State-Building in a Post-Colonial Society: The Case of Solomon Islands
Sinclair Dinnen*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite growing levels of conflict and instability in parts of the southwest Pacific, Australia has, until recently, been reluctant to intervene in the affairs of neighboring states. As the dominant metropolitan power in the region, a former colony of Britain, and the ex-colonial administrator of Papua New Guinea, Australia has gone out of its way to avoid any perceptions of acting in an imperialist or neo-colonial fashion. Instead, its influence has been wielded primarily through diplomacy and bilateral development assistance. This traditional reluctance to intervene was also justified in terms of the practical limitations of external intervention, given the cultural and ethnic complexities evident in the Pacific island states. As explained in a Foreign Affairs White Paper, "Australia cannot presume to fix the problems of the South Pacific. . . . The island countries are independent sovereign states . . . When problems are so tightly bound to complex cultural and ethnic loyalties, only local communities can find workable solutions."

A major turning point occurred in mid-2003, when the Australian government agreed to lead the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands ("RAMSI"). The decision to intervene in the troubled Pacific nation, albeit at the request of the Solomon Islands government, was viewed by many as a paradigm shift in Australian regional policy. Australia's more robust engagement is

* Sinclair Dinnen is a Senior Fellow in the State Society and Governance in Melanesia Program at the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University in Canberra. He can be contacted at: sindair.dinnen@anu.edu.au.


nevertheless consistent with the increase in state-building interventions that have become a prominent feature of the post–Cold War international landscape. The frequency of interventions in states that are perceived as at risk of “failure” has grown exponentially in the post-9/11 period. Responses that initially were triggered by security concerns have been followed by substantial assistance in (re)constructing political institutions that are now understood as critical to long-term security and political stability. Security and stability are, in turn, viewed as indispensable to sustainable economic development. In Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, parts of West Africa, Timor-Leste, and, more recently, the Pacific island countries of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, military or police-led peacekeeping interventions have been precursors to long-term efforts to build state “capacity.”

Despite its prevalence, international state-building has a distinctly checkered record.\(^3\) Institutional engineering, consciously or unconsciously inspired by Weberian concepts of the ideal modern state,\(^4\) has often come to grief in the so-called Third World. Contrary to much of the prevailing policy discourse, international state-building is not simply a technical exercise of capacity-development, but also raises important issues of politics and legitimacy. Questions can also be asked regarding the adequacy of the initial conceptualization of “failed” and “fragile” states that justify such interventions and how this feeds through to the design and implementation of practical efforts at state (re)construction. Insufficient appreciation of the distinct forces that characterize post-colonial states, as well as of the contested character of the state itself in the fragmented settings where such interventions typically occur, has tended to render external state-building projects, at best, ineffective, and, at worst, disruptive and destabilizing.\(^5\) What is generally missing is an adequate understanding of why the particular state in question has been performing so differently from the idealized state that interveners seek to construct.

These arguments will be explored through the example of the Solomon Islands intervention. Although less well-known than many others, the Solomon Islands mission provides a good case study of both the potential and limitations of international state-building. The speedy and peaceful manner in which RAMSI helped restore law and order in the archipelago has deservedly attracted


\(^5\) A case study of the destabilizing effects of the recent intervention in Afghanistan is provided in Antonio Donini, Norah Niland, and Karin Wermester, eds, Nation-Building Unraveled?: Aid, Peace and Justice in Afghanistan (Kumarian 2004).
praise.\textsuperscript{6} However, the more ambitious and longer-term task of state-building has proved altogether more challenging. This is, in part, because of the limitations of RAMSI's legal basis as a form of "cooperative intervention," as well as the resistance it has faced from local elites resentful of its intrusive character and the threats it poses to existing power relations. At a more profound level, the difficulties encountered in creating and sustaining effective state institutions also relate to the short history and shallow foundations of the modern state in Solomon Islands society.

While some of the difficulties that RAMSI has experienced are common to international state-building, others relate to the specific character of its operating environment in Solomon Islands. This Article begins by looking at the broader context of the intervention through a review of the history and fragility of the state in Solomon Islands, and, in particular, the political development in the post-colonial period. This account is followed by a short section on the ethnic tensions and immediate crisis that prompted the intervention. The establishment of the regional mission and its impressive early progress are then examined before turning to the dramatic deterioration in relations that occurred after a change of government in early 2006. Concluding remarks summarize the inherent challenges of international state-building interventions in divided post-colonial societies like Solomon Islands.

\textbf{II. THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL SETTINGS OF STATE-BUILDING IN SOLOMON ISLANDS}

Lying southeast of Papua New Guinea and north of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands archipelago consists of a double chain of around 1,000 islands scattered across 1,400 kilometers of the southwest Pacific. Like many other developing countries, its origins as a discrete political and territorial entity lie in an earlier period of imperial expansion and competition among European powers. Colonial annexation commenced in 1893 with the declaration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate over the southern islands. Other islands were added over the following decade, including the northern islands that were transferred by Germany to Britain in 1899. Arbitrary borders and a colonial system of centralized government were imposed with little consideration as to their fit with existing local polities. The harbinger of major transformations, colonial administration, was relatively light in character, reflecting resource constraints and the low priority accorded Solomon Islands by a distant

metropolitan power. Among other things, this allowed most indigenous social institutions to adapt to change on their own terms.

For many Solomon Islanders, the most important catalysts for change were interactions with missionaries or traders or employment on plantations, rather than the regulatory impacts of the colonial state. The islands—Guadalcanal in particular—were also the site of extensive fighting between the Japanese and the US militaries during the Second World War. Eager to extricate itself from its remaining colonies, Britain granted independence to Solomon Islands on July 7, 1978. Until relatively late, colonial authorities demonstrated little interest in Western “development,” and placed more value on stability and the creation of a semblance of order. Modern state institutions only began to replace colonial structures in the two decades before the Islands’ independence and, as a result, had shallow foundations in the local environment. Not only did the government of the newly independent state have limited institutional capabilities, it also had little legitimacy among most of its inhabitants. The legitimacy it did have was primarily external and came through its membership in the global club of states and the support that this provided in the form of recognition, and in later years, access to international development assistance and loans. In addition, as with many other former colonies in Africa and the Pacific, Solomon Islands was not well equipped for the challenges of independent statehood. Transport and communications infrastructure was rudimentary and the human resources needed to operate a complex bureaucratic state were in scarce supply. There were, for example, only about a dozen university graduates in 1978. A small plantation economy remained dependent on the vagaries of international commodity markets, while the daily needs of most local people were met by subsistence farming and fishing.

Today, approximately 510,000 Solomon Islanders are dispersed throughout the archipelago. The largest concentration of population is on the islands of

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7 See generally Judith A. Bennett, Holland, Britain, and Germany in Melanesia, in K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal, eds, Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century 40 (Hawaii 1994).

8 For more information on the Second World War experience in Solomon Islands, see generally Dick Crofton Horton, Fire Over the Islands: The Coast Watchers of the Solomon Islands (Reed 1970).


Malaita, Guadalcanal and on the islands comprising Western Province. Following the Second World War, the capital was relocated from Tulagi (in what is now Central Province) to its current location in Honiara on the northern shores of Guadalcanal. In the absence of any sustained struggle for independence, there was little sense of a shared political community capable of uniting the citizens of the new state. Independence created what was, in effect, a state without a nation. High levels of socio-linguistic diversity—evident in the existence of an estimated sixty-three distinct languages spoken across the archipelago—have accentuated the prevalence of localism in virtually all aspects of social, political, and economic life. Common ties, such as living predominantly in rural villages, bonds of kinship, shared language, and ties to ancestral land, along with moral frameworks drawing on local *kastom* and Christianity, provide a more meaningful basis for individual identities and allegiance than abstract notions of “citizenship” or “nationality.” Most people still exist in the interstices between subsistence and cash economies and Western and customary systems of governance. Tensions between “tradition” and “modernity” manifest themselves in many different ways, including, for example, in the routine workings of state institutions where the obligations of kinship and extended familial relations sit uneasily alongside those of neutral and detached public service.

The centralization of political power that commenced with the establishment of the colonial state has been regularly contested in different parts of the country and, in recent years, has been accentuated by dissatisfaction over the allocation of resources, the unfulfilled promise and uneven pattern of post-colonial development, and the failure to deliver essential government services such as health and education. Some provinces and regions have sought to secure greater control over locally generated revenues, and this has inevitably pitted wealthier provinces against those less well-endowed in natural resources.

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14 As posted on the website of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (cited in note 11).
15 *Kastom* is the Melanesian Pidgin term for culture or tradition.
16 For a recent review of social services, including health and education, in Solomon Islands (along with eight other Pacific island countries), see *Opportunities to Improve Social Services: Human Development in the Pacific Islands* (World Bank 2007), available online at <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64193027&amp;piPK=64187937&amp;theSitePK=523679&amp;menuPK=64187510&amp;searchMenuPK=64187283&amp;theSitePK=523679&amp;entityID=000310607_20070517100419&amp;searchMenuPK=64187283&amp;theSitePK=523679> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
For example, there have been longstanding resentments in the Western Solomon Islands over the substantial contribution made by their export logging industry to central coffers in Honiara and the relatively poor returns in the way of government services. Immediately prior to independence, these issues led to a major “breakaway” movement in what is now the Western province. Largely in response to such pressures, seven provincial governments were established in 1981. Provinces were given their own assemblies and executives, although the central government retained tight control over executive and legislative functions.

Solomon Islands inherited the Westminster system of government bequeathed by Britain to many of its former colonies. The idiosyncrasies of local politics have perplexed many observers and, in recent years, have contributed greatly to the frustrations experienced by the external statebuilders in the regional mission. While the local politics share features with other Western liberal democracies, they also have distinctly Melanesian characteristics. “Melanesian politics,” as it is sometimes referred to, synthesizes different traditions of leadership and power relations and is to be found, with local variations, in Solomon Islands and neighboring Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. The particularities of political development in these countries attest to a broader process whereby colonial institutions have been progressively indigenized in the post-colonial period. Whereas allegiance to parties distinguished on policy or ideological grounds provides the crucial framework for political careers under the Westminster model, Melanesian politics are distinctly unbounded as a result of the weakness of the party system and the highly personalized style of political behavior.

17 See generally Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, Deforestation and Politics in Solomon Islands, in Peter Larmour, ed, Governance and Reform in the South Pacific 121 (Australian Natl U 1998).
19 See Peter Larmour, Solomon Islands, in Peter Larmour and Ropate Qalo, eds, Decentralisation in the South Pacific 74 (U South Pacific 1985) (discussing the circumstances preceding the establishment of provincial governments in Solomon Islands).
20 There are now nine provinces, following the separation of Choiseul from Western Province in 1992 and Rennell and Bellona from Central Province in 1996.
In the Solomon Islands system, parties are fluid entities revolving around dominant leaders or political “big-men”\(^{23}\) and lack both coherent political platforms and organizational structures. They are primarily vehicles to be used as bargaining chips in the intense process of government formation, as well as for trading political support once governments are formed.\(^{24}\) The presence of large numbers of independents intent on maximizing returns for their political support have added to the inherent instability of successive post-independence governments. These governments have typically comprised loose coalitions of parties and independents united primarily by their desire to retain office and the material, as well as other, benefits this provides. Government leaders tend to spend more time fending off votes of no confidence and trying to sustain chronically unstable coalitions than implementing national policy objectives.

In addition, in the first-past-the-post electoral system, which the Islands utilizes, successful candidates can win seats with a tiny percentage of the votes cast; therefore, the support bases of politicians tend to accord more with kinship and other personal ties to particular communities than to formal electoral boundaries. The skillful distribution of resources and manipulation of social relations by modern politicians is reminiscent of older Melanesian leadership strategies. Once elected, politicians are pressured by the relatively small number of people who voted for them and upon whose support they depend for future electoral success to prioritize demands for local “development projects.” Addressing these parochial demands outweighs any sense of responsibility towards the substantial proportion of their constituents who voted for rival candidates, thereby leaving large numbers or voters effectively disenfranchised. The use of ever-increasing sums of discretionary funds\(^{25}\) allocated to Members of Parliament for projects in their constituencies reinforces the role of individual Members as highly personalized agents of “development,” thereby

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]
\(^{23}\) The early Pacific anthropological literature makes much of the status of the traditional Melanesian “big-man,” whose prominence was achieved through prowess in warfare or as a ritual leader, and contrasted it with the pattern of hereditary leadership more commonly found in other Pacific islands, notably Polynesian chiefly systems. See Marshall Sahlins, *Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia*, 5 Comp Studies in Socy & Hist 285 (1963).


\(^{25}\) Discretionary funds for individual MPs were first introduced in the mid-1980s and amounted to SBD$20,000 per MP per year. This amount was increased to SBD$50,000 in the 1990s. The government of Prime Minister Bart Ulufa’alu (1997–2000) increased this to SBD$100,000. It was subsequently increased to SBD$400,000 by the Kemakeza-led government (2001–06) and then to SBD$1,000,000 by the Sogavare government that succeeded it. Figures taken from Joseph D. Foukona, *The Power Twist in Solomon Islands Parliamentary Politics, April 2006–December 2007*, Unpublished Paper, presented for Asia-Pacific Week at the Australian National University (Jan 29–Feb 1, 2008) (on file with the author).
circumventing and undermining the bureaucratic delivery systems of the state (which is thereby deprived of scarce public resources). The cumulative effect of this kind of political behavior has been to promote localism and division while simultaneously subverting nation-building in the literal sense of nurturing a shared political community for all citizens. In addition, the redistribution of state funds through patronage networks as a key dynamic of Solomon Islands’ politics has contributed to endemic political instability, as well as the high levels of corruption associated with political behavior and institutions in the post-colonial years.

Concerns about limited economic opportunities, poor social indicators, declining government services, and the perceived greed of the political elite have contributed further to growing levels of popular disenchantment with the formal political process during the past two decades. The logging industry, which in the mid-1990s contributed almost half of government export earnings, has pursued large-scale extraction at an unsustainable rate that has brought little lasting benefit to local landowners. Ineffective state regulations have been no match for the ingenuity and avarice of individual leaders and unscrupulous commercial operators. Timber revenues have gone uncollected or been siphoned off by politicians, state officials, and local “big-men” in collusion with rapacious Asian logging companies. Generous tax breaks and other concessions have been

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26 The endemic political instability arises from the fact that individual MPs have no loyalty to parties or coalitions and are primarily concerned with either getting into government or staying there once in. Political leaders spend all their energies trying to destabilize incumbent governments or to maintain their fragile unity. Votes of no confidence allow this to happen. See generally Steeves, 19 Pac Studies 115 (cited in note 22).

27 While there are no reliable measurements, perceptions of high levels of corruption in Solomon Islands are shared by both local and international observers. An indication of how seriously Solomon Islanders perceive the problem of corruption is provided in the responses to a pilot “People’s Survey” undertaken in selected provinces in 2006. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed thought that government corruption had increased. The pilot was commissioned by RAMSI and undertaken by researchers from the Australian National University. See Australian Council for International Development, Solomon Islands People’s Survey Pilot (2006), available online at <http://plone.acfid.asn.au/what-we-do/countries-regions/png-pacific-solomon-islands/Solomon-islands-people-s-survey/> (visited Apr 5, 2008).


granted in return for bribes. Other companies have evaded royalty payments and taxes by falsifying species names and log grades. This nexus between contemporary politics and the logging industry was cemented during the administrations of long-serving former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni (1981–84; 1989–93; 1994–97).

Corruption associated with logging now permeates national politics. As well as building the personal wealth of individual leaders, logging monies have subsidized election campaigns, costly processes of government formation, and the inducements required to sustain fragile coalitions. Losses of revenue from such practices and fluctuating markets have also contributed to growing levels of international borrowing and public debt. These, in turn, have increased Solomon Islands’ dependence on aid and indebtedness to international creditors, as well as on the budgetary support provided by Taiwan in return for diplomatic recognition.

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30 Special Audit Report at 18 (cited in note 29).

31 Id at 57.


34 The use of financial inducements to persuade new members of Parliament to align themselves with particular blocs during the formation of new governments is believed to be commonplace, though obviously difficult to document. During the formation of the Kemakeza government following the 2001 elections, Fraenkel reports one new MP being reportedly offered SBD$50,000 to vote the “right way”; see Fraenkel, The Manipulation of Custom at 137 (cited in note 12). In the lead-up to the vote of no confidence that toppled the Sogavare government in December 2007, one opposition MP claimed that he had rejected an offer of SBD$440,000 to join the government. Opposition Lured with $440,000 to Switch Sides, as Government Lobby to Remain in Power, Solomon Star (Nov 14, 2007), available online at <http://www.islandsbusiness.com/archives/index-dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModuleID=130/focusContentID=10694/tableName=mediaRelease/ovendesSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl> (visited Apr 5, 2008).


Demographic factors have also contributed to the challenges facing this young Melanesian state. High population growth rates of around 2.4 percent per annum are reflected in the young age profile. Approximately 41 percent of the population is under the age of 15, and the median age for citizens is currently 19. School attendance is low for a variety of reasons, including inaccessibility and unaffordability. Most youngsters have few prospects of securing employment in the limited formal economy. As elsewhere in the developing world, the bright lights of town and the freedom from the constraints of traditional village life hold a powerful allure for many, particularly young men. The Solomon Islands' "youth bulge" and urban drift provide another potential source of discontent and were part of the broader genesis of the recent conflict.

In addition, growing ethnic tensions have added to this volatile mix. When the national capital was relocated to Honiara, migrants were drawn to Guadalcanal from other parts of the country. Large numbers came from Mailaita, Solomon Islands' most densely populated island, which, owing to limited economic opportunities, has a long history of its people migrating to other islands. Attractions included the prospect of work in the plantations on the fertile Guadalcanal Plains, in the government departments and businesses to AUD$95.4 million, comprising $67.4 million to RAMSI and bilateral expenditure of $28 million. Total Australian aid expenditure to Solomon Islands in 2007–08 is estimated at AUD$223.9 million and includes other Australian assistance provided through AusAID's regional and global programs and from other Australian government agencies, such as the Australian Federal Police and Customs. See AusAID, Solomon Islands, available online at <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/country.cfm?CountryID=16&Region=SouthPacific> (visited Apr 5, 2008). Along with other countries in the South Pacific, Solomon Islands has been among the highest per capita recipients of aid in the world. From 1998–2004, Solomon Islands has received over US$500 million in aid, averaging US$1,000 per capita. See Sodhi, Five Out of Ten at 15 (cited in note 28).

37 See AusAID, Solomon Islands (cited in note 36).


39 According to 2007 figures cited by New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency ("NZAID"), less than half the population over fifteen have attained primary level education. At 56 percent, primary school enrollment is the lowest among the Pacific Island countries. See NZAID Making a Difference in Solomon Islands (Oct 2007), available online at <http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/library/docs/factsheet-solomon-islands-1276920-oct07.pdf> (visited Apr 5, 2008). Disruption and security concerns associated with the recent conflict have contributed to low enrollment rates in some areas. Poverty is also a major factor, with many parents operating in the subsistence economy unable to afford school fees. See Global Education, Solomon Islands, available online at <http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/cache/offence/pid/143> (visited Apr 5, 2008).

40 Figures from the 1999 population census cited by Fraenkel indicate that while Malaita comprises approximately 14.9 percent of Solomon Islands' total land mass, it contains 30 percent of the total population. See Fraenkel, The Manipulation of Custom at 21 (cited in note 12).
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concentrated in the national capital, or, since 1997, in the Gold Ridge mine east of Honiara. The relative success of Malaitans in Guadalacanal, and their alleged insensitivity to local customs, has led to increasing resentment among many indigenous landowners who view the settlers as having prospered at their expense.41

III. THE ETHNIC TENSIONS

The immediate pretext for the regional intervention was the eruption of serious ethnic tensions in Guadalacanal in 1999 and, in their aftermath, a progressive paralysis of central government, escalating lawlessness, and deepening economic crisis.42 Beginning in late 1998, groups of young Guadalacanal militants embarked on a violent campaign of intimidation directed primarily at Malaitan settlers.43 Up to thirty thousand people were displaced from their homes in rural Guadalacanal.44 In response, a Malaitan militia was formed in Honiara with the active participation of elements of the Malaitan-dominated police force. Regular skirmishes occurred between the two armed groups in the vicinity of the national capital. A state of emergency was declared in June 1999 but peacemaking efforts by the Solomon Islands government proved ineffective. On June 5, 2000, Malaitan militants seized control of key installations in Honiara, including the national armory, and, as a result, the incumbent Prime Minister, Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, was forced to resign. A new leader, Manasseh Sogavare, was appointed, who was considered more sympathetic to the cause of the Malaitan militants.

During this time, several requests were made by the Solomon Islands government to Australia and New Zealand for assistance to restore law and order. While these requests were declined, Australia and New Zealand reinvigorated their efforts to broker peace talks between the rival militias following the events of June 2000. These culminated in the Townsville Peace Agreement ("TPA") in October 2000.45 This agreement helped avert the

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43 For an account of the emergence of the MEF, see Moore, Happy Isles at 123–136 (cited in note 42); Fraenkel, The Manipulation of Custom at 87–94 (cited in note 12).
prospect of an all-out ethnic war, but failed to establish a sustainable framework for the peace process.\(^\text{46}\)

The TPA envisaged a general amnesty for militia members in return for the surrender of their weapons. However, there was to be no independent enforcement body. Instead, the disarmament process was to be driven by the militia groups themselves and supervised by a small, unarmed, international peace monitoring team.\(^\text{47}\) Predictably, relatively few weapons were actually surrendered.\(^\text{48}\) In addition, monetary compensation was to be provided to those who had suffered losses as a result of the conflict and as a way of reconciling rival groups. This was justified in terms of “traditional” methods of resolving grievances in Solomon Islands, but deteriorated rapidly into outright criminality and corruption. Ordinary Solomon Islanders with legitimate claims were ignored while payments were monopolized by criminal opportunists, former militants, and their associates in positions of leadership and power.\(^\text{49}\) The police force had effectively broken down, and those engaged in intimidation and extortion were able to act with impunity.

While most international donors ceased providing funds through patently corrupted government channels,\(^\text{50}\) Taiwan continued its financial support, thereby fueling periodic feeding frenzies as criminals sought to access newly released tranches of grants and loans. At the same time as government funding

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\(^{46}\) The concept of ethnicity in Solomon Islands, as in other parts of Melanesia, is problematic given the small size and vast number of cultural groups. The two island identities associated with the recent conflict—Guadalcanal and Malaita—are themselves the product of recent colonial and post-colonial history and are more fluid than implied in the imagery of ethnic polarization. Inter-marriage means that many people from Malaita and Guadalcanal are, in fact, related, and labour mobility means that many young Malaitans were born and raised in Guadalcanal and are more familiar with Guadalcanal ways than those of their ancestral island. In addition, significant divisions exist within these larger identities, often arising from longstanding animosities between different groups. Indeed, much of the conflict in the period following the Townsville Agreement was intraethnic rather than interethnic in character, occurring between Guadalcanal groups and, to a lesser extent, between Malaitans. See Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, Working Paper 01/1 (Australian Natl U), available online at <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/working_papers/tarcisiusworkingpaper.htm> (visited Apr 5, 2008).


\(^{49}\) See Dinnen, *37 J Pac Hist* at 294 (cited in note 41).

\(^{50}\) Traditional donors, like Australia, have had a long and continuous presence in Solomon Islands and closely monitor the implementation of their development assistance. They usually know when it is being abused.
for the provision of services began to dry up, generous duty remissions and tax exemptions were granted to selected individuals and businesses. These exemptions rewarded supporters, repaid political debts, and compromised potential critics. It was also a response to threats, as well as a means of appeasing troublesome former militants.

Although the most serious problems were concentrated in Honiara, the dispersal of guns and former militants was accompanied by growing lawlessness in rural areas throughout the Islands, particularly in Guadalcanal and Malaita. With the national capital in turmoil, government services collapsing, and national bankruptcy looming, several island provinces announced their plans to sever or to reconfigure radically their ties with the political center. Choiseul and Western provinces proposed forming a joint state government, while Temotu, in the eastern outer islands, declared itself self-governing with the aim of becoming fully independent a year later. For most observers, it became increasingly clear that the deeply compromised Solomon Islands government (containing several prominent ex-militant leaders and sympathizers) lacked both the will and capacity to halt the rapidly deteriorating situation.

IV. THE REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

As late as January 2003, the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, declared that “[s]ending in Australian troops to occupy Solomon Islands would be folly in the extreme... [F]oreigners do not have answers for the deep-seated problems afflicting Solomon Islands.” Within six months, however, the longstanding policy of nonintervention had been reversed, and on July 24, 2003, the regional assistance mission to the Pacific island country was deployed. Justifications for this dramatic reversal in policy were couched in the strategic discourses of state failure and state-building. The specter of a failed state in Solomon Islands was now considered a major security threat to Australian and regional security. Prime Minister Howard spoke of Solomon Islands’ vulnerability to exploitation by “drug dealers, money launderers and

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51 In the year after August 2000, the Sogavare government granted approximately SBD$40 million in duty remissions. More than 330 vehicles were brought into the country duty-free, while millions of dollars of national revenue were foregone in remissions on cigarettes and beer imports. See Dinnen, 37 J Pac Hist at 294 (cited in note 41).

52 Id at 288.

53 Id at 289-90.

Howard’s Foreign Minister declared that the government “will not sit back and watch while a country slips inexorably into decay and disorder . . . The last thing we can afford is an already susceptible region being overwhelmed by more insidious and direct threats to Australia.”

In an influential report titled Our Failing Neighbour, published several weeks before deployment, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute warned of Solomon Islands becoming “a petri dish in which transnational and non-state security threats can develop and breed.” The report proposed a “sustained and comprehensive multinational effort” to undertake rehabilitation work with the consent of Solomon Islands. Restoration of law and order would be followed by efforts to “build new political structures and security institutions and address underlying social and economic problems.”

The process entailed in mobilizing the regional mission and developing RAMSI began when Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allen Kemakeza was invited to Canberra in early June 2003 for discussions. The Australian government subsequently drafted a plan of intervention, subject to agreement from Solomon Islands authorities and members of the main regional organization, the Pacific Islands Forum. Although leadership and most of the personnel and resources were to be provided by Australia, the intervention was to be undertaken on a regional, rather than a multinational or bilateral basis.


Id at 39.


The Forum comprises sixteen independent or self-governing Pacific countries, including Australia and New Zealand.

The conservative Howard government adopted a similarly critical stance towards the UN and multilateralism as that adopted by the Bush administration. There were also concerns that China might veto any request for UN involvement given Solomon Islands’ recognition of Taiwan. Approval of the regional mission was provided retrospectively in a letter from the UN Secretary-General and a press release by the President of the Security Council.
The Forum’s Biketawa Declaration on Mutual Assistance of 2000\(^{62}\) allowed for collective action in response to a security crisis in a member state. Forum Foreign Ministers endorsed the plan on June 30th, and an agreement was subsequently signed by the participating states on July 24th. A formal request for regional assistance was signed by Solomon Islands’ Governor-General on July 4th, while its parliament unanimously passed the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003 (SI),\(^{63}\) setting out the powers and immunities of mission personnel.

Labeled “co-operative intervention” by the Australian Foreign Minister,\(^{64}\) RAMSI has been described as having “a unique kind of authority in the world of state-building—it has substantial practical influence but it works with and inside the Solomon Islands Government, which remains the repository of executive, legislative and judicial authority.”\(^{65}\) Under the Facilitation of International Assistance Act, the Solomon Islands Parliament can review the intervention on an annual basis and terminate the mission’s presence by revoking consent.\(^{66}\)

The initial phase of the intervention concentrated on the restoration of law and order. This task was led by the Participating Police Force (“PPF”), comprised of around 330 police officers drawn mainly from the Australian Federal Police, but also including smaller numbers from other Australian state forces, New Zealand, and other Forum member states.\(^{67}\) Logistical and security support was provided initially by a sizeable military contingent of approximately 1,800 personnel. Significant progress was achieved quickly and without bloodshed: security was restored in Honiara, the police presence was extended to other parts of the country, and large numbers of illegally-held weapons were confiscated. By the end of a month-long amnesty, around 3,730 firearms had


\(^{66}\) The Facilitation of International Assistance Act, art 23 (cited in note 63).

\(^{67}\) The PPF includes contingents from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. A list of contributing nations is available online at <http://www.ramsi.org/node/8> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
been surrendered or collected, amounting to an estimated 90–95 percent of the country's stockpile.\textsuperscript{68} Key militia leaders and their followers surrendered or were apprehended by mission police. In the first 200 days of the mission, approximately 860 arrests were made and over 1,400 charges were laid.\textsuperscript{69} The PPF also commenced the task of rebuilding the Solomon Islands police by cleansing its ranks of criminal and corrupt elements. By February 2004, over 400 officers (approximately 25 percent of the total workforce) had been removed from the police.\textsuperscript{70}

From the outset the security work was integrated into a longer-term state-building exercise consisting of three pillars: law and justice; economic governance; and the machinery of government.\textsuperscript{71} The law and justice pillar includes assistance to the police and simultaneous efforts to strengthen the capacity of the court system and prisons.\textsuperscript{72} Economic governance entails fiscal and financial stabilization and management, as well as economic reforms aimed at improving investor confidence and stimulating growth.\textsuperscript{73} Machinery of government covers accountability mechanisms, electoral and civic education, and public service reform. RAMSI advisers, often seconded Australian public servants,\textsuperscript{74} have been placed in key government agencies in areas such as budget,


\textsuperscript{69} This was the figure provided by the Commander of the Participating Police Force, Ben McDevitt, at the One Year Anniversary Press Conference held at the Office of the Special Coordinator in Honiara, July 22, 2004.

\textsuperscript{70} Abby McLeod and Sinclair Dinnen, Police Building in the Southwest Pacific—New Directions in Australian Regional Policing, in Andrew Goldsmith and James Sheptycki, eds, Crafting Transnational Policing: Police Capacity-Building and Global Policing Reform 295 (Hart 2007). RAMSI is a complex and multidimensional operation involving many different components. The literature and documentation produced so far tends to focus on particular components. A good, general source of information is RAMSI's own website, available online at \textltt{http://www.ramsi.org/} (visited Apr 5, 2008). Additional data on the policing operation can be accessed through the Australian Federal Police's website, available online at \textltt{http://www.afp.gov.au/international.html} (visited Apr 5, 2008). For further information, see the websites of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, available online at \textltt{http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/solomon_islands/solomon_islands_brief.html} (visited Apr 5, 2008); AusAID, available online at \textltt{http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/solomons/ramsi.cfm} (visited Apr 5, 2008).

\textsuperscript{71} For further information, see RAMSI's website, available online at \textltt{http://www.ramsi.org/node/2} (visited Apr 5, 2008).

\textsuperscript{72} Id.

\textsuperscript{73} Id.

\textsuperscript{74} A seconded public servant is, in this case, an Australian public servant who is seconded from their home department in Australia for a specified period to serve in a government department or agency in Solomon Islands under the auspices of the regional mission.
State-Building in a Post-Colonial Society

audit, treasury, internal revenue, customs, payroll, and debt management. In addition to its support of RAMSI, Australia maintains a bilateral development assistance program that addresses areas including health, education, environmental and natural resource management, and community development. No exit date was specified for the mission, although ten years has often been mentioned as a minimum period. Coordination of RAMSI in Solomon Islands is managed through a Special Coordinator’s Office in Honiara, headed by a senior Australian diplomat, while Australian-based agencies operate through an interdepartmental committee in Canberra.

The restoration of law and order and prosecution of those who committed serious crimes during 1999–2003 have been major accomplishments. Many of the worst offenders are now languishing in the country’s refurbished central prison in Honiara. Significant progress has also been made in restoring stability to government finances. More efficient systems of revenue collection, including taxes, saw government revenues increase by around 170 percent during RAMSI’s first three years and have contributed to an increase in employment opportunities. Although the growth in public revenue has not matched Solomon Islands’ rapidly expanding population, it nevertheless represents a

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75 See RAMSI’s website, available online at <http://www.ramsi.org/node/16#machine> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
76 As mentioned previously, the bulk of RAMSI’s funding comes from the Australian government. Given the different government agencies involved—each with their own budgetary appropriations—it is difficult to provide an exact figure of the overall costs of the mission. A 2007 report by the Australian Auditor-General states that over the four years from 2005–08, the Australian government allocated AUD$840.5 million for RAMSI ($15.1 million for DFAT, AUD$538 million for AFP, AUD$282.2 million for AusAID, and AUD$5.2 million for Customs). The same report states that the total amount of Australian aid to Solomon Islands in 2006–07 is estimated by AusAID to be $223 million (some 52 percent of total estimated Australian aid funding to the Pacific for that year). Of the $223 million, $99.5 million will be provided via AusAID (both through RAMSI and via AusAID’s ongoing bilateral aid program). The bulk of the residual funding is for the AFP deployment. See Australian National Audit Office, Coordination of Australian Government Assistance to Solomon Islands, Audit Report No 47 2006–07 27, available online at <http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/2006-07_Audit_Report_47.pdf> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
79 For more information on the Special Coordinator’s Office, see its website, available online at <http://www.ramsi.org/node/32> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
80 Kruno Kukoc, Careful Planning Puts Archipelago in the Sun, Australian 12 (June 15, 2007).
significant achievement, especially given the calamitous economic situation that prevailed in mid-2003. While the capacity-development work with the police and other state institutions remains an incremental and long-term task, there is evidence that it is having a noticeable impact in some areas.\footnote{See RAMSI, Annual Performance Report 2006/2007: A Report on the Performance of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (July 2007), available online at <http://www.ramsi.org/node/240> (visited Apr 5, 2008).} Almost five years after the initial deployment, the vast majority of the Solomon Islands’ population is appreciative of the intervention, particularly in its contribution to community safety.\footnote{This was one of the findings from the Solomon Islands People’s Survey Pilot (cited in note 27).} Memories of the insecurity and disintegration of government in the years preceding the deployment remain strong, and many fear the consequences of a premature departure.

The Solomon Islanders’ apprehension about RAMSI leaving indicates the underlying fragility of the peace and reconstruction process. It also highlights one of the mission’s most outstanding challenges, one shared with other state-building interventions: long-term sustainability. Even after five years of intensive capacity development, Solomon Islanders demonstrate little faith in the integrity and efficacy of their state institutions and political processes.\footnote{Id at 9.} However, Australia’s substantial commitment of resources and personnel to the mission is unlikely to remain open indefinitely. Ultimately, the test of the intervention’s success will lie in what it leaves behind. Will the Solomon Islands and its leaders be able to go it alone successfully, or will the situation deteriorate rapidly once the significant RAMSI presence is withdrawn, as many appear to believe?\footnote{See, for example, Solomons’ Villagers Urge Aussies to Stay, The Age (May 16, 2005), available online at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/Villagers-urge-Aussies-to-stay/2005/05/16/111609583953.html> (visited Apr 5, 2008); Solomons Auditor Says RAMSI Needed beyond Next Year, Radio New Zealand International (March 27, 2007), available online at <http://www.mzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=31061> (visited Apr 5, 2008).} While RAMSI was initiated at the request of the Solomon Islands government and continues with its consent, local ownership and direction of current reforms remains a sensitive issue. The fact that RAMSI has such substantial resources at its disposal can lead to asymmetry in its relations with a much less well-endowed Solomon Islands government. This imbalance contributes to an impression that RAMSI constitutes a “shadow government,” operating alongside, but distinct from, the legitimate government of Solomon Islands. Likewise, and despite the significant role of the smaller contributions provided by other Pacific island countries, Australia’s dominant role has accentuated the perception that RAMSI is primarily an Australian mission. This, in turn, can erode the legitimacy that the mission’s regional character was
intended to accord. As Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, a leading Solomon Islander scholar, observes, “to a large extent, the Solomon Islands state is influenced, if not directly controlled, from Canberra.”

Mission leadership has become increasingly aware of this problem and has sought to broaden the regional mix of personnel. The fact remains, however, that there is a limited pool of relevant skills and expertise in the Pacific island countries, and arguably these are best employed at home rather than overseas.

Neither the Kemakeza government (2001–06) nor the Sogavare government (2006–07) have demonstrated much interest in engaging cooperatively with the implementation and development of the mission’s work. The former was a largely passive bystander as RAMSI got on with its job, while the leadership of the latter became embroiled in a protracted and damaging campaign to derail aspects of the mission, as discussed in Section V. Lack of active ownership and direction on the part of both governments tends to undercut claims that RAMSI represents a genuine partnership with Solomon Islands’ authorities. In turn, the absence of genuine buy-in by local political leaders does not auger well for long-term sustainability.

RAMSI’s early successes contributed to high levels of popular expectation in Solomon Islands. Unrealistic hopes have enhanced the risk of an unhealthy dependency on the mission to solve all problems, thereby undermining local responsibility and initiative. Mission leaders regularly point out that there are certain issues falling beyond RAMSI’s mandate. The issue of reconciliation provides a good example. While the mission has been prepared to provide logistical and other forms of support to reconciliation efforts, it has argued that reconciliation should be the responsibility of community leaders with the necessary local knowledge and standing. The high level of local expectations has also been reflected in the recurrent complaint that RAMSI fails to go beyond the symptoms of conflict, to tackle the so-called “root causes.” These cover a

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myriad of complex issues including, for example, political decentralization, the poor fit between indigenous and introduced institutions, and land exploitation.\textsuperscript{88}

Early emphasis on apprehending the perpetrators of violence during the tensions prompted criticism that RAMSI was less rigorous in its pursuit of the more influential figures—the so-called “big fish”—who were believed to have manipulated the situation for their own political and economic advantage. Despite a series of high profile arrests and prosecutions during the first two years, including five former Cabinet Ministers, this popular sentiment continued well into 2006. \textsuperscript{89} Ironically, once RAMSI turned its attentions to the “big fish,” it immediately ran into sustained resistance from elements of the political elite who, as we shall see in the next Section of this Article, lambasted the mission for interfering in Solomon Islands sovereignty.

RAMSI has also been placed in the awkward position of having to work closely with deeply unpopular domestic governments. This was the case with the Kemakeza administration that invited the intervention in the first place. Many of its members, including the Prime Minister himself, were viewed by the public as implicated in corrupt and conflict-related wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{90} Some local critics viewed RAMSI’s cooperation with the Kemakeza government as vesting the latter with legitimacy that it patently lacked among most Solomon Islanders.\textsuperscript{91} Cooperative interventions of this kind run the risk of becoming tainted by association with discredited governments and leaders.

Some of these dilemmas were acknowledged in an otherwise generally favorable review of the mission by an Eminent Persons Group from the Pacific Islands Forum in 2005.\textsuperscript{92} Among its recommendations, the review called on the mission to devote more attention to developing its partnership with Solomon Islands; increase the Solomon Islands and other Pacific Islands states’ participation in the mission; address the underlying causes of the conflict; and make greater efforts in the areas of reconciliation and rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{88} See Morgan and McLeod, \textit{60 Australian J Intl Aff} at 416 (cited in note 86).

\textsuperscript{89} This is a significant factor underlying the 2006 unrest, a point that is addressed in the next Section.

\textsuperscript{90} Kemakeza had been sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for National Unity Reconciliation and Peace during the first Sogavare administration (2000–01), allegedly for misappropriating SBD$800,000 of the compensation funds set aside for those whose properties had been damaged or destroyed during the ethnic tensions. See Dinnen, \textit{37 J Pac Hist} at 294 (cited in note 41).

\textsuperscript{91} See O’Callaghan, \textit{RAMSI: The Challenges Ahead} (cited in note 85).


\textsuperscript{93} Id at ¶ 61–65.
V. THE APRIL 2006 UNREST AND THE SOGAVARE GOVERNMENT

The first general elections after RAMSI’s deployment were held in early 2006. These provided a much anticipated opportunity to replace the unpopular Kemakeza administration with a new government capable of building on the mission’s accomplishments and addressing some of the country’s outstanding problems. Unfortunately, the byzantine process of post-election government formation produced a group of candidates that included many members of the previous administration. When Kemakeza’s former deputy, Snyder Rini, was announced publicly as the new Prime Minister-elect on April 18th, the crowd outside Parliament reacted with anger.94 The two days of rioting and opportunistic looting that followed reduced much of Honiara’s Chinatown district to ashes. Overseas military and police reinforcements were needed to restore order.

The Solomon Islands’ Prime Minister is chosen by members of the new Parliament in what is, in effect, a second election that excludes the ordinary voter. The successful candidate is the leader who mobilizes the largest group of members necessary to secure a simple majority in the vote for Prime Minister. In the absence of strong party or ideological affiliations, loose blocs of members coalesce around individual leaders with the single aim of winning control of the government. Frenetic maneuvering occurs as smaller groups strive to tilt the balance in favor of a particular bloc. Money and other inducements are often used to persuade members to join particular groups. During the 2001 elections, it was claimed that some members were offered up to SBD$50,000 in return for their allegiance.95 Some members who had demonstrated a preference or association with a particular grouping were allegedly offered between SBD$20,000 and SBD$60,000 to change sides during the process of government formation.


95 John Roughan, Joy to Grief Overnight, Solomon Star (Dec 18, 2001), available online at <http://www.sibconline.com.sb/Analysis%20archive.asp> (visited Apr 5, 2008). Dr. John Roughan is a former priest and naturalized Solomon Islands citizen who has been living and working in the country for almost fifty years. He has been a leading member of the NGO community and for many years served as adviser to the Solomon Islands Development Trust, which is engaged in community development work throughout the country. He is a respected social commentator and contributes regular columns to the daily newspaper, The Solomon Star. Recently he served as an adviser in the office of former Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.
Many believe that funds provided by Asian business interests have fueled the growth of “money politics” in recent years. The nontransparent and unpredictable character of this process generated intense levels of popular speculation. Snyder Rini’s unexpected triumph was a profound disappointment to many Solomon Islanders and was taken as evidence of Asian interference in national politics, hence the subsequent targeting of Chinatown.

Along with many others, mission police were caught completely offguard by the scale and intensity of the April disturbances. Rini’s fragile coalition began to disintegrate almost immediately and he resigned in the face of an impending vote of no confidence. Following some adept political maneuvering, Manassah Sogavare succeeded him as the new Prime Minister. Sogavare had served in this office previously under controversial circumstances following the de facto coup in June 2000. He was also a strident critic of the regional mission, ostensibly on the grounds of its encroachment on Solomon Islands’ sovereignty.

RAMSI’s legal foundations render it especially vulnerable to shifting political allegiances, and events since April 2006 have demonstrated the extent of this vulnerability. The second Sogavare-led government, which was to remain in office for twenty months, heralded the beginning of a serious deterioration in relations between the Solomon Islands and the Australian government. RAMSI found itself positioned uncomfortably in the middle of a progressively acrimonious confrontation between two governments upon which it depended—the first for the authorization to continue with the mission and the second for the bulk of its resources and personnel. These developments also

97 See generally Alasia, 42 J Pac Hist 165 (cited in note 96) (describing the extraordinary behind-the-scenes political maneuvering that culminated in Snyder Rini’s nomination as Prime Minister-elect).
98 Several former senior Solomon Islands police officers contested claims by Australian police that there had been no prior intelligence indicating trouble, pointing out that the announcement of a new Prime Minister should routinely merit special policing measures and that Chinatown was especially vulnerable to unrest in the capital. See Mike Wheadey (former Assistant Commissioner of RSIP), “RAMSI Tuesday Wasn’t to Do With Intelligence Failure,” New Matilda (May 24, 2006), available online at <http://www.newmatilda.com/2006/05/24/%2526%2523039%3B Bramsi-tuesday%2526%2523039%3B-wasn%2526%2523039%3Bt-do-intelligence-failure> (visited Apr 5, 2008); Frank Short (former Commissioner of RSIP), Honiara Riot Warrants Formal Inquiry, Pacific Islands Report (May 22, 2006), available online at <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2006/May/05-24-com.htm> (visited Apr 5, 2008).
99 The Sogavare-led government was defeated in a vote of no confidence moved by the opposition in December 2007. A new government led by Dr. Derek Sikua has committed to improving relations with Australia and working closely with the regional mission.

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made it increasingly difficult to maintain the mission’s image of detached political neutrality.

One of Sogavare’s first acts as Prime Minister was to call for a review of the mission and a clear exit strategy. He also named as ministers two parliamentarians who had been detained by police on suspicion of involvement in the April riots. Proposals to revise aspects of the mission, including critical areas of financial management, met with immediate opposition from Australia and New Zealand on the grounds that RAMSI was an integrated package that could not be “cherry picked.” Amid mounting rancor at political levels, the Solomon Islands government abruptly expelled the Australian High Commissioner, Patrick Cole, for allegedly interfering in local politics. In retaliation, Australia imposed visa restrictions on Solomon Islands’ politicians seeking entry to Australia.

A major source of contention between the two governments was Prime Minister Sogavare’s campaign to appoint an Australian lawyer, Julian Moti, as his new Attorney General. Critics saw this as an attempt to install a close friend and key ally in this important office in order to protect Sogavare’s political interests and undermine mission efforts to strengthen the rule of law. Moti, an associate of Sogavare’s for many years, had faced child molestation charges in Vanuatu ten years previously. Media reports alleged that his case had been dismissed on technical grounds amid rumors that he had paid off the magistrate.

Following Moti’s linking to the Attorney General’s position, the Australian Federal Police announced that they wanted to question him about his earlier activities in Vanuatu. Not surprisingly, the timing of their intervention—ten years after the alleged offence was committed—aroused suspicions in some

101 See Moore, 42 J Pac Hist at 155 (cited in note 85).
103 The gist of the allegations against the Australian High Commissioner was that he had been talking with the Parliamentary Opposition about political matters, including the prospect of mounting a vote of no confidence against the Sogavare government. He was also suspected of trying to block any overseas funding to support a commission of inquiry into the April Riots that the Sogavare government was proposing to establish. See Australian Diplomat Expelled from Solomon Islands, Radio New Zealand International (Sept 12, 2006), available online at <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?option=read&id=26756> (visited Apr 5, 2008); Alasia, 42 J Pac Hist at 182 (cited in note 96).
quarters that the Australian investigation of Moti was politically motivated. Moti was subsequently arrested while in Papua New Guinea at the request of Australian police seeking his extradition. After failing to attend a scheduled bail hearing, he was surreptitiously flown to Solomon Islands in a Papua New Guinea Defense Force aircraft. Australian authorities expressed outrage at Moti's "escape" from Papua New Guinea—directed in equal measure at both the governments of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea who were suspected of collaborating on the matter. Julian Moti was eventually sworn-in as Attorney General in July 2007.

As the accusations and intemperate exchanges continued, the Sogavare government upped the stakes, discharging the Australian-born commissioner of the Solomon Islands police while he was on leave in Australia, declaring him an "undesirable immigrant." This had the effect of barring his return to Solomon Islands and effectively terminating his employment. Sogavare and his allies openly accused RAMSI and, in particular, its law and justice components, of serving the political interests of the Australian government. The acrimony continued throughout 2007. In February, the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, took the remarkable step of writing an open letter to the people of Solomon Islands in which he berated Prime Minister Sogavare for attempting to undermine the regional mission. Sogavare made periodic threats

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108 Collaboration between the governments was subsequently confirmed in leaked copies of the Papua New Guinea Defence Board of Inquiry established by the PNG government to investigate Moti's clandestine departure from the country. The Inquiry report provides a detailed account of how Moti was able to return to Papua New Guinea. See id.


110 Id.

111 See, for example, Detainees Win PM's Heart, Solomon Star (Dec 28, 2006) (on file with author).

112 Alexander Downer, A Letter to the People of Solomon Islands From the Hon. Alexander Downer Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia, Solomon Star (Feb 12, 2007).
to terminate the mission, though strong protests from many Solomon Islanders rendered such a prospect unlikely. A senior officer from Fiji was sworn in as the police commissioner in May 2007, prompting immediate protests from the Public Service Commission about serious irregularities in the appointments process. In light of the controversy surrounding Moti's appointment as Attorney General, the manner in which the new Police Commissioner was appointed added to suspicions among Sogavare's critics that he was deliberately appointing senior officials as a way of undermining the legal and administrative process, and, in particular, the law enforcement and anticorruption efforts of the mission.

The year ended in dramatic fashion, with changes of government in both Australia and Solomon Islands. For the detached observer, a welcome opportunity to move on from the deadlock of the last year and a half has now been presented. Both new governments have expressed a commitment to mending relations and moving forward.

VI. DISCUSSION

While the recent changes in government provide a promising basis for overcoming some of the difficulties described above, the longer-term task facing the interveners in Solomon Islands remains formidable. RAMSI was always much more than a technical exercise. The protracted struggle over its control dispels any illusions about the inherently political character of international state-building. Such interventions deliberately set out to transform existing power relations. Appeals to sovereignty can provide convenient cover for those who stand to lose most from intrusive governance and economic reforms. The language and conceptual framework of intervening authorities is particularly susceptible to appropriation by local actors for their justificatory value and can be deployed against the interveners. In such cases, one version of "justice," "sovereignty," or "good governance" is likely to compete with another.

The domain of law enforcement illustrates the near impossibility of maintaining an impartial stance in such a politically charged context. Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty recently acknowledged the difficulties

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113 For an example of local Solomon Islander opposition to Sogavare's stance, see PM's Attack on Foreigners 'Shameful,' Solomon Star (Aug 23, 2007) (on file with author).


115 Civil groups that had objected to Julian Moti's appointment added the manner in which the new police commissioner was appointed to their list of grievances. See Civil Society Groups to Protest Over Julian Moti, Radio Australia, Pacific Beat (May 31, 2007) (on file with author).
of policing in the “morally ambiguous” and “politically challenging” contexts of “imperfectly governed democracies.”

Having been criticized earlier for neglecting the “big fish,” the switch to emphasize anticorruption has increased the vulnerability of police and other justice agencies to political attack. Prime Minister Sogavare’s tenacious efforts to insert his personal appointees into the key positions of Attorney General and Police Commissioner not only breached proper appointment procedures and threatened the integrity of the legal system, but also dragged those who insist on strict adherence to the rule of law into unseemly political struggles. Appeals to the technical imperatives of neutral and depoliticized law enforcement are unlikely to displace perceptions of underlying power plays, whether real or imagined.

The termination of the Australian-born police commissioner in late 2007 demonstrates the incompatible nature of freely elected government and its relationship with an intervening force. Although the intervention makes possible the legitimacy of government, it cannot ensure or control its behavior. This goes to the heart of RAMSI’s dilemmas. The reforms RAMSI seeks to implement demand robust political responses, but the legal constraints inherent to cooperative intervention severely limit the extent to which it can engage with a resistant government in Honiara. The need for cooperation restricts the mission’s ability to push for the deeper political reforms required, while simultaneously making it more susceptible to entanglement in local politics as demonstrated in the Moti affair.

The narrow and technical orientation of RAMSI’s approach to state-building also obscures the special character of the post-colonial state and why it works the way it does. The idiosyncratic performance of the Solomon Islands state over the past thirty years since independence is not just a consequence of the absence of adequate institutional capacity to be remedied by carefully targeted international technical assistance. Rather, it reflects the particular history and politics of the post-colonial state in Solomon Islands and the ways in which it has been shaped by local and global forces. As with all other states, the Solomon Islands government does not stand apart from society as a discrete entity that can be worked upon in isolation. The burgeoning literature of failed states tends to set up a dichotomous conceptualization of state and society by defining institutions primarily in terms of their policy capacity. As a result, “[s]ocial and political relationships are not seen as intrinsic to institutions, but

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only as constraints or obstacles to performance."\textsuperscript{117} The idealized institutions the interveners seek to (re)build are to be devoid of politics and the pernicious influence of social relations. However, institutions simply cannot be separated from the processes and practices of politics that gave rise to them in the first place and that have shaped them ever since. The histories of post-colonial states like Solomon Islands attest to the primacy of politics in the development of these institutions.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite the sustained efforts of some politicians to frustrate aspects of the mission’s work, the travails of Solomon Islands in recent decades cannot be reduced to the incompetence or mendacity of a handful of self-serving political leaders. While these factors have clearly contributed, they are not in themselves sufficient to explain the profound difficulties of state- and nation-building in the Solomon Islands. Governments and their leaders play important roles in a larger political economy whose roots extend deep into the Solomon Islands’ society and the manner in which it engages with the global economy. The Solomon Islands’ system of electoral politics, government formation, and unstable coalitions cannot be understood in isolation from the broader political culture. The relative absence of Weberian-style institutionalism and a functional differentiation between state and society is a reflection of the interplay of social and historical forces rather than being the product of individual or collective pathology.

Instead of nurturing shared community, political development in the period since independence has accentuated localism and division within the archipelago. An important message for interveners is the need for a much stronger appreciation of the importance of nation-building—in the literal sense—and the need for a significant broadening of the narrow state-building perspective with its emphasis on strengthening state institutions. In part, as a consequence of its mandate, RAMSI’s state-building efforts have not been sufficiently embedded in the larger and critical project of nation-making, leaving it with little scope to address the deeper causes of the recent crisis. On this point, it may be worth concluding that the disturbances in April 2006, widely seen as evidence of state-building failure, can also be viewed more positively. Can one not view the spontaneous anger of many ordinary Solomon Islanders at the lack of integrity of their government system as itself an example of nation-building in the face of state failure? Likewise, an unintended consequence of the

\textsuperscript{117} Shahar Hameiri, \textit{The Trouble with RAMSI: Re-Examining the Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands}, 19 Contemp Pac 409, 414 (2007).

months of bitter and debilitating wrangling between Prime Minister Sogavare and his Australian nemeses might be the translation of growing popular concern into a heightened scrutiny of the actions of their own government and political leadership. History teaches that nation-building is not only an inherently contested, and often bloody, process, but that it often occurs by default rather than design.