime Minister (Hayward-Jones, 2011a).

Following the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution, Australia along with New Zealand and other Western allies, pushed for wider international condemnation against the military rule in Fiji. The new Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith, sought to retain the initial Australian sanctions and concurrently held discussions with the leaders of the PICs through PIFS, the United Nations and the Commonwealth in an attempt to put more pressure on the Fiji military regime. Australia was successful in having Fiji suspended from the PIFS on 2 May 2009 – despite Fiji being the host of PIF and becoming the first member to be suspended from the organisation (Firth, 2009). Fiji was also suspended from the Commonwealth on 1 September 2009 because of the regime’s failure to adhere to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group’s (CMAG) directive to reactivate the President’s Political Dialogue Forum (PPDF) process that was facilitated by the Commonwealth and the United Nations after the coup (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011).

Since the two major upheavals – the military coup in December 2006 and the subsequent abrogation of the 1997 Constitution in 2009 – Australia’s approach, apart from a few indirect engagements, remained similar to its initial stance of limited engagement with the Fiji military regime, despite the change of governments in Canberra. Both the Howard Government and the Labour Governments led by Kevin Rudd and later Julia Gillard retained the conditionality strategy towards Fiji (Hayward-Jones, 2011b; Herr, 2010; O’Keefe, 2011: 3). Australia declined to take part in any forums organised by Fiji’s military regime to discuss progress towards parliamentary democracy. For instance, Australia and New Zealand were the only two PIF nations that declined the Fiji Government’s invitation to attend a two-day talkfest on Fiji’s progress towards democracy in July 2010. Australia was also accused of meddling in Fiji’s affairs by seeking to ‘stymie’ a regional meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) which led to the expulsion of the acting Australian High Commissioner by the Fiji regime (Park, 2010).

In the 2010 elections, the Australian Labour Party (ALP) reiterated the continuation of its non-engagement policy while the Liberal–National Coalition sought to assist in the electoral reforms for an earlier election in Fiji (Radio Australia, 2010). The then Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Kevin Rudd, did not show any sign of change in the Australian policy towards Fiji when he launched an attack on the Fiji military regime at the London CMAG meeting in May 2011 for the lack of progress towards democratic elections. His comments distanced Australia even more from the Fiji regime as Fiji’s Foreign Minister Inoke Kubaabola, accused Rudd for ‘his prejudice against Fiji’s declared roadmap, so that there is little hope for real re-engagement.
between the governments of Australia and Fiji while Rudd remains in office (Australian, 9 May 2011). For its part, in 2008 the Fiji military regime drafted the People’s Charter for Change Peace and Progress – a document prepared by the National Council for Building a Better Fiji – which outlined the Government’s strategy toward democracy by 2014. To counter Australia’s (and New Zealand’s) policy, the Fiji military regime started its ‘Look North’ policy and began engaging with stronger diplomatic and trade links in the Asian region, particularly with China, India, Japan, Korea and Malaysia (Herr, 2010).

Some concern has been raised about China’s influence in Fiji, with the former’s potential to displace the traditional regional players of Australia and New Zealand. According to Hanson, China’s aid to Fiji has skyrocketed since the December 2006 coup. In 2005 China’s aid to Fiji was just US$1 million but by 2007, its grant and loan pledges rose to US$167 million: more than half China’s annual aid to the entire Pacific and quite high compared to the AU$21 million that AusAID pledged for Fiji between 2007 and 2008 (Hanson, 2008). The evidence of the relationship was visible on the ground as China was the only sponsor of the 40th Fiji Independence Day celebrations in October 2010. Furthermore, Fiji military officers have been offered military training in China, which Herr and Bergin characterise as putting Fiji further into China’s ‘open arms’ (2010).

Australia’s non-engagement policy or conditionality strategy towards Fiji since December 2006 has been contested both in and outside Australia. Australia’s Asian allies, including Japan and South Korea, have opened their doors to the Fiji regime (Herr & Bergin, 2010). Considering the influence of China in Fiji and the region, Australia’s strongest ally, the United States, indicated a change in its policy towards Fiji. On 27 September 2010, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, held an hour-long meeting with Fiji’s Foreign Affairs Minister confirming that the US wanted ‘dialogue and partnership with Fiji’ (Gaglioti, 2010). On similar note, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, declared that the objective of the US was to ‘put Fiji back on track for reintegration into international institutions and for holding free and fair elections no later than 2014’ (Gaglioti, 2010). In addition, the US President, Barack Obama, sent a congratulatory message to Fiji on the celebration of its 41st Independence in October 2011, stating that ‘the bond between our countries will strengthen as the people of Fiji continue to pursue a brighter future’ (Burese, 2011).

Australia has continued its humanitarian aid programs but has had very limited diplomatic relations with the military regime during the time of this writing. However, there have been some positive overtures from the Australian government since the appointment of the new Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Bob Carr. Senator Carr has held trilateral meetings with his New Zealand and Fiji counterparts in relation to the restoration of democracy in Fiji. These discussions have resulted in two key positive developments: Australia has offered AU$2.65 million towards the 2014 elections preparations and also announced the appointment of a new High Commissioner to Fiji; a position that was vacant since the expulsion of the previous Australian High Commissioner by the Fiji military regime in 2009.

Overall, apart from a few exceptions, Australia’s response towards the Fiji military regime since the 2006 military coup has largely been based on the principle of the conditionality approach.
With hindsight, it can be argued that the adoption of this approach as distinct from the incentive approach used after the 1987 coups has in some ways subtly undermined the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. However, it is important to emphasise that the measures adopted by the Fiji military regime are not totally the result of Australia’s conditionality approach. In fact, all the measures of the Fiji military regime have been its own doing. What is being suggested here is that much of what has transpired since December 2006 is the result of the military regime’s retaliation against the Australian government’s conditionality approach. Perhaps it would be fair to suggest that the response of the Fiji military regime could have been averted or contained if the incentive strategy was adopted by the Australian government in the first instance.

**Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the role of the international community in relation to the exercise of democracy promotion abroad by highlighting the origins, the rationales, the strategies, the key actors and the problems associated with international democracy promotion. More importantly, this article has demonstrated that the international community has played a significant role in the promotion of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. It further points out that the key element of Australian democracy promotion relates to the application of the two approaches: conditionality and incentive. The evidence in relation the Australian involvement toward the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji in the post-1987 and post-2006 situations succinctly demonstrates the practicability of the incentive strategy over the conditionality strategy; in other words, the incentive strategy is more effective than the conditionality strategy vis-à-vis international democracy promotion.

As indicated, the international environment and its strategic interests prompted Australia to engage with the Fiji military regime in 1987. Notwithstanding this, it can be argued that the resumption of parliamentary democracy was feasible when Australia chose the option of engaging with Fiji’s military regime. In the post-1987 coup context, despite the opposition at home and abroad, the Australian government dropped its conditionality stance and sought to engage diplomatically with the coup leader and the Fiji military–backed regime. This in essence allowed Australia to exert more influence for the return of parliamentary democracy in Fiji, which ultimately paved the way for a ‘minimal’ democracy. This in return provided an avenue for Australia to negotiate and influence the review of the 1990 Constitution and subsequently return Fiji to democratic rule under the new 1997 Constitution.

In relation to Australia’s conditionality approach in the post–2006 military coup context, it can be argued that this approach has not resulted in any major breakthrough for the cause of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. Since the 2006 military coup, Fiji’s military regime has abrogated the 1997 Constitution; introduced legislations which have undermined democratic principles; shifted the election from 2009 to 2014; and above all, shifted its alliance with non-democratic nations such as China. Overall, these developments pose a threat to democracy in Fiji. In fact, the Chinese domination in Fiji (and the Pacific) is reminiscent of the post-1987 era when Australia chose to engage with the Fiji military regime to counter the threats from the USSR and Libya. Perhaps, this should be a compelling reason for Australia to engage with Fiji, taking a cue from its major ally, the US.
As a key player of the international community promoting democracy in the South Pacific region and globally, it is imperative for Australia to engage with the current Fiji military regime. Indeed, there are now renewed calls for the Australian Government to engage with the Fiji regime for its own strategic interest (considering the Chinese influence) and for the resumption of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. The Australian Government should seriously consider this view given that its non-engagement policy or the conditionality approach has not been successful since 2006 military coup. The Australian involvement in supporting the return of democracy in Fiji’s post-1987 military coup era offers a valuable lesson to the international community for democracy promotion: it is wise to promote minimal democracy as a starting point towards a more consolidated democracy. An agenda for full scale democracy promotion from the initial phase may become an ineffective exercise in the long run.

Notes

1 Under the Biketawa Declaration, the Forum Islands leaders agreed to take necessary measures to resolve security threats in the region emanating from ‘ethnic tension, socioeconomic disparities, lack of good governance, land disputes and erosion of cultural values’ (see Biketawa Declaration, 2000, www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/political-governance-security/biketawa-declaration/, viewed on 1 August 2013).

2 See media releases of the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Bob Carr, on 01/06/12, 30/07/12, 26/09/12 and 15/12/12, http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/, viewed on 3 January 2013. The new Liberal-National Coalition Government of Australia elected in September 2013, has shown a keen interest in engaging with the current Fiji regime as the new Foreign Affairs Minister, Julie Bishop, has made few pronouncements in relation the resumption of bilateral ties. She has also had dialogue with her Fijian counterpart in Sydney on 29th October (see http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Releases/AUSTRALIA-AND-FIJI-FOREIGN-MINISTERS-MEET-IN-SYDNEY.aspx, viewed on 3 November, 2013).

References


