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The Lessons in Fiji's Campaign to Change the PIF

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Fijian prime minister Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama on May 6 reiterated that he will not attend any Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders' meetings as long as Australia and New Zealand remain full members, rather than development partners like China, the European Union, Japan, and the United States. But the former junta leader said that Fiji will remain engaged in all lower-level PIF venues, including civil society, technical, and ministerial meetings, and that the forum secretariat can remain in Suva, Fiji.

Bainimarama's statements provide more clarity about Fiji's intentions regarding the Pacific's premier multilateral organization, and likely indicate a recognition that he has picked a fight he cannot win. Australia and New Zealand have both brushed off the calls for them to step back from the forum. Even more damaging, Fiji has gotten little support from other Pacific Island states. Samoan prime minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi has been particularly vocal in dismissing Bainimarama's crusade and has insisted that Australia and New Zealand are invaluable members of the PIF. Papua New Guinea, meanwhile, has been crystal clear that Fiji's decision to either rejoin or boycott the PIF will have no effect on the planned leaders' summit in Port Moresby in September.

Australia and New Zealand continue to see themselves as members of the Pacific community, and the smaller Pacific Islands largely feel the same.

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Fiji’s prime minister Voreqe “Frank” Bainimarama speaking at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015. Bainimarama has refused to attend any Pacific Islands Forum meetings as long as Australia and New Zealand remain full members of the grouping. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unisgeneva/16692666361/>

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Australia is not only the **largest donor in the Pacific**; its \$6.83 billion in aid from 2006 to 2013 dwarfed that of the next-largest donor, the United States with \$1.77 billion. New Zealand gave \$1.1 billion over the same period, making it the fourth-largest donor despite its much smaller population and economy. Japan (third largest) and China (fifth largest) rounded out the list of top five donors at \$1.23 billion and \$1.06 billion. Clearly, Australia’s and New Zealand’s focus on the Pacific, and aid on a per capita basis, puts them in a different league from the PIF’s development partners.

Even if Bainimarama’s continued pique at Canberra and Wellington does not see them evicted from the PIF any time soon, it does underscore the significant work that lies ahead if they, or partners in Washington, hope to regain the influence in Fiji that they lost following his 2006 coup. Fiji’s leaders remain resentful of what they see as a callous turning away by the island nation’s friends during a difficult time. Thousands of Fijians fought alongside Australian and New Zealand units in World War II. A shared colonial history left parallel institutions and a deep cultural affinity among the three nations. But instead of support, Fiji’s leaders believe Australia and New Zealand have treated them with high-handedness and hurtful but ultimately ineffectual sanctions.

One thing is clear: the period of sanctions has left Australia, New Zealand, and the United States all with severely diminished roles in Fiji. This created a vacuum into which China has gladly stepped. Fiji is the only country in the Pacific where **Chinese aid** (\$339 million in 2014) outweighs that of Australia (\$252 million in 2013, the most recent data available, which is unlikely to increase given Canberra’s upcoming \$800 million in foreign aid cuts). New Zealand’s aid to Fiji was \$90 million in 2013, while U.S. aid, which remains overwhelmingly focused on the freely associated states of Micronesia, was a paltry \$13 million that year.

Given this state of affairs, it is little surprise that Fijian officials express a (false) perception of China as the most effective donor in the Pacific and lament that the United States appears all but absent. This also explains why Fiji sees a far different balance of costs and benefits in Australia’s and New Zealand’s roles in the PIF. Having observed a free and relatively fair election in Fiji last year—and having accepted its legitimacy—it is time for Canberra and Wellington in particular, as well as Washington, to start

The Lessons in Fiji's Campaign to Change the PIF *(continued)*



An Australian Agency for International Development, or AusAID, response team surveys damage in Fiji after Cyclone Evan struck the island in late 2012. Fiji is now the only Pacific Island state in which Chinese aid outweighs that of traditional donor Australia. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfataustralianaid/10690539966/>

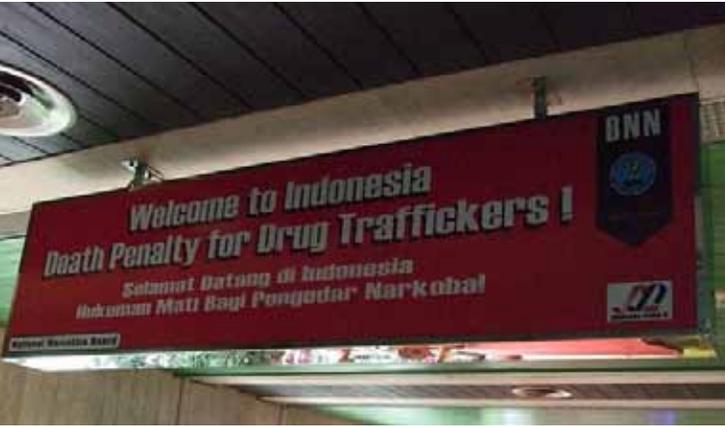
the hard work of repairing ties with Fiji, beginning with a more equitable distribution of aid funding. Fiji remains, after all, the second-largest of the Pacific Islands and certainly warrants more assistance than it is receiving.

The fruitlessness of Bainimarama's efforts to see Australia and New Zealand ousted from the PIF also does not negate the validity of some of his critiques. His May 6 comments were made while he launched a meeting aimed at forging a draft agreement to institutionalize the Pacific Islands Development Forum. That institution, launched two years ago, has succeeded despite initial opposition from Australia and New Zealand, which saw it as an attempt to undermine the PIF. Its success highlights the perceived shortcomings of the PIF, including the insularity of the leaders' meetings, a lack of consultation with nongovernmental stakeholders, the perceived high-handedness of donors, and a seeming unwillingness, especially in Canberra, to confront the existential threat that climate change poses to low-lying Pacific nations.

The best way to counter Bainimarama's scapegoating of Australia and New Zealand in the PIF is to continue to work to improve the forum's inclusivity and effectiveness, especially on climate change. ▲

The Month That Was

AUSTRALIA



A banner welcoming visitors to Indonesia and touting the nation's capital punishment laws regarding drug offenses. Canberra has withdrawn its ambassador to Indonesia following Jakarta's decision to execute two Australians convicted of drug trafficking. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/comicbase/3751666771/>

Australia withdraws ambassador after Indonesia executes two Australians. Canberra withdrew its ambassador to Indonesia in anger at the April 29 executions of Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, along with five other foreign nationals and one Indonesian convicted of drug offenses, despite pleas for clemency. Filipino Mary Jane Veloso's execution was temporarily suspended after Manila reported a woman claiming to have recruited and trafficked Veloso turned herself in to Philippine authorities. An Indonesian court a few days earlier gave French national Serge Ataloui a two-week reprieve as he exhausts his legal appeals.

Australia to slash nearly \$800 million from foreign aid budget. Australia will cut nearly \$800 million, or about 20 percent, from its foreign aid budget when the government releases its 2015–2016 federal budget on May 12. Those cuts are expected to affect aid to Indonesia, the top recipient of Australian aid, according to a May 5 *Sydney Morning Herald* report. The cuts are not expected to affect Papua New Guinea, the second-largest recipient of Australian aid, or Cambodia and Nauru due to their assistance with processing and resettling asylum seekers.

Central bank cuts interest rates to record low. Australia's central bank on May 5 cut its benchmark interest rates to a record low of 2 percent from 2.25 percent. Central bank governor Glenn Stevens said the cut, the second of the year, is meant to bolster the economy in the face of weak commodity prices, especially of iron ore, and the failure of the Australian dollar to fall in tandem, which continues to hurt Australian exporters. The economy has struggled with the end of a years-long mining boom but is beginning to see a pickup in housing construction and consumer spending.

Four from Australia's Nauru detention facility agree to resettle in Cambodia. Cambodian Interior Ministry spokesperson Khieu Sopheak on April 23 announced that a Rohingya man from Myanmar had volunteered to be the first processed refugee at Australia's asylum seeker detention center on Nauru to resettle in Cambodia as part of a controversial agreement signed between Canberra and Phnom Penh in 2014. Sopheak announced five days later that three Iranians had also agreed to resettle. The agreement will see Cambodia take in a significant number of refugees who sought asylum in Australia in exchange for a \$31 million aid package.

AGL Energy to shut down all coal-fired plants by 2050. AGL Energy, Australia's second-largest electricity generator, on April 17 announced that it will shutter all of its existing coal-fired power plants by 2050 and will not build or acquire new ones unless they have carbon capture and storage facilities. AGL said it made the decision to help curb carbon emissions, which is at odds with the current Australian government's coal-friendly policies, including its 2014 decision to repeal the nation's carbon tax—a first among developed nations.

Huge crowds celebrate 100th ANZAC Day. More than 120,000 people attended an April 25 ceremony marking the 100th Australia-New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, along with record crowds at cities throughout Australia, New Zealand, and partner nations. ANZAC Day commemorates the involvement of Australian and New Zealand troops in the 1915 attack on Gallipoli, Turkey, during World War I. In Washington, observances were held at the Korean War Memorial, Embassy of Australia, and National Cathedral, while Australian, New Zealand, and U.S. troops commemorated the holiday at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Oahu, Hawaii.

Government cracks down on illegal foreign property investors. Prime Minister Tony Abbott on May 2 announced new penalties for illegal foreign investors in Australia's property market amid fears that wealthy Asian investors are driving up prices. Foreigners can only purchase residential property under development, not existing homes. Foreign investors will have to pay a new application fee and those who illegally purchase homes will face up to three years in jail and fines of roughly \$500 million. The government said the new rules would be enforced by the end of 2015.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand defense chief visits Iraq ahead of deployment. New Zealand Defence Force chief Lieutenant General Tim Keating on April 27 made a secret trip to Baghdad to meet with Iraqi Army chief of staff Babakir Zebari. The two discussed the role of New Zealand troops who will soon travel to Iraq to help train local security forces fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. While Keating visited Iraq, Prime Minister John Key made a trip to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia, during which he told local media that some of the 143 New Zealand troops heading to Iraq were already in Dubai awaiting deployment to Iraq.



An Australia-New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day parade in Sydney in 2013. This year's centennial ANZAC Day celebrations drew record crowds to cities in Australia, New Zealand, and around the world. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/crouchy69/8682568330/>



New Zealand Defence Force personnel training in southern California in 2013. New Zealand troops are preparing to deploy to Iraq to train local forces fighting against the Islamic State <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nzdefenceforce/9203742859/>

New Zealand working on draft UN resolution on Israel-Palestine peace talks. New Zealand's ambassador to the United Nations, Jim McLay, on April 21 said that in its capacity as a Security Council member, New Zealand is working on a draft UN resolution laying out the parameters of a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians in the hopes of restarting talks. New Zealand has expressed growing frustration with the Security Council's inability to agree on an approach to the peace process. New Zealand in February ended a diplomatic row with Israel when it agreed to appoint separate ambassadors to Israel and Palestine.

Parliament passes bill strengthening protection for foreign workers. New Zealand's Parliament on April 30 narrowly passed new protections for foreign workers, including penalties of up to seven years in prison for employers who exploit migrants. The bill also allows deportation of exploitative employers who are in New Zealand on temporary visas, and extends the power of authorities to search workplaces. The legislation follows reports of abuses, including the withholding of wages, against Chinese workers hired to remove asbestos from New Zealand trains.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Pacific summit calls for greater global action on climate change. Representatives from 15 Pacific Island nations and territories on April 30 wrapped up the annual Oceania 21 Summit in New Caledonia with a call for the international community to undertake more ambitious action on climate change. Officials at the summit approved the Lifou Declaration, which demands that world leaders commit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions when they meet for the UN Climate Convention in Paris in December.

Fijian, Samoan leaders spar over Pacific Islands Forum. Prime ministers Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama of Fiji and Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi of Samoa traded barbs during the last week of April over Bainimarama's insistence that Australia and New Zealand give up their Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) membership before he will agree to rejoin. Tuilaepa dismissed Bainimarama's demands as naïve, calling him a military man "still learning" about international relations. Bainimarama responded by calling the Samoan leader a "lapdog." Papua New Guinea, the PIF host for 2015, has confirmed that the September leaders' meeting will go ahead with or without Fiji.

Papua New Guinea joins Australia-led maritime security program. Papua New Guinea on May 4 announced it would become the 12th regional state to join Australia's Pacific Maritime Security Program, which is geared

toward combatting illegal fishing and providing humanitarian assistance. Australia plans to build 21 patrol boats and boost aerial surveillance and regional cooperation as part of the program, which will replace its Pacific Patrol Boat Program as the heart of its maritime security work in the Pacific.

Nauru blocks Facebook. Digicel, Nauru's only Internet service provider, began blocking access to Facebook and other sites on April 30 at the instruction of the Nauruan government. Authorities said the outage is meant to crack down on pornography, but critics have decried that it effectively cuts off the top form of communication with the outside world for many citizens, including asylum seekers detained at an Australian-run facility. Pamela Curr of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre told Radio Australia that the block was put in place at the request of Australian authorities to ease the way for the resettlement of asylum seekers to Cambodia.

Opposition builds to U.S. military plans in Marianas. Local civil society groups and officials in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) have stepped up their criticism of U.S. military plans for Tinian Island and Pagan Island, with CNMI House of Representatives speaker Joseph Guerrero on April 7 demanding that Governor Eloy Inos oppose any military use of Pagan. Other lawmakers and the local mayor have echoed that call. The military in early April released a draft Environmental Impact Assessment for U.S. Pacific Command's planned expansion of training facilities on Tinian and Pagan, including ranges to drop inert bombs on Pagan.



A U.S. flag flies in front of a still-smoking active volcano on Pagan in 2010. U.S. plans to use the largely abandoned island for training, including inert bombing runs, have sparked opposition by local politicians and civil society. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/killkudzu/5217110170/>

French officials defend electoral law for New Caledonia. French officials including Overseas Minister George Pau-Langevin and National Assembly president Claude Bartolone visited New Caledonia on April 24 to call for dialogue between both pro- and anti-independence camps and to reiterate Paris's neutrality. France's Senate and National Assembly are considering a law that would restrict voting in a 2018 independence referendum to ethnic Kanaks and those who were on the New Caledonia electoral rolls as of 1998. The French officials were greeted by approximately 8,000 anti-independence protestors. ▲

Looking Ahead

The Future of American Predominance in the Western Pacific. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace will host a discussion on May 13 on China's emergence as a power in the Pacific and the long-term challenge it presents for the United States and its allies. Carnegie senior associates Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis will speak at the event, which will be moderated by the University of Pennsylvania's Avery Goldstein. The event will take place from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Carnegie Endowment, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW. [Click here](#) to RSVP.

The Future of the Silent Service. CSIS and the U.S. Naval Institute will cohost a discussion on May 14 with Vice Admiral Michael Connor, commander of U.S. Submarine Forces, as part of their Maritime Security Dialogue series. The series examines the challenges facing the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard amid budgetary challenges, technological opportunities, and strategic adjustments. The event will take place from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. at CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. [Click here](#) to RSVP.

A Centenary of Australian War Art. The Embassy of Australia is hosting an exhibition through June 1 of 41 pieces of art from the Australian War Memorial. The artwork is being displayed in honor of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during the First World War, and includes pieces depicting both World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and conflicts in the Middle East. The exhibition can be seen on weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Embassy of Australia gallery, 1601 Massachusetts Ave., NW. ▲

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